Chapter Four

Critical Analysis of Selected Works of Hindi Literature

2. Kafan (1936, Story): Premchand
The years between 1930 and 1940 were crucial years in the history of twentieth century India in general and for the Dalit movement in particular. These years witnessed important developments during the National Liberation Movement e.g., Civil Disobedience (1930-31), Gandhi-Irwin Pact (March 5, 1931), Second Round Table Conference, Communal Award (August 1932), Government of India Act, 1935 and twenty-eight months of the Congress Rule, peasants uprisings and more intensive attack on the British Raj.

The Dalit Movement in India experienced crucial developments during this phase as recorded by Gail Omvedt that “these years saw the All-India Depressed Classes Conference at Nagpur in 1930; Ambedkar’s attendance at the First Round Table Conference; his clash with Gandhi before and at the Second Round Table Conference, culminating in the Poona Pact of 1932; and the famous conversion announcement in 1935, ‘I have been born a Hindu but I will not die a Hindu’. She further noted “the events of 1930-32 led to Ambedkar’s final disillusionment with Hinduism, with even the best and most ‘reformist’ of the Congress leadership. At the same time these events revealed the power represented by Ambedkar and by the Dalit movement which had risen with him and confirmed his as the unparalleled leader of the Dalits, forcing the Congress leadership to deal with his demands.” This was the same period when northern India was also experiencing Dalit uprisings as we have already discussed in the last chapter that level of political consciousness among Dalits got enhanced with its political articulation and expression. All these developments, particularly Ambedkar’s leadership was immensely influencing the very shape and expression of political consciousness among Dalits.
It is important to note that during these years, the Dalit movement was attempting to explore the possibilities for autonomy, identity, mobilisation and empowerment with dynamic leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. Now the Dalit movement was shaping itself not on the lines of the 'Reformative movements' but attempting to create an alternative socio-cultural structure for an egalitarian society.

In northern India, we find that there was political assertion during mid-1920s to 1930 by the Dalits in the forms of the Adi Hindu Ideology, Bhakti Resurgence and challenge to the Arya Samaj's Shuddhi campaign. Recent research on the Dalit movement is highlighting various levels of assertion during these years. For instance, leaders like Swami Acchutanand (1879-1933) and Ram Charan (1888-1938) were highlighting importance of education, economic independence, social and religious reforms and asserting a dignified self-identity that is inherently political with equal status. Swami Acchutanand organised a massive 'Untouchable Conference' in 1922 at Old Fort, Delhi and proposed a 17-point Charter of Demands to the Prince of Wales that primarily asked for the political representation of the Dalits in all local and provincial bodies. Responding to the Charter of Demands, the then Secretary of State ordered nomination of at least one representative from the Dalit community to the local bodies. It was also ordered to all district authorities that Swami Acchutanand be given permission to organise conferences and rallies wherever he wishes. This was a significant achievement and Swamiji subsequently, organised several rallies and conference in different parts of Uttar Pradesh and attended such events in other provinces of the country for the cause of Dalit upliftment. He used to start his address with the following lines, which itself reflects his political understanding:
“Sabhya Sabse Hind Ke Pracheen Hakdaar Hum;
Tha Banaya Shudra Humko, Theya kabhi Sardar Hum;
Ab Nahin Hai Vah Zamana, Zulum Harihar Mat Saha;
Tod do Zanjeer, Jakede Kyon Gulaami Mein raho.”

This roughly means that we were the most ancient people of India, who had all rights; we were made ‘Shudra’ while we used to be the kings; now that time has gone, do not tolerate oppression; break chains, why to remain slaves?

Significantly, Ambedkar’s influence was spreading in the northern India and people from the Dalit community were making a conscious attempt to challenge Brahmanical Caste System at all possible levels: intellectually, politically and socially, with explorations from the historical anecdotes like popularising Ravidas and Kabir; establishing contacts with the Marathi Dalit Literature; proliferating ideas of Phule and Dr. Ambedkar and participating in the Freedom Struggle with a vision of Independent India where equality, liberty and fraternity could be ensured to all.

Here it is important to recall that Dr. Ambedkar was leading the Dalit movement with an untiring zeal making it broad based and mobilising community at an all-India level. He was instrumental in all political and social initiatives, contributed to the formation of three political parties and launching conversion movement challenging the very foundation of the Caste System. We have already discussed his role in the Dalit movement in the last chapter.
Thus, years between 1930 and 1940 were crucial in the history of the Dalit movement in India and developments during these years had positive impact on the course of the movement. An all-round challenge to the Brahmanical social and caste system was being felt in all walks of life and we find that Hindi literature was also responding to these issues and Premchand became the prominent figure to address these issue in his works.

Premchand (1880-1936) was writing during the first half of the twentieth century when India was facing colonialism, imperialism and National Liberation Movement. He wrote on a variety of subjects touching almost each and every aspect of the contemporary Indian social and political life. Right from the beginning of his creative life, he advocated the cause of peasantry, exploited and deprived sections of society. He understood that writers have a mission to envisage revolutionary changes and must perform a committed role "in nurturing the literary and artistic trend which brings awakening and freshness in society and throw light on real problems of the people." He resigned from his government job in 1921 after attending a public meeting addressed by Gandhiji who appealed people to join non-cooperation movement and contributed to the Freedom Struggle as a writer-activist.

His writings are voluminous ranging from novels, plays, short stories, essays and journalistic write-ups with extensive notes on contemporary subjects that reshaped the very course (including the content and form) of the Hindi literature, which got immensely influenced by his style and narrative.
Literature, for Premchand, becomes the beacon for politics that guides it at all directions; it is “exploration for harmony”\textsuperscript{5} having equality, liberty, solidarity, compassion and independence as the cardinal principles to cherish with “idealistic realism”\textsuperscript{6} that “generates dynamism, struggle and uneasiness”\textsuperscript{7} and a new aesthetic sense has to be evolved that testifies “a sense of independence, essence of aesthetics, soul of reconstruction and regeneration embedded in the problems of life.”\textsuperscript{8}

It is this understanding of literature that led Premchand to write on different contemporary issues, which were being faced by his times. He also wrote on the problems of Untouchability along with other subjects in his journalistic write-up, novels and short stories. Initially, he wrote with the Gandhian perspective but subsequently, got influenced by Dr. Ambedkar. In his later writings, we find that Premchand considered the problem of Untouchability cannot be resolved unless the inherently exploitative Caste System is liquidated and Dalits are economically empowered and politically assertive. He regarded Dr. Ambedkar as an unparallel leader of the community and got inspiration from the on-going Dalit movement that Dr. Ambedkar was leading during the first half of the last century.

Now, we would discuss some of the writings by Premchand that are either directly on the Dalits characters or have implications to that effect. This is being done in two ways: first, we would discuss some of his stories in a general way and then his story \textit{Kafan} and novel \textit{Godan} in detail to have a comprehensive analysis of his understanding on the issues.
Here it is important to note that Premchand was having a wide meaning of the term ‘untouchable castes’ that include both the ‘Scheduled Castes’ and the ‘Other Backward Castes’. The term Dalit is not very often used in his literature and if at all it has been used, it does not connote the political meaning that the term has acquired so far. Instead, Premchand used to mention the particular castes of the characters and also narrated prevalent views (which represented largely upper castes views) on those castes, for instance, in his stories like ‘Thakur Ka Kuan’, ‘Mukti Marg’ etc. There are overlapping usages of the deprived, lower and other backward castes in his literature. In some of his stories, castes of the lead characters have not been mentioned but the descriptive narrative provides several inferences to their caste status. Moreover, the context of his stories and novels is largely rural and he tried to reflect rural life in the country, attempting to present it in holistic manner. Muktimarg, Mantra, Poos Ki Raat, Algoajha, Kajaki, Sadgati, Mandir, Dhoodh Ka Daam, Gulli Danda, and Kafan are some of his short stories, which focus on different aspects of the problems of the Dalit community.

In all his stories related to the problems of ‘Untouchability’ Premchand made an attempt to highlight the level of exploitation, which is inherent in the Caste System, and described traumatic and painful life through which the Dalit community was undergoing during these period. At the same time, he exposed the hypocrisy of the upper castes and how they were trying to maintain their hegemony to sustain the oppressive caste system. Though he was influenced by the contemporary Dalit movement led by Dr. Ambedkar, but in most of his stories, his style is descriptive than prescriptive whereas in his other works, he has either presented ‘Gandhian vision of transformation of hearts’ or some socialistic kind of vision for social change. This
may be understood by the prevalent political scenario in the northern India where the *Dalit* movement was, apparently, not articulate and the over-all political fabric was guided by the Freedom Struggle led by Gandhiji. But there is a peculiar characteristic in all of his writings that he always attacked the hypocrisy that was maintained by the upper castes and to expose the limitless exploitation of the *Dalits*.

At the same time, Premchand was, apparently, influenced by the contemporary *Dalit* movement when he was writing stories like *Mandhir* and *Mantra* where issue like temple entry and ‘Shuddhi’ were addressed. *Thakur Ka Kaun* was centred on the issue of drinking water and the problem of ‘Untouchability’. There are stories, which are directly written on the *Dalit* issues, on the level of social and economic exploitation, temple entry, social disabilities imposed on the *Dalits*, common community feast and the hypocrisy of the upper castes. Premchand has highlighted level of economic and social exploitation being faced by the *Dalits* and simultaneously he also emphasised on the humane qualities possessed by the *Dalits* vis-à-vis upper castes. He directly attacked the ‘*Varna* System’ and social hierarchy and envisioned a strong challenge to break these oppressive systems.

Though Premchand has not written any particular novel directly on the *Dalit* issue (except *Karmbhoomi* partially) we find that there are several references (direct or indirect, whether inter-caste marriages, *Begar*, economic exploitation, social disabilities or land rights issues) to the problems in many of his novels. In *Godan* also, the central character is not a *Dalit* but apparently belongs to the ‘Other Backward Castes’ but, as mentioned earlier, there has been overlapping usages of the castes in Premchand’s writings.
Now we would discuss two specific works by Premchand: Kafan and Godan.

**Kafan (1936, Story): Premchand**

The story Kafan (The Shroud) was written in 1936, the year Premchand died and is the most famous as well as controversial story. The story narrates life of a *Dalit* family (Ghisu (father), his son, Madhav and daughter-in-law, Budhia) who are devastated by poverty. The whole plot is embedded in the rural society where this family is the poorest one. The story starts with conversation between father and son about his daughter-in-law who is pregnant and facing labour pain. Both, Ghisu and Madhav are represented notoriously lazy who do not want to do any work at all, fearing nothing and “living at a sub-human level they are outside all normal mores of social behaviour. While Madhav’s wife is writhing in labour pain inside the hut, Madhav and his father sit outside, greedily devouring stolen potatoes, unwilling to go and help her because the other person might grab a larger share. Ghisu recounts in detail a feast to which he had been invited twenty years ago and Madhav listens to the vivid account of food with vicarious pleasure. The wife lies dying inside” and both of them slept unconcerned about her.

Next morning, Budhia is dead. Both, father and son started mourning. The neighbours came and expressed their condolences. Now arrangements for the cremation are to be made. There was nothing in the house and both of them had no money at all. They went to the Zamindar who gave them two rupees with contempt. Other people from the village also donated some money for cremation. They now collected some five rupees and went to purchase the shroud. They looked for a cheap shroud but failed and entered into a tavern where they drank and ate forgetting all their responsibilities and fearing nothing. While drinking, they commented on several
things including rituals, traditions and system and praised Budhia "who even in death provided them food and drink." They got heavily intoxicated and in the end, started singing, dancing and wiggling just to fell down unconscious. The story comes to an end.

This is Premchand’s most controversial story that invited numerous interpretations by critics. Meenakshi Mukherjee considers this story "almost perfect distillation of a situation that disturbs the reader with intense but understated horror." She further elaborates that "in reading Kafan one remembers Engels’ advice to Margaret Harkness: ‘The more the opinion of the author remain hidden, the better for the work of art’. The radical questions that are raised in the story do not have very simple answers." It is important to note that this story is completely descriptive and analytical rather than prescriptive and ideal. It does not provide any “solution of a question” but contextualised “the correct setting of a question” which is “obligatory for an artist.” Kafan becomes “most memorable of Premchand’s stories because, although nothing is solved here, the question has been stated precisely and disconcertingly. In a society where even hard work and honest labour do not raise a man’s life very much above the animal level, how does one condemn Ghisu’s and his son’s rebellion? ‘What kind of custom is it when a living person does not get a rag to cover his body, the dead must have a new shroud?’ asks Ghisu. But even when one rationalizes the mourning is a luxury a starving man cannot afford, it is difficult to condone the action of Madhav and Ghisu. At the same time it is not easy to take the side of a society that reluctantly proffers a few coins for the dead, more to keep up a pretence than out of any real concern for human beings. The story disturbs because one sees the precariousness of our cherished human values, with bestiality on one side.
and hypocrisy on the other. The concentrated horror of the story arises out of the 
reader's inability to take side. Since Premchand's style is totally devoid of poetry and 
resonance, his optimum effect can be achieved in the direction of starkness, and 
nowhere is this better illustrated than in Kafan.\[^{16}\]

**Bhisma Sahni** finds the story “striking a note of deep anguish and tragedy.”\[^{17}\]
Analysing Premchand's style as a short story writer, Sahni further points out “the 
poorest of the poor are shown in the extremity of their condition, beyond which there 
are only terrors awaiting them. The stark simplicity of these stories presents their 
condition in all nakedness. They require no comment, no sermonizing, no rhetorical 
embellishments. They speak for themselves. And they are the products not so much of 
the anger and resentment that the author feels about the human situation, but of deep 
anguish.”\[^{18}\] Surendra Chowdhry regards the structure of the story as “macrocosmic 
that has two major characteristics: first, a lively and eventful illustration of rural life 
and second, state of merciless economic exploitation prevalent in the society...the 
story is both realistic as well as symbolic and raises several questions about the 
contemporary socio-cultural and economic systems.”\[^{19}\] Many other critics regard 
Kafan as a story representing “psychological realism”\[^{20}\] that has been conceptualised 
in a realistic background highlighting on the level of economic exploitation and how 
lack of money “dehumanises.”\[^{21}\] Kafan, in fact, represents two disequilibriums that 
are not identical and also “defamiliarised of reality”\[^{22}\] where reader “is not 
experiencing reality but understanding its complex mechanics. Things like that do not 
happen in life, but they must happen in literature to make life better intelligible. Here 
the given system of relationship is not saved but exposed to insecurity- rendered 
vulnerable. Here everything is so disclosed that we may like to change it.”\[^{23}\]
There has been a new wave of interpretations of Premchand’s work and, particularly this story, especially by the Dalit litterateurs. Before we dwell upon some of the recent interpretations, it is to be noted that these interpretations are taking place amidst an atmosphere characterised by the contemporary political vision that attempts to define and redefine (and sometime, evaluates and re-evaluates) the past, its histories and cultures. This also applies to literature and thus, new interpretations of the works, either done by the Dalit or non-Dalit writers are coming. This is also influenced by the fact where Dalit writers consider that literature cannot be devoid of the on-going Dalit movement and it is an effective instrument to broaden and consolidate the movement further. Hence, it needs to be analysed politically, consistent with the vision of the Dalit movement. Another important factor to be reiterated is the debate over the issue of literature written by Dalits or for Dalits by upper castes. This is, in a way, sympathy and empathy factor and we have already discussed it in the last chapter. Dalit litterateurs feel that the Dalit movement and its assertion, especially through literature, have to be free from all kinds of Brahanical influences and must have an autonomous character led by Dalits themselves. It is this understanding of the contemporary Dalit movement and Dalit literature that have led to the re-interpretations of several literary works including Premchand’s.

This new wave of re-interpretation starts from the renowned Dalit litterateur, Om Prakash Balmiki who, in his Presidential Address to the Conference of Hindi Dalit Writers in Nagpur (October 21-22, 1993), made a comment on Premchand’s short stories and their paradox, where he said, “Premchand has written several important stories on Dalit Consciousness like Sadgati, Thakur Ka Kuan, Dhooth Ka Daam etc. but coming to his last phase story Kafan, he seems to be an advocate of
Gandhian principles, feudal values and ‘Varna’ system. There is a paradox in his works- one, sympathy with the Dalits and other belief in the ‘Varna’ System. This led to a series of articles and journalistic write-ups by both the Dalits and non-Dalits on Premchand, his literary works (both novels and short stories) and his political vision for Dalit liberation.

Here, it is important to note that this effort has been made by the Dalit writers themselves who questioned the very message of Premchand’s writings and hence, his political vision. Most of them found Kafan “an undoubtedly anti-Dalit story,” as pointed out by Kanwal Bharati, “though it should not be concluded from this story that Premchand was not sympathetic with the Dalits but this fact also cannot be repudiated that he ridiculed on the life of Dalits in this story.” Several Dalit writers have emphasised Gandhian influence on Premchand’s writings and political understanding, which is largely correct as has been manifested in most of his literary works. But, as mentioned earlier that political fabric in Uttar Pradesh during 1930s was much influenced (largely dominated) by the Gandhian rather than the Ambedkarite discourse, though there were representatives like Swami Acchutanand and others who were propagating Ambedkarite vision for Dalit liberation. This definitely had an impact on Premchand’s writings and Gandhiji immensely influenced him as evident from his resignation on Gandhi’s appeal, his numerous write-ups on Gandhi and his politics and other references made in different journals. This also shaped his political understanding that got manifested in his literary works where he, in most of his works, prescribed ‘transformation of hearts’ especially in the context of the upper and lower castes, making ‘Untouchability’ a ‘moral’ issue.
Some other Dalit writers like Shyoraj Singh ‘Bechain’ consider that Kafan is far from the realism and “completely an imaginative story to prove that Dalits are not humane...and the purpose of this story is to portray a totally distorted picture of the Dalit community.”

Kanwal Bharati, in another article, reiterates, “Kafan is an anti-Dalit story because it has made a mockery of the Dalits through its characters who have been portrayed insensitive and inhumane.”

Here it needs to be pointed out that both Om Prakash Balmiki and Kanwal Bharti have appreciated Premchand’s works and his concerns for the Dalit cause. Kanwal Bharati made it clear when he says, “it is not doubtful that Premchand was the first person, among the upper castes, who voiced for the Dalit cause. He was against Untouchability and made efforts to eliminate it. But, despite this fact, Dalits cannot consider his literature as the Dalit literature. It was written out of sympathy and several national and international pressures can also not be ignored for its creation.”

He further emphasised that “it would be wrong to conclude that we are against Premchand. We are neither against Premchand nor Premchand was against the Dalits. His stories on the Dalits and their lives were based on his understanding of the contemporary Dalit discourse. We may agree or disagree with him today but Dalit discourse and its exponents have every right to reinterpret and re-evaluate Premchand and these interpretations should be understood as the statement of this right by the Dalit writers.”

Thus, it can be concluded that Kafan represents isolation produced by the insensitive and exploitative socio-economic system that leads to dehumanisation but at the same time it cannot be understood as a story representing the Dalit community as has been discussed above.
Godan (1936, Novel): Premchand

Premchand is known for realistic novels and has been regarded by many critics as the Emperor of Hindi novels. He was writing within a "historical context that was dominated by feudal system and its value, colonialism, slavery and exploitation and also with the growing capitalistic system... Premchand's creativity is contextualised by the National Freedom Struggle, which focussed itself against British Colonialism, Capitalism and Feudalism. This context has a very important effect on his writings and we find that those are essentially anti-feudal, anti-capitalist and anti-colonial."

Gandhian and socialistic philosophy, as we have already seen, influenced his political vision and "essentially he was a humanist... his humanism was firmly rooted in material life and was basically practical... governed by moral values, by the concepts of the good and evil, the right and the wrong." This "essential humanism" is all pervasive in his writings, especially novels. He is not a realist in technically strict European sense but he is a realist with a vision, with a mission and with "author's own intensive experience of social process" who portray human life with all its charm, excitement, love, affection, faith, morals, tension, pain, trauma, misery, pessimism and optimism.

Most of his novels have been written with peasants as the lead characters and with villages as the centre stage. This is a very peculiar feature of his novels and makes his task much difficult to portray a realistic view. "But this is the evidence of Premchand's creative excellence and his thorough understanding of the peasantry and their life that led him to write on the peasants with artistic portrayal of their lives, its realities and expectations. This effort also laid the foundation for realistic tradition of the Indian novel." This effort also "widened the frontiers of realism so as to include
in its orbit the peasant and the rural masses, most effectively. The village for Premchand was not an idyllic paradise but a world full of tension, conflict and struggle. The centre of the stage which was till then reserved only for the middle class visionary was for the first time thrown open to the village yoke, who was representing the contemporary situation much more effectively than any other segment of Indian society. And, he could do it with the help of real characters from the countryside, drawing richly for his own experience, which gives validity and authenticity to his art... he was the first novelist to reach the rural society. He was, again, the first artist to view and present our rural society not as an idyll but as an arena of life built of conflicting power groups. His village is, in fact, the picture of mini-India with all its contradiction, pulls and pressures, aspirations and failures, power and potentials. It is this complex but live reality which lends colour, beauty, power and sublimity to his art."

There is a holistic representation in the portrayal of life, with its totality, of his characters, with artistic unity highlighting on the rural and urban settings, dialectical and contradictory association of individuals with the socio-eco-cultural systems and a vision to achieve harmony. He wrote novels on a variety of subjects dealing with Freedom Struggle, capitalism, feudalism and colonialism, 'Untouchability' widow remarriage and prostitution. There is no direct novel on 'Untouchability' (except Karambhoomi) but there are several reflections in almost every novel on this issue. This may be said here that the 'Untouchability' was the social reality of his times and as a realistic, he couldn't afford to ignore it while depicting a realistic picture of the Indian society. The way this problem has been depicted, it can be analysed with two perspectives: one, politically, it is guided by the Gandhian approach and two,
artistically, it has presented a very realistic depiction of the community, their trauma and pain and in doing so Premchand also expressed his understanding of the issue, which, sometimes but in a limited ways, goes beyond the Gandhian approach. This transcendence of thought is characteristically important to analyse the works of Premchand because "as a writer with a social role and responsibility" 36 Premchand was having a political vision, close to Gandhi, but as literary aesthetician, he transcends his political worldview that becomes 'essentially humanist'. With this understanding of his political and literary vision, we would now analyse his most celebrated work Godan.

Godan was published in 1936, some months before Premchand’s death, and got world over acclaim, established a new tradition of Indian novel writings and above all presented a very authentic and realistic view of the contemporary Indian peasants and middle class lives. Many critics consider it "as a saga of Indian rural life whose protagonist Hori is the archetypal Indian peasant in his meekness and humanity." 37 The plot is, apparently, very simple that narrates the life and the struggle for life of its protagonist, Hori along with his family (Dhana, his wife, Gobar, his son, Sona and Rupa, his daughters and his brothers) who lives in a village called Belari, somewhere in the Awadh province, in acute poverty and struggles everyday either in the field or elsewhere to earn a square meal a day, which becomes the toughest task throughout their lives. The family (especially Hori) is trapped in the worst network of vicious circle of poverty, debt and ritual conservatism that was characteristic of the Indian peasants’ life during the first half of the last century.
The novel depicts, in the best tradition of literary expression, hopes and despairs, optimism and pessimism and rebellion analysing the very mindsets of the farmers, zamindars, moneylenders, priests and others in the villages of India and exploitation of the poor at all levels comes out as the central concern of the novel. The novel also narrates the dynamics of the village life, particularly the inter-community dynamics, and its politics. This has been done in a holistic manner (not emphasising on any one particular community or system) keeping, objectively, the life of the peasants and their exploitation in the centre of the novel, highlighting problems of debt, ‘Untouchability’, ‘Varna system’, zamindari system, ‘Begar’ and over-all political system of the pre-Independence Indian society.

The objective holistic construction of the novel would be evident from a very quick look on the major characters, which represents almost the whole gamut of the contemporary Indian society. For instance, Hori has been described as the representative of the Indian Peasant who “is the victim of social determinism” but humane and honest, with land as his cherished value and cow a life-long dream. Dhania, “a sharp-tongued yet tender, compassionate and querulous by turns, in open rebellion against her oppressors yet traditional in certain basic way” represents best model of traditional and illiterate rural womenfolk. Gobar is a growing youth representing anger and fear; ambition and cowardice. Datadin epitomises priestly Brahman class in the village and Silia represents the Dalit community.

“Rai Saheb (Zamindar) is another character who oscillates between two modes. He depends almost entirely on his estate for survival and is not above squeezing his poor tenants when he need money, yet the author is eager to show that he is really not a crook
at all- perhaps merely a victim of circumstance." Mehta represents intelligentsia while Malti does for the western educated urban Indian woman; Khanna embodies values of the industrial capitalism. It is precisely due to this holistic construction of the novel that Godan has been regarded 'the prose epic' by many critics.

The plot is interwoven with the urban life also representing the urban middle class (Mehta, Malti, Khanna, Onkar Nath and other in their circle) and its contradictions (particularly in terms of tradition-modernity dichotomy) that raises several questions faced by the contemporary middle class breeding disappointment, isolation and rootlessness. At the story level, these strands: urban and rural “are interlinked through contrasts and parallels, but in the ‘discourse’ the gap between them presents an aesthetic problem.” Some other critics like Meenakshi Mukherjee finds more than two strands at the story level which are important in the analysis of the novel, viz.,

A. Hori’s story, and around him the story of his family and his village;
B. Gobar’s story, moving from the village to the city;
C. Rai Saheb’s story, straddling the village and the city;
D. Mehta and Malti’s story, and that of their coterie in the city.

Here it is noticeable that how each of the above four strands are well connected as has been emphasised by Meenakshi Mukherjee that “A and B begin together although B branches off later; C and D are closely connected because although Rai Saheb’s land is in the village he has social as well as financial dealings with the urban professional class. Premchand takes care to interlink the different strands in as many ways as possible. A and B touch because there is a feudal
relationship between Rai Saheb and Hori; B and D are connected because Gobar is first employed by Mirza Khurshed in the city, later by Dr. Malti Kaul. A and D get linked when Mehta and Malti come to the village to help the people of Belari. Only B and C never meet or converge.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus, Godan becomes a classic novel on the Indian peasantry and is objectively well knit and carefully interwoven. But if we take into account the whole range of works by Premchand, we find that Godan also represents his disillusionment with the system and from the prescriptive narrative, as unlike his other works including short stories, he does not suggest any solution. "Godan has no utopia to look forward to or to fall back on. Since there is no system to be saved, the novel begins with a disequilibrium and ends at a disequilibrium. It excites a sense of profound wrong done to humanity. It makes no attempt at papering the cracks or providing a happy ending. In fact, such a piece of literary art goes beyond the text and establishes a living relationship with life. It is literature of this type, that, according to Sartre, succeeds through failure..."\textsuperscript{44}

Coming to the political consciousness among the Dalits as represented in the Godan, we find that there is only representational depiction of the issue but this representational narrative is, unlike any other work of Premchand, powerful one. As we have mentioned earlier that there are overlapping usages of different castes in Premchand's literature, in this novel also, the caste of the protagonist, Hori is not mentioned though there are some indicators to infer his caste identity, for example, there is a reference to his caste status when Datadeen trapped him for sharing his crop and deceivingly said, "I'm not your foe. You annoy me. My good man, what was there
to feel so delicate about? We are all in it together, aren’t we? How does it matter if you are a low caste (‘Shudra’ in Hindi version) and I am Brahmin? We are all members of one family. Oh, we all have our ups and downs. If something happens to me tomorrow, whose help will I seek if not yours?” This reference, along with some other ones, indicates that Hori belongs to the lower caste and represents them, who are poor, debt-trapped and exploited.

If we explore his political mind, we find that he was also representing the contemporary political understanding prevalent in his community that was exploited in the name of religion, tradition or prestige. It is to be noted that the protagonist is also illiterate, inarticulate, fatalistic and poor. At the same time, his son, Gobar is representing the young generation, though rebellion (in its embryonic form) but also not articulated politically, who refuses to be ‘a victim of circumstances’ but in the end fall prey to these circumstances, despite his efforts to change the life of his family and himself. It should be kept in mind here that the whole novel is contextualised in the northern Indian village, where there was no political leader like Ambedkar and the voice of the Dalit community was not expressed politically.

But there is another reference in Godan that addresses Dalit discourse in significant ways. This is the Matadeen and Selia episode. Matadeen is the son of the village priest, Datadeen and Selia is a Dalit (‘Chamar’ in Hindi version) woman. She loves Matadeen and has also got physical association with him but Datadeen maintains, despite physical intimacy and her devotion, a distance with her due to her caste status and treats her with disrespect and indignity as Premchand mentions that Matadeen “cunningly exploited her love for him: now she was no more than a
machine which worked at his bidding.”46 Matadeen also humiliated her when she was giving handful of grain as return of her debt to Dulari from his stock, which was practically the result of her labour. Further, when she asked from Matadeen, “Have I no right over your things?” Matadeen, shamelessly replied, “no, “you have no claim over me. You work, you are paid for it. If you want to give away my things, you can’t do it. If this work does not suit you, find another. There is no shortage of workers here.”47 (This is English translation and does not convey proper meaning of the Hindi version, which is very harsh and blunt. Last line of Matadeen’s speech is also not translated that says, “this is not Begar; we are giving food and clothes for this.”). Selia felt deeply hurt and humiliated.

This indicates towards oppressive and humiliating treatment by the upper castes for Dalits. They exploited Dalits in all possible ways: socially, economically and physically. Here Premchand has portrayed Selia’s pain in a serious and delicate manner when he writes, “Selia looked helplessly at Matadeen like a bird which has been turned out of the cage with wings clipped.”48 “It was difficult to say whether she was feeling pain much or condemning...she said nothing. She resumed work with broken heart and inactive hands experiencing a lump of salt in her throat.”49 This episode, till this point of time in the novel, points out the helplessness of the Dalit women, who were not finding political ways to articulate their anger and were made unable to protest. But immediately after this incident, another incident took place, which is very political in its expression and represents another discourse of the Dalit movement during those times.
A group of Dalit community led by Selia’s father, mother, two brothers, surrounded Matadeen and subsequently snapped his sacred thread (‘janayu’) and forced him to eat a piece of bone as a mark of protest and ‘revenge’ for his deeds. Her father, Harkhu said, “we shall degrade Matadeen to a cobbler’s (‘Chamar’ in Hindi version) position, even if we have to shed our blood to do so. Selia is a girl; she has to live with one man or the other. We have no quarrel on this point. But whoever keeps her must keep her with dignity. If you can’t make us Brahmins, we can make you cobblers.”

“If you can make us Brahmins, make us, our whole community is ready and if you don’t have that guts, then you also be ‘Chamars’. Live with us and eat with us.” Afterwards, “two cobblers dashed forward and seized Matadeen’s hands. The third pulled and mapped his sacred thread. Before Datadeen and Jhenguri Singh could recover from their surprise, two cobblers had thrust a big piece of bone into Matadeen’s mouth. Matadeen clenched his teeth but even then the loathsome object got between his lips. His gorge rose and as his lips opened the bone slipped into his mouth. Attracted by the noise, people came running. Strangely enough no one came forward to grapple with the defilers of dharma, Matadeen had alienated on and all by his objectionable behaviour with the young girls of the village. Outwardly the villagers put up a show of fight; at heart they were pleased to see Matadeen getting a taste of his own medicine.”

Premchand narrates this incident in a delicate way and comments on hypocrisy of Brahminism when he writes, “Matadeen stretched himself on the ground. He felt listless. His Brahmin’s vanity had vanished into thin air. That piece of bone had not only polluted his mouth but his soul also. However much penance he might do, however much holy water he drank, however much money he gave in
charity, however many pilgrimages he undertook, his lost dharma would not return. From today he would be considered an untouchable in his own house."\(^{53}\) Towards the end of this incident, we find that Selia was given shelter by Dhania, who justified her father and community’s action. Dhania supported their action saying, "All men are alike. When Matadeen humiliated Selia, no one raised a litter finger in protest, but when Matadeen comes in for trouble, he gets all the sympathy in the world. Has Selia no dharma of her own? That man Harkhu did well in beating up these holy goondas..."\(^{54}\)

Now Selia is living in Hori’s house and has one son, Ramu who is very naughty. Matadeen was ‘purified’ through ‘shuddhi yagna’ by the Pundits of Benaras. But this ‘purification’ has changed him a lot as Premchand writes, “well, the penance did really purify him: from that day he developed a revulsion for dharma, discarded the sacred thread, and dumped his priesthood in the Ganga. For he realised that although his patron still asked him to work out auspicious dates and consulted him in matters of marriages and births, they refused water from his hands and did not allow him to touch their utensils: this in spite of the fact that the Pundits of Benaras had accepted him as a Brahmin. In disgust, he turned a tiller of the soil.”\(^{55}\) He has realised that his religion is hypocrite and has double standards. Now he, somehow, tries to be with Selia, especially her son. One day, her son Ramu dies due to pneumonia and this becomes a critical juncture in the life of Matadeen, who now comes openly in grief and “carried the dead body (of Ramu) to the cremation ground by the side of the river, a mile away. For eight days ‘his hands remained stiff. He is not ashamed today, has no hesitation.”\(^{56}\) After one month of Ramu’s death, he came to Selia and dedicated himself to her, fully repented and changed. Here also, the whole narrative used by
Premchand is noteworthy. For instance, when he comes to Selia saying, “I am not afraid of anyone” and then moves towards Selia’s house and declared to be there, “this is our house, this is my temple.” And when Selia asked, “how will you remain a Brahmin?” he replied boldly, “I want to be a cobbler (Chamar in Hindi version). All those who fulfil their dharma are Brahmins, all those who violate their dharma are cobblers.” And in this way, he becomes fully devoted to Selia demolishing false Brahmanism, which he realised was a sham.

There have been numerous interpretations of the Matadeen-Selia episode by the critics. Some found it progressive keeping in mind the time and space of the novel. Sadanand Shahi regards that this incident “exposed not only the very hypocrisy of the ‘Varna system’ but also advocates Dalits’ protest to this. This prepares a background for the future Dalit movement that has dignity and equality as its primary goals.” Some other critics argued that Ambedkar rather than Gandhi vis-à-vis this incident influences Premchand and he would have been affected by the Temple Entry and other radical movements led by Dr. Ambedkar in the western part of the country.

Several Dalit critics like Kanwal Bharati and Shyoraj Singh ‘Bechain’ have also interpreted this episode in different ways. They regard that though Premchand depicted problems of the Dalit community but in the final analysis who got liberated: Matadeen or Selia? In the end, Matadeen transformed himself and became ‘Chamar’ but the Brahmins and other upper castes did not accept Selia. This, in their opinion, is another contradiction in Premchand’s writing, where there may be some instance (in fact, this episode is the one of the very few instances) of individual transformation but the upper castes, in general, have not accepted the lower castes. In fact, this reflects
the contemporary *Dalit* discourse that was prevalent in northern India where, different kinds of activities like 'Shuddhi' and others were taking place to consolidate their position as highlighted by Swami Achhutanand, as discussed earlier. But these paradoxes are to be analysed contextually along with other paradoxes (for example, characterisation of Rai Saheb, Mehta and Malti) and these are "coexistence of contradictory traits" and "the paradoxes inherent in Godan, though not always creative or fruitful, have to be seen in terms of the peculiar tensions of Premchand’s time, both in his life and in Indian literary history."62

It is evident by now that Premchand’s literature deals with variety of issues including oppression of the *Dalit* community, which remains an unavoidable social reality of his times. Before moving to analyse another work of Hindi literature on the life of the *Dalits*, Dharti Dhan Na Apana (1972) by Jagdish Chandra, it would be pertinent to have a quick understanding of the politics during the intervening period.

The focus of the *Dalit* movement during 1930 to 1950 was on the struggle for recognition of human existence and socio-political right. It was during these years that some parts of the United Province got inspired by the Ambedkarite approach to *Dalit* liberation and started addressing this issue politically. We have seen, earlier in this work, that Swami Achuutanand and Baba Ram Charan, who got inspired by Dr. Ambedkar, were leading the *Dalit* community in their struggle. Differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi were having impact shaping *Dalit* identity in this part, though with a slow and gradual development of the *Dalit* consciousness. It has also been discussed that the Gandhian framework largely influenced northern India but by mid-1940s a section of *Dalits* (disillusioned from the Arya Samaj and Reformist
We find that Jatavas in Agra formed the Jatava Youth League, which by 1941, had branches in Rajasthan, Punjab and Madhya Bharat. In 1944 another important development, the formation of United Province Scheduled Castes Federation took place, which was formed under the influence of Dr. Ambedkar’s All-India Scheduled Castes Federation. All these developments were preparing ground for consolidated political mobilisation, which subsequently led to formation of the Republican Party of India (RPI) in 1956. Conversion to Buddhism, led by Dr. Ambedkar in 1956, had a great ripple effect that “freed the Scheduled Castes from mental and psychological enslavement” heralding a new era in the course of the Dalit movement making the issues of identity, mobilisation and empowerment the very focus of the struggle. During 1960s, two other important factors affected the identity formation among the Dalits, viz., the temporary decline of the Indian National Congress after the 1967 elections and entry of the middle and backwards classes (OBCs) into politics that reflected changing caste composition in the region. Though RPI had a brief political existence (due to its internal factions, lack of dynamic leadership and appropriation by the Congress), it had great impact on the process of identity formation among Dalits. During early 1970s, “the most interesting socio-political development among Ambedkar’s followers is the rise of the Dalits Panthers, a militant group of young educated Buddhists... (who) offered a challenge to unite to the politicians in Ambedkar’s movement and attempted to counter violence against Untouchables in the village.” The Dalit Panthers also brought to the fore
emerging *Dalit* literature (especially in Marathi) and immensely contributed for a "tough, realistic, unorthodox literature, (and) a new socio-political movement."\(^65\)

All these developments had a gradual but great impact on formation of the *Dalit* identity and their political consciousness, though there were significant variations in its expression at an all-India level as has been noticed by Sudha Pai, “the pace of change was however, different in different regions leading to uneven development of the *Dalit* movement across the subcontinent in the post-Independence period. While parts of colonial Southern and Western India experienced strong movements demanding reservations and improved social status under leaders such as B. R. Ambedkar and M. C. Rajah, these were conspicuous by their absence in most parts of north India. In U P, the lack of an anti-caste ideology or social reform movements and the mobilisational impact of the Indian National Congress led to the development of the passive identity of *harijan* and the notion of *uplift* without questioning the caste hierarchy. Poverty and backwardness were significant contributory factors. While the influence of Ambedkar is seen in the late colonial period, it came too late, was limited to a small section of the population and failed to have the transformative effect it did in Maharashtra."\(^66\)

**Hence,** the literary expression of this kind of political situation itself becomes a complex and difficult task as it has to narrate and represent several contradictions and complexities which were faced by the society in general and the *Dalit* community in particular. Now we would analyse another novel, Dharti Dhan Na Apana written by Jagdish Chandra that was published in 1972.
Dharati Dhan Na Apana (1972, Novel): Jagdish Chandra

Jagdish Chandra is a prominent literary figure in Hindi literature who has written immensely on torture and exploitation of the oppressed people in the Indian society, especially in Punjab. We find a very sensitive and realistic depiction of the lives of the Dalits in his works, which had significant impact on the literary art (though it is to be noted that there is no independent critique of his works except certain literary journalistic criticism).

His major works include Dharati Dhan Na Apana, Narak Kund Mein Baas and Kabhi Na Chhodey Khet along with other novels and stories. He started writing Dharati Dhan Na Apana in Urdu but stopped working on it after initial eight chapters and subsequently completed it in 1968, which got published in 1972. This novel became a milestone, which reflected the socio-eco-political life of the Dalit community in Punjab and their exploitation, trauma, struggle, disillusionment, rebellion and failure, which were characteristic of that period (somewhere from late 1960 to early 1970s), for Jagdish Chandra and Hindi literary tradition.

Referring to the source of inspiration for this novel, Jagdish Chandra writes, “I got disturbed to witness the plight of the Dalits due to poverty and other reasons and the land they were tilling and the houses they resided in were not their own. They had no right on all these resources. My adolescent sensibilities got determination to portray the plight of the lives of these marginalized Dalits and “these unforgettable memories and their hidden pain” became the source of inspiration for this novel.”67
In the Preface of the novel, Jagdish Chandra makes it very clear that he has not experienced “the bitterness of life of the Harijans” due to his (upper) caste status but he got the opportunity to witness the trauma of their lives very closely. He further writes, “I have narrated these marginalized characters of Indian life in a very objective and neutral manner and have not attempted to impose my views or ideology throughout the novel.” The novel also makes an attempt to narrate inter and intra-community dynamics of the village focusing especially on the plight of the landless Dalits and their exploitation, in the Independent state but the feudal Indian society. With this kind of understanding about the lives of the Dalits, Jagdish Chandra presented a very important narrative on the contemporary life and its struggle experienced by the Dalits.

The novel Dharati Dhan Na Apana starts with the return of Kali, the protagonist, to his village in Punjab, which he left six years ago due to acute poverty and exploitation and went to Kanpur in Uttar Pradesh to earn his livelihood. He has no parent and relatives except his aunt, Pratapi, who brought him up and with whom he is deeply attached. Kali noticed no change in his village and its life. Same kind of pathetic life for the Dalits, same level of exploitation and repression by the upper castes prevailed in the village, rather he found all this much more deeper and intensified.

Local landlords and feuds consider Dalits below the human beings and treat them in all possible ways of indignity and torture. Chowdhary Harnam Singh, who along with other upper castes exploits Dalits economically, politically and emotionally represents the upper caste segment; even the language used by the upper
caste is so derogatory and abusive that Kali found intolerable and protested against it. Jagdish Chandra has depicted internalisation of such treatment that continues for centuries in such a way that reader sometimes finds it complex to interpret it. For instance, some of the caste men of Kali considered such treatment “as usual” and “normal” (depicted in Chapter III of the novel) and many of them have forcefully submitted to the supremacy of the Chowdharis of the village. But Kali, who returned from the city and has got informed of the political development outside, is not ready to submit like others and decided to lead a dignified and determined life.

Kali endeavours to improve his life and also attempts to instil political consciousness among Dalits through his consistent efforts to unite and agitate them. His first decision to build a pucca house becomes a catalyst in the plot. No one in his locality (that has been referred as ‘Chamadi’ inappropriately means ‘Dalit Basti’) ever owns a pucca house and it was a big decision, not only to visualise but also to execute. It was seen as a challenge to the upper castes, who are rich, own pucca house and enjoy all the privileges in the village. Jagdish Chandra seems to use the construction of his house as a metaphor for the construction of new system, a new house that cherishes equality and fraternity where there is no Untouchability and discrimination. There come a lot many problems in the execution of Kali’s decision like scarcity of money and raw material. Kali was also made to realised that the land on which he is dreaming to construct a new pucca house is a common property of the village, which was donated by the zamindars to habitat Dalits. There occurs several ups and downs in the realisation of his dream and towards the end of the novel, it remained a dream only leaving him disappointed, distraught and devastated. The
money he earned in the city was stolen when he was mourning the death of his aunt and now he lives a lonely life struggling for his dignity.

Kali now attempts to mobilise the Dalits on the issue of ‘Begar’ and organise them for not doing so. The novelist has narrated this incident very powerfully, examining inter and intra contradictions of the communities, their lack of political organisation and articulation and also poverty. More than six chapters have been devoted to this incident that investigates very seriously the tensions and contradictions prevalent in the contemporary Indian villages. Issues like political organisation and articulation, mobilisation and agitation, protest and revolt have been dealt in detail highlighting consolidation of the upper castes against the fragmented lower castes who are already disempowered and marginalized in the caste ridden social structures. This episode also addresses various political orientations, which were dominant during the period like reformist, socialist and communist. Though other political orientations have been tackled in a sketchy way the communist orientation has been dealt in detail that is being represented by Dr. Bishan Das, who keeps on “harping on the Marxist-Leninist discourse” and attempts to generate some sort of Marxist consciousness among the villagers. Dalits, led by Kali, expected total and meaningful support and solidarity from the comrades but they finally got disillusioned with this discourse due to Dr. Bishan Das and others’ lack of full support, solidarity and consistency. This led to a compromise between the upper castes and the Dalits turning the hope for change in the socio-eco-political set-up in the village and leaving Kali a lone struggler for the cause.
The issues of Untouchability and conversion have also been addressed in the novel. Untouchability is widely practiced in the village and the Dalits were humiliated, insulted every day, and are being forced to live a sub-human existence. It has also been portrayed delicately that how conversion from Dalit to first, Sikhism and then to Christianity, also failed to bring change in the mindsets of the upper castes. It has been narrated through the life of Nand Singh who first converted to Sikhism and later on to Christianity but upper castes and also his own community members treated him with no difference. He was unable to get a respectable status despite the proselytization. We find that the conversion movement to Buddhism led by Dr. Ambedkar had powerful impact on the lives of Dalits throughout India and people considered it rejection of Brahmanism but the novelist attempts to portray that without dynamic leadership, high level of political consciousness and political organisation, these movements reaches to a limitation and restricts itself to limited success.

Kali’s relationship with Gyanno becomes the turning point in the novel. Both of them belong to the same caste, community and village where they cannot have marital relationship whatever their emotional and sentimental association. There is a continuous description of this relationship in the text but it get no social approval that led to poisoning to Gyanno by her mother and forcing Kali to leave village, completely defeated, devastated and disillusioned of his dreams, endeavours and vision. The novel starts with his return to the village from city and ends with his tragic and forceful migration to an unknown place.
Dharati Dhan Na Apana portrays the contemporary socio-political realities prevalent during 1970s in our country addressing vital issues, like revolt against Caste System, attack on the practice of Untouchability (despite legal prohibition). It also emphasises on the need for land reforms to empower Dalits, especially in the rural area. It becomes evident from the plight of Kali’s life and his brethren that unless full-fledged land reforms are introduced in the villages, life for the Dalits would not be better. Dharati Dhan Na Apana problematises issue of land reforms and poverty in a very powerful manner and inspires for these grassroots level changes in socio-economic structure to achieve the goal of political and social empowerment.

The novel also attempts to expose the hypocrisy of the socialist and communist orientation adopted by the educated upper castes in the village, (represented by Dr. Bishan Das and his fellows) who sympathetically and notionally supported the cause of the Dalit liberation but when it comes to real and genuine solidarity they aligned with their upper castes communities. In this regard, Kali’s disillusionment occurred in a process where he visited to all possible sources for support from Dr. Bishan Das to Christian priest and others. But all of them refused to support the Dalits when they decided to boycott the upper castes Chowdharis. Boycott resulted in a compromise between the Jats and the Dalits, where later got, in a way, defeated. It happened due to acute poverty that led them to starvation and finally for the compromise. Dr. Bishan Das understood that the Dalits have reformist than revolutionary approach but failed to realise that poverty, landlessness and starvation are major obstacles in this direction and failure to address these fundamental issues led for Kali’s disillusionment with this approach. Jagdish Chandra also narrates humanistic tendencies, which were existent in the village through the character of
Lallu, a wrestler, who is ready to help Kali. But at the same time, the novelist pointed out his limitations to lend full support to the Dalits, especially during the boycott.

In this way, we find that Dharati Dhan Na Apana is a unique novel on the life of the Dalits in an Indian village. It is the first full-length novel on their life portraying socio-eco-cultural and political context, where Kali represents rebellion character of the community, who despite all limitations, contradictions and upper castes dominance, launched the movement for Dalit liberation. The failure of the boycott movement is evidently the failure of the in-built exploitative system of Indian society and not the failure of Kali’s determination and commitment to the cause. We would see in the subsequent texts that how there is continuity to this spirit and how Kali’s vision is becoming successful in due course of the history of the Dalit movement in India.


Amrit Lal Nagar (1916-1990) was born in Agra and lived his creative life in and through Lucknow. He inherited literary tradition from the legacy of Premchand and Sharat Chandra, where Premchand inspired him for realistic portrayal of human experiences and Sharat Chandra for self experienced narration of life. These two literary figures had an immense impact on the works and personality of Amrit Lal Nagar, who represented a different tradition in Hindi literature that explores and experimented with the nuances of life and its creative expression blending it with first hand experiences and investigations. His style is also very different, which sometimes makes him a complex novelist and storyteller where he attempted to address numerous issues, interwoven in one plot, and leads analysts for innumerable
interpretations. His first story collection, titled 'Vatika' was published in 1935 and appreciated by Premchand himself, who in response, commented that he expects realistic stories from Amrit Lal Nagar.\textsuperscript{72}

It is important to note that the period during which Amrit Lal Nagar was realising his creative self witnessed National Liberation Struggle and, in specific, trade union movement and increased Leftist influence within and outside the Indian National Congress. The first Progressive Writer's Association was held in Lucknow in 1936 with Premchand in the chair, who appealed for a "literature that would generate dynamism, struggle and uneasiness"\textsuperscript{73} Dr. Ram Vilas Sharma was also starting advocacy for a committed and progressive literature, which inspires for humanism, progress and harmony. There was also an enhanced Gandhian impact on the socio-political and literary context in the country. In fact, this was the period for redefining our past, shaping our present that explores future India. It was amidst this context that Amrit Lal Nagar started his creative life and got influenced by all these traits in his writings and subsequently, developing his own distinct style and considered his literature as 'humanist' that is not only emotional but also rational.\textsuperscript{74}

In his quest to explore the multifarious contexts of life and its unpredictability, Amrit Lal Nagar wrote on several subjects, expanding the horizon of his creative canvass where he addressed almost every aspect of life, ranging from individual to collective self and from contemporary society to its historical and cultural traditions carried forward from the past.
We can classify his literature in three major streams. The first one is represented by his works like *Mahakaal* (1947), *Boond Aur Samundra* (1956), *Suhaag Ke Nupur* (1960), *Amrit Aur Vish* (1966), *Nachyo Bahut Gopal* (1978) and *Agnigarbha* (1982) where he addressed variety of issues, e.g., problems of middle class and capitalist society, problems of contemporary Indian society, issues related to women’s liberation and Untouchability. The second stream is his historical novels as represented by the works like *Karwat* (1985) and *Peedhiya* (1990) that explore impact of colonialism on the Indian society while the third stream represents his cultural and historical novels, for instance, *Ekda Naimisharayane* (1972), *Manas Ka Hans* (1972) and *Khanjan Nayn* (1981). In addition, we find his story collections like *Vatika* (1935), *Aadami, Nahi Nahi* (1947), *Ek Dil Hazar Daastan* (1955), *Sikandar Har Gaya* (1973) and *Ek Dil Hazar Afsane* (1986) that attempt to address the issues concerning middle class life and its ambitions, expectations, happiness and sorrow, vision and realities. In this way, we find that he endeavoured to touch each and every aspect of contemporary Indian life, especially in the urban scenario, that struggles for meaningful survival amid several limitations.

Portrayal of urban middle class has found special attention in his works and Lucknow became his favourite urban context that synthesises both urban and rural traditions and its majestic Nawabi past in its fabric. This emphasis on urban context, hybridising with rural traditions, leads Amrit Lal Nagar towards experimentation with varied themes and concerns. It was in this context that he attempted to write Nachyo Bahut Gopal that became sociological documentation on the contemporary life of the Dalits living in urban areas. The novel came out after three years of rigorous exploration and is based on surveys, interviews and informal/formal interaction with
The style of this work is generally considered as novel-cum-reportage as we found several interventions by the author himself in the novel on the issue.

The dedication of the novel is also noteworthy. It has been dedicated to three personalities, viz, Heera Dom, Mahavir Prasad Dewedi and Jai Prakash Narayan. It is to be noted that Heera Dom is being considered the first poet to express the trauma of his community and Mahavir Prasad Dewedi published his poem in Saraswati magazine. The genesis of this work lies in Amrit Lal Nagar’s quest to explore the multifarious reality of Indian life as he mentioned in the Preface to the novel that a particular real life incident (where a rich, but aged Brahmin’s young wife eloped with a young ‘sweeper’ man) inspired him to work on this community that was reported in the Dharmyug magazine in 1975. We find that the plot of Nachyo Bahut Gopal is interwoven on similar incident, of course, with various creative interventions by the author.

Amrit Lal Nagar makes it clear in the Preface itself that it is his quest to understand the trauma of being a Dalit that inspired him to work on such theme. Here, he made an attempt to explore roots of the problem, investigating it right from the etymological perspective to its historical origin and subsequent development. He quoted from some of the Hindu Scriptures, Dr. Ambedkar and others on this issue and found that “sweepers are not castes and, if at all, they are caste, then it is a caste of vanquished.” He further elaborated, “Castes, considered Untouchables were, in fact, defeated and humiliated by the victors, who, eccentrically, forced them to do all kinds of menial works.” It is with this historical understanding that Amrit Lal Nagar
started exploring myths and realities associated with the sweepers community and contextualised the plot of Nachyo Bahut Gopal in Lucknow during the mid-1970s.

The plot revolves around Smt. Nirguniya Devi, the central character of the novel, and her life. She is located in a Dalit Basti that is representative of her struggle and trauma. Author, through the character of Anshudhar Sharma, endeavours to narrate her life in a very different literary style (by way of push-pull method, where author as well as his characters looks back and forth, sometimes, simultaneously in order to understand both individual and collective self and the contemporary social reality). This distinct method, experimented by Amrit Lal Nagar, makes Nachyo Bahut Gopal a novel-cum-reportage rather than novel itself. This method also makes the novel a complex one and sometimes, apparent inconsistencies crop up in the form. For instance, Nachyo Bahut Gopal, prima facie, looks like a biography of Smt. Nirguniya Devi as told to the journalist author, Anshuman Sharma but repeated interventions on contemporary socio-political dynamics (for example, Chapter 30 referring to Emergency, 1975) by the author makes it reportage, though these references are also intertwined with the main plot of the novel.

Nachyo Bahut Gopal portrays the life of Smt. Nirguniya Devi as the saga of the unpredictability in human life where it is not the birth status that determines one’s destiny but rather immense impact of the circumstances which metamorphoses one’s life cycle. Smt. Nirguniya spent her childhood (upto 12-13 years) at her maternal grandparents’ house amid Brahmincal traditions and after their death moved out to the house of her father’s employer, Pandit Batuk Prasad, where she was physically
exploited by his son and subsequently, married to a seventy five year old man, named Masuriadeen Maharaj.

Her husband, Masuriadeen not only ‘policed’ her socialisation with the outside world but also restricted her physical mobility and almost kept her ‘locked’ in his house. Moreover, he was not able to satisfy her sexually. (Chapter 9, page 60). Subsequent development of the event led her to elope with Mohana, the son of their house-sweeper and introduced her with a new world of reality. Mohana takes her to his uncle where she was ‘forced’ to socialise herself as sweeper and to learn their lifestyle. This transformation has been depicted in such a way by the author that it marked mental agony and trauma of the sweepers’ community and their life. This description also substantiates understanding of the author that sweepers were not a caste at all but were subjugated community that was constantly suppressed and humiliated in the course of the history.

Smt. Nirguniya experienced painful transformation and became a sweeper. In due course of time, she became the mother of two children: Nirgun Mohan and Shakuntala. Her husband became a dreaded bandit, who was killed by the police. After his death, she brought up her two children, devoted her life to the service of the community and struggled politically for the right of the Dalits. Her daughter, Shakuntala became principal of a college and son, Nirgun Mohan is a government officer in the Press Information Bureau. Nachyo Bahut Gopal depicts her struggle for identity, self-respect and rights. We find a very complicated story line in this novel that investigates pathetic lives of the sweepers’ community.
The novel is a long one having forty-one chapters in 345 pages depicting almost each and every aspect of human life and addressing crucial issues of the Dalits' mobilisation, solidarity, self-respect and identity. In specific, it addresses issue of political consciousness, Ambedkar's movement, Gandhian influence on the lives of Dalits (particularly in north India), temple entry movement and mobilisation and consolidation of the Dalits for assertion of their rights. It also narrates cultural mobilisation (through celebration of the Ravidas Anniversary), which provided impetus for cultural consolidation of Dalits in their quest for equality. Impact of Dr. Ambedkar's movement has been immense, especially among the new generations of the Dalits. Smt. Nirguniya's son represents this generation and revolted against caste exploitation and humiliation. He understood caste discrimination as "apartheid" and resolved to fight against it politically and socially.

At the same time, it also attempts to explore the problems faced by a woman, (and when the woman is a Dalit) in the male dominated society. She, painfully, said, "none other than women in this world is slave. I have seen Brahman as well as sweepers, all men are alike...I have experienced the trauma of being Dalit in two ways" (one as being a Dalit and other as a woman). But, we find high level of political consciousness in the character of Smt. Nirguniya Devi, who, when confronted with the ground realities, rose to assert her rights and resolves to fight against injustice, inequality and exploitation. She not only lives her life with dignity and self-respect but also struggles for her community and their rights, be it Temple Entry or Ravidas Anniversary Celebrations. She emphasises on the importance of education for Dalits and their children. Politically, she encourages people for consolidation, solidarity and consistent fight against injustice.
There is a very significant debate running throughout the plot of Nachyo Bahut Gopal. This debate pointed out towards the origin of the sweeper castes. Author makes an attempt to find out the historical reasons for the origin of this caste but found that there is no caste as sweeper per se, but historically, the victors forced vanquished to do menial jobs and subsequently, they were identified as sweepers and were considered lower castes.

This understanding led author to conceptualise the character of Smt. Nirguniya Devi, who spent her childhood amidst the Brahmmin surroundings, and metamorphoses to a Dalit by a series of development in her life, where she becomes victim of the social structure and its predicament. What is important to recognise the fact that she accepts her ‘identity’ and resolves to live it with dignity and self-respect as she emphasised, “I would like to be in the same society, I even don’t have a desire to become a Brahmni again.” This indicates her self-dignity and commitment to the cause of Dalit upliftment. Here it is to be noted that some critics argued that Smt. Nirguniya’s efforts for Dalit emancipation are noteworthy and her love with Mohana transforms her to a sweeper. Nirguniya adapts to a sweeper’s lifestyle under pressure in the same way as the Dalits are forced to do Begari and other menial jobs and these kinds of circumstances are not comfortable. Her (upper caste) past always remained with her at least on a subterranean level. But this also pointed out that there is no sweeper caste per se but it is caste-ridden social structure that has forced one section of the society to be considered as lower castes and Dalits.

In this way, we find that Nachyo Bahut Gopal investigates several causes for the problem and addresses vital issues of the Dalit identity, mobilisation and
empowerment. The novel also highlights psychological trauma experienced by the *Dalit* community in a caste-ridden society where they have been systematically marginalized. It also focuses on the *Dalit* assertion through community formation and launching a struggle against injustice, inequality and discrimination. It envisions that "freedom/independence are the best cherished goals...there are two kinds of people who are slave: one, women and the other, sweepers. Till the moment these people are slave, any kind of freedom remains a total false." \(^{83}\)

**Mahabhoj (1979 Novel): Mannu Bhandari**

Another novel that came up in 1979 was Mahabhoj (The Great Feast) authored by Mannu Bhandari, which comments on socio-eco-political structures, erosion of values, political corruption and precarious life conditions of the *Dalits*.

Mannu Bhandari started her creative journey as storywriter with several story collections like *Main Har Gayee* (1957), *Teen Nigahon Ke Tasveer* (1958), *Yahi Sach Hai* (1966), *Eke Plate Sailab* (1968) and *Trishanku* (1978). These stories addressed women’s issues, contradictions of middle class family life, their aspirations and expectations. Mannu Bhandari also wrote some novels like *Eke Inch Muskan* (1961), *Aapka Bunty* (1971) and *Mahabhoj* (1979) where *Mahabhoj* became her most important contribution to the Hindi literary field that proved powerful statement on the contemporary social and political system during 1970s.

Author drew inspiration for Mahabhoj from the contemporary environment that characterised by erosion of democratic values, level of inhuman treatment to the lower strata of Indian society and political manipulation for *Realpolitik*. Mannu
Bhandari herself mentioned in the beginning of novel, “it seems to me that it is very important, comfortable and reassuring to observe the interior drama of one’s life, to consider one’s personal distress and inner turmoil. But when one’s own house is on fire, confining oneself to one’s inner world and giving expression to only that, appears irrelevant, ridiculous and to some extent indecent. It is perhaps this consideration that underlies the creation of this novel. I look upon this work as an expression of the debt I owe to the environment which has determined my personality and my destiny.”84 In addition, author also drew inspiration from the Belachi Massacre in Patna district happened on May 27, 1979 where 14 Dalits, including two children, were killed. This Massacre threatened the very conscience of a fearless democracy, its governance and administration. Mannu Bhandari took this incident as a reference point to evolve a political novel underlining numerous issues of Indian democracy (democratic values, political parties, elections and political opportunism) and its role for the betterment of the lives of the Dalits in India.

Contemporary developments in political environment took Mannu Bhandari to “venture out from the subjective world of her previous fiction into the realities of grassroots politics in India—the political give and take, the strategic moves and counter-moves likened to a game of chess with the very lives of the constituents its pawns, and a Machiavellian grasp of the terms of political power...Mahabhoj is quite simply a tale of the betrayal of public trust for private ends.”85 “The novel opens with the mysterious death of a village boy (Bisu), an insignificant event which takes greater implications as members of the opposing parties in an important by-elections feast upon the tragedy like the Brahmin priests at the death-rites banquet—hence the title. Humanitarian concerns as thus orchestrated by a political framework which
gives the work its structure... Mahabhoj is first, though not foremost, a primer for the aspiring politician, cataloguing the mechanics of political success, the measures and counter measures taken by the rivals—the grassroots political process transformed into thinly disguised fiction. Its structure is the chess game: the alternating moves of two adept players, with no final solution in sight. The rules of the game are the principles to be followed, the political courses more expedient than exemplary.” 86 This kind of plot structure makes Mahabhoj a political novel that critically examines entire political system addressing various issues through complicated problematization and leaves out for the reader to explore solutions to the problem.

The plot revolves around the murder of Bisu, whose dead body was found in outskirts of the village called Saroha, where by-elections are due very soon. Bisu’s murder makes this by-election a playground for two parties: one, ruling party led by Da Sahib and the other opposing one represented by Sukul Babu, who is also contesting elections from this constituency. This murder draws special attention not because of the fact that Bisu belonged to the Dalit community but his murder became the central agenda for both the parties for acquiring political power. As is being mentioned in the text, “In truth, there was nothing special about the man or the incident. It was simply a matter of coincidence, place and time synchronized by an event important enough to stir even Saroha. In a month-and-a-half there would be an election, a by-election for just one seat in the Legislature, to be sure. But it was still important, for contesting it was the former Chief Minister, Sukul Babu, representing all the parties defeated in the last election, protesting, challenging the very existence of the ruling party... It was Sukul Babu’s candidacy that gave the election such
importance. Just one seat, but so critical for the whole Cabinet. All events thus had
greater implications. On any other day what would Bisu or his death have meant? 87

Mahabhoj narrates all kinds of political manipulations (even merciless death
of an innocent) employed by the political leaders to gain and maintain political power.
But it is to be noted that the author writes about the whole political system and its
complicated nitty-gritty in such a way to make it clear and precise without any special
emphasis that politicians have betrayed public trust and lost even minimum respect to
human dignity, democratic values, principles of natural justice and morality for the
sake of political power and opportunism.

There are two important characters in the novel: Da Sahib and Sukul Babu. Da
Sahib, who is the current Chief Minister, is being portrayed, apparently with clean
image and principled leadership, who displays great respect to democracy, freedom of
press, proper governance and corruption free administration. But his political
expediencies convey a different message for example his interview to the editor of the
Mashaal newspaper and subsequently doubling its newsprint paper quota, introducing
Cottage Industry Plan just before the elections and its inauguration by Bisu’s father
from Saroha village. All these expedient tactics, adopted by Da Sahib, manifest
completely different impact that suggests how political manipulations and
manoeuvrings are used opportunistically even by an apparent clean image principled
leader. Sukul Babu is former Chief Minister who is contesting by-elections after the
defeat of his party during last general elections. He ruled for about ten years with
absolute power and no challenge to his leadership. It is to be noted that Bisu was
arrested during his tenure without any reason and mercilessly tortured that
traumatised him till his death but now Sukul Babu is very sympathetic for Bisu and pledged to punish the guilty responsible for this act. In this context, it should also be noted down that by-elections, otherwise, would have been a very insignificant event but Bisu’s murder gave both the leaders an opportunistic agenda and the entire sequence of development changed so fast, thus making this incident a reference point for the whole novel. He utilises all means to win this by-election and in the process shrewdly attempts to seize the opportunity for political power that is being portrayed as Realpolitik throughout the novel.

Mahabhoj also portrays the practice of defection and political opportunism. Trilochan (Lochan Bhaiyya), who defected to Da Sahib after Sukul Babu’s defeat in last elections, gains political power and represents this tendency that started manifesting in the contemporary Indian political system. Along with many other tendencies being reflected in the novel, Mahabhoj attempts to critically portray almost every character that contributes to the successful governance of Indian democratic polity like, political leaders (Da Sahib, Sukul Babu, Trilochan, Rao, Chowdhary, Appa Sahib), journalists (Datta Babu), Police (DIG, Saxena), helpless peasants, Dalits and local pressure groups as well as caste struggle (represented by Thakur vs Dalits conflict in the village). The novel also narrates struggle for justice led by Binda and Rukma who were tortured through systemic flaws but continued their fight.

In this way, Mahabhoj becomes “typical of the political novel genre, it offers no solution. Rather, it dramatically brings forward the modern ideologies, expediencies and current realities in conflict with the traditional morals by which India has defined herself as a nation and people... The political concerns which enter
an author's life, both public and imaginative, may often transform every aspect of his
creative work—language, style, imagery, form. As such is the case with Mannu
Bhandari's Mahabhoj in which the author has ventured out into an area of social
criticism through a striking simplicity of language difficult in translation, a crude
realistic vitality and a genuine concern for the Indian moral tradition...The novel is
rather a realistic chronicle of the behaviour patterns of highly political groups. It is a
gallery of types: exploited peasants and outcastes squeezed by poverty, powerful
landowners and corrupt politicians, and stirred to occasional action only by outside
stimulations; tainted idealists whose eclipses are caused by acting in accordance with
their conscience rather than the Party or power structure; the perverters of power,
demagogues with messianic complexes or gangsters ruling by the ballot; and the
committed revolutionary. The conflict between political power, moral values and
democratic principles remains a running thread throughout the novel and it explores to
investigate these concepts in grassroots level reality that is characterised by erosion of
values, political opportunism, manipulation, manoeuvring, muscle power and
corruption in the administration of the country and these factors keep the Dalits at a
disadvantageous level where they are already marginalized by Caste System and
discrimination. This kind of literary exploration leads towards serious introspection
and inward looking recognizing principles of Equality, Liberty and Solidarity for all
human beings.

Thus examined, we find that Mahabhoj's contribution to the Hindi literary
expression is important in terms of highlighting flaws, which are inbuilt in the
political system, and keeping the Dalits discriminated and marginalized. It is
important to address systemic flaws (of a democratic polity) and to investigate why
this system has not delivered expected results, especially for upliftment of the *Dalits*,
as visualised by the Founding Fathers of the Constitution of India. Mahabhoj proves
to be an attempt in this direction and brings this issue to the centrality of Hindi literary
tradition.

**Period during 1980s and its political discourse**

It is important to note that there occurred a process of consolidation of the
*Dalits* in northern part of India during 1980s with two inter-linked processes, visible
from the mid-1960s: first was the defeat and temporary decline of the Congress after
the 1967 elections and the second process marked entry of the middle and Backward
Classes (BCs) mobilised by the Opposition parties, such as, BKD, into politics. Then
onwards, formation of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in 1984 further consolidated the
*Dalit* community with increased political mobilisation and consciousness and
bringing the deprived section along with minorities to a common platform. Formation
of BSP is being seen as a culmination of Kanshi Ram’s efforts in this direction
through the Backward and Minorities Communities Employees Federation
(BAMCEF) and the *Dalits Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti* (DS-4), which helped the
*Dalits* to assert them independently and autonomously. From 1989, BSP started
contesting State Assembly Elections with 13 seats and reached to its best to 98 in UP
2002 Elections. This clearly manifests its hold over the community and now it is an
important political player in the politics of Uttar Pradesh pushing forward its *Bahujan*
agenda. We have already discussed different phases of the *Dalit* Movement in chapter
three of this study.
Hence, the Dalit assertion in India, especially northern India has gone through continuous mobilisation and participation enhancing political consciousness among the Dalits that ensured their political participation in governance of the country. This also ensured formation of the Dalit identity in north India, particularly in U.P. Commenting on Dalit identity, Sudha Pai writes, "the gradual emergence of Dalit consciousness and movements was a significant feature of colonial India. The pace of change was however, different in different regions leading to uneven development of the Dalit movement across the subcontinent in the post-Independence period. While parts of colonial Southern and Western India experienced strong movement demanding reservations and improved social status under leaders such as B. R. Ambedkar and M. C. Rajah, these were conspicuous by their absence in most parts of North India. In UP, the lack of an anti-caste ideology or social reform movements and the mobilisational impact of the Indian National Congress led to the development of the passive identity of harijan and the notion of uplift without questioning the caste hierarchy... (now during the recent times) Dalit identity has two faces, neither of which can be described as revolutionary. One under the leadership of the BSP believes that capturing state power and introducing policies favourable to Dalits from above can best serve Dalit upliftment. It is elitist, conservative and election-oriented and aims at political empowerment of Dalits. The other represented by the micro-level process of Ambedkarisation functions within civil society to protect the interests of Dalits through collective social organisation. It believes that spreading the message of Ambedkar through various methods of grassroots mobilisation such as education and building awareness will in time introduce social transformation."89 It is in this regard that the new wave of Dalit literature came up in the Hindi belt during late 1980s and we find that it has a new energy questioning the very foundation of the
caste system. This protest literature that is being led by the educated Dalit writer-activists enthused fresh enthusiasm among the community and political changes in the region also complimented their efforts, thus making Dalit literature as a catalyst in the on-going Dalit assertion / movement for mobilisation, identity and empowerment.

It is with this understanding that we would analyse Hindi Dalit literature that came up during 1990s and made a great impact on the formation of Dalit identity, its consolidation with increased level of political consciousness and heading for empowerment: social, economic and political. It should also be mentioned that these writings proved very crucial in the development of Hindi literature itself as these questioned prevalent elitism, upper-caste domination, unrealistic linguistic sophistication (having no resemblance with ground realities) and parameters for literary aesthetics sense. In this direction, we would first analyse Apne Apne Pinjare, the first Dalit autobiography in Hindi, by Mohan Dass Naimishray.


Apne Apne Pinjare is being considered the first autobiography in the Hindi Dalit Literature and narrates prevalent level of exploitation and life conditions of the Dalit community in a very intensive and sensitive manner. This autobiography becomes an important first hand documentation of pathetic conditions faced by the Dalit community in Meerut (Uttar Pradesh) where Mohan Dass Naimishray was born and experienced social, economic and political exploitation. This is the story right from the childhood to adulthood (roughly upto the age of 20–22 years). Overall style of the autobiography is novel-like and explains in detail the geographical settlement of the Dalit community in Meerut city as well as during the community festivals like
Ganga Mela. At the same time, authors questions, time and age in, caste system, Brahmanism and unequal economic system. In fact, his autobiography is the development of a child, who is being told about his caste status repeatedly and gradually becomes conscious of his surroundings that make him politically conscious person who questions all levels of exploitation. In this way, Apne Apne Pinjare proves to be a significant landmark in the evolution of the Hindi Dalit Literature.

Apne Apne Pinjare can be analysed in two conceptual categories: one, the first hand literary expression of contemporary socio-eco-political and cultural contexts around the author and two, impact of these situations on his development. We would analyse these categories in subsequent four sub-categories, viz.,

Socio-economic context

Apne Apne Pinjare begins with detail narration of Meerut city. It referred to almost every aspect of human life ranging from historical instances to contemporary life styles of the inhabitants to its cultural richness. Whereas the author mentioned 1857, visit of Jawaharlal Nehru, B. R. Ambedkar, Sheikh Abdullah, Jagjivan Ram, B.P. Maurya and others indicating political history and tradition of the town, he also took care to mention geographic settlement of different communities, their occupations, food habits and cultural traits.

The author is born in Meerut city whose “geography is changing but history remains constant”\(^90\) (Shahr ka Bhoogol badal raha tha. Par Itihas baisa hi tha.) He lost his mother during his early childhood and his Uncle and Aunt brought him up. Born in a Dalit family, author along with his family (Uncle and Aunt) experiences
innumerable difficulties and torture to have a dignified social existence. Caste status becomes the only identity of a child right from his birth as Mohan Dass Naimishray wrote, "we were enslaved centuries after centuries. The moment a child is born, s/he is destined with his or her caste. The caste becomes child’s sole identity."\textsuperscript{91} He further elaborated, "We were subject to humiliation since a long time though we were not culprits (Gunahagaar). We were defeated people pushed back on the margin by the Aryans. We did not have decorations, medals and prizes by the Britishers. What we have is a bitter past and wounded experience. These wounds get resurfaced when body and soul are being hurt. We were cut off from our own history after being marginalized for centuries. We were subject to forget our culture. Our weapons got blunted. First we were displaced, then our settlements (Bastis) and later on our culture."\textsuperscript{92}

Here we find a resemblance of views with Nachyo Bahut Gopal’s concluding remarks where Amrit Lal Nagar writes, "Dalits are not any caste. Victors forced the vanquished to do menial jobs."\textsuperscript{93} We also find a common thread in the demand expressed by both the character in these literary work whereas in Apne Apne Pinjare, Mohan Dass Naimishray questioned the very foundation of Hindu society when he writes, "how cruel was that history and culture...which we have inherited for so long"\textsuperscript{94} and Nachyo Bahut Gopal’s Nirguniya Devi asked for structural changes in society so that life conditions of the Dalits could improve and they can live with dignity.

Narrating historical reasons for depravity and exploitation, Mohan Dass Naimishray proceeded to explain the prevalent socio-economic structure and inter
community interaction, particularly with the Muslim community. Author depicted tension and frenzy that pervades during communal riots between two communities and brings Dalits under the umbrella of Hindu fold that brings inconvenient feelings in the minds of the author as a young child. This feeling urged author to know more about his origin as an individual, caste and community that percolates a feeling of community and consciousness. Here that subjective elements as well as the objective cognition of the contemporary situation becomes important for generation of a sense of community and community consciousness. This is also the beginning of the generation of political consciousness among the Dalits where they become subject to repeated humiliation and atrocities and are being ‘reminded’ of their lower status.

Economic conditions of the Dalit families were pathetic. They were heavily indebted and dependent on the wishes of the upper castes for getting loans that attaches high rate of interest. These loans keep on multiplying even after paying back the principal amount with interest, with the cunning manipulation of the upper castes. This makes loan a vicious cycle that never ends for the Dalits and their families. An iconic example of this situation could be found in Premchand’s Godan that we have already discussed. In Apne Apne Pinjare this is a continuation of the same cycle that makes economic conditions of the Dalits worse and pathetic making life doubly difficult for the community as Mohan Dass Naimishray expressed in the following line, “our life gets surrounded by so many difficulties including Begar. If we don’t perform Begar our life becomes encompassed by difficulties and problems...we have double burden: one is the burden of poverty and another is that of caste.”
Cultural context

Cultural context is depicted through community festivals, rituals and community feast in the Apne Apne Pinjare. There is reference to the Ravidas Jayanti celebration and its festive preparation by the Dalits community in this part of the country. Ravidas Jayanti is celebrated with gaiety every year throughout northern India.

This is a community festival and makes Dalits organised through cultural celebration. This festival serves the purpose of instilling a sense of commonality among the community making them organised also. Mohan Dass Naimishray himself participated in one of the Ravidas Jayanti celebrations and feels happy about it as this provides him a chance to be distinct from the Hindu religious celebrations, where Dalits are not allowed to participate. The Dalits were also discriminated in the Hindu temples as Mohan Dass Naimishray expressed that “we were Shudras for temples and upper castes. We were untouchables. We were Dalits but not human beings. Even our shadow was contaminating for the upper castes.”97 In this situation, Ravidas Jayanti provides Dalits an opportunity to have their own symbolism and thereby translating it into an identity as opposed to Hindu religious celebrations. Further, there is also reference to the Ganga Mela on the bank of the Ganges but caste discrimination is also prevalent there and there is discriminatory settlement arrangement for the lower castes.

Mohan Dass Naimishray has also mentioned about the community feast during marriage among the Dalit community. He has narrated miserable conditions prevalent among the community and their cultural functions. He writes, “no one from

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the upper castes has ever attended our marriage parties...” and the party is in progress on the pavement of the roads passer-by often makes remarks like “ahe dekh, Chamaron ke chawal, chmaron ki dal, chamaron ke laddoo...” (Oh, see, rice of the Dalits, pulse of the Dalits, sweets of the Dalits...)

In this way, caste status becomes the only parameter for the community that determines the very life conditions of people. It gets manifested in every aspects of their life and becomes a permanent feature for their identity. Author finds it problematic and attempts to revolt against it right from the childhood when he boycotted Hindu temples after being humiliated by the priest as he said, “thuu, tumhara mandir aur thuhara prasad...” (Hell with your temple and its offerings). Further, he feels throughout his autobiographical narration that caste identity becomes very prominent throughout the life of an individual and even after his death, as he mentioned, “aadami jab paida hota uski jaati likhai jati hai aur marne par bhi.” (When a person is born his caste is mentioned and also after his death)

**Political context**

Level of political participation among the Dalits is depicted through municipality elections, political meetings by the Republican Party and the Socialist Party. Mohan Dass Naimishray's uncle, Ram Prasad (Ba) contested municipality elections and won to become a member with the support of the community. He campaigned in a very low manner and his campaign was more personalised. The whole community celebrated his victory and people address him as ‘Member Sahib’ and his wife as ‘Membarani’. Mohan Dass Naimishray noticed marginal change of attitude (in terms of respect) towards his Ba but his is limited to his own community
as he writes, “Community people started paying much respect to Ba but he remains as earlier (read Dalit) for the other castes: *din bhar chamda kuntene ya pitane wals chamar, mochi.*”

There is also reference to Ambedkar’s death and its influence in this town. People mourned his death throughout India including Meerut and Mohan Dass Naimishray came to know about his death from his Ba and started thinking about him. This is the beginning of this political initiation and socialisation when he encounters with the ideals of Baba Saheb Ambedkar through his family members. Though he was not able to make out much as a child, he started thinking about Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar visited Meerut twice and addressed at the *Bhaftali* Ground and Meerut College. When Dr. Ambedkar’s ashes were brought to Meerut, Mohan Dass Naimishray mentioned this brought a sense of consciousness among the community as he writes, “the sun of consciousness started rising high among the community. Their dormant feelings got awakened. Our locality was honoured by paying tribute to Dr. Ambedkar’s ashes, which were kept in the *Panchayat Bhawan*. This also brought honour to our locality in the whole district.” Name of the *Panchayat Bhawan* was also changed to *Baba Saheb Dr. Ambedkar Bhawan* in his memory.

Then the political environment of the town was changing with meetings of the *Dalit* leaders like B. P. Maurya from Republican Party of India, Maharaj Singh Bharti, Pyarelal, Mani Ram Bagadi and Majoor Ahmed from the Socialist Party and Babu Jagjivan Ram. Pointing out to the changing political scenario, Mohan Dass Naimishray writes, “the winds of change were high in Meerut... Though people form this locality were influenced by the Congress right from the beginning but now
Republican Party has also started making inroads among the community. We used to campaign during elections (though as child). This was the period of renaissance for the people of our community. We were gradually discarding centuries old slavery.\textsuperscript{104}

Thus we find that political consciousness was increasing among the \textit{Dalits} in Meerut during these days and as a child Mohan Dass Naimishray was initiated to political socialisation and participation. This also indicates that community was becoming aware of their rights and rising against exploitation and fighting for dignity and equality.

Though the socio-eco-politico-cultural life of the \textit{Dalits} is changing but marginally and caste remains the only identity for the \textit{Dalits}. Mohan Dass Naimishray has critically narrated ‘what it means to be a member of the \textit{Dalit} community’ in his autobiographical narration. Level of humiliation and exploitation faced by him, in fact, represent large section of the \textit{Dalit} community and he has given first hand sensitive account of life conditions that a \textit{Dalit} is subject to. It also reveals the very course of development of a child (in terms of psychological, political and philosophical development) who is right from his birth subject to caste exploitation and humiliation. His caste status determines every thing in his life though Mohan Dass Naimishray has noticed that there is no caste identity in the metropolitan like Bombay. He writes, “There was hunger, poverty and unemployment in Bombay but there were no caste boundaries among people. No one asked my caste, though the name of my native place was asked. I liked it for the first time. Women in this city get identity by their costume, attitude and gesture not by their castes. There were no castes (read casteism) in metropolitan. Man is a man and woman is a woman.”\textsuperscript{105} In
this way, Mohan Dass Naimishray finds some change of attitude in metropolitan
where he found that caste is not the only identity of an individual.

Mohan Dass Naimishray narrated early years of his life in Apne Apne Pinjare
spanning for about early twenty years. The narration style of the autobiography is
novel-like that depicts numerous things like the community, town, intercommunity
social relations, cultural and religious festivals, rituals and many other. In this way, it
also becomes a documentation of life and its struggle (which has been
comprehensively covered by the author) that highlights almost entire world of
happening things in and around the town.

This also becomes clear by having a look on the Dedication of the book by the
author where he says, “a black and white document of struggle of my life, dedicated
to all those who got associated and disassociated with me having feelings of
happiness and sorrow.”106 The running thread throughout the text is caste status and
its impact on the life of the author and by extension on the community. It has also
questioned the very foundation of the Hindu society and in the process challenged
them also.

Critics have viewed Apne Apne Pinjare from a variety of perspectives but
every one appreciated author’s effort to narrate first hand account of the Dalit
community. It is precisely due to this reason that makes Apne Apne Pinjare the first
autobiography in Hindi by a Dalit himself. There has been some criticism also to the
style of narration as well as its form. Use of abusive language is also criticised. But
Mohan Dass Naimishray said in an interview that he has used the language spoken by
the Dalits so that narrative could be realistic and effective. Author has used regional variation of the language and also mentioned several proverbs used by the Dalits during their daily interaction. Since the context is largely semi-urban, the language is also a mixture of rural and urban linguistic categories.

Some critics have criticised Apne Apne Pinjare in terms of its usages, for instance, Rajat Rani 'Meenu' considers some of the references in the Autobiography "irrelevant and out of context events, like references to impotent brother, prostitutes, infatuation of teen aged sisters in Bombay etc." Depiction of women has also been criticised by some critics.

Thus, it may be said that Apne Apne Pinjare becomes an important contribution to literary tradition of Hindi Dalit Literature and inspires many Dalits to write their autobiographies and first hand experiences. In this way, Apne Apne Pinjare proved to be a significant milestone for the contemporary Hindi Dalit Literature.


This is a collection of forty-two poems on the Dalit emancipation composed by Lalchand ‘Rahi’ that is published from the Madhya Pradesh Dalit Sahitya Academy in 1995. “This collection has touched almost every aspect of the Dalit community. On the one hand, it expresses socio-eco-political conditions of the community and on the other depicted their religious aspects also.” In Preface, the poet has clearly mentioned that movement against oppression and exploitation is his responsibility and he finds poetic expression as a weapon in this movement. He draws inspiration from Buddha, Kabir, Ravidas, Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar and
considers his contribution to the movement against caste exploitation as his responsibility. This approach manifests his political understanding and makes him a politically conscious person who is contributing to the movement through his poetry and other literary works. We would discuss some of his poetry from this collection.

Giving a clarion call to the Dalits, Lalchand 'Rahi' writes:

Break the chains of traditions
Leave the rotten path (of the upper castes)
Because, breaking old prison of traditions
may lead to a significant endeavour
For Dalits, in form of
Education
Organisation, and
Agitation

(Leek Se Hato in Kranti Shesh Hai)

It is to be noted that the words used by the poet towards the end of this poem are Education, Organisation and Agitation. These are the same words Dr. Ambedkar used in many of his speeches and writings.

In the title poem, Kranti Shesh Hai, Lalchand 'Rahi' while recognising contribution made by the Dalits in the National Liberation Movement, questioned inequality prevalent in Independent India. He writes:

172
Only fifteen percent got
Sweetness of Independence
But eighty five percent
remains on margins
Revolution is yet to come
for
Equality and Dignity
for
The Right to live with Dignity for Dalit
(Kranti Shesh Hai)

This poem indicates towards the political scenario that is prevalent in modern India where upper castes are enjoying fruits of Independence while for Dalits it is still exploitative system with unequal economic structures and caste oppression.

There is another poem that reasserts political principles of the Dalit movement redefining socio-political identity.
I can say it
My thinking is fighting (against)
and would continue to fight with their (upper caste) thinking
till
The reestablishment of my existence and identity
(Yudhrat Sooch in Kranti Shesh Hai)
In this way, we find that the poetic expression of political consciousness among Dalits is very articulate and questions caste oppression and economic exploitation. It is to be noted that the poet belongs to Madhya Pradesh and we can find similar feelings among Dalits throughout the country. As far as the style of this collection is concerned, it is very easy and communicable appealing directly to the community to rise against exploitation. There is also a sense of responsibility that demonstrates high level of political consciousness in author as well as his poems. This kind of literary works make Hindi Dalit Literature a political literature with principles of equality, dignity and solidarity as its foundation.


Suno Brahaman is another collection of representative Dalit poetry composed by Malkhan Singh that got published in 1996 from Rampur (Uttar Pradesh). This is a collection of sixteen poems on the life and its struggle of the Dalit community. Prevalence of casteism, Untouchability, exploitation, atrocities and hypocrisy forced poet to revolt against this system and he adopted poetic literary expression as a means to protest as he mentioned in the Preface of this collection that “I don’t know why do I compose poetry? Yes, one thing I know for sure that whenever I become a victim of casteism, exploitation and oppression or whenever I see someone being victimised, something gets boiled up in me, which I attempt to capture in words (through poems).”

In the title poem, Suno Brahaman, Malkhan Singh has not only questioned social structures but also revolted against it and asked directly the very raison-de-tre for caste system and its continuance. He writes:
[1]
The journey of our slavery
Begins from your birth
and it would end
with your end
[2]
Listen Brahman
Our sweats
Stinks to you
Then do one thing some day
Send your women
With our women
For sweeping (maila kamane)
And you!
Come with me
We would do
Leather work, jointly
Send your son with mine
In search of daily wage
And send your daughter
With ours to
To Zamindars' field for
Agricultural works
And tired by evening
Stretch over ground
Smell son, daughter and to yourself
Only then you would know
The fragrance of life
That gets strengthen
Along with body odour
[3]
...do not forget
Labourers' shoulders
Are not ready to
Bear your burden
They are not ready at all.114
(Suno Brahman)

This poem depicts anger of the Dalit community and resolves to fight against any kind of exploitation and refuses to bear the burden of the upper castes. This also demands for equality (in terms of work and occupation) and narrates feelings in a striking style. The poem becomes representative of the feelings of the Dalit community when it asks for upper castes' women, sons and daughters to join hands with their lower castes counterparts and do the same work to understand the meaning of life and its struggle. This manifests level of anger as well as political articulation among Dalits who are not only being organised but also becoming politically conscious and vocal in assertion of their rights. In other poems, Malkhan has questioned caste as the sole identity of a human being and rejects this category. He is also optimistic for future that things would change for Dalits and their continued struggle for equality and dignity would decisively prove fruitful to them.

Joothan: Atma Katha is second autobiography in Hindi Dalit Literature, written by Om Prakash Balmiki, which got published in 1997. In the Preface, writer explains about his purpose and feelings to write an autobiography. He said, "The pains of Dalit life are intolerable and difficult to experience. These experiences have got no place in literary expressions. We have breathed in such social order that is very cruel and inhuman. Also insensitive towards the Dalits."\(^{115}\)

Om Prakash Balmiki attempted many times to write his experiences but could not succeed. Later on, he wrote an autobiographical note for an edited book 'Harijan Se Dalit' on the request of its editor, Raj Kishore. Subsequently, he decided to write down his experiences completely that came out as Joothan. Om Prakash Balmiki found "there were several dangers (khateray) in writing these experiences. I started writing in a systematic way after a long period of struggle with me. This led me to relive atrocities, exploitation and deprivation. In this process, I experienced tremendous mental torture. I felt how painful it is to unlayer myself. Some people consider it unbelievable and exaggerated... but why should there be any doubt to pen down what is truth?"\(^{116}\) Thus, Joothan is a narration of one’s own life and its struggle depicting what it means to be a member of the Dalit community, what is the level of exploitation, discrimination and how difficult is the struggle for equality and dignity.

Joothan is an example of the Dalit protest literature and written "with anguish and a controlled anger against society"\(^{117}\) as viewed by Sudha Pai. She writes, "The writer describes his childhood in a small village in Muzzafarnagar district, the struggle by his family to eke out a living, provide him and education and the ill-
treatment by the local backward caste groups: the *Tyagis*. Constantly harassed and teased in the school by his classmates and his teachers, Om Prakash managed to gain an education and a government job. Written with anguish and a controlled anger against society, the book exhorts *Dalits* to improve their situation through education and critiques society for ill treatment and marginalisation of *Dalits*, particularly the *Balmiki* sub-caste to which he belongs as sweepers and cleaners.118 We would analyse *Joothan* with two sub-categories: socio-political context and struggle for identity and dignity.

**Socio-political context**

Born in Muzaffarnagar district in western Uttar Pradesh, author spent his childhood “in an atmosphere characterised by stuffed narrow streets, pigs, half-naked children, dogs, daily quarrels”119 along with acute poverty. The time period is early 1950s when he experienced Untouchability in/around his surroundings, and with much difficulty got admission in the school. From here starts his struggling journey for recognition and identity. In school he is exploited by teachers and was forced to clean school ground that barred him from attending the classes. In this context, author has mentioned his father’s protest, who not only protested against this exploitation but also psychologically strengthened him, which had ever-lasting influence on the personality development of the author. Author is deeply influenced by his father who had always encouraged him for studies. His father used to say that “*pad likh ke jaati sudharni hai*”120 (you have to do a lot for the community after getting educated). His father also stopped the practice of *salaam* (in which newly wed couple from lower castes make a round of each house where their families are working and pay respect to them. In return, they get some donation from the upper castes). Author found this
practice "most humiliating"\textsuperscript{121} and consider it as "the height of caste pride and supremacy...this is a conspiracy to trap (lower castes) and humiliate them."\textsuperscript{122} His father was very happy to note that his son has started questioning all these humiliating practices and customs prevalent in society, supported him to challenge those customs, and started breaking them in their personal life.

People from his community were doing all kinds of labour work for Tyagis right from harvesting to looking after their animals (cows, buffalo). In return, they were not only underpaid but were forced to do Begar also. Level of economic exploitation was very high and clubbed with social discrimination, this become the worst living atmosphere for the Balmiki community. Mentioning about the practice of Joothan,\textsuperscript{123} author has referred to a very sensitive instance where his mother revolted against ill treatment and humiliation meted to them during one marriage in the village. Her vocal protest, subsequently, put an end to this practice in his house.

Author got exposed to literature roughly when he was in standard VIII. He read Sarat Chandra, Premchand, Ravindranath Tagore and got influenced by their writing. Later on, this provided him an opportunity to critically examine literary trends and aesthetics prevalent in Hindi literature. For him, "Hell is just an imagination in literature. But for us life is not less than hell, particularly during rainy season. We have experienced hell in its personified form. These painful and torturous experiences have not reached to the great poets of Hindi. How horrible is this reality."\textsuperscript{124} He further noticed literature, especially poetry "very much artificial and false devoid of grassroots realities of rural society."\textsuperscript{125} Then, he started writing poems, which challenged Brahmanism, caste oppression and exploitation.
Om Prakash Balmiki passed Secondary examinations and became the first one from his community to do so. His father celebrated his success and he got encouragement from one Tyagi named Chaman Lal Tyagi. This was an unusual event during those days that “made him emotional, because this kind of behaviour was never expected amidst rampant exploitation and humiliation.”

These are some of the instances, which indicate oppressive social structure, caste oppression, economic exploitation, social discrimination and humiliation. This social context makes author to question Hindu Caste Society and subsequently challenging it in all possible ways. He failed in the Intermediate examination despite securing good marks in all subjects except Chemistry practical papers (in fact, he was not allowed to do experiments in the lab on one or other pretext by his teacher). This led him to shift to Dehradun where he got admitted in DAV Inter College. Here he got an opportunity to know and read about Dr. Ambedkar that facilitated him to articulate his anger. He got a direction after reading about Dr. Ambedkar as he acknowledged in the following lines: “A live consciousness generated within me after reading these books (on the life and works of Dr. Ambedkar). These books gave words to my numbness. The feeling of protest against system strengthened within me during these days...A new word Dalit was also added in my vocabulary, which was not replacement for the term ‘Harijan’ but expression of anger of millions of untouchables...I got a new direction...My anger started articulating...literature provided me this courage.”

Then he got job as an apprentice in the Ordinance Factory, Dehradun and after completing training was selected for further training at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.
“This opened the new avenues of ‘progress’ for him.” From here onwards, we notice a different person who subsequently became an activist for the Dalit empowerment and emancipation. Now we would discuss this phase as continuation of struggle for identity and dignity.

His days in Jabalpur were the days of personality development for him. He got exposed to Marxist ideology and literature, read Maxim Gorky’s Mother and several stories by Chekhov. He also started participating in a Theatre Group and acted in numerous plays. Active participation in literary and cultural activities developed a new perspective towards literature as well as life. Then he appeared in the interview for Ordinance Factory Training Institute, Ambernath (Bombay) and got selected. He utilised this opportunity also to read world literature (like the works of Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Romain Rolland and many more).

Days in Bombay provided him an opportunity to know about the Marathi Dalit Literature, the Dalit Panther and the Dalit activism. He started active participation and formed a theatre group, Meghdoot Natya Samshtha. This group became famous for its progressive commitment, and performed street and stage plays, organised exhibitions and several progressive events under the active leadership of the author.

His socialisation and politicisation got him associated with the contemporary Dalit movement. His involvement in the Dalit movement proved to be “self-satisfactory and a new experience” for him, where he was able to contribute through his writings and activism challenging caste oppression and at the same time organising community for protest against exploitation. He has been the witness of
Name Changing Movement of Marathwada University that had great impact on the Dalits and their struggle for dignity. He has also been witness to the politics of the Republican Party of India and the Dalit Panthers’ Movement. These activities formed his political perspective and he made literature his weapon to fight against exploitation and discrimination. He has also actively participated in several political struggles for equality and dignity. He has noticed that discrimination is rampant in almost every aspect of life and it is very, very difficult for a member of the Dalit community to achieve ‘success’ in society. He experienced discrimination and humiliation right from his childhood and his consistent struggle made him a conscious political being who challenges exploitation and discrimination wherever it persists. He has contributed, like many other Dalit litterateurs, to the Dalit movement through his progressive and powerful writings, which demand for redefinitions of almost every component of social structure and its philosophical justifications.

Towards the end of his autobiography, Om Prakash Balmiki raised several pertinent questions and asked for redefinitions of socio-eco-political structures of the Indian society. He writes, “Caste is an important component in Indian society. Caste determines everything from the time of one’s birth. Birth is not in the hand or a choice of a person. If I could be so, why I would have born in a sweepers’ family? Those who call themselves as the custodians of the great cultural traditions of this country are born with their choice? But they take help of several scriptures to justify their birth. These religious scriptures do not advocate equality and independence but establish feudal mindsets.”130
He further noticed, “Time has changed. But there is something, which is not making us comfortable. Many people attempted to know why there is hatred in the minds of upper castes towards the Dalits? Why plants and birds (animism) worshipping Hindu is so intolerant towards the Dalits? Today caste is a distinct and important component. Everything remains fine unless your caste status is unknown, but every thing changes the moment it becomes clear. The pain of being a Dalit circulates through veins like the edge of a knife. How the elite upper caste Hindus will come to know the pain of being a Dalit, of poverty, illiteracy, dilapidated life conditions and much more?”

Om Prakash Balmiki asked, “Why caste should be my identity? Some friends indicate towards the loud and arrogant writings. They indicate that I have a narrow vision. Literary expression should be articulated in a broader sense. One should come out of narrowness. Means my being a Dalit and my perspective complimenting to my socio-economic conditions and atmosphere indicates becomes arrogance for them.” He further found the reason for such indication that “it is because I am, in their views, only an SC (Scheduled Caste), standing outside their door.”

Thus we find that Joothan is an autobiography of a person who has been subject to multiple oppression, repeated harassment and humiliation. The author develops his own political understanding, participated in the Dalit movement and contributed through his writings, which substantially forms protest literature.

Many critics have commended Om Prakash Balmiki’s effort to bring to notice his struggle, which is representative of larger struggle by the Dalits in the country for
equality, dignity and solidarity. Kanwal Bharati considers it as "epic" against the system that "forms heaven for the upper castes and hell for the Dalits." These initial two autobiographies (Apne Apne Pinjare and Joothan) started new trends in the Hindi Dalit Literature and many Dalit writers wrote their autobiographical account either in the form of an autobiographical note or a series in different literary magazines. For example "excerpts from Dr. Shyoraj Singh 'Bechain's autobiography titled Asthiyon Ko Akshar published in Hans, R. N. Sagar's autobiography titled, Jab Mujhe Chor Kaha and Jai Prakash Kardam's Meri Jaat." In this way, we notice that Joothan has contributed immensely for the consolidation of the Hindi Dalit Literature.


Gunga Nahin Tha Mein is a collection of twenty-five poems composed by Jai Prakash Kardam that got published in 1997. In Preface to this collection, Jai Prakash writes, "this is correct that the Dalit literature is a literature of rejection (nakaar). But this is the rejection of those systems, beliefs and traditions, which are irrational and useless for society and nation. Since these are useless they have no value. Equality, Independence and Fraternity are the most precious values for any society and nation and the Dalit Literature accepts these values as its core values."

He composed poems with this understanding and came out with this collection. Pointing out level of discrimination and atrocities, he writes the title poem, Gunga Nahin Tha Mein that reveals how upper castes students lobby against the lower castes students and on protest this could lead to violent encounters with them hampering their studies and subsequently rustication of the lower castes students from the school.
In another poem, Ambedkar Ki Santan, Jai Prakash pointed out towards protest and movement led by the Dalits, as he writes:

...Children of Ambedkar
would not tolerate anymore
Exploitation and Atrocities
would not remain silent; would ask for all accounts
for tears of Krishna; helpless of Harkhu and mourning of Hariya
and would break chains of injustice and exploitation
To write a new history\(^{137}\)

In the same way, he asked for equality in all walks of life and writes:

...this will not continue now
there has to be
Equality in all spheres of life
right from governance to administration
from the works of sweeping and cleaning
to leather works
Equality has to be ensured\(^{138}\)

Thus we find that there is an increased level of consciousness among the Dalit writers in Hindi Literature who are not only questioning exploitative social system but also encouraging people to get organised in this struggle. Here it is important to note that literary expression is being utilised as a weapon in this movement for equality and dignity, thus making the Hindi Dalit Literature as political literature that protests against exploitation.

Harry Kab Aayega is a short stories collection by Suraj Pal Chauhan that got published in 1999. These short stories are representative of the Dalit community “that has been marginalized for centuries.” In the Preface, Suraj Pal Chauhan writes, “the feelings of the so called upper castes were always taken care of but it seems that the feelings of a very large section of society, i.e., Dalits have been deliberately ignored. Now when the Dalits themselves are able to articulate their expression, it should be welcomed by all.” Further, he raised hopes his short stories would generate introspection among the upper castes also.

The short stories, interestingly, are preceded by two write-ups: one is the Introductory titled ‘Stories Churning Social Consciousness’ by Jai Prakash Kardam and the other is a Reader’s Perspective by Pramod Singh. Furthermore, the collection is dedicated to Om Prakash Balmiki and to the characters of these stories. Here it is to be noted that the initiatives taken by Mohan Dass Naimishray and Om Prakash Balmiki had immense impact on contemporary Dalit writers in Hindi Literature and in the process, they started articulating their anger against the system as well their vision for a new society.

These stories represent consistent struggle by the Dalits as is noticed by Jai Prakash Kardam in his Introductory. He found that “stories by Suraj Pal Chauhan are influenced by Dr. Ambedkar, who said—‘tolerating injustice is encouraging it.” Thus, his characters are not ready to tolerate injustice and exploitation. There is resistance to exploitation. For instance, in story titled, Parivartan Ki Baat the lower castes (Chamars) refused to remove a dead cow, a job assigned to their castes for
nothing. They jointly refused such job despite all pressures from the upper castes (Thakurs). They were ready to pay any price for such decision because they consider this job not only forced but also humiliating. Another story Angoori symbolises a Dalit woman courage and struggle for dignity, when two upper castes men attempted to physically assault her, she resisted their assault and her courageous resistance forced men to run away from her house. In this way, these stories portray in a very sensitive manner and simple communicative narration, utter level of discrimination and exploitation in different spheres of life that a Dalit lives.

Pramod Singh in his comment found that “these stories are successful to expose upper castes' mindsets, conspiracy against the Dalits and justifications for caste system.” Other critics have also appreciated this collection. Mohan Dass Naimishray commented “in almost every story, there is a clear expression of change and consciousness, which is also the aim of the Dalit Literature. The characters of his stories are not only poor and helpless, as we find in Premchand and other upper caste writers, but they have self-respect and will power that make them successful to break the vicious cycle of Mannuvadi mindsets.” In this way, we find that this collection proves to be important contribution in the Hindi Dalit Literature, articulating not only anger but also a vision for equality, dignity and solidarity. This also has influenced successive Dalit writers in their literary expression and articulation.

After analysing these primary texts from the Hindi Dalit Literature, it is evident that there exists strong and emerging the Dalit Literature in Hindi that is challenging Hindu Caste System in all walks of life. In addition, it is also questioning the very concept of literary expression and its aesthetic perspective: whether, it should
depict the reality as it exists and being experienced or it should be portrayed with linguistic sophistication and 'polished' expression. In this regard, there are several literary magazines, which exclusively focus on Dalit issues and attempting to generate political consciousness among the community. For example, Jai Prakash Kardam is editing *Dalits Sahitya: An Annual Edition of Dalits Literature and Culture* and has come out with four volumes since 1999. This is an attempt to bring divergent perspectives on the Dalit movement, literature and life. Another magazine is *Yudhrat Aam Aadami* a quarterly coming out from Bihar/Jharkhand. It is to be noted that serious efforts are being put in to bring out such collections and these efforts are facilitating consolidation of the Dalit identity through literary-political mobilisation that, in turn, is embedded in the contemporary Dalit assertion in northern part of India.
Notes

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97 Ibid. p. 27
98 Ibid. p. 107
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100 Ibid. p. 32
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102 Ibid. p. 39
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104 Ibid. p. 75
105 Ibid. p. 136
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_12_ *Ibid.* p. 6


_14_ *Ibid.* p. 45-8


_16_ *Ibid.* p. 8


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_22_ *Ibid.* p. 45

_23_ *Ibid.* 20-1

_24_ *Ibid.* 35


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