

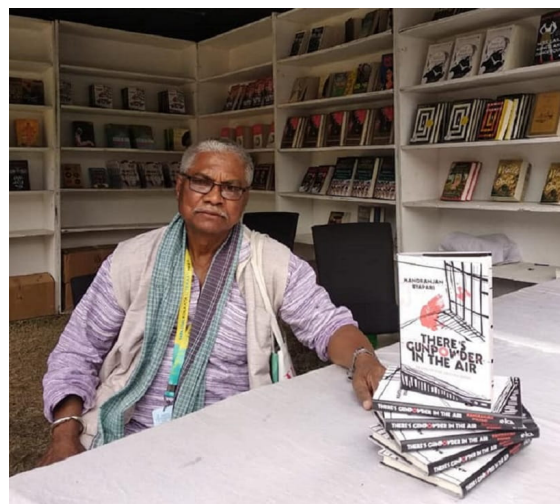
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Tamoghna Datta

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Negotiating Identity in Manoranjan Byapari's *Interrogating My Chandal Life*

Tamoghna Datta



In an interview given to *The Hindu* in May, 2018, author Manoranjan Byapari declares; "I write because I can't kill. When a kid is raped in Kathua or a man is punished for using his village well, I feel like shooting. But I can't, so I write and kill the villain." Anger, against social injustice and oppression, is the prime progenitor of the literary discourse known as Dalit Literature. The word 'Dalit', literally translated as 'ground down' or 'broken down', has a distinct connotation in the Indian social context. Dalits are the lowermost order of the Hindu caste hierarchy. Systematically exploited and othered by the upper caste Hindus for centuries, this disenfranchised community lived on the fringe of the society. The term 'Dalit' is often enlarged to encompass not merely the Hindu lower castes but other marginalized people like religious minorities or economically disadvantaged classes as well. Historically, society has turned a blind eye to the sufferings and experiences of the Dalits. Dalit writers and critics attempt to give a voice to these voiceless and excluded people. As an umbrella term, Dalit Literature comprises a vast corpus of works – poems, ballads, short stories, novels and autobiographies- written in a diverse array of languages and regional dialects. The chief purpose of these narratives is to offer an alternative perspective of the things around us, documenting the miserable and dreadful reality of the Dalit community. At the same time, they are also written as protests against the age- old practice of untouchability and the horrors perpetrated by the social institutions of caste. As Arjun Dangle writes: "Dalit Literature is not

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Tamoghna Datta (b. 08 Apr 1987) from Kolkata did her Bachelors as well as Masters in English Literature from the University of Calcutta. She is presently working as a Lecturer of English at Shri Shikshayatan College, Kolkata. She is an avid reader and enjoys travelling.

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[Back](#)