Hori and the Dynamics of Injustice: Mahasweta Devi's *Water*

VANASHREE

Hori, the protagonist in Munshi Premchand's classic Hindi novel *Godan* written in 1936 represents the marginalised Indian peasant down the ages. Maghai, the landless untouchable farmer and water diviner in Mahasweta Devi's *Water* written in 1972 continues Hori's tale of despair. The story explores the interweaving of the dynamics of rural poverty with the machinations of the local landed elite in collusion with local officials and the police. The village teacher and Maghai's son are both aware of the corruption but are afraid to protest too loudly for fear of being arrested as Naxalites. In view of the reports of fraud and corruption in the functioning of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in many villages, this article looks at the different forms of cheating practised in the name of providing relief to the poor with specific reference to Devi's story.

Vanashree (*vanashreevanya@yahoo.com*) is with the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi.

India has millions of Horis.[1] In numerous reports and narratives on rural poverty and exploitation of peasants from Kanyakumari to Vidarbha, from Delhi to Uttar Pradesh, and from Bihar to West Bengal, Hori survives as an iconic figure of Indian peasantry. Their life portrayed in the great epic, *Godan* (1935) could only be seen by the writer, Munshi Premchand with consummate understanding. The representation of our peasantry in *Godan* and thereafter in several such works show that long before academic disciplines or policymaking bodies engaged with the sociology of poverty, specifically of the agricultural section of our society, Indian literature[2] had been rendering a searching analysis and an astute observation in authentic first hand experiences of the peasantry although this subject could never productively engage the interest of the urban educated elite. Shrilal Shukla calls the bleak times faced by the peasantry in post-independence India as *Jahalat Ke Pacchhas Saal*[3] (Fifty Years of Ignorance).

This India Remains in Anomie

Is it not true that the subaltern remained untouched by the movements propagated by the mainstream? Within this discourse is there any space allotted to this class? The findings show that chronic poverty is disproportionately high among casual agricultural labourers, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and also point to the factors that contribute to the chronic poverty and the inefficacy of governance to reduce the state of deprivation.[4] Do the series of seminars and conferences that give us lessons in nation and nationalism have any space for this vast population of our society? Engagement with cultural studies has drawn scholars to align themselves with the anxieties of the middle class as the subject of their academic research. Indeed how many of us are open to the voices and interests of the poorest? In a recently hosted seminar held at Banaras Hindu University on "Imagining India: Discourse on Nationalism", the reference to abject poverty and corruption in rural India met with apparent resentment and derision in the more privileged coterie of participants and scholars who promptly reacted by drawing on the much announced "success stories".[5]

In contemporary times, the small and middle level farmers find it increasingly difficult to earn money through agricultural means and this has brought about desperation and increase in the suicide of more than 16,000 farmers. On the one hand, while the income from agriculture is shrinking, on the other, the pressures of a consumer society are telling on the middle and the small farmers and their children. All this has made visible the

most glaring forms of inequality confronting us and forced us to acknowledge what we as a mainstream culture tend to avoid. In *Every One Loves a Good Drought,* P Sainath, while documenting the dynamics of rural poverty in India tells us that

> India's agriculture sector is in the midst of collapse. What is the access of the hundreds of millions of rural poor to health and education? Do they enjoy the same rights and entitlements as other Indians? If not, what prevents them from doing so? Often, the forms of exploitation that breed and sustain poverty get no more than a cursory glance (1995: x).

Indeed we may ask ourselves: Has the poor peasantry been given full human consideration?

Can Stories Do a Good Job?

Intensive research in economics and development studies in recent years insists on taking storytelling seriously as an important source of knowledge on international developments. Despite the regular flow of academic studies, expert reports and policy position papers, it is arguably the literary narratives – stories that do a good job – if not a better one of representing and communicating the realities of international development.[6] Sainath refers to the 19th century fiction (European) as "more effective in expressing the reality of their times than some late twentieth century social scientists have been, in capturing the reality of our times" (ibid: 195). One may discern the urge for larger representation of rural life, specifically rural poverty in fictional works in India so as to awaken the social conscience of our urban mainstream culture to the most neglected aspects of Indian life. In claiming agency and authority for the rural poor, Mahasweta Devi, Srilal Shukla, Damoder Dixit, Uma Shankar Joshi, Markandeya and others sought to release significantly the revolutionary energies contained within the disarray and despondency of rural agrarian India. Taking cognisance of their works might enable the subaltern studies to reconsider the rural peasantry disparaged or stereotyped in the public sphere. Invoking various relevant texts, contexts and reports (specifically the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA)), this study enlarges upon the spectacular forms of frauds and depredations visited upon poor the peasantry with specific reference to Mahasweta Devi's (1999) *Water*. It was first written as a story and later dramatised and performed for the first time in 1972, set in a village in West Bengal.

Millions of rural and tribal Indians located in the rural landscape of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa and mired in poverty, illiteracy, and backwardness remained largely mute spectators as the country moved towards the 21st century (Mahasweta Devi 1995: ix). The blinkered perspective of the State towards the deprivations afflicting the rural poor has done very little to ameliorate their condition. It is, therefore, imperative that we analyse the ways in which poverty and the poorest are made to deal with the State as well as who tries to speak for the poorest, while recognising the links between the two. With reference to West Bengal, Harriss (2000) shows that in spite of the ruling Left Front being frequently cited as a pro-poor political party, it is the middle poor who are well represented and have an advantage rather than the very poor. Bhattacharyya (1999) finds that this failure to represent the poorest is related to the changing character of political parties over time, as both internal struggles and external electorate pressures result in a politics of "middleness" ensuring that parties move increasingly away from their more marginal constituents. As a cumulative repercussion of political indifference the significant sections of the poorest groups, particularly, the landless, have gained very little from their political programmes, either in terms of agrarian reforms, social protection programmes or political empowerment.

Devi's daring stories were peopled by the poor and the deprived men and women of the rural peasantry: dalits, adivasis, contract labourers, scavengers, farm labourers, and sexually exploited women. And she wrote these at a time when the mainstream intellectuals of our society did not choose to know and read about them. The subaltern men and women are lonely and exploited, but vigorous and not passive, at once confined and yet persistent, deprived yet sensible and caring, suppressed, and yet alert and practical. They defy any simple categorisation. When an officer from the town calls a peasant, Maghai, an "illiterate fool" (117), Jiten master, retorts, "Our country is exceptional, don't you realise that? Knowledge and culture here have nothing to do with literacy as such. Someone like Maghai can have both knowledge and culture. They have a mind like a continent that no one has cared to explore" (ibid).

Water: A Shadow State in Performance

Maghai the landless untouchable farmer, living in a village called Charsa is a variation of Premchand's Hori. *Water* may be read historically as the ongoing sequel to Hori's elegiac tale down the ages; the despair of the rural peasantry is perpetual. In a documentary on the dynamics of rural poverty, the narrative shows that the village government, the water supply, drought relief, education, health and other development public institutions like the gram panchayat are consistently distorted to ensure that caste and class dominance is preserved. The task of allocating of public funds for education or health facilities is delegated to the official representatives or to the gram panchayat. Ironically, the funding rules ensure that the poorest benefit least. Those who would demand justice or dare question the misappropriation of the funds are met with intimidation or brutal violence or labelled as Naxals and reported to the police.

Santosh, the village head and a "Dabang",[7] who is also the local big landowner, and moneylender owns a distillery that caters to the poor reminding us of Matadin the moneylender in the village Semri of *Godan*. Santosh acts as spokesperson of the backward, dalit, rural farming community. He and his cohorts, the local officials claim the "privileges of sight, including those of insight, foresight and even hindsight" (Corbridge et al 2005: 16). Empowered by the system of representation, Santosh claims to speak on behalf of others and also claims to have the knowledge and the solution to the problems the villagers face. Maghai is a low caste Dome, a meek, persecuted, landless peasant. Phulmani, a spirited, nurturing and courageous peasant wife, is also a woman whose smouldering private gaze and acerbic retorts communicate hurt and suffering, Dhura, their son reacts with anger against injustice meted out to their brethren and like his mother conveys a unique helplessness through his strident speech and sharp gestures. Jiten master who teaches the children of the

poor, and instructs the community about the dangers of consuming liquor is a freedom fighter and a follower of Gandhi. He refuses to take any facilities meant for freedom fighters. Among the exploited, illiterate rural peasantry, his role is that of a vanguard, in him one might see Devi's alternative to Naxalism. He is devoted to the goal of making sure that the deprived become conscious individuals aware of their rights as human beings and that dignity and equality become their aspiration. His persona is reminiscent of Phanishwar Nath Renu's Bavandas in *The Soiled Border* (*Maila Aanchal*).[8]

At the Charsa railway station, against the background of the faint sound of an approaching train and screeching whistle, in the semi darkness, Dhura enters the scene with three young men who are on the run during a hunt for Naxals. He shares with them his grievance about the denial of water to his community.

> Two: Didn't you know, this area's terribly dry underneath?
> Dhura: Who says so?
> Two: I know.
> Dhura: They won't allow us to touch it. Even at the government's wells, we aren't allowed to draw water. That's why we have to go and dig the sands of Charsa (95).

Dhura is not a Naxal but is suspected of being one and pestered by the village head for not being obedient and for demanding justice.

The multiplying wealth of the village head, "his house rising from height to height; twenty villages bound to him in debt forever" (95), his barns "bursting with paddy, all the lentils that Charsa grows… mustard seeds and what not" (109), and also the description, "Santosh must have his massage first. Then he'll be bathed by his servant. Then his wife will give him breakfast, of thickened milk and chida…" (102) invoke images of surfeit blatantly contrasted with the sapped lives of the poor. The absolute control he wields upon the sources of water rules out any access of drinking water to the Dome community; subjected to surveillance they are not permitted to dig a well. The sky gasps for water. The molten heat creates cracks in the earth; the pining for water grows more and more urgent and the womenfolk of the labourers sit together, sing and pray for water, and dig holes in the sand with their bare hands bruising their fingers. According to the law, all wells being public wells belong to all. The needs of the village upper castes, however, are regarded as supreme, as they need a lot of water for their cattle, servants, contract labourers, temples, and their houses; their cowsheds, barns, and farm labourers. They have five big wells and three small ones – all for their exclusive use. Again, they have three to four wells at each of their houses. But will they let the Domes, the Chandals, or anyone from the lower castes approach any of the wells?[9] Dhura makes a great clamour about it that year, with a lot of people supporting him. Even though the block development officer (BDO) is a decent sort, the subdivisional officer (SDO) is crafty and the poor untouchable villagers finally find themselves lacking in support when in spite of the new well belonging to the panchayat, they were not allowed to touch it. "But Santosh and his people use it now to wash their cattle, and set their dogs on us if we go to fetch water", says, Dhura (115). In the night, water trickles into the holes, and the poor dalits have to fetch it before the sun rises, for then the holes will dry up. Several objections are traditionally raised justifying the denial of water to the Domes, "We worship our Gods in our houses and you eat pigs and fowl. Now tell me, isn't the water polluted if you touch it?" (104).

> Maghai: Dig a well for the Domes.
> Santosh: Ah Maghai, that's a plea that breaks my heart. Look at the drought this year, with crows falling dead from the sky. I know you need water.
> Villagers: Dig us a well.
> Santosh: That's impossible this year, my good men. There's one well sanctioned this year from the relief funds, but there was an earlier application from Harcharan Thakur…so… don't you see the point?
> Maghai: So, we don't get a well?
> Santosh: Maghai, whenever you harp too long on the same thing, the government grows suspicious. And then there is harassment, and you put the blame on me. Still, I'll keep your plea in mind. I shall (exit) (119).

Though the basic equation between the peasants and Santosh is that of *hujoor and majoor* (master and servant), his demeanour demonstrates political correctness – the tone is sympathetic, solemn and controlled; he cites sarkari norms and laws and pre-empts any possibility of a debate. The likes of Santosh must appear benevolent, "At Puja time he feeds his servants, and farm labourers, and has it photographed for the newspapers, so that he can claim that he has fed so many people" (112).

Entreating for water is futile, as Phulmani says but Maghai is nonetheless summoned for the task of water divination. Bound by his revered ancestral duty, he accomplishes the task that involves rituals of fasting for self-purification, intense exertion and enervation under the scorching heat.

Draught Relief: The Drama of 'Governmentality'[10]

Poor men and women are denied the status of citizens; they are simply members of a beneficiary troublesome crowd (Corbridge et al 2005: 3). The semblance of famine drives them to ask for the help sent by the government for the poor but they confront the high-handedness of the local official, Santosh. He and his cohorts trade in the relief money; filching from the relief funds has been the customary practice of his ancestors but they were no "demon eaters" (121), reminiscences Maghai.

> Maghai: You have already collected the government's relief meant for us. Why haven't we got the money and the material yet?
> Santosh: You will, you will, Maghai.
> Maghai: But when? Don't you know my sister and her child have died of starvation?
> Santosh: You 'll get relief, all in good time.
> Maghai: This year you've drawn double the usual relief.
> Second Villager: Yes, yes. This year the government gave rice paddy seeds, chida, molasses.
> Santosh: Just a week's ration.
> Maghai: Just a week's ration, Santosh Babu? And that had to be carried by convoys of cow carts for four days at a stretch, all in the dark of the night, and under police guard? (103)

Sainath tells us that the gram panchayats in most states were and are a farce. As a result, many of the gram sabhas involved in identifying beneficiaries, did much damage (ibid: 197). He refers to Bihar as an example where families of the sarpanchs were the "multiple beneficiaries" (ibid). It is common knowledge, however, that the relatives of the village head benefit from any official

scheme meant for the needy in every region of India. In several villages of Uttar Pradesh, it is the accepted norm: the panchayat body receives aid from the government, and the famine-affected are seldom the direct recipients of the relief fund. This shows that there has not been any change in the policy of the government after independence. Allotting to the privileged elite the power of representing the majority of the poor had been a customary practice in colonial times. Since the 1950s through the 1970s to recent times, the upper caste rich have received the patronage of the government, chosen as they are the mediators to distribute relief materials to the needy. Santosh impudently declares: "The government knows that you do not know what is good for you. And that's why they entrust me with all the rations and relief" (104). Phulmani retorts: "…you joke about it Santosh, it's only you they'll give it to; men trade in paddy, you trade in relief… We don't set eyes on the magistrate; we know nothing of the government's laws for us. We know only you. You act like the government's son-in-law" (103). The views of the poor in the rural areas are shaped by the encounters at the local level (Corbridge et al, 7-9). The fraud and cheating indulged in by the local officials is not difficult to grasp. The peasantry is also aware that the State needs to protect the intermediaries to "chart an unsteady course" through what Partha Chatterjee calls the "politics of governmentality" (1997: 254). Sainath's observations of the drought situation in Bihar dramatise what Chatterjee implies by the politics of governmentality.

> Drought is beyond question, among the more serious problems this country faces. Drought relief, almost equally beyond question, is rural India's biggest growth industry. Often, there is little relation between the two. Relief can go to regions that get lots of rainfall. Even where it goes to scarcity areas, those most in need seldom benefit from it. The poor in such regions understand this. That's why some of them call drought relief teesri fasal (the third crop). Only, they are not the ones who harvest it.
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> A great deal of drought "relief" goes into contracts handed over to private parties. These are to lay roads, dig wells, send out water tankers, build bridges, repair tanks – the works. Think that can't total up to much? Think again. The money that goes into this industry in a single year can make the withdrawals from Bihar's animal husbandry department look like so many minor fiddles. And the Bihar scam lasted a decade and a half. The charm of this scam is that it is largely "legal". And it has soul. It's all in a good cause. The tragedy, of course, is that it rarely addresses the real problems of drought and water scarcity (ibid: 317).

Water and NREG

What, however, needs to be faced squarely and interrogated is the State's overall failure to implement the schemes meant for the village poor, to ensure timely resource mobilisation, to check the so-called "corruption" of the "big ones" and the local officials. Notwithstanding, the protest of the villagers against the panchayat, local officials and contractors, the state still relies on them. Ironically, calling into question the indifference of the state is beyond the common sense of the rural poor. In her account of *India Working,* Barbara Harris White dismisses views of the state that she considers to be too formalistic, or too focused on statutory responsibilities. She contends that the official part of the Indian state has been hollowed out over the course of the last 30 or 40 years, and has been replaced by what she calls "shadow state" (2003: 23). Harris has earlier observed:

> This vast assemblage of brokers, advisers, political workers, crooks, and contractors, surrounds "the official state", depriving it of its funds, and helping to show that it is run in part for the private benefit of some of its employees. The other main winners are the largely self employed men (and some women) who benefit from a world of state produced shortages and sanctioned frauds. They are the top dogs in India's "intermediate classes". The losers are the laboring households who make up the bulk of the "India of the 88 per cent" (ibid: 1).

Decades before Harris' work, Devi rendered in the "shadow state" in the dramatic version of *Water* our peasantry's equation with "governmentality". From the local goons, to the muscle men, Santosh, the SDO, the BDO, the section officers, the police to the local MLA who needs funding for the elections all connive and collude and deprive the needy of the deserved assistance. Believing in the positive outcome of presenting the case of the deprived, in his mission to help the villagers get water, Jiten makes a visit to the SDO's chamber in the town. Trying to motivate the SDO into empathising with the deprived, Jiten argues, "Sir, our country is exceptional don't you realise that…no one has cared to explore…" (117). The SDO listens, obviously bored. Jiten also lets him know that Santosh tried to bribe him into making a deal on what he (Santosh) makes from the relief funds. For the first time Jiten discloses all the details of Santosh's crooked behaviour. This knowledge fails to have any impact on the SDO though he pretends to be suitably impressed.

> SDO: The audacity.
> Jiten: What's so audacious about it? With officers like you… this is not Andhra or Bihar, there are no direct atrocities on harijans…and Santosh carries on with his mischief. It is your inaction that supports Santosh.
> SDO: Mind your own business, Jiten Babu (goes to the wings, and shouts, "Santosh Babu, please wait in the verandah") Jiten Babu, I will be leaving soon (takes his seat). What were you saying?
> Jiten: I have told you everything already.
> SDO: Nonsense.
> Jiten: Nonsense? What do you mean?
> SDO: Don't tell me any more new problems, please don't. As it is the district has a load of problems already. Drought followed by drought, flood followed by flood, flood followed by drought, drought followed by flood…chronic! Problems stick to this district like incurable dysentery. Charsa is the only block in the district, and has a regular supply of relief. A lot of cash too!
> Jiten: Not the block, it's Santosh who gets it all.
> SDO: The government has to entrust somebody with the funds for relief, and who could be better for that than Santosh, the only educated, decent man in the block?
> Jiten: So that he can filch the money and material!
> SDO: I know all about that, but it's for the BDO to see to it. It's such a shaky system!
> Jiten: There's more to it, there's caste discrimination. Santosh doesn't let the Domes have water.
> SDO: No, there's not.
> Jiten: Are you sure?
> SDO: Officially speaking, there isn't. Unofficially speaking, I'll admit, it is there. It is there in the blood of the people…how can you get rid of it? (128).
> Jiten: Do something about it. Put a little pressure on them.
> SDO: It is no use. Laws are made because they have to be made. They are never enforced. The law has abolished agricultural debt; the system of bonded labour is banned. But what do you find in reality?

Jiten: Isn't it your job to enforce the law?
SDO: Me? Who the hell am I? I'm powerless. If I threaten a moneylender, the minister will jump on me. Do you think I don't know? There are millions of rupees lent out on interest in this district, multiplying continuously, but there are no papers (129).

The vexed issue in the recent decades has been the mediated relationship between the government schemes and the target groups.[11] Ironically, the insidious mechanism through which the funding rules operate seem to ensure that the poorest benefit the least. The pro-poor reforms of decentralisation and targeted social protection, most significantly pertaining to the non-payment of debts and its appalling fallout – bonded labour – tend to be under the jurisdiction of the local elite who are in partnership with the local officials and the police.

The operation of schemes like NREGA shows that the best of schemes are prone to jeopardy. The NREGA has been made the site of operations of the shadow state performing diversely in devious ways the drama of mass scale collusion, corruption and intimidation under the auspices of the government-sponsored programme. The disclosures about the functioning of the NREGA make us notice that the mediatory bodies in India appear united in "intentions" in spite of diversities of languages and locations.[12] The profiteers across diverse states are in consensus about how to operate the funds, and appropriate grants and facilities for themselves so as to grab the maximum profit at the expense of the poor and the needy. "Crores Siphoned off",[13] citing Sandeep Pandey, reports that the audit that started in its wake showed that work done under the NREGS abounded in misappropriation. The NREGS funds are sent from the centre to the states' rural development ministries. The ministry then sends it to district magistrates who pass the money on to the panchayats. But the problem is that the work is approved and supervised by the junior engineers and BDOs. They measure and quantify the proposed work and make estimates. They are, therefore, able to put pressure on the panchayat representatives.

My interaction with the rural poor of Mudadev, a village on the outskirts of Varanasi, disclosed gross operational failure of the NREGS. The gram pradhan was not concerned with whether the works of digging for the lake or the roads were shelved. Job cards were in his custody. The practice was to show four thumb prints on the register though the owner of only one of the prints would be at work. The payment for the work of the other three would be pocketed by the village council leaders. Those who found work for even one day of the allotted 100 had to regard themselves as lucky. Whatever the government may claim, the reality was that only those who pleased the pradhanji found employment under the scheme. The job cards are in the possession of several prosperous landowners and payment for work done was delayed for eight months. Delayed justice discourages the majority of the rural poor from pursuing it or making a formal complaint for fear of being snubbed or abused by the government officials. The relatives and community members of the pradhanji are beneficiaries of the house repair funds and other funds. I gathered that the petty or big assistance from the government or rural development schemes seldom achieves its goals: whether it is for repair of a collapsed house, relief for flood or drought or loan to buy buffaloes, or even obtaining a below poverty line (BPL) card.

Body of the Peasant under Surveillance

It may be either the fear of dying of gunshot, or being branded a Naxal. Dhura says to Maghai, "Mother is frightened for me. You are frightened for your ancestors, and I am frightened of hunger. We don't get enough to eat and that is where our fear begins, know that? … Haven't you seen the police in the town?" (110). "One hears, 'The local police …er, killed them off in an armed encounter' " (99). A brief discourse on the Naxal movement[14] in the opening scene puts us in touch with the social context: the network of power that the rural rich wielded in 1970s with the willing complicity of the local officials like the BDO, SDO and the police administration and also tellingly describes the reach this class had specifically in its collusion with the police force in using repressive measures to coerce the poor into submission. Santosh being the confidant of the police informs them of the Naxal activities in Charsa. The vulnerable villagers are subjected to unjust wage arrangements with the landowners but are afraid of protesting for fear that they might be accused of being Naxals or replaced by labourers from the neighbouring villages. Though Maghai divines the location of water for the well, the jobless poor from the village are not employed to dig the well. The contractor who is Santosh's brother-in-law brings labourers from distant places in spite of the official instructions to use local labour (112).

The young untouchable boys are suspected of being Naxals if they appear disobedient. Any resistance to the system meets with tougher challenges: accusations and possible punishment. Manimala's fieldwork in the midst of the rural peasantry in Bihar in the 1980s describes the fallout of collusion between the police and the oppressors thus, "when a dalit man demands justice, he is branded a Naxalite and when a dalit woman demands justice she is labelled 'Kulta' ".[15] Once labelled a Naxal or suspected by the police of being one, poor villagers "would flee the villages in terror, and ever since then, like unwelcome pests they go about offering to work for a pittance" (121), as one of the characters says in *Water.* The bodies of the labourers do not belong to them, but are under the surveillance and control of the masters who know what is best for them. No character in the play is conspicuously a Naxalite but the shadow of Naxalism pursues the villagers. The reasons why the poor and deprived are forced to align themselves with the Naxal movement are enumerated in the story. We gather that though Jiten, Maghai and Dhura live a life of obedience and complicity with the unjust feudal order where the oppressive authority of the upper caste dabangs prevails, they are constantly threatened with being labelled as Naxalites, because the power and privilege to indict is with Santosh and his clan.

Rationalising Subjection, Imploding Resistance

The lands are parched, nothing sown can be harvested due to water scarcity. Maghai is a water diviner, and makes his gift of locating the source of water available to the landowners. His ability makes him the most respected person in his community and even the landlords show their deference. He feels proud of having inherited the secret knowledge from his great ancestors. In spite

of being deprived of the fruit of his own acumen and labour, he continues to do the job of keeping alive his ancestral tradition. Duty bound, even though he is aware of all the wrongs, he never argues; like his ancestors, he performs his duty sincerely. Even when his wife and son entreat him not to join Santosh in digging new wells he reminds them of his duty. He cannot even think of charging fees for divining water. Maghai says, "How can I refuse a job that has been handed down to me by my ancestors, a job that I owe to my caste?" (115).

Hori's internalised subservience is analogous to the mental adaptation of a slave to the first stage of the coloniser's imposition of supremacy. Religious prescriptions for the poor – meekness, patience and diehard faith in the karma of the past life – serve the purpose of the colonising processes. Therefore, when Gobar, Hori's son vehemently protests his father's tutored mindset, Hori says, "Small or big, people come from God's home. Prosperity is achieved by hard penance. The result of past births brings about pleasures and joys of life; nothing is in our credit so what is to be gained?" (17). Belief in karmic fate legitimises the subjection of the subaltern and the dominance of the privileged. The stories embedded in a belief system lend consolation to the anguished and alienated and induce passive acceptance of their subjection. In *Water*, Maghai feels offended when his son Dhura protests his meek submission to the master's injunctions for *begar* (free labour) – the task of divining water for no wages.

> Dhura: It is strange, with all the rice that the earth grows, we still go hungry. There I don't agree with you. I won't accept fate. …We burn our hearts to cinders to divine water, and then raise it from the bowels of the earth, and then they refuse us a drop of water, not a drop for Domes and Chandals. I spit on this fate, if that's our fate (110-11).
> Maghai: (In a thunderous voice) No. Don't dare spit upon your fate, son. The work we were born to may not provide us with food, but it was left to us by our ancestors…when the king Bhagirath brought the holy Ganga down from the heavens, Basumati, the mother earth, asked Ganga: "give me a little bit of it, sister, to keep hidden in my bowels".
> Dhura: (Torn between belief and disbelief) No!
> Maghai: Ganga told Basumti, "hold the Nether Ganga in your bowels…" (He rises to his feet, to enact the drama of how it all happened). So the Nether Ganga flowed into secret depths of mother earth. My earliest ancestor had come all prepared to offer puja to the holy river at her advent. But by the time he arrived, Bhagirath had already left with Ganga…he was just a Dome after all, and naïve and so easily fooled. So he thought I must've dreamt it all. Then from the bowels of the earth, the nether Ganga herself (raises his folded palms to his head), the mother deity of all the hidden waters, spoke: "you're my chosen priest. I'm the goddess, the nether Ganga, whenever…you shall pray for water… I will tell you where to dig" and ever since then that has been our work (111).

Maghai is hostage to the myths delivered to him by his ancestors and that are forever lodged in his memory validating the discrimination his community faces. The uncanny gift of sensing sources of water and the deference he is treated with reinforce Maghai's passionate devotion to the illusory ideas of his ancestors and himself as the carriers of the nether Ganga – a variant of the Hindu myth of Ganga and Bhagirath.[16] Like Premchand's oppressed rural peasant, the centuries old control packaged in the religious injunctions to the lower castes, and embedded in the stories and anecdotes condition Maghai's mind and speech. Dhura sees through this. "But why does father have to act the water diviner for Santosh whenever he asks him to? The shadow of a Dome pollutes his pitcher, and he throws away the water – that is how he treats us. Doesn't he? Tell me that?" Phulmani tells him, "But he is a Brahmin by caste" (107).

When Hori is asked why he speaks in favour of the moneylender, he replies, "I speak on my own without anybody's intervention" (17). It is the same with Maghai. Dhura does protest in personal exchanges but when it comes to direct confrontation with his oppressors, he contains his anger for fear of being handed over to the police on the charge of being a Naxal; the complex emotions holding them define what Gramsci regards as "contradictory common sense".[17] Notwithstanding their rationalisation of subservience to the privileged, it is a fact that no group of people is content to remain oppressed. Devi's very close proximity and participation in the lives of the poor peasants motivated this awareness and that is why an extremity of undeserved suffering brings about a dramatic evolution in Maghai's character; in his anger, restlessness and determination one may sense a renewed awakening of his own self – a willingness to discard the structures of socially constructed emotions.

Practice of Begar: Surreptitious Ways of Coercion

Invoking customs is a strategy to perpetuate subservience in the powerless. Michael Anderson observes that "customary law is notorious for its gloss over local servitude of gender, age and status but it is customary, thereby accepted by all" (1990: 165). In aggressive justification of begar Santosh tries to hammer across what is "morally imperative" for the villagers. He tells them that by transgressing the norm of moral behaviour – by not giving free labour – for the master's religious projects, the villagers have made themselves susceptible to God's wrath.

> The Villagers Together: We have never known a drought like this.
> Santosh: You have only yourself to blame. You have given up your religion, all the old rites, that is why the drought is so awful. This custom has been around for ages; you have always given me labour free of charge, whenever I've had a Puja. But where were you last year?
> Maghai: Who was there to work for you? There were those Naxals who were killed at Patul. And you set the cops on us at Charsa. The men ran and hid for their lives, and there was no one to offer you free service (102).

Deepesh Chakrabarty (2000: 180) probes the convoluted ways in which power operates through customs: "To speak of custom means to identify that range of activity, called privileges by the masters, assumed as rights by the slaves who flowed from the master's knowledge that the violation of norms would carry an unacceptable level of risk". In Fannon's (2007: 89) words, "the national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement" and beholding the Indian scene, says Spivak (2006: 351), "the mindset of the imperialist is displaced and replicated in the comprador capitalist".

The survival of the labourers was made even more difficult, in spite of their having cast the first seeds at the malik's farm; they are threatened with even lower wages, "No fifty paisa per head for you people, thirty paisa". "Can't you see how it happens, Dhura's mother? And this drought! There'll be swarms of labourers for fifteen paisa a day and a snack. We had an argument with Santosh over the wages" (121). The protesting Domes under Maghai's leadership refuse to submit to Santosh's bargaining and force him to

agree on their terms even though it takes hours of long drawn debate "The bastard…but before he does that he'll pour all his venom out on us. And I had to pay for that, scorching in the sun. With the drought and the heat and an empty stomach, my head was reeling" (ibid). Analysing the psychology of the dominants and the violence perpetrated by them, Hannah Arendt observes "a man feels himself more of a man when he is imposing – making others the instruments of his will", which gives him "incomparable pleasure" (1970: 36). Devi's narrative dramatises the patron – client or landlord – tenant equation between the poor and the powerful elite who exercise Foucault's notion of "discipline"[18] as "dharma". Violence is the most common means of imposing order. Villagers are often brutally thrashed on the suspicion of being Naxals. Santosh follows the customs set down by the colonial masters and that has lent power and authority to the landlords. As Guha (1989: 239) puts it "the fear of punishment replaces positive allegiance to dharma". He argues that the harsh concept of power served in the colonial period to legitimise all exercises of coercive authority by the dominant over the subordinate in every walk of life that was outside the jealously guarded realm of the official order.

> Armed with this doctrine, every landlord could indeed play Maharaj to his tenants in extracting begar from them or setting his lathi wielding myrmidons on them if they refuse to oblige. Again, according to this principle, the use of violence by upper caste elites against untouchables and adivasis or the instigation of sectarian strife by a dominant local group against the subaltern adherents of a faith other than their own could pass as a meritorious act modelled on a sovereign defence of dharma (ibid).

Hunger, Malnutrition and Dearth of Health Facilities

"The one thing that is most dreadfully real is the hunger that gnaws at one's stomach", says Maghai (109). None among the poor peasants ever has a full stomach. In India, the famines in which lives of tens of thousands of people were snuffed out in brief dense moments of dark tragedy have passed into history. But hunger survived. Sometimes entire dalit and tribal communities have to subsist for long periods without sufficient food; they are forced to cut back on their food intake sometimes reduced to eating one meal a day; or to beg for food; or to eat tubers. They eat grass and mango kernels that fill their stomach but provide no nutrition or sometimes drink the starch water left over after cooking rice, which their neighbours give them in tight fisted charity. They see their children sleep on empty stomachs and often succumb to ordinary illnesses which better nourished people would easily survive. Suffering from weakness because of inadequate food and sometimes starvation, Maghai's eyes are affected the most. For his livelihood, he also makes patched quilts, and weaves baskets. About going to the hospital, the problem is "who will pay for my going and coming back?" (107) as he asks. Maghai's grievances show that the Babusahebs of the village also hoard and trade in the medicines sent for the villagers. The doctors visit only the houses of the powerful. The paucity of healthcare makes them most vulnerable to diseases and infection. Maghai is losing his eyesight and he does not know why. "How did I lose the sight of my eyes? Eh." Even his wife Phulmani does not know what is wrong with his eyes. All Maghai understands is that he is not able to make patched quilts or baskets with bamboo stalks. It has been a common observation that to the rural poor, illness and treatment bring about crises by usually wiping out all their savings and is a common reason for indebtedness. K S Jacob writes in *The Hindu:*

> The determinants of health are serial and economic rather than purely medical. The poor health of people from the lower castes, their social exclusion is due to the unequal distribution of power, income, goods and services. Caste is of course inextricably linked to and is proxy for socio-economic status in India. The restricted access of those from the lower caste to clean water, sanitation, nutrition, housing, education, healthcare and employment is due to toxic combination of poor social politics and programmes, unfair economic arrangement and bad politics.[19]

Failure to recognise the varied forms of neglect and dearth of facilities and the State's reluctance to monitor and tackle these issues as Jacob points out result in the poorer health standards of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The poor are inevitably at a higher risk of catching diseases.

Violence as a Means

The coercive power and punitive actions of violence against the low castes and poor as portrayed in this play is an accepted fact; the representative agencies of the law are visibly committed to safeguard the interest of those in power. Jiten recalls a time when in the early 1970s, there was trouble over harvesting of paddy. On both occasion the investigating police inspector stays at the house of the accused. "But he was the culprit, the chief of a band of ruffians. Tell me was that the right thing to do on the Inspector's part?" (131). In another scene, Maghai and Dhura are seen walking along the dry bed of the river Charsa. Dhura has a bow and arrows in his hand; he is seized with a desire to kill Santosh. Trembling with fear, Maghai warns him not to mention his name even in joke (132). Jiten arrives on the scene and explains how the people of Charsa, by building a dam across the river could be redeemed from the eternal curse of going without water. Drawing with a chalk, he demonstrates how there will still be "water stored within the dam after the monsoon has passed. A few boulders might be washed away, but not all of them (135). Maghai's imagination now evokes the vision of a dam. "It's all there we'll start at once. I can see the damn, it's there, we have built it now, we have gathered the water". The hope that Charsa will never be dry again, makes him visualise… "what an amount of water! Dhura and I will till the land… look at the crops, the sheer abundance! Now we have sown the seeds, and we bathe in the dam…". He takes "a deep breath, moves away from Jiten, and acts out with flourish". Towards the end of the scene, Maghai and his men are engaged in the construction of the dam, carrying boulders dropping them in the riverbed. The collective act of building a dam is made dramatic when the peasants sing, "hei Lanka, hei Lanka/a boulder on our backs, a boulder on the ground (We're building a bridge to Lanka)" (136).

Pretending to be unconcerned Santosh says, "the dam is a good thing for everyone…I don't mind, if it helps you. I wish you all luck" (136). He secretly nurtures violent anger against Jiten, sensing him to be a formidable opponent, "Jiten is all rotten inside. Educated Mahishya by caste he has no right to serve the casteless." The thought that the untouchables quench their thirst with plenty of water from "a lovely dam", is unbearable to him. The downtrodden community had now learned to control nature was a threat. And yet the thought that "the dam will have to be broken and all

those men will be arrested", makes him wistful, for the dam indeed was beautiful. As already planned in advance in collusion with the SDO and the police Jiten, Maghai and Dhura have been charged with being Naxals and of inciting the villagers (142). The police have been informed that Jiten has incited the Domes and Chandals into building a dam. "He is manufacturing super guns, live ones, human ones, training cadres for the struggle, and the Dome and Chandal men have begun fighting for their rights" (143). The police officers have received orders to open fire at the slightest provocation during the opening ceremony of the dam. Unaware of the impending danger, Maghai and his men gather at the dam to offer oblation to Mansa, the snake goddess who is to be immersed in the river. To the people living close to nature, this was an occasion for celebration, of gaiety. Phulmani makes the "cooie" sound to warn the revellers of the danger, and announces, "Santosh has brought the police Run for your lives, all of you" (145). When told that boulders are being dislodged and that the police is breaking the dam, Maghai is frantic. His dreams on the verge of collapse, he exhorts his men to go forward and "crush the bastards with the pole of Manasa" (145). For a while, the stage is the scene of brutal attack and resistance. A moment later, we find Maghai on the stage "…tottering, one hand on his bleeding chest", grievously wounded. But he is not to die an ordinary death because "it's Bhagirath of the nether Ganga", and declares, "I can't let them carry me as a corpse into their bloody morgue. My last journey will be with the water" (146). So saying, Maghai falls to the ground carried away on the crest of the rising and gushing waters of the mad Charsa. The SDO orders in business like tones, "Put her (Phulmani) under arrest" (146), and pointing to Jiten and Dhura, lying unconscious on the ground says, "…and him and him and him" (ibid). Told that one person has been killed and 17 wounded he says, "Put them in the police van" (ibid). In the dim light, the gushing sounds of water continue roaring until the stage goes dark.

State sanctioned physical violence has had a continual role in disciplining the men and women in the rural areas. Here violence perpetrated upon the deprived involves legal forms of coercion. The ending makes apparent that violence seeks an outlet through the ideology of caste differences and perceived interests and latches on to these causes to find public expression and legitimacy. In this disarray, violence must precede its causes. In showing the subtle and intricate complicity between the local, educated "Babus", the SDO, BDO, and the police officials, Devi anticipates several studies in sociology that in the current times treat as a fraught issue the nexus between all those who fear the upliftment of the landless subaltern as a threat to the system of hierarchy. What comes to the fore is the role of the police as the natural supporters of the caste-based system inevitably implicated in class. Alexender Mohan in "Policing caste discrimination" observes:

> Police that can play an important role at the micro level in helping to end caste based atrocity, are known to take side with the members of the upper caste and intimidate Dalits into silence. They are accused of refusing to file FIRs, going slow on investigation, or booking the accused under Sections that do not attract tough sentences and, in many cases, of looking the other way as village Panchayats and elders broker some kind of understanding to appease(read) threaten the Dalits.[20]

Devi's story of the submissive-turned-protesting peasant untouchables, however, is not just specific to the untouchables but represents the hardship of the subaltern of the peasantry at large. Devi has drawn her material from personal observations and reports of several occurrences in India, where rural development and rehabilitation of the rural poor schemes, launched during the Sixth Five-Year Plan sponsored by the government failed to reach the most deserving and showed that corruption exacerbates poverty.

Articulated with empathy in fictional narratives like *Water* are the deep structures of rural peasantry acknowledged in the public sphere of the recent decades. The intimate world of stories crystallises the candid, emotionally charged voices of the peasantry; their frankness and intimacy, revelations of vulnerability, fear and ignorance, of courage, perseverance and resistance. We learn more closely, question more sincerely and connect more compassionately with the wronged; their story of oppression is not just about occasional events of crass exploitation, torture or murder but also about routine slighting, the elusive and very subtle processes of lending them a subhuman status.

NOTES

1 Hori, a small village farmer is the protagonist of Premchand's *Godan* (*Gift of a Cow*), 1994, Delhi: Diamond Books. Premchand's extraordinary grip on the world of poor peasants the exploitation and the resultant destitution and hopelessness of the poor make it an iconic study of Indian peasantry. The subsequent references to this edition are translated by me into English.

2 My work in progress, *Inside the Indian Peasantry,* in undertaking multidisciplinary studies finds figuring in Indian literature sincere concern with the analytical understanding of the peasantry implicated in agrarian crises particularly in draught conditions, unjust caste and class discrimination, village infrastructures: land and water management, land ceiling, sharecropping, banking and credit, marketing, education and health in their struggle to survive and improve their lives.

3 Shrilal Shukla, *Jahalat ke Pachhas Saal (Fifty Years of Ignominy),* New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 2004. The collection of stories exposes the disarray and anarchy brought about by the misrule of Indian governance in the 50 years after freedom. It does not spare the phoniness and follies of the great men, of institutions, of assumptions and principles, of grand announcements and slogans. A chapter in my larger project deals with several issues the collection invokes but more specifically focuses on the story, "Hori aur Unnis Sau Chourasi" (Hori and Nineteen Eighty Four).

4 See Asha Kapoor Mehta and Amita Shah, "Chronic Poverty in India: Incidences, Causes and Policies", *World Development*, Volume 31, Issue 3, March 2003, pp 491-511. Gujarat Institute of Development Research, Ahmadabad, available on line, 25 February 2003.

5 With reference to the "success stories", Corbridge quotes Partha Chatterjee's astutely conceived simile: "The civil society and the poor coexist in India like oil and water" and notes that government insists that ordinary people are listened to at the block, district, state and national levels. They are reaping rewards of an electoral system that empowers even the poorest of men and women as citizens of different territorial jurisdiction (Corbridge et al 2005: 2). The stories of the peasantry by Markandeya, Uma Shankar Joshi, Damoder Dixit and Shrilal Shukla examined in my major project illustrate the utter callousness and contempt with which the poor complainants are treated at the offices of the gram pradhan, and the lower level to the higher level public officials. Shrilal Shukla's "Hori aur Unnis Sau Chourasi" (1993) almost parodies the Agriculture Policy: Vision 2020. Indian Agricultural Research Institute, New Delhi, makes proud declaration of its "success stories" in declaring that India has made impressive strides on the agricultural front during the last three decades. Much of the credit for this success should go to the several million small farming families that form the backbone of Indian agriculture and economy. Policy support, production strategies, public investment in infrastructure, research and extension for crop, livestock and fisheries have significantly helped to increase food production and its availability. During the last 30 years, India's foodgrain production nearly doubled from 102 million tonnes in the triennium ending 1973 to nearly 200 million tonnes (Mt) in the triennium ending (TE) 1999. Virtually all of the increase in the production resulted from yield gains rather than expansion of cultivated area. Availability of foodgrains per person increased from 452 gm/capita/day to over 476 gm/capita/day, even as the country's population almost doubled, swelling from 548 million to nearly 1,000 million. Increased agricultural productivity and rapid industrial growth in the recent years have

contributed to a significant reduction in poverty level, from 55% in 1973 to 26% in 1998.

6 David Lewis, Dennis Rodgers and Michael Woolcock from the London School of Economics urge poverty experts for taking novels seriously. "Stories are humanity's oldest methods of possessing and representing reality. The stories, poems and plays we categorise as literary fiction were once accepted in much the same way that sociological discourse is received as authoritarian today. We would like to suggest, however, that literary representations of development and poverty are important, influential and potentially valuable. In arguing this, we do not take a relativist position and claim that literary forms of representation can substitute academic or policy writings; nor do we construct a case for literature being a "voice from the developing world". Instead, we suggest that practitioners and academics in the development field should include fictional representations within the scope of what they consider to be "proper" forms of knowledge in order to open up new space for exploring understandings of and policy responses to development and poverty. See www. Manchesterac.vk/aboutus.

7 "Dabangs" are the local musclemen blessed by the landowner or wealthy contractor who are granted favours in return for their services to the powerful or those at the helm of affairs.

8 See Phanishwar Nath Renu's *The Soiled Border*, translated by Indira Junghare, Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1991.

9 The division of wells along caste lines deprived the rural poor of clean water as portrayed in Premchand's "Thakur's Well" (*Thakur ka Kuan*) 2000, in the collection, *A Winter's Night and Other Stories*, translated by Rakshanda Jalil, Penguin Books. In pondering on the helpless and hopeless condition of dalits in India, Shriram Nivaria in "Dalit Sahitya Pratikriyavadi Nahin Deerghajeevi Bane", "Let Dalit Literature Aspire for a Viability Rather Than be Reactionary", *Pashyanti* (January-March), 2004, pp 32-37, draws on his own experiences: "Away from the row of the savarnas, they would be served food mostly close to those adjacent corners of the household where cattle are tethered. In deference to the savarna masters, it was mandatory for them to take off their shoes. At the time of wedding, riding horse was strictly prohibited. They were to have separate wells for water, separate inhabitation, and separate cremation grounds." It is very often reported that even paan chewing in front of the upper caste is treated as a punishable offence.

10 Stuart Corbridge's arguments in *Seeing the State Governance and Governmentality in India,* draw from the way Harris-White understands the State in India. "The states should be understood anthropologically. Instead of thinking of "them", as discrete or singular activities, States are best thought of as bundles of everyday institution and forms of rule to which the peasantry relates. Harris-White prefers Foucault's term, the "dispersed practices of government" to describe what this means to the rural poor. "Governmentality" is practised as Partha Chatterjee, 1997, *Possible World*: *Essays in Political Criticism,* and Sudipto Kaviraj, 1991 "State, Society and Discourse in India" in J Manor (ed.), *Rethinking Third World Politics,* Harlow: Longman, 72-99, points out that the lives of elite, English educated Indians do not coincide with those of their subaltern or vernacular counterparts. As a result, generally speaking it is expected that the lower-level public officials would reinterpret and sometimes significantly change the practices of government that are handed over to them by the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers at the district, state or union levels.

11 In this context, *Local Governance in India – Decentralisation and Beyond,* OUP, 2007, a collection of essays by Niraja Gopal Jayal, Amit Prakash, Pradeep K Sharma (ed.), probes the functioning of local government institutions in India and illuminate further what Partha Chatterjee describes as governmentality. The analysis of the grass root governance dispels many myths about Indian democracy and shows that at the very point where the Indian state most needs to engage the public in its operations, it fails, and even intensifies the suffering of hundreds of millions in one of the world's most unequal and oppressive societies. It proceeds to examine the process of decentralisation as required by the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments in respect of village bureaucracy, whose officials their study finds prefer local dealing with the local elite and are not answerable to the locally elected representatives; the latter however have also proved that when at the helm of affairs, they have shown brazen reluctance to part with the money meant for the really deserving.

12 This refers to the film, *Well Done Abba*, directed by Shyam Benegal, released, March 2010. It illustrates the scenario of blatantly practised cheating and fraud in the village officialdom near Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh. The electoral considerations/vote bank however lead to the resolution of problems the poor encounter.

13 *Dainik Jagaran,* 26 August 2009, p 11: Savitri Bai Phule Mahila Panchayat in its proceedings declared that under the NREGA scheme the labourers work while their payment is received by the Pradhan. At Paradkar Bhavana, Varanasi, Pappu Mushar reported that he worked for 43 days; in his job card however this was not mentioned. His daily wage had been Rs 43, but he was paid Rs 36. Sandip Pandey while applauding the Right to Information Act and the Employment Guarantee Act as a new window to the democratic system, reports in *Dainik Jagaran*, 23 June 2009, that in recent months in Uttar Pradesh several such incidents have come to light that the demand of dalit labourers for their basic rights resulted in their getting a severe thrashing from the gram pradhan, supported by the Dabangs, the police and the employees of the development section. Those who assaulted them were protected and patronised by the politically powerful. In Hardoi, the labourers' demand for wages met with brutal assault with lathis. In Mau, when the labourers from many villages collectively asked for wages the section development officers in the company of their supporters beat them mercilessly. In Sitapur labourers were assaulted while quenching their thirst by the handpump nearby. Two hundred villagers from three villages of Varanasi were set to work on wages of 39.80 paisa. Following a protest, they were beaten up. The following day wages at the rate of Rs 42 were deposited in their accounts. Sandip Pandey remarked that it looks like a strategy of the administration to respond to the labourers' demands for their rights with beating.

14 Vishesh Gupta's article, *Varga Sangharsha ki Vichardhara* ("The Ideology of Class Struggle"), *Daink Jagaran*, Tuesday, 30 June 2009, probes deep into roots of the Maoist and Naxal movements. Commenting on the chasm between the Naxals of the 1970s and those of today, he points out that the ideology of early Naxalism based on apparent class conflict, inequality and injustice vigorously promoted and campaigned in rural regions, and was seen by the farmers, landless farmers, and labourers, as capable of liberating them from oppression and exploitation. Gupta astutely observes that the state governments facing Naxalism were forced to react to it as a legal and political problem and not as a social and economic one. As regards the current times, Naxal insurgencies show that the government tried to suppress the Naxal movement but fascination for it nonetheless has grown. In the last two decades, poverty, unemployment, increase in the number of landless farmers, injustice and inequality in land distribution and rude intervention in the lives of local indigenous tribals have multiplied and intensified their alienation; all these conditions have sustained Naxalism.

15 "Kulta", the gender specific label refers to promiscuous women. Manimala, "Ek Safar Basmatiya se Bhanvari Bai Bai Tak" in *Banda Galiyon Ke Viruddh* (Against Closed Alleys), Mrinal Pande and Kshama Sharma (ed.), Indian Women's Press Corp (New Delhi: Rajkamal) 2004.

16 Bhagirath in Hindu myth was the king who brought down to earth the river Ganga from heaven.

17 Subaltern, as, subject to a broader hegemony process as Gramsci (1971: 333) describes, tends to have "contradictory consciousness". "His theoretical consciousness can indeed be historically in opposition to his activity. One might almost say that he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness) one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow workers in the practical transformation of the real world and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed.

18 See Foucault's *Discipline and Punish,* Vintage Book Editions, 1995.

19 K S Jacob points out in "Caste and Inequalities in Health", *The Hindu,* 22 August 2000, that caste is a major indicator of health outcome and mandates the need for intervention that change social structures. Probing specifically the plight of migrant labourers, he underlines how illness and its treatment usually wipe out all savings, and are common reasons for indebtedness.

20 Alexander Mohan in "Policing Caste Discrimination", *The Hindu*, 9 August 2009, p 12, talks about some ways of rectifying the practice of caste discrimination and corruption in the police system. The human aspect of law enforcement more paying in terms of returns. He argues for greater participation of the police in the lives of dalits. Policemen should learn more about dalits – the pockets in which they live, their annual festivals, rituals, anniversaries of leaders and so on, so they can develop a sense of participation, on the one hand, and anticipate areas of social tensions, on the other. Mohan is the Inspector General of Police, Human Rights and Social Justice, Tamil Nadu.

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