Chapter 3

Politics

It might well be said of me that here I have merely made up a bunch of other peoples flowers and provided nothing of my own but the string that binds them.

Michel de Montaigne, “Of Physiognomy” (Gerould 113).

The string that binds the variety of flowers plays an indispensable role in the making of anthologies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith recognizes the political role of an anthology that makes it an important tool in multifarious ways. The writer observes: “The anthology has become the literary text of cultural studies, the site of struggle about voice, authority, difference, representation, critical dialogue and pedagogy” (521). Identity-based anthologies have significantly revealed their power to accelerate the process of decentralization as they attempt to subvert and challenge the idea of a stable centre. Dalit anthologies for instance incorporate writings that clearly target the brahmanical hegemony and engage the readers to critically analyse the hegemonic patterns in the brahmanical system and simultaneously makes them active participants, in the intellectual project of the anthology. Similarly women anthologies purport to challenge patriarchal constructions through selective entries. The political and cultural resistance Dalit and Women anthologies have succeeded enormously in setting up a counter canon.

Unlike the general anthologies which include the writings of the marginalised voices without specific purpose the anthologies that are exclusively devoted to their writings overtly pronounce their political agendas. Often entries that offer reality in open, critical, vicious and obnoxious ways are preferred to the ones that render their voices in a meek, lighter and a subdued manner. By their open and frontal attacks on the dominant powerful structures, such works succeed in overturning the nationalist or universalist anthologies of the pre-90s. Significantly the framework of an anthology renders itself suitable to the classification of literature in terms of caste, class, gender, race and ethnicities. Traditional canon together with cultural and literary history has denied a complete freedom to the marginalised groups including the Dalits and women writers. Recent studies have taken enormous cognizance of
the same and have set the traditional literary history somewhere in contrast to the women’s literary history. Thus the traditional canon is confronted by the emergence of a new canon. Margaret J.M Ezell in her work *Writing Women’s Literary History* (1996) ambitiously inquires into the absence of women writers before 1700 A.D and presents a revised literary history, primarily through probing anthologies. She states:

The new feminist literary history is also manifest in the ideology underlying the construction of anthologies of women’s writings. These texts arrange materials in a historical sequence and include in introduction and notes accounts of the writers lives and times. (6)

This chapter endeavours to analyze the political foregrounding of the contemporary anthologies. As a counter to the canonical anthologies which were used rather uncritically in the academia till 70s and 80s as safe pedagogic texts, a whole range of new anthologies has surfaced. These anthologies are unconventional in the sense that they try to re-define the very act of anthologizing by way of focusing on the excluded marginalities in traditional anthologies.

Nevertheless prominent women writers have shown reluctance to be included in gender specific anthologies on the ground that they lead to a ghettoisation of women’s writing. The British poets Sheenagh Pugh and Ruth Bidgood and American poet Elizabeth Bishop declined proposals to be included in anthologies. Their anxieties could be interpreted in terms of the canonical divisions that these writers fear which rather than making the canon more inclusive creates a counter-canon by observing the gender divisions. Amy Wack in her article “Poetry anthologies should reflect women’s work” contemplates the issues she had to confront during the compilation of her anthology *Women’s Work: Modern Women Poets Writing in English* (2009). Inspite of the dissuasion faced by the editors due to the reluctance of poets to be included in the work they succeeded in compiling an anthology of two hundred and seventy one women writers, jointly edited by her and Eva Salzman.

The political agenda of women anthologies is to combat the mainstream anthologies with a telling charge of ignoring and under-representing the marginalised groups. All anthologies
and primarily the mainstream anthologies are grounded in agendas peculiar to their humanistic constructions. P.Lal’s anthology *Modern Indian Poetry in English: An Anthology and A Credo* (1969) draws together one hundred and thirty two poets out of which only thirty one writers are women. The inclusion of women poets in his anthology is suggestive of an immature attempt to give them recognition and visibility.

However what remains startling is not the enormous disparity in the ratio of men and women poets included in the anthology but the fact that most of the women poets included here could not hold their positions in the literary world. V.K. Gokak’s *The Golden Treasury of Indo-Anglian Poetry* (1970) includes ten women poets. R.Parthasarthy and Mehrotra include one woman writer each in *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* (1976) and *The Oxford India Anthology of Twelve Modern Indian Poets* (1992) respectively. *Poems by Indian Women* published in 1923 by the Association Press Calcutta has been one of the earliest attempts to organise women’s writing in an anthology in the twentieth century. *Women Poets of India* (1977) by Pranab Bandyopadhyay, *Hers* (1978) by many Ann Das Gupta and *The Fair Voice: A Study of Indian Women Poets in English* (1984) by Sunanda P. Chavan are works that have extended a distinct identity to women’s writing in India during the 70s and the 80s.

The absence of a preface and an introduction in Pranab Bandyopadhyay’s anthology draws attention to the fact that women anthologies in the early stage were not been compiled with any larger objectives apart from giving recognition to specific works and writers. *New English Poetry by Indian Women* edited by P.Lal and published by the Writers Workshop in 1976 lacks the same concrete portrayal of its objectives. Nevertheless Sunanda P. Chavan in the preface to *The Fair Voice* distinctly puts forth her objective: “to establish a viable identity for the poetry of Indian women in English” (Preface). To enhance the readers understanding of the same a detailed background study is provided. An attempt is made to examine the tradition in which forms of ‘feminine sensibility’, ‘feminine experiences’ and ‘feminine’ ways of expression have been conveyed to us through the disciplinary interpretations of psychology and sociology. Attention is drawn towards women writings on the basis of these interpretations which seek to draw responses from its readers based on the awareness of the distinctions it puts forth.
Chavan’s anthology traces briefly the course of women writings right through the Ancient India, post-Vedic India, Medieval India into the Modern India, does not succeed in giving a critically more enabling perspective. Tharu and Lalita may have shown similarities with Sunanda P. Chavan’s *The Fair Voice* in selecting the significant periods in women’s writing in India but both these anthologies differ in their treatment towards the anthologization of women writings. The former group is relentless, sharp and lucid in bringing out the intricacies that were at work to marginalise and subjugate women. Both these anthologies trace the early women writings in the first notable woman anthology in India; *Therigatha.*

*The Fair Voice* speaks of Buddhism as a religion which regarded the prospective of women’s entry to the Bhikshuni-Sangha as an undisputed and a readily available opportunity to women. Sunanda P. Chavan writes: “…Buddhism…became a means of freedom for a number of women. It regarded woman eligible for admission to Bhikshuni-Sangha, the Order of Nuns and opened to them “avenues of culture and social service” (6). Tharu and Lalita in their work have questioned such formulations and have probed the patriarchal ideologies prevalent in the early Buddhist period that reflect the reluctance to admit women in the Sangha order of Nuns.

Women writings slowly found a recognizable place in the genre of anthologies. *Three Indo-Anglian Poets* published in 1987 by K.R. Ramachandran Nair focuses the discussion on the works of three poets including two woman writers Toru Dutt and Sarojini Naidu and one male writer Henry Derozio. Nevertheless this work states no overt political inclinations to bring women writing to the fore. Irrespective of drawing distinctions based on gender, the book proceeds to take a panoramic view of Indian English writing and sheds light on its progress. The writer admits his naive objective: “The unavailability of any authentic and perceptive critical studies on the poets discussed in this book impelled me to launch upon this project” (7). However with the emergence of anthologies being exclusively devoted to women writings the issue of providing visibility and literary recognition to women writers seemed trivial and a naive objective as compared to the enormity of multiple tasks achieved by such conglomerations of entries.

With the publication of *Women Writing in India* (1992) edited by Susie Tharu and K. Lalita, the subtle act of anthologization which is marked by a compact narrative design is
witnessed. The anthology becomes a pertinent means that notably progresses towards the accomplishment of specific objectives. The work is an intelligent and a meticulous collection of more than one hundred and forty women writers in eleven languages which include Bengali, Gujarati, English, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. The work offers a wider vestibule through its recording of time from 600 B.C onwards. It intends to revisit the Indian cultural and literary history by framing its writers within the twenty six hundred years of change and allows a reassessment of literary works and writers with a rigorous questioning of the patriarchal modes of thinking. It partakes of the dynamic which questions a pre-existing order and finds a new one to ensure its own existence.

The illuminative experience of the anthology is at once related to the plethora of tasks achieved by it. Tharu and Lalita in the preface and the introduction to the anthology are clear on their basic premise and agenda. They offer a rereading and a fresh probe into ideologies, historical formulations and social circumstances that have marred an authentic and reliable understanding of literary production by women in India. An enormous revision of the literary map is offered by the inclusion of largely dismissed or ignored writers and individual works. A politically conscious act of anthologization is evident in the self-proclaimed assertion of the editors who clearly state the motive to be political and social promotion of ‘radical solidarities’ for an indigenous feminist movement. They observe:

It must by now be clear that when we made the selections we were not just looking for uncontroversially “well-formed” works or indeed simply for an individual writer’s “achievement” that would appeal immediately across time and space. We looked more specifically for pieces that illuminated women’s responses to historical developments and ones that gave insight into the dimensions of self-fashioning and the politics of everyday life as they affected women. We paid special attention to writers we thought had been underestimated or whose work ought to be far better known. (xxiv)

The discovery and preservation of rare texts is a notable feature of this anthology. Anita Desai eulogising the work wrote in the *New York Review* of Books. “A book that is revolutionary and presents a view of Indian Life and history never coherently put together before and which it will be impossible ever again to ignore. It will be considered a landmark” (Web). The
The works of underrepresented or ignored writers such as Cornelia Sorabji, Pundit Ramabai, Krupa Satti, Rokeya Sakhawat, Muthulakshmi Reddi have been assembled by the editors who have taken specific cognizance not only of their works but their contributions towards the specific genres in which they have rendered their feminist perspectives without being marred by reticence or timidity. Though the work attempts to restore the literary reputation of the forgotten women writers, the perspective of the anthology is essentially feminist. The anthology is in itself a huge dismantling of firmly established structures. Literary history is read against its overt pronouncements. The censored and the hidden events have been recaptured by Tharu and Lalita. Their patent recognition of the controversial female figures together with a firsthand probe of archives, libraries, social histories, biographies, documentaries and autobiographies offered startling revelations.

Through this anthology the editors not only try to reveal the damage caused by historical formulations which were equally distorted and unintelligible and were put forth to fulfill the imperial purposes of control and intervention by Western historians but also try to undo the process and its effects by offering a revised literary history which uncovers the path trodden by women not as passive beings but as active participants capable of probing the complexities of their situation. Their anxieties and frustrations of a doubly marginalized position as a woman and as colonized subject find adequate expression in the selected writings.

The editors use the space provided in the period-specific introductions to clear the false consolidated notions of indologists, utilitarian’s, historians and scholars. The proclamations that gain vigour from Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978) serve the purpose of reviewing history by understanding the inherent motives and complexities in its construction and thereby bringing under their crucial scrutiny, discourses that have legitimized the role of women in family, society and nation. It is against the backdrop of such formulations that the creative writings of women are brought together in which they voice their thoughts in an unrestricted and a blatant manner. One important reason to probe these configurations and historiographic explanations was the prevalent tendency whereby they invigorated patriarchy and allowed sustenance to the patriarchal system. As the anthologies candidly enunciate their
accommodations and resistances in the act of anthologization I have tried to examine their pronouncements in the space used by the anthologizer including the preface, introduction and the essays and also through an exegetical interpretation of the individual entries.

The collection begins with extracts from what the editors proclaim to be the earliest known anthology of women’s writing in India and in the world. The poetic renderings of Buddhist senior nuns called theris were brought together in an anthological compilation called Therigatha in sixth century B.C. The songs of these nuns including Mutta, Ubbiri, Sumangalamata and Mettika form an essential feminine experience which celebrates the freedom offered by their new religion which was Buddhism. Its overtly critical approach towards the rituals and practices of Vedas and the brahmanical hegemony allowed these women to embrace it freely and celebrate their release in their religious conversion. Nevertheless the entries stir the readers imagination to a questioning of the reasons that might have forced these women to adopt Buddhism as a means of release.

Mutta the first theri included in the collection sings:

So free am I, so gloriously free,
Free from three petty things—
From mortar, from pestle and from my twisted lord,
Freed from rebirth and death I am,
And all that has held me down
Is hurled away. (1-6)

The poems serve a twofold purpose. A sound reverence and veneration is felt for Buddhism to allow these women a new life in which they are “so gloriously free” (68). At the same time their present experience is set in sharp contrast to past sufferings of these women as Sumangalamata sings:

A woman well set free! How free I am,
How wonderfully free, from kitchen drudgery
Free from the harsh grip of hunger,
And from empty cooking pots,
Free too of that unscrupulous man,
The weaver of sunshades. (1-6)

The editors leave no stone unturned to prove their point. Buddhism itself is brought under a massive scrutiny. They are interested not so much in revealing the ways in which Buddhism offered them salvation but the essential circumstances that urged a woman to break free from her familial and traditional role. The editor’s state “…as the poets testify to the transformative power of Buddhism and exult in their new life, they contrast it to the painful world they leave behind” (67).

At the very outset the compositions of these women writers set the tone of the one’s to follow. The entries speak of the focus of the editors which lie not in any religion as such but in the world of women and their experiences in it. In the headnotes the scholars reveal both the emancipatory and the antagonistic element prevalent in Buddhism towards women. Tharu and Lalita proclaim the initial reluctance of the religion towards the admission of women in the same. They reveal to the readers the predication of Buddha’s foster mother who was initially denied entry into the Sangha group primarily because of her gender until the intervention of Buddha’s young disciple Ananda who spoke on her behalf. Eventually it was at the expense of observing Buddha’s ‘eight weighty laws’ that women were allowed entry into Buddhism. Holding firmly to the basic premise of the anthology the editors state “It is not without some pleasure, therefore that we provide Buddhism with yet another incarnation in these volumes” (67).

The collection of the Sangam poets from the akam (love poems) anthology also focuses on the gender distinctions. The treatment of individuals in these poems is based on their gender: “The woman in the akam poems is young and made for love; the man a warrior in his prime or one who (foolishly) leaves a woman and goes in search of riches (71). The feminist perspective of this anthology lies in exposing the objectives and the concomitant ways in which historical discourses have moulded the status of woman. Patently vital texts have been chosen for a critical analysis. The consent given by Max Muller in India: What it Can Teach Us (1883) to the Vedic or the Ancient Indian civilization and its naturally accompanying virtues that were sought by the European communities for their salvation and sustenance are sharply critiqued by James Mill in his notable work History of British India (1818).
Tharu and Lalita examine these books to reveal the inherent contradictions prevalent in these individual discourses that were meant to offer significant predominating configurations in the future. They examine the notions put forth by these individual works that are completely opposed to each other. They show that for Mill the status accorded to a woman is suggestive of the healthy or degraded state of nation. The picture Mill created of women in India was that of a helpless victim subjected to male atrocities bearing the burden of her gender in multiple ways. The mention of the immense success of Katherine Mayo’s *Mother India* (1927) was to prove the larger affirmation gained by the European community for Mill’s work as well as to elicit a response that presented colonial control as a viable solution to combat the irrationalism and immorality prevalent in the Indian society, apparent in the cruel treatment meted out to women.

The conflict laid by the propositions of the German Romantics that raise the status of women in the Vedic society is questioned by those of the British utilitarian’s that include Mill. The latter lays down a reductionist imperious approach by blurring even the distinctions made between the early Vedic and later Medieval period, right up to the nineteenth century in so far as the role of women is considered (as active participants or passive subjects of domination). The anthology intrepidly confronts such issues and endeavours to foster a reexamination of past. Tharu and Lalita give illuminating instances of woman as active participants not only in the Aryan or Rig-Vedic period but also in the declining years. They have included the verses of women Bhakti poets who have dealt with major issues and serve to establish their reputation as the worthy descendants of the Aryan woman enjoying a substantial amount of literary freedom.

The anthology translates the works of the women Bhakti poets including Akkamahadevi, Sule Sankavva, Janabai, Rami, Gangasati, Ratanbai, Mirabai, Molla, Bahinabai and Tarigonda Venkamamba. From the extracts of the women poets of the Bhakti movement one can discern their role as of those who voiced their thoughts against the rigid structures of family, society, patriarchal structures and brahmanical hegemony at large. The editor’s lucidly state the ways in which women actively responded to changes around them and used the common language as against Sanskrit which was a ingenious move to appeal to the masses as opposed to the classes. Their literary expression is not constrained, institutionalized
and fixed by the spaces imposed on them by religion and society. They address the common man in a common language and move beyond the fringes of court and temple to address the patent issues of a common man’s life. Among the medieval Bhakti woman poet saints the editors include the works of courtesans and prostitutes. Sule Sankavva was a prostitute who wrote in Kannada in the twelfth century. She writes:

In my harlot’s trade
Having taken one’ man’s money
I daren’t accept a second man’s sir.
And if I do,
they ‘ll stand me naked and
kill me sir. (1-6)

The poem speaks of the intensity of the situation in which a woman’s anxiety for the worst that she may encounter as a woman and a prostitute is brought to the surface. In her lucid and candid observation, Janabai who is among the most notable Varkari Saint poets in Maharashtra writes:

Cast off all shame,
and sell yourself
in the marketplace
then alone
can you hope
to reach the Lord.(1-6)

Ratanbai is notable for revealing a woman’s courage in encountering the hardships of life. She is symbolic of a woman who confronts the harsh reality of life and is not an escapist. She writes:

My spinning wheel is dear to me, my sister,
My husband married me and departed;…
I paid off all my husband’s debts
And over and above
Tying coin after coin in the corner of my sari
I earned a whole rupee. (1-3, 13-16)

All the entries in this anthology resonate with the experiences of women. Even the historical narratives that would give an account of historical events and their progress in a dull and a prosaic manner are presented here from a feminist perspective. In the headnote the editors observe:

...histories commonly gave accounts of the major public events that had taken place, political crisis that threatened the state, battles that had been fought, and grants or honors that had been given. Not so Gul-Badan Begum’s...She speaks of the anxieties and pressures as the womenfolk experience them. (99)

The extract selected from Gulbadan Begum’s *Humayunama* bears a valid testimony to the same. Tharu and Lalita have culled the part that reveals the anxiety and the apprehension of the young Hamida in establishing a matrimonial alliance with Gul Badan’s brother Humayun. Hamida is opinionated and contemplates the pros and cons of the alliance through her uninfluenced speculation.

Significantly in the section named “Literature of the Reform and Nationalist Movements” the political purpose of this anthology is equally transparent. They lay bare their observation according to which women even in the social, political and economic history have been identified with struggles for recognition and honour. In the section introduction they shed light on the additional role of the reform movement which had an overt political agenda: “Embedded in the explicit programs of the reform movement were massive ideological reconstructions of patriarchy and gender that under wrote the consolidation of imperial power” (152). They select entries to state the ideological transformation.s that the women of those times experienced. The entries speak in multiple ways in which these women negotiated the uneasy path that stood divided between the expectations of the men in their lives and their own individual uncertainties, aspirations and fixities.

Tharu and Lalita speak of the creation of *bhadramahila* the term which stood for a “middle class housewife” and was thus in direct contrast to the women poets who sang freely and with
a steady directness and a frank realism and belonged to the Vaishnavite cult which allowed women a greater amount of freedom in terms of their ideological stances and social existence. Extracts have been derived in this anthology from the verses of the folk singers Jogeshwari and Bhabani who dwelled in the early nineteenth century. Jogeshwari sings of her deserted love and her constancy in the same as a woman. At the same time she brings forth the callousness of her debauched husband who has turned his back on her:

I am a faithful wife.
I do not care for any but my lord…
You have thrown the jewel away that was your home.
And now you go around playing with tinsel” (7-8, 11-12).

Bhabani tries to subvert the standard forms in which the women of the time must have been cast. Her bold subversiveness is reflective of the changes that occurred during the time. Bhabani writes “Ram’s real sweet/ Shyam’s the same./ It’s only my husband who’s sour” (15-17).

Apparently each entry in the volume finds its place to fulfill a particular purpose which patently is to reveal the genesis and development of significant literature by women in India from a specific perspective. The excerpt of Rassundari Devi who was born in 1810 and wrote in Bengali was to bestow on her works a new appeal which spoke of her inner experiences and aspirations which were at once against the traditional demands of the society. This stands in contrast to being excerpted in a way that would consolidate her status as a God fearing Bengali housewife. In the excerpt from Amar Jiban (My Life) she writes: “If I am to describe my state of mind, I would say that it was very much like the sacrificial goat being dragged to the altar, the same hopeless, situation, the same agonized screams” (193).

The rendering of her state of mind at the moment when the palanquin bearers are to carry her to her new abode is at once poignant and intense. The predicament in which she finds herself as a newly wedded bride is compared to a bird in a cage. She says: “Well, I was like a caged bird. And I would have to remain in this cage for life. I would never be freed” (194). The extract does not speak of an experience that would call celebration for a girl of fourteen who has just got married but of utter despair and desolation, as the young girl feels
herself trapped in the institution of marriage. The piece included from the corpus of Mahadevi Verma’s work is “Lachhma”. It is a story of woman who after struggling in her marriage to a mentally challenged man and facing the atrocities of her in-laws returns to her parents and raises the children of her brother whose wife is dead. This piece would seldom remind anyone of a devotional mystique strain which was commonly found in the writings of the author who was a prominent figure of the Chhayavad movement in Hindi literature.

In the story she addresses the concerns, agony and experience of a woman from a feminist stance. Tharu and Lalita explore her position not as a “modern day Mirabai” but as “a major feminist philosopher” (461). Lachhma is a courageous woman who finds happiness in the trivial objects life has to offer her. The ‘old black comb’ which she loses had been a source of immense delight to her. The writer feels worried for her lot as the apple orchards provide her food in summers but soon hunger would befriend her in the approaching winter “What then will Lachhma do with the disabled old people, the small children, and the unsheltered animals?”(469). Lachhma’s transformation as a woman who has sufficient courage to bear the hardships together with her optimism and generosity is celebrated in the work as the writer views:

I saw in Lachhma the strenghth to stay unperturbed and also the generosity to forgive her accusers. Neither does she demean herself by criticizing others, nor does she diminish her self confidence by justifying herself. (468)

Mahadevi Verma confronts the issues peculiar to a woman as a wife, a daughter, a nurturer and a companion. She deals with issues that reveal their anxieties, dilemma’s and uncertainties and the audacious ways in which a woman tries to conquer them or at least seek her sustenance by confronting them. In the story the writer emerges not as a mystique but as a feminist.

An important task accomplished by this anthology was to establish the literary status and active concern of women who in the last decades of the nineteenth century were believed to be absent from ‘the agenda of public debate’. Tharu and Lalita refute the point by showcasing the works of women writers who enormously contributed in women’s periodicals between 1880s and the 1920s. They state the active contributions of the writers and editors of the time
that include Swaranakumari Devi, Hiranmayi Devi, Sarla Kumari Devi, Kamala Sattianadan, Pulugurti Lakshminarasamamba, Rameshwari Nehru, Nanjanagudu, and many others. The contributions of these women writers during the period when illiteracy exacerbated the issues of patriarchal dominance testify to their active role and increasing concern in challenging enterprises. They actively promoted and contributed in the journal literature and encouraged female literacy and emancipation.

A wide list of writers that address the concerns of the reform movement in numerous ways is mentioned by Tharu and Lalita. The editors observe:

And as for the myth that the women’s question died out after its spectacular flowering in the second half of the nineteenth century, these writers offer evidence that women hung on to ideas of freedom and justice, and infused them with their aspirations, even as they responded to the call of nation. (169)

By and large we witness in this anthology the ways in which Reform and Nationalist movements appealed to women writers. They transform the urgencies of the same to reflect in their narratives new meanings and observations. Tarabai Shinde (Marathi) and Mokshodayani Mukhopadhyay (Bengali) seem to achieve the same purpose. Muktabai’s candid dismissal of brahmanical hegemony is impressive and so are the novels of Nirupama Devi who was a Bengali widow and endeavoured to create in her novels heroines who succeeded in defeating destiny by virtue of their excessive courage and comparison without rebelling against tradition. I dwell on interesting instances for a detailed analysis though the fact remains that the entire book follows the same course.

Mokshodayani’s entry “Bangalir Babu” (The Bengali Babu) is a witty retort to Hemchandra Bandhopadhyay’s “Bangalir Meye” (The Bengali Women). The latter targets women and accuses them of whims, fancies and irrationality. The image of the Bengali babu in Mokshodayani’s work is that of an educated and self conceited man who actually lives a life of servitude: “faced with a sahib, he trembles in fear” (27). The mockery of the Reformist agenda is clear in this figure who “writes himself down as a Brahmo” (64) delivers sermon, offers emancipation to women and reveals his patriotic fervour in his desire to liberate the country from the clutches of colonial rule and yet “These sports are nocturnal; wiping his
mouth, in the morning/ The babu is respectful and sober again" (72-73).

Significantly Tarabai Shinde’s “Stri Purash Tulana” (A Comparision of Men and Women) and Savithribai Phule’s “Letter to Jotiba Phule” are polemical narratives that dwell on undeviating questioning of the traditional patriarchal modes. The comparative analysis offered by the individual pieces in this anthology foster interpretations that invite the reader to contrast and differentiate clearly the varied experiences of women. Women protagonists at times respond in a meek and a docile manner towards their immediate surroundings or might even show a vociferous aggressiveness towards the societal norms and traditions. Tharu and Lalita have successfully incorporated such pieces to reflect the varied responses of women in the peculiarity of their complex predicaments.

The story “Praticaradevatha” (The Goddess of Revenge) by Lalithambika Antheijanam unveils the intense agony of a wife who is turned a harlot by her husband and consequently threatens the structure of the Namboodri society as she exposes the names of the sixty four highborn brahmins, priests and princes during the course of her trial. Tatri’s transformation from a simple Namboodri wife abandoned by her husband to a harlot makes her strongly oppose the subjugation of women in Namboodri society. As a spouse she could never please her husband but when the latter spends a night with her as a harlot he remarks: “I’ve never been with anyone as intelligent and beautiful as you. I wish I could stay with you” (499). The statement reveals the dubious standards of men and society at large and the miserable lot of Namboodri women.

The bliss in marriage experienced by Tatri who before her disillusionment moves forward towards embracing marriage as offering “a boundless sense of happiness” (494) can be contrasted to Rassundari Devi’s apprehension and anxiety in her desire to embrace new life. Her naive adherence to her parental house and the love of her mother can be set in sharp contrast to the figure of Tatri who is bold, vivacious and defiant. Invulnerable to fear and intimidation she avenges the estrangement of her husband and the society towards her. The framework of anthology succeeds tremendously in offering such comparisons.

Anthologies define readership and the traits that the readers are made to observe in the process of reading. However the ways of defining this readership is entirely determined by
the logic of coherence that an anthologist bestows on his entries. It is a realm within which every single entry of the work resonates with new implications. In the second volume of *Women Writing in India* the extracts serve more clearly as “documents of historical struggle” (115), than as pieces of literary merit. Entries are brought together on account of the shared historical experiences that they embody. Anthology can be seen as being vitally instrumental in offering the framework for organizing body of literary works around significant historical changes and developments. Through the medium of anthology yet another direction is given to the readers to train them of specific ways in which the texts are to be absorbed. In the process the editors end up redefining feminist literary history. They observe:

> We believe that a feminist literary history must map the play of forces in the imaginative worlds in which women wrote, and read their literary initiatives not as an endless repetition of present-day rebellions or dreams of triumph, but as different attempts to engage with the force and the conflict of the multiple cross-cutting determinations of those worlds. (70)

The literary history that Tharu and Lalita wish to map intends to move beyond a confined and naive reflection of women’s writing in terms of its aesthetic value. They envision a more mighty and a challenging role for their compilation in which women writers are showcased as historically active entities reacting to their immediate surroundings in more critical ways. History is not intended to be revealed merely in terms of its polemical issues and conflicting agendas. On the contrary the editors draw on entries which reveal a scrupulous investigation of these issues and agendas by women through their narratives in subtle ways. Whether the readers acknowledges the surface questioning of historical and political issues as incorporated or redeployed in these narratives by women or indulge in a detailed inquiry of the same the fact remains clear that they are inevitably made a part of the entire anthological project. The patterns of reading that the editors intend to foster ineluctably succeed in making the readers realise the specific direction mapped out for them.

Tharu and Lalita intend their entries to be read in relation to each other. They are persistent in their intention of extending to their readers an experience in which the writers of earlier decades for instance Tarabai Shinde, Bandaru Acchamamba, Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain are offered to be read with the writers of 1920s to the 1940s which include Nirupama Devi,
Subhadhra Kumari Chauhan, Mahadevi Verma, Lalitharubika Antherjanam, Dhirubhen Patel, Balamani Amma, and Nanjanaguddu Tirumalamba to reveal that:

...these works seem conservative, restrained, cofined to spaces that have always been sanctioned to women cautious to fault... History, Politics set against the backdrop of the movement antagonisms of gender or class do not intrude in immediately recognizable forms. Yet this fiction seems to chart women’s slow but unmistakable and moving struggles for dignity and personhood outside the double-edged promises of enlightenment and the social reform movement. (185)

The editors do not deny the impetus that their compilation gives to make its writers nationally and internationally visible. However even when the editors incorporate varied writings and succeed in recovering lost works; their primary purpose was not to refurbish the canon though they inevitably end up doing so. They clearly state:

Had the recovery of literature, lost or damned in the conduit of male criticism, been our major interest, we might have translated different authors, made somewhat different selections, and used different working norms for the translations. (37)

Neither do they seek to draw attention to the common experiences of women suffering from patriarchal subjugation in different regions. What interests the editors is the ways in which women have articulated, responded, questioned or absorbed ideologies from a position which was at once decentred, marginalised and complex. The articulation of these urgencies and subtleties to the readers through complex plots, narratives and fictional creations has been the major preoccupation of the editors. Significantly the political subtleties of texts offered by editors to be read in relation to each other lay bare the dominant patterns and ideological stances that women writers have adopted over the course of years. The observation that the entries in the two volumes bring lucidly before the reader accomplish their purpose of giving a considerable knowledge of the historical and political conditions in which these women writers found and expressed themselves.

It is the framework of an anthology that assists them in bringing together different entries by different writers of different periods in history and engages the reader in a meticulous
cognizance of these varied subtleties which occupied our women writers. A single author collection occupied with a limited set of characters and historical conditions would probably have failed enormously in allowing us a familiarity with significant historical, political and social moments covering broad sweeps of time that have simultaneously affected and ruled the very core of women writings in India.

In an anthological compilation the readers would find themselves in a position to readily analyse these varied threads that have been woven in the writings by women. The entries that have been picked up in the second volume of the book are to reveal the progress of women towards creating a national identity and an “imagined community” (43). The term “imagined community” (Anderson 224) draws attention towards the new unifying patterns that include the incorporation of culture and politics in the nationalist project however the term may well be applied to the form of anthology which has significant ideological and political purposes.

The term which was originally coined by Benedict Anderson while reflecting on nationalism and national identity, gained major prominence. Tharu and Lalita’s use of the term sheds enormous light on their preoccupations. Anderson uses the term to denote a community which seeks affinity and connection without any face to face interaction with all of its members. He writes that a nation: “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (224).

The “imagined community” is created in an anthology not only by different authors but also by a collective readership that identifies with the vitally inherent claims of the anthology. Jillian Sandell while enunciating on the identity based anthologies observes: “Anthologies produce and sustain communities” (279). Anthology constructs an ‘imagined community’ not only in terms of bringing together writers from different historical periods, or geographical locations but also in constructing a readership that finds instant affinities with the shared experience that a particular anthology intends to extend. The collection of suppressed groups, voices the inherent identity politics that operates subtly in an anthology’s construction and intends to organise people ideologically, politically and through reinforcing affinities in views.
Tharu and Lalita select significant entries which can enlarge the patterns and elements through which the nation is redefined. The collection of entries mark a notable shift which women writings reveal; without being overtly feminist or radical in most of their works. After defining nation and nationalism as products of a redefined and constructed discourse; gender issues are scrutinized as a measure adopted to facilitate governance of the nation-state and its people. However my primary endeavour has not been to probe the matter of historical and political formulations but to shed light on the manner of conveying political stances and the complexities of tendentious interpretations through conglomerating selective entries.

Selections have been made from significant historical moments to unfurl a woman’s rendering of her own predicament. The editors draw our attention to works in which religion and gender prejudices fostered by the British are reflected in some precolonial writings and are reinterpreted in peculiar ways in Independent India. Razia Sajjad Zaheer who wrote in Urdu in her posthumously published work “Neech” (Lowborn) renders the predicament that the lowborn Shyamali who is a domestic worker at the house of upper class Muslim woman Sultana, finds herself in. Shyamali preserves a dignity of appearance and manners. She does not greet her masters as “maibap” (145). In a way she denies to stoop to irrationalities. However looking at her Sultana her mistress is reminded of the centuries old established notions of the society against the lowborn people:

Those low-born women-they were unreliable, she had always been told. She thought of the stories she had heard from her grandmother about girls bought during a famine who ran off with some man the moment they got enough to eat. These women picked up husbands and dropped them with equal ease. (145)

Both Sultana and Shyamali have witnessed unsuccessful marital relationships. But what catches our attention is not the adverse reaction of society when Shyamali’s affair with Ram Avtar is revealed but the courage of this woman who abandons the latter when he is equally oblivious as was her husband to her psychological and emotional needs. What Shyamali loves is not Ram Avtar’s job or money but just him she says “I have the courage to support ten like him” (153). Though Sultana ultimately realises the complexity of Shyamali’s predicament ; what one feels is the larger plight of being doubly marginalised first as a woman and second as a low caste woman in a society where personal integrity and morality are virtues that are
The protagonist in Manjul Bhagat’s “Bibiji” finds her true association with the tandurwala and his family. Her own sons are oblivious of her very existence. The writer Shivani who occupies an important place among the feminist writers renders in her short story “Dadi” a figure of authority and perseverance. Dadi is an upper class Hindu woman and would leave for holy dips in the Ganges to purge herself if she consumes food by a Muslim servant. Yet the woman with austere religious standards raises herself over the ones who brag their rationality when she forgives the Muslim servant spy. Unlike the juice shop owner who lost his son in the Indo-Pakistani war and intends to have his revenge by attacking the Pakistani spies; Dadi forgives them. The narrator states: “Ammaji’s old heart had forgiven the snake long ago. Wasn’t he someone’s son too? Wasn’t he doing it for his country” (187).

The editors assemble these stories to showcase the narratives of assimilation as witnessed through women writings. Dadi is at once traditional and modern, humane and secular. Women show a sympathetic attitude towards Muslims and the low caste people. However the editors reveal that this accommodation and assimilation also leads to a consolidation of an upper caste Hindu centrality. And then they include works where the virtues of assimilation and consolidation are contested. Tharu and Lalita present the complex preoccupation of women writings which is not just to extend an aesthetic experience to the reader but to impart a critical sense of a woman’s engagement with vital issues. Hamsa Wadkar’s autobiography brings to light the agony and failure of an economically independent woman who ends up living a life in which her own aspirations have come into a direct conflict with tradition.

The political upheavals particularly in the state of Hyderabad are not precisely mentioned in Wajeda Tabassum’s short story “Utran” (castoffs) but could be implicitly related through the traditions, culture and ideologies of the upper class nawab family in which Chamki lives with her mother. Caught in midst of the disparities fostered by caste and the class system Chamki’s refusal to wear her mistress’s used clothes is a sign of her defiance. She finally triumphs by mating with her husband the night before her marriage and takes her revenge. Chamki smiles victoriously and tells her mistress: “Pasha-I-I-I- All my life I kept wearing your cast off’s, but now you also” (416).
The chronological structuring of authors and texts is an historically structured move. In Europe such proceedings which intended to give a concrete form to national literature emerged in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Julia Wright observes:

Anthologies have been produced and published for centuries but the chronological arrangement of material with which we are now so familiar is a relatively recent development and one coincident with the establishment of National Literature.

(334)

All anthologies that are period-specific would inevitably lead to giving a concrete form to the literature of its country. In the process of tracing the literature of the nation from its original state to the present one anthologies construct the nationalist literature and history. In Tharu and Lalita’s work they successfully revisit the field of literary history and nationalism and enlarge the scope of women writings through observing a chronology in which women’s literature is organised and inevitably made part of the national literature.

Two years after the publication of Tharu and Lalita’s work The Feminist Press released *Truth Tales: Contemporary Stories by Women Writers of India* in January 1993. Originally published by Kali for Women the work is edited by Laura Kalpakian and has a meticulous and thoughtful introduction by Meena Alexander. Unlike *Women Writing in India* this work includes only one entry written originally in English. “Midnight Soldiers” by Vishwapriya Iyenger is the only piece in English whereas the other six are translations from the regional languages which include Bengali, Gujrati, Marathi, Hindi, Tamil and Urdu. Both these anthologies include writings in translation. These are compilations that cull pieces from a linguistic variety of works. Apparently they offer an unfolding of regional experiences which owe their peculiarities to distinct customs, mores, traditions and cultures.

In its varied accomplishment of tasks *Truth Tales* goes far beyond its representative role. Through the culled pieces in seven languages an attempt is made to probe “seven distinct sensibilities” (8) reflective of the writers regional consciousness. In the preface to the anthology, substantial light is thrown on the direction towards which the anthology leads its readers:

…these stories cull the essence of women’s experiences: the power, the passion,
the pain, the hopelessness, the fury, the joy. The predicaments these women find themselves in are not untypical: It is their individual responses to them that define the women, their social milieu and its mores. (8)

The politically awakened consciousness of both the old and the new writers finds a concrete expression in their writings. The older generation of writers have been involved in the national liberation movements and the literary renaissance and the new writers have also absorbed and reflected in these writings their political, social and cultural preoccupations. The collection of contemporary fiction reveal the engagement of women in issues pertaining to gender inequalities, cultural ideologies, social injustice and marginalisation in Modern India. Mahasveta Devi (Bengali), Mrinal Pande (Hindi) and Ismat Chughtai (Urdu) firmly hold their positions in Women Writing in India and Truth Tales.

Mahasweta Devi “Shishu” (Children) a short story in Bengali included by Tharu and Lalita can be read along with her story “The Wet Nurse” included in Truth Tales. In both the entries Mahasweta Devi’s role as a political activist devoted to the concerns of the underprivileged and marginalised sections of society is apparent. In the story “Shishu” she unmask’s with telling force the tribal predicament. Mr Singh who becomes the epitome of philanthropy and benevolence extended to the tribal people is caught towards the end by the “Agarias” the tribals who expose through their undernourished bodies and their “dry unholy touch” (249) the stark reality that lies behind their predicament. They have suffered at the hands of the government: “Punitive taxes… ruthless oppression… terrible persecution” (240). They reveal their state as they trap and address Mr Singh who comes to the place designated as the relief officer: “There are only fourteen of us left our bodies have shrunk without food. Our men are impotent, our women are barren. That’s why we steal the relief. Don’t you see we need food to grow to a human size again?” (249).

Whereas in “Shishu” Mahashveta Devi’s concern for the tribals is apparent; in her story “The Wet Nurse” included in Truth Tales she dwells into the tensions based on gender inequities. Jashoda’s image as a woman and above all as a mother is subverted and fractured. Her ability to nurse more than fifty mouths gives her a living but towards the end she is abandoned by the people she shielded from misery. Her circumstances reveal the complexities of a subaltern consciousness battling against feudal oligarchy. At her deathbed
suffering from breast cancer she reveals an acute failure to comprehend reality as a wife
mother and an individual. The author states: “One had to be a Jashoda to nurse the world. One
also had to die alone, friendless...Jashoda’s death was god’s death. In this world...when a
person takes on godhood...he is rejected by everyone and is left to die alone” (61-62).

All the entries in this anthology cling tenaciously to their objective. They expose ideologies
and fracture the iconic roles into which women were cast and reveal a feminist perspective
that remains intrinsic to these writings. To propose that this perspective is coerced and thrust
upon the readers through the medium of ‘anthology’ would be to miss precariously the
essential objective of these works that seem to stand their ground and are adamant in their
desire to offer reinterpretations by offering a variety of experiences. Women anthologies
intend to explore the long tradition of women writings by revisiting the same through
illuminating perspectives.

Simultaneously the entries which deal with different subjects stand united in the
framework of an anthology. In these anthologies the responses of the readers are primarily
evoked not by responding to entries individually but by being influenced through the
uniformity of purposes, complexities and dilemmas which underwrite such literary creations.
It is the structure of anthology that facilitates such revelations. Matila in “Midnights Soldiers”
by Vishwapriya Iyenger is emblematic of female revolt and Shakun in Suniti Aphale’s “The
Dolls” renders a bleak picture of female labour.

As an artist who excels in making dolls she desires the love of the dear ones in her life.
Her dilemma lies in her spiritual and sexual despair which the writer renders vividly. Equally
vivid is the portrayal of the middle aged Malini Mausi in Mrinal Pande’s “Tragedy in a Minor
Key”. Mrinal is carried to the brink of frenzy as she finds herself lacking in the resources that
could have eluded defeat thus: “All her pronouncements swing between an acute hatred of
femininity and a black self pity” (103). In “Tiny Granny” Ismat Chughtai’s protagonist offers
a contrast to Shakun in the story “The Dolls”. Meena Alexander writes:

She is named and renamed: “Baftan’s kid,” “Bashirah’s daughter in law,”
“Bismillah’s mother,” and finally “Tiny’s Granny”. The last name sticks with her
till death, While the lack of a name of her own testifies to her marginality, we
recall that such bonds with familial others are precisely what the dollmaker
Shakun lacks. (21)

The passage lays bare an essential function of anthology. The protagonist of each story is caught in a different predicament. However this difference does not allow the reader to be smugly self satisfied by reading these stories as separate areas of female articulations of their beliefs and perspectives. Even if the reader repositions himself/herself before reading an entry it does not suggest that the deep feminist engagement and the commonality of purpose which brings together the entries that offer varied articulations and negotiations of women in a challenging world reflected in all of them can, at any point be overlooked.

Though Shakun lacks the familial bonds which Tiny’s Granny doesn’t yet we realise both of them inquiring into complex issues through their marginalised positions. Shakun leads an independent life through her art of making dolls, but she does not see her salvation through this art which offers her a twisted liberation. The dolls she makes offer her no release but as she says: “grab you round the throat like ghosts” (72). The predicaments of all the protagonists in this anthology create a world in unison and not by being distinct entities to be perused individually in sections. Brought together in an anthology these individual entries enact their role as a chorus urging their readers towards the realisation of something that remains influential and elusive. The world of Matila, Shakun, Mrinal and all others is brought together under one roof. We are offered a range of voices that not only address the readers but each other. The reader is made to take cognizance of a common thread that binds them.

Many anthologies released during the last quarter of the twentieth century, vary in intensity of their political commitments but somehow intend to linger on the same ground. Relatively these works seem to lack the political invigoration that has amply survived in *Women Writing in India* and *Truth Tales*. Eunice De Souza in *Nine Indian Women Poets: An Anthology* (1997) published by the Oxford University Press selects works of nine Indian women poets writing in English. The limited number of poets reflects on her primary endeavour to do justice to works of the individual poets and simultaneously allows her enough space to include more works of the same author and reveal the variety, shifts and multiple concerns that define their works. A limited number of entries cannot do justice to the literary aura of an author that stays in the readers mind. The anthologist has to make choices and in the process of making those choices succeeds invariably in making some friends and
some foes. However having made her choices De Souza stands by them.

Apart from including her own work the writers that fit her criteria of selection and successfully occupy a place in her anthology are Kamala Das, Mamta Kalia, Melanie Silgardo, Imtiaz Dharker, Smita Bhatt, Charmayne D’ Souza and Tara Patel. By including Indian women poets writing in English the work places itself in contrast to Tharu and Lalita’s anthology:

Women Writing in India does not include any women poets writing in English on the grounds that their work ‘is more easily available to the reader’. This is not, true, in fact. Even libraries which are required by law to stock all books published in India have virtually nothing because publishers do not concern themselves with this law. (5)

With the appearance of Bequest (1992) by Keith Fernandes and Eunice De Souza and Arlene Zide’s and Aruna Litesh’s anthology In Their Own Voice (1993) Women writings started gaining increased recognition and critical attention. L’ India Dell ‘Anima edited by Andrea Sirotti and published in Italy by Le Letere in 2006 is an anthology compiled in Italian. Poets including Meena Alexander, Moniza Alvi, Imtiaz Dharkar, Sujata Bhatt, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Reetika Vazirani, Gayatri Mazumdar, Arundhati Subramaniam and Mary Anne Mohanraj have been anthologized. The Italian publication bears sufficient testimony to the increasing worldwide interest in women’s writing.

Women’s Voices: Selections from Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Indian Writing in English (2002) by Eunice De Souza and Lindsay Pereira is an anthology of women’s writing that envisages the reader to draw a distinction between the belletristic model of writing and a more pragmatic one and thus endeavours to reflect a more politically conscious model of writing in which the writers address vital issues of concern. The collection of forty writers includes travellers, political activist’s legislators and diplomats. Eunice de Souza claims in the Introduction: “For the most part these were writers writing for a cause. There is little of the ‘art for art’s sake’ present in their writing” (xii). However the collection which gathers more politically and socially conscious writings does not undervalue the idea of presenting the range and the quality of these writings. Equally important are the objectives of
reassessing literary reputations. In her previous anthology *Nine Indian women Poets: An Anthology* (1997) De Souza restored the literary place of Melanie Silgardo in this work by the inclusion of extracts from the novel *Purdah and Polygamy* she intends to re-establish Iqbalunnisa Hussain.

The distinct ways of anthologization are emphatically at work. While on one hand the editors restore the reputations of the lesser known writers such as Herabai Tata, Shovana Devi and Hussain on the other hand they offer illuminating ways to reassess the already established ones. By extracting the prose writings of Toru Dutt as opposed to the verse for which she is largely known, the editors offer new ways of approaching the writers and interpreting their works. The editors observe:

Toru Dutt, for instance is celebrated as a poet. While this is fair enough as she was the first woman poet in India writing in English, it is really in her letters that she is most marvellously alive. The letters are affectionate, observant, satirical, touching. (xii)

Extracts have been taken from Herabai Tata’s *A Short Sketch of Indian Women’s Franchise Work* (n.d), Rani Chimnabai’s *The Position of Women in Indian Life* (1911), Kitty Shiva Rao’s *Education of Women in Modern India* (1946), and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay’s *The Awakening of Indian Women* (1939). These are astutely composed works which address doctrinal problems, social reforms, women rights during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. She further assembled the writings of Venu Chitale and Zeenuth Futehally; the writers who were virtually removed from the literary scene. Even a hasty glance at the contents of the work would explicitly reveal an unmistakable and politically active consciousness that informs each of these writings.

The issues of child marriage, purdah, and patriarchal oppression are majorly dealt in the anthology. All the entries are placed in a historical context and examine the complexities and subtleties of women’s writings. At the same time women anthologies have successfully released women writers from the predicament in which mainstream anthologies enmeshed them. The notion that the underrepresentation of women writers in mainstream anthologies is primarily due to lack of significant literary works by women as compared to writings by men
is refuted and challenged by women anthologies that draw together eminent works that can largely be valued both as individual pieces of art and works steeped in historical and political changes of the time.

The wide spectrum of the broad anthological surveys of the Indian women poets in anthologies devoted to their writings, bring to the surface a concrete observation that these anthologies have exceeded their original scope in multifarious ways. Preservation and representation of literary work and writers remains a naive and a confined objective which has been exceeded by such compilations by adding a political dimension to it. Such anthologies intend to be more critically enabling and politically conscious of their abilities. The most common entries in these works trace women’s engagements, negotiations and confrontation of issues pertaining to history, politics, sexuality, identity and personal evolution. Their politics lies in establishing distinct perspectives through the encouraging and facilitating framework of an anthology. Entries are culled to fit into their arguments made at the very outset of the book and it is in the togetherness of these individual works that a war is waged against the ingrained gender-related notions.

II

The dilemma in which the Dalit writers found themselves was close to the one that existed for women writers. However though both the groups are marginalised in distinct ways yet the subjugation to which the Dalits were subjected in India’s centuries-old caste system has serious implications. More importantly in the case of a Dalit woman writer who writes from a doubly marginalised position; which is that of gender and caste. Hira Bansode in her poem “Slave” finds herself in a similar predicament. Dalit writers appeared in general anthologies but the ones that were exclusively devoted to their writings had a specific purpose of promoting their distinct voice of protest.

The Dalit anthologies also serve as politically active tools when they feature texts that document the social, religious, political concerns of the editor. These concerns are further examined by the distinctions drawn by the anthologizer on the basis of caste, class and gender. Having discussed the anthologies that are formed on basis of observing the gender distinction and giving a concrete form to women literature, I now proceed to discuss the
anthologies compiled on the basis of caste divisions. The works aim to give adequate representation to oppressed classes and address the social, psychological and economic issues in their lives.

Pritish Nandy in *Modern Indian Poetry* (1974) brings together poets who are acutely conscious of their social and political reality. The anthology includes the poetry of political activists, radicals and revolutionaries. Engaging art in a dialogue through distinct works of opinionated writers Nandy contemplates the specific role of literature: “Literature is no longer an academic discipline. It is no longer expected to grow within a literary matrix. It is seismographic and records in sensitive detail the slightest tremors in our social framework” (18).

Nandy includes the protest poetry of the sixties which marked the Digambar Kavalu movement in Telugu poetry. The poets Cherabandaraju and Nagnamuni are ones anthologized from the vast group that included Bhairavyya, Jwalamukhi, Nikhileswar and Mahaswapna. The inclusion of Sri Sri has also been on the basis of his vital involvement in the revolutionary movement. The editor is particularly conscious of the voices of protest that emerge due to political changes that include the trade union rights, land reform movements and food riots. He states “It is not surprising therefore that quite a few of the poets in this anthology are currently serving jail sentences for their radical views” (19).

Apart from the radically opinionated poets that include Kaifi Azmi, Sri Sri, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Samar Sen and many more Nandy have also accommodated poets from the Dalit literary movement. Namdeo Dhasal and Arun Kamble have succeeded in making their place in Nandy’s general anthology which despite of its political consciousness remains a general work since it also excerpts pieces that fall outside the domain of Dalit literature. The primary objective of the editor in this collection of sixty poets was not specifically to draw attention to the political complexities and incorporate traditionally marginalised voices though it remains one of the objectives but to present before the reader; works “that arrive within the scope of modern sensibility” (21) and offer “a representative sampling from the diverse trends and different literary traditions that form the rich and exciting mosaic of contemporary Indian poetry” (21).
The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry (1994) jointly edited by Vinay Dharwadker and A.K. Ramanujan was published a year after Tharu and Lalita’s Women Writing in India. Unlike Nandy, Dharwadker and Ramanujan make no pronouncements of the anthology’s political and polemic material. Though the anthology includes important Dalit writers such as Hira Bansode, Daya Pawar, Namdeo Dhasal and Jyoti Lanjewar all of whom have also been represented in An Anthology of Dalit Literature (1992) by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot yet it too falls under the category of a general anthology that remains preoccupied with the question of canon and representation.

Out of the hundred and twenty five poets gathered here there are: “thirty two women writers drawn from thirteen languages, and at least half a dozen writers from traditionally marginalized positions in Indian Society” (x). The thematic considerations of this anthology include familial relationships, spiritual dilemma, and urban existence apart from political and social crisis. In unison one acknowledges the primary endeavour of these anthologies to cover wide regions, languages, social and religious groups, movements and religions. They stand in sharp contrast to anthologies that originate with a purpose to bring a specific kind of poetry to the fore. As opposed to the general anthologies the Indian literary scenario witnessed the appearance of anthologies that have divorced themselves from all concerns but to promote their groups, make their voices heard and draw from its readers a specific response that they desire.

Space does not remain a constraint in such anthologies and the anthologizer plays freely on the literary ground making his selections and exclusions. The poetry of protest and revolution found the form of anthology particularly suitable to their requirements. Such anthologies assembled a range of voices that vociferously denounced the power structures and critically probe the centuries-old established patterns of social contradictions and equations of power. However Dalit writings have flourished in different languages including Telugu, Oriya, Malayalam, Gujrati, Punjabi, Maratha, Bengali and Tamil. The poetry of the “Digambar Kavulu” poets who are also known as the nude poets was gathered in the form of an anthology which was originally published between 1965 to 1968 in three volumes under varying titles. They are named the nude poets because of a striking uncovered spontaneity that their poetry reveals. Their poetry took the form of the Digambar Kavulu movement. Their anthology addresses the common man in revolutionary and unconventional ways.
The contributions of poets like Nagnamuni, Jwalamukhi, Cherabanda Raju, Nikhileswar and Mahaswapna was to condemn society and its perpetuated contradictions. Though these poets stand united in their objectives yet their styles are different. Being gathered in anthological compilations affords a fruitful opportunity for the reader to take cognizance of these common themes and stylistic variations. Cherabanda Raju clamourously attacks the rank opportunism of the nobles, warriors and upper classes in general. Mahaswapna examines the fault lying with historical formulations and Nagnamuni detests all Puritanism. These poets render their subaltern consciousness in different ways which is readily revealed to the reader in the form of an anthology.

The last quarter of the twentieth century has witnessed the appearance of many Dalit anthologies. In Gujarati the first short story anthology released in 1987 Gujrati Dalit Varsa edited by Mohan Parmar and Harish Mangalam endeavours to give a sense of Dalitism. In Bengali literature Debes Ray’s anthology Dalit brings together influential writings of the Dalits. The work which was published in 1997 by the Sahitya Academy reflects on the experiences of the marginalised writers. This is the kind of poetry that refutes W.H. Auden’s claim that “Poetry makes nothing happen” (50).

The vast range of anthologies which have appeared in many Indian languages bear testimony to the fact that Dalit literary movement is slowly occupied a national and an international recognition. The movement which originated in Maharashtra strengthened its roots in Karnataka, Gujarat, Orissa, Kerala and Punjab. The contributions of writers from Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have further succeeded in giving a concrete form to Dalit writings in South Asian literature.

Dalit anthologies offer an assortment of texts that contain within their realm peculiar experiences primarily the ones that have been grievously ignored or suppressed in general anthologies. They address the foremost issue of what really constitutes ‘Dalit Literature’. Many non-Dalit writers who write on Dalit issues and themes have not been extended the nomenclature of a Dalit writer. The observation rests primarily on the ground that Dalit writings originate from a pervading experience which cannot be extended to a non-Dalit writer. The former voices the despair, fixities and subtleties of a marginalised position that cannot reveal its obnoxious nudities to someone who stands outside the realm of Dalit experience.
Dalit anthologies particularly bring this question to the surface for a critical analysis. On being questioned for the inclusion of non Dalit writers in Dalit anthologies such as *Dalita Kathalu, Chikkano tuttunapata* (1995), *Padunekkina Paata* (1996), *Nallaregadi Saallu* (2006) and *Kai Tunakala Dandem* (2009) Vemulla Yellaiah a Dalit writer from Andhra Pradesh replies:

Dalit rooted in Dalit ethos alone can narrate the Dalit experience. The rest of it all is fiction. One must know that Dalit literature springs from experience, identity and memory...The non-Dalits especially the upper caste ones, are eager to be included in the Dalit anthologies as they clamour for popularity, and they want to sport on their faces a progressive mask. The Dalit anthropologists, who include the writings of the non-Dalits, too recourse to it in search of popularity. The anthologies edited by the Dalits need not have included the writings of the non-Dalits. (Web)

Clearly anthologies that seem to be devoted to a particular cause in this case to bring together peculiar Dalit experiences have surpassed their own range in attracting new political issues. Having analysed the important women anthologies in the light of their political aspect I proceed to examine two significant Dalit anthologies that include *An Anthology of Dalit Literature* (1992) by Mulk Raj Anand and Eleanor Zelliot and *Poisoned Bread* (1992) by Arjun Dangle.

*An Anthology of Dalit Literature* is an exemplary work that initiated the trend of anthologizing works of Dalit writers that had already made an impact through their writings in native languages. Their translated writings could now reach a vast range of national and international audience. Rendering the verses of Dalit writers in English had the effect of transnationalizing their mortifying experiences and tribulations. The anthology allowed the voice of the Dalit writers to reach beyond their cloistral limits in regional languages as they were now heard by the world wide audience. Dalits were sensitised towards vital issues through the compilation which endeavoured to achieve a broad objective to bring Dalit literature out of its insular territories to a more global recognition. It simultaneously provided
an opportunity for the Dalits across the world to stand united in their claims. Anupreeta Das writes:

Today, mainstream publishers such as Sage, Macmillan, Penguin and Oxford University Press consider three to four manuscripts of translated Dalit writing a year; five years ago it wasn’t even a category. In December 2003, India’s first publishing house devoted to caste issues; Navayana (“new vehicle”) opened for business. (Web)

The Anthology of Dalit Literature and Poisoned Bread have created a pedagogical market for themselves especially after the recognition of Dalit literature as a discipline in universities and colleges across the globe. After the World Conference on Racism in Durban, Dalits have not only gained worldwide recognition but have also succeeded enormously in establishing alliances with the subjugated groups across the world. Dalit studies have made its mark, as an optional course in universities abroad. Though its whole hearted reception in literature departments abroad can be questioned, yet it has succeeded in establishing a vital place in South Asian Studies. With the pedagogical appeal of these anthologies that are slowly gaining the status of a textbook in most of the universities and colleges; these works have tremendously succeeded in deprivileging the authoritative academic tome.

Simultaneously such anthologies become manifested forms of a subtle pedagogical politics as they succeed in pedagogically appeasing the students who belong to these minority groups. These works combat the dominance of brahmanical elitism and the proliferation of literature by high caste men. K. Satyanarayana who teaches at Central Institute of English and Foreign languages, Hyderabad has exposed the initial indifference and reluctancy of upper caste students to a Dalit Studies course:

When I offered Dalit Studies as one of the courses in the M.A in August 2000 initially only one student registered. It was not accidental that he was a Christian. When I did not offer it for the last two semesters a lot of students, mostly dalits have been asking for the course. (15)
It has been more than a decade since the remarks were made. Now Dalit literature is not just studied for being ‘politically correct and fashionable’ but as a part of literature that has witnessed a remarkable growth, acceptance and recognition. An imperative role of literature in relation to issues of caste and class emerges as a number of Dalit anthologies are compiled to question established universal constructs which offer a decontextualized learning to the students and the general readers. Dalit anthologies give a vital opportunity to its readers to engage in a persistent scrutiny of political issues. The potentialities of Dalit literature are revealed to the readers across the world with a specific purpose of probing the past of the Dalits as well as their present. The political compositions of different writers are gathered under a common perspective. Mulk Raj Anand reveals the commonality that runs through each poem:

The process of poetry arising out of the cry can be felt in most Dalit poems, because in these utterances protest seems to come from the insulted and the injured, who have laboured for generation for the supers, their hands with dirty work. (xi)

The anthologizer draws attention to the amalgamation of the personal into the classical, the effect of the repetitive rhythms and the “evocations of mood” (xii) and rasas. Thereby the prospective readers are trained to consume the work in a particular manner. Out of the seventeen poets gathered here five of them were the founding members of Dalit Panthers. Namdeo Dhasal, J.V Pawar, Arun Kamble Arjun Dangle and Prahlad Chendvankar were active members of the organisation.

Dalit literature flourished as a consequence of the movement which originated in Maharashtra. These writers took inspiration from the Black Panthers and the civil rights struggle of the 1960s in the United States. The writers of the Dalit Panther Movement endeavoured to champion the cause of Dalits in their literary and creative pursuits and turned their endeavour into a strong political and a radical movement in which Dalit writers rendered their experiences in a provocative language. These searing narratives of pain and suffering are available to the readers in the form of anthologies, autobiographies, novels and critical discourses. Dalit anthologies gather entries which are absorbing literary expressions of the
consciousness which is awake socially and politically towards the social oppression and economic exploitation of the past and partially of the present. The first Dalit literary conference held in 1958 could not reach concrete results.

However the appearance of Dalit anthologies bears testimony to the fact that Dalit literary production is gathering momentum. The political and the social concerns of the Dalit Panthers are reflected in the works assembled here. The compilation also includes the works of writers who fall outside the group but yet stand united in their concerns. Among Dalit women writers the appearance of Hira Bansode, Mina Gaybhiye, Anuradha Gaurav and Jyoti Lanjewar reveal the heightened interest of women in Dalit Literature. Eleanor Zelliot offers an elaborate historical background of the Dalit Sahitya.

The editor enlightens the readers understanding of the Mahar movement, the Buddhist conversion of 1956, Ambedkar movement, Dalit Panther movement and major political events in the Dalit history such as the burning of Manusmriti at Mahad in 1928, Kala Ram and Chawdar Tank events. Among all the writers Namdeo Dhasal and Daya Pawar have been majorly anthologized. Dhasal is the most notable figure of Dalit literature and is made strongly heard by his inclusion of ten poems. Nine poems have been extracted from Pawar’s writings, making him the second most amply heard voice in the anthology. Zelliot vividly reveals her preoccupations in compiling this work:

Although I am not in the field of literature, I have gathered together this collection because of my interest in all the facets of the Ambedkar movement, and I have found the poetry an excellent reflection of the values and accomplishments of that movement. (17)

The entries chosen offer an indictment of society mostly in a fierce derogatory manner and at times in a subtle satirical tone. Significantly an attitude of protest, defiance and transgression is advertently steeped in each poem of the anthology. Zelliot writes: “This volume is full of outrage, but also of hope, of self-criticism as well as criticism of society” (19). The speaker in Hira Bansode’s “Bosom Friend” raises her voice against the tradition she detests and yet makes a futile attempt to appease her friend that belongs to the same. Her naive ignorance and belief is rendered clearly as the poets write: “Usually women don’t forget that tradition of
inequality/ But you came with a mind large as the sky to my pocket/ size house” (3-5). However after being refuted by her friend who is offended by her table manners she writes: “Dear Friend -- You have not discarded your tradition/Its roots go deep in your mind” (44-45). The poet lucidly exhibits her ultimate despair as she recognizes the unbridgeable chasm that exists between the caste Hindu woman and the Dalit woman.

Entries that mention the political upheavals during the Ambedkar movement have greatly influenced the editor’s criteria of selection. The Chawdar Tank event at Mahad dictated Ambedkar’s attempt to annihilate caste by drinking water from the pond which was restricted to Dalits. The Satyagraha was launched on 20th March 1927 as a movement against the injustices of the Hindu social order. In “O Great Man” Hira Bansode targets the upper castes: “It is clear that nature belongs to all/But these people bought that too./Every drop of water in Chawdar Tank/Was stamped with their name” (24-27). Arjun Dangle’s poem reflects the Dalit misery during the period of the Peshwa rule: “We used to be their friends /When, clay pots hung from our necks,/Brooms tied to our rumps./We made our rounds through the Upper Lane/ Calling “Ma-bap, Johar, Ma-bap” (1-5).

Namdeo Dhasal in the poem “Now, Now” celebrates the leadership of Ambedkar in the following lines: “After a thousand years we were blessed with a/Sunflower-giving fakir;/Now, now, we must, like sunflowers, turn our faces to the/sun”(12-15). In his poem “So that My Mother May Be Convinced” he reveals the distinctiveness of Dalit voice in relation to the traditional poetic voices. The footnote by the translators clearly state the purpose of including the entry: “ This early poem of Dhasal’s is trite at times, bombastic and doctrinaire at others, but has been included because of its power and its shocking difference from the traditional sentimental Marathi ‘mother’ poem” (67).

Mina Gaybhiye in “The Weeping Wound of Centuries” mentions the Marathwada riots in 1978 which occurred over a proposal to rename the Marathwada University and claimed several lives.

I had sutured with difficulty
the weeping wound of centuries

Those stitches are all ripped out, ripped out by Marathwada…
Let the village become a burning ground
along with me
I will not live like a dog, nowhere. (1-3, 7-9)

Yeshwant Manohar’s poem “I’m Ready for Revolt” is steeped in a radical and revolutionary spirit. He gives a provocative expression to his feelings in the following lines:

I’m burning with a feeling of revolt
and I call out to you
I will write the poem of revolt on your sword
Today I have become a storm—come with me!
I reach out to you—give me your hand!(1-5)

The poems in this anthology mock the traditions, the Varna system, and scoff at the racial discrimination still prevalent in the rural and the extremely lower sections of the society. The teachings of Ambedkar and his strong presence makes its mark emphatically in Dalit anthologies. The social and economic progress of Dalits is seen as an inevitable result of Ambedkar’s visionary approach. The Dalit writers celebrate the legendary figure in their writings. In “The Nameless One’s” Jyoti Lanjewar evokes the memory of Kala Ram and the Chawdar Tank events:

They make palaces of words!
But I have seen them crumble.

“Kala Ram” and “Chawdar Tank—
the history of pain
is carved on each our hearts.(32-36)

In his poem “I have Become the Tide” J.V. Pawar celebrates the “mantra” -- surging protest of Dalits against the caste Hindu’s especially by the burning of the Hindu law book Manusmriti that proves untouchability legitimate and justified. The poet states thus:

The wind that blows everyday
that day yelled in my ear.
“women stripped”
“village boycott”
“men killed”

As it spoke, it gave me a mantra: “Make another Mahad!”

My hands now move toward the weapon on the wall. (12-18)

A harrowing picture of the despair of a psychologically troubled self is revealed in Keshav Meshram’s “One Day I cursed that—God”. The poet curses God on his birthday and refuses to acknowledge the Brahmin deity that seems to have turned its back on his sufferings:

Would you chop a whole cart of wood
for a single piece of bread?
Would you wipe the sweat from your bony body
With your mother’s ragged sari? (21-24)

Arjun Dangle’s anthology Poisoned Bread released in 1992 is a noteworthy anthology of Marathi Dalit writings and acquires the the status of first anthology of critically acclaimed works by Dalit writers. Unlike Anand’s and Zelliot’s anthology this work gains credibility and an extended literary viability on account of its editors positions primarily as a Dalit and secondarily as an social and a political activist. Dangle's active participation in the social, literary, cultural and the political movements firmly establishes the reputation of the anthology in the Dalit literary world.

The agenda of the anthology is to provide maximum visibility to prominent Marathi Dalit writers who have been suppressed or denied a place in the literary world and make the world realise the complexity of a Dalit predicament. The work opens up the passage through which these writers can make themselves visible to the native and the distant reader. Dangle reveals the criteria that guided his selections. He states:

Dalit literature is not simply literature. Although today, most Dalit writers have forgotten its origins’ Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change. It is a consciousness of these beginnings that has guided me in the
selection of the poems, short stories, autobiographical extracts, essays and speeches included in this anthology. (xii)

Dalit writings are at once the result and the medium of classifying Dalit Literature as a separate entity. They endeavour to bestow a distinct status on Dalit Literature which confronts an intricate social reality and moves beyond the imaginary and entertaining functions of literature. The purpose of the pulsating entries in the anthology is to bring a change. Dalit writings are grounded in commitment towards a cause and are thus revolutionary. The anthologies that collect Dalit writings indispensably offer themselves to the realisation of this purpose. The anthology Akar is regarded by Dangle as the “first representative collection of poems by the Dalit’s” (248). It includes the works of prominent Dalit writers Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, Hira Bansode and many more. However this anthology lacked a social and a political awareness.

Many new periodicals such as Asmitadarsha, Satyakatha, Pratishtan, Marathwada, Amhi and Magova appeared with a specific purpose to incorporate Dalit writings and extend to them a freedom of expression that had been denied to them so far. Consequently a number of autobiographies appeared in the seventies and the eighties. Baluta and Upara by Daya Pawar and Laxman Mane were the ones selected for the Ford Foundation award. The inclusion of the first person narratives in anthologies reinforce the identity politics that seem to address the issues pertaining to subjugated status of the minorities. Thus we acknowledge women and Dalit anthologies to have given sufficient representation to the autobiographical works of the authors. Apart from autobiographies editors have excerpted their letters, diaries and personal narratives to present a lucid picture of oppression and marginalisation to those who have not experienced it.

Arjun Dangle’s Poisoned Bread incorporates writings which offer a sharp indictment of the Indian society and the Indian social system at large. The first poem of the anthology is by L.S. Rokade’s “To be or Not to be Born” takes the reader to acknowledge the terrible predicament in which the young Dalit child finds himself entangled. He seeks human recognition and is perturbed by the immediate complexities that lay bare before him. He questions his mother thus:
Do I want to be born-
Do I want to born at all
in this land?
Where all paths raced horizonwards
but to me were barred. (7-11)

While “Rivers break their banks” and “Lakes brim over” with water, his mother has to shed blood for a “palmful of water”. In her poem “Caves” Jyoti Lanjewar inquires into complexity of her situation:

How did we ever get to this place
this land which was never mother to us?
Which never gave us even the life of cats and dogs? (13-17)

Keshav Meshram in the poem “In Our Colony” contemplates the complexities of Dalit reforms and the inevitable influence of the simultaneously existing powerful force of literacy and education that combats tradition and culture

Reforms get confused
paths are bruised, schemes stumble
now- only now have boys started learning…
The axes of words fall upon the trees of tradition. (46-50)

Dangle includes the essays of both the Dalit and the non-Dalit writers to display the distinct ways in which each of them has developed a discrete approach towards ‘Dalit literature’. All the essayists included have been associated with the progressive movement. He includes the works of non Dalit essayists Sharatchandra Muktibodh’s “What is Dalit Literature?” and R.G. Jadhav’s “Dalit feelings and Aesthetic Detachment” together with the Dalit essayists to bring to the surface the differences in their approach towards Dalit Literature. Dangle states:

The aggressiveness seen in the writing of Dr M.N. Wankhade or Baburao Bagul is not to be seen in that of Prof.R.G.Jadhav or Sharatchandra Muktibodh. Bagul and Wankhade make an extremely frank analysis of society, religion and literature and throw down a revolutionary gauntlet; Muktibodh and Prof. Jadhav
Sharat Chandra Muktibodh endeavours to relish an artistic quality in Dalit literature which remains oblivious to the primary concerns of commitment and involvement towards a cause. He states an example of Haribhau Apte who fails to represent feminine bondage at an artistic level in his Marathi novel _Pan Lakshat Kon Gheto_ (1880) (Who cares to Heed). He emphasises towards a Dalit sensibility that has a point of view and is committed but simultaneously has a concrete vision enhanced by their experience:

> It could be said in conclusion that a Dalit point of view accompanied by Dalit consciousness would not necessarily result in great Dalit literature. But an original and important Dalit work of literature would emerge only when a Dalit point of view would visualize itself through concrete experience. (269)

R.G. Jadhav in his essay “Dalit Feelings and Aesthetic Detachment” voices a similar opinion. He also endeavours to relish a rewarding amalgamation of social content with an aesthetic form in Dalit Literature. He attributes the absence of literary forms like drama and humour in Dalit literature to a lack of a sense of aesthetic detachment. He writes:

> I think that from the point of view of Dalit aesthetics, the important thing is to achieve aesthetic distance by liberating oneself from extreme involvement in social awareness. It means that the Dalit writers have to realize their total sensibility towards life from the level of art. (300)

Baburao Bagul in “Dalit Literature is but Human Literature” displays a sharp and a scathing indictment of society. He dispenses away with all concerns in the pursuance of ‘Dalit-hood’ as he observes:

> The established literature of India is Hindu literature. But it is Dalit literature which has the revolutionary power to accept new science and technology and bring about a total transformation. ‘Dalit’ is the name for total revolution; it is revolution incarnate. (289)

These writers have envisaged a vital role of Dalit literature which is to transform, change and revolutionize the existing social, political and literary trends that have influenced Dalits. M.N.
Wankhade considers it imperative to promote drama as an essential form. Unlike R.G. Jadhav, his reason is not to prove the adequate literary sensibility built on the virtue of aesthetic distancing but to enter the domain that restricted Dalits entry into it. Theatre was an enterprise that like publishing refused entry to a writer on the basis of his ascribed status. Wankhade affirms a separate status and treatment of Dalit literature. He refutes the high aesthetic ideal of art for art’s sake and contemplates its worthlessness in Dalit literature. He writes in a revolutionary vein: “I feel that without going after the recognition of the establishment, Dalit writers must write for the Dalit masses, for their awakening- for the Dalits, only for them” (323).

Under each generic classifications—poems, autobiographies and essay, the editor endeavours to collect entries that mark what he states the “distinctiveness” and differentness of Dalit literature. Only after being appeased of the existence of same the individual works of Dalit writers were anthologized. The second element allows entries on the basis of the inherent quality of the work. Dangle however does not elaborate on the definition of the ‘quality work’ that he seeks. He takes a panoramic view of a Dalit existence in his stories. He seeks to show a commonality of experience and a similar crisis experienced by the Dalits of the rural as well as the urban areas. Through the assemblage in the anthology Dangle intends to goad the reader into an ameliorative response. It is in the process of the realization of this objective that a vital Dalit identity is constructed not as an enfeebled entity but as a powerful and a consistent presence.

The story “Poisoned Bread” by Bandhumadhav places the protagonist in a rural surrounding. It reflects the estrangement of its protagonist for whom literacy and education becomes a source of emancipation and yet he faces the wrath of the upper classes. After engaging himself in a witty retort with poor Yetalaya’s city-bred grandson (Mhadeva) who accompanies his grandfather to seek their share of corn Bapu Patil replies:

Need he be so impertinent just because he knows how to read and write? And mind you, even if a Mahar or Mang gets educated, no one will ever call him a Brahmin. A Mahar is a Mahar even if he passes L.L.B and becomes a barrister.

(148)
The bread soaked in the dung and urine of Bapu Patil’s cow is consumed by Yetalya and causes food poisoning that ultimately leads to his death. The “Poisoned Bread” brings a revelation which the Grandfather utters in his death bed:

I can only say: never depend on the age-old bread associated with our caste. Get as much education as you can. Take away this accursed bread from the mouths of the Mahars. The poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man…

(153)

The subhuman marginality of Dalits is vividly unmasked in “The Cull” by Amitabh. The news of Timaji Patil’s dead cow spreads “like wildfire throughout the Mahars Shanty town” (191). The religious veneration paid to the cow by the Hindus is rendered as a meaningless ritual to the carcass eater Dalit community. Their battle for survival is not with the caste Hindus but with the kites, vultures and crows who are struggling to have their share of the beef while it is been carried by the villagers. After scraping the carcass of all its flesh the villagers are drenched in the colour of blood “as if they had played Holi” (195). The invocation of Holi is an attempt to mock the religious sanctity of the festival since the red colour is at once colour of blood and brutality.

Nilya is a member of the Mahar community who is forced into the real world by his mother who insists him to get his share of the cull to feed the family. Though Nilya “...had been reading till late night in the light of the kerosene lamp. But she had to wake him” (192); his mother wakes him to the brutal reality in which his act of reading and becoming a literate is terribly mocked. The narrative goads the reader into a critical questioning of the hierarchical patterns and centuries old notions of the caste system that remain blind and coldly indifferent to the plight of the Dalits. With his bleeding feet, pricked with thorns Nilya embraces reality. His immediate need is to survive and he makes perseverance his virtue while: “The birds are still hovering over his head, swooping and pecking, the dogs are barking. But Nilya is busy filling up his pot” (196).

In Baburao Bagul’s “Mother” and Bhimrao Shirvale’s “Livelihood” the complexities of Dalit life in urban slums are reflected. The protagonist Kashi struggles for existence in a world in which her mother dies, her husband is behind bars and her paramour abandons her.
The extent of her desolation is reached in the fact that even prostitution is denied to her because of her unwanted body. Kashi takes to begging and the hideous formlessness of Kesu Ghatge’s son allows her to earn sufficiently, by arousing the sympathy of the onlookers. The story ends with Kesu Ghatge’s return from the prison claiming the child. While he takes the child from her the reader is drawn towards a questioning of Kashi’s predicament: “What he had on his shoulder was his livelihood. What Kashi had lost was her lifetime’s livelihood” (182).

Pandu’s mother in Baburao Bagul’s story “Mother” finds herself in a similar predicament. Just as Kashi she too is a widow and her beautiful appearance first subjects her to the cruel suspicion of her husband before he dies of tuberculosis and then of the society. She fears falling prey to Dagdu’s carnal desires who leaves no opportunity to dishonour her. Pandu remembers the words of his jeering neighbours when he wore new clothes on Diwali: “Your mother’s “business” seems to be doing very well. What a great rush there must be. Five rupees for each customer” (189).

Dangle has anthologised these stories to reveal the impediments and frustrations of a Dalit community. In the battle for survival and sustenance the values of the society and its cultural impositions hold no good for them. The protagonists of these narratives defy all cultural patterns and values in their encounter with the urgencies of their circumstances. Both Kashi and Pandu’s mother are widows and the primary question that lies before them is that of sustenance. Dangle has extracted entries that reveal the anxieties, crisis and frustrations of Dalit middle class. In the short story “Promotion” Waghmare who is promoted to the level of an officer in the reserved category succeeds in liberating himself economically.

Nevertheless his achieved status does not change his ascribed position in society. Godbole his junior is not ready to take his orders. Since he does not want to be known as a Dalit by strangers he contemplates change of surname to Akolkar. He is not ready to endure the association of his wife with his comrades and relatives who reside in the slums. He says “Don’t talk too much. Learn to maintain your status. After all, you are an officer’s wife” (172). He is finally left to contemplate his despair when in his desire to bury the frustrations and anxieties of being a Dalit by his newly acquired economic independence his son is still subjected to the ages old discrimination practiced by Pramod’s grandmother who pushes his
son for drinking water from their pot. Waghmere’s desolation, after the incident is revealed to
him, creates a feeling of pathos. His condition is described thus: “His newly –sprung wings of
promotion fall off and a mere mortal named Pandurang Satwa Waghmare crashes helplessly
into the abyss below” (172).

The inherent contradictory formulations of the Indian social system surface through the
medium of autobiographies included in the anthology. The reader is allowed to enter a literary
realm where the seal of authenticity guaranteed by the genre allows him/her a greater freedom
to explore the multiple facets of economic and social injustices meted out to Dalits. Two
autobiographies by Women writers Shantabai Kamble and Kumud Pawde have been included
while the others are by prominent male writers. The poetry included in the anthology comes
largely from the literary output of the Dalit Panthers. The spirit of protest is unmistakable in
all these works that combat subjugation and oppressions.

It is the peculiar anthologization of Dangle that succeeds in making this anthology a social
document offering a powerful indictment of the traditional and cultural patterns. He includes
writings of the politically conscious Dalit writers and offers a variation of genres to trace the
growth of this consciousness. The editor does not restrict himself to formulations that reveal
the position of Dalits in rural areas but takes up an extended view by including writings that
portray the anxieties of Dalits in the urban slums. The predicaments of the Dalits belonging to
the upper middle class have been conveyed to the reader with equal force and vigour.
Through the medium of his anthology Dangle is training the reader towards a more
sociologically, historically and politically conscious approach towards the Dalit literature.
These narratives of despair surge with emotion and allow the Dalits to converse among
themselves and with the readers of the Dalit community in particular to reveal the
specificities of Dalit experiences.

Nevertheless the politics of anthologizing proposes a re-evaluation not only of the writers
but also of the native traditions, cultures and historical moments which also have an
inevitable impact in the literary personality of the writer. Anthologizers are particularly
conscious of their act in selecting entries that in unison make the anthology an immensely
powerful site of struggle. The reader is lead towards a direction where a felicitous entry may
fail to be prized and a capricious selection may not be entirely deplored. The politics of
anthologies in such instances is inherent in the recognition of the play of entries which makes the reader critically conscious towards issues pertaining to race, caste, gender, ideology, history and his/her social experiences in multifarious and beatifying ways.
Endnotes

1 It is the earliest anthology in post-Vedic India in which more than seventy three verses of women writers during the 600 B.C have been assembled. These women who largely converted to Buddhism reveal their predicaments in which they found themselves entangled and consequently celebrate their emancipation in their new religion which remains Buddhism. It is in these verses that they have responded to their larger surroundings. Their verses suggest an empowerment extended to them through their means of expressions and are reflective of the ways in which women writings are different from those by men as they respond to the social and the cultural changes around them.

2 Katherine Mayo was an American writer and her polemical work had a great impact on the American and British views of India during the late 1920s. Her work is overtly biased, prejudiced and critical of the Hindu society and is considered as a deliberate project to justify colonial rule. Mahatama Gandhi in his sharply critical review of the book writes: “This book is cleverly and powerfully written. The carefully chosen quotations give it the false appearance of a truthful book. But the impression it leaves on my mind, is that it is the report of a drain inspector sent out with the one purpose of opening and examining the drains of the country to be reported upon, or to give a graphic description of the stench exuded by the opened drains.(for details see http://www.lehigh.edu/amsp/2006/02/teaching-journal-kat)

3 The Varkari saint poets dwelled largely in the states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. They flourished within the bhakti spiritual tradition and worshipped lord Krishna in the form of Vithoba.

4 Humayunama (The History of Humayun) was written in 1587 by Humayun’s sister Gul-Badan Begum in Persian. The historical project was undertaken by Gul-Badan Begum at the instance of her brother. The extract is culled from the translated version by Annette Beveridge.

5 These women poets made a vital contribution in popularizing the folk forms which include Kabigan, jhumur and tarja. Tharu and Lalita describe Kabigan as “a form of poetic duel or repartee”(187), jhumur is “a tribal song and dance performance” and tarja “is a form of a repartee” which like the jhumur is “sung extempore, reflect the life and problems of the poor and use a racy, colloquial language” (188) but unlike the jhumur lacks songs and dance.
6 The Namboodri's are the upper caste Brahmins and powerful feudal aristocrats from the state of Kerala and are widely known for their austere adherence to traditional patterns and norms.

7 The phrase has been originally derived from Benedict Anderson’s work *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

8 The Digambar Kavalu poets emerged during the mid sixties. They are also known as the naked poets who rejected the conventional patterns and celebrated the literature with which the common man could easily relate.

9 Now renamed The English and Foreign Languages University. (EFLU)

10 The ideological difference made the Panthers split in the year 1975. Buddhist and the Marxists frameworks were adopted by members of the Dalit Panther community according to their beliefs and stances.