

Chapter 2

Ambedkarite Thought and Emergence of Resistance in Dalit Fiction

The caste system of India is primarily a social system unique to India which has survived more than three thousand years and has adapted itself to current situations in the course of time. The issue of its survival is somewhat ironic: on the one hand, it looks so rigid and on the other hand it is so dynamic that it constantly reinvents new ways to keep its existence intact and powerful.

The caste system can be termed as all pervasive and it is intricate and ubiquitous in India. It is important for the self-identification of people. It touches the life of a person before her/his birth and also affects her/him even after death. The caste system is a system based on birth and ancestry which puts its followers arbitrarily in the fixed hierarchy of status/purity without any chance of mobility or escape. Anupama Rao (2003) defines caste as, “religio-ritual form of personhood, a social organization of the world through the phenomenology of touch, an extension of the concept of stigma from the facticity of biological bodies to metaphorical collectivities such as the body politic, and most importantly, it is an apparatus that regulates sexuality” (6). Caste can be described as a socio-religious formation which governs the persons of a group in such a way that some of its members are privileged at the cost of the others. Its simultaneous rigidity and adaptability are its main characteristics. These two characteristics are contradictory to each other but, in terms of everyday life, they are complementary to each other in the caste system.

Caste can be situated at the local level. It creates many local circles where its members interact with each other. This creates possibilities of self-recognition and self-governance for these local circles on caste lines. These circles can be often found in villages, where most of the local villagers know people belonging to their caste in other villages. But within the village, it is very clear that social interaction is established along the axis of caste, where there are distinctions in caste locality where caste rules are sharply visible. I argue that a particular caste's social relations are limited to the circle they are part of and rarely there is an

establishment of social relationship, particularly of marriage, outside this circle. In most of the cases the sense of belonging to a caste group is strongest within the village. As one comes near to his/her village the caste pride or caste consciousness starts becoming stronger, and as one moves away from the caste circle in the village, these identities start intermixing with other identities such as religion, language, state and culture. This can be observed in migrant workers who leave their village circles to venture into territories where he/she is a laborer, visiting many places, meeting diverse people, befriending many of the same and different castes from his/her village. But when he/she returns to his/her village, he/she needs to follow the rules of the caste or to face severe punishments. In this sense villages are the space where this caste consciousness is at the centre. The villages are also the spaces where caste demarcations are visible and practices of untouchability are a part of everyday life of the lower caste communities. The villages are the primary upholders of the caste system in modern India. In this sense, I argue that the caste system is a very local and a psychological entity. This could be identified as *varna* and *jati*; *varna* works at the national and international level which emphasizes the four major categories of the caste system and *jati* works at the local level which is countless and varied at the local level (Parmar 21; Waughray 16-22). The system penetrates the psyche of a person so thoroughly that it forces him/her to identify and locate himself/herself to a particular position given to himself/herself in the caste order. One tries to know the caste identity of the other person by enquiring about the last name, native place, caste belonging, ancestral deity etc. Caste creates constant self-authorization where one is always searching for the place and if one does not know the position he/she is made aware of that position, particularly if he/she is from the lower caste or the Dalit community. Dr. Ambedkar in his *Annihilation of Caste* (1936) notes that:

Ask a Mahomedan or a Sikh who he is. He tells you that he is a Mahomedan or a Sikh, as the case may be. He does not tell you his caste although he has one, and you are satisfied with his answer. But you are not satisfied if a person tells you that he is a Hindu. You feel bound to inquire into his caste. Why? Because so essential is caste in the case of a Hindu that without knowing it you do not feel sure what sort of a being he is (208-281).

Caste is practiced in south Asian countries, particularly India. The rules of caste are interconnected to religious doctrines and scriptures which provides legitimacy to these practices. Consequently, the caste system controls the lives of millions of Indians especially

so, called Hindus and the Dalit who were formerly known as untouchables. In the context of the India the presence of the caste system is also there in Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism. This system of caste has ingrained into the social as well as religious rules of the majority of religions of India. The caste consciousness is present in most of all followers of different religions in India. The presence and practices of untouchability is part of above-mentioned religions and even conversion does not change the caste status of the person.

This brings the question of what is untouchability? And who is untouchable? The Navsarjan Trust, a grass root organization working on the problem of untouchability and to empower the Dalits since 1989, defines it as “a direct product of the caste system. It is not merely the inability to touch a human being of a certain caste or sub-caste. It is an attitude on the part of a whole group of people that relates to a deeper psychological process of thought and belief, invisible to the naked eye, translated into various physical acts and behaviours, norms and practices” (“What Is Untouchability?”). The untouchable is a person who does not hold any place in the caste system, he is outside the caste system in the textual sense but is very central to the existence of the village and its economy. He is the person whose labour does not hold any entitlement or wages in the village economy. He is available anytime, to do any kind of work, for all of the village, who is given meagre sustenance by the village without any wage, entitlement, dignity or self-respect. While comparing the conditions of the jews and untouchables, Dr. Ambedkar in his *Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto* notes that the problem of untouchability is not the problem of untouchables only, it is the problem of the touchable or the upper caste. The untouchability is imposed and inflicted on the untouchables, segregation in the case of untouchables is compulsory unlike the jews where it is voluntary (*BAWS, Vol. 5 3-5*).²

The caste system has profoundly affected Dalits who were formerly known as untouchables. The untouchables were kept outside the structure of the caste system but their existence was fundamental to the existence of the caste system. Untouchability is fundamental to the structure of the caste system and cannot be separated from the caste system. One cannot eradicate untouchability without annihilating the caste system because it is through untouchability that

² B. R. Ambedkar, *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches (BAWS) here onwards*.

the caste system establishes its power and hegemony. The notion of purity and pollution which is very integral to the caste system is the key strategy through which the caste system is organized. Untouchables are considered the most impure, so impure that they are outside the fold of the caste system itself. They were forced to do works like, but not limited to, manual scavenging, carrying the dead etc. which are considered as polluted works. According to Vedas, those who are close to this pollution or impurity are declared as impure and polluted. Alan Dundes argues, “Two potent sources of impurity emanate from the body—one arises from the bodily wastes and emissions and the other from death” (qtd. in Parmar 22). This impure work made them so impure and polluted that they carried pollution from birth. They were named as Panchamas, Chandalas or Pariah. The origin of the social order where untouchables are forced to such works and degradations are sanctioned by the religion itself. The entry on Hinduism in the *Britannica Encyclopedia* argues further that

The caste system, which has organized Indian society for millennia, is thoroughly legitimated by and intertwined with Hindu religious doctrine and practice.....Four social classes, or varnas—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras—provide the simplified structure for the enormously complicated system of thousands of castes and subcastes. (“Hinduism”)

The earliest reference to the caste system is found in the creation myth of *the Purusha Sukta* where it is written that from the body of the Divine being or Creator all were created. Brahmin from mouth, Kshatriya from hands, Vaishyas from thighs, and Shudras from the feet (Ambedkar, *BAWS*, Vol. 7 22-23). This creation myth also creates graded hierarchy and a system of graded inequality where Brahmins observe ultimate power and monopoly over knowledge and as interpreters of Dharma, Kshatriya the warcraft and rule/kingdom, Vaishya the businesses, and Shudra services the above mentioned three castes. Dalits or formerly known untouchables are outside the purview of caste system and are considered as lowest of the beings, sometimes lower than the Animals or as nobodies (Berg 92). In the village republic the superiority of the touchables and inferiority of the untouchables are the established order by the touchables and this is the law. Everyone has to follow this law, especially the untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar notes that in this order “The Untouchables have no rights against the Touchables. For them there is no equal right, no justice by which that which is due to the Untouchables is allowed to them. Nothing is due to them except what the Touchables are prepared to grant. The Untouchables must not insist on rights. They should pray for mercy and

favour and rest content with what is offered” (*BAWS, Vol. 5* 25). This is the reality of the village republic. It is the republic of the caste Hindus, by the caste Hindus and for the caste Hindus. The untouchables are outside this village republic and outside the Hindu fold. Dr. Ambedkar notes that for the untouchables this is “an Empire of the Hindus over the Untouchables. It is a kind of colonialism of the Hindus designed to exploit the Untouchables. The Untouchables have no rights. They are there only to wait, serve and submit” (*BAWS, Vol. 5* 26).

Gail Omvedt (2011) observes that the rise of Brahminism was seen particularly from the sixth to the tenth century especially with the confrontation, often violent, with Buddhism and Jainism, which also resulted in the political hegemony of Brahminism (2). She notes that “The main themes of brahmanic Hinduism were the identification of orthodoxy with acceptance of the authority of the Vedas and the Brahmins and the idea of *varnashrama dharma*— the fourfold system of caste and the idea of life—as ideal social structure” (2). This system is also known as the Varna system and it is hierarchical. The *varnashram*, for Gandhi, was solely based on the distribution of labour and work, not the distribution of laborers or the followers. According to Gandhi, caste has nothing to do with the varna and ashrama (Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* 326). For Gandhi this is an ideal system where everyone is free and equal, something like a utopian state. On the other hand, for Dr. Ambedkar, caste and Varna systems are very deeply connected, he notes that “The caste system is not merely a division of labourers—which is quite different from division of labour—it is a hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other. In no other country is the division of labour accompanied by this gradation of labourers” (Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* 234). This hierarchy he believed gets its sanction from religious texts and the mythical idea of the varna where one is born in one’s varna and has to live according to its rule. The system of varna was understood by Gandhi as a division of people on the basis of occupation and which provided some mobility according to work and merits but the present system is based on birth, where the member of the caste system is branded at birth and cannot escape it till death. *Manusmriti* written by Manu is a text that argued that the Hindu social order must have standardized the caste rules based on dharma. Later the British administration used *dharmashastra* like *Manusmriti* to form the basis of the colonial legal system, legalizing and imposing caste rules uniformly on the population (Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* 269; Waughray 70-71).

There are two views of the origin of the caste system one is based on the theory of Aryan invasion, where the Aryans were seen as the invaders, who invaded the indigenous population of this country and after subjugating imposed culture and rule of servitude on them. This view has been shared by Mahatma Phule in his *Gulamgiri* where he tried to show that various *avtaras* of Vishnu can be seen as the various invasions on the indigenous populations (Phule 1991). Omvedt notes that with the arrival of the westerners and colonial rule, and establishment of the linguistic relation between Germanic languages and Sanskrit language the Aryan race theory got the attention of the leaders like Lokmanya Tilak to accept the Aryan race theory, to project Hindus as a superior race and others as inferior (Omvedt 3). Dr. Ambedkar believed that there was existence of migration of the Aryans but he does not subscribe to the theory of invasion. For Ambedkar India was from the beginning a heterogenous continent with existence of multiple cultural and indigenous population. He also rejected that there was a question of difference of race in the Indian context. In his *Annihilation of Caste* Dr. Ambedkar makes this point saying, “As a matter of fact the caste system came into being long after the different races of India had commingled in blood and culture. To hold that distinctions of castes are really distinctions of race, and to treat different castes as though they were so many different races, is a gross perversion of facts” (237-238). So, it should be noted that the caste system like the race is a social construct and not a natural construct as it is shown. Ambedkar believed that during the earlier time when the agricultural settlers started settling and constructing the villages, there was a constant fear of invasion, so to deal with that the villagers must have made a contract with the Broken Men, who were part of the defeated tribe, who were already living on the outskirts of the village, to guard the village in return of certain material conditions. This contract later on may be imposed by force and perverted in the compulsion to live outside the village and compulsory servitude to village, in this manner the Dalit or untouchables may have come to existence (275-277).

Dalit is not the official term through which the Dalits are recognized in India. The term for untouchables officially recognized and accepted by the Government of India is Scheduled castes (SC) this term refers to the castes which are listed in the Schedule. This schedule was created and inserted in the Government of India Act, 1935. This scheduled represents the castes which belong to the cluster of castes which are known as the Untouchables (Berg 2020 5-6).

Annapurna Waughray in *Capturing Caste in Law: The Legal Regulation of Caste and Caste-Based Discrimination* notes that it was the efforts of the Dr. Ambedkar which made the Dalit Pan-Indian category. The term Untouchable which was identified around 1909 was just the name describing the particular ritualistic discrimination faced by certain castes, it was Dr. Ambedkar who gave this term the all-India political and social legacy and status (Waughray 2013 81). After independence this schedule became part of the constitution of India and is in force since then and now it contains around eleven hundred castes in it (Ibid. 82; Parmar 2014 25-26). Prakash Louis has explained the evolution of the term Dalit as: “The term Dalit is a past passive participle of the Sanskrit root dal meaning to crack, split, open, etc. Dalana means tearing or causing a burst. Dalit means split, broken, destroyed, scattered, torn asunder.” (qtd. in Parmar 2014 26). On one hand, through this term, Dalits accept their identity as crushed and broken people and on the other hand it also represents an assertion by Dalits that they will not let themselves be crushed by anyone anymore. The term Dalit which is defined as ‘Broken people’ now became the currency through which most of the Scheduled castes identify themselves. This term, although not being officially recognised, is accepted by most of the scheduled castes and it also became the word which harmonizes people belonging to different castes, who share similar experiences. The term Dalit also represents the idea of strength and self-dignity and identity in the modern times. Instead of connoting derogatory meaning like the term ‘Harijan’, the term Dalit depicts strength and respect.

India Untouched, a 2007 documentary by K. Stalin and Drishti Media Collectives, explored the existence of untouchability in modern India. Not much has changed since then. The 2016 Una flogging of Dalits in market, death by suicide of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit student of University of Hyderabad, due to discrimination and exclusion by the university administration and death by suicide of Dr. Payal Tadvi, due to discrimination by her colleagues, Hathras rape case of a Dalit girl and many similar cases are the proofs of constant and ubiquitous presence of caste-based discrimination and atrocities across the country. These and similar cases also prove that caste-based discrimination, untouchability and extreme atrocities towards SCs and STs are part and parcel of India’s present socio-cultural environment and are not a thing of the past. As racism in America and antisemitism in Christian European countries are woven in all facets of life of the people living there, caste is also woven very deeply into the fabric of history,

politics, society, culture and economy of India. It will be difficult to claim that after independence the position of the untouchables and lower caste has changed significantly.

Due to access to education and affirmative action programs by the state these groups have seen some developmental changes in standards of living and upward economic mobility of some degree. But in the caste system of inequality and injustice which can be regarded as the foundation of modern India, freedom and equality for some sections has still remained an object of constant struggle. The caste system of India has proven to be perverse and is become the reason for discrimination and inhuman treatment of some groups by their own fellow country brothers and sisters who considers them inferior. Due to spread of education and social awareness and knowledge of rights and legal policies, resistance towards caste discrimination has been increasing since the Dalit movement and the Dalit women's movement beginning from the 1970s. The rise of several Dalit and lower-caste parties and also the political consciousness and importance of vote politics too has played a role in it. The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party, founded by Kanshi Ram and made famous by Mayavati created a strong sense of the Dalit consciousness at the national level. Last but not least after the liberalization some positive changes have been noticed in the society, such as the expansion of educational opportunities and employment. Due to rise of the social media and awareness of news and communication measures, the incidents of caste discrimination are reported more and this has also been helpful in mobilizing the support for those who are working against caste-discriminations. At the core of this, it can be argued that, the policies and provisions which are drafted in the Indian constitution can be regarded as the principal reason for social, political, and economic changes in India. However, the members of the Dalit community in many parts of the country are still fighting for basic necessities like water, food, land and social acceptance.

Mahatma Jotiba Phule with his wife Savitribai Phule can be considered as the pioneers of the anti-caste movement, who had a clear ideology and will to tackle the caste system. Phule with his wife came to be the couple who devoted their life to fight against the evils of caste and provided tools to fight caste oppression particularly through education. It was Phule who started the school for girls and untouchables. It was Phule who realized that education and knowledge can destroy the shackles of this *Gulaamgiri* of the caste system. Phule opened

school in 1848 and proposed to his wife that she should teach them. Teaching women, particularly lower caste, was so unacceptable at that time that orthodox opponents forced Phule's father to exile Phule and his wife from home.:

Education of women and the lower castes, he believed, deserved priority. Hence at home he began educating his wife Savitribai and opened a girls' school in August 1848. ...Jotirao asked his wife to teach the girls in his school. Stones and brickbats were thrown at her when she was on her way to the school. The reactionaries threatened Jotirao's father with dire consequences if he did not dissociate himself from his son's activities. Yielding to the pressure, Jotirao's father asked his son and the daughter-in-law to leave his house as both of them refused to give up their noble endeavor (xvi).

Phule's principal work is *Gulaamgiri* (Slavery) which was originally published in Marathi is a shudra critique of the caste system and talks about the Aryan invasion theory as the origin of the caste system. Phule pronounced that Brahmins were not the aborigines or indigenous to India and they were the invaders who invaded the land and after conquering the indigenous of this continent they imposed stringent caste rules on them, degrading the indigenous population to slavery. He discussed various *avtaras* of Vishnu and represented them as the various phases of Brahminic conquest. He shows, for instance, the *avtara* of Vamana demonstrates how the wise and just indigenous king Bali was suppressed and defeated by Vamana's cunning and how the cruel Parshurama shed blood of innocents without showing any mercy. Omvedt points out that:

Phule's argument that knowledge, education and science were weapons of advance for the exploited masses was in contrast to all elitist theories that sought to link western science and eastern morals and argue that Indians could maintain their (Brahminical) traditions while adopting science and technology from the west for material development. For Phule, rather Vidya or knowledge was in direct contrast with the Brahminic, ritualistic shastra and was a weapon for equality and human freedom as well as economic advance. He constantly stressed the need for Shudras and ati-Shudras to stand forth and think on their own (28-29).

While talking about the Dalit Movement, Anand Teltumbde draws very significant similarities between Mahatma Phule and Dr. Ambedkar, although both are very far separated in time and

have a different economic, social and educational background, he argues, they intellectually and ideologically share political positioning. Teltumbde writes that:

Both Phule and Ambedkar regarded British rule positively for introducing modernity into the moribund Hindu society but simultaneously both showed its limitations; both repudiated the claims of nationalists that India was a nation; both had no faith in the Indian National Congress; both came to characterise and oppose it similarly; both declared their vehement opposition to Brahminism but still did not hate Brahmins; both were rationalist; both had hated the parasitic class of priests, landlords, moneylenders and capitalists and sought to organise their victims; both emphasised the importance of education in the scheme of liberation of Dalits and backward castes; and so on and so forth (“Theorising the Dalit Movement”).

Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Phule can be distinguished from other anti-caste protesters in two ways. Firstly, while other anti-caste leaders focused on only the upliftment of the lower castes in the Indian society without attacking the caste system Phule and Ambedkar attacked the very system and called for the annihilation of it. Phule through his Aryan Invasion theory presented Brahmins as Invaders and their Brahminic system oppressive and forced on the indigenous population delegitimising the Brahminic rule as an alien rule while establishing indigenous population as the true descendants conquered and tortured by the invaders. Dr. Ambedkar on the other hand attacked the very origin of the caste system that is the beliefs in the Vedas and Scriptures and called for their destruction as the beginning of the annihilation of caste and the foundation of the society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. Secondly, apart from relying on the upper caste for the change Phule and Ambedkar took the different path of education and knowledge through which to equip the untouchables to revolt and fight.

Dr Ambedkar made his life a mission and that mission was of annihilation of caste and upliftment of the millions of Untouchables and women to provide them equal rights and opportunities. His journey started slowly with his Journals, periodical and newspapers *Bahishkrit Bharat*, *Mook Nayak*, *Samta* and *Janta*, *Prabuddha Bharat* and many more. He wrote on the issues of Dalit and their problems since 1919 onwards. His various verbal and written submissions before various commission like Southborough Commission (1919), Montagu-Chelmsford reforms (1919), Simon Commission (1928), Three Round Table

conferences, and “States and Minorities” proposed as the draft constitution before the Constitution Assembly are few of the examples of his constant and consistent action for the betterment of not only his people but for the rights of all. He was not the leader who needed a show of constant presence on the political field, his actions were more impactful, his works and writing in most of the cases end up reforming rules and also originated many reforms. His articles were well researched and full of relevant information. His insights in the problem were precise and impressive to the point it looks like he is writing about the future in his pages. As Dr. M.V Pylee observed that “Ambedkar brought to bear on his task a vast area of qualities, erudition, scholarship, imagination, logic and eloquence and experience. Whenever he spoke in the house usually to reply to the criticisms advanced against provisions of Draft Constitution there emerged a clear and lucid exposition of provisions of the Constitution. As he sat down, the mist of doubts vanished as also the clouds of confusion and vagueness” (qtd. in Kuber 1973 149-150). His social activism started from small events and lectures and the major event came as the Mahad Satyagraha. R. Javahar has rightly observed, “Had Dr. Ambedkar confined his attack on Hindu Religious system to verbal outbursts and in usual way as other reformers did in the past, the orthodox and conservative Hindus would have not taken him seriously, but he did not prefer to remain a preacher and became a man of dynamic action. He gave his teachings a practical shape through Mahad Satyagrah” (qtd. in Samel 1999 723).

The Mahad Satyagraha was a well-organized event keeping in mind the objective of that right entitled by the untouchables to all the public places in the Mahad provided by the Bombay governments resolution of the Bombay legislative council move By C.K. Bhole in 1923. It was under the purview of the law that all the untouchables can lawfully access the public places but they were not able to due to severe hostility by the other upper caste and this provided the reason and venue to protest and starting of the important journey of Dalit movement. The Mahad Satyagraha particularly the march towards the Chavdar Tank where Ambedkar led masses of the Depressed Class to drink water and exercise their right to public space and amenities was peaceful and without any ill intent of spreading any malice between the castes. But this step was seen by other caste Hindus as a personal attack on themselves and they got incited and responded with violence. A case was filed against Dr. Ambedkar which was dismissed later, but the news that the tank was purified after this agitation by the upper caste agitated Ambedkar and he announced the new satyagraha or protest against it. 26th December

1927 was chosen for this protest and on 12th December, to preempt this, some orthodox Hindus filed suit against Ambedkar claiming the Tank as private property. But it was not enough to stop the masses gathered there. Following the request from the Collector, Dr. Ambedkar pacified the gathering and requested that the event be conducted peacefully and lawfully.

On 27th December a very radical thing happened. Dr. Ambedkar with his fellow delegates sent a message so strong to the caste Hindus that it created many tremors. On this date at 9 P.M Dr. Ambedkar burnt the copy of *Manusmriti*, in front of the *pandal* of the conference and then buried it in a pit. This message to do away with the caste system of India is a very important point in the history of the anti-caste movement in India. The Mahad Satyagraha established Dr. Ambedkar as a leader in true sense. He respected law and maintained a peaceful and non-violent attitude, maintaining his equipoise and emerged as a true leader of the untouchables who knew where to attack. The burning of the copy of *Manusmriti* was an attack against the ideology of Brahminism and the caste system. The Mahad satyagraha became a major and an important episode in the journey of Dr. Ambedkar's anti-caste struggle and Dalit movement in general. Upendra Baxi evaluates the symbolic and historical significance presenting the following four features. In his "Emancipation as Justice: Babasaheb Ambedkar's Legacy and Vision" he notes these four features:

First, it establishes the emergence of Babasaheb Ambedkar as a leader of the Atisudra masses. Second, it symbolises protest against the worst aspect of Hindu hegemony which denies basic human needs to the untouchables: access to drinking water. Ambedkar thus inaugurates the discourse of equality in access to satisfaction of the most minimum basic needs in the history of Indian jurisprudence. Third, the Mahad satyagraha testifies to Ambedkar's submissiveness to the concept of the rule of law, even when he perceives that the rule of law is no flaming sword with which to liquidate any of the manifold existential horrors and tragedies affecting his people. Fourth, the Mahad satyagraha innovates a tradition of protest (more cogently than the temple entry protests) which challenges the very foundations of the Hindu hegemony (128).

Another very important event in the history of Dr. Ambedkar's Emancipatory and Anti-caste movement was the Poona Pact of 1932. The Poona Pact holds a very serious and coercive position in the movement of Dalit upliftment and their chance of achieving social and political

equality and freedom. The demand for the separate electorate for the Depressed castes was accepted in the Second Round Table Commission (SRTC), which for Ambedkar was of the utmost importance as it will grant the Depressed caste their due political right and a chance to be heard and represented at the political levels. For Gandhi, on the other hand, it was more a personal and religious matter. He believed that it would break the very fabric of Hinduism and destroy it. The British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald even tried to convince Gandhi by saying that “the Depressed Classes will remain part of the Hindu community and will vote with the Hindu electorate on an equal footing” (qtd. in Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* 364). Yet for Gandhi it was a matter of faith and not reason. Gandhi stated that “For me the question of these classes is predominately moral and religious. The political aspect, important though it is, dwindles into insignificance compared to the moral and religious issue” (qtd. in Baxi 1995 132). He believed, when saying, that he was representing the millions of untouchables of India, but this perhaps was questionable. Gandhi’s action was an act of “extreme form of Coercion” in the words of Dr. Ambedkar (*BAWS, Vol. 9* 253). Parmar gives an alternate reading to Gandhi’s opposition of separate electorates for Depressed castes. Parmar notes that

Gandhi’s aim in opposing the scheme of separate electorates for the Depressed Classes is to further the aim not of the Depressed Classes, but of ‘Hinduism’, not the religious interests of Hinduism, but the political interests of the leadership of the Hindu community. Gandhi could visualize the challenge from the leadership of the Muslim community, which could result in a reduction in the seats in the legislatures, and thus the leaders of the Hindu community will lose political autonomy (Parmar 47).

Gandhi started his epic fast unto death until the award of separate electorates was revoked. Dr. Ambedkar was put under immense pressure. Should he not agree to Gandhi’s terms and Gandhi dies, it was likely that his followers would unleash violence on untouchables for the murder of the Mahatma. At last, Ambedkar had to give in to Gandhi’s demands and sign the Poona Pact, giving up the separate electorates for few more reserved seats for Depressed Classes. This started as the grant for the religious communities like Muslims and Sikhs who were given separate electorates to secure their representation against the majority Hindu population. The Muslim league wanted to count the number of seats allotted to the Hindus after the deduction of untouchable community from the Hindu population and Congress emphasized that the untouchables are part of Hinduism and should be counted, but none of these parties ever took seriously the view of the untouchables and what the untouchables want and did nothing to solve

the problem of the untouchability. This could be compared with the demands made by the Southern states of United States of America after the civil war to count slave population to increase their representation in politics but never thought about improving the conditions of the slaves as the history bears witness. The dominant caste Hindus' would use their coercive power in politics and manipulate the election results in favour of the Hindu candidate opposite the Dalit candidate. This would create a serious problem for the representation of the Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar through the separate electorate wished to prevent this happening and to secure the representation of the Dalits. Dr. Ambedkar lamented the loss of a separate electorate as he knew the true value of that precious second vote. According to him if the separate electorate and that second vote is present, then:

No caste-Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect the Untouchable in his constituency or be hostile to their interest if he was made dependent upon the votes of the Untouchables. Today the Untouchables have a few more seats than were given to them by the Communal Award. But this is all that they have. Every other member is indifferent, if not hostile. If the Communal Award with its system of double voting had remained the Untouchables would have had a few seats less but every other member would have been a member for the Untouchables. The increase in the number of seats for the Untouchables is no increase at all and was no recompense for the loss of separate electorates and the double vote (*Annihilation of Caste* 369).

Though the issue of untouchability was articulated as a moral and religious one by Gandhi, Ambedkar recognized that it was never merely a moral or a religious matter; it was in many ways the economic and commercial issue. According to Ambedkar, there were 240 million exploiting the 60 million of untouchables without giving them adequate remuneration. In most of the cases through *begar* and bonded labor untouchables were exploited. Caste Hindus exploited them for their ceremonies and pomp. This structure enabled caste Hindus to feel superior as a master race although they were, in fact, colonial subjects. Ambedkar argued that caste was an economic system where when the economy was rising the Hindus' benefits were secured first and untouchables last and when the economy started falling down the losses of Untouchables were secured first and Hindus' last (Baxi 1995 133). It was noted by Ambedkar that in the 1937 elections after the Poona Pact, from one hundred fifty-one reserved seats the Congress won seventy-eight. From these "the Congress provincial ministries across the country decided not to offer any cabinet post to a single one of the seventy-eighty legislature"

(Ambedkar *Annihilation of Caste* 370). This proved that the attitude of caste Hindus towards untouchables was of hostility and exploitation. When choosing the candidate, the modus operandi of the Congress was noted by Dr. Ambedkar, he observed that “From candidates who came from high caste Hindus, such as Brahmins and the allied communities, those with the highest qualifications were selected. In the case of the Non-Brahmins those with low qualifications were preferred to those with higher qualifications. And in the case of the Untouchables those with little or no qualifications were selected in preference to those who had” (371). There was never a genuine interest of welfare for the untouchables in the heart and mind of Gandhi or any other member of the congress who regarded themselves as the well-wishers and representatives of the untouchables.

Dr. Ambedkar has argued that Congress and Gandhi have done immense injustice to the untouchable community in the political and social life of the nation. In his book *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to Untouchables* (1945) he writes that “There have been many Mahatmas in India whose sole object was to remove Untouchability and to elevate and absorb the depressed Classes, but every one of them has failed in his mission. Mahatmas have come, Mahatmas have gone. But the Untouchables have remained as Untouchables” (Ambedkar *BAWS, Vol. 9* 315). He continues, saying that Gandhi has always talked about abolition of untouchability but he never sat on the fast unto death till the untouchability has been abolished or stopped practicing by the caste Hindus (Parmar 59). Parmar notes that “Gandhi certainly wanted to give equal status to Brahmin and Shudra. However, it is equally true that he has not taken a strong action to address the problem of sociological division” (57). Gandhi as a representative of the untouchables was never true to heart for their upliftment; his patronizing attitudes towards untouchable community was more disabling rather than enabling. His protest regarding the abolition of untouchability never culminated in a permanent concrete output. On the other hand, Dr. Ambedkar’s leadership for the untouchable community was more emancipatory rather than abstract, religious, or moral. He was more attracted towards the achievement of solid political rights, social equality, and complete *swaraj* for the untouchables. Parmar notes that:

The Mahad Tank Satyagraha, Chawdar Lake Satyagraha, the Round Table Conferences and the Poona Pact established the importance of Ambedkar in the context of the anti-colonial movement. From his moves in these socio-political events one could easily

mark that Ambedkar linked the emancipation of the Dalits with Swaraj. However, at the same time, he was not willing to mortgage the political future of the Dalits to the mercies of the upper caste, Hindu leadership of the Congress. What he sought was a measure of political autonomy for Dalits within the national movement (48).

Freedom and social equality were Ambedkar's goals and he was genuine enough to transform his ideas and will into concrete form into laws, rights, and protective legal resolutions through his will and hard work. When Dr. Ambedkar became the chairman of the drafting committee of the Constitution of independent India he knew that this was the last chance that some safeguards or special provisions were made for the untouchables. The Constitution of India became the first constitution which contains a provision of offense in the Bill of Rights. The article 17 of the Indian Constitution reads that "'Untouchability' is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of 'Untouchability' shall be an offense punishable in accordance with law" (GOI 8). Although the real mission of abolition of caste was sidelined, the system of castes was not abolished but untouchability and discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, race, birth, gender, colour and religion was abolished and made illegal. The system of reservation for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were provided reserved seats in the political election, jobs and admission in to academic institutions which was termed as a compensatory discrimination by Marc Galantar (Galantar 77-94).

For Ambedkar caste is mainly a social problem which is connected to the mind and attitude of the people particularly caste Hindus. He recognized that caste is notional and that attitudinal change is needed if one wants to eradicate caste. Ambedkar, in his *Annihilation of Caste*, declared that "caste is a notion; it is a state of mind. The destruction of caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change" (286). As I have stated earlier, the primary difference between Dr. Ambedkar's anti-caste movement was that he understood the real source of this problem of caste is the religious backing of this evil system of caste and he was courageous enough to attack at the point and clearly stating that "People are not wrong in observing caste. In my view, what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of caste. If this is correct, then obviously the enemy you must grapple with is not the people who observe the caste, but the shastras which teach them this religion of caste.... The real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the shastras" (286-287).

In Ambedkar one finds the true leader of the depressed class who led Dalits, tribes, women and other marginalized groups, towards a future which consists of hope and self-respect. His ideas of emancipatory struggle for the untouchable was inspired from the genuine experience felt by him as an untouchable and his goal was to make everyone feel how he felt free in the United States when he was studying there. But he was realist in his approach, he knew that this was a herculean task and caste Hindus will not easily give up their domination and control of labor and means of reproduction so easily. His efforts gradually moved towards from social to political rights, when he realized that social equality cannot be easily achieved, or he lost hope in reformation of Hinduism, he started his efforts for securing political rights and power for the depressed castes. For him physical freedom and political equality was more important than the metaphysical or spiritual matters. He believed in the principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.

Caste for Dr. Ambedkar was the ultimate problem of the Untouchables which has suppressed millions of Untouchables under the domination of the upper castes and so for that he started studying caste system. For him annihilation of caste became the primary and ultimate mission which he studied till his death. There are three major works we can identify from his corpus which focuses solely on the caste and caste system. First, the 1916 paper titled “Castes of India: Their Mechanisms, Genesis and Development” read by B. R. Ambedkar at an anthropological seminar of Alexander Goldenweiser in New York on 9 May 1916. Second, the undelivered speech published in 1936 *Annihilation caste* and the last is his unpublished book *Untouchables or the Children of India's Ghetto* (1989) where he compares untouchability with slavery and the conditions of jews in Europe and captures his keen insights into the problem of caste system and probable solutions for its annihilation.

In his 1916 paper Dr. Ambedkar tries to explore the origin, mechanism and spread of the caste system in India. He understood that although caste is the local problem of India it can cause greater mischief if it spreads to the other parts of the world. Because it prohibits intermarriage and does not provide any chance of proper connection to the outsider. At that time Dr. Ambedkar believed that endogamy is the main characteristic of the caste system as he notes

that “This critical evaluation of the various characteristics of caste leave no doubt that prohibition, or rather the absence of intermarriage—endogamy, to be concise—is the only one that can be called the essence of caste when rightly understood” (Ambedkar *BAWS, Vol. 1. 8*).

Caste operates through endogamy and to maintain endogamy the problem of surplus women and surplus men should be dealt with. The problem of surplus men was conveniently dealt with because he is a man and an asset to the caste so he is married off to the unmarried girl who is not yet marriageable. The problem of the surplus woman was dealt by either *Sati* or permanent widowhood where strict restrictions were imposed on the widow’s movement and space where she can be. The caste system also promoted girl marriage as one of its mechanisms to maintain its endogamous nature dealing with the contractual marriage within the caste at a very early age (*BAWS, Vol. 1. 13*). As regarding the origin of the caste, he believed that the origin of the mechanism of endogamy is central to the establishment and maintenance of the caste systems. He was of the opinion that during some point in the history the Brahmin caste decided to follow the system of endogamy and enclosed it from everyone and this led to the imitation of the same by other castes the nearer the caste the severe the imitation. Because he believed that Brahmins at the beginning may have not possessed so much power over other castes and only controlled their own domains. He also believed that caste existed long before Manu. Manu has only philosophized and anthologized various ancient and prevalent local traditions in a written form. This point where the priestly caste has detached itself from the general body of the people and enclosed itself through the mechanism of endogamy may have been the point where the varna system which was based on work and which provided mobility became rigid varna system based on birth which prohibits mobility or any organic contact with other castes. Ambedkar concluded that caste cannot operate in singularity; it is always in the plural. Caste creates the constant process of otherization through which it decides the position of the observers of the caste. The voluntary endogamy for some became mandatory for others and it created a system of caste where deviation from the caste rules led to punishment and excommunication and the creation of other castes or sub-castes. Through this, the whole Varna system has created the small units of castes which are of imitative nature and which seek constant upward mobility in the system yet maintaining the rigidity of practice which looks authoritative and provides authenticity.

Annihilation of Caste is an undelivered speech prepared for the Jat-Pat Todak Mandal by Dr. Ambedkar, and when Mandal officials read the speech they found it unacceptable and told Dr. Ambedkar to modify it to make more palatable for the caste Hindu population, but Dr. Ambedkar rejected any request of modification and the Mandal, fearing backlash from Hindu population, cancelled the Conference. Dr. Ambedkar published this speech in 1936. It was well received and established Dr. Ambedkar as a most radical social-reformist who was fighting against caste and wanted to annihilate it. It was noticed by Gandhi and there was a debate on this matter between Gandhi and Dr. Ambedkar where Gandhi resorted to conspicuous and ambiguous arguments totally missing the essence of Dr. Ambedkar speech. Dr. Ambedkar in reply explained his points with rational proficiency and well backed research and strong, relevant, logical arguments.

Annihilation of Caste can be considered as Dr. Ambedkar's best work in his anti-caste protest. This speech contains one of the most articulate attacks on the caste system with equally articulate reasons for the foundation of the new society on the basis of the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. "What is your ideal society if you do not want caste, is a question that is bound to be asked of you. If you ask me, my ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity. And why not?" writes Dr. Ambedkar (260). Dr. Ambedkar with his academic acumen produces arguments against the caste system and why and how it should be abolished. He believed that the caste system does not promote the fraternity which is needed as a cement to strengthen the society as a whole. The caste system has created the graded system which promotes enmity between castes and limits their interaction to their caste only. Hinduism is not a religion based on principle but it is based on rules and regulations, which are followed blindly and has led to the creation of the watertight caste societies.

Dr. Ambedkar believed that Hinduism is a dead body due to the caste system. It has to be reformed and there is the need to raise a new body, with fresh foundations. The caste system has not only destroyed the hope for harmonious and united social experience of the fellow country-men but also infected other religions. Dr. Ambedkar believed that just as there is the belief that a country should not have dominion over another, in the same way, one caste should not have dominion over another and that freedom and equality should be provided to all with

abolition of caste. He believed the *swaraj* without social reform does not have any value or meaning. In his reply to Gandhi, Ambedkar objects to the caste system for the following reasons:

(1) That caste has ruined the Hindus; (2) that the reorganisation of Hindu society on the basis of chaturvarnya is impossible because the varnavyavastha is like a leaky pot or like a man running at the nose. It is incapable of sustaining itself by its own virtue and has an inherent tendency to degenerate into a caste system unless there is a legal sanction behind it which can be enforced against everyone transgressing his varna; (3) that the reorganisation of Hindu society on the basis of chaturvarnya would be harmful, because the effect of the varnavyavastha would be to degrade the masses by denying them opportunity to acquire knowledge and to emasculate them by denying them the right to be armed; (4) that Hindu society must be reorganised on a religious basis which would recognise the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity; (5) that in order to achieve this object the sense of religious sanctity behind caste and varna must be destroyed; (6) that the sanctity of caste and varna can be destroyed only by discarding the divine authority of the shastras (334).

Dr. Ambedkar through *Annihilation of Caste* has made certain things clear that he believed that the caste system has killed Hinduism and due to Brahminism its revival is impossible. A caste Hindu will never accept untouchables as his equal and if it would be possible, it will certainly take ages. He came to believe that he will not be able to change the mind and psyche of millions of followers of Hinduism, and he did not want to remain the part of this religion which is based on unjust and iniquitous foundations. He announced that he was born Hindu but will not die as a Hindu. He converted to Buddhism in 1956 two decades later before his death with millions of his followers. After the publication of *Annihilation of Caste* one can observe that he has lost trust from Congress and Gandhi particularly after seeing the results of the Poona Pact and he knew that if he is not able to change society he should at least try and achieve some political safeguards for his people. His strategy became more focused on political rights and safeguards, education for untouchables, unity of untouchables, and creating a new identity or personality for untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar's ideal society was made up of liberty, equality and fraternity, the slogan of the French revolution, in which he has immense trust. His decision of conversion to Buddhism was also an attempt of affiliation with the religion which believed in these ideas of equality, freedom and fraternity or *maitry*. According to V. Geetha, Dr. Ambedkar later in

his life came to find the sources of the liberty, equality and fraternity in Buddhism. This is one of the reasons of his conversion to Buddhism (Geetha 2020). We can argue that Dr. Ambedkar spent his whole life pursuing this homogenous time where freedom and equality existed or revival of that time which was a historical past. Partha Chatterjee in his “Nation in Heterogenous Times” argues that homogenous time is an ideal or utopian concept, but real life is that of heterogenous time of heterogenous politics (Chatterjee 399-418). This can be observed via example of life and works of Dr. Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar by providing his theory of the origin of the untouchability tried to do two things, first he rejected all the claims of the sanctity and belief in faith or religious scriptures, and second by rejecting the theory of Aryan invasion or races, rejected the idea of the separateness or inequality. He located the origin of untouchability and caste order in the era where there was the existence of nomadic tribes. He claims three things, that shudras were originally of warrior class and they inflicted many tortures on the Brahmins and later when Brahmins gain political hegemony they imposed ritual restrictions on the shudras and degraded them. Second, the untouchables were originally the broken men who were scattered after the wars between the tribes and came in contact with the brahmins to guard the village borders. Later that perverted into this system of untouchability. Third, the origin of untouchability must have been the reason for the ideological confrontation between the Brahmins and Buddhist. Brahmins at one point of time stopped eating meat especially beef and declared themselves as superior than the Buddhists, this utter hatred towards Buddhists may be the reason behind the untouchability and rise of the notion of purity and impurity. The broken men were too poor to stop eating dead cattle and beef and cannot part away with the leather work and other use of cow skin. This must have resulted in their degraded status as untouchables outside the caste order. This Ambedkar argued must have happened around the fourth century A.D. and in this sense the untouchability must not have existed before 1,500 years (Chatterjee 403-406).

Taking this departure from the earlier leaders of the anti-caste movements as well as to the caste Hindus who tries to connect the racial science and religious perpetuity to the caste order, Dr. Ambedkar located the homogenous time where equality between Brahmins, shudras and untouchables existed and placed it in the historical purview. He presented his own idea of homogenous time which could be persuaded for the establishment of equality in his own real time. This creation of a new kind of politics, created so many diverse actions in the historical

time of pre and post-independence era. One should note here that Dr. Ambedkar was a realist and he knew that the promises of universality came with many masks which were used to cover the continuation of real inequalities. He was aware that the total freedom and equality in this social order is like a utopian dream, so his pressure in the later part of his political life turned towards not the establishment of the total freedom and equality but to the adequate representation with constitutional guarantees which could enforce movement towards them. His actions were strategic and well calculated, because he was the minority among the majority who did not care about him or upliftment of the untouchables. The problem of untouchables and untouchability was always suppressed under the homogeneity of Hinduism. Dr. Ambedkar's whole life can be observed as how the heterogenous time is the real time which is also the place where heterogenous politics exists. The creation of the nation as the homogenous entity, was the imagined time, but different politics were actually happening in the real time. The existence of Congress, Muslim league, problem of untouchables and untouchability, Hindu domination, the issue of class and many more politics were happening simultaneously in that heterogenous time and one can always say this is also continuing right now. Chatterjee presenting the dilemma of Dr. Ambedkar notes that:

He is fully aware of the value of universal and equal citizenship and wholly endorses the ethical significance of unbound serialities. On the other hand, he realises that the slogan of universality is often a mask to cover the perpetuation of real inequalities. The politics of democratic nationhood offers a means for achieving a more substantive equality, but only by ensuring adequate representation for the underprivileged groups within the body politic. A strategic politics of groups, classes, communities, ethnicities-bound serialities of all sorts-is thus inevitable. Homogeneity is not thereby forsaken; on the contrary, in specific contexts, it can often supply the clue to a strategic solution, such as partition, to a problem of intractable heterogeneity. On the other hand, unlike the utopian claims of universalist nationalism, the politics of heterogeneity can never claim to yield a general formula for all peoples at all times: its solutions are always strategic, contextual, historically specific and, inevitably, provisional (Chatterjee 416).

This heterogeneity of politics cannot be separated by the homogeneity of the nation. This creates the possibility of new forms of reforms, invention of new strategic terms of definitions, creates possibilities of new political and social alliance and also creates a new path for achievement of political justice. This heterogeneity of politics is inevitable but can be

suppressed, diluted, or can be distracted too. But this leaves hope for the future and space for the performative actions.

Dr. Ambedkar was aware about the importance of plurality and also of the development of all. Although his major focus was the upliftment of the untouchables, he was working for the women's rights, tribes, workers, criminalized tribes and caste and other backwards castes too. He believed in the egalitarian principles of fraternity, equality, and liberty and he followed their path through his life. He was against Brahminic ideology and social structure it creates, not against Brahmins; he hated caste not his fellow countrymen. He was always neglected, even when he was in the cabinet, but he continued his work. Describing Ambedkar's anguish Upendra Baxi notes that:

He bitterly complains that he was given only the law portfolio-a portfolio of no administrative importance, 'an empty soap-box, only good for old lawyers to play with.' He desired labour and planning portfolios or at least some association with planning, given his excellent economics background, and the prerogative of influencing allocation of resources for the betterment of the weaker sections. But he complained that he was 'always left out of consideration'; when his colleagues were given additional portfolios, he was denied even a temporary charge! (Baxi 129-130)

Yet he attempted to revise the Hindu Code Bill. It was his last resort to reform Hinduism through law. He tried to add some progressive and just provisions such as providing the right to inheritance to the daughter and freedom to inter-caste marriages. This Bill was protested nationally and was diluted with several amendments. Dr. Ambedkar resigned saying this government has not done any substantial work for the SCs and STs. Upendra Baxi rightly notes that:

Ambedkar's conception of emancipatory politics proceeded beyond a comprehensive de-legitimation of slavery, which was but another name for untouchability. It proceeded, as already noted, to a wide-ranging programme of equality and equity measures aimed at the fulfilment of a wide variety of material and non-material needs. It is this total programme of societal transformation which constituted his conception of Swaraj. Swaraj was not just freedom (from the British); it was a just freedom (146-147).

Joseph Macwan's *The Stepchild*

The Stepchild is one of the best novels produced in Gujarati Dalit writing. *Angaliyat* (The Stepchild) is the first Gujarati novel written in 1987 which was awarded the National Sahitya Akademi award in 1988. The novel was translated into English as *The Stepchild* in 2004 by Rita Kothari. The winner of the National Sahitya Akademi Award this novel opens up many questions such as of representation, untouchability, treatment of Dalits, condition of women and a constant struggle for dignified life by Dalits in front of the readers. The story of the novel begins in the early 1920s and ends after independence. The novel is set in the Charotar region of Gujarat. The two communities of Vankar, weavers (Dalits) and Patels (upper-caste) are in constant struggle during the whole novel. In the Preface of the novel's English translation the author depicts his anguish regarding the representation and acceptance of Dalit life, culture and writing. Macwan writes that:

There is no dearth of literature about the higher castes in Gujarat but most of the life experiences of the common people find no reflection at all. Suffering, want, pain, exploitation, social injustice- the marginalized Dalit community is continuously victimized by all these evils and yet it has a culture of its own, a unique tradition of living its own adventures and tales of courage...Mainstream literature has not even touched these aspects. *Angaliyat* is a symbol of this attempt. *Angaliyat* is a tale of a culture that is extinct and pushed into oblivion on purpose. It is not an attempt to re-establish its prestige but to acknowledge and sing of its strength and character. Although *Angaliyat* received the National Sahitya Akademi award in 1988, it has still not been translated into any Indian language (vii).

The novel through the use of realism paints pictures which can affect the reader, it can motivate or even make the reader uncomfortable just by reading the novel. Achyut Yagnik in his introduction to this novel explains the title as:

The title of this novel *Angaliyat* carries within itself the age-old divide between the center and periphery in the spheres of family and society of Gujarat. Originally a kinship term, the word *Angaliyats* stands for a stepchild who, following the mother's second marriage, comes to a new home holding her finger, *angle* (finger). In a patriarchal and matrilineal society, such a child would always remain on the periphery of the stepfather's family. Similarly, in a society where the second marriage of women

is a social taboo, the castes, and communities who allow such a marriage would be considered either 'backward' or 'excluded'. In the perception of upper-caste Gujarati society, for centuries, the crucial demarcation between the *ujaliyaat* (savarna) or forward and *pachchat* (Dalit) or backward communities has revolved around the practice of second marriage, *naatru*. In such a social background, *Angaliyaat* signifies the secondary, the peripheral, never accepted by the core, the core of family and society (qtd in Macwan xxviii).

The title of the novel here is symbolic. In the society when the stepchild comes with his mother to the step-father's house he gets the same kind of love, respect or place as the lower castes and Dalits were treated as the stepchild. They were never given the place of respect, love and dignity enjoyed by the other castes and yet they were kept in the structure of society for toiling for others and doing dirty and polluted work for the others.

The novel's focus is on the description of power and control. Who has the power and who can control whom is one of the major themes of the novel. The Patidars or the Patels are the ones who hold the power. Land and knowledge are the key to these positions of power at the small village of Charotar Region of Gujarat in the early 1920s. The Dalits do not have power, land, money, or knowledge, and are at the periphery. This novel is a struggle between the centre and periphery, where the Patidars are at the centre and Dalits on the periphery. But there is also presence of another centre—the British Raj, which holds power at the centre and Dalits and upper castes are at the periphery of this centre. This made the struggle for swaraj two folded, they were fighting for the freedom of the nation as well as freedom from the caste. Now this constant central and peripheral relationship of control and to not to be controlled creates the complex struggle of violence and hatred which leads to the destruction of the weak in material and physical sense, but makes their spirit stronger, bolder, and more assertive.

Joseph Macwan was born in a Dalit family (Christian Convert family) of Gujarat, of Charotar region, his life was spent around Anand, Nadiad, and Kheda. His family with many others converted to the Christianity due to the caste discrimination they faced from the upper caste. In Anand district where Macwan served as a teacher in St. Xavier's High School and nearby area which is known as *Padhariya* was a locality where Christian families were located, it was

surrounded by the Muslim community from the one side and Hindus from the other. The existence of church and Jesuit institution such as St. Xavier's press provided a spiritual support and economic opportunities to the converts. The two education institutions run by the Jesuits – St. Xavier's High school and Vimal Miriam High school – provided educational opportunities to many Dalits around this locality. (I am one such student of the St. Xavier's high school.) The Christian converts are located near the village of Khambholag, Aanklav, Gopalpura, Jitodiya, Vadod and Gamdi.

After losing his mother Macwan was ill-treated by his stepmother and was never cared for by his father. He started developing a keen poetic perspective and a soft-corner for those who are suffering. His *Vyathana Vitak* is one such examples of his creative acumen capturing reality and putting life into words. He has written many novels and stories and critical works. He has written following novels: *Angaliyat* (The Stepchild): 1986, *Laxman Ni Agni Pariksha* (1986), *Mari Parnetar* (1988), *Mankhani Mirat* (1992), *Bij-Trij Na Tej* (1995), *Ajanm Aparadhi* (1995), *Dada Na Deshma* (1996), *Mavatar* (1996), *Amar Chandalo* (2002), *Dariya* (2006), *Bhini Mati Kora Man* (2004), *Apano Paras Aap* (2005), *Charushila* (2011). He has written character sketches such as *Vyathana Vitak* (1985), *Vahalana Valakha* (1987), *Mari Bhillu* (1989), *Janamjala* (1990), *Jivatarna Natarang* (1994), *Manas Hovani Yantrana* (1995), *Na Ye Chand Hoga* (1996), *Ramana Rakhopa* (1998), *Lakhya Lalate Lekh* (2004). *Sadhanani Aradhana* (1986), *Aagalo* (1991), *Pannabhabhi* (1992), *Fari Amba Mohre* (1998), *Orchid Na Phool* (2004), and *Biji Boni* (2008) are a few short-story collections to his credit.

Angaliyat (The Stepchild) deserves special attention because of the subject matter with which he deals and the aesthetic beauty he creates. Unlike other works of literature, particularly by upper-caste writers, the novel does not deal with the individual. The subject matter of *the Stepchild* is social. It is a social novel depicting the harsh reality from the perspective of the oppressed. Macwan may have created an aesthetically beautiful tragic love-story out of it, but he creates a story of struggle, a story which has captured in itself the story of those whose history was erased, never captured, written or recorded. The history conserved through the oral tradition does make an impact providing resources which do not need citations or references.

Macwan's novel deals with a few radical questions. It was written in the aftermath of the 1981 and 1985 anti-reservation riots in Gujarat, in which Dalits were targeted. Macwan's novel Creates a new kind of fiction taking inspiration from the activities of Dalit Panther party and resistance philosophy of Dr. Ambedkar thereby fueling new power into the community which was powerless. Some of the key questions that Macwan focuses on in this novel are (1) the question of representation (2) the problem of untouchability (3) the discrimination and physical violence faced by the Dalit community. (4) the lack of unity in the Dalit castes and (5) the Question of *swaraj* or independence. Through the story of two communities and its enmity due to caste and power struggle, Macwan asks us fundamental questions such as: Is this our *swaraj*? What is freedom for Dalits? Where is social equality in this nation?

The idea of freedom and equality ranges from start till the end of the novel. At some moments, the reader feels as if the British rule was more just and fair from the Dalit point of view and that the British attitude towards Dalit was less prejudiced. The reader may also feel that as the time frame of the narrative approaches the independence of India in 1947, the situation of the lower caste and Dalits was becoming more stringent and less free. Inequality and inequity were rising, the power transfer from the British to the Indian people, basically upper castes, left Dalits in a situation more fragile than ever. Swaraj at some points looks as if it is bondage for Dalits. The story starts in the villages of *Shilapar* where there are few Vankars (weavers, untouchables) and majority Patidars (Patels, upper caste) who live together. The time is early 1920s and ranges until after the independence of India. The Vankars are not totally dependent on the upper castes and this creates a problem of the ego for the Patels who want to harass, control, and exploit the whole community. The novel describes these constant power struggles vividly and also realistically whereas the history happens, the power ends up in the hands of the upper caste after the independence, but also signals the rise of a new generation of the untouchables who are identified as Dalits and are ready for the resistance.

The Stepchild is not the story of Teeha and Methi only, it is a story of Valji and Goka who are considered as the *Angaliyat*, or the step-child. The whole Dalit Community is treated as the step-child and are kept at the margins, by the caste Hindus. Throughout the novel we will find that abuses were hurled at the Dalits, their fates destroyed, they were attacked violently, their

lives and dignity were under constant attack and one could not say what unfortunate events will happen next in their life. The story starts with the harassment of the Dalit girl in broad day light by some Patel boys.:

As Teeho was saying these words, c-r-a-ash came a sound and a young woman carrying a pot of water on her head stood completely drenched. The stone that had broken her pot struck Teeha's hand and fell right next to him. As soon as the pot shattered, the woman's companions withdrew and stood at some distance. The woman herself, wet from head to foot, stood rooted to the ground. After a while, her words, 'Bastard, which mother produced such an evil man?' 'Mind your bloody language... you slut!' so saying, a man from the opposite parapet got up and the rest guffawed. Their eyes roved over the woman's nipples visible through her wet blouse. Flustered under their lascivious gaze she re-adjusted her wet *pallav* (portion of sari) across her chest" (15-16).

The important issue of gender and caste discrimination faced by the Dalit women has been discussed at the very beginning of the novel. The protagonist of the novel Teeha (Teeharam) comes to her rescue with his friend Valji. The Untouchable raising a voice against an upper-caste was an unacceptable thing. The Patels although being in fault cannot forget this and they vow to take revenge and destroy the life of Methi and Teeha. To ruin Methi's life they plan to rape Methi but let go of this plan due to the warning from the Thakor village sarpanch.

We come to know that Teeha and Methi have chosen each other but the world around them was cruel and intent to destroy them and separate them. Teeha and Methi loved each other and wanted to marry, but Teeha's rivalry with the Patels creates difficulties in this. Teeha and Methi plan to elope and Teeha's best friend Valji helps them in this plan. They arrange a car to execute that plan, but for that they needed the help of the village sarpanch of Teeha's village who is a Patel. He informs the Patels of Methi's village and they try to abduct Methi. In this way Teeha and Valji's plan to escort Methi, backfires in which Valji loses his life due to violent attack by the Patels.

When Teeha was in mourning of his friend's death, during this time few Patels conspire against Teeha and write a fake letter addressing Methi and his father in which he insisted that Methi

should marry somewhere else, because to take care of Valji's family He (Teeha) has married Kanku's cousin. The letter mentioned that Teeha is making Master (a teacher in a novel who was kind hearted, assertive, and helpful towards untouchables) write that it was the wish of Valji that Teeha should marry his sister-in-law Monghi. Teeha is going to honor his friend's last wish and is going to marry Monghi and Methi should marry her fiancé (153).

Methi gets married to Chunthabhai who is a drunkard. She becomes a victim of constant domestic violence. Here Macwan discusses another important issue faced by majority Dalit women that is of ill-treatment by their husband and even domestic violence. In the middle part of the novel in one such incident of domestic violence, Methi counter attacks her husband and fatally injures him. She with her son decides to commit suicide. Coincidentally, she is saved by Teeha and their lives cross again but they were forced to live apart as Methi's husband is alive. Without divorce from her husband, Methi cannot marry Teeha, and Methi's husband due to hatred and envy, refuses to give her divorce.

Caste struggle is present throughout the novel. There is a constant attempt by the upper caste to tighten the already existing shackles on the body and spirit of the Dalits. The constant violence, the institutional pressure of police, the use of money to economically exploit and hinder the progress of the Dalit can be observed. One can see the use of power and hegemony to suppress any dissent in any manner. But this can also be observed that there is a presence of resistance by the Dalit in body and in spirit. The coming forward of Teeha to help a Dalit girl, confronting a dominant caste, fighting for self-respect, attempting to unite his community members, all these are the forms of resistance one can observe throughout the novel via its characters. They are placed in such a way that it blends reality and fiction which creates a sense of suffering and empowerment at the same time.

One can find the presence of resistance not against the caste system but also against the patriarchal system based on gender. The author, through the character of male and female, tries to depict that both male and female lives are in shackles. The life of a female character is more difficult and miserable as she is discriminated against because of her lower caste status and

also because of her gender. She is ill-treated not only by the caste Hindus but also from members of her own castes. The author put these micro resistances not only in the incidents depicting the male characters but female characters too. Like it was Methi who decided to elope with Teeha, it was her decision, it was her decision to strike and fight against domestic violence of patriarchy, it was her decision to commit suicide and it was her decision to live with Teeha. The realistic tone presents the oppression of the women and how they were suppressed but at the same time presents the incidents which motivates characters to act, resist, and struggle. A reader will find these small resistance and decision making by the characters throughout the whole novel. The shackles are there on the Dalit body and spirit but there is also constant struggle, action and will to break these shackles and free one-self from it. This struggle from freedom is depicted in this novel by Macwan.

After sometime Teeha was convinced by everyone to get married and start a family, but after his marriage his wife's ill-tempered nature and bad manners creates friction and forced Methi to live separately with his son Gokal. Time passes and we find that oppression of Dalits continues in the novel, they were faced with violence, forced labour without any wages, they were boycotted in some neighbouring villages. Due to these inhuman conditions many members of the community migrate to Ahmedabad to work in the mills and Dalit community becomes more fragile, vulnerable, less free and less equal especially after independence.

At the end of the novel Teeha becomes a victim of violence from upper caste Patels. This was because they felt disrespected by him.

The same Teeha had humiliated the Patidars more than once. He had never been laid hands upon. Even today, he was high and mighty and most rude to a sarpanch, the nephew of one of the leading ministers of the state. He had to be brought down a peg or two. Without looking left or right, the mukhi's stick came down upon him.... Teeha ducked, and caught hold of the stick. In that tug-of-war, the mukhi faced defeat and embarrassment. Two of his front teeth broke and he was covered in blood. Mohan, who had accompanied Teeha to hold the other end of the bale for display, fled for his life. Eight to ten young men came crashing down upon Teeha. With sticks and punches, they left Teeha half-dead. Two policemen were seated in the square. They dragged Teeha

there and beat the remaining life out of his body and threw the bloodied body outside (226).

He was fatally beaten up by the crowd and was not helped by the hospitals, Police (Station) officials and even Deputy Superintendent of Police got their instructions from Dehlawala who is minister now, the hospitals refused to treat him due to it is a case of physical violence, and he dies in his way to home without any treatment (226-228).

Yet the novel does not end at the tragic death of the Teeha, he leaves a legacy not through his own son but in the Gokal, Methi's son. When everyone started leaving the village to work in the mill and for the safety, Gokal was obliged to take care of Teeha's family and his name.

In Teeha's absence, Dana found his home lifeless. Monghi had her sister's welfare in mind and Dana too found it best to flee from the village. After blessing Gokal one morning, he also left by the city-bound train to spend his life in a mill.... But where could Goko go? He still had aspirations of maintaining Kaka's loom and prestige. On her deathbed, his mother had given him only one piece of advice: 'Keep your Kaka's name going, beta! It was hardly possible to do that by quitting the village, was it? It was extremely difficult to maintain the name.' Vali's first son took exactly after his mother, while the second one turned out to be a wastrel. Their lives could not improve without Goka. Goka kept working on the loom as if paying off Teeha's debts. He looked after both this house and that. With no resentment about Vali's haste, he helped her fix up Mohan's engagement at the age of eighteen. It did not have the glory of Teeha's wedding nor it did have the mood and music of Goka's engagement, but what emerged clearly was that Goka was playing Teeha's role (230).

Gokal becomes the exact image of Teeha. He is righteous as well as hardworking and talented and takes every responsibility with hard work and honour. At the end of the novel when there was a meeting for opening a new school in the village which was attended by the Dehlavala Sheth it was announced that the name of whoever gives a donation of five thousand and one rupees, will be engraved on a marble plaque and placed before the class. Standing at some distance, Gokal spoke up: "'Rupees seven thousand and one from me.' Heads turned with surprise. The man noting things down asked: 'In whose name, bhai?' Gokal proudly answered: 'In the name of Teehabhai Gopalbhai Parmar!'" (234-235).

The end of the novel which highlights the incident of the school meeting is very symbolic. Here, (1) Macwan presents the assertive nature of Dalit community, that they are also nation builders, who have contributed for this country. (2) The author also presents that now nobody can stop the Dalits from entering the mainstream, and although it will be long and hard struggle, the Dalit community will make their way into the mainstream. (3) Education is shown to be the arena through which Dalits can win equality and justice. Macwan has particularly chosen the school and not the temple or any social building. He emphasizes the importance of education in the life of Dalits. He wants to underline that education is the key which can and will open many doors and paths for Dalits. (4) Macwan, through this ending, also points out that the new generation has to continue the task of achieving equality, preserving freedom and maintaining dignity which the earlier generation has started and for that, if faced with oppression, resistance and counter-attacks should be carefully deployed.

Macwan's *The Stepchild* presents a perspective similar to and is inspired by the Dalit movement in Maharashtra and Dalit Panther party's militant ideology to resist and counter-attack caste atrocities and caste violence. The influence of Dr. Ambedkar was at the centre of the Dalit movement and Dr. Ambedkar's life and mission has inspired millions of Dalits to fight for their right and protest. Dalit Literature movement was inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's teachings and his works. It has inspired many Dalits, who were coming out of the universities and colleges and staring at their blank future due to discrimination by the state and society, to pour their love, sadness, anger and pain into their writing. The Dalit writing was rejected by the main-stream upper-castes but it was accepted by the Dalits as their own. The Dalits are for the first-time meeting with those who can truly represent them and this has inspired others to read and many more to write and share their similarly shared experiences, creating a bond and relation which has strengthened the Dalit identity and self-image. Although the Dalit Panther Party lost its existence after few years, still they (the writer and activist connected with the movement and the party) have provided an example of protest and resistance. Which came from the writing of the writers at that time, who were originally inspired by the ideals of Dr. Ambedkar – Educate, Agitate, Organise. The presence of Dr. Ambedkar and his ideals are one of the common features of Dalit writing. In this novel too, the master is an Ambedkarite figure who does not practice untouchability/discrimination and is ready to help the untouchables. Master helps Teeha and

Valji to meet the police inspector and collector for the protection of the Dalits under the law of the British. He also places Dr. Ambedkar's photo at the funeral of Valji to spread awareness regarding Dr. Ambedkar and his works among Dalits. But as Swaraj approaches the master also starts to become helpless. Once the *swaraj* was achieved there was none to provide protection of law to the Dalits and the master was also transferred. The ideas of struggle and resistance are at the centre of this novel.

One can observe via this novel how an author or writer reacts/uses the idea of freedom and equality. The author through fiction represents the questions of freedom and equality of the Dalit Community. The writer asks society that when will Dalit community will get Swaraj from the caste System? Will society accept Dalit as equal ever? If yes when? Are 70 years after freedom not enough to give due respect to Dalits and accept them as equals?

G. Kalyan Rao's *Untouchable Spring*

Antarani Vasantham was written in Telugu by G. Kalyana Rao in 2000 and was translated into English as *Untouchable Spring* in 2010 by Alladi Uma and M. Sridhar. *Untouchable Spring* is a history of the Mala and Madiga community woven into fiction by the author. This history is not a history of numbers and years. This is a history of oppression of untouchability, of violence towards Mala and Madiga's, of love and affection which untouchables have among them. At one moment the author writes that "Where one has no property, affection is indeed property, love alone is life" (121).

G. Kalyana Rao was born in 1945 and spent most of his early years at her mother's village Sambasivapura Agrahara in Nellore district. After the death of his mother he was nursed by two women, one was a washerwoman and the other Madiga. His grandmother's life, her stories, and songs played a very important role in Kalyana Rao's novel. The stories he heard from his grandmother about his mother gave him the idea of pride and self-respect which his mother had. The character of Subhadra is based on his mother (Satyanarayana and Tharu 469). When he was twelve, he moved with his father, who was a teacher and also sympathetic to the

communist movement due to which he was arrested in 1952. The village Alakurapadu was an important centre for the Telangana Armed Struggles in the 1940s. This presence of resistance shaped his early life which later motivated him to take part in the struggles such as the people's movement in which he contributed as a writer and cultural activist. He was also an active participant of the Virasam (Revolutionary writer's Association) and served as secretary for over six years and president for two years. This novel took him fifteen years to finish; it depicts the rise of the Dalit movement, the Dalit women's movement, the post-Mandal unrest around the country, Ambedkar birth centenary celebrations, and the rising resistance by the Dalits can be observed throughout the novel. Kalyana Rao was a supporter of the armed struggle and its influence is also felt throughout the novel. Kalyana Rao through this novel wants to raise the following questions:

Where does the true revolutionary come from? What is that is it that had gone into his or her making? To Gurajada and Gandhi, I say "My history, my culture, my heritage is no less than yours. I do not need to change my culture and move into yours." In the caste system, dalits are considered the lowest. But how do dalits view it? What is their "reply"? (qtd in Satyanarayana and Tharu 470)

This novel is so real that one can ask, after reading this novel, how it can be called fiction. Why? It appears as if every line written in this novel has a place in the real world. Every incident, spoken sentences, thoughts, are rooted in reality and look as if copied from the real world exactly. The author has said that it was based on his life but it is not an autobiography, it cannot be because it is not only his story it is also the story of others, related to him who share similar experiences. The novel also is a critique of traditional historiography presenting alternative history, through church records, oral history and taking material from the culture providing counter narrative where Dalits are at the centre, their life is subject and also the object. But it has been done in a way which holds to the aesthetic beauty of the writing, yet preserving the naturalness of ordinary language spoken by the characters. The separation between fiction and reality is so thin that one is constantly reminded of the nature of the genre and creative prowess of the author.

This is the story of the history of the seven generations of one family and it is narrated by Ruth, wife of Ruben. It is the story of memory of Ruben, who has discovered his family heritage.

This is a story of generational struggle for freedom and equality. Ruth is wife of Ruben and after his death she narrates the story of Ruben and his memory of his forefathers and their struggle. This is the story which starts with Ruben's grandfather Yellanna and followed by the story of his father Sivaiah. This story also talks about his son Immanuel and his grandson Jessie who later joins armed struggle. Apart from this, this is also a story of Boodevi, Subhadra, Sasirekha, Ruth, Mary and Ruby. This is also story of the struggle between Karnan (upper-caste landlord), of Yennala Dini village and his exploitation of Dalits and other lower castes. This is the story of the murders and tortures of anyone who raises their voice against the authority of Karnan or the social order. this is the story of struggle for water, this is the story of police brutality where Malas and Madigas were targeted and tortured, this is the story of fake encounters of the Telangana Armed struggle. This is also the story where Rao raises questions of definition of literature, aesthetics and art. This is also a story which raises questions of historiography. This is also story of humility, love and simple joys of untouchables lives. This is the story of struggle for survival, and rise and fall of untouchables protest for recognition of equality. This is the story of protest, of action and of development in severe conditions.

This is the story of seven generations of Dalits who share caste discrimination, who share untouchability, who share the thirst for water, who share experience of bonded labour, who share struggle, who share resistance and will to change the outside world. This is a story of each generation which brings a newness in the world, a possibility of change but at the same time they all share an experience of untouchability. As Kalyana Rao writes that:

Every generation would not be like the previous one.

But there was a uniqueness here.

That uniqueness was all the more unique in the lives of the malas
and madigas of this country.

Untouchability. That was always the same. Was there at all times.

Was there in all generations. They had no life without its touching

them, without its meeting them. No family.

After Sinasubbadu, Yellanna. After Yellanna, Yerrenkadu. After

Yerrenkadu, Yellanna. After Yellanna, Sivaiah. After Sivaiah, Reuben.

After Reuben, Immanuel. After Immanuel, Jessie.

Just like that.

After Sinasubbi, Latchimi. After Latchimi, Lingalu. After Lingalu,

Subhadra. After Subhadra, Sasirekha. After Sasirekha, Ruth. After

Ruth, Mary. After Mary, Ruby.

It could be any generation. Life could be anyone's. It did not go

without touching. It did not go without untouchability stinging it (188).

The novel is narrated in such a way that it moves from flashback and into the present with ease. One generation tells the story of their struggle in the oral tradition of remembering history or we can say weaving the history and life into story. This story is full of the rich culture of Mala and Madiga. The novel talks about a constant struggle between the untouchables and upper-castes. The following episode talks about this struggle. The story of Narigadu and his murder when the Malas and Madigas walks from Ooru(village) during flood. When the Malapalli and Madigapalli were surrounded by the floodwater and everyone was about to die, Narigadu came as the leader with Mataiah. Narigadu says “Till now we have no piece of land here. Now we won’t have even our lives. I don’t want to die. I want to live” (Ibid. 29). He led everyone to a higher mound than the upper-caste Ooru which was prohibited till then. It was for the first time Malas and Madigas walked from the Ooru in the leadership of the fierce Narigadu holding an axe in his hand. They all survived the flood, Malapalli and Madigapalli got flushed out when the rain settled and water retreated; they saw how their locality was washed out in the flood. But after two days nobody knew how but Narigadu who went to gather sticks never came back alive. Mataiah carried him, saying he was punished for saving the lives of his people, for walking through Ooru, he was punished because he chose the higher ground than upper castes in life and in thought.

There has been a fight for water in the history of caste. Untouchables have to struggle to access this very basic human necessity. The Mahad Satyagraha of 1927 led by Dr. Ambedkar and violence by the upper caste that followed is a prominent example of how untouchables have to struggle to get access to the water. The situation is still similar in some parts of the country. Studies by Jayshree Soni (2006); Lyla Mehta (2007); Rakesh Tiwary and Sanjiv Phansalkar (2007), Swarup Dutta et al (2015 and 2018) present that caste-based discrimination in access to water resources are still prevalent across India. Such incidents have been documented in “India Untouched: Stories of a People Apart”. Dalit community members and especially Dalit women are the victims of this discrimination and they have to endure, abuses, and violence at the daily bases. This was also well documented in the fiction too. Kalyana Rao’s depiction of Dalit communities struggle access water is apt and to the point:

There was no drinking water well for the malas and madigas. The entire village had only one drinking water well. They called it the central well. Except there, everywhere else there was only tasteless water. That well was to the east of the geviti tree. Except for the malas and madigas everyone else in that village drank only that water. As for the malas and madigas, they would stand a distance from the well carrying pots. If kind-hearted upper castes who came to draw water felt sorry and poured water into their pots, they would water to drink. Otherwise not (112-113).

The Dalit communities across the nations has been systematically deprived of the water resource and made dependent on the caste Hindus. They were put at the mercy of the upper caste Hindus for potful of water, the water is there but they cannot touch it directly. The touch of water will bring violence on the body of the untouchables. The same can be observed in the novel that, after the Dalits acquire access to the pond water by planning and coming together, that followed violence which is discussed below. This deprivation is not only of drinking water but of irrigation water too, the Dalit community does not hold any right over water bodies and if they are given access they were at the last. This kind of discrimination and deprivations leads some from the Dalit communities to be water thieves. This predicament was well presented by the author. Above mentioned studies show that even after seventy years of independence and claims of development, the struggle for water is the present reality of millions of Dalits around the nation. It is the same everywhere: water is kept away from the untouchables, it is a ubiquitous and unchallengeable fact.

Another key incident in the novel happens when Pittodu, Poladu, Musalaiah and Mallaiah plan to divert canal water to water their fields when it was forbidden by Atchireddy. Rao makes poignant comments that this is a strange thing in this great country that it produces great and skilful water thieves (113). When they diverted water to their field in the night Atchireddy suspected them and sent his men to beat them. Pittodu and Poladu get hurt. At that moment Subhadra takes the spade and, going to Atchireddy's field, diverts the water to their own field. Delicate and fragile Subhadra was enraged and fed up of the hardships and was ready to face anyone; everyone was stunned and shocked, and it was even suggested by Chukkireddy that she was possessed by the Goddess. It is one of the ironies of the culture of India that whenever the untouchables do something miraculous and extraordinary its credit was snatched away and attributed to non-existent entities. Rao writes about this presenting the alienation of the action done by the Dalit character "In the Jataka Subhadra would be possessed by the spirit. Therefore, in truth, it was a goddess who had entered her. Chukkireddy would believe that. Chukkireddy would not believe even if Subhadra shouted out loud and clear that it was she, Subhadra, who did this work" (118). The Dalit in the eyes of the upper caste Hindu is not capable of any action, he cannot be the active subject who can bring change. There are millions of examples where Dalits are performing with miraculous zeal and bringing changes, but this contribution is always neglected, and suppressed by the upper caste Hindus. The upper caste Hindus suffers from the self-inflicted blindness in the case of the untouchable problems and progress. At the time of the independence struggle, untouchables' questions were never taken seriously and resorted to internal problems in Hinduism which can be sorted out later through moral schooling (of untouchables particularly). E.M.S Namboodripad in his *A History of Indian Freedom Movement* noted that for Nehru, the problems of untouchables were very trivial and did not need great attention. Namboodripad notes that Nehru viewed Gandhi's harijan campaign as diversionary. For Nehru "It led to the diversion of the people's attention from the objective of full independence to the mundane cause of the upliftment of harijans" (qtd. in Omvedt 45). Even the work of Ambedkar was suppressed and he was practically forgotten after the independence, but it was due to the Dalits particularly of the Maharashtra who hold Dr. Ambedkar and his works dear and kept his memory alive. It was Dalits who revised the works of Ambedkar and brought him again to national and international fame and the due credits should be given to them not the state or any political parties. Many belonging to upper castes, are still living with this self-inflicted blindness. On the one hand, they deny an existence of

caste-based discrimination and untouchability and on the other hand they decline to recognize any exceptional act by the untouchables crediting it to something or other and not the giving due credits to untouchables. In this sense I argue that the problem is not in the Dalit or Tribal community, the problem of caste is due to the upper caste mentality, which after seventy years of independence, still does not believe in the democratic cooperative living and does not believe in the ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity given by the Indian constitution. To destroy this caste system Dalit and caste Hindus have to come together and reach at certain consented compromises otherwise this problem of caste will destroy, Indian culture, unity, and hinder the development of its people.

When Ramanujan and Sinassubarayudu planned with the Palle (hamlet or a small settlement) that they would enter the Avalpadu lake and use the water, it was a very long fight for the water which only Untouchables could understand. They planned everything and entered the lake, women, children and elders. The temple trustees ran towards the Palle shore with sticks and axes but the Malas were prepared for this and attacked them in a planned manner. They gave a strong fight and chased the upper caste Reddys away. But later on, the upper caste used police power to attack the untouchables. “These upper castes see a lot of villainy in the dreams of untouchable people. This government suppresses them very cruelly. This government after 1947. The government that proclaims ours is a free country” (Kalyana Rao 219). The author writes symbolically speaking free for only upper castes. The Avalapadu witnesses police brutality. The police beat up women, children, and elders of untouchable caste without any concession to their age, gender, or birth. Ramanujan was accused as a communist leader and with twenty others, locked up. They need to go to court but, in the end, at least, no one stops them from using the water of the lake.

Though they went through such difficulties, they did not find it a problem. There was a single reason. The desire of generations was fulfilled. They were getting into the lake. They were drawing water. The landlords did not have the courage to stop them.

Just for a mouthful of water, a battle did take place there. But that did not mean they loved wars. If they could get water by peaceful means, there would not be anyone more peace-loving than them. But their lives taught them that they could get anything only if they fought for it. (228)

These incidents are not only incidents of water, they are incidents of life, of freedom. They wanted freedom in their lives. This struggle for water can be compared with the struggle for their rights and equality. The Dalit in this novel through their struggle never claimed sole ownership of the water pond, they just demanded their own share, their share of freedom, equality, recognition, resources and respect. But life has taught that they all have to fight for these. This kind of struggle for the entitlements are limited to the Dalits only; life and history has taught them to struggle and protest. Dalit just wants that they should not be treated as the second-class citizens and they should be given equal entitlement which another citizens exercise. This brings up the question of humiliation in the context. Emphasizing the arguments made by Mata Prasad in his autobiography, Ramnarayan Rawat and Kusuma Satyanarayana point out that “the origin of Indian nationalism must be located in the nationalist leaders’ personal experiences of colonial humiliation, during which they were treated as second-class citizens both in India and England” (1-2). The experiences of personal humiliations felt by the leaders of our freedom struggle gave rise to the freedom struggle. Of all these experiences, the experience of Gandhi thrown out of the train was most vividly described in his autobiography and also recorded in the national history; this experience of humiliation and treatment as the second-class citizens were very crucial in forming the struggle to achieve freedom. On the other hand, one can argue that the experiences of Dr. Ambedkar were the exact opposite of the experiences shared by the other upper caste Hindus, when Ambedkar travelled to America, London and Germany for higher education, his experiences were of freedom and equality. His intelligence was appreciated and encouraged, he was respected by his peers and no one was bothered about his caste. This experience of freedom, equality, and respect by fellow people played a very important role in Dr. Ambedkar’s understanding of rights, justice, and *swaraj*. I argue here that while the upper caste Hindu leaders only wanted freedom to re-establish the status quo and social order before the pre-colonial era, Dr. Ambedkar’s idea of *swaraj* was creation of the space/nation where ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity can appear. The ideas of Gandhi, Nehru and others regarding *swaraj* developed from only negation of rights by the British raj, Ambedkar’ ideas were developed as more inclusive, and were based on responsibility and fraternity. This legacy of different perspectives of Dr. Ambedkar’s ideas can be observed in the text of constitution and is a strong pillar of Indian democracy which should be understood by all. This attitude of responsibility and fraternity is observed in the Dalit literary texts.

The above-mentioned episode about the struggle for water resources talks about untouchability, religion, caste, violence, and survival. Unlike the struggle or wars by the upper-caste, the wars of untouchables are for simple and basic things like water, land, food, life. The novel has depicted pre-independence and post-independence life so accurately. The author writes that:

In this country, the air that one breathes has caste.

The water one drinks has caste.

The field canal that flows and the land that yields harvest have caste.

The school, the temple and the village square have caste.

The food one eats, the house one lives in and the clothes one wears have caste.

The word one speaks has caste.

Literature and culture have caste.

The State has caste, its laws have caste.

Justice and the courts have caste.

The corpse and the cemetery have caste.

God has caste. Devil has caste (227).

Kalyan Rao through this novel has achieved the following things: first, he has collected and presented the history of the untouchable. Second, the novel proves that caste and untouchability are ubiquitous. Third, there is nothing sacred in the religions where caste exists. Fourth, the struggle is for life and life is a struggle for the untouchables.

The novel has a unique revolutionary characteristic in its subject matter and execution. The revolt is there from beginning till end like caste, untouchability and coercion. Dalits revolt for their dignity, for land, for water, for life and for freedom. Why am I treated this way? Why am I not free? Why am I not free? Why am I not equal? The story of the novel is woven around these three questions. The Dalits of the novel know their condition but they are chained from

everywhere. When they break one chain another chain is tied to them. These chains look unbreakable but the Dalit body who wants his caged body to be free of bondage never stops and will never stop attempting to break these chains. The body of the untouchable is in chains not his mind, his spirit, his will. The Dalits in this novel act on their own. They challenge traditions, question religions, demand necessities, and fight for survival and self-respect.

Even after seven decades of independence the situation of Dalit and Tribal community is miserable. Some are still tortured and living under the similar situation full of everyday caste discrimination. A 2010 survey of 1589 villages of Gujarat titled “Understanding Untouchability” prepared by Navsarjan trust proves that untouchability is still practiced in the rural villages of India (Armstrong et al 2010). There are more than 90 untouchability practices that are part and parcel of day to day life of many Dalits in rural areas of Gujarat. This is the reality. All-around India caste is still alive and still part of daily lives of millions of people, caste has adapted itself and the discussion of the UK Equality Act 2010 (Waughray 2013) and US Cisco case proves caste has extended itself even to the foreign countries. Caste discrimination case proves that caste never stops chasing Dalit. This proves that the problem of caste has traversed through the continents and is the reality of present-day conditions. But times are changing and the Dalits are now on the path of law and justice led by Dr. Ambedkar. The use of connotational measures and guarantees provided by the state is used by Dalits for their protection and assertion. Some of the Dalits have chosen the path of social and political activism through which they are extending their support and solidarity for those who are in need. The belief in the law and constitution is there in the majority of the Dalits, they see the constitution not as the religious text of exploitation but as the text prepared by Ambedkar for the protection and safeguards of Dalits and the marginalized. This belief in law and justice represented by the constitution is central to the theory and praxis of untouchable discourse. The assertion and acceptance of the plurality through keeping presence in the public and political spaces by the untouchables has got new dimensions due to the numerical importance of Dalit and their electoral value. This leads to new ways in which Dalits address the question of caste now. The constant presence of constraint on the Dalit body and spirit has forced Dalits to discover new ways of assertion, agitation, and discoveries of self-potential in their struggle for freedom and equality. The protests and agitations have become more frequent in Dalit

community. Due to spread of education, awareness and availability of more help and support than before, it has become more aggressive, and they can and will resist.