

leather exports during the nine-month period have been placed at Rs 395 crore. And according to the Trade Development Authority's projections, export earnings from leather in January-March 1982 are expected to be around Rs 105 crore, so that total export earnings in 1981-82 would be Rs 410 crore.

The Export Promotion Council for Finished Leather is even more optimistic and holds that it would be possible to hit the export target of Rs 430 crore fixed for 1981-82. There have been brisk enquiries for footwear components from Italy, USA, UK and West Germany and bulk orders for shoe uppers and finished leather from the East European countries. The USSR is emerging as an important buyer of leather and leather products from India. The demand for sole leather, which had been disrupted by the Iran-Iraq war, has also started picking up.

These are encouraging developments no doubt. But will the leather industry be able to take advantage of them fully? In fact many of the Indian participants in the last leather fair at Paris frankly admitted that they would not be in a position to execute bulk orders for all the items they

were displaying. Most manufacturers are faced with continuous scarcity of accessories and machinery for proper fitting and finishing to produce quality leather products. There is also much to be desired with regard to creative product ideas and product designs.

With a view to strengthening the export base, the government has asked the leather industry to explore possibilities of joint collaboration ventures with overseas buyers, backed up by adequate marketing tie-ups with them. The industry has also been invited to take advantage of the facilities offered under the scheme for 100 per cent export-oriented units.

Commerce Ministry sources have indicated that the accent will be on export of value-added leather goods rather than finished leather. They have also held out the assurance that 'irksome' procedures, both in respect of import of raw materials and industrial licensing, are being reviewed. The government has decided to permit additional capacity for finished leather and the new capacity is to be set up mostly in states which at present have no leather finishing units. The government, it has been suggested, may even consider import of finished leather, to boost exports of leather goods.

had been co-opted by the ruling powers. And hence their indifference to basic questions, an indifference that was absent among the Gujarati poets (at a different level, GPD also has noted this difference in attitude). Consequently, contrary to GPD's conclusion, I came away with the impression that if Marathi dalit literature is to "come up with almost revolutionary answers", a completely new crop of writers untainted by the politics of co-option have to come up.

That is one point. The second and related point is the surprisingly middle class nature of the whole affair. It is true that one major theme of dalit poetry is rural oppression, but not only is the writer urban middle class (itself a debilitating factor) but the attitude is also middle class. This was reflected in the lackadaisical manner in which the discussion on language was conducted. That dalit literature, after more than a decade of existence, is not very serious in coming to grips even with the primary contradiction between writing for the oppressed and yet using the sanskritised language of the educated is indeed surprising. If dalit writers had come to grips with this problem they would have discovered — as revolutionary poets in Andhra have discovered — that there is a whole sea of new problems awaiting them. For it is only urban middle class Telugu (or Marathi or whatever) that has a more or less uniform nature throughout the state. The moment you get down to writing in the language of the rural poor, you enter the realm of dialects and face a new contradiction: that between authenticity and intelligibility. For revolutionary literature to be authentic and to really appeal to the people you are writing for and about, the language has to be that of the local people; but an excessively localised dialect makes it unintelligible to many who speak the same language. Right now it is this problem that is being debated most vigorously in the pages of journals like Varavara Rao's *Srjana* — by revolutionary poets in Andhra. That dalit poetry has not yet even recognised the existence of this contradiction (surely, the dialect of the rural poor in Western Maharashtra cannot be the same as in Aurangabad) appears to indicate that dalit poetry as it is today is quite far from "coming up with almost [if not quite?] revolutionary answers",

K BALAGOPAL

Waltair,  
January 28,

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## LETTER TO EDITOR

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### Dalit Literature

I HAPPENED to attend the Lokayan seminar on Gujarati-Marathi dalit literature as a representative of the Revolutionary Writers' Association of Andhra Pradesh. GPD's account of the seminar (*EPW*, January 16) is not exactly exceptionable but slightly off-target. He appears to have missed what was the most remarkable fact about the seminar its explicitly political tone. Indeed, had there been any apolitical or anti-political individuals at the seminar (mercifully there were none) they could have legitimately complained that it was 'politics' that everybody was discussing and not literature.

The question that was repeatedly raised — rather obliquely by GPD himself and more explicitly by Manishi Jani and Punalekar — was whether the dalit movement had any future ahead of it if it refused to define its goals. What does the movement wish to achieve? What particular kind of liberation does it have in mind? The

Marathi dalit writers had a routine answer to this. Arun Kamble says: "aim of *the* movement is humanism; liberty, equality and fraternity; absence of exploitation". Arjun Dangle is even more inclusive: "all the revolutions that have happened anywhere - Ambedkar, Phule, Marx, Mao, Lenin..." (I only hope I have not misunderstood their Hindi). Unfortunately we have seen too many expansive 'total revolutionaries' to be happy with such formulations, especially when Dangle adds: "class antagonism of the Marxist model does not exist in India". But perhaps what was more striking was their indifference towards the whole question. Their only response to the deep-felt questioning of their Gujarati counterpart, Manishi Jani, was a stony silence. They had 'arrived'. Their poetry had entered school/college textbooks. (That is no mean achievement. There can be no two views on the matter.) As was even suggested by somebody they