

## **From Quest for Justice to Dalit Identity: A New Look on the Crisis of identity of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal**

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***Abstract:** In the recent years, it has become a common fashion among the social scientists, journalists and popular writers alike to classify the Scheduled Castes of India as Dalits. Being induced by the 'Dalit Panther movement' of the 1970's, academics of both Dalit and non-Dalit social background; have reinterpreted the protests of the Scheduled Castes against upper castes' oppression and their writings under the banner of 'Dalit Discourse'. These trends eventually have encapsulated the Scheduled Castes within the fold of 'Dalit identity'. However, a major section of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal has reservation to accept 'Dalit identity' what the Dalit writers and non-Dalit scholars are trying to impose on them. Rather, they are more comfortable to be identified as Scheduled Castes in the society. This paper has analyzed that the social movement of the Scheduled Castes of late colonial Bengal is losing its dignity in the recent years because of classification of the Scheduled Castes merely as Dalits. Simultaneously the author has argued that 'construction of Dalit identity' of the Scheduled Castes is a theoretical imposition on them at least in case of West Bengal.*

**Key Words:** Dalits , Dalitology , Scheduled Castes , Identity , Dalit Studies, 'Dalit Discourse.'

### **From Quest for Justice to Dalit Identity: A New Look on the Crisis of identity of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal**

In the recent years, it has become a common fashion among the social scientists, journalists and popular writers alike to classify the Scheduled Castes of India as Dalits. Being induced by the 'Dalit Panther movement' of the 1970's<sup>1</sup>, academics of both Dalit and non-Dalit social background; have reinterpreted the protests of the Scheduled Castes against upper castes' oppression and their writings under the banner of 'Dalit Discourse'.<sup>2</sup> Their researchers have developed three basic trends: (i) dalitism among the Scheduled Castes who denied upper castes' domination/ hegemony, (ii) researches of the non-Scheduled Castes who have treated all oppressed people as Dalits (including Scheduled

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Castes; Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Castes, religious minorities and oppressed gender, etc); and (iii) writings of the Scheduled Caste scholars who accepted academic domination/ theoretical imposition of both the Dalit and the non-Dalit scholars without criticism. These trends eventually have encapsulated the Scheduled Castes within the fold of 'Dalit identity'. However, a major section of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal has reservation to accept 'Dalit identity' what the Dalit writers and non-Dalit scholars are trying to impose on them. Rather, they are more comfortable to be identified as Scheduled Castes in the society. This phenomenon suggests that the 'theoretical propositions of the academics and Dalit activists need new outlook'. In this paper I'll thus argue that social movement of the Scheduled Castes of late colonial Bengal is losing its dignity in the recent years because of classification of the Scheduled Castes merely as Dalits. In this context it will also be examined that the construction of Dalit identity of the Scheduled Castes is a theoretical imposition on them since reality differs from theory.

### **Meaning of Dalit and Dalitism**

'Dalit Studies' as an academic discipline has drawn much attention of scholars and popular writers since a couple of decades. But as a social concept 'Dalit' is an ambiguous one for many of us. What does Dalit(s) mean? It is perhaps a significant question for millions of people. Literally *dalit* means broken, crushed or reduced to pieces (what is an adjective in English grammar). In Dalit Studies, 'Dalit(s)' is a collective /proper noun. Again, in the Sanskrit *dalita* is a verb.<sup>3</sup> Thus grammatically the concept *dalit* is not free from ambiguity.

However, for the Dalit Panthers of the 1970s and 1980's meaning of 'Dalit' was very much clear. According to them 'Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution who believes in humanism, rejects the existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, fate and heaven'.<sup>4</sup> It means 'dalit' stands for assertion/ revolution against discrimination through creative writings and reinterpretation of experiences of oppressed/ marginalized people. So dalitology is a voice against injustice, social oppression and discrimination. Thus idea and objectives of the 'Dalit Panthers' are very much clear. They initially used this term in case of the Mahars, a Scheduled Caste community of Maharashtra. Later the term Dalits has included all Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and other oppressed section of the society. Dalitology got more positive outlook in the 1990s when main producers have been branded as Dalits. In an article Kancha Iliah (a notable Dalit thinker) has argued that 'the Dalitbahujans are the skilled producers-instrument makers, creative builders of the material basis of society. Conversion of their experience into the framework of knowledge can produce an alternative version of

history—the Dalitbahujan alternative'.<sup>5</sup> This assertion suggests that non-dalits are merely parasites who depend on the Dalits for their survival.

This assertive voice of the dalitology has been echoed in many such writings especially in Southern and Western India to express their pain and feeling by refuting and deconstructing the non-Dalit version(s) of protest. In this context, the Dalit Christians of Southern India have treated the 'words' of protest very seriously. In their edited volume (*Dalit Theology*, 2010) Santhianathan Clarke, Dinabandhu Manchale and Philip Vinod Clarke, thus have used 'word' as a tool of Dalit assertion.<sup>6</sup>

The positive meaning of the term 'dalit' or dalitology, is however, often moves downwards particularly when the non-Dalits come forward to use Dalits merely as a synonym of untouchables.<sup>7</sup> Since the 1980's researches of many non-Dalit scholars have diluted the 'voice' of dalitism of the colonial period. Here we can take Gail Ombetd as an example. He identified the Mahars of Maharastra as untouchables and hence they are Dalits.<sup>8</sup> Ishita Banerjee-Dube<sup>9</sup>, Imtiaz Ahmad and Shashi Bhusan Upadhyay<sup>10</sup> and such many schollars have done the same thing. According to Shashi Bhusan 'the former untouchables are now called Dalits who are voicing their grievances in various level'<sup>11</sup> Similarly Padma Velaskar wrote: 'Dalit refers to former untouchable caste communities.'<sup>12</sup> These are a few examples only. Influence of such writings is comparatively deeper in the society (than the meaning propounded by the Dalit Panthers and the Dalit Christians). Negative meaning is getting more solid form thanks to media both print and electronic. Negative aspect of Dalit identity will be discussed in the subsequent sections of the article in the context of West Bengal.

### **Background of Social Movement of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal**

Territorially, West Bengal is the 14<sup>th</sup> state of India (with only 88,752 skm<sup>2</sup> out of 3287240 skm<sup>2</sup> i. e, 2.69%) while population wise it is fourth with 7.54% of India's total population (91,347,736 out of 1210193422 of 2011 census). Among the Scheduled Castes population of India, West Bengal is sharing 11.07% (total 18452555 out of 166,635,700 in India 2011) what is again 24% of State's population. Scheduled Castes of West Bengal are divided into 60 sub-castes with wide ranging diversity. While five major sub-castes like the Rajbanshis (3801677), the Namasudras (3504642), the Bagdis (3058265), the Poundras (2450260) and the Bauris (1,228,635) collectively constituted 14043479 souls, i.e. 76% and rest 55 sub-castes constitute only 24% (4409076 heads only). Population of some sub-castes is even less than two thousands like the Banter (138), the Dabgar (252), the Halalkhor (1174), etc). The Scheduled Castes of West Bengal are equally diverse in terms of their education, economic and social location.

In spite of having 24% share of the Scheduled Castes in West Bengal's population they do not have strong political voice at present. However, their political importance was much higher in the late colonial period. Before the partition of Bengal in 1947, the Scheduled Castes had established themselves as a bargaining power (especially from 1920 to 1946). They became essential part of the 'government of Bengal and provincial level electoral politics in the last decade of the colonial rule (1937-47)'. How did they emerge as a strong political power in the colonial rule? Answer of this question lies in their social movement what started in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Let us have an idea about the social location of the Scheduled Castes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. We have two basic tools to understand the situation. First one is the observations and opinions of the non-Scheduled castes. Second one is the experience of casteism as recorded by the Scheduled Castes in their own words. For the first one we can get a preliminary idea from the perception of Sri Ramakrishna Parama Hansadeva (1836-1886), a famous saint of the nineteenth century. His disciple (Swami Saradananda) has recorded that before his appointment as a priest Ramakrishna had reservation to consume the food prepared with the money of Rani Rashmoni (1739-1861), the builder of the Dakshineswar Kali Temple who was a Kaibartya by caste. In Ramakrishna's words:

"I felt very sorry to think that I am consuming food supplied by a Kaibartya. Even in those days the poor and beggars were not interested to accept the food offered to the deity of the temple. In many days the Prasad (sanctified foods) had given to the cows and dumped to the Ganges when no one was ready to accept them."<sup>13</sup>

Bengali novels composed in the colonial and early post-colonial period have also frequently recorded the marginalized location of the Scheduled Castes. Bankim Chanda's novel *Debi Choudhurani* (1882)<sup>14</sup> and Bhibhuti Bhusan Bandyopadhyay's classics like *Pather Panchali* (1929)<sup>15</sup> and *Ichhamati* (1950)<sup>16</sup> are although not based on the marginal people but they occasionally reflected the casteist attitude of the upper castes towards the Scheduled Castes. Both of them have used the names of the Scheduled Caste communities like the Bagdis, the Doms, the Haris, the Pods, the Chanrals, etc. as slang usages. Similarly Rabindra Nath Tagore's *Gora* (1910)<sup>17</sup> and *Ghare Baire* (1916)<sup>18</sup> and Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's stories<sup>19</sup> have contained a few sentences about the marginalized social lives of the Scheduled Castes although they are no way the protagonist of Dalit Discourse.

There are a few more literary pieces produced by the non-Dalit novelists in the colonial period where attitude of the upper castes towards community-based social systems of the Scheduled Castes have been properly reflected. Among such writings

mention may be made of *Hasulibaker Upakatha* (1947) of Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay,<sup>20</sup> *Padma Nadir Majhi* (1936) of Manik Bandyopadhyay, *Dhorai Charit Manas* (1949-51) of Satinath Bhaduri. In these writings, the Scheduled Caste communities have been invariably constructed as sub-standard, uncivilized, non-Aryans, and indigenous people who deserve no respect because of their unclean professions! We have plathora of such examples.

For the second tool we can talk about the autobiographies of the Scheduled Castes such as *Diner Atmakatha* of Raicharan Sardar (1866-1946), *Jiban Katha* of Rajendranath Sarkar (1975) and *Uttarbanglar Sekal O Amar Jibansmriti* of Upendra Nath Barman (1898-1988). They recorded their experience of casteism in their own words. We can get an idea about the nature of attacks they received from their upper caste Hindu colleagues. For instance we are quoting from the autobiography of Raicharan Sardar titled *Diner Atmakahani Ba Satya Pariksha*.<sup>21</sup> He had recorded an incident of 1891:

“There was an incident at Dhamua(village) what I like to mention here. Shri Bhuban Mohan Chakraborty, Head Master of the School; used to live at the house of Shri Girish Chandra Putatunda (a Brahmin). I used to take lessons from the teacher in every morning for two hours. In that house I (along with a student of Napit Caste) used to sit on a mat. On 3rd day of Bhadra, 1298 B.S. (1891) our mat had touched the Brahmin boys. It was noticed by Putatunda’s widow sister. She had insulted me with derogatory words.... I did not feel that I have committed any offence. Rather I was inspired to establish a respectable caste identity (of ours).”<sup>22</sup>

A similar record has also left by Sri Upendra Nath Barman in his autobiography.<sup>23</sup> The Scheduled Castes had to face caste discrimination even after being educated and competent enough. In his autobiography, Rajendranath Sarkar (1903-1979), a Pundra lawyer, had categorically recorded the practice of casteism even by the highly educated lawyers. In his word:

“I got membership of the Bar Association since my joining the Khulna District Bar in 1929(as a lawyer). One tradition has drawn my attention in the very first day. A servant was employed to serve water to the lawyers. I saw that the lawyers were following casteism. Water used to be served to the upper caste Hindu lawyers in the pots made of brass metal or copper. Ordinary pots and aluminum glasses were allotted for the Muslims and the lower caste lawyers respectively.....In the Second day, when I asked for water, Durgapada (servant) gave me water in a dirty aluminum glass. I told him that I would not drink water in this glass. He replied that only this glass is is allotted for you!”<sup>24</sup>

Incidents of casteism as recorded in the autobiographies had also equally recored in the colonial adiministrative records including census reports and ethnographic studies.  
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In such a society full with caste discrimination, only available tool for the lower castes for gaining respect was to establish respectable caste identity in the society! Most of the Scheduled Caste communities thus had developed a sense of 'self-respect' by announcing a 'self identity'. By rejecting the imposed dictums of the traditional Hindu scriptures (as interpreted by the Brahmins), theses caste communities had attempted to create a notion of 'imaginary' but 'respectable' caste identity. Being instigated by the government policy of social stratification in the late nineteenth and twentieth century<sup>26</sup> caste organizations of the Scheduled Caste communities had submitted their prayers to the census superintendents for assigning more respectable status in the official records since 1891. In most cases, they asserted for 'Kshatriya' caste identity (such as the Rajbanshi Kshatriya, the Poundra Kshatriya, the Malla Kshatriya, Byagra Kshatriya, etc.)<sup>27</sup> while some castes claimed for the Vaishya (such as the Dhobas, the Sunris, the Bhuinmalis, the Jelia Kaibartyas) and respectable Sudra (like the Namasudras) identity. These demands of standard caste identities were translated into practice in the first quarter of the twentieth century through the construction of 'self-history', adoption of respectable rituals and social reforms.

Again, they had given maximum emphasis on the spread of education to empower the caste fellows to develop their financial and social status. So 'social justice' was the 'goal' while 'social reforms' was a means to reach to that goal. In such a social context of colonial Bengal, *kshatriyaization* (of the Rajbanshis (1891-1947), the Poundras (1891-1956) and the Malos (1911-1947), etc.), *namasudraization* (Namasudra movement of the Chandals (1872-1947)) and *vaishyaization* (Vaishya movement of the Dhobas (1911-1947), the Sunris, etc.) of the Scheduled Caste communities were basically movements for attaining self-respect and social justice.

This trend of social movement of the Scheduled Castes turned into a political movement after the beginning of electoral politics in Bengal. During the period between 1920 and 1936 they participated in the elections held for Bengal Legislative Council. In the elections (1920, 1922, 1926 and 1929) by utilizing their caste feelings, the Scheduled Castes had mobilized their fellows to get victory in the general (non-Muhamedan) constituencies. Because of their huge concentration in particular area the Rajbanshis, the Namasudras and the Poundras had made considerable progress in the elections.<sup>28</sup>

The Scheduled Castes had appeared as a significant political force in Bengal after introduction of 'political reservation' in the 1930s. In the election of Bengal Legislative Assembly held in 1937 the Scheduled Caste communities (particularly the Namasudras,

the Rajbanshis , the Poundras, the Malos , the Sunris, the Mals, the Bagdis, the Muchis and the Sunris) had participated in 30 reserve seats as well as in general seats. Most of them came victorious as independent candidate (22) with strong caste feeling while the Congress (6) and the Hindu Mahasabha(2) had also mobilized them.<sup>29</sup>

After the election of 1937, the Scheduled Castes (SC) thus established themselves as a political force in Bengal. An analysis on the election results of 1937 also indicates that besides the 30 reserved seats, they won three general seats (1 Congress and 2 Independent). We find that two ministers were appointed from the Scheduled Castes in the government formed by Fazlul Haque (1937-1941). Sri Prasanna Dev Raikot (of Jalpaiguri cum Siliguri constituency), a Koch-Rajbanshi landlord ; was entrusted the charge of the Department of Excise and Forests while Sri Mukunda Bihari Mullick ( of the Namasudra community of (Khulna) got the charge of the Cooperative, Credit and Rural Indebtedness ministry.

In the general election of 1946, however, result of the Scheduled Caste organizations like the All India Scheduled Caste Federation (AISCF) and the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity were very much deplorable. Although Jogendra Nath Mondal from AISCF and Nagendra Nath Ray from the Rajbanshi Kshatriya Samity got victory but most of the Scheduled Caste candidates contested under the banner of caste organization were defeated. Congress alone got 22 out of 30 reserved seats while the Communist Party won one seat. It indicates that the Scheduled Caste on the eve of the partition of Bengal (1947) began to be controlled by the nationalist organization like the Congress. This trend may be interpreted as 'a shift of attitudes of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal from caste-based politics to the nationalist politics.' It is however, beyond doubt that the Scheduled Castes of Bengal had provided opportunity to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to enter to the Constituent Assembly in 1946 (who later appeared as the father of Indian Constitution).<sup>30</sup>

### **Towards the Analysis of Movement**

Social movement of the Scheduled Castes for establishing respectable identity and achieving political power has been an interesting subject among the social scientists since the late nineteenth century. It has interpreted by the scholars of colonial period either as 'gradual Brahmanising of the aboriginal/non-Aryans/casteless tribes'<sup>31</sup> or as *sanskritization*<sup>32</sup> and 'method of absorption of the lower castes into the Hindu fold'.<sup>33</sup> In these studies the Brahmins/ upper caste Hindus have been taken as the point of 'standard reference'. This stand led us to make a difference between the social mobility of the lower castes and social reforms of the upper caste Hindu *Bhadralokas*.<sup>34</sup>

In the post-colonial period, 'caste' appeared as a popular subject of the study in social science's perspective. A host of scholars have engaged their theoretical and pedagogical endeavour to analyse 'caste as occupational social stratification', 'caste-class continuum', nature of caste society, 'caste mobility', structure and power of caste, social change, relationship between caste and class, etc. These theoretical and empirical studies, however, could not place the movements of the Scheduled Castes beyond the side-effect of colonialism.<sup>35</sup>

The 1980s, however, has witnessed a new trend in historical writing on caste particularly with the rise of the Dalitism and Subaltern School of historiography. While the non-Indian scholars came forward in the 1980s to reconstruct the history of protest of the low-caste leaders against the casteism, the 'Subaltern historians' (mostly Indians) have initiated a new trend in historical writings. They attempted to historicise the location, consciousness and protest of the 'subordinate people (subalterns) of India' with a new perspective. Although within a quarter century (1982-2005) the Subaltern Historians have produced twelve volumes (altogether 90 articles) but only three articles of them (written by Partha Chatterjee) have indirect/ direct relations with the Scheduled Castes of Bengal. First one is '*Agrarian relations and communalism in Bengal 1926-1935*' what is associated with communalism. It indirectly refers to the subordinate locations of the Scheduled Castes of colonial period.<sup>36</sup> Second article (*Caste and Subaltern Consciousness*)<sup>37</sup> is, however an interesting one. After criticizing the Marxian notion on caste and Luis Dumont's *Homo-Hierarchies* (1972), Chatterjee has analysed a few points about the minor religious sects (*Vaishnava*) of pre-colonial and colonial Bengal. Most pertinent part of this article is a section on Balaram Hadi (Hari) and his experience as a religious teacher of the low caste people (Subalterns) of Nadia District. His study shows that Balahadi sect was appeared as an 'alternative practice' constructed by the subordinate caste groups against the dominant castes and sects. But social movements of other Scheduled Castes have no place in the Subaltern studies. Third article (*Religion and urban domesticity*)<sup>38</sup> of Partha Chatterjee has clarified the attitudes of the "Calcutta-based Western educated Hindu Bengali Middle Class" towards Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansadeva (1836-1886). Chatterjee, however Sadly neglected the role of Rani Rashmoni (1793-1867), a Kaibartya Zamindar (of fisherman caste), behind the growth of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement.

Although Subaltern historians did not write anything about the social movement of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal but a perception has developed in the academic world to treat them as 'Subalterns' or as 'extremely inferior' who did not have ability even to speak. Thus the question raised by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1988 '*Can a Subaltern*

*Speak?*<sup>39</sup> has become a point of controversy both among the Subaltern historians as well as other social scientists who think beyond any frame.

However, since the 1990s a group of scholars have taken up the issue of the social movement of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal very seriously. They attempted to construct the history of the lower caste movement either along the line of *sanaskritization* or under the banner of the class-caste struggle. There we find a few studies on certain specific castes such as Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya's studies on the Namasudras<sup>40</sup> Swaraj Basu's<sup>41</sup> study on the Rajbanshis of North Bengal, Rup Kumar Barman's study on the fishermen communities of Bengal,<sup>42</sup> and Krishna Kumar Sarkar's<sup>43</sup> study on the Poundras. There are a few more works which have occasionally analyzed various aspects of 'self-respect movement' of lower caste communities of Bengal.<sup>44</sup> These works, however, have failed to cross the boundary of '*sanskritization*'. Thus the Scheduled Castes have been treated only within the 'parameter of 'sub-standard' social category who aspired to be standard people who actually in their eyes nothing but oppressed, i.e., Dalits.

### **Dalit Identity of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal**

The concept of Dalit identity is now being invariably applied to all Scheduled Castes. Even the scholars who once attempted to construct the history of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal as 'caste historians' are now trying to identify the Scheduled Castes of Bengal as Dalits in a sense who are oppressed / depressed/ inferiors. For instance we can talk about Prof. Partha Chatterjee and Prof. Sekhar Bandyopadhyay. It has been already been motioned about Partha Chatterjee's position in the 1980s or 1990s. Very recently Partha Chatterjee has categorically argued that Scheduled Castes are Dalits. He wrote in a forwarding note 'that it has been more or less accepted by all that the Scheduled Castes can be identified as Dalits'.<sup>45</sup> Similarly Sekhar Bandyopadhyay who wrote *Caste, Protest and Identity*(1997)<sup>46</sup> in the late twentieth century now in the recent work has categorically projected the Scheduled Castes of both colonial and post-colonial Bengal merely as Dalits.<sup>47</sup>

So in the twenty first century, Scheduled Castes of West Bengal including their twentieth century assertion (under the colonial rule) and post independent struggle for survival are being analysed by the non-Dalit scholars only under the framework of 'dalit' history in negative sense of the term. Thus the trend of research generated by the non-Dalit scholars like Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, Sarbani Bandyopadhyay, Santosh Rana and Kumar Rana<sup>48</sup> and host of others has transformed the identity of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal to Dalits!

Influence of both dalitism and academic domination of the non-Dalit scholars have their inevitable impact on the literary and scholastic endeavour of the Scheduled Castes of Bengal. Being induced by dalitism of Western and Southern India, a few Scheduled Castes activists have recorded/are recording their experience of casteism in the recent years. Among them Monohar Mouli Biswas and Monoranjan Byapari got significant attention from the non-Dalit scholars. Monohar Maouli has claimed that he is a 'Dalit scholar who born in a Dalit family and is fighting for the Dalits through literature'.<sup>49</sup> In his autobiography Monohar left an impression of traditional life style of the Namasudras. Monoranjan Byapari, on the other hand; has recorded his struggle for survival in post colonial India as refugee, as rikswapuller, as a worker of left political party and as a person who can write his experience against casteism, exploitation and oppression.<sup>50</sup> Both Monohar and Monoranjan have been accepted as Dalit writers by the non- Dalits. Even to some extent the non-Dalit critics/ protagonists are romantic and bias towards Monoranjan.<sup>51</sup> However, it is beyond doubt that these writers are now branded as Dalit writers either as assertive writers (dalitism) or as oppressed (negative meaning).

### **Beyond Dalitism**

Social movements as well as autobiographies of the Scheduled Castes so far analysed in this article have an academic relevance either as the contents of 'Dalit discourse' or as a branch of literary study. It is a common 'usage' in media to classify the Scheduled Castes merely as Dalits. What is the perception of the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal about their identity? In our field survey we have asked a question that 'how do you want be identified in Indian / Bengali society? 100% of them have replied that they are happy to be Scheduled Castes. 'They don't think that they are Dalits'. For them Dalit identity is a humiliating one (i.e., negative meaning of the Dalit). They replied that their identity as constructed by academicians and media as Dalit is no way acceptable to them.

Again the ideologies of the Dalit Panthers like anti-Brahminism and opposing Hindu deities have failed to mobilize the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal. In our survey we have noticed that the Scheduled Castes of this state have embraced all goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. They are not rejecting the Hindu deities. However, a few communities (particularly the Rajbanshis, Poundras, Bagdis and Bauris) in the recent years are popularizing their own gods and goddesses i, e, moving towards Nativism.<sup>52</sup>

## Conclusion

Dalit identity of the Scheduled Castes as many academic scholars and popular writers are trying to build up is not free from criticism from within. While the Dalit Panthers have induced the Scheduled Castes of southern, western and northern India in large scale to accept dalitism, in West Bengal neither dalitism nor Dalit discourse have come up as a dominant trend among the Scheduled Castes . Only a microscopic minority of the Scheduled Castes have accepted the researches of the non-Dalit scholars. Thus they are (Scheduled Castes) transforming themselves into 'academic slaves'.

On the other hand, the Scheduled Castes of West Bengal in general feel that their identity is based on their sub-castes, i.e., the Rajbanshis, the Poundras, the Bagdis, the Bouris, the Namasudras, etc. They again are glorifying their social movement of colonial period in order to organize their sub-castes fellows of present generation. Hence the Rajbanshis , the Poundras and the Namasudras of West Bengal are trying to build up Panchanan Barma (1865-1935), Raicharan Sardar and Harichand Thakur as the father of their respective caste identity. The intellectuals, political leaders as well as socio-cultural organization of these communities of present days through their writings and activities are drawing our attention to their respective goals and achievements. Thus the sense of sub-castes is more prominent than the common Dalit identity in West Bengal.

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## Notes and Reference

1. Under the leadership of Namdeo Dhasal , J.V. Pawar, Raja Dhale and Arun Kamble the Dalit thinkers and activists have developed an organization in 1972 called Dalit Panthers in order to fight against casteism/Brahmanism. Through their literary works the Dalit Panthers had organized the Scheduled Castes and neo-Buddhists of Maharashtra as a resistant force. Later this movement has considerably inspired the Scheduled Castes of a few states of India .

2. Post-colonial nationalist historians, journalists and popular writers have branded the low caste communities including the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Castes as “Dalits”. According to Kancha Ilaih they are Dalit Bahujan. ‘Dalit’ has been appeared as a subject of research to the non-Dalits. However, the educated Dalits are now asserting themselves under the broader umbrella of Dalit Discourse, a discourse by the dalits by their own for raising voice against the social injustices, exploitation and discriminations.
3. The thirteenth century poet Joydev in his *Dasavatara* wrote: *Dalita Hiranyakasipu-tanu bhringam, Keshava dhrita naraharirupa jaya jagadish hare* (दलित हिरण्यकशिपुतनुभृङ्गम् । केशव धृत नरहरि रूप जय जगदीश हरे ॥, Meaning: Thine aesthetic hands ornamented with uncharacteristic sharp nails those are approximating petals of lotus nicely **to**rn, the material body that actually pays no attention to thee of the demon Hiranyakashipu as black bee, O Keshava! Thou art taken an incarnation of a half man and half lion **to** act it. Awfully, I pray to Thee, the omnipresent lord of the Universe; Thine glory is protecting the world eternally). It means *dalita* is a verb. Prof. Jyotishka Ranjan Sarkar, A Sanskrit scholar of Cooch Behar, has given me this translation.
4. Chinna Rao Yagoti: *Dalit Studies: A Bibliographical Handbook*, (Kanishka Publishers and Distributors, 2003), p.11.
5. Kancha Ilaih : *Productive Labour, Consciousness and Histcry: The Dalit Bahujan Alternative*, in Shahid Amin and Dipesh Chakraborty (ed): *Subalterns Studies LX: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996), p.164.
6. Santhianathan Clarke, Dinabandhu Manchale and Philip Vinod Clarke: *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, (New Delhi, Oxford University Pres, 2010), p. 1. They wrote-- ‘This edited volume is a compendium of words: flaming words, extinguishing words, flowing words, wailing words, faltering words, protesting words, hopeful words, threatening words, freeing words, inviting words, expelling words, and healing words. Yet, this is not a collection of words spouted out by empty minds. Rather it collates numerous words that raised from targeted bodies, heavy hearts, and imaginative minds in collaboration with the world of Dalits in general and, and Christian Dalits in particular. Most of these words emanate from a prior covenant made with Dalit communities: to feel their pēin and attest to their hope.’ Santhianathan Clarke, Dinabandhu Manchale and Philip Vinod Clarke: *Dalit Theology in the Twenty-first century: Discordant Voices, Discerning Pathways*, p. 1.
7. Chinna Rao Yagati: *op.cit.*, p.11
8. Gail Omvedt: *Dalit and the Democratic Revolution: Dr.B.R. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in colonial India* , (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 1994).
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15. Bhibhuti Bhusan Bandyopadhyay: *Pather Panchali*, (Kolkata, Reflect Publication, 2011), p.31.
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18. Rabindra Nath Tagore: *Ghore Baire*, first published in 1916, reprint edition, Viswabharati Sulabh Rachanabli, 4.
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  27. Nripendra Kumar Dutta: *Origin and Growth of Castes in India (Volumes I & II Combined)*, (Calcutta, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, 1986), pp.292-314.
  28. Rup Kumar Barman: *Partition of India and Its Impact on Scheduled Castes of Bengal*, (New Delhi, Abhijeet Publications, 2012), pp. 108-115.
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  30. Dr. B.R.Ambedkar entered to the Constituent Assembly in 1946 from Bengal since his party failed to get victory in Bombay . For details about political participation of the Scheduled Castes see: Sekhar Bandyopadhyay: *Caste, Protest and Identity*(Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997); Swarja Basu: *Dynamics of Caste Movement* (New Delhi, Manohar, 2002); Jaya Chatterjee: *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition (1932-1947)*, (CUP, 1994).
  31. H.H. Risley: *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, 2 Vols*, (Calcutta, Bengal Secretariat Press, 1891, Vol. I, p. XV.
  32. M.N. Srinivas: *Social Change in Modern India* , (New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1980). According to Srinivas 'sanskritization' is such process by which 'a low Hindu caste, or tribal or other group, changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently, twice-born' caste. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India*, p.6.
  33. N.K. Bose : *The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption, Science and Culture*, Vol. VII.4 (1941).
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