



“Dehumanization and the Document of Marginalized Life: Satinath Bhaduri’s *Dhorai Charit Manas*”

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Introduction

The marginalised human being is a significant subject in literature. The sorrows, poverty, and resistance of the oppressed and exploited classes of society have profoundly influenced literature. The conflict between the powerful and the deprived or marginalised classes has drawn the creative attention of writers. From the nineteenth century to the progressive literary movement of the twentieth century, the depiction of this struggle has been reflected across various branches of literature—poetry, novels, drama, and short stories. Bengali literature too contains a notable representation of marginal life. Particularly in twentieth-century literature, alongside the realistic portrayal of the lives of peasants, workers, and the marginalised, their struggle for rights and justice is vividly seen. In Satinath Bhaduri’s novel *Dhorai Charit Manas*, the marginalised people emerge as the central characters.

Objective of the Research

Among the writers who emerged during India’s freedom movement, Bengali novelist Satinath Bhaduri was a prominent figure. One of the most pressing issues of the pre-independence era was the economic, social, and political oppression of the marginalised classes. The purpose of this research is to shed light on the problems of the marginalised people and their journey towards emancipation, as reflected in Satinath Bhaduri’s novel *Dhorai Charit Manas*.

Research Methodology

As methodological approaches, both analytical and descriptive methods have been adopted.

We shall now attempt to highlight the subject under discussion through a review of the narrative of Satinath Bhaduri’s *Dhorai Charit Manas*:

Satinath Bhaduri’s *Dhorai Charit Manas* was first published serially in *Desh* magazine—its first part in 1948 and the second in 1950. In book form, the first part appeared in 1949 and the second in 1951, published by Bengal Publishers.

Bhaduri framed *Dhorai Charit Manas* in the structure of Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas*, which itself was composed in the style of the epic *Ramayana*. Thus, paralleling the seven books of the *Ramayana*, Bhaduri organised *Dhorai Charit Manas* into seven sections:

- **First Part:** (1) Adi Kanda, (2) Balya Kanda, (3) Panchayat Kanda, (4) Ramiya Kanda
- **Second Part:** (1) Sagiya Kanda, (2) Lanka Kanda, (3) Hatasha Kanda

In this way, the novelist sought to match the seven sections of Tulsidas’s *Ramcharitmanas* with his own seven divisions. At the same time, through the chronological development of *Dhorai*—from his birth to maturity—Bhaduri portrayed the transformation of a protagonist from Bihar’s Purnea district against the socio-political background of India. The time frame of the novel extends roughly from the Non-Cooperation Movement to the Quit India Movement.

The novel opens with a description of Jiraniya, Tatmatuli, and Dhangartuli. The Tatmas were a community of weavers whose ancestors migrated from Darbhanga district of Bihar to settle in Tatmatuli. Landlord Phukan Mondal gave them shelter, naming the area *Phukan Nagar*, though later it became known as Tatmatuli. Since then, the Tatmas made it their permanent settlement.

Their lives revolved around **Roja (folk healer)**, **Rojgar (livelihood—such as housebuilding or sand sieving)**, and the *Ramayana*, their sacred text. The novelist notes:

“The *Ramayana* serves as a precedent in the speech of their men, especially the elders.”¹

Side by side, the novelist narrates the history of the Dhangars of Dhangartuli. Their ancestors were originally Oraons who migrated from Santhal Parganas. Some of them were Christians. They primarily worked as gardeners and labourers, known for their honesty and diligence, which made them sought-after as workers.

The chapter *Bauka Bawa's Origin* introduces the story of Bauka Bawa. Mute since childhood, he initially begged with his mother, but after her death he renounced begging. Taking a trident, he sat beneath a banyan tree and came to be known as *Bauka Bawa*—a saintly figure among the Tatmas.

It was in Tatmatuli that Dhorai was born, belonging to the Tatma caste. His father died when he was barely eighteen months old. His mother Budhni later married Babulal Chaprasi, and left Dhorai in the care of Bauka Bawa, where he grew up, even joining Bauka in begging.

Nevertheless, Budhni's maternal affection often surfaced, as she would secretly bring food for Dhorai. As the novelist remarks:

"There was never a scarcity of rice at Babulal's house. Had Budhni not secretly fed the boy then, how could Bauka have raised him? At that time, no child singing *choupais* from the *Ramayana* would be refused alms by any householder in town."²

When grown up, Dhorai learned the truth about being left with Bauka, which bred resentment towards his mother. He stopped begging, instead seeking work from Shanichara of Dhangartuli. He began working as a road labourer (*pakkir*). This act broke caste tradition—never before had a Tatma ventured outside caste-based occupation. Consequently, the Panchayat declared him an outcast and even set fire to Bauka's hut. But Bauka refused to incriminate his fellow Tatmas, fearing loss of caste honour. Eventually, recognising Dhorai's generosity, the Panchayat rebuilt his house through collective contributions, restoring his honour.

Dhorai excelled at road-building, mastering its techniques. Around this time, he met Ramiya, a strong, beautiful girl from Munger. Fascinated, he resolved to marry her. With financial help from Bauka—who had received compensation for an injury—Dhorai married Ramiya and began married life.

His first act of protest came when he complained to the authorities about unjust tax increases. This was unprecedented among Tatmas, but the authorities dismissed him with threats. Nevertheless, his community's respect for him grew.

Later, marital discord with Ramiya led Dhorai to leave Tatmatuli, ending the first part of the novel.

The second part narrates his arrival in Koeri Tola, where he confronted more complex caste conflicts and oppressive landlords like Bachchan Singh. Dhorai became a leader in land-rights struggles, supported by allies like Sagiya, Biltā, and Ganouri.

A devastating earthquake struck, followed by Gandhi's visit to Jiraniya, yet the relief was hijacked by the landlords and corrupt intermediaries. Political disillusionment deepened when Congress leaders, including Ladli Babu, revealed themselves to be protectors of the elite rather than the oppressed.

Ultimately, disenchanted, Dhorai joined Rammanohar Lohia's *Azad Dasta*, a revolutionary group. Here he was given the titles *Dhoraiji* and later *Ramayanji*.

The novel ends tragically. Wanted by the authorities for participating in the Quit India Movement, Dhorai goes into hiding. His fatherly affection for a boy named Antony (possibly his lost son) adds a poignant dimension, but he later learns Antony is not his child. With Ramiya dead and no family left, he feels utterly alone. Finally, broken in spirit, Dhorai walks along the Kosi-Siliguri road towards surrender before the magistrate, marking the conclusion of *Dhorai Charit Manas*.

Now we shall highlight *Dhorai Charit Manas* by Satinath Bhaduri in the light of **dehumanization and marginalized life**.

The novel *Dhorai Charit Manas* is primarily based on the struggles of the *antyaj* or marginalized community. On one hand, they had to fight against colonial exploitation, and on the other, they had to resist the oppression of indigenous feudalism. To free themselves from these double shackles, the marginalized people chose the path of resistance. In this novel, characters like Dhorai and Biltā stand as representatives of this subaltern class.

The novelist depicts the brutality of Anokhi Babu, the eldest son of the landlord, in this way:

"The affairs of Babu Saheb were managed by his elder son Anokhi Babu. Yet, he could not remain content. He had once counted twenty-five lashes on Luchua the chowkidar, and then imposed a fine of one rupee."⁵¹

The novel is replete with such instances of **discriminatory practices**. The division between the upper classes and the marginalized masses is guarded by the wall of wealth and inequality. The disparity between the educated and the uneducated creates a chasm between what is called the 'civilized' and the so-called 'primitive'. The differences in mindset between villagers and townspeople repeatedly push marginalized people into inferiority complexes. Furthermore, the endless divisions of caste, class, and community have historically kept these people in a perpetual state of deprivation.

In the novel we witness a **poverty-stricken, deprived rural society**. Though a handful of privileged people such as Anokhi Babu—the opportunist Congress worker and son of Babu Saheb—do appear, the vast majority are poor. Poverty itself has become the barrier of their lives, forcing them into daily struggles. The novelist observes:

"For the Tatmas the year has been very bad. Work has become difficult to find. The wage was only six annas, and even then the Babu brothers imposed all sorts of demands."⁶¹

Satinath in his novel *Chitragupt's File* also highlights the oppression of the marginalized by landlords:

“How many months had really passed after Hindustan’s freedom? Only August, September, October, November, December, and now January. Merely five months. But in the village of Shironia, only Ayodhya Choudhury had attained independence.”⁶²

Through his fiction, Satinath consistently exposed the **harrowing realities of oppressed rural society**. Similarly, Assamese novelist Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami) in her renowned novel *Iaruingam* also portrays the exploitation of marginalized people. She writes:

“All the villagers stored their paddy together in one granary. Afterwards, it was distributed. But when some households could not complete their harvesting, soldiers cut away half their standing crop. Soon after, the army set its eyes on the granary. Before that, the Japanese had come and gone. Now the white sahibs were coming. Nobody knew what they might do. Fear gripped people’s minds.”⁵²

In her writings too, there is a resonance of **human dignity for the marginalized**.

In reality, the marginalized are deeply religious. Historian Ranajit Guha calls the subaltern class the “*pichhre-barg*” (backward class) and remarks on their consciousness:

“One of the most distinctive features of subaltern consciousness is religiosity. By religiosity I do not merely mean loyalty to religious institutions, but that alienated state of mind which, under its influence, cannot perceive the essence of worldly phenomena accurately, attributing qualities of one subject to another. Thus, what is worldly appears supernatural, and what is essentially human is mistaken as divine.”⁶⁹

This raises the question: Are the subaltern and marginalized the same? In this regard, researcher Ruma Bandyopadhyay explains:

“Those placed at the very bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy are marked by *tamas*. Thus, below Brahmins, Kshatriyas, and Vaishyas stand the Shudras. They are considered embodiments of darkness, engaged in mean occupations, untouchable by caste, poor due to economic inequality, illiterate in education, and superstitious in culture. These oppressed, untouchable, backward people form the lower class.”⁷⁰

This community is easily deceived. For instance, some tricksters placed an idol of *Gandhi Baba* inside a pumpkin and used it to collect money for liquor. But Dhorai, though born into this marginalized community, reveals a spark of **consciousness and protest**. Ruma Bandyopadhyay notes:

“Even though the Tatmas’ beliefs are ingrained in Dhorai’s blood, he possesses an extraordinary power of judgment. Within this awareness lies the seed of the future rebel Dhorai. When he carried the pumpkin painted with Gandhi Baba’s image on his head, he doubted why Gandhi would appear in others’ vessels but not in his own. Though unable to voice disbelief, he consoled himself by thinking perhaps his devotion lacked strength. Yet the very suspicion signals awakening.”⁷¹

For the masses of colonial India, Gandhi was a divine figure who they believed would grant them freedom. In *Dhorai Charit Manas*, both Dhorai and Bilta dream of a *Ramrajya* through Gandhi. But their faith begins to falter when corrupt landlords like Ladli Babu become chairmen of district boards through Congress patronage. The novelist writes:

“A few days later, somehow, Ladli Babu became chairman of the District Board.”⁷²

Scholar Shrabani Ray, in her essay “*Gandhi and the Mahatma: The Contradictions in the Novel*”, remarks:

“The landlord Baccan Singh, with thousands of bighas of land, introduced himself as a ‘peasant’ while crushing the Santals and Koeris underfoot. His younger son Ladli Babu was warmly embraced as a Congress worker and soon became leader of the Rajputs and Bhumihars, while the selfless Master Sahib lost importance within the party.”⁷³

Satinath’s elder brother Sribhuthnath Bhaduri noted:

“In the third part of *Dhorai*, he had planned to depict post-independence political developments—disorder in governance, bureaucracy, mismanagement, old political workers seeking state favors, greed, selfishness, the Rajput-Bhumihar-Kayastha-Harijan issues—all of which later appeared in his satirical short stories. He had intended to capture these in *Dhorai*’s third part.”⁴⁴

Unfortunately, that part of the novel was never written.

Later, even Ladli Babu and the Circle Manager approach Dhorai with election proposals. The Circle Manager addresses Dhorai respectfully with “*tumi*” (you) instead of the derogatory “*tui*”. The novelist writes:

“Even the Circle Manager Sahib knew Dhorai, called him by name, addressed him as *tumi* instead of *tui*. Dhorai’s heart swelled with pride.”⁸⁴

Here, Dhorai as a representative of the marginalized asserts himself, defying inequality. This is where Satinath’s **originality** lies, setting him apart from other writers.

In *Dhorai Charit Manas*, he elevates marginalized people to the central position of the narrative. After centuries of humiliation, the characters attempt to merge into the **mainstream society**. Dhorai, for instance, challenges the *Tatma* society’s superstition and barriers. Traditionally, the Tatmas’ occupation was cleaning wells. But Dhorai joined work on the Kooshi-Siliguri road (which they called *pakki*). The Mahatos and Nayebs organized a panchayat against him, excommunicating him:

“Stop the rascal’s hookah and water!”⁸⁹

Yet they could not suppress him. Dhorai, unlike his community, refused to accept restrictions. One researcher writes:

“Sitting by the river, dangling his feet from a wooden plank, he watched the grey-winged cranes and wondered at caste discrimination. Perhaps the white cranes despised the grey ones just as the Babus despised

Tatmas and Dhangars. His rebellious mind asked—does having grey wings mean their hookah and water should be stopped forever?”⁹⁰

Another striking episode occurs at Sonaborga. From Maghuddas he learns:

“Tatmas are not an inferior caste. They are actually musicians, almost Brahmins—if not entirely, then just below them. In many western regions, Tatmas have taken the name Kanouji Tatmas and wear the sacred thread.”⁹¹

Encouraged, Dhorai, Rabia, and others wish to wear the sacred thread. But the priests and Mahatos opposed them. The elders feared divine wrath. In anger, Dhorai thundered:

“Kurmish may wear it, but if we wear the sacred thread, will the earth burst open and water gush forth?”⁹²

Ruma Bandyopadhyay observes:

“When Tatmas from nearby villages could adopt the sacred thread without disaster, why should Dhorai’s group not? Ultimately, the Tatmas united, brought a Brahmin, and performed the *upanayana*. From then on they became ‘Das’; and Dhorai, as a devotee, became Dhorai Das. Thus he inadvertently assumed leadership of his community.”⁹³

From this point, Dhorai’s rebellion gathers force. He becomes the leader of the Tatmas and eventually joins the freedom struggle under Gandhi’s leadership.

Conclusion:

Although society continuously demeaned the marginalized, they were in no way inferior to the so-called ‘civilized’ classes. Through the character of Dhorai, Satinath Bhaduri reveals deep empathy for the *antyaj*. The marginalized not only recognized the mechanisms of social and political exploitation but also overcame inferiority with dignity, asserting themselves as sovereign beings. Herein lies the true achievement of Satinath Bhaduri’s *Dhorai Charit Manas*.

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