

Dalit Literature as Emergency Literature and Crisis Aesthetic

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Abstract: *This paper argues for Dalit literature as the embodiment of an emergency aesthetic in a time of crisis, particularly in India. The lack of proper aesthetic paradigms to articulate and address the crisis of subjugation and structural coercion necessitates an aesthetic of resistance that can only form against the backdrop of emergency. This paper offers a close reading of the Dalit feminist author Kalyani Thakur Charal's poetry and her novella Andhar Bil O Kichu Manus ("Andhar Lake and Some People"; 2019). At the same time, this paper examines the concepts of "emergency" and "crisis" through a non-canonical way of looking that differs from the method to look at these issues from the vantage point of a global, unified implication; Kalyani emphasizes the intersection of everyday social perspectives that also have universal significance in this globalized world. The tendency to prioritize the particular over the general to draw attention to the general importance of the particular gets its impetus from the Dalit feminist standpoint, which seeks to analyze the social structure that put all "differences" into categorical groups. Dalit literature demands a counter aesthetic of recognition and solidarity to erase discriminations by recognizing "difference", and to address the collective silence or negligence of the everyday emergency condition arising from systemic attempts at keeping the subjugated as nirbak ("alphabet-less"; and the process is called "nirbakization", or the act of silencing). For the genre of "emergency literature", there would be a methodological flaw if we focused on various global crises while ignoring everyday existential struggles in liminality. Thereby, this paper connects "emergency literature" with the struggles of Dalits who have had to live within humiliating conditions of emergency and coercive discrimination throughout their lives.*

Keywords: Dalit Literature, emergency Literature, crisis aesthetic, ontoethics, nirbakization, everyday social, Dalit feminist standpoint, existence of liminality.

How do we define the newly emerging genre called "emergency literature"? It is a literature of such a time, as philosopher Santiago Zabala argues (2017, n.p.), when we politically, that means governmentally, do not come across any incident of "emergency"; emergency literature emerges in the "absence of emergency." This "absence of emergency" is itself the greatest emergency that remain unaddressed properly; a situation that requires an aesthetic/political response that shakes us out of our complacency and forces us to recognize the

precocity of our current situation. Now if we ask, the emergency of what? Who has drawn this situation of emergency? To trace the answers to these questions, we have to look around our age and think a bit about the contemporary condition, both at the local and global level. The daily lives and living conditions of people around the world constitute an unacknowledged emergency. It is not an emergency that has been officially declared by authoritarian political regimes, but it is nonetheless political in the Rancierean (2010, n.p.) sense of a politics that disrupts the prevalent notion of institutionalized consensus; a politics that seeks to address, answer, confront, and agitate against the circumstances of disenfranchised/oppressed people. The precarious condition of life in our age is ignorantly exacerbated by cold-blooded politicians and the governing bodies of our states, who quietly work to ensure most of the policies and rules remain unknown to and unaddressed by the people they govern. So, the current crisis has been imposed on us by the political class and the regimes of capitalist bourgeois knowledge production in a very dramatic, artful manner. Now it is the people's turn to raise their voices and break the cycle of indifference by making the unacknowledged emergency situation recognizable to all. It is the current situation of crisis, embedded in the debris of enlightenment hubris, that necessitates an urgent, immediate "emergency of aesthetics" (Zabala 2017, n.p.) that would correspond to and converse with the current emergency.

Therefore, emergency literature records the pain, anger, struggle, evolution, adaption, and eruption of resistance derived from every individual's lived experience. In this scenario, we can say emergency literature portrays the art of living, the politics of existence, and the struggle for survival in this neo-precarious condition. Therefore, this "crisis literature" shocks the prevalent mainstream aesthetic sensibility and, more aptly, it breaks the hierarchical concept of literature as a pleasure-providing source of leisure. On the other hand, the global humanitarian crisis has widened the scope for solidarity between mainstream aesthetics and the non-mainstream/subaltern aesthetics that compel the bourgeois, upper-caste cultural and academic elites to revisit their prevailing understanding and to open up new platforms to promote these *dissensual aesthetics*. However, we could not say that today's dissent promoting aesthetic understanding would not be appropriated by the all-devouring nature of bourgeois aesthetic practices. Therefore, we have to be more cautious in this time of emergency. Our responsibility should not be limited to theorizing or dilettantish rhetorical articulations of alter-native and/or different literary aesthetics, but should also focus on the practice of developing different aesthetics for living in this time of crisis. Therefore, the performance of dissensus, that reveals the contingency of perceptual order has to be enacted at the ground level of daily life. This paper traces an ethos of dissent in Dalit literature by examining the work of Kalyani Thakur.

In the context of India, Dalit literature precedes this newly emerging genre of emergency literature. Throughout India, Dalit literature primarily

records the various experiences and testimony of downtrodden sections of society that have been subject to maltreatment, marginalization, and dehumanizing practices by the elite castes within the hierarchical structures of Indian society. The primary affordance of Dalit literature is its ability to cultivate the sensibilities of its audience by making them aware of the expressions of pain, anguish, trauma, anger, resistance, struggle, etc. Apart from these, however, Dalit literary aesthetics has also dominantly nurtured the crux of understanding human existence—the very ethos of “becoming”. Dalit literature stands against the socio-cultural silencing (or “nirbakization”) to suppress Dalit voice that results from the monolithic projection of Dalit literature as an outburst of trauma and suffering. Actually, Dalit literature moves a step forward by not just recording the blemishes of life, but also instigating a continuous effort to engage, negotiate, and overcome a destitute situation in life. This act of penning down the struggle of life is itself an example of resistance and, in a parallel manner, Dalit literature also represents the other side of their social and cultural lives except and that goes beyond their sufferings. In a way, Dalit literature actualizes Elizabeth Grosz’s concept of “ontoethics”, in that it “addresses not just human life in its interhuman relations, but relations between the human and entire world, both organic and inorganic” (Grosz 2017, 1).

I want to focus on Bengal’s Dalit literature by women who articulate the issue of “an ontoethics [that] cannot but address the question of how to act in the present and, primarily, how to bring about a future different from the present. This question is simultaneously ontological, ethical, and political” (Grosz 2017, 1). This particular Dalit feminist consciousness engages the question of how to act in a state of emergency when, on the surface of society and in the mainstream consciousness, there is an acute absence and complete erasure of emergency. The process of “nirbakization”¹ or making the subaltern voices inaudible to the cream of society make the subalterns learn how to respond to such socio-cultural silencing by tackling crisis, surviving emergency, and raising their voice to resist. As Aniket Jaaware (2019) remarks regarding Baburao Bagul’s narratives and Dalit literature in general, Dalit literature conveys a particular situation incapable of bearing any social (caste) ethics to perform, therefore is a “destitute literature” that basically deals with destitute or aporetic void or emergency/crisis situations of life especially of the untouchables, “and yet one (Dalit writers or Dalit people) performs an action that will have consequences for oneself and for others” (Jaaware 2019, 145). Dalit literature deals with impossible performative situations yet the characters as well as Dalit literature itself perform over the situation to survive with dignity. In that sense, this paper proposes that Dalit literature in India has already set the agenda of “emergency literature” and paved the way for a new sensibility of a *crisis aesthetic*.

In this article, I look at the literary work of Kalyani Thakur Charal’s, an eminent Dalit writer in Bengal, whose novella *Andhar Bil O Kichu Manus*²

(“Andhar Lake and Some People”; 2019) is an instance of emergency literature in a time of crisis. In such a trying time, modern capitalist bourgeois intelligentsia has fallen apart and failed to control nature and non-human species. The bare and hollow reality of human modernity is exposed and evidently visible in the current Covid pandemic situation. The collapse of techno-scientific knowledge-based human modernity during the unprecedented conditions of the Covid pandemic affects each and every stratum of society, compelling people (mostly the academicians) to revitalize the socio-political-cultural discourse and offer an appropriate aesthetic response to save the human species in this time of emergency. Such an emergency aesthetic is not merely an attempt to rescue humankind from its attitude of indifference and recognize the ongoing emergency. It also seeks to help people to negotiate and overcome the situation. Besides, this paper attempts to look at the local implications of the phenomenon of “emergency” by examining the everyday dealings and daily lives of Dalit people. Dalits inhabit this state of emergency from the moment of their birth. However, mainstream academia has not thought or cared to invent a new aesthetic order to address the emergency conditions of this deprived, marginalized group. Rather, through sheer indifference and negligence, academics have categorized these people’s literary configurations as part of a “subaltern”/“alter-native” aesthetic where caste based oppression has not yet been recognized and primarily fashioned against Eurocentric literary aesthetic thoughts. Such homogenization and non-recognition contributes in deepening/strengthening the process of “nirbakization.”

Discursive Method

To deal with an aesthetic that not only affects the way readers think of a represented situation, but also implies the ethico-politics of a distinct way of living and a philosophy that emerges from the very ontology of a particular situation, we need a theoretical methodology to analyze such onto-ethico-political aesthetics of Dalit literature in particular and emergency literature in general. Before discussing this theoretical methodology, allow me to address the existing aesthetic of Dalit literature. Sharankumar Limbale (2004, 120) notes that: a) Dalit literature should be based on the artist’s motivation from their lived experiences; b) these experiences should have a social value; c) these experiences should resonate beyond the provincial boundaries of literary articulations; and d) should have relevance across history. Limbale’s argument evidently hints at forging a pan-Indian Dalit aesthetic solidarity. However, to achieve such collective solidarity, the importance of recognizing different lived experiences is highly significant. Acknowledging difference is necessary to establish a consensus among various categories. Limbale’s argument also hints at the socialization of individual experience. Therefore, binary categories like

individual/collective, public/private, etc. seem complimentary. Individuals always oscillate between each side of the binary while performing in practice.

To address this dilemma, Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai (2019) have intervened with a theoretical methodology to cognize these experiences from the vantage point of “the social” or “our daily interactions with unknown persons/situation in various spaces.” To prioritize the role of the “social” in understanding how caste is practiced is to destabilize the category of the individual. At the same time, this act of identifying the performance of the “social” within the contours of “everyday life” problematizes the tendency to homogenize and attribute fixity to social experiences. Now the question comes: what is the “social” then? How do we define this category? To answer these questions, we may have to take into consideration the role of a disembodied and/or disembedded individual, whose experience within a particular instantiation of the social can perform as the same for her own associated/belonging group/community/social at a particular moment. This means the social is “a site where the individual is not yet the social (an embodied agent within social structures) but has already lost the naivety of being individual” (Guru and Sarukkai 2019, 14). Henceforth, lived “experience” is the only viable way to study the structural differences and varieties of oppression and crisis situation in general. Jaaware (2019, n.p.) has very clearly shown that the social is different from society. Broadly speaking, society is a monolithic, utopian idea primarily based on principles of equality or sameness that have yet to be achieved. The social, on the other hand, is what we deal with till now as it performs on the principle of sociability that is to interact with others, unknown – non-belonging persons. Therefore, it is assumed that the “social” is a montage of different individual experiences.

Kalyani’s Novella and Emergency Aesthetics

Kalyani's novella *Andhar Bil O Kichu Manus* is completely based on her experiences, which stand in for the experience of her community. Kalyani sees herself from a distance as being a character in the narrative. She performs as a disembodied individual. How this novella epitomizes the literature emerging from emergency time and gains the status of an emergency aesthetic to overcome the crisis – is the point of concern of this paper.

The novella opens against the backdrop of the 1947 partition of the Indian sub-continent. Millions of people saw their identities transformed overnight as Indian citizen were reclassified as refugees in India. Such uprooted characters of the novella were in search of rehabilitation, resuscitation, and sustenance in a new, unknown place of India. The characters of the novella, from the very beginning of the narrative, were nostalgic about their fond memories of the past and their previous symbiotic bond with their former environment. Now, they roam hither and thither, just to find a marshy land where they can survive. The very title of the novella implies that it is a narrative

of an uprooted people's collective effort to ensure their everyday means of subsistence from a marshy land. While they live within a modern governmental state, they maintain a liminal existence in a primitive condition, earning their food and shelter from direct interactions with nature. What they are nostalgically lamenting is nothing more than a familiar environment and favourable conditions for living.

Their circumstances help arouse within these people a sense of camaraderie and familial bonding that leads them to build a community:

As long as they are not able to form their own houses, the whole village cooks and dines together. Such collective living gives birth to so many small houses beside the bank of the Andhar *bil* or the dark lake. The only assuring fact is they have the *bil* by their hands. Sink pot, pour water and drink as you wish [...] The water of the *bil* is good for boiling the grains of boot, chickpeas etc., Kanule's *ma* ["mother"], Dinabandhu's *ma*, Shangale's *didī* ["sister"] bring water by brass made pots. They cook *ranga ranga dhenki chhanta chal* [a type of reddish flecks of rice] in earthen pot. (Thakur Charal 2019, 8; translated by me)

Yet they always make comparisons between the water of Madhumati River, the river they left behind because of the dislocation caused by the brutal partition of India, and the water of Andhar *bil*. There is no apparent difference between their past and present occupation. What they did before, while living in the eastern regions of undivided Bengal, are the same thing they are doing now to earn their living: fishing, sowing paddy seeds, cutting jutes from standing water, sailing small boats, etc. (Thakur Charal 2019, 8). As they are directly dependent on natural things and their environment, the deportation from their place/space implies an estrangement from their soul.

As these people's lives are completely entangled within nature, their ritualistic culture exemplifies and reflects nature-human bonding. The worship of various plants, natural objects, and animals are well-practiced customs and often regarded as the means of recovering from diseases and as a solution to any problem (Thakur Charal 2019, 10). They use natural ingredients for any medication and to help with childbirth (Thakur Charal 2019, 28). The entire novella is crowded with the descriptions of minimalistic living, not simply within, but also with nature. Various edible roots, small grass leaf, succulent roots of water lily, and various types of paddy like *jagli dhan*, *chingrevushi dhan*, along with crab and small fish from the marshy area, are all the necessary ingredients of their food items. Almost all the villagers sell these things at the nearest market. These uprooted people are also in the habit of collecting the essential materials for fuel from the fields—dried twigs, hay straws, cow dung, etc.

This does not mean that these people are away from the lights of modernity. Most of the parents of this community, despite living such a bare life, are very eager to get their children educated. The children of this locality, (mostly of the Namasudra³ community) go to school and lend a hand to help their parents in household activity, cultivation, etc. Kalyani depicts the daily life

of this community through the experience of her protagonist Kamalini, a character who closely resembles Kalyani herself:

The Namha students read in the school of this locality. Most of them are from the locality beside Andhar *bil*. Children also come from neighbouring villages. Boys and girls do study here jointly. Kamal also read in this school. She collects snail, oyster from the *bil*, goes to collect dried cow dung with her grandmother, cuts the grass for domestic animals, collects dried branches for fuel, goes to give rice to her father in the field, along with all her siblings do clean and clear the weeds of grounds, bring the stacks of paddy grains to home on their head from the field after cutting them [...] Despite doing all these things they go to school [...] almost many of the teachers of this school do teach in the school at the same time do work in the fields. (Thakur Charal 2019, 51)

Kamalini sees that her friends Shila and Mani, and others from other localities, do not do such things. These instances show how uprooted people come across caste experiences in modern institutions like school, colleges, etc. These migrant or dislocated *namah* people settle their houses on the outskirts of a village, mainly besides the marshy lands. The author writes in this novella that the houses at the centre of the village, beside the railways and school buildings, are brick-built, unlike the houses of her community. So, the interactive dynamism between caste and class can be easily felt through this instance. Again, caste can stigmatize a particular space, which comes to be seen as abominable, as when the elite-caste students of Kamalini's school look down upon Kamalini and the other students of her community by saying that the latter have come from the *bil para* (the lake locality inhabited by the refugees). Thus, the marshy areas where Kamalini lives become complimentary to or easily interchangeable with caste untouchability and unhygienic, unhealthy places. Whenever a Dalit female writer writes about such experiences and holds them up to the larger society, she writes differently, which is itself an instance of the emergency aesthetic that resists various maltreatments and dehumanizing caste experiences.

However, Kamalini's people had to suffer a lot from natural calamities and environmental disasters, which not only threaten their lives but also hamper their means of earning their livelihood. For example, too much rain causes a flood that inundates the paddy fields in the locality, while the scarcity of rain becomes the cause of tension regarding the jute decomposition. Almost all the houses become waterlogged during the rainy season. People have to take shelter elsewhere in higher places like the concrete schoolhouses. Kamalini's family stays on two cots, placing one above the other. In this situation, the son and daughter-in-law of Kamalini's aunt come to Kamalini's house to stay. Due to continuous rainfall, fuel is scarce. It is in such situations that cows, calves, snake, and human beings all become nonviolent to each other and stay together (Thakur Charal 2019, 58).

Despite all these hardships, the novella is full of descriptions about the various techniques people use to survive such destitute situations. Generally, these people are directly dependent on nature, though not in an organized, formal manner like modernized forms of cultivation and fishery. Hence, in

times of environmental adversity or natural calamity, there is no change in the way of life for these people. In other words, their hardship continues throughout their life, whether there is a natural disaster or no natural disaster. The end is more or less the same.

It might be argued that this way of reading is an act of romanticizing, glorifying and thereby belittling these people's suffering or their socio-political-cultural deprivations. However, I argue that this novella rightly represents the (im)possible situations where humans are called upon to perform social ethicality by articulating the liminal state of existence of its characters, which is, as Jaaware (2019) observes, a distinct feature of Dalit literature's specificity. At the same time, this paper throws light on the glimpses of the spirit of fellow-feeling, camaraderie, symbiotic ways of living, the resilient power to continue with life, and the aesthetics of the minimalesque way of living delineated by the author in this novella. This aesthetic understanding towards the philosophy of life may provide an emergency literary aesthetic for a time of crisis.

Now the question is: how does Dalit literature and writing respond to the universal category of emergency in general? Are the purposes of such emergency literature only to engage the readers with the represented situation, or do they provide readers with another worldview to overcome various crises in their own lives? To put it differently, does such literary aesthetic only address a limited group of readers who can identify with situations it represents, or does it convey a message to a larger group of readers irrespective of any difference? Responding to such queries involves recognizing that every global crisis has its own spatio-temporal renderings. To tackle global emergency, we have to deal with its local version. At the same time, we must cultivate a collective awareness and recognition of the fact that humanity at large is endangered in the current era of the "capitalocene" (Moore, 2016). We, the people, have to launch a struggle to survive this time of emergency.

The emergency aesthetic seeks to give the elite a critical jolt: a shocking experience that articulates the truth of a destitute time, which the characters of Dalit literature deal with on an everyday basis. Their experience is the crux of a time of crisis. Dalit literature, therefore, gives a shock and generates a sense of introspection for non-Dalit readers. Moreover, by representing the acute yearning for a better life through a collective, continuous struggle to exist, Dalit literature somehow becomes able to problematize the existing aesthetic without forming a separate regime or being indifferent to a greater cause. Thus Dalit aesthetic involves and includes non-Dalit readers too, encouraging them to revisit their past deeds, learn lessons from their actions, and invites all to perform/contribute according to the needs/necessity of emergency situation. Apart from these impacts and/or purpose of Dalit literature, Dalit feminist fiction discusses as subject matter a destitute and/or (im)possible situations to describe the performance of social ethicality by Dalits in their everyday life. Thus Dalit feminist standpoint analyses/represents situations, lived experiences

from the intersectional perspectives of caste and gender and also includes its non-Dalit readers with an introspective impact on the latter.

Dalit Poetry and Interplay of Global and Local Implications of Emergency Situations:

In this section, I describe how universal and local, public and private, and collective and individual issues come to be addressed in Dalit literature. The Dalit feminist standpoint invokes an intersectional insight into human cognitive perception, as well as into literature. Kalyani's poetry gives expression to the struggle for existence, dignity, freedom and equality; an alphabet to the "unimaginable" untouchables who are kept "nirbak" since the age-old days. Kalyani's poetry also delineates her concern for humanity and the planet Earth. Her work is an example of how a Dalit female writer can transgress the modern individualized-differentiating social markers and expand the contours of collective responsibility by placing herself as a citizen of this world.

In Kalyani's 2004 pamphlet, the first poem is titled "Anti-war Poem". It celebrates the Buddhist philosophy of love, peace, and *maître* (camaraderie) against bloodshed, hostility, and war and emphasizes equal respect for the diversities of every nation. The last poem of the same pamphlet, named "Strange Society", gestures toward the hypocrisy of the *bhadralok* (gentrified elite) society and the self-responsibility to rectify this rotten, caste-ridden society:

The gloomy broom hanging from the waistband
Sweeps away the footsteps of the untouchables.
Yet thousands of year's of tyranny does not
Obliterate countless Dalits from the bosom of this country.
It is the country which hides the seed of casteism
Under the guise of communalism---
And bent-headed *bhadraloks* go to their usual job
Or raise storms of debates on their tea-table---
At last, I come to the road of the city
With tightening a bell,
Holding the bridle of time on hand
And being the controller
I drive this headstrong, untamable horse like,
Decadent society into the right track (Thakur Charal, 2004, 16)

Kalyani expresses her apprehension around not being able to retain a distinct Dalit consciousness in particular and a sociable ethics of humanity in general. In Poem No. 1 of her (2015) anthology of poetry, *Chandalini Vane* (“Chandalini [She-Outcaste] Says”), she expresses a sense of fear about losing her appreciation for life’s ethical sanctity and the possibility that her class/ caste consciousness is being submerged into or appropriated by the mainstream socio-political-cultural-aesthetic. In Poem No. 28 of the same anthology, Kalyani laments the futility of love in this crooked, hostile world, as if the personified emotion of “love” is itself not willing to stay in such a heartless place:

I had wished to make Dharmashoka⁴
 With utmost love.
 No bloodshed, no death.
 But, would it be so---?
 Love goes back leaving us alone.
 S/he wants to be Chandashok⁵
 Again and again!
 S/he makes her hands blood-drenched
 And the heart of others.
 And alas! Futile efforts of mine;
 Futility comes back
 Without caring for any regrets
 And leaving behind the image of Ashoka (Thakur Charal 2015, 41).

Kalyani also talks about such an eco-feminist sensibility from the standpoint of Dalit consciousness in Poem No. 31 of the same anthology, which does not celebrate modern capitalistic values of conjugality or the postmodern virtue of erotic sexuality but, rather, seeks recourse in benevolent love. The lover regrets his inability to keep his partner happy, so the lover sets his partner free and gives her a pinnacle as a dowry so she can sail across the land of “Hetal, Sundari and Goran” [all plants of Bengal delta] to freely share her words with the river, sea, trees and birds (Thakur Charal 2015, 44-45). Again, Poem No. 33 symbolically presents human hubris and the human desire to dominate less powerful beings or natural objects against nature, which continues to impart care, love, protection, and shelter to everybody without arrogance (47). In poem No. 37, Kalyani says: “I learn lesson from Nature/And sink into my own world solitarily” (Thakur Charal 2015, 37).

Poem No. 39 exposes the ferocious and savage nature of human beings, which is more dangerous than the wild animals. Significantly, animals (unlike human being) are not hypocritical, greedy, lavish and capitalist. They do not

exploit others' labour or appropriate others' property or humiliate their fellow creatures:

To learn the lesson of non-violence
I go to the forest of tiger
Leaving this civilization of crowdy city.
... (Thakur Charal 2015, 39).

Through these poems, this paper exposes the vast expanse of Dalit aesthetic consciousness, which does not succumb or conform to the mainstream pleasures of an aesthetic sensibility that cherishes literature as a means of leisure and refreshment. On the contrary, Kalyani's work emerges from a void; a sense of absence and insecurity that haunts the reader, shaming them through literature and critique. Such a Dalit aesthetic standpoint actually turns the dominant aesthetic upside down and looks upward from the ground level. Kalyani Thakur succeeds in expanding the scope of a Dalit feminist literature by putting a constant dialogue between her own life/community experiences and her world consciousness. Both elements have enriched every single domain with their distinct aesthetic understanding.

Conclusion

Dalit literature in India forges a critique of society's collective consciousness – specifically, the socio-political-cultural impetus to remain totally indifferent and silent to the global humanitarian emergency arising from violence and plunder. This social indifference towards various shades of emergency in the global or local contexts of different class, caste, and gender groups and the environment in general is a means of “nirbakization,” foreclosing or silencing the appearance of “subaltern”/otherized voices in everyday cultural or political spaces. Dalit literature performs the role of emergency critique by constantly questioning the status quo. With all these elements, we can see Dalit literature as literature in “emergency,” which forces readers to engage with some pertinent questions regarding aesthetics, ethics, epistemic and ontological issues, politics and sociality. Thus, Dalit literature stands against the collective trend of “nirbakization.”

Notes

¹ The term used and conceptualised by Monohor Mouli Biswas, a renowned Dalit writer in Bengal. See an interview taken by Mahuya Bhaumik and Jaydeep Sarangi, “Growing up Dalit in Bengal: Conversation with Manohar Mouli Biswas”.

- ² The excerpts from Kalyani's novella and the poems originally written in Bengali are translated here into English by me for the sake of this paper. In this paper I have called the writer by her first name, Kalyani.
- ³ In the eastern regions of then undivided Bengal, various lower caste people engaged with different low-profile jobs like fishing, boating et cetera, notoriously known as *Chandala*, started to gain a community consciousness through an upward mobility due to the upgraded occupation status as small-scale peasantry; and named as Namashudra. Various interpretations are available behind the cause of such naming as well as the meaning of the term. See for further information Sekhar Bandyopadhyay's (1997) book *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal, 1872- 1947*; the introduction and first chapter.
- ⁴ The Great Ashoka (b. 304 B.C) was a King (268-232 B.C) of Mauryan dynasty. The battle of Kalinga was fought and won by him but it became the turning point to metamorphose him from the paths of cruelty to the paths of *dharma*. Thus he was adorned by the title "Dharmashoka".
- ⁵ Another name of King Ashoka, conferred to him due to his brutality at his earlier phase of life.

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