



The Case For Bahujan Literature

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"In the world of literature, the process of arriving at a conclusion is more important than the conclusion itself. When we read a novel, the narrative is more important than the climax. This is also true of other literary genres, including poetry and the short story. By implication, this principle also applies to this book. You will find this anthology of select articles from the literary debates that raged in the pages of the *FORWARD* Press magazine intellectually stimulating. This book will take you through the process of preparing a blueprint for propounding the concept of Bahunan literature and will introduce you to the bitter arguments and counterarguments on its various interpretations. These discussions and debates are meant to help you reach a carefully considered conclusion. Literature and criticism also play the same role. As for the conclusions, you yourself have to arrive at them."

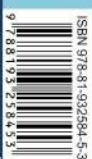
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The Case for Bahunan Literature Edited by IVAN KOSTKA & PRAMOD RANJAN



The Case for Bahunan Literature



Edited by IVAN KOSTKA
PRAMOD RANJAN

*To Kanwal Bharti, the matchless
researcher and critic*

The Case for Bahujan Literature

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The Case for Bahun Literature (Literary Criticism)

Edited by Ivan Kostka and Pramod Ranjan

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‘Bahujan hitay, Bahujan sukhay’

In the world of literature, the process of arriving at a conclusion is more important than the conclusion itself. When we read a novel, the narrative is more important than the climax. This is also true of other literary genres including poetry and the short story. By implication, this principle also applies to this book. You will find this anthology of select articles from the literary debates that raged in the pages of the *FORWARD Press* magazine intellectually stimulating. This book will take you through the process of preparing a blueprint for propounding the concept of Bahujan literature and will introduce you to the bitter arguments and counterarguments on its various interpretations. These discussions and debates are meant to help you reach a carefully considered conclusion. Literature and criticism also play the same role. As for the conclusions, you yourself have to arrive at them.

FORWARD Press was published in print from May 2009 to June 2016. From 1 June, it has metamorphosed into a website. The publication of writings, including criticisms, on the concept Bahujan literature continues on the website. The articles compiled in this book pertain to the initial period of this discourse. Since then, the journey has gone far ahead. But these introductory articles are necessary to comprehend the process in its entirety. The order of articles in the book is subject-wise, not chronological, to help you imbibe the finer nuances of the discourse.

The concept of Bahujan literature is simple – literature of the Bahujans as opposed to that of the elite. As Buddha had said 2500 years ago, “Bahujan Hitay, Bahujan Sukhay”. But some important things have to be kept in mind in this context.

Bahujan literature is the literature of the majority. But it is not a majoritarian literature. It is not founded on numerical strength. It is the representative voice of different sections of society against the collective communal consciousness built by Manuvad and in favour of those facing social and cultural deprivation. This is the literature of the last man in the last row facing any kind of deprivation. It not only raises the issues of economic deprivation and untouchability but also identifies the different forms of socio-cultural exploitation and considers them important. This difference between Bahujanism and majoritarianism should always be kept in mind. Bahujanism is about liberty, equality and fraternity; majoritarianism is an intellectual means to es-

establish the dominance of the elite. In this society riddled with varna and caste, this concept aims at ameliorating the shared pain of different social groups and at bringing about equality of opportunity in cultural and literary expressions. It promises to take all such people along who are committed to raising their voice against these inhumanities.

In today's India, the key deprived communities are women, SCs, STs, OBCs, DNTs and all Pasmanda religious minorities. The concept of Bahujan literature is concerned equally about the travails of each of these communities and believes that the reasons for the exploitation of each are more or less the same. And if these reasons are to be described in one word, that has to be Manuvad. It is not only one of the cruellest concepts in the world but its capacity to mutate with changing times has lent it a rare longevity. Today, it has joined forces with capitalism. If you will attack it from one side, it will ooze out from the other. You may fight the socio-economic domination of the Brahmin-Dwij communities and you may taste success but when you see your own family in the mirror of women's discourse, you may discover that Manuvad has had the better of you. Women treat these conflicts as conflicts between men. They have no role in them.

8 Many battles are being waged in parallel and in isolation. The SCs are fighting against untouchability and social exclusion. The STs are fighting against the corporates for their right over water, forests and land. The OBCs are fighting against their social neglect and for securing their share in the means of livelihood. The DNTs are in the thick of a battle for daily bread and for a social identity. The Pasmanda Muslims and other minority communities are engaged in a struggle to have the Mullahs and clerics implement the true principles of their so-called egalitarian religions. Some of those born into privileged families – whom we call savarnas in popular parlance – are caught up in an inner conflict between their intellectual commitments and the familial beliefs. The lessons, the wisdom they have gleaned from literature, social sciences and history, have become a perpetual source of disquiet for them. The thought that they may be on the wrong side has made them restless. Anyone who is socially active knows that some of them have been and are ardent supporters of the struggles of the deprived sections and are trying their best to “de-caste” themselves.

There are some basic commonalities in these struggles. To begin with, they have a common objective – that of building a socially, economically and culturally equitable and sensitive society. The basic tone and tenor of their literary expressions are the same. On the other hand,

the literature and thought of the elite, the privileged, consider these struggles meaningless. They want us to tread in the footsteps of Manu and Nietzsche. To protect their interests, their ideology tries to focus on the internal conflicts of the deprived communities and wants to confine them to separate cells. The concept of Bahujan literature busts their theorizations and proposes a wider and comprehensive struggle while underlining the distinct problems of different sections. In the language of sociology and literary criticism, it does not pit mega narrative and micro discourse against one another but brings them closer and makes them interdependent and complementary to each other.

Bahujan ideology is the oldest ideology of resistance in India. Traces of it can be found in the Lokayat tradition that predated Buddha. Literary historians, researchers and critics are duty-bound to explore the contents of literary writings, underscore these similarities and try to bring the different, parallel struggles closer to each other.

FORWARD Press believes that the Bahujan ideology has been dented and bruised due to different reasons and is in urgent need of repairs. We will try our best to identify the factors that have weakened this ideology and to come up with the ways and means for rejuvenating it through FP Books. Literature is only one dimension of this ideology but since in Indian languages, literature and literary criticism are only ideological and metaphysical tools, a critical appraisal of Hindi literature becomes imperative for the development of the concept of Bahujan. Hence, we propose to focus on literary criticism in the books to be published in the future. Here, perhaps, a clarification is necessary: Working in the Hindi belt is both our commitment and our limitation, although we will continue exploring the literature of other Indian languages for such aspects of Bahujan ideology that are hitherto unknown in the Hindi world and bring them to you.

In this series, we will soon be publishing some more books interpreting and explaining the concept of Bahujan literature.

For now, we will be eagerly waiting for your feedback on this book.

- Pramod Ranjan

One big umbrella genre

Pramod Ranjan

The concept of 'Bahujan literature' was born in the editorial department of FORWARD Press and the credit must go to our editor-in-chief Ivan Kostka, critic and linguist Rajendra Prasad Singh and writer Premkumar Mani. The evolution of the concept was the outcome of the debate and discussions between us, which lasted for well over a year and a half. Firstly, it was Ivan Kostka who introduced me to this idea when I was appointed editor (Hindi) of *FORWARD* Press in May 2011. Later, Rajendra Prasad Singh too came up with the concept of 'OBC literature'. But Premkumar Mani doggedly opposed this terminology and I too was not agreeable to the use of this term. I preferred using the term 'Shudra literature' rather than 'OBC literature'. The word 'Shudra' has its origins in culture and Hindu religion and there is a long literary tradition of Shudras and Atishudras in the Hindi belt.

Ultimately, we agreed on the umbrella term 'Bahujan literature' and in the year April 2012, *FORWARD* Press published its first Bahujan Literature Annual. The publication was discussed and debated in many newspapers and magazines.

What is Bahujan literature?

* Bahujan literature is a big umbrella genre, under which fall Dalit literature (for convenience's sake we can describe it as "Atishudra literature"), Shudra literature, Tribal literature and Women's literature. Terminologies, thoughts and viewpoints like Ambedkarite literature, and OBC literature can be included in its internal discourse.

* In Hindi, the concept of Dalit literature has gained acceptance only over the last two decades. But there are two contradictions inherent in it. First, it has only been accepted as a marginal literary genre, which means that some "other literature" constitutes the mainstream. Communist writers call this other literature Progressive or People's literature. Whereas, Rajendra Yadav and almost all writers and supporters of Dalit literature insist that "what is not Dalit literature is 'Savarna literature'." Thus, according to them, the mainstream Hindi literature is 'Savarna literature'. On the other hand, the compositions of many 'Dwij' writers, a major part of the contents of which is dominated by their 'Dwij' consciousness, is also counted in Pro-

gressive literature. The second contradiction of Dalit literature is that it has been confined to the Scheduled Castes i.e. only the writings of persons born in one of the Scheduled Castes listed in India's Constitution are qualified to be described as Dalit literature. This means that it is only the literature of the Atishudras, who underwent the agony of untouchability. Even the Shudras are out of its ambit.

* All the major movements in Hindi literature – whether it was Bhakti movement or Progressive movement or “Nayee Kahani” movement – ultimately went on to become “mainstream” literature. Does this not beg the question, why, despite its intellectual promise and its powerful pro-change thrust, Dalit literature was designated as marginal literature while ‘Dwij’ literature enjoyed the status of mainstream literature? Even if this does not smell of a conspiracy, shouldn't it make Dalit writers introspect and correct their conceptual mistakes?

* If we find many similarities in the writings of Kabir and Raidas can't we also tell the differences between them? Similarly, if there are similarities in the thoughts of Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar, there are ample differences too. The similarity between Atishudras, Shudras, Tribals and women is that they all were victims of the brahmanical system and they all struggled against it. This similarity, in the Indian context, places their literature in the category of Bahujan literature. The dissimilarities (which are evident not only in their values but also in their literary expressions) affords them the rationale to maintain a distinct identity of their own literature (Dalit literature, OBC literature, Tribal literature).

* The question of the growth of the concept of Bahujan literature is, in reality, the question of the growth of criticism in Hindi literature. As we go on identifying Bahujan literature, ‘Dwij’ literature will automatically shift to the margins. Because, the majority of Hindi literature is Bahujan literature. The need of the hour is to examine our literature from all possible angles.

(This is an abridged version of the editorial essay published in the Bahujan Literary Annual April 2013 issue of the FORWARD Press magazine.)

Conception of a concept

Pramod Ranjan

The first annual was published in April 2012 to mark the birth anniversaries of Jotiba Phule and Bhim Rao Ambedkar. In 2013 too, the annual was published in April. This year, in view of the Lok Sabha polls in April-May, we thought that the April issue should be devoted to Bahujan politics instead of literature. However, this annual is once again dedicated to the two great personalities who laid the ground for Bahujan ideology in modern India.

Their words might have been different but both Ambedkar and Phule talked of the slavery of women and Shudras and Ati-shudras, their liberation and their unity. The concept of 'Bahujan Literature' was born to highlight the need to explore the socio-cultural foundation of the liberation and unity of Bahujans. When, in 2012, we published the first annual, the idea was a new one and it was difficult to convince the established Hindi writers of its validity and need.

21 But things have changed a lot over the last two years. Many magazines discussed and debated the issue and we received both bouquets and brickbats. In the field of literature, it is better to be castigated than to find that what you are saying has evoked no reaction at all. In this respect, it is fortunate that many key Hindi writers formulated their opinion on the concept of Bahujan literature and voiced it in one forum or the other. In this issue too, you will find that Marathi writer Sharan Kumar Limbale and others have expressed their differing and sometimes contradictory views. But amid ifs and buts, there is a unanimity among all of them that the ancient stream of Bahujan literature must be rediscovered and explored, and it must become the mainstream of contemporary literature, encompassing Dalit, Tribal, OBC and women's literature.

Some writers have reservations regarding the use of the term OBC literature. From the outset, I was against this nomenclature. OBC is a constitutional-legal concept, which has been crafted by the state to provide some material benefits to backward castes. In some states, sub-castes of Brahmins, Rajputs and Vaishyas are also included among the OBCs. These castes don't share a common socio-cultural heritage with Bahujan castes. Hence, the objection to the term OBC literature has a strong basis. But, then, how can one disregard the elephant in the room, the fact that middle or intermediate castes today form a sizeable chunk

of Indian society? The intermediate castes are the biggest social group in India and they form a majority of the communities which are lumped together as OBCs. That is probably why, for the sake of convenience, some people have named the literature of these communities as OBC literature. This is fine for casual conversation but I feel that formally, we should either call it the 'literature of the intermediate castes' or use a new word which conveys its exact import. We hope that there will be many rounds of discussion and debates on this issue and ultimately, we will be able to find a term which is acceptable to most, if not all. But one thing is very clear: The concept of Bahujan literature would be incomplete without giving an identity to the literature of this huge populace.

The intermediate castes and the Dalits have had close bonds since olden times. The Manuwadi system relegated both to the bottom of the social ladder. The differentiation of touchable and untouchable was only a Dwij stratagem aimed at using the two groups for different purposes. Even excluding the heroes of South India, the list of those who fought for equity in the last 2500 years is a pretty long one. It includes Buddha, Makhali Ghoshal, Ajit Keshkambali, Kabir, Shahuji Maharaj, Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar and Ram Manohar Lohia. You may use any criterion to draw up the list but you will discover that most of them were born in intermediate castes, which are today known as OBCs. Another commonality is that whether they belonged to intermediate castes or were Dalits, all these heroes fought for the emancipation of both the groups as well as of women. Today, the Tribals are the worst victims of the system. And they cannot be excluded from this category.

As you must be aware, the number of Bahujan youths in the field of academics has gone up substantially. I am sure that the youths pursuing higher education in the disciplines of humanities, social sciences, history and literature, with their hard work, intellect and their down-to-earth experiences, would put the upside-down world of Indian literary discourse back on its feet. The concept of Bahujan literature is only a beginning.

(This is an abridged version of the editorial essay published in the Bahujan Literary Annual May 2014 issue of the FORWARD Press magazine.)

On OBC literature

The renaissance of the 'Backwards': The wait continues

Abhay Kumar Dubey

If the Uttar Pradesh election is taken to be a test then it can be concluded that the section of Indian society called Other Backward Classes (OBC) in the Constitution has not been able to go very far in its efforts to become a modern political community. The OBC electorate is like insecure capital, free only to be plundered. All political forces are able to sneak into this voter base, whether they are upper-caste-dominated parties like the Congress and the BJP or mainly Dalit-based parties like the BSP, or even those parties – small (Rashtriya Kranti Dal, Rashtriya Lok Dal, Apna Dal, etc.) or big (SP) alike – that claim to represent OBCs. As a sociopolitical category, this fragmentation of OBCs points towards a deep cultural failure. At present, it is hard to substantially define this cultural failure but its symptoms can definitely be highlighted.

One symptom is that in the process of political modernization, the word Backward, till today, has not been able to cover the journey from being “derogatory to honorific”. As opposed to OBCs, those who were far lower placed in the social hierarchy – the Scheduled Castes – have undisputedly achieved this. The word Dalit they use for themselves does not carry the same meaning socially as it does in a dictionary. The social implication of Dalit is no longer broken, crushed or downtrodden. It now means battling and upward mobile. This Dalit success broadly has two aspects: first, on a communitarian level, they have, more or less, achieved political unity despite immense discrimination and one can see remarkable expression of the same as a ground reality in UP; and, second, a continuous intellectual struggle to create an alternative world on a literary and cultural level. Unlike them, OBCs have neither political unity nor any kind of literary-cultural effort on their agenda. OBCs do not have their distinct literature, nor do they have their specific cultural expressions. On the one hand, the upper-caste parties scramble for their votes and, on the other, there is nothing on cultural grounds that distinguishes their conduct and creativity from that of the upper castes. The journey from “derogatory to honorific” is completed only when there is an effort to provide an alternative in every field. Before Dalits, Nax-

alites had achieved this. It took a long time for Dalits to achieve this, and this success of theirs is not uniform across the country. But the path they are on may take a long time to lead them to the destination, is nevertheless, clear in all aspects.

In the light of the fragmented OBC electorate in UP, it is in order to look at the graph of the OBC leadership. The history of OBC politics informs us that it has always been divided into two. One part had leftist and socialist leanings and, thus, kept itself from the right wing. Perhaps that is the reason the OBC socialists refrained from striking an effective sociopolitical alliance with the upper castes and have tried to increase their support base among Muslims and Dalits, which in itself is a laudable democratic strategy. Had it succeeded, our electoral democracy would have been gifted a large and new political community. And many a time it did seem that positive results are forthcoming. When one saw the alliance between the BSP and the SP in 1993 at the UP level, it was one such remarkable moment. Similarly, in 1995 in Bihar, Lalu Yadav's outstanding electoral success was a part of this pattern. Together these successes pushed the Congress and the rightists into a corner and the evident unity of OBCs, Dalits and Muslims seemed to emerge. But this emergence proved to be short-lived. With the rising stock of the BJP, Muslims did continue to extend their support, but Dalits rather quickly expressed their lack of interest towards socialists. As opposed to that, another section of OBC leadership emerged as a vehicle of the right-wing forces, or even while adopting a non-communal stance did not hesitate to hobnob with the forces generally known as communal. As a result, time and again this OBC mobilization was able to turn upper-caste support into political gain for itself.

The main reason behind the failure of socialist OBCs is inherent in the foundational drawbacks in the socialist imaginary. On analysing the manifestoes of the Socialist Party for the 1957 and 1962 general elections, it becomes easy to see that the socialist thinking did not have anything substantial to offer to Dalits and Muslims. It must be noted that these manifestoes were written down by Dr Ram Manohar Lohia himself. The Lohiaites continue to read them as a "work" by their beloved "Doctor Sahib". These manifestos utterly fail to underscore the problem of communalism. After Partition leaderless and defenceless Muslims felt that they would get nothing by backing the socialists. On the other hand, by giving the slogan "Pichhda Pave Sau mein Saath" (OBCs must get 60 out of 100), the man-

ifestos made the Dalit question a sub-category of “backwardness”. Since “backwardness” and “untouchability” were two separate categories, both required distinct kinds of politics. Socialists raised the banner for OBCs and in exchange received their support. But beyond that they got practically nothing by way of a social base. Using their political acumen, Mulayam Singh Yadav in UP and Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar tried hard to bridge these fundamental gaps. But after having tasted different kinds of successes, today both these leaders seem helpless in these changing times. Right in front of their eyes, their political opponents (Nitish Kumar and Mayawati) forged some timely alliances with the upper castes and are marching ahead. With the relative decline of the BJP, Muslims too are looking for possibilities beyond socialist OBCs. In any case, there is another process underway within Muslims. A sense of similar kind of social differentiation is arising within them as was seen among Hindus. As a religious kind of political community their politics is no longer what it was earlier. Now they vote in a much more fragmented manner.

On a social level we can see that OBCs are divided into right-wing OBCs Yadavs and non-Yadavs. Now a third category has come – the MBCs, whose social status is better than Dalits only in one respect that they do have to face untouchability. From UP to Bihar these MBCs are available for any party and any ideology. Since their vote is silent and their voice is never distinctly raised, it has not become possible to correctly assess their ability to make or mar the political future of any leader or party. Others take away the credit of their political success. The 2007 UP election was a proof of this predicament. The extraordinary electoral success of Mayawati was attributed to her “Sarvajan” (all people) strategy by the media and the other analysts. A picture was painted that behind Mayawati’s victory lay the Brahmin–Dalit alliance. The voting statistics, however, told a different story. No doubt, Mayawati received more upper-caste votes than earlier but the truth remained hidden that without 34 per cent MBC votes she got, she could never have reached the majority figure.

In his Bahujan politics in Uttar Pradesh, Kanshi Ram gave an important place to the MBC voters. He knew that votes of socialist OBC (practically the Yadav community) and right-wing OBCs (practically non-Yadavs, primarily Lodhi and Shakya community) will not come to the Dalit-based party. So, first he drew the Kurmis, as the creamy

layer among OBCs, towards himself and with that he continued to do well-planned MBC politics. In 2007 Mayawati especially benefited from this spade work done by Kanshi Ram. However, this time all eyes are on this segment of the OBC votes. In the 2002 elections, the Rajnath Singh-led BJP tried to carry out a separate enumeration of MBCs so that by giving them reservation benefits they may be drawn into Hindutva's political camp. Rajnath Singh wanted to compensate for the loss of Lodhi voters who slipped out of the BJP's grip when Kalyan Singh fell out with the party. Now everyone knows the story of this failed attempt by the BJP. In this regard one interesting fact is that the Yadav-, Lodhi-, Kurmi-dominated political forces are least bothered when it comes to seek the loyalty of this MBC electorate. Obviously, these votes are going to be divided among the BSP, the Congress and the BJP.

OBC politics is on the crossroads where it has become essential for it to redefine itself. The socialist and right-wing OBC groupings are in decline. Their philosophical glow is fading away. OBCs have so far failed to lay any claim as a political community. OBC renaissance has all but happened. The wait continues.

(Forward Press, February 2012)

The idea of OBC literature

Rajendra Prasad Singh

If in Hindi literature various streams like Siddh literature, Nath literature and Jain literature can be, and are, identified in the name of religion and sects, then why can't OBC literature be recognized as a self-contained and robust stream? Not only that, in Hindi literature, when in the name of a god and on the basis of his form, literary streams can be classified as Ram kavya (poetry), Krishn kavya, Sagun kavya, Nirgun kavya, then why this reluctance towards OBC literature? If OBCs are considered part of Indian society even then it makes no difference. If in Indian society there can be a literary epoch ("Samanta Yug" or Feudal Era) on the basis of the name of a dominating class, then why, in the name of the weak and the backward class of that same society, can the idea of OBC literature not be brought forth? Not to talk about class only, even on the basis of caste, in Hindi literature terms like "Charan Period" have been recorded. In the modern period, appellations like Dwivedi Era (poetry), Shukl Era (criticism) have been presented on the basis of caste-signifying titles. If there can be a Dalit literature then why not OBC literature? In the name of half the population, in Hindi literature the woman question and women's writing have been highlighted. In Indian society, the OBC population goes beyond 50 per cent. Then why should there be no OBC literature?

What is "OBC Literature"?

There's no doubt that with the idea of OBC literature many discourses will begin. There will be debates on nomenclature. There will be discussions on its form. The purist pedants will condemn OBC literature for corrupting the holy notion of literature through this "casteist division". And much more will follow. But this much is clear that OBC literature is literature only of the socially and educationally backward classes.

Upper-caste literature is full of rebirth, fatalism, casteism, the discrimination on the basis of high and low and the miraculous. These elements are not there in non-classist or non-upper-caste literature, that is, Dalit literature and OBC literature. Hindi Dalit literature and OBC literature are both complementary to each other.

Anti-Brahminism, founding an equality-based society, doing away with feudal forces, condemning social and religious hypocrisy, establishing economic equity are the kinds of literary tones that unite these two literary streams. Despite this, Hindi Dalit literature opened its doors only for Scheduled Caste (SC) writers. The room for OBC writers is shrinking. But historical facts tell a different story. Under the leadership of Arjak Sangh, people from the Dalit–Backward classes were together. The thinkers for both the classes were also the same. Periyar and Phule came from Backward classes. Ambedkar belonged to the Dalit class. In spite of this, Ambedkar considered Phule his guru. In the history of Hindi literature, the so-called mainstream of literature is reserved for the upper castes. In all this, where do OBC writers go? Today, in the absence of a separate individual development of OBC literature, all the others are bagging what as a right belongs to them.

Just as gravity had existed before Newton discovered it, OBC literature is from antiquity even though its discussion is recent. Any Hindi critic or historian can very easily recognize the stream of OBC literature running from ancient times to medieval and modern times. In Siddh literature, besides Dalits, there have been many OBC writers. Meenpa is a fisherman. Kamripa is a blacksmith. Tantipa comes from the Tantwa (weaver) caste. Charptipa and Kantalipa are Kahar (carrier) and tailor respectively. Mekopa, Bhalipa, Udhlipa and others are Vaishya-Vaniks (Banias). Tilopa is an oil seller (Teli). It is obvious that a fisherman, a blacksmith, a basketmaker, carrier, tailor, bania, oil seller, etc., are OBC castes. So, we can claim that Siddh literature is full of OBC writers. Kabir, on whose basis a whole structure of Dalit literature has been raised, is himself an OBC poet. By caste, whether he's a Jugi or a Julaha, in all circumstances weaving castes are part of OBC. Periodically, many castes go out of OBC and become part of the Schedule Castes list. The main reason to be included among Scheduled Castes is, compared with others, their relative social and educational backwardness. Even now many castes included in the OBC list have been demanding to be included in the SC list. Hence it won't be wrong to say that Dalit literature and OBC literature complement each other.

Sant Literature and OBCs

It is said that the number of Dalits is maximum in the Sant (saint)

stream. But while asserting this, we very nearly forget the OBC writers. Otherwise Sant literature is full of such writers. In Maharashtra alone there have been many OBC writers like Namdev (tailor), Gora (potter), Sanwata (gardener), Narhari (goldsmith), Sena (barber) and Raka (potter). In Hindi, saints like Trilochan (Vaishya), Akha (goldsmith), Sadan (butcher), Charandas (Vaishya), Paltu Sahib (Bania), Bula Sahib (Kurmi), Dharamdas (Vaishya), Singaji (cattle rearer), Sunder Das (Khandelwal Vaishya), etc., are OBC writers. Among women, because of being Vaishya, poetesses like Sahjobai and Dayabai are OBCs. In the Sant stream of literature there have been two Daria Dases. Daria Das from Bihar came from a tailoring family and the one from Marwar is a Dhunia (comber). Both the tailor and the comber castes are on the OBC list. Dadu Dayal was also a Muslim Dhunia. Muslim Dhunias are also included among OBCs just as Muslim washermen, Cheek, Pamaria and other castes. Overall, it can be said that the Hindi Sant literature is literature written mainly by OBC and Dalit writers.

The history books in Hindi are full of various kinds of sects and writers belonging to particular sects. They especially highlight the brahmanical sects and ignore OBC streams of sects as part of a conspiracy. In medieval Hindi literature, Vallabh sect, Nimbark sect, Radhavallabh sect, Sakhi sect and so many other brahmanical sects are discussed. About 80 per cent of the poets of Vallabh sect are Brahmins. In Nimbark sect, all poets are Gaud Brahmins. All the major poets of the Radhavallabh sect are Brahmins. The only difference is that one may be a Gaud Brahmin, while the other may be a Shukl Brahmin. In Sakhi sect all the poets are Brahmins and belong to a single clan. On the basis of such caste-based sects, upper-caste literature has continued to dominate.

Among the many brahmanical sects of Bhakti, Shri, Brahm, Rudra and Sanakadi are particularly famous but when discussion moves to the Sarbhang sect, historians go silent. The reason is that all the major poets of Sarbhang sect are OBCs. In the 18th century, many poetic luminaries belonged to the Sarbhang sect. Chhatarbaba is considered the first poet of this sect. He was a potter by caste. His only capital was a pot. During the day, he would cook his food in it, himself, and in the night go to sleep using it as a pillow. It is said that he was very close to Bhinak Ram, who was a weaver by caste. Potters and weavers are both OBC castes. But in the Sarbhang sect,

Tekman Ram has been the most popular. Tekman Ram lived in Jhakhra on the banks of River Dhanauti in district Champaran. He was a blacksmith by caste and because of poverty worked as a mason. The practices of poets of the Sarbhang sect were different from those belonging to brahmanical sects. They considered caste differences, religious pilgrimages and fasts to be hypocritical. They said that to view all people equally, a man should free himself from such controls as untouchability. Overall, it can be said that the sects belonging to the OBC stream were different in theory and practice from the sects of the brahmanical streams. But the sects of the Dalit stream were similar to the OBC sects in terms of theory and practice. The reason was that the main objective of the sects of the Dalit and OBC streams was the establishment of a casteless society, while brahmanical sects were covertly promoting the caste system.

In the 18th century, parallel to the Sarbhang sect, the Shivrinarayani sect was also very popular. The Shivrinarayani sect belonged to the Dalit stream. Premkumar Mani has written that the father of Babu Jagjivan Ram was a saint of the Shivrinarayani sect and was very well respected in the society. The Shivrinarayani sect was leading a movement among the Chamars. It had gained much fame in Bihar and eastern UP. Hence, it can be said with certainty that in Hindi, different streams of OBC literature, Dalit literature and upper-caste literature have already been there. Otherwise why would more and more OBCs join Kabir Panth or Dalits join the Ravidas tradition, and people from upper castes join the Bawri Panth?

Brahmanical literature

As we have said, among many of the brahmanical sects of Bhakti, Shri, Brahm, Rudra and Sanakadi have been particularly famous. The reason is that all these sects agreed that the Brahmin caste is superior to all the other castes. It is certainly true that often almost all the acharyas (teachers) have loosened the grip of caste for bhakti (devotion). But this loosening of the cords of caste was effected not to erase caste distinctions but to increase the population of the devotees so that with the increase in the number of devotees more and more money by way of offerings might be collected. What kind of philosophy and principle is this that an acharya has placed a sense of truth in a being? Some have said that this (human) being is submitted to the autonomous Brahm (ultimate being) while the others

have gone on and rejected the autonomous reality of the being itself in the presence of the Brahma, but no one has rejected the superiority of the Brahmin. This only means “god” divided the brahmanical sects but caste united them. So it could be said that the stream of the upper-caste literature is completely opposite to the streams of OBC and Dalit literature, whereas the streams of OBC and Dalit literatures do not cancel out, but make more contact with each other.

Rajendra Yadav has written: “I have a list of modern Hindi literature. This list was made years ago with Premkumar Mani. It has the names of ten poets and ten short-story writers. Is this a mere coincidence that, with a couple of exceptions, all the poets are Brahmins and all the writers are non-Brahmins? ... The list of poets went something like this: Pant, Nirala, Mahadevi Verma, Ajneya, Mukti-bodh, Manglesh Dabral, Nagarjun, Rajesh Joshi, Ashok Vajpayee, Arun Kamal. The writers are Premchand, Jainendra, Yashpal, Bhagwati Charan Verma, Renu, Mohan Rakesh, Sanjeev, Pankaj Bisht, Uday Prakash, Priyamvad and Asgar Wajahat.” If Rajendra Yadav had added his own and Premkumar Mani’s names then the latter (short-story writers) list would have become OBC-laden. However, OBC writers have often kept themselves away from self-promotion, even though Rajendra Yadav and Premkumar Mani are two of the best short-story writers in Hindi literature. If we take out Mahadevi (a Kayasth) from the list and add Dhumil or any other Brahmin poet, the whole list will be exclusively Brahmin.

If we talk about plays, then it is the oldest among the modern prose genres. In Hindi literature, after Bhartendu, Jai Shankar Prasad, a Sahu OBC, has been the greatest playwright. The history of Hindi theatre is written keeping Prasad in the centre. The subject of most of Prasad’s plays are historical. Even in those, the theme of one-third of the plays is related to kings and queens of the Maurya and the Gupta dynasties. It is believed that the kings of Maurya and Gupta dynasties belonged to OBCs.

The beginning of prose literature in Hindi

In fact, in Hindi literature the tradition of prose was started by OBC writers. Dr Motilal Menaria has presented many samples of ancient Rajasthani prose. Evidently, the primary credit of literary writing in Dingal language goes to the Charan caste and after that to the Bhat, Rao, Motisar and Dharhi castes. In ancient texts, Cha-

rans were called “Bhangans”. “Bhangarh” is a branch of Dharhis. Dharhis are Hindus as well as Muslims. Muslim Dharhis are called Malanoors. Hindu Dharhis are known as Jats, Sonars, Chhipis, etc. All of them are OBCs. It is in these castes that Rajasthani prose developed. In the eastern regions too, like Bihar, the Siddh OBCs began the tradition of writing prose. Consider *Yogabhyas Mudratippan* by Siddh Kumripa (potter). The research department of Kashi Naagri Pracharini Sabha has shown that it is a work in ancient Kharhi dialect. This is to say that the credit for beginning prose literature goes to OBC writers.

Later, people from the upper castes also joined in. Because of being OBC literature, from ancient times to the modern period, the stream of Hindi prose is ruptured at various points. At some points this rupture lasts 50 years while at some other points it is about 100 years long. And when this rupture is found to be re-integrating then it joins the clan-based trio of Acharya Vallabh, Vitthalnath and Gokulnath, in whose names many writings in prose in Braj language are famous.

The Modern Suppression of OBC Literature

In modern times as well, through magazines and journals, all efforts were made to suppress OBC literature and its writers. *Saraswati* was a famous magazine of the early 20th century, about which it is said that it had the complete account of the Dwivedi Era of Hindi literature. But this was merely an eyewash. *Saraswati* magazine refused to publish the works of brilliant writers such as Jaishankar Prasad. Perhaps, because of this, Prasad in 1909 under the editorship of his nephew Ambika Prasad Gupt began publishing the monthly *Indu*. The initial writings of Jaishankar Prasad can be seen in the issues of this magazine. In a sense, *Indu* was an OBC magazine. The initial writings of Maithili Sharan Gupt were published in the Calcutta-based OBC magazine *Vaishyopkarak*. Critics did not speak well of this magazine. The reason was that it was branded a caste-based magazine, while Pratap Narayan Mishra’s *Brahmin* magazine (1883, Kanpur) was referred to as the best among the magazines of the Bhartendu era. The truth is that *Brahmin* was a deeply brahmanical magazine whose editors used to write that it had been months since they received dan-dakshina (religious offering).

The short-story writers who were published by *Saraswati* were

usually Brahmins such as, Kishorilal Goswami, Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, Girija Dutt Vajpayee, Ramchandra Shukl, Chandradhar Sharma Guleri, Jwala Dutt Sharma, Vishambharnath Sharma Kaushik, Bal Krishan Sharma 'Navin', and so on. *Saraswati* was an upper-caste magazine, just as *Kalpana*, which appeared later. *Kalpana* was published from Hyderabad (1949). Om Prakash Deepak wrote that he had seen the lists of 500 such Indian writers whose books were reviewed in 100 issues of *Kalpana*. Out of those, 150 names had Sharma, Pathak, Pandey, Awasthi, Chaturvedi, etc., as surnames, which declared their Brahminhood.

Another such magazine was *Maryada*, which was also hailed as the best monthly magazine of its time. Krishnakant Malviya started its publication in 1910. This was also an upper-caste magazine that did not give much space to OBC writers. To illustrate this point, the November 1912 issue of *Maryada* published 15 works in which 14 were written by those with surnames as Mishr, Awasthi, Joshi, Singh, Goswami, Chaubey, Shukl, Trivedi, Sharma and Malviya. The only OBC writer was Jagdwihari Seth. Such upper-caste magazines only published vegetarian OBC writers. The reason was the OBC writers with a 'vegetarian mentality' did not launch fierce attacks on Brahmanism. Jagdwihari Seth was one such OBC.

Whither OBC literature?

In the social field, discussion about "social justice" is on the rise. The emphasis is on democratization of politics. The slogan to abolish economic disparities is being raised. Then why is there no talk about reservation in literature and literary justice? The Hindi syllabi in universities are full of poems, stories, etc., by upper-caste writers. Research on such writers also continues without a break. Dalit writers have started departments of Dalit literature in universities or have got Dalit literature included in the Hindi syllabus. But OBC literature is still in limbo. In fact, OBC literature is being ground between two grindstones. Caught between upper-caste and Dalit literature, its situation is pretty bad. Actually, OBC literature is a literature groaning between upper-caste and Dalit literature. This situation in which it finds itself is the result of a conspiracy. Otherwise, you would be left with no doubt that OBC literature is extremely robust and is available in abundance. What is needed is for someone to methodically underline it.

If a region like Bihar and Jharkhand is made a basis, there are 109 castes that comprise OBC, in which are included people from all three religions – Hindus, Muslims and Christians. There are 28 Dalit castes in all, whereas there are merely four upper castes. On the strength of only four castes, upper-caste literature is at No 1. With 28 castes, Dalit literature is at No 2, while 109-caste-strong OBC literature is on the margins. What it means is that a literature of 32 castes has overpowered the literature of 109 castes in such way that it could crush it, whereas OBC literature is quite strong and available abundantly. The truth is that OBC literature is not merely a literature of the Other Backward Classes. It is a literature that provides humane ideas to an Indian society that is still divided by categories born of hatred.

(Forward Press, July 2011)

‘OBC discourse has benefited the Dalit movement’

Prema Negi in conversation with renowned Dalit writer Sharan Kumar Limbale

How would you define Bahujan?

Bahujan means many people. In Uttar Pradesh, the Bahujan Samaj Party came into existence for the Bahujans. Kanshi Ram gave political clothing to the concept of Bahujans and tried to implement Babasaheb's thoughts on the ground. The credit for defining and publicizing the word "Bahujan" in the Hindi belt must go to Kanshi Ram. In Maharashtra, many conventions have been organized to popularize the concept of Bahujan literature. However, those at the forefront of the Bahujan literary movement in Maharashtra are not SCs or STs but OBCs. A fairly large number of seminars, meetings and conventions on this issue have been organized in the state. In convention after convention, it was stressed that all backward and Dalit castes should be brought under the umbrella of Bahujans. The concept of Bahujan literature predates the Mandal Commission. Kancha Ilaiah, who comes from an OBC background, took a major initiative in this direction. His book titled *Why I am not a Hindu: A Sudra critique of Hindutva philosophy, culture and political economy* shows how every feature of Hinduism is designed to oppress Dalitbahujans in one way or another. This book should form one of the basic documents of the Bahujan discourse. In this book, Kancha Ilaiah also raises issues pertaining to women. He says that despite Saraswati being the goddess of knowledge in Hinduism, women were never allowed to study and despite Laxmi being the goddess of wealth, women never got property rights. In Maharashtra, Dalit movement had begun with the the Dalit Panthers in the 1970s. Dalit discourse began in the Hindi belt quite late and OBC discourse is in its initial stages.

After Dalit and women's discourse, why is the need for OBC discourse being felt now?

People have woken up to the need for OBC discourse owing to the success of Dalit movements and literature. A new round of OBC discourse, inspired by Phule and Ambedkar, has begun. Phule and

Ambedkar are the guiding lights of this discourse. OBCs are gradually realizing that savarnas used them as tools for centuries. The Mandal Commission not only gave a new direction but also a new tenor and a new face to the OBC discourse. This has also benefited the Dalit movement as the OBCs are now aligning with the Dalits and their coming together is strengthening the progressive forces. The expansion of education after Independence has led to writers emerging from the ranks of such castes and communities that could never before boast of literary talents. As far as Bahujan literature is concerned, its format was more of a movement than of a consciousness. However, the Mandal Commission led to the spreading of the consciousness. As OBCs started getting educated, they felt the need for a movement. Around 60 per cent of the country's population is OBC and today, they are conscious of their strength. In these circumstances, it would have been surprising had a discourse not begun.

Can a non-Dalit writer express the pain of the Dalits in the same way as a Dalit writer?

A non-Dalit writer can express the pain of the Dalits but with certain limitations. There are reasons for this. The writings of non-Dalit writers are based on what they think; those of Dalit writers, on what they feel. This difference is palpable when one reads their writings. Over the last couple of years, innumerable stories and novels centred on Dalits have been written in Hindi and Marathi by non-Dalits, but these are more virtual than real. Now, what the Dalits are writing is based on their personal experience. But this is being projected in a wrong way. A message is being sent out that Dalit writers do not want non-Dalits to join the Dalit discourse or write anything about them. One question that naturally arises in this context is why this issue was raised only after the Dalits began giving expression to their pain. Why was nothing written about the Dalits earlier? Where were these so-called pillars of literature when Dalits were being oppressed and suppressed? Why did they not spare a word for them? They are now conspiring to widen the chasm between Dalits and non-Dalits.

Why is the presence of women in Dalit Literature so small?

Women seem to be on the margins in Dalit Literature because Dalit women writers have yet to start writing in the true sense. Some Dalit women have become articulate. With time, their numbers will rise.

Those who belong to the new generation are acquiring education. It would be natural for them to pick up the pen to document the pains and miseries, oppression and exploitation of their communities. But it is true that to date, Dalit women writers have not gone beyond autobiographical accounts. Secondly, a woman is a woman – no matter which community she belongs to. Dalit men are as patriarchal as non-Dalits. They ill-treat women as much as savarna men do.

Some say that OBC is only a political category.

Bahujan is a political category and so is Dalit. The literature of Dalits, however, is not only political. That is because we are raising our voice against tradition, caste, inequality, social evils and inertia. We are writing to build an equitable society, which definitely falls in the category of political writing. The Backwards are not writing for the heck of it. Their writing has a definite objective. They have set out to achieve something.

How will dividing literature into different castes and camps affect democratic values?

This question sounds logical but in reality it is not. When the Dalits are negating the caste system, who are the people who are branding their literature as Dalit-Backwards? It is not the Dalits but the savarnas who have divided literature into various castes and camps. We all have to work jointly to ensure that literature is not divided into castes and camps. But this does not seem to be happening. We are being branded because we are talking against the caste system.

How do you view the initiative to bring the Shudra, Ati-Shudra, women's and Tribal literature under one umbrella as part of the endeavour to establish the concept of Bahujan literature?

Undoubtedly this is a very good initiative and it should be welcomed. I and many other thinkers believe that the tragedy of Shudras, Ati-Shudras, women and Tribals is the same. But as far as bringing the literature of all of them under the umbrella of Bahujan literature is concerned, it is an ideal which, like most ideals, is unachievable. And that is because of the cultural diversities. For instance, the Tribals are entirely different from others and their exploiter is the capitalist system, not society. Hierarchies accentuate these differences, and this is something that cannot be changed

overnight. This can be understood by an example. Small plants cannot grow under a big tree. They need a separate place. Similarly, Shudras, Ati-Shudras, women, Tribals – they are different streams which will be able to grow and develop only if they are allowed to grow independently. Once they are developed, we can think about bringing them under one umbrella. But till now, they have not got an opportunity to grow. That is why they should be allowed to come forward in the way they want to; let them become vocal against injustice, let us leave them to themselves. What is most important is that they are breaking their silence. This will lead to the building of a new society. Every stream is giving birth to new heroes with new ideas – their circle is widening, their horizon is widening. In a sense, this is also an initiative to strengthen democracy.

It is often alleged that the historiography of Hindi literature did not objectively review and critique Kabir and dismissed him as a poet of “khandan-mandan” (one who puts forth only arguments and counterarguments). And in this context, the need for his objective assessment through OBC criticism is being emphasized. Your take? Yes, that is true. But Kabir is a poet from another time, so is the novelist Premchand. They cannot be used as parameters for the evaluation of today’s OBC literature. This is modern Bahujan literature. How can Kabir be its parameter? Of course, Kabir can be critiqued and assessed in the historical context. The literature of the Backwards was written post Independence. Kabir lived much much earlier. He was great. We should discuss him but not in the context of OBC literature. Ambedkar had said, “I have three gurus: Buddha, Kabir and Jotiba Phule.” But Kabir doesn’t impress me much. He was basically a spiritual thinker. We are Dalit-OBC thinkers. Similarly, women’s discourse is also political, not spiritual. Bahujan literature is also not spiritual. The writers are writing about their rights, their oppression. Linking Kabir with today’s Bahujan writers would not be doing injustice to Kabir but to the Bahujan writers. Today, we have to expand Bahujan Literature, critique it. We need not compare it with what Kabir had said. Those who want to confine Bahujan discourse to Buddha and Kabir want it to lose its way. Word is the biggest weapon of writers from OBC communities.

Jotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule were among those personalities

who ushered in India's modern age. They opposed the caste system and the brahmanical inertia. They advocated improvement in the economic condition of farmers. But why are both of them missing from the history of Hindi literature and criticism – and this, despite a large number of Hindi writers and critics being progressives?

If the Phule couple is missing from Hindi Literature it is because Hindi criticism has mainly been spiritual. It kept on revolving in the orbit of Hindu religion around Tulsi, Sur and Kabir. I don't know when the critics and reviewers of Hindi literature will get rid of ancient spiritual gurus. That, even in the 21st century, the Untouchables cannot enter temples does not worry them. In a way, history and culture are tools of exploitation. A new India is being built after Independence but our Hindi writers are irresponsible. Independent India has failed to build an independent culture. Though I do not believe in God, I pray to him to free Hindi from Kabir and Premchand. Hindi literature is not idealistic. Much has been written against women, Dalits and Tribals in it. We have to reject it. A new way of thinking is not talked about. Our reviewers and critics do not know the problems that are confronting us. And that is why there is no new discourse. The Hindi critics have a closed mind; they are intellectual pygmies. Instead of grappling with cultural issues, they are obsessed with history and tradition. I reject them outright. Now, new critics should emerge from the ranks of Dalits, Tribals and women.

In Hindi literature, the Bhakti, progressive and Nai Kahani movements were considered part of the mainstream but the Dalit, women's and Tribal literatures – that laid the foundation of social justice and equality – are still on the margins. Why is it so?

Whether it is the Bhakti or progressive or Nai Kahani movements, they were all not mainstream movements but movements of the savarnas. Does mainstream mean Brahmin? I say it is wrong to consider them mainstream movements. Savarnas were dominating literature till recently. But now, writers have changed, their caste has changed, the caste of literature has changed, and the caste of thinkers has changed. Democracy has demolished the culture of inertia that was thousands of years old. Brahmins have lost their privileges. That is why they are talking of mainstream and back-stream. What should have happened was that what was written by the others should have been considered mainstream. I put what is described as the main-

stream literature in the dock. It is the stream of caste, it is a stream of confusion, it represents savarna mindset, it glorifies old traditions and wrong practices. Since only one caste had a monopoly over the acquisition of knowledge, what its members said or wrote was declared the mainstream. With the expansion of education, writers arose from different castes and the bastions of domination crumbled. Now they are in a state of panic. I am not saying that all Brahmin writers are casteist. I am only against the brahmanical system, not progressive Brahmins. Progressive thoughts could not transcend the boundaries of caste. I do not give any importance to such a mainstream; we do not need it. When the real mainstream is built, it will include Dalits, women, Tribals and all others.

What is the difference in the Dalit consciousness of Hindi and Marathi literature?

There are significant differences between Hindi and Marathi writers. Marathi writers are associated with a movement, hence they are aggressive. Hindi writers are government servants. They are obsessed with the “mainstream” mindset. Hindi literature is not a rebel literature; it lacks the aggressiveness of Marathi literature. Unlike Marathi, Hindi literature has not given voice to the Dalit movement. Secondly, Hindi writers have the advantage of being close to the capital. We have to struggle hard. We have to struggle even to get our books published. Om Prakash Valmiki became well known in the Hindi belt by only writing one book *Jhoothan*. I got recognition in Hindi after writing over a hundred books.

Kabir, Phule, Gandhi, Bhartendu, Maithilisharan Gupt, Jaishankar Prasad – all are credited with laying the foundations of Bahujan Literature. But as far as women’s emancipation is concerned, except Phule, the credentials of all are under a cloud. To what extent would the women’s discourse agree with these thinkers?

Definitely, all of them have been sources of inspiration but as far as women’s discourse is concerned, I believe that only Phule and Ambedkar can show us the way. Phule does not need any certificate for what he did for the emancipation of women. It is another matter that few in the Hindi belt know about him. That is because Hindi literature never took him seriously.

(Forward Press, May 2014)

‘OBC literature doesn’t exist. But it must be discussed’

Reputed literary magazine *Hans* is completing its 25 years this month. On this occasion, Pramod Ranjan, consulting editor and Ivan Kostka, editor-in-chief, *FORWARD* Press spoke to *Hans* editors Rajendra Yadav and Sanjeev on various issues. Short-story writer Sanjay Sahai, who was present in the *Hans* office, also participated in the conversation. Excerpts from the interview:

Pramod Ranjan: *Rajendra ji, Hans is going to complete 25 years. First of all, congratulations! I would like to know how Hans started.*

Rajendra Yadav: See, any writer has two wishes. First, that whatever he writes should get published and, second, that he has his own publishing house and that he receives his royalty. We did both the experiments. Akshar Prakashan has been around for 25 years. We have published all the big writers of our times, whether it is Ramvilas Sharma, Ajneya or Premchand. [We published] their first books, like Rahi Masoome Raza’s *Syahi ka Kaagaz*, *Aadha Gaon*, Raghuvir Sahay’s *Atmahatya ke Virudhh*, etc. This way we published many works. But the objective with which we started it was not accomplished because it was beyond us to make a business of it. It could only have brought revenue if we had handled its business side; we couldn’t do that. But we had a few motivated friends, with small-time jobs. There’s a place close by (in Dariyaganj, New Delhi), where we would hold meetings with them. We met every Wednesday. There were Jains among us there. We would say we were meeting for *Hans*, would plan for *Hans* but we talked about everything except *Hans*, for example, where do we get good chaat in Delhi?; where is good jalebi?; let’s order. Whose is dahi-vada the best?; Where are the best kababs? There were Jains but a couple of them ate kababs. We had the best of liquor. We did this for four years. Then we thought they were not going to do it. Among them there was one very close friend, T.M. Lalani. He worked at Birla Company’s Auto Motors and read a lot of literature. He knew a lot about cricket, music, history, casteism and languages; in other words, an

all-rounder. He read very deeply. He was anxious to start a magazine. We felt that the gentleman was very ambitious. He would not let us publish the kind of magazine that we wanted. Even if he came on-board, he would create problems. So, in scorn he built another company – Panth Prakashan Pvt Ltd. His advisors were people from among us. Five people started Panth. They said they would start their own magazine called Kans. Those talks also went on. Meanwhile, we had another friend Hari Prakash Sharma who later went and lived in Canada. A very good story writer. His first story “Vapsi” (Return) was published in *Dharmayug* in 1963 and became very popular. He once went to London and befriended Gautam Navlakha, who is now a big social worker, is often on TV and a part of the EPW advisory board. Gautam Navlakha was a son of a rich father. His father was a Marwari but a Marwari of sophisticated tastes. The father was an adept businessman but the son did not want to do business. He was educated in St Stephen’s Delhi and in London and then married a Swedish girl. He wanted to come back and do some “intellectual work”. He talked to Hari Prakash. Both came back and it was decided that they would start a magazine.

But his father said that he would give him only five lakh rupees. This is in 1986 and at that time five lakh was a big amount. And he said if he could bring out a magazine within that much then he must go ahead or else close shop. So, Gautam Navlakha and we together started magazine by the name of *Hans*.

Pramod Ranjan: *Your editorials have been very well appreciated. I, in fact, grew up on them. It shaped the way I looked at the world. I would like to put another question to you and also to Sanjay Sahai. With time genres also change, earlier we had epics and ballads, but don't you think that the contemporary genres of the short story and poetry have become irrelevant? Everyone is looking for more editorials, that is, demand for ideas-based non-fiction writing is increasing and the relevance of creative literature is diminishing. Do you feel like that?*

Sanjay Sahai: I don't think so, because as we have just discussed, *Hans* has two aspects – one aspect is about social issues, and a host of social aspects. *Hans* has worked to raise all those issues and has shaken the society and the readers. It enrages you. All your ready-made notions suddenly seem to be shattering and scattering. You

feel sad but later you are forced to think, because *Hans* begins that debate. I feel that in the last 20–25 years whatever intellectual growth has occurred in this country, *Hans* has played a hugely powerful and important role in that. If there were no *Hans* and no thought of Rajendra ji, then there would not have been this courage to demolish the readymade beliefs and notions and look beyond. This is one aspect.

Second, the same writers are being published simultaneously in five or six magazines, so it is possible that for a particular writer the story that is published in *Hans* is not as good as his other story in another magazine. This is very possible. But this is no reason that you can ignore stories in *Hans*. The stories that give birth to those debates, raise them, or are written because of their influence, are there in *Hans*, and so are the aesthetic stories. *Hans* published somewhat less poetry. In conclusion, I don't think that the short story has become irrelevant.

Rajendra Yadav: Our commitment is to the short story and that we have fulfilled and a very funny thing is that even today, after 25 years, when I read a story in another magazine, I realize that I have read it. It went from us. This means even today *Hans* remains writers' priority.

Sanjeev: Pramodji, you are right. The issue you have raised is right. Rajendrajji has done that and we have also raised the point: why is it that readers are taking more interest in social discourses and less in stories? There are a couple of things that I understand – parallel to *Hans* there are about two or three short stories that do the rounds in electronic media. On the intellectual level, they are put together using various fragments and are of inferior standard. But they are acceptable in terms of entertainment. And what is artistic has a very limited visibility.

See, a man only has 24 hours a day and he takes more interest in entertainment-oriented stories. And the earlier stories or stories of 1970s that used to pull you back are no longer there. Perhaps there was more potential in stories of the 1970s and contemporary stories turn out to be weak. And we have stories that are above-average but sometimes there is a problem as to what to keep and what to leave, as we saw in the context of stories by Sanjay ji, Uday Prakash and Sara Reddy. And there are a lot of discourses within social discourses, because everyone wants to speak up. He or she may not

speaking in an aesthetic form but would like to speak directly. I agree that there is an indication that people want to speak directly and have shifted away from the world of art.

Pramod Ranjan: *The credit goes to Hans that it started Dalit discourse in Hindi. But Premkumar Mani says that Dalit literature has been reduced to Schedule Caste literature. Do you think that's how it is?*

Rajendra Yadav: We believe that they are Dalits because they never had any training in articulation, or were not allowed to speak. They are beginning to speak for the first time. Earlier, only we spoke on their behalf. Premchand has written many stories on Dalits. Many other writers have done that. Now when the Dalits are speaking themselves, the balance of the middle class has been upset a little.

Sanjeev: What you point out in Premkumar Mani is actually correct. For the first time, the hunger, the anguish to express themselves is seen in Dalits. They are emerging from the pain they have experienced. We've just received a story from Om Prakash Valmiki. It is not that many writers, such as Premchand, should only concentrate on the stories of Dalits. We think that writers like Ajay Navariya, who have the capability and skill to write about those pains and struggles in good prose, and who cannot limit themselves to those things alone, should widen their scope and should highlight it in the context of the larger society. Why should they only go for a unilateral portrayal? What you are saying about Premkumar Mani is right, but now the Dalit writers are rising above that. The boundary that they have set that only a Dalit can create Dalit literature is wrong. I give you an example, but from a slightly different context. It is said about women that only a woman can write feminist literature; this too is wrong. We have recently received a story called "Janm" (Birth) by Swayam Prakash. I haven't seen a better story on feminist discourse than that. In that story, a woman is giving birth to a child. She goes through terrible pain and agony. It is so unbearable that she wishes that the child died. There are full details of childbirth and it is not written by a woman but by a man. So, a limit set like that is fundamentalism and now this fundamentalism is slowly melting away, and this is a good sign.

Rajendra Yadav: Shall I tell you one thing? There's a book by Simone de Beauvoir called *The Second Sex*. Prabha Khetan has trans-

lated it [into Hindi]. There is chapter in it which is an eye-opener ... she says in "The Myth of Woman" that writers have portrayed women in some wonderful ways. Their heroines are considered stalwarts of literature. But unfortunately, none of them knows what a woman is. They are looking at women from their perspective, with their eyes. So it is that we have created women, one greater than the other, like Chitralkha, Amrapali. But do all those women out there love them? Think about it honestly. Do they think it is their own dream? They think men have many dreams, let them create their dreams. They are not affected by it.

Ivan Kostka: *When I returned to India in 2007, within six months I was invited to attend the second "All-India OBC Sahitya Sammelan" in Nasik. The first was in 2006 in Pune – it had started with the burning of the Manusmriti. It was called "All-India" but was almost 99 per cent pure Marathi. Even my talk on Mahatma Phule and his literature had to be translated by my friend Sunil Sardar into Marathi. He was the only person who, though a Marathi person based in Delhi, spoke in Hindi at the sammelan. There was almost no talk about literature. I am just giving you the actual situation. If you are seriously calling it "sahitya sammelan" then where is the "sahitya", where is the focus? There was no focus. So my question from 2008 till now is this: like there is Dalit Literature, which definitely found its voice and helped shape Dalit consciousness and identity – this is my analysis – is there such a thing, especially post-Mandal, as OBC literature, particularly in Hindi?*

Rajendra Yadav: There is no such thing as OBC Literature!

Sanjeev: Yes, an issue like that came up. Recently we received a letter from the media and they asked if they could come? Could there be OBC literature? We said, where did you read it? They said, in your *Hans*. I was amused. We said, you throw up an issue on your own accord. There's no such thing. Nothing like that exists. Yes, there is Dalit literature...

Pramod Ranjan: *Rajendra ji, from Ivan Kostka's query another question arises. Presently we look at Hindi literature in two ways – there is Dalit literature and there is mainstream literature; there is no third literature. From this viewpoint, we also classify older works under Dalit literature, for example, works of Hira Dom. We*

say this particular literature is Dalit and this is not. So, Rajendra ji, does it seem that on one hand there is Dalit literature and on the other brahmanical literature?

Rajendra Yadav: It's all brahmanical literature.

Pramod Ranjan: *Then what is Maila Aanchal?*

Rajendra Yadav: What! It's not a matter of Brahmanism being clearly visible. But it is in that framework.

Pramod Ranjan: *My question is about the Shudra, Bahujan, OBC literature. If on the one hand we have Dalit literature and on the other, brahmanical literature, then where can we place works like Maila Aanchal?*

Rajendra Yadav: Listen ... Listen ... Dalit literature is new, is of a different identity, whereas brahmanical literature kept coming as a sansakar, a value. We can also point it out separately. But when we look at the caste system, that one is a Pandit, a Brahmin, etc, then that literature is brahmanical literature. And when we look at male domination, who's the boss at home, we conduct ourselves accordingly. That means there's nothing like brahmanical, it is but a symptom like we have in male domination. The construct of the family is what really exists. And in India, no one can live without caste. He or she will have a caste; and those who do not have caste, we try to know it by various means and then place him or her mentally. This caste that has pervaded our minds is what really is Brahmanism.

Sanjeev: The way Rajendra ji has defined causes some confusion for me because during the Bhakti period, except for Sagun Panthis, most Nirgun Panthis were either OBCs or Dalits. Before that a few people were from the Siddha sect. It was all intermingled and it had contempt for Brahmins, orthodoxy and rituals. But we never called it OBC literature. It comprised barbers, potters, dyers and others. This was because those people wanted to establish their power. The only way they could rise up was the way in which they were suppressed. It was destined to end the way it did.

Rajendra Yadav: No, see ... we have two more here, Sant literature and Bhakti literature, in which all are devotees; these were associated with large monasteries and temples, with different monasteries and schools. And this Sant literature was generally a common literature. There is a big reason for this. The reason is that they were not

allowed to enter the temples and hence they were forced towards the Nirgun literature. They were not familiar with Sagun literature or did not have a framework for that.

Sanjeev: Their God did not have a caste but the God of the others had a caste.

Rajendra Yadav: That is why the worship of their God is more nir-gun (without attributes). There is less idolatry. Meera has an idol but there the dedication to the idol is more important than the idol itself. She remembers the name of Krishna but her own feelings dominate. So a tenacity is evident. And the thought of the Sant literature can also be seen in common people. There are Muslims, dyers, potters, etc. They did literature along with their labour. Now and then they would be weaving and also doing literature; this is one big difference that is seen between the two.

Pramod Ranjan: *I am a little unclear about what Sanjeev ji has said. He said that we didn't refer to the Middle Ages as Shudra literature, it was mainstream literature. Whenever there was a movement in literature it became a mainstream movement. For example, look at your Progressive movement, Nai Kahani movement or any other movement. But Dalit literature is a movement of the margins. The supporters of Dalit literature admit that on one hand there is mainstream literature and on the other Dalit literature. Does it not seem that there is some weakness somewhere?*

Rajendra Yadav: No, it's not a weakness. Whose literature would there be? Those who have the power or those who are under that power? Sixty per cent belong to power, to politics. Another thing about Dalits is that they don't have any other experience of life, they know nothing else but their own things or their masters'. These people worked in fields. They are their servants working in their homes. One, they lived outside the house, relationships with them are rather functional, that's why they are part of systemic process of this India. They are a part of the system but they are not a part of the system, they are outsiders. So their experiences are very simple. These people looked at their masters as God. So when such people got freedom, the first blueprint of freedom they got was what they saw in their masters. All their decisions were made by the master. So what we say is that it is now that their history has begun. They did not have a history. Whatever history there is, is of their masters' ... She

who lived her entire life for us, sacrificed her children, left her home, that woman burnt for us, either as a Sati or forcefully. But now they have started writing their new history, because only those have history who can take their own decisions of life. So they started writing and the most authoritative thing they could write is their autobiographies. That's why 60 per cent of Dalit literature is autobiography. Our autobiography is everywhere in India, it has all the things. There are often obsessions in their autobiographies and they have this struggle to be free. So, we say that Brahminical literary aphorism is Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram and the dictum of Dalit literature is Torment, Struggle, Liberty. This is the vision of the future because those belonging to the Satyam-Shivam-Sundaram formula just do not have a future. They have their own present ... they have a vision and their literature is future literature. It's true that aesthetically we should oppose some of these things but then I question myself and find that all beliefs, all strategies of literature are our own. It's when we take a judgemental position that we say your stuff is wrong. Well, this is what they are fighting against – you are not a judge of what is ours, our lives, our writing. This means that we want to stop them at the gate, search them and allow them entry if they are found clean. Else, not allowed! This is inappropriate power, rejecting half of humanity. They don't have aesthetics; they do not have the way of saying things. Then I question myself, if this egotism – to judge things, to pass a judgement – is not what we have inherited as a part of our sanskaras, our belief system. We are part of that power that determines things, and that's why we say they are not aesthetic. It's possible that their art is different from ours or they may reject their own. At the moment we are rejecting it, aren't we? We are telling them how to write, how not to write. In the future, perhaps they may have their own way of thinking and their own creativity.

Ivan Kostka: *But you are still talking about Dalit literature and writers. You must have read something at least in translation by Mahatma Phule and may have read something by Savitribai Phule. She was a great poet as you may know and they were very clear about their Shudra identity. Phule in fact always addressed himself to Stree-Atishudra-Shudra, in that order. Now his identity was very clear, in his writing also he had a certain style – some of it was polemical, for argument, Gulamgiri (Slavery) being the primary ex-*

ample. But he has written several works including ballads, satire, and one play as you may know. So definitely at least 150 years ago, well before Dalit literature was even conceived, there was, in Maharashtra at least, clearly a literary voice that identified itself as Shudra. This literature had a sense of taking up the causes and making common identity with women – first of all – as the most oppressed, starting with Brahmin women. In fact, Phule's first social work was on their behalf which became a scandal in Pune, which in those Peshwa days was about 40 per cent Brahman. His wife also did a lot of work in Marathi literature, especially poetry. So we know that 150 years ago a couple was actually practicing Shudra literature very consciously. Those days there was no school of Dalit literature, but as we now look back and analyze can we not say the Phules' body of work would fit into a frame we can call Shudra Literature? And so I ask once again, is there not any other literature written that we can say it is by and about Shudras/OBCs?

Rajendra Yadav: They are a part of our system, they are a part of our society; they cannot be isolated ... they always had an interaction with us. So things didn't happen on their own for us. Let them interact with us. It has come, now whether we take it positively or negatively depends on our point of view. Whether they take it positively or negatively is up to them but they cannot escape our influence. We ...

Ivan Kostka: Who is "we"?

Rajendra Yadav: We are all those who are not Dalit ...

Ivan Kostka: But we are not talking about Dalits but Shudras.

Rajendra Yadav: Shudras were never segregated like the blacks in America ...

Ivan Kostka: But Phule identified Shudras with them when he titled his book "Slavery" and dedicated it to those Americans who helped liberate the blacks from slavery.

Sanjeev: It's very hard in our country. Shudra and Atishudra are all intermingled. We have said many times that it not very clear where the definition of Dalit ends. Then later somebody told us that those among Shudras who are untouchables would be Atishudras and those who are touchables would be Shudras. We posed this question

to Shudras as well. Gradation is there in the entire Hindu society. What is the jati of a Brahman? It is present in the jatis within castes. That's the fundamental thing that does not allow the caste system to be eliminated from India and because of that there does not emerge a clear path. But about this Shudra thing, we all are Shudras. All non-Brahmins are Shudras. In any case, there hasn't been a clear discourse on this. But a discussion and discourse like this must happen.

Ivan Kostka: *But should there be such a discussion – about OBC literature?*

Sanjeev: Definitely, there should be ... If not now then when?

Pramod Ranjan: *Sanjeev ji, perhaps, agrees that time for OBC literature to come into existence has arrived.*

Sanjeev: No, no, we have not said that. We have said that there hasn't been a classification like that till now. We have said that if it could be defined then Siddh literature and Sant literature belong there. A discussion on that should begin, this is what we believe.

Pramod Ranjan: *If you make a distinction between mainstream literature and literature of the Atishudras then Shudras just don't have a literature ...*

Rajendra Yadav: Pramod Ranjan ji, you've made up your mind that you will take our lives!

(All laugh)

(Forward Press, August and September 2011)

‘This is your time, not mine’

Amarendra Yadav

The death of Rajendra Yadav was a huge loss to the world of literature. The writer of short stories, novelist and also the editor of the literary magazine *Hans*, Yadav was one of the founders of the Nayi Kahani movement. Besides editing *Hans*, his participation in literary-cultural events in India and abroad and his insightful interventions in discourses on women and Dalits kept Yadav constantly in the limelight. The new generation of writers found in him a great friend and till he passed away, young authors pounced on an opportunity to interact with him. I was also one of them, and after I shifted base to Delhi, Rajendra Yadav was one of the first people I met. While pursuing a postgraduate degree in journalism in the capital, I worked for the Hindi daily *Lokmat Samachar*. Then, in 2013, I joined *FORWARD* Press and I got to meet Yadav many times. While these meetings were very formal, his easy-going nature allowed me to open up to him and, on occasions, even argue with him.

After going through the *FORWARD* Press Bahujan Literature Annual published in April 2013, many questions and doubts arose in my mind. Somehow, I felt that only Rajendra Yadav could answer my questions. My doubts mainly pertained to the concept of Bahujan literature as propounded by *FORWARD* Press. FP Editor-in-Chief Ivan Kostka and Consulting Editor Pramod Ranjan had already interviewed Yadav (see page 33). But I was not satisfied with his answers.

So, one morning, I reached the Daryaganj office of *Hans* to talk to him about OBC literature. After an exchange of pleasantries, the discussion began in earnest:

Sir, what is your view on OBC literature?

I don't think any concept of OBC literature exists or has come to the fore.

When you accept the existence of Dalit literature, why are you not ready to concede that there is also OBC literature?

Dalit literature is an expression of the pain of the sociopolitical realities of those communities.

You have turned Hans into a veritable platform for debate and discussion on Dalit literature. But you are depriving the OBCs of a similar right.

I have no hesitation in saying that in the last 25 years, the best stories written in the Hindi belt were published only in *Hans*. I am not given to unwarranted humility and I can proudly say that at least 80 per cent of the best Hindi stories were carried in *Hans*. If you consider *Hans* a platform for discourse and discussion on the contemporary literary scene, I have no problem. If you want a similar discourse and discussion to be launched vis-à-vis OBCs, first let me know what the concept of OBC is.

Sir, the Mandal Commission bunched together backward communities and named them Other Backward Classes. The people of these communities want to express their pain but you are opposing them. Listen, the first thing is that I am not opposing anything. Bhai, I am only saying that, first, let the OBCs put forth their views in a comprehensive manner. Let them bring forward their thinkers. When they have no thinkers, how can there be any thought?

You are also an OBC. Why did you not work in this direction?

See, I am telling you again. In my time, there was nothing like OBC literature. So how could I have worked on it?

If you are an OBC, why don't you want to call yourself an OBC writer?

I do not intend to confine myself to the limited circle of OBCs.

You talk about Dalit thinkers but you cannot see any thinker among the OBCs?

Dalits have Ambedkar, Achootanand and Phule. Whom do OBCs have?

But Phule came from OBCs ...

At that time, there was nothing like OBCs.

But today, OBCs do exist and you are one of them.

This is not my time. This is the time of people like you. What you will do now, will take you forward.

But you are not ready to provide a base to people like us.

In my time, there was no OBC discourse in literature. If you say there is such a discourse now, work on it.

Will you help us?

Once you've worked at it honestly and logically and put forward your thinkers, then, if you need my help at some point in time, let me know. I will help you.

But you are not helping us now.

Please try to understand what I am saying. In our times, literature was not partitioned in this manner. We fought for our identity within the literary mainstream. If you want to carve out a separate identity for yourself, go ahead, write on it. I am with you. I want to bring new thoughts to the fore. This is something new for me. If you succeed in your endeavour, we will see. We will give whatever help you require.

With these morale-boosting words, he made it clear that my time was up.

On 9 October 2013, when Navneet Yadav phoned from Katihar to inform me about Rajendra Yadav's death, it came as a big shock. For a moment it seemed as if my world had collapsed.

(Forward Press, May 2014)

Caste discourse in literature

Premkumar Mani

The recent discussion on OBC literature (OBCL) in *FORWARD* Press has compelled me to reflect upon the issue. I remember that in the 1970s there was a similar discussion within Marathi literature about Dalit literature (DL). I was young then. At that time I also wrote an article on this topic, that is, DL, which was carried in various journals and magazines. In 1975 we also organized a seminar on DL in Patna, in which many of the renowned Marathi Dalit writers participated.

In Hindi, the discussion on DL gathered pace after 1980. When caste discourse began in politics, after the Mandal movement in 1990, this discourse in literature became increasingly prominent.

There has been a long tradition of ideological movements in Marathi society. In modern times, we had Tilak-Savarkarites on the one hand and Phule-Ambedkarites on the other. DL was proposed by the Phule-Ambedkarite faction and it made it clear that till that time literature had been written with an implicit acceptance of casteist discourse; and that it rejected it. It said that they would highlight greater freedom, spontaneity and humanity.

The era in which DL was proposed was an era of the rise of progressive and modernist discourse in Indian literature. The progressive part was under the influence of the Marxists and the modernists were talking about post-Marxist discourse. But it must be noted that both these parties did not influence Dalit writers.

What were the reasons? Marxists and post-Marxists could not sever ties with their Tilak-Savarkarite background. As a result, both progressives and modernists started searching for their roots in nationality. For convenience sake, I would cite the example of Hindi literature. Here Ram Vilas Sharma was looking for his nationality by researching into 1857 and “Indian Renaissance”, while Ajneya and Nirmal Verma were searching for the self in Jai Janaki Jeevan Yatra and the Kumbha Mela respectively. The truth is that there is fundamental unity in both these parties and they share a common background.

The unity between Marxists and Phule-Ambedkarites would have been natural. But the Marxists – and more than them, the post-Marxists – were found leaning towards Tilak-Savarkarism. One can see a huge influence of Tilak-Savarkarism in Hindi. Ramchandra Shukla is noth-

ing but the literary avatar of Tilak. Ram Vilas Sharma gave a Marxist guise to Savarkarism. But Phule-Ambedkarites very honestly continued to postpone a communion with Marxism. The established ideologies of Marxism constantly ignored the Phule-Ambedkarites. As a result, both followed two separate directions. That was unfortunate.

Marx and Ambedkar agreed on almost all things except one. This was a fundamental difference but the elements of unity are aplenty. Marx believed that material or economic causes were responsible for a man's fate. If economic deprivation of a man is eliminated, he can acquire everything else pretty much automatically. For Marx, exploitation meant economic exploitation; and, liberation meant economic liberation. A liberated man then would not be subject to exploitation in any way. Ambedkar believed it wasn't so. The primary issue is dignity. When a man obtains dignity (respect), he also receives everything else – including economic freedom. This is all the difference between Marx and Ambedkar. This is the element that must be used when one explains history. Marx said that Hegelian philosophy was standing on its head and he put it back on its feet. Ambedkar could have said that Marxism was lying on its stomach and he truly put it on its feet. In fact, there's an interrelation between nationalism and dignity. After all, nationalism is nothing but an extended sense of dignity. When the Indian middle class was fighting against the British rule, it was, in effect, fighting for a collective dignity. Ambedkar's struggle was for a comprehensive dignity. The discourse he presents through his writings shows that instead of merely political liberation, he believed in a total or a complete liberation. The fact that in his last days he joined a religious movement, demonstrates this mindset.

But unfortunately, the Dalit movement inspired by Phule-Ambedkarism when it reached Hindi was reduced to a Scheduled Caste movement and literature marked as Dalit literature was turned into Scheduled Caste literature. Who is responsible, where were the shortcomings, these are topics for research. But the truth is that DL that emerged in opposition to parochialism is now surrounded with much greater parochialism. It is one thing to advocate caste discourse and social discourse in literature and quite another to establish a new form of casteism. The upper-caste critics have played a big role in presenting it in this manner. Overall, they have established DL in the manner of a separate "cell", similar to caste-based ghettos in Indian villages where in southernmost part one finds ghettos of

the Dalit castes. In the same way DL is reduced to merely being an appendix to the body of Hindi literature.

But what will this OBCL do? Does this movement, which wants to make caste and not ideas as the basis to stand upon, wish to come up as another parochial discourse? In the upper-caste-dominated political parties in North India we find Dalit and OBC cells. Now we even have MBC cells. So will OBCL become a new cells?

If OBCL has a distinct ideology then it must be made clear or else it will hardly be wise to set up a new sect in the name of caste? DL was accompanied by an ideology – Phule-Ambedkarism. The goals were big. There was a scope about it. When in 1975 I organized the seminar on DL, besides Baburao Bagul, Daya Pawar, Arjun Dangle and Satish Kalsekar, P. S. Nerurkar was also present. Nerurkar was a Brahmin by birth but a respected writer of Dalit literature. If we look into the Sanskrit literature, we will find Kalidas from the Kurubs (a Backward caste) writes in support of the caste order, where as Ashwaghosh, who comes from a Brahmin family, writes Buddhacharita and Vajrasuchi and opposes it. In modern Hindi literature, there's a long tradition of writers like Rahul Sankrityayan, Prem Chand, Rangey Raghav, Muktibodh who raised a voice against the caste order. But it was clear to all what Jaishankar Prasad and Maithilisharan Gupta, who belonged to non-upper-caste sections, were doing. We can easily understand what kind of mindset was at work when Shudra Chandragupta was turned into a Kshatritya.

It's not a question of caste but of ideology. Don't look at it like reservations in jobs. Before thinking about literature try and mould yourself accordingly. Yes, I have no problem in admitting that the parochial thinking of DL is active behind whatever is being said about OBCL today. It is better to sit together and clear it all through dialogue and discussion.

(Forward Press, November 2011)

Deliberation on OBC literature

Bajrang Bihari Tiwari

As a curious student, I have been following the debate initiated by *FORWARD* Press – ‘By and For India’s Aspiring Millions’ – on Bahujan/OBC literature. I never found myself competent enough and in the position to comment on it in writing. The much-talked-about April 2012 Literary Annual on Bahujan literature is before me and I have garnered the courage to give my very brief reaction to the debate.

As far as I know, till date, no philosophy of Bahujan literature has been proposed. *FORWARD* Press has fulfilled a historic responsibility by taking a lead in this respect. According to the magazine, Bahujan literature is inclusive of Dalit-Tribal-Women literature. Here comes in a poser for the litterateurs representing these identities. Would they like to be seen under the Bahujan umbrella? Won’t they be apprehensive that the late-awakeners in the field of literature – the OBC writers – want to position themselves as the leaders? There was a time when Dalit literature was defined in a way that made it inclusive of all identities but later, Dalit litterateurs (especially Hindi ones) themselves confined it to those born into the Scheduled Castes.

In his introduction to Bahujan literary criticism, Pramod Ranjan has put every desirable goodness into it. May all these desires be fulfilled! If that becomes a reality, Bahujan literature will definitely be the literature of the future. Pramod Ranjan has chosen his “favourite” story-writer Sanjay Kundan for analysing the dwija literature. Choice has its own politics; and compatibility, its own arguments. Had he wanted, he could have chosen any other writer with a similar social background as Sanjay Kundan. Then, does Kundan have only one identity? Are things like his economic status, ancestral profession (all Brahmins are not priests), educational status, the region from where he comes, his urban or rural background of no consequence at all? The problem with identity-centered thinking is that it disregards the process of synthesis. It sees individuals, thoughts and situations only in black and white. This is its strength too. Synthesis is the anti-thesis of identity-based thought process.

Be that as it may, Sanjay Kundan and his admirers will be glad that he (Kundan) has been chosen as a representative of the twice-born community. Bhalchandra Joshi, Pramod Bhargav or Devendra

Pathak could have been chosen as well. But then, the purpose would not have been served as the writings of these litterateurs are centered on the Dalit-Tribal life. Rajendra Prasad Singh is an acknowledged theoretician of “OBC literature”. He is also a linguist. Whatever little I have read him has only whetted my appetite for his writings. He digs out facts with great diligence and presents to his readers pieces of startling information. For instance, his caste-oriented commentary on Tar Saptak of Ajneya “who has the status of a Brahmin” and the rise of Nai Kavita movement of Kayasthas as a reaction. Rajendra Singh concludes that these poetic movements were caste-based.

Rajendra Prasad Singh, in fact, enjoys the same status in OBC literature as Dr Dharmveer in Dalit literature. Both are obsessed with brahmanical values. Both the theoreticians believe in “revelatory” criticism and both harbour hatred for Communist ideology. Rajendra Prasad Singh, in his article in the April 2012 issue, had described Marxian criticism as “sheer dishonesty”. Since for him, blood is the sole determinant, it is natural that he reaches the conclusion that the writer of a particular caste can be correctly evaluated only by a critic of the same caste. Rajendra ji has criticized Acharya Ramchandra Shukla for linking poetry with the “freedom of mind”. According to him, “besides identity, Bahujan literature is an exercise for freedom from hunger”. According to him, the biggest weakness of the literary historiography of Hindi is that the caste of the writer is not mentioned along with his name. If he wants, he can treat Ramchandra Shukla as his ideal because he (Ramchandra Shukla) has paid due attention to this expectation.

Premkumar Mani found it necessary to denigrate Premchand in order to establish the importance of OBC writer Renu. He proffers the argument that only an OBC critic can explore the soul of an OBC writer. Premchand’s village is “artificial”, “has been viewed from a distance” (from how far is not clear), whereas Renu’s village is “not artificial, it is real” (see page 95).

Supposing Renu and Premchand had been born in each other’s caste, then, how would Premkumar Mani have evaluated them? The OBC identity does not seem to be interested in banishing varna and caste from the social space. However, it does create hurdles in the path to freedom of man. We should learn from these hurdles and move on.

(Forward Press, August 2012)

The decline of Hindi criticism

Premkumar Mani

On many an occasion, I have been very disappointed by the way the Hindi professors and critics engage in literary discourse. I have often felt that they are not ready to change themselves. All fields of human knowledge are witnessing great changes. New dimensions of debate and discourse are emerging with great rapidity in disciplines such as history, economics, sociology, political science, science and even spiritualism. But the Hindi litterateurs seem to have built a wall around themselves. They are neither ready to breach the wall themselves nor willing to allow anyone from the outside to do so.

I am saying this in the context of a literary comment of mine (see page 95) and the counter-comments by at least two Hindi critics (Dr. Namvar Singh and Bajrang Bihari Tiwari) on it. Commenting on Hindi novelist Phanishwarnath Renu, I wrote, "The village of Premchand's *Godan* has been viewed from a distance. Renu has experienced the village. His village is not artificial. It is real."

What I meant to say can be gauged very well by reading the article in its entirety. But there is no doubt that the village described in Renu's *Maila Aanchal* appears to be more real than the village of *Godan*. The same, however, cannot be said of the village in another of Renu's novels, *Parti Parikatha*. To see and to experience are two entirely different things and when I say artificial, I do not mean that it does not reflect reality at all. Paper flowers do look like flowers from a distance but they are not flowers. I stand by my comment. My comment is based on facts and anyone can see and comprehend it. Reading only *Godan* will not suffice if one wants to understand the Indian village of today. One will have to read *Maila Aanchal* and *Ragdarbari*. The description of *Godan*'s village provides only an overview of the caste system while the *Maila Aanchal* delineates the caste system in detail. Without understanding the caste system, one cannot have a comprehensive view of the Indian village. Renu has taken pains to understand the village society, woven with the threads of caste.

Marx said that oriental despotism was founded on the village and its simple system of production was responsible for its backward-

ness. The advent of modernity is not possible without destroying it. Dr Ambedkar also said the same thing. Renu does not contradict this proposition but he suggests some amendments. Renu pleads for bringing to the fore, the elements of democracy and modernity that inform the rural set-up. He believes that democracy can spread only by associating the village with the process. This is a view which not only distinguishes Renu from Premchand but even puts him ahead of the latter, especially with regard to discourse on the village. But some readers of my comment felt that I am putting Premchand on a lower pedestal than Renu. Premchand has his own place and Renu his own. But, if, on some issues, we do a comparative study the two, it surely does not amount to the contempt of the great writer.

I was surprised to read what respected Namvar ji said, when asked about my comment. Talking to a magazine (Interview by Swatantra Mishra, *Tehelka Hindi*, 15 August 2012), he said that Premchand and Renu should not be compared as they belonged to different times.

Premchand wrote in the days of the freedom struggle and the corpus of his writings was much bigger than that of Renu.

Namvar ji is great. He is worthy of being worshipped. But I cannot agree with this comment. Going by what he says, no comparison can be made between Kalidas and Ashwaghosh. They were separated by several centuries. And Ashwaghosh has written much less than Kalidas. Ideologically, I find myself closer to Ashwaghosh (Ashwaghosh was opposed to the varna system while Kalidas was its proponent). But as a litterateur-artiste, I undoubtedly rank Kalidas much higher.

Namvar ji could have, at least, learnt from his guru, Dwivedi ji. In his book *Kabir*, he has given a comparative study of the poetry of Kabir and Rabindra. Didn't these poets belong to different ages? If Kabir is great, so is Rabindra. One can easily detect the influence of Kabir on the poetry of Rabindra. And this only adds to the stature of Kabir. This is a dialectical relationship in which a later writer imbibes the writings of the earlier one and proceeds ahead.

Renu broke the inertia that had gripped the field of the Hindi novel after Premchand. And it is not I who am saying this. It was eminent critic Nalin Vilochan Sharma who pointed this out. Writing about *Maila Aanchal*, he said, "This novel broke the deadlock in the field of Hindi novel." When deadlocks are broken, new traditions

come into being. Renu is an extension of Premchand. To cite an example from Hindi mythology, Renu and Premchand are somewhat like Rama and Krishna. Rama was not a complete incarnation, only Krishna can be described as such.

As for the comment of Bajrang Bihari Tiwari (Forward Press, August 2012) it is objectionable and indecent. He sees me as being casteist. I will only like to say that I have never had a casteist outlook. Discussing the caste system is one thing and being a casteist is another. I would request Tiwari to first shed his narrow thinking and only then enter into a dialogue with me.

The Brahmanical approach towards discourse is unscientific. It tells us that once there was 'Satyug' and the present age is 'Kalyug'. Brahmanism believes in movement from good towards evil. It does not believe in progress; it believes in decline. Earlier, everything was good; now everything is bad. Earlier, 'Devbhasha' Sanskrit ruled the roost; later came people's languages; earlier, it was the age of the gods; now it is age of the lesser human beings.

Science says that the world has moved from the simple towards the complex – from among unicellular organisms emerged multicellular ones. The people's languages came first; they were refined by the elite to build their own language. The earlier times were worse; the present times are better. This is progress.

Literature too has progressed. In Hindi, it began from Bhartendu and progressing from Premchand to Jainendra to Agyeya came to Renu and then moved ahead. Bhartendu was a milestone and so were Premchand and Renu. Renu got acceptability only because he rejected Premchand at several levels. In the fields of literature and culture, progress is the buzzword; decline is never underlined. The transition is not from bad to good but from good to better. A particular model of a watch retains its currency only until a new, better-designed watch replaces it. If the new does not have any substance, it won't be able to replace the old. Kalidas said that the importance of a thing does not lie in it being old or new; it lies in its qualities. Sometimes, in his newer writings, a writer himself rejects his older thoughts. Just as Sharatchandra rejected 'Patherdasi' in 'Shesh-prashna'. Progress should be understood in these terms. The son is a progression on his father, a disciple on his mentor. There is a Sanskrit maxim which says that great is a father who loses to his son and great is a mentor who is vanquished by his disciple.

A believer in degeneration, as he is, Tiwari felt that I have conferred greatness on Renu and have affronted Premchand. If there was anything worth affronting in Premchand, I would not have hesitated a moment to do so. (I have bitterly criticised Tulsi, who predates Premchand.) But Premchand is very dear to me. His words and his imagery resound in my mind. Even for Renu, Premchand was as great as for anyone else. Since there was Premchand, Renu could take his writings and his discourse on the village ahead. Premchand is a point of departure in Hindi literature and the point of departure will always continue to be important. But some people want to stay put at the point of departure. I do not intend to be one of them, for that would be an insult to Premchand.

(Forward Press, October 2012)

How relevant is the concept of OBC literature?

Virendra Yadav

To imagine the concept of OBC literature in the manner of Dalit literature is a disputed and dangerous exercise. Especially, when keeping it separate from the social, cultural and economic circumstances of the OBC society, one limits it to the identity of a particular caste group. Caste-based prejudices become evident when one microscopically searches for “OBC” elements in the writings of Bhar-tendu, Maithilisharan Gupt and Jaishankar Prasad but ignores literature by writers from the non-backward sections in which the labouring backward classes and the marginalized sections of society occupy a central place. If one is searching for the labouring tradition of the backward community against the dominant elitist literary tradition then should that search be based on the subject matter of literature or on the caste of the writer?

In 1936, while presiding over the founding ceremony of the Progressive Writers Association in Lucknow, Premchand had appealed to the writers, “It is our duty to support the Dalit, the oppressed, the deprived, whether it is an individual or a group.” Before asking the other writers to do so, Premchand had himself given central place to Dalits, backwards and the marginalized in his literature. Not only that, he had made a call to change the aesthetic criteria of literature and thus challenged the brahmanical organization of Indian society. Premchand clearly believed that, “Our Swarajya [Independence] consists not only in freeing ourselves from the yoke of foreign domination but also from that social yoke, from that hypocritical yoke that is much more fatal than the foreign rule.” In saying this, Premchand was standing on that same ideological ground that was occupied by Jotirao Phule and Dr Ambedkar because they too did not consider slavery of Brahmanism any less than British imperialism.

Shankar, the Kurmi, in Premchand’s short story “Sava Ser Gehun” and Rajdhan, the Ahir, in his “Baba ji ka Bhog” were oppressed not by British imperialism but by varnashrama-based Brahmanism. *Godan*’s Hori too came from the backward community Kurmi, not from any upper caste. In Premchand, this choice of char-

acters from backward communities was not incidental; it was a result of uncovering that feudal varnashrama-based power structure that was at the root of their exploitation. In his entire oeuvre, Premchand has presented a counter-discourse to the roots, the conventions and the past-oriented glorification of the varnashram-based Hindutva. This is the reason that Premchand's brahmanical contemporaries called him a "prophet of hatred" and even a top critic like Ramchandra Shukla tried to diminish his stature by calling him a "social reformer" and a "propagandist".

In the same manner as Premchand, many other writers from non-Shudra and upper-caste backgrounds, freeing themselves from varna and class, have made farmers, Dalits, women and other labouring communities the subject of their creativity. Foremost among such were writers like Nirala, Rahul Sankrityayan, Pandey Bechan "Ugra", Vrindavan Lal Verma, Nagarjun, Rangey Raghav and Yashpal. It was because of his commitment to the labouring communities that Nirala could write:

*Today the mansions of the rich/Will be schools for the farmers
Dhobi, Passi, Chamar, Teli/Will unlock the darkness
Will read a lesson, spread the mat*

And it was because of this Nirala was traumatized as an "untouchable among Brahmins". In all his works, Rahul Sankrityayan presented the historical and contemporary perspective of the socio-economic exploitation of Dalits and backward castes. Rahul Sankrityayan concluded that "India lived in the greatest of hells, because it suffered slavery of foreign as well as home-grown leeches." On the one hand, he fashioned a discourse on social slavery through the life struggles of an Ahir woman Satmi in his short story "Satmi ke Bacche" (Satmi's Children) and, on the other, in stories like "Rekha Bhagat" he constructed a narrative of resistant consciousness of the backward community against the awful oppression of the landlords.

It was because of his committed social vision that Rahul Sankrityayan could underline the presence of resistant consciousness in the backward community. And because of this same vision he was also able to puncture the myth of the "First War of Independence of 1857" in which Dalits and backwards were prevented from fighting shoulder to shoulder with the upper castes. In his story "Kanaila ki Katha", while discussing "1857", he says, "How could the high caste

and low caste fight in the same line?” Exposing the caste-based discrimination, Rahul Sankrityayan deconstructs the power structure of the crusade of “1857” in which Dalits and Shudra castes did not play any decisive role and which, ultimately, was merely a result of clashing of interests of British power and local feudal elite.

Like Premchand, Nirala and Rahul Sankrityayan, Pandey Bechan Sharma “Ugra” and Rangey Raghav wrote many short stories such as “Budhua ki Beti” and “Gadal” respectively and thus gave literary prominence to the margins of the society. In this context Nagarjuna’s novel *Balchanma* is considered a sociological document. The protagonist Balchandra (Balchanma) is a Gop (Ahir) by caste. The fact to be noted here is that all the works mentioned above, including *Balchanma*, had been written before Renu came out with his *Maila Aanchal*.

What should be the background (or prologue) of OBC literature? This is an issue one must ponder. If writers like Bhartendu and Maithilisharan Gupt are assessed, they will be found to be supporters of Hindutva and sustainers of the chaturvarna system that lays the foundation for the exploitation of backward and labouring communities. Sublimating the Hindu traditions and past, Bhartendu tries to seek the reason for India’s wretchedness, and naturally ends up denouncing the Muslim religion and neglecting Dalit and labouring castes. In the pages of *Harishchandra Magazine* and *Kavi Vachan Sudha*, the two magazines Bhartendu edited one can see an aloofness towards Dalits and the Backwards as well as several instances of elitist pronouncements. Vasudha Dalmia has done an extensive analysis of this subject in her book *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*.

It is actually ironic that one is looking for a tradition of OBC literature in Maithilisharan Gupt who in *Bharat Bharati* considered patriotism to be synonymous with Hindutva and expressed deep concern at the decline of the chaturvarna system. In this regard, the following lines from *Bharat Bharati* can be considered:

*Brahminhood, royalty and Vaishyahood, all is destroyed
Shudrahood and animalhood as waster remains, how sad*

His Hindutva includes a sense of triumph in the face of Buddhist decline:

*Even though Sanatan Dharma was ultimately triumphant
Lord Shankara chased away horrific Buddhist illusions*

How can Maithilisharan Gupt, who considers Buddhism to be a “horrific illusion” and laments the decline of the varnashrama system, be the high priest of the literary legacy of the labouring OBC community? So while shaping the theory of OBC literature, why do those who, on humanistic grounds, consider Jaishankar Prasad’s *Kamayani* ignore tales of struggle of the backward communities as found in works like *Godan* and *Balachnama*?

When Premchand spoke about changing the “criteria of aesthetics”, he wanted to liberate the mainstream in Hindi literature from elitism and place the consciousness of labour in the centre. The campaign of freeing oneself from jati and varna and thus making a literary intervention began with Premchand’s generation. As a result of this campaign, despite being born in an elite Ashraf Sayed family, Rahi Masoom Raza could write a novel like *Aadha Gaon* (Half a Village) in which OBCs like weavers and Ahirs, from both Hindu and Muslim communities, are in the forefront.

Writers like Maitreyi Pushpa, Virendra Jain, Abdul Bismillah, Sanjeev, Shiv Murti, Bhagwan Das Bhorwal, Chandra Kishore Jaiswal and Ramdhari Singh Diwakar are strong links in this very tradition. Should novels like Maitreyi Pushpa’s *Idannammam* and Virendra Jain’s *Doob* be ignored merely because they have been written by a Brahmin and a Jain, respectively?

Here, one must also note that despite their OBC caste background, writers like Sanjeev, Shiv Murti, Chandra Kishore Jaiswal, Madhukar Singh, Premkumar Mani, Bhagwan Das Bhorwal, Dinesh Kushwaha and Subash Chandra Kushwaha belong to the mainstream Hindi literature. Through their literary campaigns they are enriching mainstream literature with the questions and militant consciousness of Bahujan society. To limit these writers to an OBC category would amount to surrendering mainstream Hindi literature to elitist concerns. When the elitist mechanism of literature is preparing to banish Premchand’s “Hori” from the centre of literature and bring Ajneya’s “Shekhar” in its place, any kind of literary division on the basis of caste will be suicidal and regressive.

Leading Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav is the prime example of how caste cannot be the decisive criterion in literature. Despite supporting marginalized sections and Dalit discourse, Rajendra Yadav has admitted that all his literary writings are steeped in the concerns of the middle class. He had once talked about disowning it. Now if

caste is considered a criterion in literature, wouldn't one need to work quite as hard to establish Rajendra Yadav's literary writings as OBC literature as in case of Bhartendu, Maithilisharan Gupta and Jaishankar Prasad.

While working hard on shaping the theory of OBC literature, those who are reminded of Gandhi because of his Bania background must not, however, forget that all his life he remained a staunch supporter of the varnashrama system and Hindutva was a point of departure in his thinking. Yes, in this regard, it is natural for Dr Ram Manohar Lohia to come to mind as someone who did provide a positive direction to the political thinking of OBCs. But, in effect, it is ironical that Lohia, who paved a way for OBC politics, had literary followers who, by starting a literary institution like Parimal in the name of opposing the left, only strengthened the bastion of "aestheticism" in literature. It is not surprising that Lohia devotees like Dr Dharamveer Bharati, Vijay Dev Narayan Sahi, Dr Raghuvansh, Keshav Chandra Verma, Dr Laxmikant Verma and Dr Jagdish Gupta were forming a clique/faction with Ajneya all their lives. Hence, seeking a meaningful role of the literary version of Lohiaism in determining the theory of OBC literature will only make Bahujan literature toothless.

What is needed today is to give the central place in our literature to anti-varnashrama and anti-brahmanical thinking as well as to the struggles, dreams and ideals of Bahujan society as found in social thinkers like Kabir, Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar – not the creation of a separate clan in literature on the basis of caste. When the mainstream of literature is trying to connect with the concerns of the Bahujan society, any concept of OBC literature is neither required nor relevant.

(Forward Press, April 2012)

Literature and power

Hare Ram Singh

In a conversation with FORWARD Press (see page 33), Rajendra Yadav, talking about Hindi literature, said that the entire literature (barring Dalit literature) was brahmanical; even though at first glance, it may not appear to be so, its framework was brahmanical. This, he said, was true of even Phanishwarnath Renu's *Maila Aanchal*! Rajendra ji added, "History belongs to those who can take their life's decisions themselves." Then, presenting himself as different from Dalit literature and litterateurs, he said, "This is inappropriate power, rejecting of half of the humanity. They don't have aesthetics; they do not have the way of saying things. Then I question myself, if this egotism – to judge things, to pass a judgment – is not what we have inherited as a part of our sanskaras, our belief system. We are part of that power that determines things, and that's why we say they are not aesthetic. It's possible that their art is different from ours or they may reject their own. At the moment we are rejecting it, aren't we?"

This interview of a Dalitbahujan supporter like Rajendra ji raises many questions. For instance: If the corpus of Hindi literature, which does not fall within the ambit of Dalit literature, is brahmanical or at least its framework is brahmanical then today, is it necessary that we (OBC) continue with their framework or identify ourselves as part of it? Is Phanishwarnath Renu's *Maila Aanchal* really cast within the brahmanical framework? Isn't *Maila Aanchal* different from brahmanical literature in many ways?

Rajendra Yadav said that history belonged to those who take their life's decisions themselves. So, if the OBCs take their own decisions in the field of literature or underline the separateness of OBC literature or mould its principles, then what is wrong with that? When they (Savarnas and Dalits) are taking their decisions in the field of literature themselves, then don't the OBCs have the right to take their own decisions, decide things themselves, judge and pass judgments? When half of India's population is made up of OBCs then why can't they have their own literature? In the past and also in the present? Rajendra Yadav says that "We are part of that power that determines things", then can we accept that we (OBC) are actually

a part of the power that decides things?

Echoing Rajendra Yadav's views, Virendra Yadav wrote in *FORWARD* Press (see page 55), "To imagine the concept of OBC literature in the manner of Dalit literature is a disputed and dangerous exercise. Especially, when keeping it separate from the social, cultural and economic circumstances of the OBC society, one limits it to the identity of a particular caste group. If one is searching for the labouring tradition of the backward community against the dominant elitist literary tradition then should that search be based on the subject matter of literature or on the caste of the writer?"

Why are Hindi intellectuals so meek? The history of Hindi literature of the last one century shows that the debating space has been shrinking because of the tendency of not taking risks, not entering an area where there are pitfalls. It is time which has given birth to OBC literature and by blocking its way, we are only stopping the growth and development of Hindi literature and that is because we are suffering the "arrogance" of the Savarna mindset. Viewing OBC literature from the angle of subject-matter and class are two very different things. How can Virendra Yadav forecast that the identity of the OBC literature will remain limited to a particular caste? Is the term OBC caste-specific? Is it not the name of an Indian class? Does OBC mean anything other than backward classes?

Will the progressiveness of Premchand, Rahul Sankrityayan, Pandit Bechain Sharma "Ugra", Rangeya Raghav, Nagarjun, Dr Dharmaveer Bharati, Dr Laxmikant Verma and Rahi Masoom Raza alone suffice to create a literary history of the progressiveness and hard work of the backwards? Should they (OBC) leave their life, history and literature to the decisions of these gentlemen?

The literature of Rajendra Yadav and Virendra Yadav belongs to everyone. But OBC have given birth to them and to their literature. Hundreds of millions of people have played a role in developing their caste consciousness. Marxist critic Dr Lallan Prasad Singh, while speaking in BHU, had stated that the aesthetics of OBC literature was based on Marxism and Kabir, Jotiba Phule, Marx and Budha were at its centre. By linking OBC literature with caste, Virendra Yadav has tried to confine its expansiveness. The attitude of Virendra ji to Dalit-OBC relations is not clear.

Can Rajendra Yadav tell us why most of the recipients of Sahitya Akademi awards (Hindi) and Jnanpeeth awards (Hindi) were Brah-

mins or Savarnas? Can he tell us why no extensive work was ever undertaken on the history of Kumhar, Nishad, Cheri, Kharwaar, Koeri and Ahir? Rajendra Yadav and Virendra Yadav, please remember your own words: “Literature will be of those who hold power or of those who are subservient to power?” We have to decide where we stand.

(Forward Press, July 2012)

OBC heroes developed Dalit consciousness

Chauthiram Yadav

OBC heroes have played a key role in all the cultural movements launched in our country. It would be patently unjust to deny their role in reforming and changing Indian society. Dr Ambedkar was both the spokesperson and the pillar of the Bahujan communities. The OBC heroes before Ambedkar began by dismantling religious domination through Dalit movements. At that time, the brahmanical system, with its notions of caste and religious superiority, was in place. Hence, socio-economic and religious inequality was pervasive. The OBC heroes raised their voice against Brahmanism and feudalism to end this inequality. They also targeted the feudal system because it was the patron-in-chief of Brahmanism and social inequality could not have been removed without breaking the back of the feudal order. Brahmanism not only supported the Varna system but propounded the superiority of one man over another – it separated man from man. That is why a comprehensive movement against religious, social and economic exploitation was needed to annihilate Brahmanism.

There are political movements and there are cultural movements. Many OBC heroes launched cultural movements at different times. They included Shahuji Maharaj, Periyar and others. Dr Ambedkar launched a political movement all over the country. Ambedkar's movement had a deep and abiding impact in Uttar Pradesh. Initially, it was the OBC heroes who promoted Dalit movements and Dalit literature. At the national level, Jotiba Phule was an OBC and so was Periyar. In North India, Lalai Singh Yadav and Ramswaroop Verma were strong advocates of the Dalit movement. They launched pro-Dalit movements and took them forward. They also wrote plays about Dalits, their problems and their status in society. It is surprising that while the Dalits acknowledge their contribution, the OBCs don't. They don't even know about the books of Ramswaroop Verma or Lalai Singh Yadav. Lalai Singh Yadav wrote five plays, of which *Shambuk Vadh* and *Eklavya* are very famous. Thus they carried on a long agitation against the system of dominance. Lalu Prasad Yadav, Mulayam Singh and Mayawati took this movement forward but later

they fell into the trap of power politics. Grabbing power became their sole objective and they did not work for bringing about social change.

Cultural movements develop the art, literature and culture of a community. A cultural movement is very important for the Dalits and the Backwards because cultural backwardness is the biggest impediment to their progress, hence the need for launching a wide and comprehensive cultural movement.

The contribution of Jotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule towards wiping out socio-economic inequality can never be forgotten. Jotiba Phule wrote a book on social inequality titled *Gulamgiri*. This book, which has been translated into English, dwells on the struggle against Brahmanism and women's education. Phule gave voice to the farmers, farm labourers, the oppressed, the Dalits and the exploited. The seminal contribution of the Phule couple in the field of women's education can be gauged by the fact that they opened the first school for women in Maharashtra, which was also the first such school in India. The savarnas went hammer and tongs against the Phule couple's attempts to educate women. The savarnas did not educate their women. In fact, the savarna women were worse off than Dalits – they were Mahadalits. Till 100-150 years ago, they could not even step out of their homes. It required great courage to establish a school for educating women in those times. Savitribai was the first woman who went outdoors to teach. When she left her home for her school, she would always carry a change of sari with her, as on the way, those opposed to her initiative hurled stones and cow dung at her and taunted her with vulgar comments. But she did not give up. What is astonishing is that the savarnas have never rated the work of the Phule couple in the field of education, especially women's education, as highly as Raja Rammohan Roy's. This, despite the fact that by the time Raja Rammohan Roy appeared on the scene, the reach of education had expanded considerably. There is no denying the fact that the struggle of the Phule couple laid the foundation of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra.

In south India, Erode Venkata Naikar Ramasamy Periyar was the messiah of the Dalits. He launched a powerful movement against Brahmanism. He fought to get Dalits access to temples. When Periyar launched his movement, the Dalits were not even allowed to walk on the streets skirting temples, let alone enter them. The Dalits were worse off than animals. Although at the instance of some Congress leaders, Periyar agreed to lead the Vaikom movement, he became disillusioned

with the Congress after he saw how its Brahmin trainers treated non-Brahmin trainees at the party camps. He proposed to the Congress leaders that they demand reservations for Dalits. However, his proposal was turned down and he quit the Congress. Subsequently, brahmanical thinkers launched an agitation against Periyar. Mahatma Gandhi asked the opponents of Periyar to allow Dalits to walk on roads near the temples or else face a massive and aggressive movement led by him for opening temple doors to Dalits. As the backward-Dalit communities were increasingly siding with Periyar, the credibility of the Congress hit a low. Gandhi was not with Periyar. He was only worried about the ground beneath Congress' feet slipping away.

Similarly, Sahuji Maharaj, the ruler of Kolhapur who hailed from a backward community, proved to be a great hero of the Dalits. He was the first ruler to grant 51 per cent reservations in jobs for the Dalits-Backwards, thus paving the way for the establishment of an equitable society. He can well be described as the progenitor of reservations for the Dalits and Backwards in India. He also launched path-breaking initiatives for women's education and took several other progressive steps. He gave the poor, the farmers and the oppressed an opportunity to partner in administration. Shahuji Maharaj was a diehard advocate of proportional representation in governance, administration, land ownership, wealth, education and culture. His slogan was "Jiski jitni sankhya bhaari, uski utni hissedari, jitni jiski hissedari, utni uski bhagidari, jiski jitni bhagidari, uski utni zimmedari" (The bigger the number, the greater the share; greater the share, greater the partnership; greater the partnership, greater the responsibility).

As for the OBC heroes not getting their due place in Indian society, literature and academics, we need to understand that there is no academic centre of OBCs, although ideologically committed OBCs are present in every field today. Rajendra Yadav was the first to raise the issue of OBCs being pushed to the margins in the literary world. Many have started initiatives in this direction now.

(The article is based on a conversation that Prema Negi had with well-known critic Chauthiram Yadav.)

(Forward Press, May 2014)

OBC literature has the widest range

Harinarayan Thakur

Free trade and free communication as a result of globalization has brought about economic liberalization in the world. It has also widened the fields of culture and literature and made them more liberal. Globalization may have its limitations but its liberalizing effect does tend to place at the centre that what was in the margins. The communications revolution has accentuated this process. The advocates of globalization argue that just as when a dam is breached, its water attains the sea level, similarly free trade and free markets will lead to the flow of capital and money from the rich nations to the poor and the developing ones, thus reducing poverty and increase equality. The same is true of emotions and thoughts. You may choose to disagree but the fact is that African American literature had an impact on Marathi literature and that in turn led to the emergence of Dalit literature in Hindi. In a country of bewildering diversity like India, transnational corporations and private industrial houses will have to give opportunities to the deprived and backward sections just as is being done in America, Australia and the European countries. In India, so far, democracy has been confined to the political arena. Social and economic democracy is still a far cry. That is why India has been witnessing clashes of identities. These clashes and social churning have given rise to many a cultural and given social discourse. Dalit, women's, Tribal, Muslim, Christian, immigrants' and numerous other discourses have emerged. Among them is the OBC or Shudra literary discourse. The range of this discourse is the widest among all of them.

Identity-based literature

Dalit literature is the one in which Dalits are the heroes. Women's discourse is the one that is led by women. And that is true of Tribal, minorities', immigrants' and all other discourses. The sufferings these sections have gone through have given them the right to take centre stage. But then, isn't the same true of OBC literature or the literature of the Backwards and Untouchables – whom Phule described as the Shudras and the Ati-shudras respectively? The literature in which a hero of the backward class overcomes all odds to set new standards is OBC or Shudra Literature.

Seen from this angle, there is no dearth of OBC heroes in literature, culture, society and politics. Their heroism was never viewed in literature the same way as other discourses on the margins saw their heroes. But can heroism or securing victory somehow be the sole identifier of OBC literature? Shouldn't it be backed by a set of principles, an ideology?

Politics and sociology of OBC literature

OBCs or the Backwards are not a caste but a class defined by the Constitution that includes hundreds of Hindu and Muslim castes, besides castes of other minority communities. These communities have been given reservations in different states on the basis of their socio-economic and educational status in those states as assessed by the Mandal Commission. They include castes such as Nai, Kahar, Kumhar, Kanu, Kunjra, Kabari, Mallah, Tanti, Nat, Banjara, Julaha, Dhobhi, Dhankaar, Lohaar and hundreds of other toiling castes and even Muslims who are worse off than the Dalits. It is true that the Dalits were considered Untouchables and the savarnas despised them. For centuries, they faced humiliation, exploitation and oppression born out of the varna system. But the members of the backward classes were in direct contact with the savarna society. They served them as serfs and labourers, and faced atrocities at the hands of their feudal masters that, in some cases, were worse than what the Dalits endured. They had to do "begar" (unpaid labour), serve them day and night and still face humiliation. They were treated like animals. They were bought and sold like commodities. Feudal lords gave their women away as dowry when they married their daughters off, forcing them to lead the life of concubines. They were not allowed to own any property. For centuries, they lived like slaves. Till recently, they worked as bonded labourers in villages and even now continue to do so, although these cases are rare today. As they had no other means of livelihood, they were forced to endure the humiliation heaped on them and continued serving the upper castes.

As their socio-economic interests were directly linked to the feudal castes, for protecting their purity, superiority and their means of livelihood, they too were forced to treat the Dalits as untouchables. This was the graded inequality of Brahmanism, which earmarked a slot for every caste. But the Backwards were liberal towards the Dalits and had sympathy for them. Since the Dalits lived

away from the main settlements, they could at least share their pain and agony with their brethren but the Shudra or toiling classes lived among the savarnas and did not even get this opportunity. They were beaten but were not allowed to cry.

There is a story by Yashpal titled *Dukh Ka Adhikar*. The protagonist of the story is a woman who is selling watermelons in a market and is sobbing. Only a day earlier, her son died after being bitten by a poisonous snake. He had gone to the fields to reap watermelons. A snake was hiding among the plants and bit him. But she can't afford to sit at home and mourn the death of her son. If she doesn't sell watermelons, she won't have anything to eat. The condition of the Backwards was the same in the Ancient, Medieval and Modern eras. The trauma faced by women was almost the same, differing in just the form. That is why opposition to the varna and the caste system was the common thread connecting the movements of Dalits and the Backwards from Makkali Ghoshal to Kabir to Mahatma Phule. Subsequently, the problems of Muslim minorities and women also assumed centre stage in these movements.

Besides attacking the caste and varna hierarchy, Kabir also talked of the Hindu-Muslim divide and narrow-mindedness. Buddha did not touch on the Muslim issue as he pre-dated Islam. Raja Ram Mohan Roy did launch a movement against the Sati system but other problems of women were not on his radar. Phule was the first to describe women as Dalits and highlight a wide range of issues that concerned them, including education, child marriage, widow remarriage, and female infanticide and foeticide. He also launched movements on these issues. By launching the Shudra-Ati-Shudra movement, Phule raised the banner of revolt against Brahmanism. Gandhi's programme of Dalit emancipation was confined to untouchability but Ambedkar's was a gist of all the earlier movements. Ambedkar's movement highlighted issues related to Dalits, OBCs, Muslims and women in a comprehensive manner. After the Dalits got reservations under the Poona Pact in 1932, leaders, writers and intellectuals of the backward classes formed their own organizations and began demanding their rights. Their movement was complementary to Babasaheb's movement. They did not run a parallel movement. That is why Babasaheb ensured the incorporation of Article 340 pertaining to Other Backward Classes in the Constitution.

Social activists, leaders and writers of backward classes

In the initial phase, egged on by the Arya Samaj movement, the caste-based organizations of the Backwards joined the race for wearing the sacred thread and describing themselves as descendants of high-caste Brahmins and Kshatriyas on the basis of “Krinvantu Vishwamaryam” (My objective is to make the entire world Aryan). As a reaction to the Savarna opposition to this exercise, new movements led by Triveni Sangh and then Picchda Varg Sangh and Arjak Samaj emerged. The names of their key leaders and social activists were: in Bihar, the founders of Triveni Sangh, including Babu Dasu Singh, Navdeep Chandra Ghosh, Gurusahai Lal and Ganpati Mandal, as well as R.L. Chandapuri, Chulhai Sahu, Sant Prasad Gupta, Jagdev Prasad, Ramlakhan Singh Yadav, Devsharan Singh and Ram Avdesh Singh; in Uttar Pradesh, Dr Badlu Ram “Rasik”, Ramswaroop Verma, Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, Dwarka Prasad Maurya, Durgadutt Singh Kushan, Shivdayal Singh Chaurasia, Durgadeen Sahu, Chedilal Sathi, Babulal Prajapati and Kunwar Uday Veer Singh; in Delhi, Ramprasad Saini, Pyarelal Sonkar, Prithivipal Singh, Gyanendra Nath, Bhairav Prasad Chandra, Ramprasad Dhangar, Sardar Mohan Singh, Bhagwan Das Seth, Bihari Lal, G.D. Chaurasia, J.P. Yadav and Badan Singh Pal; in Madhya Pradesh, Dr Indrajeet Singh, Khoobchand Patel, Chintamani Saha, Gokhul Prasad Saini, Kanaiya Lal; in Punjab, Dr Hazari Lal, Santram B.A., Ameer Singh, Chandhary Chanan Singh and Sitaram Saini; in West Bengal, Ashutosh Das, S.K. Sarkar, Upendra Nath Barman, Gaursundar Nath, Khalil-ur-Rahman Ansari and Vivekanand Vishwas; in Odisha, Yaduman Mangraj, Dr P. Parija and Laxmi Narayan Sahu; in Rajasthan, Mahant Laxanand, Gheesaram Jat, Kalu Ram Rathore, Swami Parmanand Bharati, Santosh Singh Kachwaha, Chotelal Sukhaji and Ram Swaroopchand; in Mumbai, K.S. Dondkar, W.C. Vagh, G.C. Bobade, K.P. Saha, S.R. Londhe, R.B. Raut and D.R. Gadhi; in Andhra Pradesh, G. Lacchanna, Dr N. Chenna Reddy, G.R. Verma, K. Kamraju, A. Hussainappa and T.N. Vishwanath Reddy; in Mysore, Karnataka, B. Gopal Reddy, N.C. Deshappa, P. Mariyappa, K.G. Deshappa, K.P. Bediyar, M. Verappa and N.B. Krippa; in Madras, Tamil Nadu, V.M. Ghatikachalam, N.E. Manorama, S. Ramanathan and M.A. Nair; in Kerala, P.M. Abraham, P. Neelkanth, B.D. John and E.P. Verghese from Kerala Christian Picchda Varg Sangh; in Assam, Jitendra Nath Chaudhary, Heeralal Gupta,

Gaurmohan Das, Charu Barman, Sonaram Phukam, Girdhari Das, Gyan Mohan Das, M.N. Saikia and Nilambar Das.

These movements launched during the Freedom Struggle brought about political consciousness among the Backwards, and the socialist movement led to the Backwards coming into power in many states. In independent India, Karpoori Thakur was one of the first bearers of this consciousness, which was later sharpened by Kanshi Ram. Lalu Yadav included the issues of Dalits, Backwards and minorities in his political agenda and successfully ruled Bihar. Karpoori Thakur, Lalu Yadav, Nitish Kumar and Ramvilas Paswan in Bihar; Chaudhary Charan Singh, Kanshi Ram, Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mayawati in Uttar Pradesh; Devilal in Haryana; Karunanidhi in Tamil Nadu; and Devegowda in Karnataka are the symbols and products of this consciousness. Today, national politics also hinges on the symbols and representatives of the backward classes. In order to encash this sentiment, even national parties like the BJP were forced to project Narendra Modi as its backward face. But whether it is the politics of the Backwards or of the Dalits, it seems to be digressing from the path of Phule and Ambedkar and Manuwadi forces are benefitting from it.

OBC literature: Form and possibilities

Not much work has been done on OBC literature. However, the writings of litterateurs and poets of the backward classes – including those of the Vaishya community – do display sensitivity to the Dalit and Backwards and their content, characters and situations do show that they had imbibed Dalit backward consciousness. Prior to Independence, Phule, Periyar, Narayan Guru, Bhartendu, Santram B.A., Ramswaroop Verma and Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu among others wrote literature imbued with Dalit-backward consciousness. Some of them continued to be active even after Independence. OBC discourse can trace its roots to the writings of Bhartendu, including a satire titled *Vedic Hinsa* and another work called *Bharat Durdasha* themed on Brahman-Sraman dialectics. Jaishankar Prasad may have been a writer of brahmanical consciousness but the thinking he finally arrived at is reflected in his novel *Kankal*, which pours scorn on religious dogma, hypocrisy and culture. We can discover the soul of OBC literature in the Bhojpuri plays of Bhikhari Thakur. Almost all the characters in his plays come from the backward classes and the plays describe their

condition and their life. The texture and structure of Renu's writings and their sensitivity and contents also reflect the concerns of the backward communities. Whether it is stories like 'Samvadiya', 'Thes', 'Teesri Kasam', 'Lalpaan Kee Begum', 'Panchlight', 'Raspriya' and 'Rasul Mistri' or novels like *Maila Aanchal* and *Parti Parikatha* – the heroes and the ambience of all of them are closely linked with the backward communities. The same is true of novels and stories of Sanjiv, in which the protagonists are barbers, kahars, ironsmiths and potters, and of the writings of Chandrakishore Jaiswal, Ramdhari Singh Diwakar, Surendra Snighdha and Dinesh Kushwaha. Their contents, style and characters – all portray their sensitivity towards the backward communities. This kind of fiction is being written even now, and in the times to come this trend will only grow stronger.

OBC literature: Principles and limitations

Today, scientists use cross-breeding to produce better varieties of plant and animal species. The same is true of the human species, too. But the varna and caste system shrewdly put a blanket ban on cross-breeding. Marriages outside one's caste or varna were disallowed. "Sagotra" (within the same gotra) marriages were prescribed for the Shudras while "vigotra" (outside of one's gotra) were prescribed for the Dwij castes. This ensured that while there were genetic improvements in the Dwij castes, the same did not happen in the case of the backwards and the Dalits. It may be mentioned here that this norm is enforced even now in Indian society. The Muslims also aped it, and in Kayasthas too, "sagotra" marriages are the norm, as the scriptures place the kayasthas among the Shudras. Their problems are thus the same as those of the Shudras. Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar, Periyar, Dr Rammanohar Lohia and Karpoori Thakur among others emphasized inter-caste marriages for both genetic improvement and annihilation of caste. Then, will identity-based discourses (such as the OBC discourse) hinder inter-caste marriages? Not at all.

It is a bitter truth that inter-caste marriages began in the very communities which were against them. Despite stiff opposition, Gandhi's son Devdas married a Brahmin woman. Most of the inter-caste marriages, including that of Indira Gandhi, took place among upper castes. Even today, when marriages take place between Sheikh-Syed-Pathan communities of Muslims and the Brahmins, the partners have genetic

– if not caste – similarities. Most of the top Muslim leaders have married Brahmin women. Inter-caste marriages do take place among the prosperous Dalits and Backwards but they are few and far between. Even then, inter-caste marriages do not serve to annihilate caste. The caste of the father in patrilineal communities and of the mother in matrilineal communities becomes the caste of the offspring. That is why such identity-based discourses are unlikely to hinder inter-caste marriages. In fact, if the social status of the Dalit and Backwards improves, members of other communities will become more inclined to forging marital ties with them. And if such marriages take place, they are welcome.

Another apprehension that is frequently voiced about OBC literature is that it will replace class discourse with caste discourse. Such apprehensions were voiced by many scholars, including Namvar Singh, when the issue of “reservations in literature” surfaced. When I asked Namvar Singh about it, he replied with a counter-question – “Will there be as many literatures as there are castes? This would break literature into innumerable pieces.” At first glance, this apprehension seems to be valid. But then, when was literature undivided? It gave the appearance of being undivided only in the phases in which it was dominated by a particular caste or class. Otherwise, it was divided in every era. Even today, it is divided into caste-based camps, though no one accepts it in so many words. That is as true of the mainstream elite literature as of the identity-based Bahujan literature. Talent may be important but caste somehow wriggles into literature. In India, caste is all-pervasive. It is there in religion, culture, philosophy, society and politics. OBC literature’s theorizations include opposition to Manuvadi values and establishment of the identity, existence, respect and human dignity of the Backwards. All streams on the margins and the new cultural discourse are part of it. Its ideology includes the likes of Lohia, Gandhi and Ambedkar. It aims at digging out its forgotten history and symbols. The OBC discourse is thus bound to sharpen and grow.

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No objection to OBC literature

Jaiprakash Kardam

One of most important debates that raged in the field of Hindi Literature during the past year was the one on OBC literature initiated by Dr Rajendra Prasad Singh. It began with his article 'The idea of OBC literature' (see page 19) published in the July 2011 issue of *FORWARD* Press. He advocates the need for OBC literature with the argument that "When there can be Dalit literature, why can't there be OBC literature?" Behind his thesis of OBC literature is the complaint or the anguish that "The doors of Hindi Dalit Literature are open only to the writers of Scheduled Castes. The space for OBC litterateurs in it is shrinking gradually". Dr Rajendra Prasad Singh is a well-known linguist and critic. His article initiates a discussion in the wider context of Hindi and Dalit literature. His anguish and his complaint deserve to be pondered. The article neither opposes Dalit literature nor does it have a confrontationist tone. It is a discussion – pure and simple. He believes that OBC literature and Dalit literature are complementary to one another. Opposition to Brahmanism, establishment of an equitable society, annihilation of feudal forces, bringing about economic equality and rebuttal of religious dogma are the common aims that link both these literary streams. This is the cornerstone of the discussion. The litterateurs from the Siddha and Sant literature up to the modern age, whom Rajendra Prasad Singh has named, are all considered Dalits by Dalit literature.

It would be hasty to say which direction this debate on OBC literature will take and how far it will go. However, it would not be out of place to mention that the structure of Dalit literature does not stand only on the foundation of Kabir. In fact, it is based more on Ambedkarism and includes a wide range of personalities, ranging from Buddha to Kabir, Raidas and Jotiba Phule. Buddha is a symbol of 'Bahujanwad' and the Dalit literature, which considers Buddhist philosophy as its foundation, is also an advocate of 'Bahujanwad'. Barring Brahmanical and feudal forces, everyone else is a supporter of 'Bahujanwad'. This, even Rajendra Prasad Singh admits. Then, how can it be said that the doors of Dalit Literature are open only to Scheduled Castes? The doors of Dalit literature are open for all 'Bahujans' but what is sad is that except the writer from one of the

Scheduled Castes, no one else wants to call himself a Dalit litterateur or wants to be described thus. Rajendra Prasad Singh, himself a prominent proponent of Dalit literature, enjoys a great respect among Dalit writers but even he neither calls nor considers himself a Dalit litterateur. His comments on Dalit literature are the comments of a writer who is a supporter of Dalits. The problem with OBC writers is that they neither openly associate themselves with Dalit literature and nor vocally oppose savarna literature. Rajendra Prasad Singh may be right when he says that “OBC literature has been caught between Dalit literature and savarna literature” but the problem lies not with the Dalit literature but with the writers of OBC castes. They want to simultaneously ride on the twin boats of Dalit and savarna literature, which, alas, is not possible. They should seriously introspect as to what they have gained by playing second fiddle to savarna literature. If they consider themselves Dalit and sincerely associate themselves with Dalit literature and Dalit society, there is no reason why they won’t get adequate space and respect in Dalit literature. If they join forces with Dalit literature with full commitment, no one can stop them from carving out a niche for themselves as Dalit litterateurs.

Here, it would not be unjust to mention that not only do many OBC castes consider themselves superior to the Dalits but even resort to violence and oppression to maintain their domination. For instance, in recent years, the Jat community of Haryana indulged in extremely violent and barbarous behaviour with Dalits in Dulina, Gohana and Mirchpur. If writers of the Jat community – who consider themselves Dalit litterateurs – do not write or speak against this oppression of Dalits, do not fight shoulder to shoulder with the Dalits for their rights, do not add their voice to that of the Dalits, then, how can they be considered Dalit writers? If a writer does not rebuke the members of his community for oppressing the Dalits, for trampling upon their dignity and either remains silent or goes into hibernation, then how will the Dalits open the doors of their homes for him? Any comment or debate on Dalit literature will remain incomplete without taking such realities into consideration.

As far as the concept of OBC literature is concerned, Rajendra Prasad Singh has raised a valid point but before proceeding any further, he will have to take into consideration several different aspects of the issue. To begin with, the naming of Dalit literature has a long

history and it has come about after a long journey. It has passed through many stages. After widespread discussions and consideration of names such as literature of equality, Parallel literature, Buddhist literature and neo-Buddhist literature, the term Dalit literature was accepted. The discussion on this nomenclature still continues. A section of Hindi and Marathi litterateurs is in favour of renaming Dalit literature as Ambedkarite literature. But the label Dalit literature has widespread, nationwide prevalence and acceptability. The first and foremost duty of OBC writers is to unmask the writers and the literature that propound, patronise and support the values of inequality and discrimination and to oppose them with their full might. The stronger this opposition is, the greater will be the acceptability and identity of their writings. There can be no objection to the OBC writers trying to create a separate category of OBC literature. What is important is to bring it out from the shadow and influence of brahmanical-feudal literature and litterateurs. Nothing can be better than OBCs and Dalits raising their common voice against inequality, injustice, untouchability and exploitation.

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‘A snake in the grass’ wreaks havoc

Sudhish Pachauri

Where there is literature, there cannot be reservation. And where there is reservation, there cannot be literature. Literature is literature. What can reservation possibly have anything to do with it? If anyone demands reservation, he intends to divide literature. Just tell me, can literature be divided?

Literature is above caste, gender and religion. It does not differentiate on the basis of the place you come from, the era you belong to, the language you write in and the sort of person you are. We are progressives for life. All our life, we protected and patronized our men in true progressive style. We fetched sinecures for them. We arranged their daily bread. We had them accommodated in literature, others in academies, still others in committees where they could line their pockets. Our fame spread far and wide. In every city, we had our band of admirers, always ready to lug our bags. We, the greatly respected, after performing hundreds of such selfless acts of service, were left with little to do. Then, one evening, we blurted out the truth.

Reservation in literature? What can be worse than that? Literature is literature. How can there be reservation in it? Then, in keeping with the changing times, we jumped on the OBC bandwagon. Till the time we donned the progressive hat, we batted for our progressives. Now, we had a wider field. The work was the old one – of “rakshan” (protection). We simply added an “a” to “rakshan”. And it became “arakshan” (reservation). So, now we started doing “arakshan”. We never differentiated between “rakshan” and “arakshan”. We provided “arakshan” to our “rakshits” (protectees) in literature. But when the Dalits started demanding reservation in literature, we gave the issue a rethink. And we changed our view. We were outraged. We insisted that no reservation should be given in literature. How is it possible? How can anyone even talk about reservation in literature?

Literature has no caste. It has no religion. There are neither Sharmas nor Vermas, neither Singhs nor Yadavs, neither Agarwals nor Guptas in literature. There is no Dalit or OBC. There is no male or female or third gender. For a long time, we had been determined to destroy caste. Then we entered the Marxist alley. Since then, we

have settled down in the Marxist neighbourhood. We replaced the word caste with class. We thought about class but worked for caste. Before we knew a writer's name, we enquired about his caste. The writer who was in the right caste was right. Our disciples or the disciples of disciples – if they were of any use – became part of our family. But the tag of “the famous Marxist” always preceded our names. Marxism saved our honour. It hid caste. Instead of caste consciousness, we wrote class consciousness. That was what the world at large saw. The inside story is that we were considered quite dynamic within our castes. Being a progressive did not mean that we had to take on the caste dynamics. Talk of class and further the interests of your caste. How we loathe Raghuveer Sahai, who wrote a third-rate poem and brought our house crumbling down. Is this a poem, which says, “Kuch bhee likhonga, waisa nahin dikhunga / dikhunga/ ya to riryata hua ya garajta hua / kisi ko puchkarta hua/ kisi ko barajta hua/ Bania, Bania rahe/ Bamhan, Bamhan aur kayastha, kayatha rahe/ par jab kavita likhe to adhunik ho jaye / kheensein ba de jab kaho ga de/ sach kaha hai, ghar ka bhedi lanka dhaye. (What I will write, I will not be/ I will be seen either whimpering or thundering/ fondling someone/ discarding someone/ Bania should remain a Bania/ Brahmin, a Brahmin and Kayastha, a Kayastha/ But when he writes a poem, he should become modern/ He should break into guffaws when asked to, should sing when asked to/ Someone has very rightly said, a traitor who is one of your own can bring down an empire).

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On Adivasi literature

Tribal Literature: Challenges and possibilities

Ganga Sahay Meena

The last decade of the 20th century witnessed the rise of a host of new movements in India. Women, farmers, Dalits, Tribals and various ethnic groups came together like never before and made demands and raised issues that could neither be understood nor settled through the established theoretical and political idiom. They asserted that their exploitation was due to their specific identities and to fight that exploitation and discrimination, they forged alliances with other groups/communities with similar identities and launched a joint movement for their emancipation. Since identities formed the basis of their exploitation as well as their struggle against it, this process began to be called “identitism”. Besides sociopolitical movements, literary movements also joined this battle against exploitation of the deprived. Feminist literature and Dalit literature were the by-products of this process. Now, Tribal literature, imbued with Tribal consciousness, is also trying to carve out a place for itself in the world of literature and criticism.

The development of literature and of different art forms in Tribal communities predated the emergence of literature and arts in the so-called mainstream society. But the Tribal literary tradition was mainly oral. Even after being pushed into the jungles, the Tribal communities continued their creative literary exploits. However, as this literature was in unsophisticated folk languages and because the Tribals were far from the centres of power, their literature, like they themselves, was largely ignored. Even today, Tribal literature is being produced in hundreds of indigenous languages but we know little about it.

Historical and material factors led to the emergence of the contemporary Tribal literary movement. About two decades ago, the central government adopted the policy of economic liberalization, thus throwing open the doors to the market economy. In the name of free trade and free market, a no-holds-barred race for earning more and more profits commenced. This translated into wanton loot of water, forests and land – the prime resources of the Tribals – even

to the point of putting their lives at risk. Figures speak for themselves: Over the last one decade at least 10 lakh Tribals have been displaced from the Jharkhand state alone. Most of them are working as domestic servants or daily-wage labourers in metros like Delhi. Ironically, the government then argues that as there is no Tribal community native to the National Capital Region (NCR) of Delhi, there is no provision for reservations for the Tribals in educational institutions and government jobs in the region. Where should these people, displaced from the land of their ancestors in the name of development, go? It is said that when the United Nations decided to observe the year 1993 as the “International Year of Indigenous Peoples”, the Government of India’s official reaction was that “The Indian Tribals or STs are not indigenous peoples as defined by the UN” and that “all Indians are indigenous people”. It also asserted that the “Tribals or STs in India are not being subjected to any political, social or economic discrimination”.

The entire issue boils down to giving Tribals the right to self-determination. Tribal literature is also voicing this demand. On what basis can the Tribals, deprived of their water resources, forests and land and leading a miserable existence in the cities, call this country their own? The government-market nexus has posed a challenge to the existence of the Tribals. Those who are still living in their homes have been caught between the devil of the government and the deep sea of extreme Left. Those who have settled elsewhere have become like trees without roots. With rivers, hills and forests no longer their neighbours, their distinct identity, based on their language and culture, is getting lost. Never before have the Tribals faced such a deep crisis of identity and existence. It is but natural for any community to resist threats to its existence. This resistance manifested itself at the social and political levels, and also in art and literature. Thus contemporary Tribal literature was born.

Whenever outsiders made unwarranted interference in their lives, Tribals resisted it. The past two centuries were witness to a string of Tribal uprisings. These uprisings also generated creative energy, but it was mostly oral. Owing to the lack of means of communication, it could never get pan-Indian recognition. From time to time, non-Tribal authors also dwelt on Tribal life and society. This entire tradition of portrayal of Tribal life in literature may be considered the background of the contemporary Tribal literature. It is evident that

no literary movement begins suddenly on a precise date. Its emergence and development is a slow, often indiscernible process, and is influenced by various circumstances. Broadly, it can be said that the contemporary Tribal writings and discourse began in 1991. As the economic policies of the Government of India exacerbated the oppression and exploitation of Tribals, the resistance to it also increased. Since the exploitation as well as its resistance was a pan-Indian phenomenon, so was the creative energy born out of it. We can thus conclude that Tribal literature is the creative energy generated at the national level post 1991 to protect the Tribal identity and existence in the face of intensified exploitation due to economic liberalization. Both Tribal and non-Tribal authors are playing a role in it. The geographical, societal and linguistic context of this literature is as different from the rest of Indian literature as Tribals are from the rest of the Indians. And this distinctiveness is its key speciality.

Tribal literature is the literature of a search for identity, of exposing the past and present forms of exploitation by outsiders, and of threats to Tribal identity and existence, and resistance. This is a pro-change, constructive intervention, which is dead opposed to any sort of discrimination against the descendants of the original inhabitants of India. It supports their right to protect their water resources, forests and land and their right to self-determination. Although the contemporary Tribal writings and the discourse on it are in their early stages, it is heartening to find that useless debates like “empathy versus sympathy” are on its margins. Anyway, there is no reason the authenticity of sympathy and empathy should be given so much importance. The authenticity of expression definitely is, and should be, more important than the authenticity of feelings. It is true that authentic expression is not possible without long experience, close contact and sensitivity, especially with reference to Tribals. But empathy still cannot be made the sole criterion for judging authenticity.

As Tribal literary discourse is still in the making, its issues are also just taking shape. Beginning with “Who are Tribals?”, the discourse has broached issues related to Tribal society, history, culture, language and so on over the last decade. Magazines play a key role in the launch and development of every literary movement. The following magazines have played important roles in raising Tribal issues in the world of literature and in promoting creative literature related to them: *Yuddhrat Aam Admi* (Hazaribagh, Delhi; editor:

Ramnika Gupta), *Aravali Udgosh* (Udaipur; editor: B.P. Verma 'Pathik'), *Jharkhandi Bhasha Sahitya*, *Sanskriti Akhda* (Ranchi; editor: Vandana Tete) and *Adivasi Satta* (Durg, Chhattisgarh; editor: K.R. Shah). Besides, Pushpa Tete through *Tarang Bharati*, Sunil Minj through *Deshaj Swar* and *Shishir Tudu* through the evening newspaper *Jharkhand News Line* are also promoting Tribal discourse. Many mainstream magazines have also brought out special Tribal issues, thus contributing to the development of Tribal discourse. These include *Samkaleen Janmat* (2003), *Kathakram* (2012) and *Ispatika* (2012). Initially, the leading Hindi magazines showed scant interest in Tribal issues but with the growing acceptance of the discourse, Tribal life is increasingly finding place in the columns of such magazines. Tribal writers are getting adequate space in small magazines.

Tribal writings are diverse. Tribal authors have benefitted from the rich oral literary tradition of the community. There is no central genre of Tribal literature like autobiographical writings in the case of women's literature and Dalit literature. Tribal and non-Tribal writers have portrayed Tribal life and society through poetry, stories, novels and plays. The Tribal writers have made poetry the main weapon in their struggle for Tribal identity and existence. Autobiographical writings are few and far between in Tribal literature and that is because the Tribal society believes more in the group than in the self. Concepts like "private" and "privacy" remained alien to most of the tribal communities for a long time. Their tradition, culture, history, exploitation and its resistance – all are collective. And collective feelings are much better expressed through folk poetry than through autobiographical works. The sharp Tribal pen is expanding its reach at a fast pace.

In colonial India, the problems of the Tribals were mainly related to ban on collecting forest produce, land revenues of various kinds, moneylenders' exploitation and police atrocities. After Independence, the flawed model of development adopted by the government deprived the Tribals of their water, forests and land and displaced them from their homes. Today, displacement is the main problem confronting the Tribals. This, on one hand, is depriving them of their cultural identity and on the other, threatening their existence. If they try to preserve their identity, their existence is threatened and if they try to secure their existence, their identity is lost. That is why, today,

Tribal discourse is the discourse of existence and identity.

As Tribal literature draws its energy from the tradition of tribal uprisings, the language and geography of those uprisings also assume significance. The original writings of the Tribal authors are in their languages. The Tribal literature in Hindi is greatly influenced by the rich literary tradition of indigenous languages. A part of this literature has been translated into other languages. The literature being written in different Tribal languages is being translated into major languages like Hindi, Bangla and Tamil, thus acquiring a national form. Tribal literature is marching ahead, imbued with the rebellious sentiment of the Birsa, Sidho Kanho and other revolutionary Tribal leaders and their movements.

(Forward Press, April 2013)

Literature of the most oppressed

Ashwini Kumar Pankaj

The discussion about the idea of OBC literature (OBCL) kick-started by *FORWARD* Press (“The idea of OBC Literature”, Rajendra Prasad Singh, July 2011; see page 19 of this book) raises many questions. In this regard, the article by Kanwal Bharti (November 2011; see page 98 of this book) is also rather disquieting. These two and the other scholarly thinkers who wrote on the topic have established the concept OBC/Bahujan literature and its philosophy with facts and argued for it well. But in the context of the majority of the oppressed peoples and oppressed nationalities, all these writers seem to be standing at one end – and it’s just them there. In the context of oppressed nationalities, ie the tribals, all seem to be standing on the same polar opposite and at the same distance. These writers are constructing the idea of ‘Bahujan’ literature while ignoring 150 million Tribals. There is a need to examine the fundamental point of departure of the ideas of (a) “Bahujan” presented by the OBC castes and (b) “Dalit” by the Scheduled Castes, even as they neglect the most oppressed section of Indian society, the Tribals.

First of all let’s look at some excerpts from Kanwal Bharti’s essay:

* “The Dalit movement ... has succeeded in developing a sense of identity within OBCs.”

* “It was primarily the Dalits who fought the battle for the implementation of Mandal Commission for OBCs.”

* “DL has an identity and has roots primarily in the philosophy of Jotiba Phule, Dr Ambedkar, Buddha, Kabir, Ravidas and its primary ideology is rejection of caste order and untouchability.”

* “DL has accepted the heroes of the Dalit classes, which also include OBC heroes.”

* “OBCs are Shudras that come within the caste order. In this respect, they are also Savarna (upper) castes. Perhaps this is the reason they consider themselves higher than the Dalits and practice untouchability against them.”

The first statement seems to suggest that it is only Dalits who are fighting the battle of identity in this country and if today OBCs are talking about their literature then it is the former’s gift to the latter. The available documents tell us that Tribals were the first com-

munity that fought for identity, rights and freedom in 1765–66. They have been engaged in this struggle ever since. Ignoring this Tribal movement so full of sacrifices and martyrdom, what kind of “Bahujan history” do you wish to construct? Yes, Bharti ji’s second statement is indeed correct: The battle for the Mandal Commission was fought by Dalits, though this is not the complete truth. In this battle, OBCs were in complete solidarity. In this context, I would only say that the tribals did not fight for “reservations”. In 1912, a few educated tribals started Chhota Nagpur Unnati Samaj – the first ever (tribal) organization for social reform, rights and reservations in education and jobs and by 1940, “reservations” was not a major agenda. With a comprehensive global perspective, the organization metamorphosed into a political entity and the battle was now focused on the oppressed nationality, i.e., its identity, rights and complete freedom. The organization was renamed Adivasi Mahasabha and later it became Jharkhand Party. In India’s political history, this valiant struggle of the oppressed nationalities is known as the Jharkhand Andolan. And it was not confined to the tribals alone but comprised oppressed non-tribal section of then Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. And it continues to be so even today.

Further, Kanwal Bharti says with regard to Dalit literature (DL) that “its primary ideology is rejection of caste order and untouchability”. No one contests this but does one see it in action in the social conduct of Dalits? Will the caste order be demolished merely by “philosophical” condemnation? If that’s true, I would like to know the extent to which Dalits have become “casteless” in Bihar, Jharkhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. Is the process of shedding caste continuing or are caste structures and Hindu practices still effectively present among them? Dalits have accepted their own and OBC heroes but not the tribal heroes, whereas the Tribals have embraced not only Dalit-OBC heroes but national heroes from all communities in India.

“OBCs are Shudras that come within the caste order. In this respect, they are also Savarna (upper) castes. Perhaps this is the reason they consider themselves higher than the Dalits and practice untouchability against them.” This is exactly how both Dalits and OBCs have been treating the tribals and still do. You may visit any tribal area in the country, and you will find both standing not with the Tribals but with the ruling class.

Similarly, in his July 2011 article, Rajendra Prasad Singh very neatly establishes unity between Dalits and OBCs on these very bases. There is no space for the Tribals in the idea of Bahujan given by an OBC. How can there be? In all practical terms, the Tribals are a non-brahmanical, casteless community. To be united with them, one has to give up “Brahmanism and caste” in all aspects of society, politics and culture. There, one doesn’t have the privilege to accept “Buddhism” and live within the caste. That’s why unity is possible only between Dalits and OBCs, and as both the scholars say Dalit and OBC philosophies share a common foundation. But what kind of philosophical foundation is this which looks for common features of Bahujan unity and collectivity in each other but utterly refuses to cast a glance towards tribal society which is actually living them out in all aspects of worldview and conduct.

The other point to be considered is that the idea of OBCL is being proposed on the basis of a caste category defined by the colonial rulers. In Manu’s varnasharma there were four categories: Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. Tribals were Asuras; bitter opponents of the brahmanical order and rule. With their collectivity, co-existence, interdependence, fellowship and federal and republican system, they had maintained a studied distance vis-à-vis the Aryans, the Devas. It was hard to assimilate the tribals, who followed a completely opposite philosophy of life, into the varnasharma system. Hence, they were not included in any of the categories. The British created two categories by jumbling castes that fell under Vaishyas and Shudras. Till today, the Indian ruling class continues to shuffle both these categories for its convenience and political gains. Many castes within these categories are themselves anxious to move in and out to grab a share in the reservation pie. A few are eager to get out and seek ST status for some security in the era of globalization when the opportunities are shrinking all around. Those who either in history or at present laying a claim to be STs have never been seen to be nurturing dreams of freedom by joining any of the tribal movements.

And then by relying on the brahmanical cunning of Hindi literature those castes that were included in OBC category, and, according to Manu, were Shudra artisan castes, have been assimilated into OBCL. The foundation of OBCL is being laid on the strength of castes such tailor (Darji), potter (Kumhar), ironsmith (Lohar), barber (Nai), water-carriers (Kahar) and weaver (Bunkar). The truth is that

castes such as Teli, Bania, Kayastha, Kurmi and Gwal have always been supporting the brahmanical powers. In Hindi literature too these are the castes present as moneylenders, lathaits (stick-wielding goons kept by the rich) and cunning scribes. How can then there be a shared identity between them and the Shudras, ie the artisan and productive castes? Their social status is entirely different. They are still zamindars in many parts of North India. It is due to their socio-economic status that Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar are able to capture power in a capitalist system. Ram Vilas Paswan and Mayawati too have no qualms about entering into any brahmanical alliance.

To be a tribal means to be casteless. Even after a long struggle, the Dalit community has not been able to become casteless and politically, its struggle is reduced to merely “capturing of power”. OBCs, in fact, are miles behind. The difference between Dalits-OBCs and Tribals is not merely geographical, but cultural and political. Without reflecting on this, any conception of Bahujan literature or Bahujan politics will remain incomplete.

In colonial and independent India, who are the people targeted the most in their struggle against feudal-capitalist alliance as well as imperialism? Who are the people uprooted and killed the most? Who are the people whose dead bodies are hung like animals and photographed by the state? Think about it: Who seeks a truly republican system and who seeks in this same system power and privileges, acquired on the basis of numbers? Go back to any date in the previous centuries and come to any date in the 21st century, in the wars of history and present only two communities are pitted against each other, Surs and Asurs. In this historical battle, where does one find Dalits and OBCs? The question deepens when today we find many caste groups fighting to be classified as Tribals to avail of “reservations” but never becoming part of the tribal struggle. Most importantly, tribals think of themselves neither as superior nor as inferior to anyone. It is not my intention to prove their superiority according to their life philosophy. Neither does this article seek to glorify Tribal struggles. I am only insisting that with our new as well as old concepts, we make the “Bahujan” struggle wider, stronger and sharper. Let’s also reflect on whether, consciously or unconsciously, we are narrowing down the huge struggle for freedom of the oppressed identities by merely laying “caste-based claims”.

(Forward Press, February 2012)

Bahujan literature and Adivasis

Kanwal Bharti

It's good that the debate on the concept of Bahujan literature continues and through Ashwini Kumar Pankaj's article "Without the most oppressed: Is Bahujan literature Possible?" has reached the Adivasi (Tribal) society. Bahujan writers should be grateful to Ashwini Kumar Pankaj that he has called their attention to Adivasis (see page 84), excluding whom the stream of Bahujan literature cannot be created. I welcome him and feel that the social and economic emancipation of Adivasis is of concern to Bahujan literature as well. Dr Ambedkar was the first Dalit thinker who admitted this. He held that as in the case of Dalits, the backwardness of Adivasis is also a result of the Hindu civilization.

But one has to consider if Adivasi literature is as vocal against Brahmanism as Dalit literature. When we study Adivasi literature, the fundamental struggle we find in it is for forest and land. The history of that struggle begins with their battles against the British, which were necessary to save land and forest. But in the centre of battle that Dalit literature fought was the question of Dalit emancipation. No doubt, the battle was against the Union Jack. But the struggle was most incisive when it came to Brahmanism and Hindu religion. But the Adivasi community did not fight against Brahmanism and Hindu religion because it was not in the Hindu fold. It had its own religion that did not have untouchability. But the Adivasi intellectuals failed to realize that more than the British government it was feudalism and Brahmanism that was responsible for their social and economic backwardness.

For Ashwini Kumar Pankaj, the Dalit fight against the caste system is practically a lost cause. This is his point of view, which may be right. But this is not a comprehensive view. Actually, the way Ashwini Kumar understands annihilation of caste is certainly a dream but it is not a dream that can be realized overnight. The Dalit movement has the vision to resist untouchability and the resolve to restore the human dignity of the untouchable. Has the Dalit struggle against the caste system not realized this goal? Isn't Dalit participation in government and administration, a Dalit president, chief minister, chief justice and chancellor a proof of success? Was this change

possible 100 or 150 years back? Then how can one say that the struggle against the caste system and untouchability is a failure? There is no doubt that a creamy section has emerged among Dalits (in fact, this is true of all classes and communities) and is getting benefits because of their caste. Dr Ambedkar pointed this out when he said Brahmanism is present in all classes. It is exactly this section that Ashwini Kumar Pankaj has in mind while formulating what he does. However, the truth is that a person who is suffering because of caste wants to demolish caste. A few people claim the capitalist model does not have caste. It is true, but this applies only to those who have resources. A rich Chamar can buy a ticket and sit beside a rich Brahmin, but within society, social distance still remains between the two. But this is also equally true that only capitalism has the power to wipe out residual feudalism. So, if one doesn't see a casteless society coming into being, it is not because of the failure of Dalit ideology but because of a "democratic" alliance between feudalism and capitalism.

One can certainly consider Ashwini Kumar's contention that Dalits and OBCs both practise untouchability against Adivasis. Is it because of either ignorance or casteist thinking? It is on the same grounds that OBCs practise untouchability against Dalits. This evil can only be banished through ideas and thoughts. The casteist idea that has dwelt in people's minds for thousands of years can only be extracted through ideas. And obviously, intellectuals have a role to play. But it has been my bitter experience that Adivasi writers and social activists do not dialogue with Dalit writers. Ten years ago, in Ranchi itself, the city Ashwini Kumar comes from, some of us Dalit writers had a dialogue with Adivasi writers and leaders. With me were Mohan Das Nemisharay and Sheoraj Singh Bechain. The local writer Vasvi played a crucial role in that. We all discussed a whole lot of issues and then arrived at Dr Ram Dayal Munda's residence and devised a work plan. But nothing came out of it. In all these 10 years no Adivasi writer entered into a dialogue with us. Vasvi too, who was part of the work plan, kept a distance. How should we see this? We feel that it is Adivasi writers who do not wish to dialogue with Dalits. If someone had worked on closing the distance then today oppressed Dalit and Adivasi sections would not support the ruling classes.

I must also make clear that the natural unity between Dalits and

OBCs that is being talked about has a political and not a caste basis. Then why can there not be Dalit-OBC and Adivasi unity on similar political grounds? But for that to happen, the Adivasi community must first of all come out of the mindset of upper-caste intellectuals, who, to lure them away from Dalits, and have become their pseudo friends. Dalit writers did not allow upper-caste infiltrators to find a foothold among themselves.

Ashwini Kumar Pankaj argues that “the idea of OBCL is being proposed on the basis of a caste category defined by the colonial rulers”. This argument does seem to be substantial. It is also worth considering when he says that Adivasis were Asurs, who had their own collectivity, co-existence, co-dependence, participation and a federal system; and because of that the Aryans and the “Devas” maintained a distance from them and could not assimilate them into the varnashrama. But varnashrama does not include Dalits either. The reason was not untouchability but that they were non-Hindus. It was on that basis that Dr Ambedkar considered them a minority. But one cannot deny Ashwini Kumar’s claim that till the time they were not aware of their roots, they remained with the brahmanical rulers but as soon as they became aware, they established their own rule. It is because of this realization that today in the entire Hindi belt, including in the central government, the Brahmins are excluded from power. Is social change any less significant?

Now the grouse that remains is in many parts of North India, OBC castes like Telis, Kurmis, Banias and Kayasths are landlords. The answer to this is that such land ownership is the gift of India’s capitalist democracy. Its history goes as far back as feudal system. In this context he rightly says, “Lalu Prasad Yadav and Nitish Kumar are able to capture power in a capitalist system. Ram Vilas Paswan and Behan Mayawati too have no qualms about entering into any brahmanical alliance.” Here a counter question can be asked: When Brahmins were in power, why did they not have qualms striking alliances with Dalits and OBCs? When a Brahmin is establishing his rule with the assistance of Dalits and OBCs, why should Dalit-OBC leaders have qualms in assuming power in alliance with Brahmins? What kind of thinking is that? In politics, what matters is the base of the party. A political party tends to work in the interests of the class that constitutes its support base. In India, both the Congress and the BJP are parties with a Brahmin base. But on that base alone

they cannot come to power. They can't do without the support of others. The Congress has so far ruled on the strength of the support it received from Dalits-OBCs. But the Dalit-OBC politics has inverted this equation. Now in addition to their own base they take Brahmin support and are playing the same game that the Congress used to play. What qualms in that? This is what constitutes the politics of social transformation. Perhaps in the times ahead, this same transformation will play some role in creating a casteless and classless society and the questions of caste and religion will become marginalized.

But it is not possible to agree when Ashwini Kumar Pankaj says, "in the wars of ... [the] present only two communities are pitted against each other, Surs and Asurs. In this historical battle, where does one find Dalits and OBCs?" With such a line of thought rejecting the struggles of Dalits-OBCs, how will he be able to connect Adivasi literature with the concept of Bahujan literature?

(Forward Press, April 2012)

Bahujan identity and scientific consciousness

Musafir Baitha

Some intellectuals who have been initiated into the stream parallel to the so-called mainstream are unable to digest ideas that give encouragement to the marginalized identity and scientificity in society and literature. This holds true even for the so-called progressive and leftist non-Bahujan writers. But what is really worrisome is that among the Bahujan too, a section considered to be intellectual and aware, unwittingly, falls into the trap of an inferiority complex, and turns against its own identity, or, starts praising the opposing identities.

Savarna (upper caste) historian Romila Thapar thinks that blessed are the Adivasis who have kept the primitive culture and structures intact in their original form, and which made necessary sources available to historians in their study. This may be her “pastime”. This, in fact, is the “progressive or leftist” cultural discourse of the savarna intelligentsia, who nurture the desire to keep a deprived caste or community undeveloped for their own intellectual and spiritual development! But it is unfortunate that many Bahujan writers adopt the same perspective in their writings. For example, even a conscious poet like Nirmala Putul who has experienced the hardships of an Adivasi life is, unwittingly, losing sleep over preserving the original identity of Adivasi culture. The poet is attached to many of the signs and symbols of the culture that very clearly are the residue of an undeveloped society. To shed such tears of folly that they will be lost in the process of development cannot be seen as a sign of being a protector or a well-wisher of Adivasi society or culture. One must not try, in the light of scientific beliefs, to construct a culture or identity that is proving to be incapable of gaining human rights and democratic rights in changing times and changing society.

“Where there is no forest, no river, no mountain/Don’t marry me off there/And certainly not where motor cars run faster than man / Where there are tall houses and big shops ... Choose for me a bridegroom/Who plays a melody on the flute/And is an expert in playing on drums” (from the poem, “Don’t Send Me So Far-off, Father”).

Like Nirmala (Putul Santhali), a young poet Anuj Lugun is writing

originally in another Adivasi language (Munderi); his attachment to traditions is also a cause for concern. Lugun wishes to sing against cultural denial and social justice in his poetry. Why is this traditional aesthetic vision of seeking bliss in expressing denial still alive? As if, even while expressing sorrow, one must sing to the tune of mainstream poets and must seek some pleasure. It is necessary for the writers from the marginalized sections to imitate the aesthetics of writers from the dominant sections! Is Lugun true to Dalit or humanist aesthetics when he writes nostalgic lines such as “And barefoot/they walk down the forest trails/Never say we are Adivasis/They know/How to cure themselves with forest herbs/They know why animals behave the way they do/Understand the moods of the weather/All trees and shrubs, hill and mountains, rivers and waterfalls know who they are.”?

What does this glorification of a life of poverty signify? Why this attachment to this culture in which one is compelled to walk barefoot and has to be dependent on herbs for health? Can someone ask the poet if he still wants that same life? “Anuj Lugun has shaken the bastion of Hindi literary awards” – if somebody felt this way when Lugun received the Bharat Bhushan Aggarwal Award for his poem “Aghoshit Ulgulan” (Undeclared Revolt), then we must ask, how and why? And isn’t it also true that this fortress should have been shaken a long time ago?

In both these poets writing in Adivasi languages, one can see conscious attempts to seek acceptance across the board and also a bright future and for that they avoid directly opposing the savarna power structures and adopt the class-based perspective of the so-called mainstream progressive left. And the crafty, calculative and savarna pen pushers who are considered leftists have played a huge role in establishing their image as Hindi poets.

It is also worth noting that these ideas about gods and goddesses are also constructed by the dominant classes. Any movement started and carried on with the support of a culture or civilization based on divine decrees – whether ancient or modern – can never be in the interests of the Bahunians and the marginalized. What Bahunians need the most is rationally and scientifically based, humane, fundamental rights and this can only be possible on the ruins of every kind of divine tradition.

(Forward Press, April 2012)

On Bahujan literature

Remembering Renu

Premkumar Mani

The death anniversary of Phanishwar Nath Renu falls this month. He died on 11 April 1977 while undergoing an operation for peptic ulcer. This issue of *FORWARD* Press focuses on Bahujan literature, and in this context it feels necessary to remember him.

I met Renu ji in 1975. I was a young man of 22 and he was an illustrious writer. In those days, Patna wasn't culturally as poor as it is today. There used to be a beautiful coffee house at the Dak Bangla road, which was a cultural home to people in the city. Every evening cultural activists and writers would gather here. At that time cultural activists certainly enjoyed a higher status in the social life of the city than politicians and journalists. One of the corners was known to be the Renu corner. That's where Renu ji would sit and that was exactly where I met him. It's worth remembering that it was during the Emergency; and in the eyes of the government he was a dangerous writer. In fact, a few people did keep away from him. But Renu remained unaffected. I sensed a spiritual glow and a gentle courage on his face. It did not take us too long to be on friendly terms. In between, he would be absent for very long periods of time (he went to his village) and when he fell sick he was admitted to Patna Medical College where he was bedridden for a long time.

When he was in the hospital, we would meet almost every day. Even in the hospital he had a corner. He would always be surrounded by people. It was very interesting to listen to him. You could not talk a lot in front of him. He had such a hypnotic personality that one could not but show off one's littleness in his presence. Other than Ajneya, I haven't seen anyone who had such an extremely noble disposition. The ethos of the Bengal renaissance and the radiance of the socialist movement had become an inseparable part of his personality. I believe that merely studying or assessing Renu's character is a challenging task in itself.

Critics and commentators declared Renu literature to be regional (aanchalik) and washed their hands of it. His literature has elements of regionalism and this is what makes it unique. That signifies its authenticity and liveliness. However, regionalism is not the central

element in Renu literature. The central element is Renu's unique social perspective, which, through him, found a place in his literature. His first novel *Maila Aanchal* is important for its unique social viewpoint and not for its regionalism. Through this novel, Renu gives us a singular description of India's great freedom movement. Meriganj, the village in *Maila Aanchal*, is divided along caste lines. In Renu's words, "People from all the twelve varnas live here." Ram Kirpal Singh of the "Sipahiya Tola" (Rajput section) deep in his feudal mode. There is no information about his taking any part in the freedom struggle. Taking part are people like Baldev Yadav, Chunni Gosain and Bawan Das. Two are born in backward families and one is without caste. People like Ram Kirpal Singh, Vishwanath Prasad and Jotakhi are not part of this movement. It is Renu's silent appeal that the struggle for independence must be seen from this new perspective. Renu has championed the development of discourse on caste in Hindi literature in a methodical way. He strikes hard on cultural ills like jati and varna. In Premchand's *Godan*, the village is looked at from afar; Renu's experienced village is presented as it is. His village is not artificial; it is real.

But we must not forget that Renu imagined a casteless, equal society. The hero of *Maila Aanchal*, Prashant, doesn't have a caste. "He's been hearing the story of his birth since his childhood. Even the maid in the house, the gardener and the halwai in the neighbourhood know the story of his birth ... Prashant's ancestry is unknown. His mother had placed him in an earthen pot and committed him to the care of raging Mother Kosi, the flooding river. That is all there is to the story of his birth, which everyone told in their own way." Ajneya had given an atheist hero to the Hindi novel. Renu gave one without caste.

In terms of popularity, *Maila Aanchal* exceeded all expectations and suddenly Renu was the brightest of stars on the literary firmament. He became a legend. But with that began the search for his caste. To continue in the upper-caste-dominated urban society of Patna, Renu had to cook up stories about himself. Well-known critic and the writer of an independent monograph on Renu, Dr Surendra Chaudhary, has said: "Renu ji spread some stories about himself. Everyone does such things. There is certainly a psychological reason for this, some inner urge. Sometimes it is some kind of social neglect. ... The inner tales point to a single direction – Renu's person-

ality was constructed from within deep emotional and social contradictions. Perhaps, it was these sharp oppositions that made Renu a writer, an activist and, to an extent, a revolutionary.”

The discussion around Dalit literature began after 1970 in Marathi, and in Hindi it began much later. But in his novel *Parti Parikatha*, published in 1957, Renu discusses Dalit literature. Though it is not a serious discussion and one gets the feeling that Renu wishes to mock this aspect of literature, he does, in fact, foreground this particular crisis in the village: Why do only the upper castes play the role of heroes in the plays staged there? Commenting on a social revolutionary, Nakshatra Malakar, in his area, Renu said in a 1971 interview, “Nakshatra Malakar has a meaning – a tremendous restlessness in ordinary life.” Hindi readers know that in his *Maila Aanchal*, Renu presented him as a character Chalittar Kar-makar.

Even today, Renu’s literature is awaiting dedicated study and research. But limiting myself to the word limit of this column, I can only offer this humble tribute on his death anniversary.

(*Forward Press, April 2012*)

‘Bahujan’ as the mainstream

Karwal Bharti

Knowing how severely the idea of Dalit literature (DL) was opposed within Hindi literature, one can predict that the idea of OBC literature (OBCL) won't be easily accepted. But DL will welcome OBCL. This is for two reasons. First, this will be a massive achievement of DL, and especially of the Dalit movement, that it has succeeded in developing a sense of identity within OBCs. After all, how can we deny that it was primarily the Dalits who fought for the implementation of the Mandal Commission report for the OBCs? Second, OBCL will go a long way in building a mainstream within Hindi literature. But this will happen only when the idea of OBCL is clarified in terms of its principles and philosophy. I am saying this because the kind of things one gets to read these days about the idea of OBCL do not have clear-cut principles and philosophy, though they do have an emotional conceptualizing, which is quite thought-provoking. It is, however, not yet clear how to identify OBCL.

OBCL should have emerged much before DL. If it is appearing only now, then it is definitely a result of the explosion of DL. Whenever it comes into being, it will primarily be confronting DL. It will also be compared with DL. Dalit writers too will carry out a comparative assessment. The biggest problem in this assessment will be its identity. How will it be identified? What will be the fundamental principles of its philosophy? Just as DL has an identity and has roots primarily in the philosophy of Jotiba Phule, Dr Ambedkar, Buddha, Kabir and Ravidas and its primary ideology is rejection of caste order and untouchability, what will be the philosophy of OBCL? DL has accepted the heroes of the Dalit classes, which also include OBC heroes. Will OBCL do the same? Will it keep Ambedkar at an arm's length and accept only Phule and Buddha?

OBCs are Shudras that come within the caste order. In this respect, they are also Savarna (upper) castes. Perhaps this is the reason they consider themselves higher than the Dalits and practice untouchability against them. It is to be noted that the bitter experiences of caste atrocities that Dalits have are not available to OBCs. It is on the basis of these experiences that DL remains the most distinguished literature. What would be the distinguishing features of

OBCL? The OBC has not been able to develop a politics of its own; how will it develop a literature? Literature and politics develop out of a social movement but unlike the Dalit movement no parallel OBC movement has made a nationwide mark. Mandal movement was actually a part of the Dalit movement. OBCs did not even participate in this movement. When the Dalit movement was mobilizing OBCs in favour of Mandal, barring few exceptions, OBCs were busy pulling down the Babri Mosque. The fundamental difference between Dalits and OBCs is that Dalit do not consider themselves Hindus, while OBCs do. DL is a literature of “Not-Hindu” philosophy. What will be the philosophy of OBCL – Hindu or “not-Hindu”?

In a detailed discussion on the idea of OBC literature (see page 19), Rajendra Prasad Singh has raised many questions. There is no denying his argument that if there could be DL then why there can't be OBCL. But the question is where OBCL is actually found. One cannot construct it by bringing out names of writers from among Siddhas to Jaishankar Prasad and from Rajendra Prasad and Rajendra Yadav to Premkumar Mani. There is no doubt that many of the Siddhas were from the Dalit-OBC castes, and there were about 30 of them, but they all were poets belonging to the Siddha tradition and not to any separate stream, which can be now connected to OBCL. And, of course, there is no doubt that there were Sant poets in the Middle Ages, in south India as well as in the Hindi region, but can their writings be labelled Dalit-OBC? If yes, then why doesn't Rajendra Prasad ji show that Kabir, Ravidas and Namdev are separate? The information that he provides about the existence of a Sarbhanga sect in the 18th century all of whose poets were OBCs and whose first poet was Chhatar Baba is truly important. He must work on this and all their writings must come to light. That can really become the primary foundation of OBCL. But if, as he says, Sarbhanga poets showed all signs of brahmanical hypocrisy – abiding by the norms of casteism, going to pilgrimages, observing fasts, etc – and thought of man as beyond the control of untouchability, then I don't think they were very different from Ravidas. Then in what sense is it OBCL? Separate from DL or parallel to it? And in modern Hindi literature, when he considers Jaishankar Prasad an OBC and calls him a brilliant author, it must be kept in mind that he was also a brilliant mouthpiece of Brahmanism. If such is the way the idea of OBCL is being determined, in which caste and not the ideology is

important, then I don't think that literature will be transformational.

In my view, OBCL would also be based on liberty, equality and fraternity and, hence, in such situation could a dividing line be drawn between DL and OBCL? Here Rajendra Prasad Singh rightly says that in principle and practice Dalit and OBC streams are the same and he also gives the right reason for this: both want to establish a casteless society. One can also completely agree with him when he says that OBCL is very powerful and that OBC works are available in large numbers. But as he himself holds, these large numbers do not mean a thing if they are not classified properly as OBC discourse. Now, when this work has not even been done and no OBC writer, including Rajendra Yadav, Premkumar Mani, Madhukar Singh, Sanjiv, Shiv Murti, Dinesh Kushwaha and Virendra Sarang, is writing with an idea of OBCL, and not even expressing themselves fully in that sense, then how can you level this allegation that "OBC literature is a literature groaning between upper caste and Dalit literatures"? This is a baseless allegation. When something doesn't even exist, the talk about it being crushed between two grindstones is merely a flight of fancy. First, let OBCL with its conceptualization come into existence. Only after that, its direction and location will be determined.

About a decade ago, a few OBCs began talking about Avarna Sahitya (Non-Upper-Caste Literature). A conference was organized in Patna and a souvenir was published, to which I also contributed. Perhaps it was with this idea that Ravindra Laddu began publishing the *Shambuk* magazine. In the 1970s, Ramswaroop Verma started Arjak Sangh in Lucknow and laid the foundation of Arjak Literature, which we can link to the idea of OBCL. Dalits gave wholehearted support to this movement. This entire movement was against Brahmanism, which stirred up both Dalits and OBCs. Later this movement got politicized and OBC writers became indifferent to the notion of OBCL that it created. These pages from history are of the period to which Rajendra Prasad Singh and my generation belong and these are the truths that cannot be denied. So, it is not wise to count the number of castes and allege that DL is suppressing OBCL.

And how wonderful it would be if there were no DL and OBCL! And we could establish the idea of Bahujan as the predominant stream in literature.

(Forward Press, November 2011)

Bahujans as the Indian proletariat

Arvind Kumar

What is Bahujan literature? The *FORWARD* Press Bahujan Literature Annual April 2013 asks this question and also seeks to answer it. The issue examines, debates and discusses the concept of Bahujan literature from different angles and the 18 articles carried in the issue will be remembered long for their diverse approach and their sharp analysis. The editors of the magazine consider Mahatma Jotiba Phule as the great grandfather of Bahujan literature. Editor-in-Chief Ivan Kostka argues, "... though Babasaheb [Bhimarao Ambedkar] has inspired generations of Dalit writers, he himself was not a literary writer." On the other hand, "Phule ... himself was a literary writer."

Managing Editor Pramod Ranjan, in his editorial essay, "Bahujan Sahitya aur Aalochana" (Bahujan literature and criticism), asks: "How do we look at a particular literature? How do we distinguish it from any other literature? How do we understand its impact? From which angle can it be best understood? Shouldn't criticism answer all these questions?" It is true that Hindi criticism has not been discharging this responsibility. As Pramod Ranjan says, "Some big names in the field of Hindi criticism, because of their *dwij* [twice-born] social background, did not take cognizance of the literature of Shudras and Atishudras as a separate genre." To enlarge the ambit of Bahujan literature, we also includes Dalit, Shudra, Tribal and Women's literature in it.

All the articles in the issue are centred on the theme – Bahujan literature's definition and its relevance, if any. Harinarayan Thakur, in his long article, "Dalit aur Bahujan Sahitya ki Mukti Chetna" (Liberation consciousness in Dalit and Bahujan literature), while recounting the role of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda, Dayananda Saraswati, Periyar and Ambedkar in its origin and development, writes, "But the appellation of Mahatma has been conferred only on two of them – Phule and Gandhi." Thus, the reader gets a broad historical and social perspective of this literature. Sapna Chamadia takes the history of this literature even further back in time – to Sant Raidas.

A key question is of Marxism. Hareram Singh writes in an essay that he associates Bahujans with the proletariat but capitalism was not the only thing that needed to be opposed in Indian society.

Here I would like to add a bit from my personal experience. In the 1950s, I quit the Congress and become an enthusiastic member of the Communist party. In the Congress, we young men used to visit “Harijan” bastis to teach the children and the elderly, and for the expansion of education under Gandhiji’s “Uddhar Andolan” (redemption movement). As a member of the Karol Bagh branch of the Communist party, I had the good fortune of coming in contact with painter Ram Kumar, his younger brother, thinker and writer Nirmal Verma, and would-be renowned painter Swaminathan. At a district-level meeting, in ignorance I asked Nirmal, “Comrade, what is our Harijan policy?” I was given an answer which was absolutely indigestible for me. I was told, “In Communism, we divide the society into capitalists, proletariat, etc. Since Harijans are not a separate class for us, there can be no separate policy for them.” I was not happy with the answer but told myself it probably had some deeper, hidden meaning, which I would comprehend later. By the 1960s, neither Nirmal nor I was a communist. Unfortunately, Nirmal became a protagonist of Hinduvad and I its diehard opponent, which I continue to be till this day. Thus, I concur with Hareram ji and Rajendra Prasad Singh when they say that “Adding the word Bahujan to proletariat is proper and correct”, although I do not agree with many other things they say.

Here, it is important for us to understand that Marxism, which was born in the particular socio-economic conditions that prevailed in post-Industrial Revolution Europe, has not and cannot give any satisfactory solution to the problems of the East, including India and African societies. In China, many classical Marxist formulations were avoided in Maoist theory. Be that as it may, this annual literary number has posed many questions before us, the answers to which must be explored. I hope the next literary annual will answer some of these questions.

(Forward Press, September 2013)

Will only caste be the basis of 'Bahujan'?

Devendra Choubey

Over the last several decades – in fact centuries – various ideological movements have tried to define literature. Some have said literature portrays the real society; others have said it reflects society; still others have insisted that ideology is literature. Then there are activists who say that whatever is being written about society is literature. Similarly, there are those who say that literature is just the ordinary flow of life and others who say it is a mix of emotions and thoughts. But what is important to decide is what actually literature is and whether it is necessary to define it. In the 1990s, the implementation of the Mandal Commission report set in motion a process of sociopolitical change. This prompted a large section of Indian society to start describing its writings as Dalit literature.

Famous fiction writer and editor of *Hans* Rajendra Yadav and Marxist critic Manager Pandey welcomed and supported this new genre of literature and tried to analyze it historically in the context of Aswaghosh's *Vajra Suchi*. But when, at a literary conference, Rajendra Yadav advocated divorcing Dalit literature from the Scheduled Castes and linking it with a bigger canvas, he had to face stiff opposition. This, when his clear objective was to broaden the ambit of Dalit literature by bringing under its umbrella the literature of all the exploited and deprived communities.

The concept of Bahujan literature, which *FORWARD* Press has been seeking to promote, may become established as a new literary concept some day provided it takes under its wings other exploited and deprived sections such as Shudras, Atishudras, Tribals and women. But here we must also consider whether "Bahujan" will include only these social groups and whether caste will be the sole determinant of who is a Bahujan and who is not.

Secondly, what will be the ideology of Bahujans? The reason why this question assumes importance is that a long historical process lies behind the development of any concept. At the centre of this process are the basic problems of individuals and society. Society persistently grapples with these problems, trying to free itself

from them, but inertia is so deeply rooted that it takes ages for a new concept to develop. The Dalit community, in the Indian context, and the coloured people internationally are examples of this. Kabir and Nagarjun are two instances of Hindi litterateurs whose writings are not cited for their literary value but for their sharp and unsparing assault on the inertia gripping society and for developing social consciousness. These writers even risked social opprobrium in the pursuit of their mission. There are many such writers and individuals in society. Rajendra Prasad Singh argues that OBC criticism is needed for a rational and just evaluation of such writers. But what kind of criticism should we demand for evaluation of Nagarjun? While Kabir had many critics, several Marxist, traditional and progressive critics do not even consider Nagarjun a poet. Some conservative critics even brand him as a pamphlet writer of a political party. What I feel is that there is a need to develop a logical methodology that evaluates not the writer but his writing.

Sometimes, besides historical and social circumstances, geographical hurdles also come in the way of rational evaluation of writers and thinkers. At times, such hurdles are artificially created. But literature or thought with social concerns finds expression one way or the other.

The movement launched by Jotiba Phule and Savtribai Phule against brahmanical inertia and the caste system had a profound impact on society. In Hindi, their thoughts were reflected in the writings of authors like Radhamohan Gokul. In the Hindi belt, Radhamohan Gokul not only praises the work of the Phule couple but also insists on its importance. But after the advent of Gandhi and Ambedkar, during the freedom struggle, the ideology of the Hindi belt became infused with nationalism. It would, however, be wrong to say that issues related to the social system entirely disappeared. Many movements arose in the beginning of the 1940s that were clearly inspired by Ambedkar and Phule.

The fact is that the literature and thought basically engage with contemporary questions. Sometimes, some issues are missing from these questions but that does not mean that these issues are of no importance. Many a time, when we are trying to develop literary concepts we forget that the fundamental thrust of a society is not based on any particular caste or community but on the basic problems of that society. Humanism is its core and all ideologies and lit-

eratures aim at preserving this humanism. Writers like Kabir, Jotiba Phule, Bhartendu, Mahaveer Prasad Dwivedi, Maithilisharan Gupta, Mahadevi Verma, Mahatma Gandhi, Ambedkar, Periyar, Bhagat Singh, Premchand, Rahul Sankrityayan, Phanishwarnath Renu, Ram Manohar Lohia, Charu Mazumdar, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Mahasweta Devi and U.R. Ananattmurti – all worked to create this fundamental thrust so that humanism is preserved and society marches ahead with collective consciousness. If the concept of Bahujan literature develops, at its core should be this feeling of humanism so that society retains its rationality and judiciousness.

Literature always stands by those truths that can take society forward. Truth has many forms. Needless to say social deformities are also very much a reality of our society. The new literature is taking on this reality and is trying to develop a consciousness that can preserve our humanism. If humanism survives, so does our society and the world will become a better place to live in.

(Forward Press, May 2014)

Bahujan literature: Some notes

Amrendra Kumar Sharma

Bahujan literature is the antithesis of elitist literature. Sometimes, they seem to be at loggerheads, sometimes they seem to be engaged in a bitter battle and there are also occasions, when they seem to be parallel to each other. Literature mirrors social contradictions – it sometimes confronts contemporary history and sometimes becomes its fellow traveller. “The history of human growth is the history of the endeavour of the human race to move in the direction of progress. Historical, not philosophical, elements are the determinants of this endeavour” (*Manushya Aur Dharma Chintan*, Raosaheb Kasbe). By a close reading of this history, Bahujan literature attempts to find its roots in it.

Going through the April 2012 Bahujan Literature Annual published by *FORWARD* Press, we find that, from the seventh century BC, Bahujan literature meanders through the writings of ‘Kautsa’, Makkali Ghosh, Buddha, Kabir, Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Periyar, Bhartendu Harishchandra, Jai Shankar Prasad, Phanishwarnath Renu, Ram Manohar Lohia, etc., up to the 20th century. Bahujan literature includes them in its fold based not on an analysis of their writings but on their caste. This is where Bahujan literature hits a dead end. We all know that it is the writings of these commentators, philosophers and authors, not their caste, that made them immortal.

A work of literature is evaluated on the basis of its core direction and not the caste of its author. I agree with Pramod Ranjan when he writes in his editorial that “retrograde values do not come alone; they come in packages. If you are orthodox vis-à-vis caste, your attitude towards women will be the same.” I also concur with some of Virendra Yadav’s views on the relevance of the concept of OBC literature (see page 55). He correctly says that “categorizing writers as OBCs is tantamount to giving the mainstream Hindi literature a free run to pursue its elitist objectives”. The acceptability of the writers whom he had named is not because of their caste but their writings and their OBC concerns. Bahujan literature should be wary of confining itself to any straitjacket. This is the biggest challenge before it.

Rajendra Prasad Singh’s article “Bahujan literature and criticism” loses its way while trying to raise some important issues re-

garding Bahujan literature. At one place, he writes that the criteria, poetics and aesthetics of Bahujan literature are different. But he does not care to expound or analyse these different criteria, poetics and aesthetics. He includes OBC literature, Dalit literature, Tribal literature and, to an extent, literature centred on women in Bahujan literature (Why? One may well ask.). It is surprising that despite referring to “Tar Saptak” and drawing several other parallels, he fails to bring forth his concept of Bahujan literature and wanders aimlessly talking about “Kayastha kul shiromani”, etc. He falls into the trap of simplistic statements like “Marxist criticism in India is dishonest”. He must be aware of the fact that if he has the freedom to describe Marxist critics as dishonest the latter also have the freedom to do the same to him.

Rajendra Prasad Singh says that “An OBC criticism methodology is needed to evaluate OBC authors.” Why not Bahujan authors? He does not enlighten us as to what this methodology is. If we want to challenge the Marxist or twice-born criticism and its mentality on fundamental, solid grounds, we will have to make a concrete theoretical and practical beginning. And for that, in the words of Virendra Yadav, we do not need to establish a “separate camp”, especially, when the challenges of the 21st century, with their smooth, alluring colours, are slowly being assimilated into our lives, without one being any the wiser. There is this invisible underbelly of this capital-oriented 21st century. Many bitter truths, many moans, many muffled screams, many struggles and many tales of resistance which are neither heard nor seen are embedded in its many layers. Way back in 1884, Karl Marx, through his economic-philosophical writings, had given us one instrument that can help us peel off the upper layers and access the underbelly. He writes, “A trader in minerals only sees the commercial value of the minerals, not their beauty or their form. He has no perception of the science of minerals”. Men and women, soaked in mud, planting paddy never seem to be / are detestable”. This statement of Rajendra Prasad Singh has no basis whatsoever. There is a need to give a serious thought to the decline in the tradition of agricultural culture in India due to the policies of the nation-state and to follow it up with appropriate action. Rajendra Prasad ji should have talked about that. Bahujan literature has yet to give shape to its philosophical framework and define its scope and objectives.

While talking of the social foundations of Bahujan literature, we should pay serious attention to economic factors. The important question (which, in fact, is the answer) in the analysis of Kanwar Bharati (and Anita Bharti) that “among the Dalits, like in every other community, a creamy layer had emerged” deserves to be pondered (brahmanical thinking is not the exclusive preserve of any particular community or group) because literature from any part of the world has an economic angle and we cannot remain aloof from it. The economic angle is often the determinant of social relations.

Which side of the political spectrum is Bahujan literature on? This should be discussed and debated. In the 21st century, capital has emerged as a powerful adversary to ideology. MNCs are cornering the lands of farmers with impunity. Uncle Sam’s astute policies are affecting our daily life. In this backdrop, Bahujan literature should take a clear and firm stand.

Only if Bahujan literature can assume the role of the avant garde in social change, and/or prepare itself for that role can the concept of Bahujan literature gain currency and stand up to the dominant systems.

(Forward Press, November 2012)

Touchstone of aesthetics

Sanjeev Chandan

Recently, I came across a rather strange proposition. A Dalit author argued that Savitribai Phule could not be the symbol of Dalit literature but that instead Achootanand Harihar's wife deserved the honour. Contrast this laughable contention with Babasaheb Ambedkar describing Buddha, Kabir and Jotiba Phule as his ideals – none of whom were Dalits. This begs the question of what has become of the Dalit literary movement and whether, in the words of Mahatma Phule, it has been reduced to merely the "literature of the Atishudras". This begs another question, too: Can Dalit literature, which arose as a protest against the Varna system, provide a literary and cultural alternative to Brahmanism without giving expression to the pain and struggle of the Shudras, who also suffered under Brahmanism? Thus the need for the concept of a joint struggle on the literary plane of Shudras-Atishudras and Tribals is being felt. This can be and is being called Bahujan literature and can be described as "Phule-Ambedkarite literature" too.

If the concept of Bahujan literature has some basis, then, it logically follows that "Dwij" literature also exists. Though there is no formal category called Dwij literature, it can be recognized on the basis of symbols, imagery, language, objectives and the overall ambience. It directly or indirectly supports the Varna system. On the other hand, the symbols, imagery, language and milieu of Bahujan literature give expression to the struggles and dreams of the Bahujans while opposing the Varna system. These are the basic contours of Bahujan literature. But it is also imperative that if the concept of Bahujan literature is taking shape, its aesthetics are developed. Bahujan aesthetics should be considered the touchstone or else every OBC expressing himself would be contributing to OBC literature.

The present social milieu of the OBCs should also be kept in mind. It seems that Brahmanism has struck deep roots among the OBCs and the OBCs are more fatalistic and greater proponents of cultural hegemony than Dalits. If an OBC writer is a firm believer in fatalism, cultural hegemony and the Varna system, then, can their writings be called Bahujan literature? On the other hand, Phule-Ambedkarite consciousness should be the essential criterion for a

work to be classified as “Bahujan literature”. Thus, would the writings of a litterateur, who is Dwij by birth but has Phule-Ambedkarite consciousness and rejects Brahmanism, form part of the Bahujan literature? The protagonists of the concept of Bahujan literature need to answer these questions.

We humans have a natural resistance to change. We are wired to be status quoists. Attempts are being made to construct counter-myths to take on the popular Hindu myths. This is a social reality which cannot be ignored. Whether it is worshipping Mahishasur or re-rendition of the story of Holika or a Dussehra dedicated to great Bahujan personalities in Maharashtra or the celebrations around Baliraja – they all are alternative cultural efforts. Only Bahujan literature will show this cultural consciousness and take on Brahmanism. Bahujan literature should grow with Dalit literature as its extension and it should not oppose the existing Dalit literary movement.

The proponents of this concept will have no dearth of challenges. This year, *FORWARD* Press has brought out this Bahujan literature special number. Next year, why not publish articles that focus on the benchmarks of Bahujan literature, the foundations of its aesthetics and criticism of some well-known literary works? These are all part of aesthetics.

(Forward Press, May 2014)

Sole platform for the Tarabai Shindes and Savitribai Phules

Anita Bharti

How many of us aware writers, social activists and agitators know about – and talk about – the 19th-century radical writer Tarabai Shinde and her 1882 book *Stri Purush Tulna* (A Comparison Between Women and Men, a booklet on the social situation of women that created quite a stir at that time)? Or, the most important social revolutionary leader of the 19th century, Savitribai Phule (1831 –1897), who was a pioneer in the field of girl-child education and faced plenty of problems but did not give up; and eventually despite all sorts of adverse circumstances, oppositions, prejudices and indifference, became the first woman teacher in India? Even after so many years since Independence, our Indian society and the upper-caste educated class, infected as it is by caste prejudices, is not ready even today to honour Savitribai Phule and the work of social reform that she did and thus include her in the list of prominent Indian social reformers.

The place Tarabai Shinde deserved in Indian feminist movement and the feminist philosophy undergirding that movement – like the other Indian and foreign feminist thinkers – was not granted to her. One wonders, what after all is the reason for this gross neglect of both Savitribai Phule and Tarabai Shinde. Could it be that since both belong to the Bahujan section, the casteist society has chosen to ignore them? It is well known that both Tarabai Shinde and Savitribai Phule came from Bahujan society. Hence, is it merely a coincidence that both of these figures are not part of the so-called mainstream history and movement because they are Bahujans or is it a well-calculated move, a historical, social and intellectual conspiracy?

With the awakening of their own sense of identity, a consciousness emerged among the Dalits and Bahujans that made it possible for them to know their icon Savitribai Phule and for the last seven to eight years she has begun to feature prominently in the list of Indian radicals. In this context, it has become necessary for me to talk about this because for the last few years the Dalit Women Movement has been celebrating her death anniversary on 10 March as the Indian Women's Day and what is heartening to see is that today many Dalitbahujan and women's

organizations too have begun to celebrate 10 March as Indian Women's Day. This is the result of a common strength and common struggle. So is the concept of Bahujan literature (BL) – that is how I see it. I believe that with the emergence of BL, the debate being conducted by Dalit literature (DL) on various issues and questions will expand, the struggle will gain strength. DL has always considered those figures its friends, well-wishers and leaders who took a stand against caste and fought a committed battle against inequality, regardless of their community and caste background.

I also believe that the voice and expressions of oppressed identities have always been present in society in one form or the other, whether is folk literature, folk art or any other medium. Unfortunately, this casteist country that considers talent a quality acquired by birth has only sung praises of the talent of very few and selective castes. The voices of all the other identities were either drowned out or were forcefully stifled. Their voice was never allowed to become a prominent accent. Now the way the men and women from the Dalitbahujan society are getting educated and, equipped with sharp ideological consciousness, are coming forward in the debates and tackling questions, it raises the hope that the time is not far when all oppressed and stifled identities will come together and, fighting against oppression, indignity, victimization heaped upon them, will rein in the vicious cycle of conspiracies that had pushed them to the margins.

Sometime ago, discussions around another stream of literature began to be called Bahujan literature. Now whether we call it BL or OBCL, we must openly and comprehensively debate it. While doing that, our attitude should be liberal. BL should not suffer the kind of opposition, resistance, dismissals and invectives that came in the way Dalit and women's literature. It is always better to have open discussions about an ideology and principles because it is only through debates and discussions that we can explore and investigate any ideology and principle and not via some ready-made guesswork or by simply ignoring it. If the principle is right, the discussion will proceed; and if not, it will come to a close on its own.

Initially DL and women's literature too came under a lot of fire – sometimes for the content and sometimes for the form or craft. In fact, objections were raised against expressing bitter experiences related to caste- and gender-related tragedies of life. But both the identities rejected all allegations and doubts, and finally dug their heels in the field

of literature. Now it is a different matter that within Dalit literature and women's literature, the Dalit woman is struggling with those questions, prejudices and doubts that faced Dalit literature and women's literature in their struggle in the world of literature.

An important question that BL will have to face is this: Since Bahujan society is not very weak economically and, in fact, many of its castes are rather strongly placed and enjoy considerable honour in society, and they do not face indignity like the Dalits, then what was the need to begin a discourse on the existence of BL? I believe that today oppressed and repressed Dalit identities are shaking off the long history of oppression, harassment, immense indifference and victimization and presenting strong resistance to the oppressive powers, and not only opposing it but also succeeding in giving its opposition a creative expression of an extremely high order. This creative expression is also giving birth to a mass consciousness in the oppressed, victimized and exploited society. In such a scenario, if people from Bahujan society becoming aware of their own identity through literature join the other repressed and victimized identities then there is nothing wrong in it; in fact, it is good. Bahujan society is a very big society. It is possible that today people who are considered "forward" in this Bahujan society will come forth but in the future the extremely backward and crushed identities will also succeed in putting forth their viewpoint.

There is an unlimited power in literature. Social and political movements too draw a lot of strength from literature. On the basis of this limitless power of literature, it is possible that one day Dalit movement, women's movement and other progressive and democratic movements and Bahujan movement, all will come together and, equipped with the consciousness of their identities, they will organize themselves into a single class against caste, gender and any other kind of inequality and discrimination. I could be just dreaming about the coming together of all sorts of identities but this dream may come true the day Dalits, OBCs, Tribals, minorities, women and others all present a collective challenge to this casteist, brahmanical, feudal and capitalist patriarchy. This dream turning into reality looks all the more possible because of the emergence of the concept of Bahujan literature. But yes, Bahujan literature must deliberate deeply all its aspects, ideological, philosophical, political and religious.

(Forward Press, April 2012)

Everything else is pulp fiction

Sandeep Meel

The stratification of Indian society, done under the guidelines provided by the Brahmanical social ideology, was accompanied by an elaborate hypocrisy of ‘sacredness’, leaving no possibilities of ideological union between Shudras, Ati-Shudras and OBCs. As the unity of these three classes would have sounded the death knell of the extant system, whenever movements fighting for equality were launched in India, the Savarnas tried to smuggle the OBCs into their camp. The real danger was the disintegration of Brahmanical Hindu religion and it could be saved only by giving it a new veneer of faith and religion.

Arya Samaj was an example of one such attempt which tried to disrupt the impending unity of the Shudras, Ati-Shudras and OBCs in colonial India. That was because all the three classes were using their knowledge of instruments of exploitation, acquired by them through experience, to spread awareness and thus create a wider consciousness of liberation. That was why it was essential for Brahmanism to build structures of art, literature and land relations that would continue to keep the society divided.

In post-Independence India, this agenda was implemented with even greater alacrity. The Savarna litterateurs were feeling threatened by the growing popularity of Dalit literature. They could also see the signs of an emerging OBC literature and a ‘great’ Hindi critic voiced this ‘pain’ of the Savarna community by tossing comments like “No reservation in literature”. In fact, they were not fearful of OBC literature. What they feared was the emerging new concept of ‘Bahujan literature’ in which Dalit, women’s, tribal and OBC literature was included. This concept had the potential to wipe out their carefully crafted divisive strategy. And then, it would not have remained confined to art and literature. It would have spread to all areas of knowledge where the Bahujans were making their presence felt. When the critics were shouting themselves hoarse, the first battalion of OBCs was demolishing the outermost circle of the Savarna domination of Indian academic institutions. They were not only attacking the Savarna domination in terms of numbers but they were also endeavouring to bring into public domain the knowledge that

was kept under wraps for centuries. The pace at which Bahujan presence is growing in the field of politics is much faster than in the arenas of literature and art. That is because the savarnas have had almost a complete monopoly over publishing, criticism and reading and writing. The fact that many authors wearing the cloak of 'progressivism' too, ultimately, played the role of Savarna critics should not be mourned.

That is the reason why the concept of 'Bahujan', which was relegated to the margins, is finding a place in the chronicles of society. It was these so-called Progressives who glorified Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan instead of Jotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule. What is even more interesting is that workers, farmers and the proletariat were never the concerns of these critics. Their caste identity remained most important for them: art and progressivism could wait. On the other hand, in the concept of Bahujans, right from Buddha to Phule, the concerns of the farmers and the workers have always found a central place. The seven notes of music were created by Dalits and OBCs but while giving the Savarna status of 'classical music', no one even bothered to tell the world that it had been created by Bahujans and it was their intellectual property.

The entire level of consciousness in this 'loot of knowledge' has been created with Dwijis as its base. Therefore, it can safely be concluded that the aforementioned Hindi critics must have been primarily concerned about maintaining the dominance of Dwijis.

Jotiba Phule's play *Kisan Ka Koda* is an excellent documentation of the condition and problems of the peasants in the Indian subcontinent. It is an accurate analysis of the dialectics of the contemporary social, political and cultural ambience. But it was deliberately ignored. Also intriguing is that the concept of 'social equality' did not find a place in the teachings of any Indian thinker prior to Buddha. It was systematically developed at the conceptual level by Phule. Now, the question is, if the concept of 'social equality' does not exist even in a cultural structure then how and why is the literature of that cultural structure considered "people's literature"? In fact, it does not even qualify to be called literature because it is status quoist. It has no role to play in the development of society. Thus, Indian literature begins and ends with Bahujan literature. Savarna literature is merely an instrument of exploitation.

The stream of Bahujan literature is quite a long one. And it is

also a fact that if you subtract Bahujan literature from the so-called Hindi literature, only pulp fiction will remain. The desperation and anxiety of the critic referred to above can be understood. How can he become a 'great' critic on the basis of this 'pulp', especially since all his instruments of criticism are Savarna?

Another pertinent issue is that the assessments of Savarna thinkers vis-à-vis the pace of social change have proved to be wide off the mark. For instance, this critic insisted that it would take 100 to 200 years to free society from its well-entrenched mores and prejudices. But the rise of political awareness among the Bahujans and the quickened pace of cultural changes seems to have shortened this time frame. If their understanding of society and its processes is so flawed then wouldn't it be legitimate to ask as to what degree the so-called 'Progressive' movement was influenced by Savarna conservatism.

(Forward Press, July 2014)

‘Start a Mahatma versus Mahatma campaign’

Waman Meshram

I was very pleased to see the *FORWARD* Press Bahujan Literary Annual April 2012. However, one thing that disappointed me was that it had so few pages. Our people will not be satisfied with this. An annual must have more pages [than the usual issue]. People will be ready to pay for it. I myself would buy 1,000 copies of that [bigger issue].

Here I want to share a few things that are important for *FORWARD* Press to be established at the national level. This magazine is taking forward the ideas of Mahatma Phule in a very conscious way. This is a unique effort. But to try and carry forward the ideas of Phule is like playing with fire. The OBC section which *FORWARD* Press seeks to reach out to, believes in Mahatma Gandhi and not Mahatma Phule. In North India, Ram Manohar Lohia influenced OBCs into following Gandhi – very deliberately. I am saying this on the basis of documented evidence. Gandhi is a very potent weapon of the politics of the domination of the upper castes.

Second, Jotirao did not consider the so-called freedom movement a freedom movement at all. Many people among the OBCs will outrightly refuse to accept this. This is about the time when Gandhi was not even born. Congress leaders even tried to persuade Chhatrapati Shahu ji Maharaj to join the “freedom struggle”. He refused to come on board. Efforts were made twice to appropriate Babasaheb Ambedkar in that same movement. You will be surprised to know that he too refused to join. I sometimes think if our great [Dalitbahujan] men had joined the so-called freedom movement, the results would have been disastrous!

You would not have been able to see the things in the Constitution that are in our favour if Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar had become part of the freedom movement.

I believe there were two freedom movements. One was led by the Congress, which was about the freedom of Brahmins from the British. Brahmins got their freedom on 15 August 1947 and their freedom movement ended. But the second freedom movement –

freedom from the Brahmins – continues even today.

Friends, to deliberate upon OBCs we must first understand the sociology of OBCs. In the year 1952, when the first Backward Classes Commission was formed, even the Brahmins in Maharashtra were part of the OBC. And that is why a [Poona] Brahmin, Kaka Kalelkar was made its chairman. Protesting this move, Babasaheb Ambedkar went on to resign [from the central cabinet]. Babasaheb used to say that a Brahmin from Poona is the worst scoundrel of them all. Besides being a Brahmin, Kalelkar was also a Gandhian. So he was doubly a scoundrel. Once he had to visit a district. He wrote to the Muslim Collector there that he must have only a Brahmin to cook for him. Another example of his villainy is that when he had submitted his report to the Government of India, Kalelkar wrote separately a 30-page letter to the president. In that letter he said that he was not in agreement with the report of the commission. Making this letter the basis, Nehru did not even allow the tabling of the report in the House.

In the end, I would like to say that you must start a special “Mahatma-versus-Mahatma” campaign. Mahatma Jotirao Phule versus Mahatma Gandhi. One needs a lot of heart, a lot of courage for that. I believe that *FORWARD* Press has that heart. The suggestions I am giving to you are a sure way to become unpopular, but you can’t proceed forward without taking this path. You and we must adopt this way. Whatever *FORWARD* Press has published so far is extremely heartening. In fact, I would also say that *FORWARD* Press must organize a conference of Bahujan writers on a large scale, so that the literature of the Bahujan section makes progress.

(*Forward Press, May 2012*)

‘I believe in the idea of a Bahujan literature’

Arundhati Roy

Good afternoon everybody. It’s true that I was asked only a day or two ago whether I would come [to this function for the release the FORWARD Press’s Bahujan Literary Annual] and I did happily agree, even though I never agree to be the chief guest for any occasion. But the reason I agreed to do this was because I think, here, we are on to an important idea. That’s why it was something I wanted to do.

[It is] the idea of a literature of people who look at the idea of oppression from a complex point of view. Because the problem I think [is] in how we struggle against a caste-ridden society. A caste-ridden society is a society worse than a society of slavery, worse than apartheid. A society that claims this hierarchy of injustice is institutionalised in its scriptures. So how do you possibly fight that? And an institution that is so many centuries old where you are asking people to – or people think you are asking them to – deny everything they are in order not to be unjust because the composition of every individual human being is one of unjustness. And that is linked to religion, which is at the core of them.

So the fight against caste is such a complicated one. Because on the one hand it is a fight against an identity that’s imposed on people arbitrarily, and to fight that you have to accept that identity and then you get locked into it, which is just what they want. And then you divide yourself up and get locked into it, then pit Dalits against the Muslims, OBCs against the Dalits, the Christian against the Adivasi. And inhabiting those identities that have been forced on us, we quarrel with each other and we actually play out exactly what caste was meant for. The most demonically clever system of administration is not where the people at the top control the people at the bottom, but [where] you create a division and make all of them fight with each other.

So how are we to fight this with anger while at the same time always holding in our hearts the idea of justice – not just the anger against injustice but the idea of justice, the idea of love, the idea of

beauty, of music, of literature? How do we not become bitter, small people because that is what they want us to become? And so I believe [in] the idea of a literature, of a Bahujan literature, a literature [which looks at] every kind of oppression, and it doesn't have to be just caste oppression – there are so many different kinds of oppression – but we cannot ever look away from what is the structure of society, which is a society whose engine is based on caste, a society whose politics, whose idea of everything runs on the basis of caste. But that doesn't mean it doesn't run on the basis of class, it doesn't mean it doesn't run on the basis of this extreme form of capitalism. All of those things have to be taken into account to understand how this society works.

That is why I think we have to look at literature as the means by which we can understand this complexity. That is why literature is such an important thing. It is not about how many copies sell and who won the Booker prize. It's about what are the ideas that excite a society into changing. That is why I was so happy to accept this [the invitation] because I feel the people in this room have the right idea. That idea is worth a lot in today's world.

We are facing a situation where you have the BJP and RSS now involved in Ghar Wapsi. This actually began long ago, at the turn of the 20th century. It has nothing to do with religion. It only has to do with demography, politics and numbers. They are now trying to use Babasaheb Ambedkar's own ideas of reservations as an inducement to those who have converted to Christianity, to Islam to escape the scourge of caste, to reconvert. They are trying to use Ambedkar's thought against himself. At this time, it is important to understand who are our friends and who are our enemies.

Even radical posturing which serves to deepen the divisions of caste in order to divide people is helping the other side. So we must be thinking very clearly now because we are going to face a huge amount of violence. All Christians, all Muslims, all Dalits, there is a big game being played with the OBC community, where people are posturing as OBCs when they are not – when they are Baniyas – and trying to swing the votes the other way and move into a situation we had before, which is a kind of not Hindu religion supremacy but Hindu supremacy in terms of race, in terms of nationality. So we have to be thinking fast and thinking on our feet and be able to say who are our friends and who are our enemies in a very complicated

situation. I know that I'm in a room of people who have thought very deeply and very wisely about this and I'm very proud to be sharing the platform with them. Thank you.

(This is the transcript of the inaugural address delivered by Arundhati Roy at a function to mark the sixth anniversary of the *FORWARD* Press magazine at the Constitution Club, New Delhi, on 29 April 2015.)

(Forward Press, June 2015)

Do only the twice-born have literary merit?

Gynanpith Award (Hindi)

1968	Sumitranandan Pant	Brahmin
1972	Ramdhari Singh 'Dinkar'	Bhumihar Brahmin
1978	Ajneya	Brahmin
1982	Mahadevi Varma	Kayastha
1992	Naresh Mehta	Brahmin
1999	Nirmal Verma	Khatri
2005	Kunwar Narayan	Rajput
2009	Amar Kant	Kayastha
2009	Shrilal Shukla	Brahmin
2013	Kedarnath Singh	Rajput

(The Jnanpith Award for the year 2009 was given jointly to two Hindi writers)

Sahitya Akademi Awards (Hindi)

1955	Makhanlal Chaturvedi	<i>Him-Tarangini</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1956	Vasudevasaran Agrawala	<i>Padmavat Sanjivini</i> (Commentary)	Vaishya
1957	Acharya Narendra Dev	<i>Bauddha Dharma Darshan</i> (Philosophy)	Khatri
1958	Rahul Sankrityayan	<i>Madhya Asia Ka Itihas</i> (History)	Brahmin
1959	Ramdhari Sinha 'Dinkar'	<i>Sanskriti Ke Char Adhyaya</i>	Bhumihar
1960	Sumitranandan Pant	<i>Kala aur Bhura Chand</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1961	Bhagwaticharan Verma	<i>Bhoole Bisre Chitra</i> (Novel)	Kayastha
1963	Amrit Rai	<i>Premchand: Kalam Ka Sipahi</i> (Biography)	Kayastha
1964	'Ajneya' (S.H. Vatsyayan)	<i>Aangan Ke Par Dvar</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1965	Nagendra	<i>Rasa Sidhanta</i> (Treatise on poetics)	Brahmin
1966	Jainendra Kumar	<i>Muktibodh</i> (Novel)	Jain
1967	Amritlal Nagar	<i>Amrit aur Vish</i> (Novel)	Brahmin
1968	Harivansh Rai Bachchan	<i>Do Chattanein</i> (Poetry)	Kayastha
1969	Shrilal Shukla	<i>Rag Darbari</i> (Novel)	Brahmin
1970	Ram Vilas Sharma	<i>Nirala Ki Sahitya Sadhana</i> (Biography)	Brahmin
1971	Namwar Singh	<i>Kavita Ke Naye Pratiman</i> (criticism)	Rajput
1972	Bhawani Prasad Mishra	<i>Buni Huyi Rassi</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1973	Hazari Prasad Dwivedi	<i>Alok Parva</i> (Essays)	Brahmin
1974	Shiv Mangal Singh 'Suman'	<i>Mati Ki Baraat</i> (Poetry)	Rajput
1975	Bhisham Sahni	<i>Tamas</i> (Novel)	Khatri
1976	Yashpal	<i>Meri Teri Uski Baat</i> (Poetry)	Khatri

1977	Shamsher Bahadur Singh	<i>Chuka Bhi Hun Nahin Main</i> (Poetry)	Jaat
1978	Bharat Bhushan Agarwal	<i>Utna Vah Suraj Hai</i> (Poetry)	Vaishya
1979	Dhoomil	<i>Kal Sunana Mujhe</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1980	Krishna Sobti	<i>Zindaginama</i> (Novel)	Khatri
1981	Trilochan	<i>Tap Ke Taye Hue Din</i> (Poetry)	Rajput
1982	Harishankar Parsai	<i>Viklang Shraddha Ka Daur</i> (Satire)	Brahmin
1983	Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena	<i>Khutiyon Par Tange Log</i> (Poetry)	Kayastha
1984	Raghuvir Sahai	<i>Log Bhool Gaye Hain</i> (Poetry)	Kayastha
1985	Nirmal Varma	<i>Kavve aur Kala Pani</i> (Short Stories)	Khatri
1986	Kedarnath Aggarwal	<i>Apurva</i> (Poetry)	Vaishya
1987	Shrikant Verma	<i>Magadh</i> (Poems)	Kayastha
1988	Naresh Mehta	<i>Aranya</i> (Poems)	Brahmin
1989	Kedarnath Singh	<i>Akaal Mein Saras</i> (Poetry)	Rajput
1990	Shiv Prasad Singh	<i>Neela Chand</i> (Novel)	Rajput
1991	Girija Kumar Mathur	<i>Main Vaqt Ke Hun Samne</i> (Poetry)	Kayastha
1992	Giriraj Kishore	<i>Dhai Ghar</i> (Novel)	Vaishya
1993	Vishnu Prabhakar	<i>Ardhanarishwar</i> (Novel)	Vaishya
1994	Ashok Vajpeyi	<i>Kahin Nahi Wahin</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1995	Kunwar Narain	<i>Koi Doosra Nahin</i> (Poetry)	Rajput
1996	Surendra Verma	<i>Mujhe Chand Chahiye</i> (Novel)	Kayastha
1997	Leeladhar Jagudi	<i>Anubhav Ke Aakash Mein Chand</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1998	Arun Kamal	<i>Naye Ilake Mein</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
1999	Vinod Kumar Shukla	<i>Deewar Main Ek Khirkee Rahathi Thi</i>	Brahmin
2000	Manglesh Dabral	<i>Hum Jo Dekhte Hain</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
2001	Alka Saraogi	<i>Kali-Katha: Via Bypass</i> (Novel)	Vaishya
2002	Rajesh Joshi	<i>Do Panktiyon Ke Beech</i> (Poems)	Brahmin
2003	Kamleshwar	<i>Kitne Pakistan</i> (Novel)	Brahmin
2004	Viren Dangwal	<i>Dushchakra Mein Srashta</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
2005	Manohar Shyam Joshi	<i>Kyap</i> (Novel)	Brahmin
2006	Gyanendrapati	<i>Sanshyatma</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
2007	Amar Kant	<i>Inhin Hathiyaron Se</i> (Novel)	Kayastha
2008	Govind Mishra	<i>Kohre Mein Kaid Rang</i> (Novel)	Brahmin
2009	Kailash Vajpeyi	<i>Hava Mein Hastakshar</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
2010	Uday Prakash	<i>Mohandas</i> (Story)	Rajput
2011	Kashinath Singh	<i>Rehan Par Raghu</i> (Novel)	Rajput
2012	Chandrakant Devnale	<i>Patthar Phenk Raha Hun</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin
2013	Mridula Garg	<i>Miljul Man</i> (Novel)	Brahmin
2014	Rameshchandra Shah	<i>Vinayak</i> (Novel)	Vaishya
2015	Ramdarash Mishra	<i>Aag Ki Hansi</i> (Poetry)	Brahmin

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