

## **The *Marginalized* in the Construction of ‘Indigenous’ Theoretical and Literary Spaces in Bangladesh**

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### **1.**

In the middle of the 80s of the last Century, Bengali culture witnessed the emergence of a literary and theoretical movement known as ‘Uttaradhunikatabad’<sup>1</sup>. The movement was initiated by poet and critic Amitabha Gupta, who in 1985 presented the concept in the little magazine *Janapada*. It was then nurtured by critics, literary theoreticians and litterateurs like Anjan Sen, Birendra Chakravarti, Uday Narayan Singha, Tapodhir Bhattacharjee etc. from India and Ezaz Yusufi, Sajidul Haq, Jillur Rahman and Khondakar Ashraf Hossain from Bangladesh. Little magazines from India and Bangladesh like *Gangeya Patra*, *Beej*, *Alochanachakra*, *Samprata*, *Lalnakkhatra*, *Chatimtala*, *Sanket*, *Anyastar*, *Drastabya*, *Bipratik*, *Sudarshanchakra*, *1400*, *Ekabingsho* etc. nurtured the movement.

When Gupta first proposed the concept, it was centered on a new trend in poetry, which Gupta identified as a move beyond modernist literary culture. Following years, however, saw the movement developing its’ unique corpus of theoretical postulations regarding poetry and other forms of literature, poetic language and ontology.

Gupta’s article titled *Nibedan*, published as the appendix of an anthology of *Uttaradhunik* poems, titled *Uttar Adhunik Kabita*<sup>2</sup>, offers a comprehensive account of the theoretical understanding at its earliest phase. He posited the new movement against the Modernist

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<sup>1</sup> Uttar = Beyond, Adhunikatabad = Modernism. (Adhunik= Modern, Adhunikata= Modernity) *Uttar* is also used to mean ‘Post’ which has led many scholars and thinkers in translating this term as ‘Postmodernism’, whereas a few others have used the term *Uttaradhunikatabad* as one of the translations of the term ‘Postmodernism’. Such practices have at times led scholars into describing this school as a variety of Postmodernist movements. However, many scholars (e.g. Bhattacharjee 1995, Chakraborty 2008a) have shown in detail how such a position is not tenable given the oppositional Epistemological, Ontological and Aesthetic features of these two movement.

<sup>2</sup> Kabita= Poetry.

poetic movement of 1930s, which, he claimed, had delinked Bengali poetry from its thousand year old poetic tradition. Comparing between two anthologies of Bengali poem, *Bangla Kabya Parichay*<sup>3</sup> (1938) edited by Rabindranath Thakur, and *Adhunik Bangla Kabita*<sup>4</sup> (1940) edited by Buddhadeb Basu<sup>5</sup>, Gupta notes that while the first one had included poems from medieval Bengali Hindu and Muslim poets, poets belonging to various folk-religious traditions and folk-semi-classical-popular performing traditions, the second one excluded all such poets. He observed that the reader of the first anthology could feel the acceptance of the medieval-folk-popular forms of Bengali poetry as an integral part of the lineage of contemporary Bengali poetic world- "Reading *Bangla Kabya Parichay*' confirms that Bengali poetry has a history, a tradition." (Gupta, 1989/1995, 5)<sup>6</sup> . In contrast, *Adhunik Bangla Kabita* represents a belief that "a rootless...modernism is enough." (Gupta, 1989, 5) It is in this context that Gupta quotes poet Arun Bhattacharya's request to young poets- "The turbulent years of 1930-80 is over now. Friends, now please return from Rimbaud, Baudelaire or Eluard, Mayakovsky to mahajan padavali<sup>7</sup> and Ramprasads'<sup>8</sup> poems, Shreedhar kathak<sup>9</sup> and Nidhubabus'<sup>10</sup> songs." (Q, Gupta, 1989/1995, 67) Gupta felt that the *Uttaradhunik* poets were doing exactly that- "The memory of the whole tradition of Bengali poetry gets its imprint in the poems of the Uttaradhunik poets." (Gupta, 1989/1995, 2) He also noted how these new poets had broken the metropolis-centralism of modern and modernist Bengali poetic world and had added the geographical-linguistic-cultural experiences of satellite towns and villages in the corpus of contemporary Bengali poetry through the use of localized language and imagery and by adopting Little Magazines as the main medium of publication.<sup>11</sup> It would be useful to note here that Gupta was conscious

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<sup>3</sup> Introduction to Bengali Poetry

<sup>4</sup> Modern Bengali Poetry

<sup>5</sup> The first addition was edited jointly by Buddhadeb Basu and Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay. However, since the second edition (1954) Buddhadeb Basu remained the lone editor.

<sup>6</sup> Quotations from Bengali texts have been translated by the author unless mentioned otherwise.

<sup>7</sup> Vaishnava lyrics of pre-modern Bengal.

<sup>8</sup> A Shakta poet of medieval Bengal.

<sup>9</sup> Performer of a folk-popular tradition.

<sup>10</sup> A nineteenth century semi-classical performer.

<sup>11</sup> It must be noted here that through the inclusion of folk-rural-popular genres within the fold of 'tradition', by celebrating the breaking of metropolis-centralism and through prioritizing the emergence of multiple voices

about the possibility that his postulation might be interpreted as a revivalist aesthetics. That's why he stressed the point repeatedly that he was not arguing for a 'return' to the pre-modern tradition and rural experiences at the cost of the cosmopolitan Bengali literary tradition nurtured through its' two hundred years long engagement with western philosophical and literary sensibilities, rather he was arguing for and celebrating an engagement with the ancient-medieval and rural-folk-popular experiences in the formation of the contemporary poetic sensibility. (Gupta, 1989/1985)

Though Gupta talks exclusively about poetry in this article, he also expanded the conceptualization to the domain of fiction. In a 1986 article, titled *Bangla Upanyas: Ekti Prastab*<sup>12</sup>, he traced back the roots of Bengali fiction in the medieval Bengali narrative tradition, contesting the understanding of an earlier historian of Bengali fiction who had traced back the roots of Bengali fiction only to Sanskrit-Pali narrative traditions. However, Gupta also noted how modernist Bengali fiction had effectively erased the tradition of medieval Bengali narratives and how, in opposition to them, a few contemporary writers have used the medieval narrative memories in the construction of their fictions, both in theme and form of narration. (Gupta, 1986)

As we have noted already, Guptas' ideas were nurtured and further developed by his contemporary litterateurs and theoreticians from Bangladesh and India. Anjan Sen argued that every literary tradition has a corpus of 'intracultural codes' which play a textual function in later productions. He shows that the post-Rabindranath modernist Bengali poets (excluding a few major poets like Jibanananda Das and Bishnu Dey) had somehow succeeded in erasing or marginalizing the corpus of Bengali 'intracultural codes' and promoted that erosion as an aesthetic position quite successfully. He also shows how a large number of poets from 70s and 80s broke out of that dominant aesthetics and started using the traditional Bengali 'intracultural codes' in their writings. Sen marks this as the salient feature of the *Uttaradhunik* aesthetics. (Sen, 1986; 1991) Birendra Chakravarti proposed an *Uttaradhunik*

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and Little Magazine movement, this group was show-casing the influence of Left movement in Bengal which had brought irreversible changes in the Bengali socio-cultural fields since 1940's and had witnessed a strong Naxalite (Maoist) movement in the 70s.

<sup>12</sup> Bengali Novel: A Proposal

ontology, which he named as *Uttarbyaktisatta*, taking the term from an article of Jibanananda Das, arguably the most important post-Rabindranath poet. He defines, again following Jibanananda Das, *Uttarbyaktisatta*, as that self which is shaped through a continuous and fruitful engagement with space and time, taking the self beyond its' immediate surroundings. He posited that *Uttara*-self against the 'personal-self' antagonized to and excluded from spatial and temporal engagements, promoted in the creation and aesthetics of a few major authors from 30s like Buddhadeb Basu and 50s like Sunil Gangopadhyay. (Chakravarti, 1991) Tapodhir Bhattacharjee added theoretical momentum to the movement. Based on his long engagement with Indian and Western theoretical schools he gave the essay-based thoughts of early *Uttaradhunik* thinkers a strong theoretical base. Through a detailed study of various kinds of modernism in Bengal, he traced the evolution of the *Uttaradhunik* sensibility and offered an analysis of the current status of the movement. He also proposed to link other radical thoughts like Feminism, Post-Colonialism, Marxism, anti-Casteism etc. with *Uttaradhunikata* and proposed its' second phase as *Uttarayanbad* as a larger Marxist liberal humanist position. (Bhattacharjee, 1995) In the nineties itself Khondakar Ashraf Hossain and Ezaz Yusufi started introducing the *Uttaradhunik* concept in Bangladesh through their little magazines. Khondakar Ashraf Hossain played the most important role through *Ekabingsha*, a little magazine which he edited for twenty years. Though they didn't add much to the theoretical corpus of *Uttaradhunikata*, their writings prioritized medieval and folk traditions of Bengal further over the Sanskritic traditions. This seems natural in the context of the history of the composite Bengali culture that took shape during the medieval era through artistic-religious-social re-working of the pre-Muslim Bengali culture and the history of the formation of a primarily geographical-linguistic Bengali identity around the emergence of Bangladesh, a formation that remains contested, and hence relevant, in contemporary Bangladesh as well.

## 2.

As would be evident from references to earlier litterateurs in the discussion of the *Uttaradhuniks* themselves, as mentioned above, there are examples of writings in earlier and

contemporary Bengali literature that manifested the sensibility which the *Uttaradhunik*s tried to argue for. In pre-*Uttaradhunik* literature, Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824-1873) engaged extensively with Indian mythical characters and Sanskrit epic form, Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay (1847 - 1919) used the traditional forms of storytelling in his fictional writings, Rabindranath Thakur (1861-1941) re-worked traditional and folk motives, philosophies and forms in many ways, Jibanananda Das (1899-1954) used medieval and folk Bengali motives in most of his signature poetic works, Jasimuddin (1903-1976) explored folk themes and forms in his poems, Satinath Bhaduri (1906-1965) used folk narrative technique very successfully in one of his novels, Bishnu Dey (1909-1982) used folk, Sanskritic and medieval motives extensively in his poems, Amiyabhushan Majumdar (1918-2001) experimented with folk and traditional theme and narrative techniques in his fiction. However, none of these authors, nor any critic before the emergence of the *Uttaradhunik*s, postulated any aesthetics around such engagements, nor did they prioritize such engagements as a counter-move to colonial modernity. In fact, Trailokyanath Mukhopadhyay continued to be considered as a minor author pronouncedly for the very reason that the mark of medieval folk-narrative technique was so evident in his writings, Jasimuddin also faced the same fate for remaining 'restricted' to folk and rural themes and forms. The scenario since the 70s, however, would be rather different. A significant number of writers manifested their engagement with traditional and folk forms and motives. Fiction writers like Debesh Roy and Abhijit Sen prioritized experimentation with medieval and folk narrative techniques and themes. Poets like Gita Chattopadhyay, Al Mahmud, Jahar Sen Majumdar, Dilip Bandyopadhyay and many more started prioritizing their engagement with epic, medieval and folk forms and themes in their poetic works. Unlike the preceding era, these authors made that engagement the signature of their writings and critics also started considering that engagement as an important point of discussion. However, it was the *Uttaradhunik*s who identified this engagement as the marker of a new era in Bengali literature and offered a theoretical orientation to this sensibility.

We must also note that many critics tried to develop indigenous theoretical schools before and at the time of the emergence of the *Uttaradhunik*s. We can mention the attempts of

scholars like Narasimhaiah (1990, 1994), Mukhopadhyay (1988), Dharitriputra (1997), Dasgupta (1998), and Mukhopadhyay (1999) at re-inventing Sanskrit poetics in their search for an indigenous corpus of theories of criticism. Rajan & Daniel (1998) added the attempt to contemporize ancient Tamil poetics to this tradition. What, however, remains very significant about these attempts, in the context of *Uttaradhunikata*, is that though these attempts are important in the history of the search for a counter-position to the colonial-modernity, most of such attempts have taken the re-invention of ancient Sanskrit (and ancient Tamil in one or two exceptional instances) poetics as the most available option in that process, perhaps not giving deserved importance to the fact that those ancient schools evolved around literary cultures which were very different from medieval or contemporary Indian literary practices. Barring a few exceptions (e.g. Dharitriputra, 1997) their works provide valuable readings into how difficult it might be for critics if they center their postulations on thousand year old thoughts rather than taking cues from living literary traditions. In contrast to these attempts, the *Uttaradhunik*s have tried to postulate a literary and critical understanding which would take its' cues from existing literary practices, albeit prioritizing one over the others. In this sense, the *Uttaradhunik* school is more compatible with schools of thoughts like Nemades' *Desivaad* (see Paranjape, 1997), which he developed in the 80s based on creative re-appropriation of Linton's (1943) concept of Nativism in the context of contemporary Marathi literature, Devy's search for a Bhasa aesthetics through reading the histories of Bhasa literatures outside the Euro-centric or Sanskrit-centric models (Devy 1992), Barber's conceptualization of Yoruba Oral Aesthetics based on the living tradition of *Oriki* performances in Africa (Barber, 1993), or Nigerian critic Ogunyemi's conceptualization of 'African wo/man palava' based on a creative mixing of contemporary practices and terminologies taken from African myths (Ogunyemi, 1996).

The *Uttaradhunik*s, however, failed to engage with a very important aspect of the 'tradition' they proposed to prioritize. While their postulations underline that the *Uttaradhunik* sensibility celebrates the folk and popular traditions, hitherto marginalized in the elite Bengali literary space, while their formulation of 'tradition', through literary and critical writings, pronouncedly includes the culture of the socially-culturally marginalized groups

from ancient and medieval Bengal, while they note that the *Uttaradhunik* moment is marked by the presence of voices from rural locations, and while they note that ‘tradition’ has oppressive elements as well, their critical works do not deal with the very fact that Dalit and Feminist engagements with ‘tradition’ needs to be understood in their respective terms. In their journey for more than three decades, during which they remained very active through publishing, editing and compiling both literary and critical texts surrounding *Uttaradhunikata*, through which they gave the *Uttaradhunik* a specific shape, they remained totally silent on this particular aspect. Though Bhattacharjee (1995) pointed out that the new phase of *Uttaradhunik* movement would include Feminist and anti-Caste positions, he himself did not expand further on actual or possible structures of engagement with a ‘tradition’ which was predominantly patriarchic and casteist; neither did any other *Uttaradhunik* thinker. *Uttaradhuniks* from Bangladesh were neither any exception. While concentrating on the ‘Bengali’ identity, they remained unresponsive to Feminist and Dalit engagement with ‘tradition’. Thus, as a whole, *Uttaradhunik* postulations nurtured a significant lacuna in their conceptualization of the ‘tradition’, subscribing to, perhaps unintentionally, the dominant patriarchic and upper-casteist model of a ‘national culture’ which prefers not to engage with possible alternative reception and engagement with ‘tradition’ from Feminist and Dalit positions.

Chakraborty (2008b) pointed out this lacuna in a paper published in a little magazine edited by Amitabha Gupta. Chakraborty explored the existing Feminist and Dalit writings in Bengali literature to reveal how those writers had created a different and complex mode of engagement with ‘tradition’. Based on detail reading of women writers from nineteenth and twentieth century and Dalit writers from twentieth century, Chakraborty showed how those authors had invented alternative ‘tradition’ of women’s history and writings and Dalit identity (Ashapura Devi, Sulekha Sanyal, Mallika Sengupta, Mahashweta Mukhopadhyay, Anil Sarkar), left subversive cues for alternative readings in otherwise ‘conformist’ writings (Suramasundari Ghosh, Mankumari Basu), gave expression to suppressed voices through re-doing dominant mythical, epic and medieval characters and narratives (Sanjukta Bandyopadhyay, Sutapa Sengupta, Tapati Chattopadhyay, Chaitali Chattopadhyay,

Mahashweta Mukhopadhyay, Mallika Sengupta, Urmila Chakraborty, Anil Sarkar, Anil Biswas), and gave expression to the hatred felt towards the dominant 'tradition' (Chaitali Chattopadhyay, Tapati Chattopadhyay, Mallika Sengupta, Anil Sarkar, Anil Biswas). Chakraborty argued for developing a theoretical schema that could effectively accommodate such complex engagements with 'tradition'.<sup>13</sup>

Though Chakraborty (2008b) included a brief discussion of one prominent writer from Bangladesh (Selina Hossain), a more elaborate analysis of the works by Bangladeshi authors would reveal that Bangladeshi Bengali literature also has comparable complex engagement with 'tradition' which, again, has not been accorded due importance, even a passing mention, in the formulation of the *Uttaradhunik* position in Bangladesh.

### 3.

Selina Hossain's (1947-present) *Neel Mayurer Jouban* (1978)<sup>14</sup> re-created the world of 8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Bengali life taking cues from the life depicted in the hymns of *Charayapada*, an anthology of hymns composed by authors belonging to a Buddhist subsect during 8<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> century (Islam 2014). That sect had a special status for women and the lower-caste/out-caste, which is evident from the life the hymns describe, substantiated by the hagiographies of the leading personalities, some of whom composed those hymns, of that sect. (Chattopadhyay, 2010) Given this and the fact that *Charyapada*, was already a celebrated text being the lone specimen of ancient Bengali, the foregrounding of women and lower-caste life in the novel would not have been considered as any important intervention in the literary culture. This understanding, however, changes when one considers the political atmosphere in which the novel was written and how the author has also added the element of language-conflict in her novel. In her novel, the story turns into the narration of a conflict between the upper-caste and the lower-caste around the question of language. While the

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<sup>13</sup> However, in a response published as a post-script in the next issue of the little magazine, Gupta maintained that *Uttaradhunikata* in its engagement with 'tradition' had already created space accommodating such voices. This argument cannot be denied so far as creative writing is concerned; however, our focus here is (as was in Chakraborty 2008b) on the theoretical corpus.

<sup>14</sup> Hossain has two more novels, *Chandbene* (1984) and *Kalketu O Fullara* (1992), which reconstruct characters and stories from medieval Bengali narrative tradition.

upper-caste protagonists prefer Sanskrit and hate the spoken language, the lower-caste protagonists prefer the spoken language over Sanskrit, compose poems in that language and fights for that language. Given that Bangladesh had by then witnessed large-scale rapes and killings during its' liberation war, had an almost three decades long fight for its' language, had witnessed the formation of a Bangladeshi identity based on geographic-linguistic features, and had witnessed the resurgence of the political forces which acted against that identity, Hossain's selection of a text that fundamentally foregrounds independent women, and re-constructing the narrative as that of a conflict between the dominant and suppressed languages could surely be read as a literary intervention both in the immediate political culture as well as in the age-old patriarchic Bengali culture. The fact that Hossain has been an active participant in defending the language-based secular Bengali identity in Bangladesh<sup>15</sup>, because of which she had to face unfavorable consequences at politically turbulent times, and has contributed actively in the movement for women's rights in Bangladesh<sup>16</sup>, provide substantial context to this reading.

Shaheen Akhtar's (1962-present) *Sakhi Rangamala* (2010), however, offers a less directly politically interventionist, yet more relevant for the *Uttaradhunik* movement thanks to its use of 'intra-cultural codes', example of Feminist and Dalit engagement with 'tradition'. Akhtar's narrative schema and language shows conscious engagement with medieval and folk narrative techniques and local language. She has creatively used the narrative techniques of various medieval and folk narrative genres like *Palagan*, *Itihas*, *Puthi*, *Kathakata*. She has used folk rhymes and songs within the narration. The language is a mix of the Noakhali dialect with imprints of the linguistic tropes of various medieval and folk narrative traditions. The story itself has been taken from a popular folk ballad, *Palagan*, titled *Chaudhurir Lorai*<sup>17</sup> from Noakhali region of Bengal. In addition to this, the author has also taken cues from narrations of the same story in a few other medieval historical writings and modern local histories. The original *Palagan* was centered on the folk-memory of the love affair of a local

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<sup>15</sup> Hossain has many creative and critical writings celebrating the ethos of the liberation war of Bangladesh.

<sup>16</sup> Hossain has a large corpus of creative and academic writings (including a Gender encyclopedia) depicting/dealing with women's life, women's history and women's rights.

<sup>17</sup> *The Feud of the Chaudhuris*

landlord and the family-feud surrounding it. Akhtar, however, prioritizes the women and lower-caste characters in her narration. This prioritization begins with the title itself. While the title of the source *Palagan* presented it as the story of the local landlords (Chaudhuri is the family name of the landlord), the novel, in its title, presents itself as the story of the lower-caste woman character Rangamala. Akhtar consciously and repeatedly uses this lower-caste identity in her narration and ascribes an irreversible power to this lower-caste woman. In the opening section itself, which narrates that Rangamala has been killed and the slayer is returning to the palace of the landlord with the head of the woman, as proof of the killing, the narrator describes an uncanniness in the surrounding, as if the nature was responding angrily to the killing, and interprets this uncanniness as an omen- "As if it is not the butchered head of that lower-caste woman that is being brought, rather a wildfire is approaching, which will extinguish the whole of the Chaudhari family." (Akhtar, 2010, 7)<sup>18</sup> Again, compared to the source stories, Akhtar has created and given voice to other women and low-caste characters like the mother and wives of the landlords, servants, slaves, performers and fighters.

In comparison to both these authors, Harishankar Jaladas (1955-present) represents a very different kind of identity and different kind of engagement with 'tradition'. Born in a Dalit Hindu family, he experienced double marginalization, that of a religious minority and a dalit. Jaladas belongs to the *Kaibarta* community, a lower caste community of fishermen. Jaladas has published quite a few fictional and academic (including his doctoral thesis) works surrounding the life of that lower-caste community. The fact that he named his memoir as *Kaibartakatha*<sup>19</sup> (2009) further testifies to his conscious positioning as a Dalit activist. It is from this Dalit perspective that he engaged with 'tradition' in some of his fictional writings. In his novel *Mohana* (2013), he has reconstructed the history of the Kaibartas. Medieval Bengal had witnessed a rebellion by the Kaibartas, led by the Kaibarta chief Divya, against the Pal king Mahipal II (c 1075-1080 AD). Mahipal II lost his life in the battle and the Varendra (Northern Bengal) region was ruled by three successive Kaibarta chiefs, Divya,

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<sup>18</sup> This section is comparable to how the medieval woman Ramayana composer Chandrabati describes the curse of nature witnessed by the citizens of Ayodhya after Ram had abandoned Sita. (see Devsen 2002)

<sup>19</sup> The Story of the *Kaibarta*

Rudyok, and Bhim, until Ramapal (c 1082-1124 AD) re-established Pal authority in that region. (Chowdhury 2015) Though those Kaibrata leaders were landlords and local chiefs, belonging to a higher sub-caste amongst the Kaibartas, the memory of this rebellion has gained much importance in contemporary Dalit movement as an example of a glorious phase of Bengali Dalits.<sup>20</sup> Jaladas re-creates this story in his novel as a reconstruction of the Kaibrata ‘tradition’.<sup>21</sup>

Continuing this project of the reconstruction of ‘tradition’, Jaladas has written an epic novel *Ekalabya* (2016), which narrates the life and time of the epic ‘non-aryan’ character Ekalabya. In the original story as narrated in the *Mahabharata*, Ekalabya was a *Nishad* prince. His skill at archery was better than that of the Pandav and Kaurav princes, leading Dron, the teacher of the princes, to demand Ekalabya’s right thumb as *gurudakshina*<sup>22</sup>. Though hesitant in the beginning, Ekalabya paid *gurudakshina* by cutting his right thumb which ensured that he would never be able to excel further in archery. He continued to appear in the later sections of the *Mahabharata*, as an archer, as an ally to the Kaurava crown-prince Duryadhan, as a warrior against Krishna. The base story of offering his right thumb as *gurudakshina* has been used for long as the epitome of a student’s commitment to the master. Later, this same story has been used by Dalit activists, re-interpreting Ekalabya as an iconic character representing the cruel suppression of the Dalits in Indian Brahminical culture. As a reconstruction of the Dalit ‘tradition’ on a grand scale, Jaladas narrates the whole life of Ekalabya, with detail depiction of the society, politics and personalities of that time.

It must be noted here that through his writings Jaladas has not only re-constructed a Dalit ‘tradition’, not only documented contemporary Dalit lives in Bangladesh<sup>23</sup>, but has also foregrounded a long-avoided issue in contemporary Bangladeshi political culture. The Hindu community, being a shrinking minority community in Bangladesh, has mostly avoided

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<sup>20</sup> e.g., Dalit poet Anil Sarkar has used this memory in a poem reconstructing the Dalit ‘tradition’. (Sarkar 2002)

<sup>21</sup> Before Jaladas, Satyen Sen had also published a novel, titled *Bidrohi Kaibartya* (1969), on the same history.

<sup>22</sup> Payment students were supposed to make to their teachers after the completion of their training under the Brahminic education system.

<sup>23</sup> His first novel *Jaladas* (2008) and another novel *Dahankal* (2010) narrate the contemporary life of Kaibartays as a fishermen community, his novel *Ramgolam* (2012) narrates the life of *Methars*, another out-caste community.

dealing with the patriarchic and casteist practices within the community. While feminist interventions in larger Bangladeshi society have had some influence on the Hindu community as well, the question of caste never got much attention. Jaladas has brought back attention to the issue of caste through his writings, both creative and academic.

Thus, these authors have consciously created literary spaces where Bengali 'tradition' becomes less homogeneous, and the engagement with 'tradition' turns more complex, embedded with recorded instances of, and the potential of, intervening in the immediate political culture. It is interesting how the search for an 'indigenous' Bengali aesthetics visibly avoids those complexities, constructing a sense of 'tradition' that excludes conscious Feminist and Dalit interventions, creating a divided terrain, perhaps reproducing the divide in that process.

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