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‘Dalit Aesthetics’ through Poetic Rendering of Experience: A Study on Bengali Dalit Poetry

Partha Sarathi Mondal

Abstract

Dalit literature is the articulation of protest and anger against the injustice and social exclusion the Dalits are subjected to in the caste-ridden, hierarchical society of India. The Dalit authors and critics argue that it is this protest and anger, a new literary strategy which can build the aesthetics of Dalit literature. Dalit literature, however, is yet to form a conceptual standard on which the Dalits can represent and universalise their experience of pain. Many Dalit poets have attempted to build a distinctive aesthetics through poetry. But poetry essentially related to emotion seems inadequate to build a conceptual framework which is essentially an intellectual phenomenon. Though Dalit writers resist the Sanskritised aesthetics of mainstream literature by using their own language, registers and idioms, they nonetheless partake of the mainstream aesthetics when they articulate themselves in poetry. Gopal Guru (2012) claims, “Poetry helps the Dalit in making connections through metaphors but not through concepts” (p. 23). My paper, however, will argue that as Dalit experience is at the centre of a distinct Dalit aesthetics, Dalit poetry based on rich experience can contribute to build a new aesthetics for Dalit literature. My paper will refer to a number of Bengali Dalit poets whose poetry can serve to build a separate aesthetics through poetic rendering of their distinct Dalit experience, conforming at the same time to many principles of mainstream aesthetics.

Keywords: Dalit, Aesthetics, Experience, Bangla, Poetry.

Introduction

The word “Dalit” stems from the Sanskrit word “Dal,” which means “broken,” “split open,” “crushed,” or “downtrodden”. The term “Dalit” was originally used by Mahatma Phule of Maharashtra to refer to the oppressed individuals who were for long regarded as “untouchables” in the caste-ridden Indian culture. The term “Dalit” was made popular in the 1970s by the Maharashtra movement known as the Dalit Panthar, which raised the predicament of the Shudras, the “untouchable” community in Indian society. “Dalit” refers, broadly speaking, to people who have been denied their social, political, economic, and cultural rights throughout their daily lives due to systematic and institutional subjugation. The activities of the oppressed communities, in particular the Dalits, were initiated in 1958 in India by intellectuals such as Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule. The social movements’ militancy quickly finds a place in Dalit literature- writings by and about Dalits. The collection of works known as “Dalit literature” originated in Maharashtra a few decades ago. Dalit literature perpetuates the caste-based injustice and inequality that has been a malaise in Indian society for millennia. It is a part of the revolt or protest movement against this injustice and inequality.

This literature challenges or questions the aesthetic norms of the canonical literature with its bluntly direct and explosive language, which lacks stylistic suavity or elegance. Dalit poetry, however, conforms to a large extent the aesthetic standards of mainstream literature and maintains the elegance of the mainstream canon. Dalit writers’ claim for a distinct aesthetics for their literature is based on their rich experience and legitimised by their refusal to use the rhetoric and stylized syntax of mainstream literature. There lies a paradox in this regard: Dalit writing, by resisting the mainstream aesthetic principles and thereby promoting an alternative aesthetics, strives to uphold a distinct identity in the literary world but at the same time it seeks to find a place in the canon of mainstream literature by voicing protest against the literary exclusion from the mainstream. Dalit poets have developed a remarkable knowledge of aesthetics- traditional poetics and metaphors. Their poetry is also steeped with their experience, and so it has the inner merits, the potentials, to build distinct aesthetic standards. In this paper, I shall discourse on a few Bengali Dalit poets, underscoring the aesthetic merits of their poems, how their poetry despite abiding by the mainstream aesthetic norms seeks to challenge the hegemonic exclusion culture of the Savarna people by depicting their lived experience which contributes to build an alternative aesthetics of the Dalits.

1. Dalit Experience as a Major Construct of ‘Dalit Aesthetics’

“Aesthetics” is described as the study of sensory-emotional values, or sometimes called judgements of sentiment and taste, from a technical epistemological point of view. Generally speaking, though, it includes inquiries concerning both art and beauty. ‘Aesthetics’ denotes a framework of universal principles based on beauty and pleasure. The mainstream literary critics strictly believe that all forms of literature have to be evaluated on a universal criterion known as ‘aesthetics’. They maintain that any academic, writer, or critic, regardless of caste, can draw from the experience of the “other,” in this case the Dalits, and depict and discuss their way of life. They contend that analysing and comprehending literature cannot be dependent on an author’s personal experiences and life experiences. Dalit writers, however, counter this view by arguing that a non-Dalit or Savarna writer cannot represent Dalit reality in literature as Dalit literature is essentially an articulation of Dalit consciousness. The majority of Dalit literature is written by Dalits who are themselves victims of the caste system, and its aesthetics stem from the fact that it views man as the centre of narrative and analysis, striving for equality, justice, and solidarity for all of humanity while expressing trauma, exploitation, and suppression of community in incredibly creative and expressive ways. Dalit authors contest the validity of any canon that does not use Dalit aesthetics as the yardstick for judging their works. They contend that Dalit literature is the literature of real experience rather than art for art’s sake. Dalit critics have contended that if literature can strive to evoke pleasure, then why can’t it also evoke pain? Dalit literature, according to Sharankumar Limbale, is not subject to fair and objective criticism.

Even though there is currently a vast corpus of Dalit literature, Dalit literature has not yet established a theoretical framework within the dominant Indian social sciences. Savarna writers, critics, and academicians denigrate Dalit writings, labelling them as ugly, repetitious, and biased because they deviate from the mainstream/Sanskrit aesthetics. In its early stages, Dalit writing primarily expresses protest against injustice and prejudice based on caste, calling for a place for the Dalits in the cultural and socio-political spheres. Dalit literature first addresses the angst and protest of the Dalits, their identity and dignity, and the questions it raises about politics, religion, and the male-dominated power system. An attempt is made to express disapproval of Hindu religious texts, iconography, and imagery and to substitute them with other images. Dr. Ambedkar made an effort at this in 1956 when he publicly burned the *Manusmriti* and later on converted to Buddhism.

The last few decades have seen a noticeable departure from mainstream literature in the

works written by Dalits. The new methods and styles that the Dalit writers start utilising diverge greatly from those seen in mainstream literature. For instance, in mainstream Hindi literature, the prose narratives are filled with romanticism, idealisation, and imagination, while Dalit writers in Hindi create a unique form of narrative that blurs the lines between fiction and realism (Consolaro, 2018, p. 27). While the sophisticated syntax and rhetoric of mainstream Hindi writing are abandoned, dialect and sociolect are highly valued. The Dalit deities, icons, and counter-cultural value systems take the place of the hegemonic Hindu value systems and the supremacy of Hindu deities, pictures, symbols, etc., as reflected in literature. With a focus on the unique experiences of each person, the abstract concepts of traditional value systems that get along the concepts of beauty and truth undergo a profound transformation.

Dalit writing was once criticised for being unattractive and lacking in artistic refinement; today, it is avoided because it seems repetitious to many. As Indian academics are unwilling or unable to identify the alternative thematic and stylistic concerns of Dalit literature, it is questionable whether Dalit writing can, at this moment, have an impact on mainstream literature. In order to distinguish Dalit literature from other forms of writing, different methods and approaches are tried in contemporary Dalit literature. Dalit writers have utilised the Dalit emblems, rituals, and imagery that serve as the foundation for their different approaches. It is debatable, though, to what extent Dalit literature have been able to forge their own symbols to address their long-standing status as Shudras as described by Hindu scriptures and to reconstruct a cultural past.

The issue of defining a new aesthetics was first elaborated in the groundbreaking works of Sharankumar Limbale and Omprakash Valmiki. These works attempted to theorise Dalit writing as a unique and different stream of Indian literature that offers unprecedented experiences, a new flavour, a peculiar vocabulary, a new protagonist, and an alternative vision. Dalit writers believe that the aesthetic standards set forth by the dominant discourse do not adequately address and evaluate their corpus of works; hence they tend to reject the idea that their writing be assessed solely on the basis of these standards. Dalit critics present an alternative aesthetics based on their own experiences and negate the aesthetic tenets of the hegemonic discourse. In essence, Dalit writing is far from being a work of fiction or anything beautiful or enjoyable. It is a multifaceted expression of the subaltern's anguish, born out of the harsh hardships endured by the Dalit people over the years. Dalit writing is actually a counter-cultural or resistive writing. This is exactly how Sharankumar Limbale has said. Limbale (2004) notes that while characterising the traits of Dalit writing, Dalit literature is predicated on three key elements: the writer's social commitment, self-affirming values, and the capacity to bring the core principles of life—equality, freedom, justice, and fraternity—to the reader's attention (p. 33). It is incorrect to see Dalit literature as speaking in a single voice in the political and literary spheres; this also applies to Dalit literature in all languages. The phenomenon of Dalit writing is a subject of varied literary experiences: there are many different persons, life experiences, literary voices, and viewpoints that frequently conflict with one another.

Dalit consciousness, which is different from other writers' consciousness, is a vital source for Dalit literature. One of the main features of Dalit consciousness that has been highlighted is the rejection of conventional aesthetics and of the idea of what constitutes "great poetry." In public venues of literary critical discourse, the process of deconstruction that the notion of Dalit awareness articulates with relation to mainstream literary culture and canon is being methodically implemented as an exercise in revisionist aesthetics. In order to facilitate Dalit critical analysis, the idea of Dalit consciousness is being developed. This notion will serve as a sort of "test" that will allow Dalit critics to assess the "Dalitness" of any literary work. With a different set of literary strategies, the critical process of reading and analysis enables

Dalit readers to take back control of their writing and stop being written about.

1.1. Bangla Dalit Poetry and the Emergence of an Alternative Aesthetics

In 1992, a new chapter in Indian literature began with the release of Arjun Dangle’s *Poisoned Bread*, the first-ever effort at an English-language Dalit anthology. In Bengal, Dalit writing first appeared in the latter part of the 1800s. Bengali Dalit writers began producing *Matua Sahitya* (Literature of the Matuas) in the nineteenth century. The emerging status of Dalit literature in Bengal is described in some detail by Manohar Mouli Biswas in two of his books, *Dalit Sahityer Ruprekha* (An Outline of Dalit Literature) and *Dalit Sahityer Digbalay* (The Horizon of Dalit Literature). A school teacher named Rasbehari Roy, also referred to as Roy Pandit, began *Namasudra Darpan* (Namasudra Mirror), a journal, in 1909. During that time, Dalit people started publishing magazines like *Yogi Sakha* (Companion of Yogis), *Namasudra Bandhab* (Friends of Namasudras), *Namasudra Hitoishi* (Well-wishers of Namasudras), and a few others that addressed the issues of those who lived on the periphery, both literally and figuratively.

But Dalit literature in Bengal did not get the strength and depth required to be taken seriously as a literary movement until the 1970s and 1980s of the 20th centuries. Kshirod Bihari Kabiraj, Upendra Nath Biswas, Amita Bagchi, Shyamal Biswas, Manohar Biswas, Achintya Biswas, Harendra Nath Samaddar, Chinmay Roy, Kalyani Thakur, and Manju Bala are a few of the notable names. The list is lengthy and gets longer every day. It is not to say that any of these poets have produced poetry that is worthy of equal praise, but their contributions to Bangla Dalit poetry have contributed to the larger literary movement that has swept the nation with its revolutionary goals. There are many similarities between Dalit literature in other vernacular languages including Marathi, Tamil, Kannada, Gujarati, and Hindi and modern Bangla Dalit poetry. It has been playing a significant role in forming the Dalit resistance by leading an uprising against oppressive religion and culture, as well as the charade of “untouchability.” It has created a different kind of beauty to speak up against exploitation and repression that are deeply ingrained in sadness and rage. It produces “a lofty image of grief,” which is one of the main ideas of the Dalit alternative aesthetics. It artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, and ridicule endured by Dalits, according to Limbale (p. 30). A few of these poems are genuinely groundbreaking in their use of language, style, and idiom. Their goal is to challenge the accepted conventions and literary standards in the Bangla language. This poetry aims to be as sympathetic as it is evocative in terms of striking symbols and pictures, as well as differently modulated myths and metaphors (Acharya, 2014, p. 98).

Marxist ideology has been the dominant force in Bengali politics for at least the last thirty years. Marxists have consistently avoided discussing caste concerns in public, claiming that there is no such thing as caste. They solely made class-related claims. This does not imply that Bengal does not have a caste system. Prominent Bengali writers including Manik Bandopadhyaya, Rabindranath Tagore, and Bankim Chatterjee have written on caste discrimination in some of their works. It is true that certain major authors have written about the lives of Dalits; some examples are Tagore’s *Chandalika*, Debesh Ray’s *Barishaler Jogen Mandal*, and Manik Bandopadhyaya’s *Padmanadir Majhi*. However, it seems that there is a distinction. Manik Bandopadhyaya, a Brahmin, has not succeeded in creating a flawless portrait of any character in the book. From the viewpoint of a Dalit, it is rife with errors (Chaudhuri, 2018, p. 17). He makes the point that “*Titas Ekta Nadir Naam*,” written by Dalit author Adwaita Mallabarman, paints a more realistic picture of the group.

Dalit literature, according to Arjun Dangle, portrays the hopes and aspirations of the exploited masses. Dalit literature depicts their struggle for survival, day-to-day issues, the

taunts they endure, their experiences, and their perspective on all of these things (Dangle xlvi). In actuality, the spirit of Dalit literature is Dalit consciousness. Its dedication to the Dalit cause, its own Dalit identity, and its promise to change society's structure are what give it its identity (Singha and Acharya, 2012, p. xxv). Being an offshoot of the same tree, contemporary Dalit poetry in Bangla has the same objective and employs the same methods. It conveys themes of solitude, alienation, protest, uprising, and battle for survival, liberation from various forms of servitude and exploitation, indifference, estrangement, and displacement—a quest for self and a yearning for human dignity (Deshpande, 2001, p. 60).

Bengali poet Kalyani Thakur, a modern Dalit, explores the psychological undertones of casteism in her poems by focusing on the minds of educated middle-class Bengalis (Thakur, 2007). Kalyani, who used to be a vegetable vendor before landing a job with the Indian Railways, loves to wear her Charal identity as part of her name in protest of the hypocrisy of the “bhadrakalok.” The sentences express a clear protest against the humiliation that society has placed upon her, and a strong sense of melancholy underlies the wrath that is shown. In *Chandalinir Kobita* she states,

My colleagues in office
 Call me charal, chamar, dom
 I have to listen to these insults every day...
 Even then I have to remember that
 In Bengal there is no such thing as a 'Dalit'
 Even if Dalits exist everywhere else in the world, here there are none/
 Everywhere in India there may be castes/
 But here there are none...

(Chaudhuri, p. 17)

In another personal poem Kalyani Thakur writes the pathetic tale of her family:

My grandfather
 was not allowed to enter the boundaries of the school
 My father with extreme difficulty learnt to write his name
 on palm leaves with ink made of ash powder
 My mother carried dung with her left hand
 Grandfather had to bring the offerings for Durga puja
 You have certainly not understood
 The spot on which she stood
 with her dung-filled left hand
 had to be covered
 Oh! Compared to the touch of the Dalit's feet, the faeces of a cow
 is holier. (Charal)

In this poem, Kalyani Thakur describes how the Dalits have lived in the liminal space, bridging the requirements of the higher castes while yet being treated inhumanely—sometimes worse than animals.

Another well-known figure in Bangla Dalit poetry is Chuni Kotal. Chuni Kotal belonged to the marginalised Lodha community, a Dalit minority that endured extreme social disgrace and humiliation during colonial and even postcolonial periods. Due to external forces, Chuni Kotal was forced to end her life. She was a postgraduate student at Vidyasagar University. Her untimely demise serves as a tragic reminder of the torment inflicted by upper-caste society upon a resilient and desperate tribal lady who tried to use education to elevate herself in the social ladder. Her poem “Protest,” which appears in *Shatabarsher Bangla Dalit*

Sahitya (2011), captures the community’s heartbreaking suffering at the hands of societal injustice:

The barren field gets flooded in Lodhas’ blood
Deafening shouts of blood-thirsty cutthroats
Some rushed inside forest in a mad zest for life
A rickety old man rolled down embankment;
The dark deed committed- an eerie hush fell
No voice of protest rent the air;
Lodhas hide inside the forest for life-
The braver seek help in BDO office.
Next day the police recover
Six mutilated bodies of hapless Lodhas.
Newspapers on 4th July term them DACOITS
Write the case diary- “Killed for raping...
A sixty-year-old woman”-
Isn’t there justice for poor Lodhas in India?
Aren’t they fit for justice on their homeland?
(Biswas and Pramanik 111-112)

Manohar Mouli Biswas is another well-known figure in Bangla Dalit poetry. As in other parts of India, the caste system has long shunned and disregarded Dalits in Bengal. The anthology *Vivikto Uthoney Ghar* (A hut in a separate campus) by Manohar Biswas reveals the cruel abuse that the upper castes inflict on the Dalits. In actuality, he states, “I write about my own people and their struggles. I was born into a Dalit caste. For this reason, I am referred to as a Dalit writer by others (Halder, 2018). The unsung hero of the *Mahabharata*, Ghatotkach, is the speaker of his poem *Yuddhe jabo* (I shall go to fight). He doubts the very effectiveness of the marriage between his mother Hidimba, a non-Aryan lady, and father Bhima, an Aryan. The poem includes Ghatotkach’s fervent query,

I can swell and swallow
All the injustice of the world
Then why am I hated? Why am I ignored? (Biswas 12)

Dalits have been troubled by this question for countless years. Manohar Biswas has effectively conveyed the continuity of Dalit experience across time and history by rearranging the mythological stories. According to Indranil Acharya (2014), the poem makes the case that the distinctive and special Dalit experience predates history and is not limited to the ordinary realities of modern life (p. 96). It is safe to say about the poet that he does not require ferocious words to challenge the extreme injustice that befalls the Dalits. Of course, Dalit poets of various Indian languages have employed this narrative technique of rearranging Indian mythology and highlighting a new, less obvious aspect of caste reality contained in such old tales (Acharya, 2014, p. 100).

Although the Dalit literary movement and Bangla Dalit poetry share a fundamental revolutionary goal, their focus on the aesthetic quality of literature sets them apart in a significant way. Critics generally agree that Dalit writing is not very sophisticated artistically. Bangla Dalit poetry, however, is distinct in one aspect i.e. its compliance with the aesthetic merits of literature (Acharya, 2014, p. 98). Dalit literature is accused by certain critics of being propagandist, categorical, and frequently negative. L S Deshpande, however, argues that Dalit writers choose to be genuine over being elegant, sometimes even at the expense of decency, if given the choice between the two (p. 62).

A poet is a product of his social milieu, no matter how transcendental. There is a place for art in the world. “It was created by someone at some point in history, and its purpose is to

discuss a concept or problem that is relevant to humans with other people” (Guerin, 1999, p. 18). Like other Dalit poets in India, the poets from Bangla are undoubtedly dedicated to the society in which they live. Let’s take a passage from Kalyani Thakur’s poetry collection:

I am leaving behind these marshlands
 The people of the forest
 I am leaving behind the river, the forest path
 Far from here somewhere are my own
 People who are sweating blood
 Who survive beating after beating
 My ancestors! (Charal)

The lines effectively convey the poet’s concern for society’s marginalised members, a group that is shut off from mainstream culture and separated from one another. The tragic story of the “people who are sweating blood who survive beating after beating” is being sung by the poet. She depicts a lonely forest of West Bengal in another poem, when the Dalit community’s sect becomes the political target:

This is a great game
 Lalgarh Lalgarh
 A game of green and red
 the black people
 have red blood
 the green grass
 Jungle Mahal
 This is a great game
 of green and red (Charal)

The following lines from a poem by Kalyani Thakur assert the poet’s wistfulness to dream which has an anti-climactic effect:

Happy dreams adorn this path
 The morning passes in soft sunlight
 The sun dwells in a house of clouds
 A flood of colours washes over the green forest
 Such a morning has come after long
 Freedom leaves this mind delicate
 Through the parted clouds, across the gaps of sky
 A village boy passes through
 To board a plane, fly to the eastern
 Moon and whisper in its ear
 Let all my fears remained chained,
 My many dreams like luxuriating
 As they roll in, they like laughing... (Charal)

The phrases “Happy dreams adorn...” and “The sun dwells...” are personification and metaphor, respectively. The poet uses some exquisite imagery, such as “The morning passes in soft sunlight” and “Freedom leaves this mind delicate/ Through the parted clouds,” to convey her need for dream in her depressed psychic state brought on by the societal ill of casteism. But “they like laughing” serves as a note anti-climax, shattering the poet’s fantasy for dream.

We can quote a few lines from Manohar Mouli Biswas’s two poems, *Warfare* and *Phoolan Devi*:

Oh! Phoolan, you have come from
 The lowest caste
 From a marginalised village.

Opressors of women, be aware of it—
She resists at some points; (Biswas)

Red flag has thirst for blood;
A rose of revolt.
All my decaying cells
Restore the spirit I have
To live as rails of protest. (Biswas)

Here, we clearly detect a caustic voice against the societal injustices meted out to Dalit women as well as a sarcastic undertone towards the West Bengal political party that was in power at the time. These phrases serve as the “rails of protest” that define the Dalit resistance. Here, the poet uses some wonderful literary tropes to convey his discontent with social injustice. The poet is compelled by casteist society to believe that a Dalit is only a “body” and not a human person with a human essence; in this sense, exploitation, oppression, deception, and deprivation are the “worms” that nibble at the “flesh alive.” “Red flag” has a symbolic suggestion that most likely refers to the disregard of the previous administration. The metaphor “A rose of revolt” accurately conveys that a Dalit has evolved into a rose with dazzling petals of his uprising against the long-standing tyranny, no more a small nameless blossom to be crushed by the feet of the upper caste.

An additional noteworthy figure in Bangla Dalit poetry is Achintya Biswas. Among his notable compositions in this genre are *Oxygener Bhor* (Oxygenated Morning), *Bidhi Badhdha Satarkikaran* (Statutory Warning), and *Charu Baurir Gaan* (Songs of Charu Bauri). The following lyric, from *Charu Baurir Gaan* (Song of Charu Bauri), *Nirakhharder Kabitar Sabha* (Poetry Meet of the Illiterate), brilliantly illustrates the necessity of starting a strong protest by the oppressed people:

Galled blue envelope- a courier of death;
Poison me, poison you, poison us
And then dwarf us to inane beings.
Crocodile laughter of the blood-thirsty
Dracula will lure us into a trap of death.
The infernal button of explosives
Will be pressed- night’s black agents
Will hurl us into oblivion.
But before that overwhelming moment
Retrieve your lost pen and dreams of
A thousand benighted years and a milky white
Piece of paper. Before the poisoned peril
Once more let’s meet to write it in verse- THE DREAM.
(Biswas & Pramanik 121)

This small poem is full of artistic grace and what Limbale called “life-affirming literature.” The poet’s rage is evident throughout, despite his attempts to “envelop” it in metaphors and symbols. The phrase “Crocodile laughter of the bloodthirsty Dracula” is a fitting way to sum up the inhumanity of the caste system towards the downtrodden, disadvantaged, and exploited Dalits. The phrase “The infernal button of explosives” indicates the resentment and wrath of the oppressed Dalits, which they kept hidden for a millennium. The “poisoned peril” is a striking metaphor for the Dalits’ plight in caste-ridden Indian society. Here, the poet seems to be urging all the oppressed to write a loud protest letter that says, “Retrieve your lost pen.”

Thus, there is ample evidence to support the claim that Bangla Dalit poets are acting as societal voices through their poetry and are, in P B Shelley's (2001) words, "the unacknowledged legislators of mankind" (p. 225). In order to express their protest against casteism, a social injustice, the Dalit poets of Bengal have recently broken away from the convention of romanticism or nationalism seen in the mainstream Indian literature and in this way, they have developed an alternative aesthetics. They were treated inhumanely by society from the moment they were born since they were Dalit or marginalised members of society, and eventually they turned to poetry as a way to communicate their horrific experiences. A Dalit work emerges from a social situation, from a social context, states Deshpande (2001) (p. 60). It is the result of both personal creative impulses and societal pressures (Deshpande, 2001, p. 63).

Conclusion

It is important to remember that a poet needs to meet certain criteria in order to identify as such, that there is a significant distinction between a poet and a versifier, and that poetry is an artifice with certain prerequisites. Poetry shouldn't be judged only on its ability to convey sorrow and suffering; rather, a poem should have other characteristics that readers look for in a piece of art, such as certain standard devices that have been passed down from the past. T. S. Eliot once said, "No poet, no artist of any kind, has his complete meaning alone." His importance and admiration stem from his connection to the deceased poets and artists (Hayward, 1958, p. 23). The poet's combination of the "personal" and the "impersonal" creates this equilibrium. "He may have moods, a will, and personal goals as a human being, but as an artist he is 'man' in a higher sense—he is 'collective man'—one who carries and shapes the unconscious psychic life of mankind," according to C.J. Jung (Jung, 1954, p. 229). A poet is dependent upon his work, it being essentially his instrument. As Komal Agarwal (2014) explains, through a shared legacy of orality (speech, folklore, and music), poetic/significant language and rhetoric enable aesthetic cognition, which is realised through enactment, performance, and reading. According to Sanchez, art, performance, and poetry become a sort of subconscious dialogue between the poet and the reader or audience. During the aesthetic experience, the reader or audience and the poet or performer become a single knowing subject, and performance and language's transformative power leads to the emergence of a collective or community consciousness (p. 49). The accusation that Dalit literature lacks artistic sophistication is incorrect when we refer to Bangla Dalit poetry. The majority of this corpus exhibits a fair mix between literary value and revolutionary social intent, which unmistakably contributes to build an alternative aesthetics of Dalit literature.

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