

DALITS IN THE HISTORY OF FREEDOM STRUGGLE: WITHIN AND BEYOND TEXTS

Sangeeta Krishna*

Abstract

Over the last few decades history has become a site of contestation on the issue of historical amnesia. The Indian historians did not ritually engage with the role of the Dalits in anti-colonial struggles or in the freedom struggle. This historical amnesia exemplifies the depth of the predicament of Indian history and historiography. The present paper is of course a step toward small beginnings in the grand project of 'History from Below'. Focus has been devoted to the following aspects: participation of dalits during the period of 1857 revolt to 1947 freedom struggle movements, association of dalit heroes in some of the important historical incidents and dalit movements, their historical consciousness or identity and the aspiration of dalits to carve out a respectable place in history. It highlights the importance of revisiting the past through the folklores and memories juxtaposed with some archival materials and memorials from a different perspective. No doubt History of Dalits is within and beyond text.

Keywords: Dalits, History, Freedom Struggle, Folklores, Oral tradition and Oral History.

History is a powerful medium/means which serve to articulate one's existence. Historians claim that history is an ongoing dialogue between the present and the past to understand and plan the future. This implies that the past is a negotiated domain between present and future. In this context we can situate the history of the subalterns,¹ the marginalized and the excluded sections of the society like Dalits, women and many other communities who are silenced in the

*Assistant Professor-cum-Assistant Director, Centre for Study of Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policy, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar Central University, Vidya Nagar, Lucknow, India.

historical discourse and for whom no written records are available. Here an attempt is to map the methodological, epistemological and ontological neglect of Dalit from history. The historical evidences confirmed that Dalits have been left out of history, or when included, relegated to the periphery or projected as people 'without history' in the traditional historical scholarship. This lacunae of traditional history has been brought to light by Dalit historians. They claim that the ignorance of Dalits' contribution to the society in the past made it easier to deny their contribution in the present too. In fact, they have their own histories but these are often retained in an oral rather than written form.

Turning the pages of professional history reveals the historiographical silencing / amnesia about the contribution of Dalits. It acquaints us by the reference of only known names of freedom fighters. This is not astonishing because these known fighters were engaged with those times politics and provided leadership to the nationalist movement freedom struggle. What does this imply? How is one to apprehend this subversion of history? It is only by putting the elitist interpretation/portrayal/depiction of history or the master/grand narratives under the scanner that any space can be created for the marginalised in history. Ranjit Guha states, (1982) 'The historiography of Indian nationalism has for a long time been dominated by elitist nature, colonialist elitism and bourgeois nationalist elitism.... Both these genre of elitist share the prejudice that the making of the Indian nation and the development of nationalist consciousness were exclusively elite accomplishment'.

India's freedom struggle saw mass participation at an unprecedented scale and many of these participants were Dalits who remain invisible and forgotten heroes. Recorded history only told the stories of elite nationalist rich feudal landlords, and kings and queens like Rani Lakshmi Bai and Tantya Tope, Gandhi, Nehru so on and so forth. As mentioned above the role played by Dalits in the freedom movement is totally missing in the official history of Indian freedom struggle.

And in the process of rectifying the fabrications of elitist historiography came the ignored question of subaltern consciousness. According to Chatterjee, (2013) subaltern consciousness is the realization of the subaltern of his exploitation at the hands of the elite and it is this consciousness which is manifested in a subaltern insurgency, say, a peasant revolt. It can hence be said, "(subaltern) consciousness evolves out of the experiences of subordination—out of the struggle, despite the daily routine of servitude, exploitation

and deprivation, to preserve the collective identity of subaltern groups.” Simultaneously with this question as to which sources, historical records and papers should be researched to identify the reliable evidence of this consciousness as asserted by the scholar above.

Where was one to look for the evidence of this autonomous consciousness? It could not be found in the bulk of the archival material that historians conventionally use, because that material had been prepared and preserved by and for the dominant groups. For the most part, those documents only show the subaltern as subservient. It is only at the moment of rebellion that the subaltern become visible as the bearer of an independent identity/personality. Scholars comprehended that when the subaltern rebels, the masters realize that the servant too has a consciousness, has interests and objectives, methods and organization. It was also realized that if one had to search for evidence of an autonomous subaltern consciousness in the historical archives then it would be found in the documents of revolt counter-insurgency.

Realizing that official records as scripted by the dominant groups, were suppressing the notion that subaltern could have a consciousness, the only record of it could be found in the documents of revolt and counterinsurgency. And a host of writings by Ranajit Guha (1983) and Gautam Bhadra (1994) Gyanendra Pandey (1984 &1990), David Hardiman (1984), Sumit Sarkar (1984) and Shahid Amin (1996) Dipesh Chakrabarty (1984&1989) Partha Chatterjee (1986 & 1993) came to underscore how the subaltern despite being a cardinal part of India's history was but detached from its making and allotted only an inadequate space. While analysing the discourses on knowledge production which were elitist in nature came the thrust towards correcting the fabrications of history by revisiting elite history and resurrecting the power of orality, as well as creating a subaltern history by listening to the subaltern.

Many other scholars also stated that history should be irrefutably encompassing with reference to the marginalised communities. Taking into account the various critical opinions of history writing with reference to subaltern history, critics like Benoy Sarkar have further added, ‘...for history is incomplete and quite unable to guess the future of mankind...so long as it (did) not concern itself with the whole of human life and its thousand and one manifestations...’.He further strongly said that national unity was possible only through the study of “folk culture.” (quoted in Mayaram,2005)

An unexplored area in most historical writings on the freedom

struggle is an engagement with the folklores, oral tradition especially folksongs of these Dalit freedom fighters as well as the 'marginalized literature or literature from below' in the form of pamphlets, booklets etc. These booklets help to spread the feeling of nationalism among Dalits at the grassroots level by putting forward their actual contribution to the freedom struggler and claiming compensation in the present. This nationalism is in effect 'a state of mind, an act of consciousness' (Kohn,1944) made possible, as demonstrated by Benedict Anderson (1983), through the development of newspapers, books and administrative bureaucracies that allowed millions of people to 'imagine' themselves as part of the same community.

Revolt of 1857 and Forgotten Heroes

Our entry point for analysis is the great revolt of 1857 because it has exercised great impact on the minds of common mass for their freedom. We find that the scanty recorded history of the period concerned did not however, document the large number of battles fought by the common people as part of the rebellion and which had left a lasting impression on their minds. The stories of forgotten heroes are circulated in the oral history and hidden memorials in the regions of present day Uttar Pradesh as it appeared from field survey. Conventionally the Revolt of 1857 has been referred as the First War of Independence in nationalist perspective. In fact, it has generated a lot of debates on 1857 among historians. Over the years historians have also examined multiple facets of 1857. These relate to the organization (Khan,1998) of middle level leadership, common leaders of the revolt (Bhadra,1985), activities in the areas where British authority had been subverted and if it was indeed a restorative rebellion (Khaldun,1972). Recently in the 1990's we find historians focusing on the popular dimensions of 1857, including the specificities of the involvement of adivasis, (Singh,1985) low castes and outcastes (Tiwari,2007) popular culture/ popular consciousness and questions related to the alternative order that emerged. (Tiwari,1998)

The study of Rudrangshu Mukherjee entitled *The 1857 Revolt Awadh in Revolt, 1857-58: A Study of Popular Resistance in Awadh* pioneered the attempt to uncover the dimension of popular peasant protest by showing how the influx of colonialist policies upset the moral economy of the peasant world. He examined the linkages between the talukdars and the peasants. (Mukherjee,1984) As he further puts, the peasants did not play a mere rear-guard, subaltern

role. Actually, it was found that the peasants were on the side of the rebellion in areas where the talukdars remained loyal to the British. This perhaps illustrates that the rebellion was not always elitist in character and that in Awadh it had a mass popular base. The approach of Rudrangshu Mukherjee is indeed an attempt to provide space to forgotten heroes of the Revolt. (Ibid)

The rebellion left a deep imprint in the minds of the common people that is impossible to perceive from the scanty recorded history of that period. The focus of the present paper is to retrieve the socially subjugated knowledge and serves the main task of this study. Retrieving only through language expressed in the form of folktales, folksongs, folklores, memory and orality, it gives legitimacy to our methodology.

From the discourse '*history from below*' the real nature of rebellion started emerging which revealed that it had not taken the form of an organized movement against the British but it commanded extensive popular support, especially in Awadh, and throughout the North Western Provinces and Western Bihar. Peasants, political sadhus were found in local narratives. (Dinkar, 1990)

The exclusivity of this paper lies in the exploration of these unconventional sources and rich evocation of the experiences/contributions of Dalits who contributed to the freedom struggle movement starting from Revolt of 1857 to 20th century independence movement. Their lives were touched by nationalist fervent of the then nationalist upsurge. A diverse range of materials, official and archival sources juxtaposed with oral narratives, poems, folksongs have been engaged in order to understand the freedom struggle from a Dalit perspective.

In the last few decades, these erstwhile marginalized sections have been asserting their identities through myths, legends, heroes and histories of their own castes. Many heroes of these castes have begun to symbolize their caste identities, evoking feelings of pride and glory within their members. The political discourse of the Dalits today is based on their own culture, which is founded on caste heroes and the collective memories around them. These heroes and their myths help them to develop a new emancipatory cultural form that subverts the dominant code and resists the constant humiliation faced by them in their everyday lives that is sanctioned by the ancient texts of the dominant castes.

They assert that despite their historical role in the building and development of this nation, the state has not helped them to recover from their past social, cultural and economic losses. They believe that

their role has not been sufficiently acknowledged in the recorded history of nation-making and their contribution in the freedom struggle has been completely ignored. (Kushwaha, 1993)

The reason why the revolt of 1857 is important for Dalit assertion is that this incident is treated as a beginning of India's struggle for independence and Dalits participated in more organised way. Hence, Indian patriotism believed to have started from this point. The stories of forgotten heroes who were found to have played their role across rural North India gave Dalits a lot of space to choose their own heroes of 1857 movement.

And we find the images of the freedom struggle of 1857 in folklores of various folk languages. Multiple trends of history of this period of freedom struggle of 1857 with the help of these sources available in Awadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili folk songs and narratives along with the available archival material can be traced. Questions like- which image of the leadership of Indian national movement was being formed in masses? What kind of relationship they had with the masses and how were people associated with them? And how the mass especially the marginalized perceive freedom struggle and their role? arises. The answers to all these questions can be found in folk culture. Thus, there are infinite spaces in folk culture through which history of Indian nationalism can be reinvestigated and reconstructed.

Readings of folktales and folklores reveal Dalits' active role in the freedom struggle starting from the Revolt of 1857. In fact the massive scale on which the freedom struggle was launched could not have been possible without the participation of these castes. But unfortunately the contribution of Dalits has neither been documented nor acknowledged in the writing of history. Here it is very important to point out that in Dalit oral traditions², elite nationalist heroes in the revolt of 1857, such as Kunwar Singh, Tantya Tope and Nana sahib do not figure. The people who do figure are Chetram Jatav, Ballu Mehtar, Banke Chamar, Vira Pasi, Jhalkarbai, Udadevi, her husband Makka Pasi, Avantibai Lodhi, Mahaviri Devi, Matadin Bhangi and Udaiya Chamar, who were martyrs born in the lower strata of the Indian society.

It is of course a way of saying how it was difficult to achieve freedom in the absence of sacrifices of our leaders. A Dalit singer dating back the freedom struggle to Revolt of 1857 which is referred as the first war of independence by nationalist historiography, expresses his grief over how Britishers' colonial rule had disrupted the entire economy, invaded the social structure and had made Indians their captives. It is true that Mangal Pandey raised his voice but he was inspired by Matadin Bhangi. In this light, Matadin Bhangi

was the first freedom fighter in the true sense who was the bugler of freedom for the country. Many folk songs composed to highlight the contribution of Dalit society are sung by Dalit folk artists from village *SarsadKhurd* of Gorakhpur which reads like this:

Song on the role of Matadin Bhangi³

*Azad nahota Bharat
 Agar ShahidonkiShahaadatnahihoti
 1857 kiRahliSamayiya
 SwatantrataSangramkaPrathamnayakMatadinBhangi
 KrantikaAagbhadkayausne
 BarrackpurChhawnimein ban gayaJungi
 DhanlooteHumre Bharat kiphookwariya
 Aa-i re London se Gore Gujaria Aa-i-re*

There is no value of the diamond, if it has no light.
 Similarly our country could not be free
 If our martyrs had not given their lives.
 That was 1857
Matadin sweeper became the first freedom fighter,
 He torched the fire of revolution in *Barackpurcantt.*
 The garden of my India has been looted,
 By the English who have come from London.

The song composer here compares the importance of martyred heroes with the radiance of diamond, saying- as in the absence of radiance diamond loses its value, so difficult is the attainment of freedom for our country if our martyrs had not given their lives. During 1857, *Matadin Bhangia* sweeper became the first hero of the freedom struggle as he torched the fire of mutiny in *Barackpur* cantonment.

This song not only mentions *Matadin Bhangi* but also tries to establish that the first freedom struggle of India started because of a Dalit. The two lines *Dhanlootehumre Bharat kiphookwari, Aa-i re London se Gore Gujaria Aa-i-re* also try to show Britishers in a feminine role which came from London to plunder India but before the Indian revolutionary *Matadin Bhangi* who has been depicted as ferocious and brave and masculine have turned them away. This song epitomizes the assertions of Dalit masculinity by Dalits themselves. It contests the image of how Dalit male body was socially constructed, denied, by colonial authorities, by upper castes and by Dalits themselves, for social control and for identity construction. Dalits have attempted to challenge the stereotypes about themselves by asserting their

own masculinities in different ways. Here, the important fact is that Dalit society chose a person among themselves for their self made history. The authenticity of this song is also seen in the folk culture of Dalit society because first of all we need a history and then its hero. Dalit writers are attempting to look upon the mutiny as part of their struggle for freedom, and portray their histories as the real and comprehensive truth. In Dalit folklores and literature, the revolt has taken on the character of a Dalit resistance, where alternative Dalit rebel heroes are constructed, exaggerated, 'discovered' – and represented as the real symbols of 1857 in Dalit popular nationalist consciousness. In these accounts, the armies of soldiers against British consist largely of Dalits.

These reflections are also found in the poems. Reading the verses regarding 1857 of the famous Dalit poet Bihari Lal Harit (Disodiya, 2004) who says, '*Nai, dhobi, kurmi, kachchi/bharbhujje bhaat kumhaar lare. Larekhak rub mochidhanak/sab daliton ke parivar lare.*

(Barbers, washermen, Kurmis, gardeners, grain-parchers, bards and potters fought against *Bartaniasarkar*. Cobblers and dhanuk fought. All Dalit families fought.)

In the above two lines the notion of unity and solidarity of all the castes against British *hukumat* including the 'lower' caste is being revealed.

Writing history with an impassioned language is towards a mission of claiming a past and using it for the furtherance of their future. The motive behind writing inspirational histories of this kind is to stimulate Dalit nationalism, Dalit patriotic sentiment, and their pride. They are rewriting history to provide dignity to the Dalits. (Verma, 2004) Thus, they say, '*Dalit upekshitvirvaronka, hogaphir se navsamman, samay chakra kichaalkarti – parivartankasabkogyan*' (The neglected Dalit brave warriors will again gain new respect. As time passes, this change will be recognized by all.)

The above song reflects how in the course of time things and situation change. The word *kaalchakra* denotes the symbolic aspiration for some change in future. A positive note of aspiration for change and recognition is the core message of this song. Through 1857, they are also seeking to win acceptance from the wider society by creating and legitimising a space for themselves within the nationalist narratives. (Tiwari, 2004)

Scholar like Badri Narayan Tiwari tells that the historicity of these narratives is questionable but the politics behind the creation and narration of these stories is to dethrone the established heroes of the mainstream narratives.

However, these histories are not just reinventions of the past or inspirational histories. They also reveal a deep impassioned plea to recognize the unsung heroes of the revolt, who were often illiterate and left no written records. Dalits claim to be overturning the inaccuracies and prejudices of mainstream historiography, be it nationalist, Marxist or western, by retrieving lost histories. As one Dalit writer (Verma, 2004) claimed, '*yatra-tatrasarvatramilegi, unkigaathakicharcha, kintuupekshitveervaronka – kabhinahinchaptaparcha*'.

(Here, there and everywhere, you will find references of their deeds, but the ignored/neglected (Dalit) heroes are not found in written records)

The above depiction hints at popular and folk discourses where there has been discussion about the Dalit community who has been missing from the pages of academic history in the absence of any documentary or archival evidences. Therefore, there is need to explore and analyse unconventional sources such as folksongs, and other oral sources in the form of social and collective memory.

Revolt of 1857 and the regions of Uttar Pradesh: Banaras, Gorakhpur, Ghazipur and Ballia

However, an investigation of many villages of North India shows that the 1857 episode is still quite popular among many Dalit castes. The rebellion was concentrated in the north Indian Gangetic belt starting from Delhi to Bengal. It began in Meerut on 10 May after the news spread that the garrisons in Delhi had revolted and expelled the British. It spread like fire to other parts of UP like Aligarh, Etawah, Mainpuri, Etah and so on. In this manner it engulfed other parts of UP and Bihar like Kanpur, Awadh, Banaras, Azamgarh, Gorakhpur, Gonda, Bahraich, Sitapur, Ghazipur, Sultanpur, Western Bihar and ultimately to Bengal. In Upper India it was more in the form of a chaotic agrarian upheaval gathering together a wide range of discontents. The rebellion got extensive popular support, especially in Oudh, throughout the North Western Provinces and western Bihar. The popular base of the revolt is being reflected in the folksong given below:

*Jaunpur⁴ bhiainthrahathaghurrahatha Ballia
Issbastikakajarijaagi Us nagarikabiraha
GazipurkikushbuchaunkiAzamgarhka Charkha
Buxarkemaidanmeinaaya' lor'sambhale Arrah
Chhapra ne bhibaateinsamajhiapnedilkidanki
SunoBhaiyonSunoBhaiyonkathasunosattawanki*

The song talks about mass agitation and collective struggle for independence in all the regions. The active participation of all the regions of eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh and the adjoining areas of Bihar in its own unique manner was reacting to the British challenge during this period. It tells how most of the regions of eastern Uttar Pradesh (present districts of eastern Uttar Pradesh) particularly Mirzapur, Jaunpur, Ballia Ghazipur Azamgarh, and Buxar and Arrah in Bihar got stirred up. Sepoy discontent was an essential component of the rebellion but the mutiny derived its strength from the civil population (Metcalf, 1990). Banaras was also a centre of the 1857 revolution.

The singer tells that along with Jaunpur which was also taking pride of its participation. Ballia also stared at Britishers because of its strength, Ghazipur which is known for its fragrance also got astonished and the Charkha of Azamgarh too got actively instrumental in the revolt of 1857. None of the districts remained untouched in showing their pent up anger and protest against the Britishers including the narratives of forgotten Dalit freedom fighters.

On the basis of alternative sources like folklores, oral narratives, and folk memories the Dalit writers claim names of many Dalit men and women who had fought in 1857 revolt in the whole of Uttar Pradesh, such as Jhalkari Bai Kori, Uda Devi Pasi, Mahabiri Devi Bhangi, Laazo, Saheja, Ranbiri. The story of Uda Devi Pasi, for example, is quite well known and intrinsic part of the memorable anecdotes of bravery during 1857. She dressed up in man's attire, hid herself on a tree in Sikandrabagh in Lucknow and shot dead many Englishmen before being found and gunned down. Less known but as part of Dalit oral tradition is the story of her husband, Makka Pasi, who led two hundred Pasis near Chihat and attacked on the troops led by Henry Lawrence passing through the area, leaving numerous Englishmen dead, before he was finally shot dead. (Raza, 1965) With Mahabiri Devi Bhangi there were 22 bhangi Dalit women fought to kill the British. Besides, there has been mention of Veerangana Laazo who fought with her husband Madadin Bhangi in 1857.

In the Dalit narrative, Matadin Bhangi emerges as a source of inspiration for the first spark of the revolt. The story (Dinkar, 1990) is as follows:

There was a factory in Barrackpur where cartridges were manufactured. Many of the workers of the factory belonged to the untouchable communities. One day, one of the workers feeling thirsty asked a soldier for a mug of water. That soldier was Mangal Pandey. Mangal Pandey, a Brahmin by caste, refused to take water from him because the worker was an

untouchable. This was very humiliating for the worker. On this the worker reacted sarcastically, '*Bara awahaibrahamanka beta, jinkartusonka tum upyog karat ho, unpargaaye or suarkicharbilagawaljaathai, jinhe tum apandaatun se torkarbandukmeinbharat ho. O samaytomkajatiaur dharma kahanjawat. Dhikkartumhare is brahamantwa ka?*'

(You claim to be a highly respectable Brahmin, but the cartridges which you bite with your teeth and insert into your guns, are all greased with the fat of cows and pigs. What happens to your caste and religion then? Curse on your Brahmanism).

Thus, these narratives along with a description of the nationalist movement is being sarcastic of the hierarchical structure of the Indian society, where the untouchables are not allowed to go near the dominant castes because of their low birth and ritual 'dirtiness'. Such strong overtones of religion and ritual pollution were not new, there have been instances when people from Dalit community had traditionally been regarded as lowly or 'polluting' by the upper caste rebels. In many Bhojpuri folktales and songs otherwise 'ideal' heroes *Lorik* and *Sorthi* are also shown as hating the untouchables as their dharma would be gone if their body is touched by them which is well reflected in the folksong (Mishra, n.d) '*Jab cherideehenhamarisharireaa ho/ hamarodharamvachalijai?*'

Despite all such societal perceptions and the prevailing social conditions there are instances of many unsung Dalit heroes in the Dalit folk narratives whose names are worthy of mention here. Sehja, a Bhangi by caste from Sisauli in the district Mujaffarnagar, Ranbiri from *safaikamgar*, Amar Shaheed Bhagvani and her 300 revolutionaries, Shaheed Banke Chamar (Singh,1990) from Kunwarpur village of Jaunpur district which used to be a part of the then Banaras Sheela Devi was from Banda, Jittan Chamar from Sitapur, Shaheed Chetram Raidas and Ballu Mehtar from Eta all of them died participating in the Revolt of 1857.

Moving further there is reference of nearly two thousands (2000) Pasis who came out of their hamlets in Magarwara village near Unnao, to attack the army of Henry Havelock on its way to a massacre of a huge number of the Pasis. (Tiwari,2007) There is another narrative about a Dalits participation in the 1857 Revolt which is popular in the oral memories in the form of narratives of the region. In Gorakhpur district in Dumri Khurd or Chotki Dumri is the village from where all the activities of the movement took place and from where Dalits, Muslims and other backward class people revolted in a big way. It was predominantly a village of Dalits.

The narrativisation of the Dalits' role in 1857 in Gorakhpur on

the basis of local memories reveals not only about what happened but how the event has been preserved in the collective memory of the people. Ram Bahadur Dwivedi⁵ is one such example who talks about the role of the Dalits in the first freedom struggle of 1857 that Dalits did the job of hiding the volunteers in the mutiny of 1857. They begged and worked as CID. The people of Dalit society were poor and lived in broken huts. Their settlements were called dirty ghettos. The Britishers did not search the Indian revolutionaries if they hid in their homes. Therefore, Dalits participated hugely in the movement of 1857. Ram Bahadur Dwivedi described another famous narrative of Gorakhpur and Purvanchal. Dumri State was in Gorakhpur district around 1857⁶. Now it is famous as Sardar Nagar.

He states,

The present Dom Tola of Gorakhpur is famous due to courageous lady named Jagat Bela. She was of Dom caste in schedule castes. She belonged to Magahiya Dom blood. There was a landlord whose name was Bandhu Singh⁷ and whose estate was later on handed over to Surendra Singh Majethia by the Britishers. Bandhu Singh was one of those landlords of 1857 who not only fought to get his estate again but also joined hands with the locals to evict the English. Then a lady named Bela made a group of 37 people of her community and fought with the Britishers. This place is known as Jagat Bela in the west of the present Gorakhpur. After some time Jagat Bela came to know that Bandhu Singh is also fighting with the Britishers. So, she joined him. Some volunteers also fought with them there and they became martyrs. In the context of 1857 we do not see racial contribution but with the passage of time various writers described the events according to their opinions which created more discrepancies. This place became a memorial for martyrs after Bandhu Singh's martyrdom. But the history of Jagat Bela got suppressed or may have been suppressed in the pages of history. At present there remains only a railway station which has been named after Jagat Bela on the opposite side of the river Rapti which commemorates that great freedom fighter.

Scholar Amin (1996) has beautifully illustrated 'the interest of my story lies in the entanglement of a local affair with the affairs of Indian nationalism – as ideology, as practice, as history'.

It is about reading between the silences. He tries to provide an insight into the plurality of explanations and the presence of multiple contexts in which the event can be located—even outside the nationalist historiography. He explicitly states that, for him it was not a question of counter-posing local remembrance against authorized accounts, the process by which historians gain access to pasts is richly problematic, as is the relationship between memory and

record, and the possibilities of arriving at a more nuanced narrative, a thicker description, seem enhanced by putting the problems on display. (Amin, 1998) This possibility of plurality in narratives can be identified and explored only when the past gets reconstructed from a different perspective, with greater perceptiveness.

Memorialising Martyrs

In order to investigate how both memory and history are served by memorials and photographs as sources of documentary evidences of Dalits history a field survey of a few districts of United Provinces such as Gorakhpur, Ballia Ghazipur and Benaras was done. Along with the memorizing of oral and written folk narratives these memorials are providing authentic base for creating the history of Dalits.

Chauri Chaura Case

In the nationalist historiography Chauri Chaura is located as an event which provoked suspension of the Non-Cooperation Movement. It is worth mentioning here that there are two villages near Chauri Chaura-*Dumri Khurd* or *Chhoti Dumri* and *Dumri Kala* or *Dumri Khas* or *Badki Dumri*. Both these villages are located at a distance of five miles from each other. The Zamindars /feudal lords lived in *Badki Dumri* or *Dumri Kala*, whereas poor people, mostly Dalits from *Chamar* caste lived in *Chhotki Dumri*, which became the centre of the Chauri Chaura incident of February 1921-22 .

In fact, this incident was a turning point in the Indian freedom struggle, as it gave birth to an alternative revolutionary movement. Scholar like Kushwaha in his elaborative work has challenged official description of the struggle, which is inscribed on black granite in Chauri Chaura. The Chauri Chaura memorial is built at Gorakhpur which speaks of the official description of Chauri Chaura incident that took place in the year 1922. This inscription has strangely wiped out the real nerve centre of the movement-*Dumri Khurd* village, from where all the activities of movement took place and from where Dalits, Muslims and other backward class peoples revolted in a big way.

But, today several scholars including Dalits and folk culturists are unveiling the inherent role of those martyrs who have been lost in the common mind or have been cremated in the pages of history.

On the basis of local/popular memory, some scholars, and Dalit writers, the Dalits who showed their protest by burning police

station was not merely a challenge to the British empire instead the protesters hoisted the tri-colour flag at Chauri Chaura railway station and post office on that particular night tried to prove their intention of uprooting the British empire.

According to local history burning of thanas had been an old strategy of protest by people of Gorakhpur as it was evident during the revolt of 1857 (as discussed above). Amin turns to the “memory” and “remembrance” of the people which often offer a different narrative than affidavits and testimonies.

Some historians claim that the protagonist of the Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur incident was Ramapati Chamar. In this historical event people of many castes including Ahir, Pasi, Chamar and Dhobi caste became martyrs.

A visit to the site reveals some interesting fact. Most of the 19 people who went to gallows on April 23rd, 1923 belong to Dalit and backward communities. Entry into *Shahid Smarak Sanghralaya* (Pic.2) at Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur, we found a few statues with inscribed names. And those following statues with inscribed names at Shahid Smarak (Pic.1) at Chauri Chaura in Gorakhpur have enough evidences to speak of dalits’ participation. Ramapati Chamar excited the crowd by saying *Nihathegaribon par golidagne wale in jaalimokozindajaladalo*. On hearing this the protestors put the police station on fire. During this fire 23 constables (sipahi) lost their lives. This violent event was severely criticized by Mahatma Gandhi. The Britishers put 272 Dalits on *chalan* (punished). These leaders from *Chamar* and *Pasi* caste were sent to jail and got death sentence. Along with him there were names like Amar Shahid Sampati Chamar, Ayodhya Chamar, Kallu Chamar, Garib Chamar, Nohar Chamar, Falai Chamar, Birja Chamar, Mandi Chamar, Medhai Chamar, Dudhai who were sentenced to rigorous imprisonment, death or punished under Section 302.

The stone inscription locally known as *Shilapatti* depicts a few names of Dalits along with the people from the non-dalit communities, who also participated in the incident and became martyrs.

On the basis of personal interface and documentary evidences a few names of freedom fighters from the *Pasi* community from different villages of thana Chauri Chaura appeared who played a great role in the Chauri Chaura case. The death sentence ordered by the Session Court to the following leaders was converted into rigorous imprisonment by Appellate High Court, Allahabad. (Saroj,2001)

To name a few local Pasi heroes from Gorakhpur who were sent to 5-8 years of rigorous imprisonment are Chotu Pasi, Raghunath,

Ramsaran, Alagu, Ramjas, Awadh, Jamuna, Narayan, Nagesar. Besides there are a few names of revolutionaries from the same community who got acquitted of charge by the court also deserves mention here. They are Chaittar, Govardhan, Shivraj, Inder, Dhodhra. Sunder died in the jail during prosecution.

Chauri Chaura explodes the myth that Dalits did not participate in the freedom movement as well as it also reinforces their role. As a researcher and student of history this provoked me to revisit properly over the issues which seemed hidden and not investigated.

Romila Thapar (2005) states that there is now a “growing recognition that the past had to be explained, understood, reinterpreted...and that such explanations could also help us understand the present in more focused ways than before”. Further, Thapar refers to this as ‘critical enquiry’ which calls for a fresh perception of the ways in which narratives were constructed and legitimized through various authoritative mediations.

Non Cooperation Movement & Civil Disobedience Movement

Moving ahead to Non cooperation and Civil Disobedience movements in the 1930s we get similar version. There were names of Dalit heroes from Chamar and Pasi communities from Gorakhpur who fought and were fined, punished and sent to jail for 3-5 years. Those names deserve mention here. They were Mithai Chamar, Mukkhu Chamar, Thelu Chamar, Raghubar Chamar, Ram Dulare Chamar, Umrao Chamar, Bhabhuti Chamar, Gajadhar Pasi, Sahbal Pasi, Sahwali, Tillarurf Pillar Pasi, Balikaran Pasi, Bindeshwari Pasi.

Sahajanwa Case

Reading between these incidents was the Sahajanwa Case. The incident of Sahajanwa was also found lingering in the memories of the villagers which they said that they heard from their ancestors. In 1925 in Gorakhpur a few revolutionaries were reported to have looted government *khajana* from the running train. Among those revolutionaries there were people from Pasi community too who took part in that loot incident. (Saroj,2001)

Quit India Movement of 1942 and the United Provinces

With the adoption of the famous 8th August Resolution, the entire country plunged into what was the last battle for freedom and United

Provinces was no exception. As mentioned above people from different class and caste participated hopefully in this movement by being united and integrated.

Gorakhpur district and the August Revolution or the Quit India Movement have been beautifully depicted in the folksong composed and sung by the local singers. Those classes who were sidelined / marginalized from history, tried to prove their identity and establish themselves in history through their own means. The main attraction/ beauty of these songs are not in the fact that they depict their role on local level only but that they establish their national participation as well. That is why Dalit society tries to propagate and establish itself through it. In this context the present folk song holds great importance.

Song⁸ on August Revloution, 1942

*Aayil August KeAndolan
FarkeLagalSabke Man
BijuliDaudalJagal Ballia
Chalale Muslim Hindu Harijan
MachigayilLadai Bus Jujhar
Thana DakkhanaRailTaar
Sab Police AdalatAhaldar
Hakim DukanGoligola
Padigayil sab karobar
Bajigayil Vijay ke Danka Hamar*

The revolution of August has come,
Everybody's heart is stirred,
Balia has awakened as if charged by electricity,
Hindu, Muslim, Harijan all came together,
The movement became very intense,
Police stations, post offices, railways, telegram,
Police court, bureaucracy,
Shops were affected,
All business came to a halt,
Only trumpet of our victory is heard...

This song (Mishra,n.d) has been sung with reference to the revolutionaries of *Ballia* during August Revolution of 1942. It show how people of all communities *Hindus, muslims, harijans* have assembled together and are excited. The entire *Ballia* woke up, charged and electrified with excitement. The movement became very intense. *Post office, police station, railways, telegram, court, doctors, shops* all were

affected and came to a halt. Only trumpet of our victory is loud and heard from roads to branches. Such was the scene of revolutionary Ballia in the local memories. The main attraction of these songs is not in the fact that they depict their role on local level only but that they establish their national participation as well. That is why Dalit society tries to propagate and establish itself through it. Many other folk songs were also composed to depict the characteristics of this district. A special quality of these songs is that their composers and singers belong to the Dalit society. Those classes who were sidelined from history, tried to prove their identity and establish themselves in history through their own means. In August 1942 during the mass movement of Ballia there were several Dalit martyrs who had been killed by police or military. The names⁹ inscribed on Stone Patti known as *Yoddha Swataantrya Samar* (Pic.3) located at famous Ballia Chowk echoed this local memory. There have been a number of names of Dalits like from *dusadhchamar, kandu, sonkar, gond, mallah, dhobi* and others apart from the above.

Ghazipur in the Memories of Locals

Likewise the district of Ghazipur also has been active in the Indian Independence Movement. But according to the local old people, they had the regret that the memories of people from less powerful communities, who also gave their lives at different times are not similarly remembered or preserved. Some names of Dalit martyrs from Ghazipur district were as follows: Satya Narayan son of Chamaru village Sevai, Mahmoodpur got punishment for 2 years and the fine of 15 Rs. in 1942. (Singh,1990) Similarly Swarup son of Chamaran village Sadiyabad got punishment for 5 years in 1942.(Ibid)

Forgotten Heroes of Doharia Gorakhpur in 1942

Another important event took place at Doharia (Pic.4) (Sahjanwa Tehsil) on 23rd August, 1942. In response to the famous Quit India Movement of 1942, a meeting was held to record its protest against the British Government at Doharia. Unfortunately it was responded with unprovoked firing, killing nine and injuring hundreds. *Shaheed Smarak*, in their memory, stands there which still keeps their memory alive.

Names of some of the Dalit Martyrs of Doharia Incident which were mentioned in the *Janapadiya Pragatika* (2003) are as follows:

Shree Jethu Prasad of village Ghaghsara, Shree Jagat Bali of village

Pali, Shree Ghirau Barai of village Bikuraha, Shree Badri Gaderia of village, Shree Ramdas Gaderia and Shree Bharosha Beldar of village Pali and Jogia all from Thana-Sahajanawa of Gorakhpur. (Ibid)

Benaras and the Revolutionary Fervent

During the freedom struggle the revolutionary fervent of Benaras was at its pinnacle. Being culturally rich Benaras too had been the local popular memory of the freedom struggle. The Dalits of Benaras also actively participated in the freedom struggle. Chamars and Pasis from Dalit community played great role in the freedom struggle. To name a few of them who got punishment, rigorous imprisonment, or kept under detention:

Sri Mukund Ram, Sri Raja Ram, Sri Shivnath Prasad son of Sri Chhannu Ram, Sri Kattu Ram, Sri Gopaldas son of Sri Jageshwar Ram, Shri Chaturi Ram son of Chauthi, Sri Jagarnath Prasad son of Mahendra Ram, Sri Jitawan Ram served as chief during Salt Satyagraha in Sonia in Benaras in 1930 Sri Tilakdhari son of Mangru Sri Panna Ram Sri Ramdin Ram Sri Bishwanath son of Baiju Mallah became martyr in the Dashashwamedha Police Firing on August 13, 1942.

In addition to the above there is a huge list of Dalit freedom fighters whose names can be mentioned here. Visit to Central jail of Varanasi and a closer look new built *Shila-Falak* (Pic.5) in the Memory of Freedom Fighters on which the names of the martyrs have been inscribed reveals the that people of from different castes including the Dalits, or the lower castes in Banaras, showed their active involvement for which they were imprisoned and became victims of police firing. During the Quit India Revolt of 1942, 13 people from different castes became the victim of police firing, out of that 07 people belong to Dalit caste.

They were Shri Viswhanath son of Baiju Mallah died of police bullet on 13 August, 1942 at Dashashwamedha Ghat. Kashi Prasad son of Panaru died in police firing at Dashashwamedha Ghat, Nirahu Bhar, Chauthi Noniya, Panoram Ram from village Cholapur and Fakire son of Dasrath Ram village Bhasoura, Saiyyad Raja, (Vidrohi,1989) Kshivanu Chamar of village Birna got imprisonment for 18 months in 1942, Sumer Ram thana Dhanapur got imprisonment 10 years in 1942. Sukhdev son of Harkhu Chamar village Bildas got 4 years punishment in 1942. (Singh, 1990). Anantu son of Shivjatan village Ghanapur got punishment for 7 years during Quit India Movement.

Besides, there were 13 other people who got life imprisonment

from Banaras, out of that 8 were Dalits including some scheduled caste people. They were Jungi Ahir, Maiku Lohar, Ramcharitra Kori, Ramnath Koeri, Nifikir Ahir, Bandhan Ahir, Ram Prasad Mallah, and Khedu Bin. Apart from the above mentioned some of the Dalit freedom fighters who got jailed were Jagrup Dusadh, Bachau, Kharpattu, and Ghurau Ram so on and so forth.

Conclusion

It can be observed that there is a need to rectify the historical amnesia about the contribution of Dalit heroes during the freedom struggle and capture the official history of India thoroughly. Moreover, it reiterates the perpetuation of elitist histories, and at the same time it highlights how some records are exclusive and some engender inclusivity. Dalit studies being an encompassing and ever-growing field aspire for empowering the culture, identity and history of the Dalits and it can be done through exploring the alternative sources like folklore, oral tradition and oral history which serve as removing distortions of many life stories of Dalits due to which they are abused as outcastes and untouchables. As stated above the Dalits have been subjected to a lopsided representation which grossly underplays their pioneering role in India's struggle for independence. The inclusion of the orality, other alternative records have created a space for the Dalits, as well as empowered them to claim a historical space for themselves.

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Notes

1. In the discourses of Antonio Gramsci, the subaltern groups were defined as those masses who are relegated to the margins of the hegemonic structure.
2. The word oral, in oral tradition, oral literature, oral narratives etc points to uttered, transacted by words of mouth. Oral is often contrasted with written. Following this line of interpretation oral tradition sometimes means any kind of unwritten tradition including physical monuments, religious frescoes, sometimes only traditions enunciated or transmitted through words. Folklore has been recognized as a major component of oral tradition. The records serve as raw material. It becomes history when the historian selects a limited number

of facts from them and places them in a way as to answer questions of current interests to the academic community or society at large. Obviously history is constantly being re-written because each generation asks different questions, causing historians to go back to the data base, select new bodies of facts, and give them new meaning.

3. Sung by Baburam Pal of Caste Pal (Gaderiya/OBC) and Ramsamujh Pasi from village Sarsada Khurd of Ghazipur, from Gorakhpur. Personal Communication with him on December 15, 2013.
4. Jaunpur is located to the northwest of the district of Varanasi in the eastern part of the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. From 1775 AD to 1788 AD it was under the dominion of Banaras. In 1818 Jaunpur became a separate district. In 1820, Azamgarh district was also brought under Jaunpur but whole of Azamgarh in 1830 was separated from Jaunpur.
5. Personal Communication with Ram Bahadur Dwivedi, Kauriram village, Gorakhpur on December 25, 2013.
6. Chaura Bazar was a part of Bandhu Singh's Jagir till 1857. After the construction of railway station Chaura Bazar in the mid 1880s came in to existence. Quoted in Shahid Amin Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura 1922-1992, pp. 12-13.
7. Bandhu Singh of the Dumri estate in Gorakhpur who waged a guerilla warfare against the British in 1857 and is believed to have offered the heads of the slain Britishers before a local deity Tarkhula Devi in village Tarkhula. He was hanged on a tree. Oral Tradition/ has reference of it that when he was finally captured and hanged at the Alinagar square in Gorakhpur on 12th of August, 1857, the hangman's rope broke seven times and eventually it was only after he prayed to the *Tarkhula Devi* to grant him martyrdom that he could be finally hanged. As per local people belief on the day he was hanged, seven palm trees in Tarkhula village were uprooted (symbolising the seven failed attempts at his hanging) and the pond behind the *Devi* temple turned red.
8. Mishra, *Poorvanchal- Uttar Pradesh Main Krantikaari*, p. 271.
9. The names are found inscribed on the Stone Patti known as *Yoddha Swataantrya Samar* located at famous Ballia Chowk.

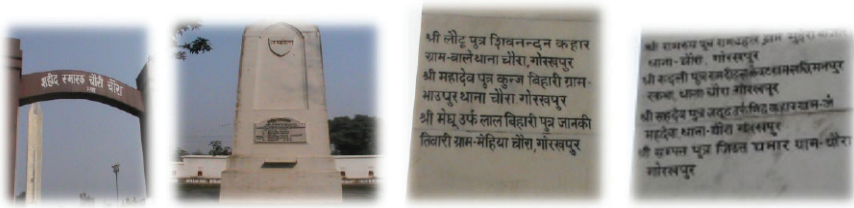
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ANNEXURES



Picture 1: Stone *Pattis* from Shahid Smarak, Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur taken during field survey.



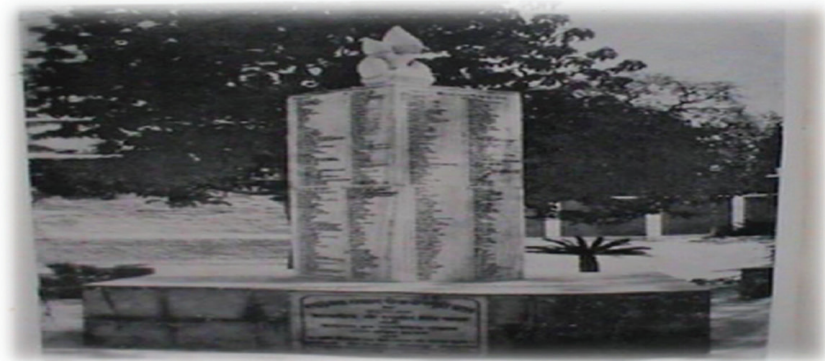
Picture 2: *Shahid Smarak Sanghralaya*, Chauri Chaura, Gorakhpur taken during field survey.



Picture 3: Name of martyrs of 1942 Revolution including Dalits (people from lower castes) in Ballia district. This Stone *Patti* known as *Yoddha Swatantrya Samar* at Ballia Chowk. It is popularly famous as *Shaid Stambh* also.



Picture 4: *Shahid Smarak* at Doharia in Gorakhpur



Picture 5: Names of freedom struggle martyrs inscribed on new built *Shila-Falak* in Benaras Central Jail