

The Creative Launcher

URL: <https://www.thecreativelauncher.com>

ISSN: 2455-6580

Vol. 6 & Issue 4, (October-2021)

Publisher: Perception Publishing

Published on 30th October 2021

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Representation of the Namasudras in Literature

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2021.6.4.34>

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.53032/tcl.2021.6.4.34>

Pages: 230-235

Abstract

In Bengali Dalit literature, the Namasudra writers and poets play a crucial role in combating the complete social marginalization of Dalits, their movements, iconography, experiences, and worldview. According to Manohar Mouli Biswas, “It is a counter cultural movement that has been aiming to undo the age-old caste ridden oppressions against the dalits by representing their lives, deprivations, struggles, histories and promoting their culture and liberation through literature” (Biswas XXV). There have recently been many books written

by Dalit Namasudra authors, some of which have been published in English. Using these archives and texts, we may now see the Dalit Namasudras from a different perspective, one that previously would not have been possible through the use of traditional historical archives and writings. Among them mentionable are Manohar Mouli Biswas's *Amar Bhubane Ami Benche Thaki* translated as *Surviving in My World*, Manoranjan Byapari's *Itibritte Chandal Jiban* translated as *Interrogating My Chandal Life*, Dr. Manoranjan Sarkar's *Ekjan Daliter Atmakatha*, Jatin Bala's *Sikar Chenra Jiban* and so on. This article attempts to rebuild the alternate history of the Namasudras by deconstructing the standard material on the subject using historical and literary analysis.

Keywords: Dalit, Subaltern, Hegemony, Caste, Identity crisis, Namasudras

So far, Dalit writers, particularly Namasudra authors, have been able to gain access to the wisdom of *savarna* writers. Through the medium of literature, they have found an outlet for their activity. The English translations of these authors' books have been widely acclaimed. The Namasudras, an eastern Bengali non-Aryan caste considered Dalits or untouchable, are depicted as having a different history from the mainstream historians and writers, and their real history is not accurately recorded by the historians of the time, nor is their life of poverty, hardship, and exploitation adequately reflected in the mainstream literature. So, Debjani Sengupta writes, "these texts that memorialize and actualize a literary culture and history that would otherwise remain inarticulate" (5).

Since the Namasudras, descendants of the non-Aryan castes Chandals, Nama, and Nishad, spend much of their time farming and doing menial labour in Bengal, they are referred to as Dalits or untouchables. After India's partition, they fled East Bengal and eventually settled in India. At the present time, this emigration is still occurring. All of the above, socially, politically, economically and culturally, they are outcasts. For centuries, official historians and writers have twisted their true history, and mainstream literature has failed to portray their reality of poverty as well as their sense of exploitation. Indian caste or caste identity has recently been a focus of academic inquiry or study, which is worth noting. Social scientists and historians have studied casteism in South Asian society. They emphasize on caste-based mobilization during colonial times, and caste politics or caste-based violence in the wake of the colonial era. Even more remarkable is the fact that Bengal's Namasudras have been studied by scholars and historians from all over the country. A few theoretical models have been proposed to understand the "process of change" in the hierarchical social rank. They "have developed a few theoretical models to conceptualize the 'process of change' in the hierarchical social status" (Barman³⁵) of the Namasudras.

Because the Namasudras are a caste that is socially, economically, and politically marginalised, little is known about their conflicts, sufferings, or achievements in mainstream history or literature. People like Manohar Mouli Biswas, Manaranjan Byapari, and Jatin Bala have risen to prominence in this group. They've made a mark on Dalit writing in their own

unique way. They present an alternate and true history of the Dalit Namasudra group, to whom they belong and with whom they share a strong bond.

The Namasudras were once called as *chandal* or *chanral* in Bengal. They started to seek a new identity as Namasudras in the second part of the 19th century. According to Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, the name Namasudra didn't exist in the public domain until the mid-19th century since their identity was known as the chandal at the time. In 1911's census, they were classified as Namasudras as a consequence of a social reform effort. The Namasudras have a difficult difficulty that the other Bengali lower castes do not: tracing their history and determining their origins and identities.

Eastern Bengali non-Aryan caste the Namasudras are classified as Dalits or Untouchables and are mostly involved in farming and other menial tasks. They fled East Bengal after the partition and ultimately assimilated into India. According to Bipul Mandal, "Etymologically this term means a group of respected sudra, Nama means respected and sudra is a classified section of the people holds the lower strata in the caste strata in the caste society" (Mandal 3). As for Namah and Sudra, they both refer to the fourth Varna in casteist system in Bengali. To avoid King Ballal Sen's fury, the Namabrahmans changed their name to the Namah-Brahmanas and identified themselves as Namah-Sudras. This allowed them to escape the king's anger and live to tell about it. The Namasudra is a reworked version of the Namahsudra, which came before it.

Namasudra author's writing doesn't have a critical community. Non-Dalit intellectuals have recently written some academic writing on the autobiographies of Manoranjan Byapari and Manohar Mouli Biswas, as well as other Bengali Dalit literature. However, in terms of quantity, it's really low. Dr. Jaydeep Sarangi is bringing Bangla Dalit Literature to the forefront in his own unique style. *Bangla Dalit Writer Writes Back*, an edited collection of writings on the life and work of Manohar Mouli Biswas, was released recently by him. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay wrote a complete history of the Namasudras using Bengali tracts, booklets, and newspapers, as well as official and historical documents. When it comes to the Namasudras of Bengal, he does an excellent job of tracing their history from the time they first emerged as a census-defined group, all the way through to their eventual dissolution after India's partition in 1947. There aren't many notable books in my field of study, but a few of papers have lately appeared in well-known publications.

Manohar Mouli Biswas is a Dalit activist and writer from Bengal who writes in both Bengali and English. Poems, short tales, novels, and literary criticism are only a few examples of his diverse creative output. He has made a substantial contribution to Bengali Dalit literary criticism and aesthetics, in addition to his creative talent. It is impossible to conduct research on Bengali Dalit literature without consulting his vast archive, which he built as a historian of the Bengali Dalit struggle. According to Maumita Majumdar, "Monohor Biswas as an educated Dalit gives voice to 'othered'/ subaltern characters" (138). In his shadow, the Dalit movement thrives, Biswas has a large amount of critical work to his credit, including Dalit historiography projections and aesthetic theories regarding Bengali Dalit literature. His critical works and theories, which are seen as radical aesthetics, have a

counter-canonical quality to them. After a successful run in the Indian language, he has recently published *An Interpretation of Dalit Literary Theory and Movements: Through the Lens of Ambedkarism*, a collection of his critically acclaimed writings.

Biswas recalls his experiences of being a Namasudra in his book, *Amar Bhubane Aami Benche Thaki* (2013), translated as *Surviving in My World: Growing Up Dalit in Bengal* (2015). Between him and the other members of his community a link was formed. The fight for survival of the Namasudras in the face of caste prejudice is recounted in order to refute the idea that caste discrimination does not exist in Bengal. Without a doubt, he has made incalculable contributions to Bengali Dalit literature and is a literary Titan in that field. His achievements are far more extensive than his work as a creative and analytical writer. He is also a Dalit activist who works with the Bangla Dalit Sahitya Sanstha to achieve Dalit emancipation.

Manoranjan Byaari, a Dalit cook and writer, is originally from the Dalit community. The search for a new home and identity has shaped Byapari's literary work. He depicts a Dalit's attempt to establish a foothold in a hostile society. When he was just beginning out as a riksha puller, he had his first story, "Riksha Chalai", published in Mahasweta Devi's magazine *Bartika*. *Britter Shesh Parba* (2001), *Jijibishar Golpo* (2005), and *Golpo Samagra* (2006a) are a few of his published works (All Stories). *Itibritte Chandal Jiban* is his autobiographical novel.

Chandal Jibon (2009), a book about the life of a young Dalit refugee boy, is a significant historical chronicle of post-1947 Bengal and Naxalitarian unrest. This nonfiction study takes an in-depth look at the situation of East Pakistani immigrants in India, including caste oppression and humiliation. In addition, another book, *Chhera Chhera Jeeban* (2019), was published in 2019 and explores the 'other' world outside of what is considered civilized. *Chonna Chhara* (2019) tells the storey of people who live in the midst of nowhere and strive to get by day to day without running out of resources.

Ambedkarism and Marxism, according to Manoranjan Byapari, have a lot in common. He underlines the contrast between the terms "caste" and "class" as a fundamental argument. He is considered an upper caste member by the Dalit group. The demand for basic essentials like as food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare drives Dalits. He believes that Dalits who have sorted out these five concerns have developed their own subculture separate from the rest of the Dalits. Those focused with how to fill their bellies cannot be regarded typical of the general public. This is the cornerstone of his writing. Shreya Chaterjee writes, "Subsequent volumes of Byapari's autobiography... will undoubtedly advance his reception, among literary scholars" (394).

Dalit literary giant Jatin Bala is credited with helping to establish resistance through his own unique style of writing. In West Bengal, where he lives, he writes to raise the banner of Dalit self-determination. For his revolutionary contributions, this Dalit exile writer has garnered various literary accolades. Jatin Bala is a well-known Dalit author who has written a number of short stories. His short works are excellent examples of documentary realism. Antonia Navarro-Tejero writes, "The stories, beautifully translated from Bengali to English,

unravel the perishing of a writer who not only saw difficulties from his condition of Dalit, but also for being a refugee and an orphan in post partition Bengal” (Tejero 7). He promotes a vision of a society free of caste and dominated by non-Brahmins in his works. His translated short stories are collected in *Stories of Social Awakening: Reflections of Dalit Refugee Lives in Bengal*.

Although the organised Dalit literary movement in Bengal did not begin until the suicide of Chuni kotal in 1992, the field of Dalit writing grew dramatically after India's independence. A number of well-known Bengali Dalit authors emerged as a result of the revolt. Other important members of the group include Kapil Krishna Thakur, Nakul Mallik, and Manoranjan Byapari, in addition to Manohar Mouli Biswas and Jatin Bala. Dalit artists have consistently challenged Dalit writers and their domination over the literary arena. A parallel structure was developed to compete with the higher caste writers and give Dalits a place to voice their fury, misery, sadness, and suffering. Dalit writers, particularly Namasudra authors, who gained access to the savarna writers' world of knowledge, have shattered it. By using literature as a pretext for their action, they've carved out a niche for themselves. On a global scale, English translations of these authors' works have gained critical acclaim. Bengal's academic community, on the other hand, has showed little interest in Bengali Dalit literature, and they are not included in the undergraduate or graduate curricula save in a few cases. The Namasudras are the second largest schedule caste in West Bengal, and they also make up a major minority community in states such as Assam, Tripura, and Jharkhand. Because of this, they've had a poor reputation throughout history and literature. My study aims to fill in the gaps and offer new perspectives on the Bengali Dalit literature that is currently being examined.

Edited volumes and magazine articles focusing on Bengali Dalits do not offer us with a clear allohistory of the Dalit Namasudras from the standpoint of Dalit aesthetics. The rhetoric, shape, and expression of classical or Sanskritized literary theory do not relate to the aesthetics of Dalit literature. While Dalit life is often linked with poverty, filth, ugliness, and crudeness, Dalit literature's aesthetics reveal the beauty of human values with remarkable resiliency. On the other side, a counter-memory type of alternative history allows those who have been excluded or oppressed to recount their own version of history. My paper, which aims to bring Representation and Namasudra literature together, is about alternative history and Dalit literature. “It may be considered additionally as allohistory” (in a real sense 'other history') (Sherif 63).

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