

Chapter I

Rise and Development of the Dalit Movement

Spontaneous revolts and organized struggles against economic exploitation and untouchability by ati-Shudras or untouchables is not a recent phenomenon. They have continued throughout history, from the beginning of the caste system. Their number has increased since the beginning of British rule in India. Earlier, they were sporadic and localized. Now, they are on a large scale and cut across geographical boundaries.

In this chapter, I propose to analyze the rise of the Dalit Movement in India. In order to do so I have first analyzed caste in its historical perspective in the context of various anti-caste or anti-untouchability movements. I then analyze the evolution of the caste system. I also analyze different terms used for untouchables as they have evolved to the present day. Drawing on the writings of Ambedkar, Louis Dumont, M. N. Srinivas and Gandhi, I discuss how different definitions emerged over the years. The second section presents an analysis of resistance of untouchables to their socio-economic and political exploitation by upper caste people, which ultimately transforms into the Dalit movement. The notion of identity in particular provides a significant dimension to these anti-caste movements, and thus paves the way for the Dalit Movement. I then move on to the political use of caste and reservation. The section also analyses use of the Brahminical ideology in post-independence India to divide society on caste lines. I argue that this ultimately helps in consolidation of the Dalit Movement in India. The fourth section gives a historical account of the rise and development of the Dalit movement in Gujarat. Finally, I discuss the development of the Dalit discourse and Dalit quest for self-identity in Gujarat and the role played by Dalit literature in this quest.

1.1: Defining Caste: A Historical Perspective

It has always been difficult to define “caste,” perhaps due to its complex nature. “Caste” has its origin from a Portuguese word “casta” that means “lineage” or “race.” The term “caste” evokes a picture of fixed statuses and occupations with social immobility firmly solidified by the rules of endogamy. All these features deal strictly with “purity” and “pollution” located in a hierarchical social structure.

There are two views concerning the origin of the caste system. One view is the western or the historical view and the other, the Brahminical view. The western view is generally centered on the Aryan-Invasion theory, the consequent social oppression, and the enslavement of the native population. The Brahminic view is based on the mythological-religious theory that originates in the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Rig Veda*. Interestingly both views are mostly based on the evidence found in the *Vedas* and post-Vedic literatures.

According Dumont, caste is an institution unique to the Hindus. In his book, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste and its Implications*, he has stated, “Some eight centuries before Christ, Brahmin thinkers made an absolute distinction between ‘status’ and ‘power’. For Brahmins ‘status’ means religious rank and it is stronger than power” (3). It is this principle of subordination of worldly power to status that underlines the Vedic Institution of varna, dividing society into four orders: Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (warrior), Vaishya (trader), and Shudra (menial worker or service providers). Thus, the institution of varna is hierarchical.

There are two models of the caste system operating in India, varna, and jati. Varna is the vedic classification of the four ranked occupational orders. Jati, on the other hand, is a purely

local system of ranked, hereditary, and mainly endogamous groups, each associated with one or more traditional occupations, and all are interdependent. Most of the people live their daily life in the midst of the jati model of caste. Thus, it becomes very much part of society and the rules and regulations that are designed to govern the caste system become inimical for the Hindus.

Every Hindu carries jati, which is hereditary and which fixes his status in society.

The basis of the jati system is the opposition between the pure and the impure. The higher castes are pure in relation to the lower, and the two have to be kept apart in order to safeguard the purity of the highest. They would become impure if they were exposed to the lower castes. However, the two are interdependent, the lower castes doing essential but very impure jobs for the higher. In his book Dumont noted “the distinction between the pure and impure as the fundamental basis of the caste system” (3-5). The purity-impurity distinction is the only form from which the hierarchy takes place for the Hindus.

Prior to the spread of Buddhism and Jainism, Brahmins ate meat including beef and drank liquor. However, when the Buddhism and Jainism challenged Brahminical supremacy, and posed a threat to it when they brought in new ideas like ahimsa (non-killing), vegetarianism, and renunciation. Faced with a threat to his position, the Brahmin made the new ideas his own in effort at survival and they became vegetarians and teetotalers. They not only declared themselves vegetarians but also declared that those who were eating meat were impure.

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” (81). Both the sources of impurity find recognition in the early literature of India. The Chandala’s untouchability, for example, has been the consequence of his duties on the cremation ground and of his eating food that has been left by someone else. Chandala is a Sanskrit word translated as ‘polluting’ which in

extension refers to untouchability. Vivekanand Jha in his elaboration on the origin of untouchability also opines that, “Chandala is none other than the prototype of the untouchable” (1).

In order to protect themselves Brahmins excluded Chandalas from society and the caste order –varna system. They have been considered as panchamas or avarnas. Panchama means that untouchables are the fifth category of the varna system or the caste order. Thus, exteriority has been forced upon the untouchables. They have been subjugated and forced to stay outside the village settlement. Not only their residence has been kept apart but they have been also debarred from all spheres of life. i.e. social, political, religious, cultural and economic.

Different terms have been used for untouchables since the origin of the concept of untouchability. They have resisted some terms also and found out new terms to identify themselves. I have here discussed some key terms, which have been used as well as resisted by the untouchables.

The Aryan invasion theory gave a new term “Adi” to the untouchables an important nomenclature in the twentieth century. “Adi” referred to original and reflected the aspect of original settlers. It manifested as a part of theory “the sons of the soil.” It also indicated non-Aryan lineage. This concept became very popular in the southern India in the 1920s. It gave birth to the Dravidian Movement and Dalits started to call themselves – Adi-Dravidians, Adi-Andhras and Adi-Kannadigas.

Gandhi who is considered to be the champion for removing untouchability within the Hindu ChaturVarna framework, called the untouchables “Harijans,” men of God or in extension “Children of God”. The denomination was used in 1931 amid conflict between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the issues of political representation to Dalits. Gandhi borrowed the name from a

Bhakti saint of the 17th century, Narsinh Mehta. Narsinh Mehta rejected caste structure and considered every human being equal.

Gandhi primarily appealed to caste Hindus to use the term “Harijan.” While giving currency to the word, he explained,

The ‘untouchables’ to me is, as compared to us (caste Hindus); really a *Harijan* – a man of God – and we are ‘*Durjana*’ (men of evil). For while the untouchable has toiled and miled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the shortcomings and faults that we may lay at the door of these untouchables. It is still open to us to be *Harijan* ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them (*CWMG*, Vol. 48, 174-75).

Gandhi has also opined in *Harijan* that, “it was his object to have all the Hindus become *Harijans*. Only by removing untouchability, they could deserve to be called God’s children. Moreover, if Hinduism can purify itself of untouchability, he said, there will be only one caste, known by the beautiful name *Bhangi*, that is to say, the reformer or ‘remover of all dirt’” (7 July 1946, 3).

There has been opposition to the term “Harijan” right from 1931 when Gandhi tried to popularize it. The All India Depressed Classes Conference held in Lucknow from 22 to 24 May 1936 came out with 11 resolutions. The eighth resolution stated as reported by Prakash Louis,

This conference expresses its sense of strong abhorrence and insult at the term ‘*Harijan*’ as it is applied to the Depressed Classes, and asks those who have no desire to insult the Depressed Classes not to use the term ‘*Harijan*’ in reference to them. This conference further expresses its dissatisfaction with the *Harijan* Movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi. (141)

The leaders in the Bombay Legislative Assembly initiated an agitation to oppose the Bill using the word Harijan. Subsequently in 1938, the word Harijan was replaced by the word Scheduled Caste. Thus from early 1930 onwards, the nomenclature Harijan was rejected by

Dalits. However, the Government of India after four decades issued a Circular on 10 February 1982 in which it directed all the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations to use Scheduled Castes for the Dalits in the caste certificate issued by the authorities.¹

While contrasting the two categories, Gopal Guru states,

The category of Harijan cannot be encapsulated within the dalit category since it is entirely 'metaphysical'. It imputes an element of 'resigned fate' to the subject and therefore can render it inactive. Second, the term *Harijan* is an ascribed one since it does not flow from the untouchables own experience. It was artificially imposed on the untouchables by Gandhi and those upper caste people who could not genuinely integrate them within their social consciousness despite its divine association. Overall, the category of *Harijan* lacks a discursive capacity. (1998, 471)

Depressed classes is the another term which was earlier used by social reformers and then by the British government also. The term "Depressed classes" has included (a) Untouchables, (b) Aborigines and Hill tribes, and (c) Criminal Tribes. Although he used it on occasions, Ambedkar opposed the use of this term on two grounds:

First, this term includes others who are not strictly untouchables. Secondly, it gives the impression that the depressed classes are a low and helpless community. When as a matter of fact in every province numbers of them are both well to do and well educated and the whole community is acquiring consciousness of its needs, is charged with ambitions for securing a respectable status in Indian Society and is making stupendous efforts to achieve it. On all these grounds, the term 'depressed classes' is inappropriate and unsuitable. (Vol.2, 499-500)

Another term that has been used for untouchable is Scheduled Castes. The term Scheduled Castes has become in the last 50 years or more the official identifier of the erstwhile untouchables or the exterior castes. The Simon Commission first coined the expression

¹ For details read the Circular 12025/44/80-SC&BCD.1/IV 10-2-1982 issued by the Ministry of Home affairs, Government of India. However, the State Governments and Union Territory Administrations continue the use of the word 'Harijan'. The Ministry of Home affairs has issued another circular 17020/64/2010-SCD (R.L.CELL) 22-11-2012. This shows that there is no monitoring system in place for not using the word 'Harijan' in the public domain.

Scheduled Castes and it was embodied in the Government of India Act, 1935. In 1936 for the first time, the Government of British India published a list of Scheduled Castes. The Schedule is a list of castes entitled to the parliamentary seats, public employment, and special educational benefits. Thus, the scheduling or placing under a list is taken into account for providing certain protection and framing schemes in the matter of reservations in service on community basis. Thus, the term Scheduled Castes is a British bureaucratic invention.

The term Scheduled Castes comes in the line of categories like Outcastes, Depressed Castes and Exterior Castes created by the British administrators. While the term has useful moral neutrality, it is essentially legal in nature: the people in question have been transformed into a special legal class of citizens for certain purpose of the state.

Prakash Louis has explained the evolution of the term Dalit in his book,

The term *Dalit* is a past passive participle of the Sanskrit root *dal* meaning to crack, split, open, etc. *Dalana* means tearing or causing to burst. Dalit means split, broken, destroyed, scattered, torn asunder. The noun *dala*, besides meaning the splitting, has also the positive connotation of something unfolding itself (*dala-komala*, a lotus, *dala-kosal*, a jasmine). (145)

He has also stated the term “Dalit” denotes two actions at a glance. Firstly, “an affirmative action, that is, ‘yes we are Dalits, and we are crushed and broken people’ and Secondly, it also indicates assertion that, ‘now we will not allow ourselves to be crushed by you (the dominant castes) anymore’” (145).

The term “Dalit” is supposed to have been used firstly by Jotirao Phule (1827-1890) in his attempt to work for *Dalituthan*, that is, upliftment of the Dalits. It is interesting that Ambedkar in his fortnightly *Bahishkruit Bharta* has used the term Dalit. He has defined it

comprehensively: “Dalithood is a kind of life condition which characterizes the exploitation, suppression, and marginalization of Dalits by the social, economical, cultural, and political domination of the upper caste Brahminical order.”² Though Ambedkar has not popularized the word 'Dalit' for untouchables, his philosophy has remained a key source in the emergence and popularity of the term Dalit.

In a way, the word Dalit is of relatively recent origin – of the 1960s – in public discourse. Marathi literary figures and neo-Buddhists began to use the word Dalit in their writings and the contributions of the literary initiatives in replacing “Harijan” and *Achut* with Dalit may be located as the first case of public use of the term Dalit. They have expressed their anger, protest, and aspiration through this new word. The word has gained currency in public sphere during the Scheduled Caste – Caste Hindu riots in Bombay in the early 1970s. Dalit Panthers have used the term to assert their identity for rights and self-respect and thus emerged as a political category. Barbara Joshi has quoted Gangadhar Pantawane in her book *Untouchable! Voice of the Dalit Liberation Movement*. In his view,

Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. The Dalit believes in humanism. He rejects existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, faith and heaven because these have made him a slave. He represents the exploited man in his country... Dalitness is essentially a means towards achieving a sense of cultural identity. The inferiority complex based on to be a dalit' has now disappeared. Now Dalitness is a source of confrontation. This change has its essence in the desire for justice for all mankind. (79-80)

² Ambedkar, however, did not use this category often, preferring to deploy different terms depending upon the changing context. For example, when dealing with the imperial state he used the category of depressed classes. When addressing high caste Hindus he used the category bahishkrit meaning totally outcaste. In the arena of competitive politics, he preferred the term ‘Scheduled Castes’. This was evident when he used this term for establishing the political party, Scheduled Castes Federation. However, he also tried to provide a class identity to the Dalits during the late 1940s. Finally, in an effort to politically radicalize his own social constituency, he used the term Dalit. *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, Vol.2*. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra. 1995. 499-500.

The term Dalit was discarded as a socially reactionary category by a section of the community who prefers *bahujan* to both the Buddhist as well as Dalit categories. Kanshi Ram, the founder leader of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) popularized the term, *Bahujan*. Sudha Pai mentions Kanshi Ram's visualization of Bahujan Samaj,

Bahujan Samaj consisted of the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes, the other Backward Castes, and the minorities, who together constitute about 85 percent of the population and about 6,000 sub-caste groups. Kanshi Ram further argued that such a coalition based upon caste did not mean that the Bahujans are castiest. Rather they were victims of the caste-based society created and perpetuated by the Brahmins. (121)

Kanshi Ram also reiterated that there are two ways of by which the political position of the Dalit-Bahujan can undergo transformation. First way is electoral victory and second through social transformation. In his article, "Transforming Dalit Politics" Gajendran interpreted Dalit politics thus:

The invention of categories such as bahujan or dalit-bahujan, usher in the plausibility of a progressive agenda of transforming Indian society as a whole including Dalits. So far the political processes in the subcontinent, at least in the modern period, have sustained a political structure favoring the top rungs of the Hindu social order despite pretensions of adopting diverse ideological orientations. In such a setting, the category bahujan sought to upset the applecart of pro-caste Hindu politics. It actualized in electoral politics what Phule began in 19th century Maharashtra as a social reform movement and what Ambedkar contemplated in his political experiments of the 1940s. (471)

The categories defining Dalits that emerged over the years indicate the interactive process between the Dalits and the non-Dalits. They also point to the emerging Dalit identity formation. On the one hand, there is an attempt to reject the term as well as the meaning attached to some terminologies. On the other hand, it is an effort to carve out a self-definition by Dalits. This has

not been an easy exercise, given the debilitating and devastating effect of casteism in general and untouchability in particular.

1.2: Anti-Caste and Anti-Untouchability Movements in India

In this section, I analyze the resistance of untouchables to their socio-economic and political exploitation by the upper caste people, which ultimately transformed into the Dalit Movement.

The academicians both in pre-independent India and in post-Independent India have seen Dalit and anti-caste movement as diversionary because they have analyzed it through the lenses of Marxist Movement or National Movement. As Gail Omvedt has rightly pointed out in her book that the

Analysis of the Dalit Movement has suffered from both interpretations. It has been seen as diversionary either from the economic class struggle because of its argument for the necessity of struggling against social oppression, or in terms of the needs of a national struggle because of its insistence on putting the needs of the most oppressed/exploited group first and because of its willingness to treat the Indian elite, not foreign powers, as the main enemy. (1994, 14)

Dalit movements and anti-caste movements have played a pivoted role for the development of theories of caste. The leaders of these movements have used the theories of caste with a specific aim to achieve the abolition of caste and the exploitation that it generates. These theories are the product of the confrontations of the Dalit and non-Brahmin movements.

The major difference between upper caste social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati and Gandhi and Dalit leaders like Phule and Ambedkar is that the previous reformers have wanted to abolish untouchability and tried to reorganize Hindu varna order; while Dalit leaders have not only wanted to abolish untouchability alone but varna system itself which is exploitative.

Caste struggles or caste movements are for the upliftment of the status and thus cannot be considered against the caste system. Thus, it is not seen as a progressive movement also.

Moreover, the caste movements were not anti-caste at all. Every participant caste wanted to maintain the hierarchy but were not in favour of demolishing it. Thus, it has led towards failure to identify those groups with the greater interest in being anti-caste.

Ghanshyam Shah points out that the Dalit Movement has not been singular or unified. He says:

There has not been a single unified Dalit Movement in the country, now or in the past. Different issues related to the Dalits, around different ideologies. However, all of them, overtly or covertly, assert a Dalit identity, though its meaning is not identical and precise for everyone.... But all the Dalit Movements were circled around a common quest – the quest for equality, self-dignity, and eradication of untouchability. (2001, 195)

Before the word Dalit became popular there were movements recorded in Indian history that were anti-caste or anti-untouchability. Their main aim was to remove caste-based discrimination. The notion of identity had provided a significant dimension to these anti-caste movements. My focus in this section will be on the way anti-caste movements set up resistance to upper caste society.

Rudolph and Rudolph have observed that untouchability had religious sanction and Brahminical ownership over knowledge. They say that

The untouchables were divided, starving, and illiterate; they had neither the means nor the weapons nor the power to make their grievances known and not to express their anger. No doubt, the only thing to do in these circumstances was to make the best of the situation and try to endure it as best they could. It was probably for this reason that their mobilization has been essentially vertical. (153)

In other words, they traditionally espoused the quarrels of their masters.

The first movement that publicly opposed the caste system was Buddhism. Buddha—the founder of this religion—questioned caste.³ As Gail Omvedt argues,

He had not only denied it but had included many ‘untouchables’ who were known as Chandalas in those days in its fold and had given them leading roles. Buddhist texts gave evidences to this fact. In one of the *Jataka* tales, Sariputta, the Buddha’s most esteemed follower, took birth as a Chandala and gave true teaching to a Brahmin student.... Buddhism played a leading role in contesting the field of defining social order with Brahminism, and within this gave an important role to untouchables. (2011, 13)

Buddhism profoundly differed from Brahminism. Buddhism considered only those kings *Cakkavati* who provided salaries to bureaucrats, capital to merchants, seed to farmers and help to the poor. This was in contrast to the Brahminic ruler, one of whose main duties was to enforce the law against *Varna-sankara*, the mixture of castes.

Buddhism had never tried to become a state religion though the Kings were Buddhists. Kings had sponsored it but had always encouraged pluralism. The *Sangha* held itself aloof from politics, and this was perhaps one of the major reasons of its downfall. By the middle of the first millennium, Brahminism was on the ascendance. Its own vision of Varnashrama based society began to triumph, broken only in part by Muslim invasions. Between about the eight and twelfth century, with the support of Brahminism, a new village society began to form. Untouchables began to be condemned to live in a special quarters.

This did not mean that there was no resistance. It was there but the Islamic rulers collaborated with the upper caste elites and the concept of equality of Islam was sidelined. However, Sufism, which became powerful at the lower level, began to spread the concept of equality and love of God. Thus, Sufism paved a way for the Bhakti Movement. The period

³ See Gail Omvedt for detailed account of this argument. Chapter 2 “Before Hinduism: The Buddhist Vision” of *Understanding Caste: From Buddha to Ambedkar and Beyond*. 10-15.

between twelfth and seventeenth centuries had seen many saints who opposed the caste system and spread the concept of equality. The leading figures of this movement were Basavanna, Chokamela, Tukaram, Kabir, Ravidas and Mira.

From the twelfth century onwards, the caste system became so powerful that even Islamic rulers had to follow it. The exploitation of the Dalits increased. There was no governing machinery to control it. The saints especially – Basavanna, Chokhamela, Kabir and Ravidas – started to speak against this exploitation.⁴ They used Hinduism as a tool to enforce equality among all castes. C. Fuller mentions in his book, “The Bhakti Movements did not contest the caste system” (157). However, in my view it did speak against the caste system but not in a tone of revolt but very passively. It had created an atmosphere where people started to think about the evil character of the caste system. All the saints proved that Dalits could also become recipients of God’s grace. Thus, the God who was out of their reach now entered their courtyard also. However, whatever they opposed was within the realm of Hinduism only. The Bhakti Movement paved way for the further movements that were against the Brahminical ideology.

⁴ Basavanna was the first person who founded the Lingayata Movement in the northern Karnataka. Though he was a Brahmin and a minister in the Kingdom of Kalyana, Basavanna rejected all the priestly rituals. Instead, he taught a purified form of Saivism, centered on the Linga, worn as a personal meditational focus by every person. He mocked at the ‘idolatry’ and practiced a firm monotheism. In his views, Man should be known from his character, thoughts, and behavior and not based on his birth. He had divided the humanity into two spheres – Bhakta and Abhakta (devotee and non-devotee). He wrote many spiritual songs, which show his zeal to overthrow the caste system. He opened the gates of Hinduism for all castes and thus tried to break the caste system. The movement lost the grip over the society in the fourteenth century and was revived in the fifteenth century but this time it was much more compromising.

Chokhamela was one of the important figures of the Bhakti Movement. He was a Mahar. In his devotional songs, he had presented his agony of being an untouchable. He did protest and question the caste system through his *abhangas* (devotional songs).

In North India, the tradition was exemplified most thoroughly with Kabir and Ravidas. Kabir, though born in a Muslim family, attacked mullahs as well as pundits, was against ritualism, and questioned caste. He also questioned the myth of *Purusha Sukta* and argued that if they had been born out of different parts of Brahma then why not all of them looked alike?

Ravidas was a chamar by caste and presented himself as a chamar in his devotional songs. He strongly believed that the caste system is the main hindrance and it should be thrown away to have some social reforms in the society. Ravidas’ general poetry was not so fierce, but it had given us one of the most beautiful expressions of a vision of utopia – Begumpura – a world without sorrow. For details, see Gail Omvedt. *Seeking Begampura: The social Vision of Anticaste Intellectuals*. New Delhi: Navayana. 2008. 103-07.

The anti-caste movements gave new dimension to the anti-untouchability movement and paved the way for the Dalit Movement. Major figures such as Jotiba Phule, Iyothee Thass Pandithar, E.V. Ramasami Naicker, Gandhi and Ambedkar dominated the scene.

Jotiba Phule was a pioneer leader of the anti-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra. He was born in 1827 in a Mali (gardener), a Shudra community. He had the rare privilege of education and used his knowledge to question the hegemonic power of the Brahmins. He understood the value of education and propagated the idea of its importance throughout his life.

Phule's main goal was to educate Shudras and ati-Shudras so that they could easily give up Brahmin priests for rituals. His major writings included plays, poems, and polemical works, which attacked Brahminism. He attempted the demythification of the Hindu concepts. Through his books *Ballad of Raja Chhatrapati Shivaji Bhonsle* (1869), *Priest Craft Exposed* (1869) and *Gulamgiri* (Slavery, 1873) he began to construct a counter history for the lower castes that drew heavily on the prevalent idea of Aryan invasion to explain the suppression of Shudras and ati-Shudras.

Phule was the first thinker who sought to unite the Shudras (non-Brahmins) and ati-Shudras (Dalits). He argued that the later were not only more oppressed but had been downgraded because of their heroism in fighting Brahmin domination. In his view, Shudras and ati-Shudras together represented an oppressed and exploited mass. Thus, Phule was not fighting on the religious front merely but fighting against the political implication of the religion.

He used Aryan race theory as explored in *Gulamgiri* that was the dominant explanation of caste and Indian society in his time. According to this theory, Brahminical superiority was justified not only by the Brahmins of India but also by the Orientalists and Britishers. Phule turned this theory on its head, to formulate a theory of contradiction and exploitation. He

presented Brahmins in a new avatar. He agreed with the Orientalist view that Brahmins were indeed descended from conquering Indo-Europeans but far from being superior, they were cruel and violent invaders who had overturned an originally prosperous and equalitarian society using every kind of deceit and violence to do so. They forged a mythology, which was worse than all others since it was in principle based on inequality and forbade the conquered masses from even studying its texts.

The caste system penetrated so deeply and widely in the life of an Indian that it is very difficult to lessen the psychological impact of it from their psyche. To lessen the psychological impact and free people from the Brahminical domination Phule deployed the weapon of knowledge. He had studied in a missionary school and thus was well aware of the impact of knowledge. He concluded that it is the knowledge that gives power to the Brahmins and education is the only way to defeat their ideology. Therefore, he started schools for Shudras, at- Shudras and women. Through education, he brought Dalits and Bahujans under one umbrella and led them to fight against the Brahminical paradigm.

Phule used various avatars of Vishnu in his book *Gulamgiri (Slavery)*⁵ as stages in the conquest of India. Phule's principal work, *Gulamgiri (Slavery)*, contained the clearest formulation of the interpretive framework within which he had understood the Aryan migration theory. The English preface to the book, originally written in Marathi, begins with the following sentences:

Recent researches have demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt that the Brahmins were not the aborigines of India. At some remote period of antiquity, probably more than 3000 years ago, the Aryan progenitors of the present Brahmin Race descended upon the plains of Hindoostan from regions lying beyond the Indus, the Hindoo Koosh, and other adjoining tracts. (Vol.1 xxix.)

⁵ Though *Slavery* was published as a separate text in 1873, I have referred *Collected Works of Mahatma Jotirao Phule*. 2 Vols. Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1991.

The core areas of his argument were entirely oriented to the context of the Marathi-speaking area of western India:

The Aryan Brahmins established their own supremacy and domination over the original inhabitants here by conquering them in wars. The war-like Kshatriyas were enslaved and were given the pejorative name of “kshudra” (insignificant) – which later was corrupted into “Shudra.” (Vol.2, 132)

Phule identified the enemies of the Aryans, described in the *Vedas* and *Puranas* as *dasyu*, as representatives of the indigenous population. Furthermore he subjected a large number of central episodes of the Hindu puranic mythology, in particular the first six avatars of Visnu (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Narasimha, Vamana, Parasurama), to a radical rereading and interpreted them as evidence of a Brahminical conquest. Two narratives of Vamana and Parshurama were discussed by Phule. Vamana narrative dealt with the story of the Asura king Bali, whom he represented as a wise and just indigenous king, who fell down in the struggle against the conqueror Vamana (Vol.1, 13–21). The narrative of Parasurama described Parasurama as a wicked Brahminical warrior king, who succeeded in extinguishing the last resistance of the Kshatriyas (Vo.1, 27–31).

The ‘system of slavery’ established as a consequence of the Brahminical conquest was, according to Phule, characterized not only by a serious physical but also a mental oppression (Vol.1, xxxiv). The Brahmins had denied the Sudras any access to education, and had forced them into ‘mental slavery’ through the ‘pernicious fiction of the caste-system’:

The Bhats [=Brahmins] invented an elaborate system of *caste-distinction* based on the way the other Shudras behaved towards them, condemning some to the lowest rung and some to a slightly higher rung. Thus, they permanently made them into their protégés and by means of the powerful

weapon of the “*iniquitous caste system*,” drove a permanent wedge among the Shudras... The

Bhats created dissension among the depressed and the downtrodden masses and are battenning on these differences (are leading luxurious lives thereby). (Vol.1, 1-li)

Against this background, it is apparent why Phule made the contrast between Brahmins and Kshatriyas/Sudras the *leitmotif* of his argument. Certainly, he left no doubt that even the so-called untouchables could quite legitimately lay claim to be Kshatriyas. They owed their particularly hard lot to the circumstance even under Parasurama, as the last defenders of their homeland, they sought stubbornly, albeit unsuccessfully, to resist the Aryan invasion:

Parashurama forced those Maha-aris⁶ whom he had defeated and captured as prisoners in the wars to take an oath to forswear warfare against the Brahmins (that they would never wage war in future against the Brahmins). He tied black cotton threads around their necks as mark of condemnation, and forbade their Shudra brethren even to touch them. Parashurama started the practice of calling the valiant Maha-ari Kshatriyas by such names as Atishudras, Mahars, Pariahs, Mangs and Chandals, and persecuted them in the most inhuman way, unparalleled anywhere in the world. (Vol.1, 27-28)

According to Phule, before the Aryan invasion the present day Shudra (lower caste) and ati-Shudras (untouchables) had developed an indigenous civilization. This civilization was destructed by the Aryans i.e. Brahmins in order to subjugate the autochthons and thus they were reduced to the rank of lower castes. As a result, all the non-Brahmin castes – ranging from Marathas to Untouchables – represented a non-Aryan, older and superior culture epitomized by King Bali.

⁶ ‘Maha-ari’ in Marathi means ‘great enemy’, and for Phule provides an etymological explanation for ‘Mahar’, the name of the largest Marathi-speaking Dalit group. See for more detail, Rosalind O’Hanlon *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low Caste Protest in Nineteenth-Century Western India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 141.

Rosalind O'Hanlon has explained in her book "Throughout his life one of Phule's most important concerns was to promote a sense of common collective identity—as Sudras/Ati-Shudras – among the agrarian majority, explicitly including the Dalits. In hindsight, this attempt failed even within Phule's lifetime because of opposing stakes" (271).

Phule's analysis of Aryan race theory presented four arenas of Brahminism – ideology, culture, violence and conquest. His analysis kept the peasant community as the center. He stressed that the peasant community was first conquered by the Aryans and later on by Muslims and British also. The difference between Aryan invasion and Muslim and British invasion is that the former did not only conquer peasants but also downgraded them socially, economically and politically. Brahmin rule was a regime that used state power and religious hegemony to maintain exploitation. The key exploited group was the peasantry and the key exploiter was the bureaucracy that the Brahmins dominated even under colonial rule. Thus, his analysis not only sensitized his reader to the issue of peasant poverty but also led them to fight against the Brahmin exploitation. Thus, he brought Shudra – Ati-Shudra on the forefront of the political scene for the very first time in the history of India.

Religion was the thrust area for Phule. He strongly believed that Dalits and low castes people did require a religious alternative, which is free from dogmas and rituals. Phule strongly believed that no religion is concerned about the occupation of its followers but Hinduism is a religion that divides its followers based on the occupation. It is so rigid that one has to follow the hereditary occupation only and to divert from it also causes problem. It is the occupation that identifies the community and not vis-à-vis. Throughout his life he strongly condemned Hinduism, challenged its legitimacy and questioned its existence. He refused to even recognize 'Hinduism' in his book *Sarvajanik Satya Dharma*. In his view, Hinduism is not a legitimate religion but

superstition, a bag of tricks, a weapon of domination. His ideal family would be that in which the father becomes a Buddhist, the mother a Christian, the daughter a Muslim and the son a Satyadharmist. Thus, he totally sidelined Hinduism.

Gail Omvedt quotes G. P. Deshpande in her book who argued that, “Phule was ‘the first Indian system builder’ providing a ‘logic of history’ as Hegel did in Europe” (2011, 28). Gail Omvedt further elaborates by arguing that

Phule’s thought proved that socio-political struggles of the Indian people could generate universal criterion. Phule also talked about knowledge and power much before Foucault did. In fact, Foucault’s postmodernist analysis comes at a time when Europe has literary seen the ‘end of history’ whereas Phule’s effort were to change the world/society with the weapon of Knowledge. (2011, 28)

She further comments 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 shashtra 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. (2011, 28)

Phule’s stress on education and knowledge showed a striking contrast with the upper-caste efforts to acquire technology while maintaining “traditional” values of many cultures. He made it clear that education was a weapon to change “Eastern Morals” and to bring about a kind of cultural revolution as well as a technological one.

Phule’s view was that the leaders of Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj were hypocrites who professed to fight caste while in reality observing its rules. He was of the view that the notions of

Brahmins and Aryans were essentially anti-Shudra. According to him, Brahminical forces established both of these organizations to modernize and analyze themselves. Thus, he saw that the Bhakti and Shakti forces would establish their hegemony even after the British leave India. Hence, he decided to start a secular, anti-caste and not anti-Brahmin Satya Shodhak Movement. The Satya-Shodhak Movement was established to counter the so-called reform movement of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Saraswati, Tilak and Ranade. All these reformers were ready to reform the religion but the evils of untouchability and oppression and suppression of Shudras and anti-Shudras was totally overlooked by them.

In the Southern part of India also, the caste system was strongly condemned by many scholars and prominent among them was Iyothee Thass Pandithar (henceforth referred to as Iyothee Thass). Iyothee Thass endeavored to build a new casteless Tamil society based on his research on the literary, social, and religious caste histories of ancient Tamil Nadu. His re-readings of ancient Tamil history enabled the spread of the ideas of socialism, rationality, and modernity in colonial India.

A contemporary of Jotirao Phule, Iyothee Thass was a great source of inspiration for Ambedkar, who was born nearly 40 years after Iyothee Thass. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century when hardly anything was known of Indian Buddhism, Iyothee Thass had done a good deal of pioneering work in the discovery of Indian Buddhism in India. In 1898, he and his friends met with Sir Henry Olcott of the Theosophical Society and requested him to allow them to meet the Srilankan Buddhist leaders. In July 1898, Iyothee Thass and two of his friends went to Colombo and met Sinhalese Buddhist leaders. Thus, began Tamil Buddhism.

Referring to Iyothee Thass' protests against untouchability, K. A. Geetha points out, "In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Iyothee Thass raised a distinct protest against

Manudharmic Brahminism, and fought for the dignity and rights of the untouchable communities. Most importantly, he insisted that the untouchable communities in Tamil Nadu must identify themselves as Panchamars (fifth Caste).” (118-119)

Iyothee Thass published a journal called *Oru Paisa Tamizhan* from 1907 to 1914 (later published by his friends from 1926 to 1934) in which he interrogated the established notions of Brahminical superiority, purity, and dominance. *Oru Paisa Tamizhan* (later *Tamizhan*) provided a space for Panchamar intellectuals to vehemently denounce Brahminical ideals and notions of Swadeshi ideals.⁷ These vituperative criticisms against Brahminism anticipated and paved the way for E.V. Ramasami Naicker’s (Periyar) anti-Brahmin movement and the Self-Respect movement, which followed a decade later. It is striking to note that a distinct Panchamar politics and sensibility aroused by Panchamar intellectuals like Iyothee Thass in the early decades of the 20th century, failed to sustain its drive in the middle years. Their alignment with the Self-Respect and later with the Marxist movements suppressed their distinct voices.

The protest against Brahmin hegemony and their Manudharmic caste division begun by Panchamar intellectuals like Iyothee Thass, Rettamalai Srinivasan, Murugesu Bhagavathar and Rev. John Ratnam Maduriar was a great inspiration not only to Adi Dravidas but also to non-Brahmin leaders like E.V. Ramasami Naicker (1879-1973) popularly known as Periyar (henceforth referred to as Periyar). Periyar led the Self-Respect movement in Tamil Nadu. One of the greatest anti-Brahmin movements in India, Self-Respect movement targeted the Brahmin dominance through criticizing the idol worship. Aloysius comments that Periyar’s “focus was not God and religion in general or in the philosophical sense but religion in particular – the

⁷ For elaborate discussions of the articles published in *Oru Paisa Tamizhan* see Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millenium From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Calcutta: Samya, 1998.

Brahminical religion – taken in its practical – social dimension of buttressing up social iniquity and in humanity” (4).

Periyar educated the Dravidians and Adi-Dravidians to bring about a cultural revolt with an aim of making society casteless and egalitarian. Braj Ranjan Mani observes that

Stressing egalitarian social relations across caste, community and gender lines, Periyar advocated the overthrow of caste and instituted non-Brahminic forms of marriage celebrating the equality of women and her right to choose life-partner and other such practices designed to give a death blow to the Brahminical order. Presenting a radical critique of the religious beliefs and practices in a variety of ways, Periyar wanted to demolish the whole Brahminic structure of society which he saw as the root cause of the degradation and subordination of Women and the non-Brahmin populace. (324-25)

Periyar joined the Congress in 1919 and became a prominent figure in Tamil Congress. Soon he saw it a Brahminized Tamil Congress and left it to organize the Self-Respect movement. Periyar also disagreed with Gandhi on issues like caste, culture, and nationalism.

In 1927 at a conference of the Justice Party held at Coimbatore, Periyar suggested that it would be better if the party divided itself into two distinct organizations. One would carry out political responsibilities and the other would work toward social reform. Periyar found this distinction necessary because even those political parties, which professed to transform the existing social order were forced to compromise on their principles for political gains. Because of this decision the Self-Respect – Samadharma Party was launched in 1932. The Self-Respect movement vehemently attacked the existing social systems of religion, caste, and gender and articulated a rationalistic world-view, which would pave the way for a radical change in the social order.

In Periyar’s view,

The Self-Respect Movement was started with the objective of instilling a sense of self-respect in the people of this country and to unify them. The Self-Respect Movement really endeavors in transparency, to explain why and how the people of our country had lost their self-pride, to assert that the obstacles in their way should be abolished, and indeed to abolish such obstacles. (Aloysius, 5)

The Self-Respect Movement headed by Periyar strongly denounced Brahmin ideology and interrogated established notions of caste and religion. They analyzed the religious *scriptures*, *Vedas*, *Itihas*, *Puranas*, religious festivals, rituals, practices and traditions. In this, they resembled the Panchama intellectuals like Iyothee Thass Pandithar, Masilamani and Maduraiar. Periyar and the Self-Respecters envisaged a samadharmic society, where rights, claims, and responsibilities would be equal; it would be a new egalitarian community, which would function as an alternative to the Brahmin caste order.

At a national level, Gandhi and Ambedkar's views on untouchability, caste system and the reform of the Indian society played a key role in shaping ideas with regard to the caste in India. If we want to analyze Gandhi in the context of Dalit Movement then one has to look at him in two spheres: political as well as social. Gandhi's views on caste and untouchability have come into light from 1920 to his death. His views have been not constant and he changed his views— mostly a positive progression—on untouchability, varna and the caste system.

Gandhi has stated in *Young India*, “Swaraj is an unattainable without the removal of the sin of untouchability as it is without Hindu-Muslim unity” (Vol. II, No.52, 364). After sometime he has mentioned in *Young India*, “I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable....” (Vol. III, No.17, 145).

Describing the varna system Gandhi has written further in *Young India*:

...The four divisions define a man's calling; they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. All are born to serve God's creation, a *Brahmina*

with his knowledge, a *Kshatriya* with his power of protection, a *vaishya* with his commercial ability and a *shudra* with bodily labor. This however does not mean that a *Brahmina* for instance, is absolved from bodily labor or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a *Brahmina* predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. This is nothing, again, to prevent the *shudra* from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only, he will best serve with his body and need not envy others their special qualities for service. Varnashrama is self-restraint, conservation, and economy of energy. (Vol. III, No.40, 317)

Gandhi has argued that human beings generally waste their precious time and energy on trivialities like exploring different means of livelihood or avenues of amassing riches. In his views, our ancient system of Varnashrama dharma is such a system that did not waste our precious time and energy on non-essentials and trivialities but would give us ample time for the realization of the higher goals of life. He has understood the Varnashrama system as constituting such a healthy division of work and therefore suggested that it might be taken as prototype for reorganizing the existing exploitative and competitive social system. He suggested that Indians should accept the lessons of the division of labour through which we could keep our material ambitions under leash and set free our vital energy in the pursuit of the higher goals of life. In the light of this understanding, Gandhi has explained the meaning of varna in *Young India*,

It simply means the following on the part of us all the hereditary calling of our forefathers in so far as that traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. You will realize that if all of us follow this law the Varna we would limit our material ambition and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and where through we can know God. (Vol. IX, No.41, 355)

After a week he has elaborated his views, “Man is born in order that he may utilize every atom of his energy for the purpose of knowing his Maker” (Vol. IX, No.42, 357).

According to Gandhi, this occupational division of society into four varnas has a scientific basis and thus it is not against reason. Gandhi has argued that the four-fold division of labour viz. teaching, defense, creation of wealth and manual service existed in every community and country and that just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered by Newton, the law of varna existed before the Hindu *rishis* discovered it. Thus, for Gandhi, the law of varna has been a universal law governing the entire human society.

Varna system is based on the belief of the hereditary transmissibility of character. Gandhi accepted this feature of the varna system as true which has led him to say in *Young India*,

I believe that just as everyone inherits a particular form so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors and to make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That this admission, if he will act upon it, put a legitimate curb on our ambitions and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field for spiritual research and spiritual evolution.

It is this doctrine of *Varnashramadharma* which I have always adopted. (Vol.9, No.38, 329)

His acceptance of the theory of hereditary transmissibility of character and talents is further added to when he says

I believe that every man is born in the world with certain natural tendencies. Every person is born with certain definite limitations which he cannot overcome. From a careful observation of those limitations the law of Varna was deduced. It establishes certain spheres of action for certain people with certain tendencies. This avoided all unworthy competition. Whist recognizing limitations, the law of Varna admitted no distinctions of high or low, on the one hand it guaranteed to each the fruits of his labor and on the other it prevented him from pressing upon his neighbor. This great law has been degraded and fallen into disrepute. But my conviction is that an ideal social order will only be evolved when the limitations of this law are fully understood and given effect to.

(Bose, 265)

Varnashrama as interpreted by Gandhi might satisfy the social, economic and religious or spiritual needs of a community. He has considered varna as an extension of the principle of the

family because both are governed by blood and heredity. So when communities practice the law of varna it becomes homogenous and integrated as a family. Viewed from the social point of view, according to Gandhi creating a family feeling among the members of a community is the best possible adjustment for social stability and progress. In short, the fulfillment of the law of varna would remove the gradation of high and low from the social structure and would create an atmosphere conducive to self-realization.

Highlighting the efficacy of varna system in preventing economic competition, Gandhi states in *Harijan* that, “if it is regarded as a law laying down, not the rights or the privileges of the community governed by it but their duties, it ensures the fairest possible distribution of wealth, though it may not be an ideal, i.e. strictly equal distribution” (Vol. I, No. 4, 2). In addition, the law of Varna is based on the principle of heredity that has the support of the findings of modern psychology. When a man follows the occupation of his father a lot of time and energy is saved which otherwise would have to be spent on learning the occupation. In this way, also it serves the community accumulate capital.

Coming to the religious or spiritual significance of the law of varna Gandhi says that when the whole community accepts the law, it will be possible for its members to devote ample time for spiritual perfection. Gandhi says,

I hold this to be a universal law governing the human family. If man's function as distinguished from that of lower animal is to know God, it follows that he must not devote the chief part of his life to making experiments in finding out what occupations will best suit him for earning his livelihood. He will recognize that it is best for him to follow the father's occupation and to devote his spare time to qualify himself for the task to which humanity is called. (Mathur and Mathur, 540)

In order to gain a proper understanding of Gandhi's position in relation to the varna system it is essential to emphasize at least four important points. First, varna is not to be

confused with caste. Although Gandhi occasionally used the terms caste and varna as almost synonymously until about 1925, subsequently he drew a clear distinction between the two and stated that varna should not be confused with caste. He writes in 1925 in *Young India*: “I regard *Varnashrama dharma* as a healthy division of work based on birth. The present ideas of caste are a perversion of the original” (Vol.7, No.17, 145). In 1927, his condemnation of the nefarious caste system becomes clear and emphatic. He writes in *Young India*: “Varna has nothing to do with caste. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of varna, it is a travesty of varna that has degraded Hinduism and India” (Vol.9, No.46, 390).

Second, Gandhi reads the relationship between birth and varna as incidental. He argues that it is the qualities, attributes, and conduct of the person that really determine his varna.

Third, Gandhi has considered all varnas as equal. According to him, there has been no warrant for considering one varna superior or inferior to another. According to Gandhi, the law of varna refers to earning one’s livelihood. In addition to one’s hereditary calling, one is free to do any other work with a view to serve society and for self-realization. Gandhi also said that there is no question of compelling any person to follow the parental occupation against his or her aptitude.

Fourth, Gandhi has stated that though varnas are to be four, the number is not unalterable. In future reconstruction the number could be increased or reduced.

Gandhi has considered our failure to follow the law of varna in its purity as largely responsible for our economic and spiritual ruin. He holds the opinion that there is no real Brahmin or Kshatriya or Vaishya. All are Shudras. He highlighted in *Harijan* that “Today *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras*, are mere labels. There is utter confusion of *Varna* as I understand it and I wish that all the Hindus will voluntarily call themselves *Shudras*”

(Vol. I, No. 5, 3). Gandhi hoped that from this one varna, the other three varnas would gradually emerge purified and equal in status, though different in occupation. These are the various views in which Gandhi articulates his views about the varna and caste system. After reading Gandhi, I have found that he has totally overlooked the structural violence inherent in the system. Because of gradation, the concept of untouchability has come into existence. He has not spoken a single word against Hinduism; in fact, he wants to set Varna system in its original form. He is worried much more about the spiritual aspect than the condition of the untouchables.

Gandhi is aware that the condition of the untouchables is extremely bad. He has said that, “The untouchables were the poorest section of Indian Society. Their avenues of employment were strictly limited and they lived apart in unhygienic surroundings on the outskirts of villages and cities” (Kriplani, 383).

Gandhi’s statement resonates with that of Ambedkar who also opines that untouchables are not part of a Hindu society at all. 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. In fact, he was more worried about the political division of the category Hindu. When Ramsay MacDonald declared a provision of separate electorates for untouchables. Gandhi wrote a letter to him saying,

It will create a division in Hinduism, which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction what so ever. I do not mind untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity, I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political rights of untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life. (1987, 661-63)

Gandhi's real objection to separate seats for the Depressed Classes was not that it gave too little to the Depressed Classes, but that it would "create a division in Hinduism" and thus it will "destroy Hinduism", as Gandhi stated in his letter to Ramsay MacDonald before beginning the Yeravada fast. Ironically, Gandhi had seen Hindus as one community as though the division did not already exist.

What is clear is 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. Not just Gandhi but also Madan Mohan Malaviya, the leader of the Hindu Mahasabha, has reacted with a politics of inclusion—those who have formerly been excluded from the Hindu fold as untouchables, are now sought to be included within the fold, with the paternalistic name "Harijan".

Conventional Hindu upper caste wisdom has it that Gandhi overcame the British imperial policy of 'divide and rule' by the Yeravada fast. The fast is part of the legend of the 'national' movement. This conventional wisdom also has it that Ambedkar has been a willing tool of the British in implementing their 'divide and rule' policy.

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.

Through separate electorates, Ambedkar sought to ensure that the Dalit community would elect Dalits. Gandhi, on the other hand, wanted to prevent exactly this measure of autonomy. Agreeing to reservation of a proportion of seats for Dalits, Gandhi insisted that the entire Hindu community would elect these Dalit “representatives.” This would ensure that the upper castes who have dominated the Hindu community would decide on who would be the Dalit representatives. However, by agreeing to proportionate representation for Dalits Gandhi tacitly admitted that there are divisions among Hindus, which should have a bearing on the political structure. Though he said that separate electorates “will create a division in Hinduism,” he in effect accepted that this division was not created by the provision of separate electorates. Gandhi’s objective clearly was to maintain upper caste hegemony over the Hindu community.

The British policy of “divide and rule” was not the issue in Gandhi’s Yeravada fast. The question was of political autonomy of the Dalits. Gandhi's objective was to keep the Hindus united as a political community. However, I cannot understand the concept of united Hindus and against whom the unity of Hindu was required? Not, as it has been conventionally argued against the British—those are not the issue in the Yeravada fast. The unity of Hindus as a political community was necessary in giving their politically dominant sections (upper caste Hindus, property owners, professionals and, behind them, the important power of the pan-Indian bourgeoisie) a greater weight vis-a-vis the other communities, meaning essentially Muslims, in the constitutional set-up leading to “self-rule.” It is for this reason that Gandhi proposed to unite all the organizations, and representatives of upper caste Hindus, ranging from Madan Mohan Malaviya of the Hindu Mahasabha to G. D. Birla and in the Poona Pact these groups are precisely those which supported him. Moreover, the effect if not objective, of the Yeravada fast

was to force the Dalits, under Ambedkar, to accept their position of being subordinated to the politically dominant sections of the Hindu community.

The Poona Pact⁸ was signed on 24 September 1932 by M. M. Malviya and Ambedkar. M. M. Malviya represented caste Hindus while Ambedkar signed on behalf of untouchables. According to the Pact, 148 seats would be reserved for the Depressed Classes in the general electorates. The Pact also provided for an adequate sum for providing educational facilities to members of the Depressed Classes in every province out of the educational grant.

Thus, one can easily say that Gandhi did not consider the campaign for the removal of untouchability as a political one. On the contrary, it was for him an act of religious reform although he did not deny the political and economic implications of this revolutionary reform within the realm of Hindu ideology. Gandhi considered untouchability a religious and spiritual problem as I have described earlier. In his view, the problem of untouchability was a problem of the self. He had transformed the notion of the individual self who will purify himself from the caste-ego and thus it will be converted into a collective self gradually. Gandhi opined that this method would change hearts of the upper caste people willingly and thus would stay forever. It would create such a society that would be casteless, free of exploitation, and respectful of every member of it. Ambedkar rejected this method as it was based on a utopian concept and would be not useful as it depended on the individual self, which could take infinite number of years for the self-purification.

In contrast to Gandhi, Ambedkar's chief objective was to annihilate the caste system and the superiority of Brahminism. He understood India and its reality not from the perspective of "Hindu" identity but in its "popular reality." He was convinced with the fact that Hinduism as a religion is the core of all the social problems and inequalities. Therefore, he repudiated Hinduism

⁸ For details of the Poona Pact refer Appendix-I.

and found an alternative in the form of Buddhism. He adopted and offered Buddhism as an alternative religion not to Dalits only but to masses of India. He viewed Dalit Movement not in a capsule of Dalits only but always saw it as a combination of Shudras–Ati-Shudras who were socially and economically exploited. In his view, the propositions of Congress Party vis-a-vis caste exploitation are nothing but a solid and modern form of Brahminism.

Being a political strategist Ambedkar was quite aware of the importance of the non-Brahmin. Keeping this aim in mind, he rejected the nationalist politics and made alliances with varied non-Brahmin Movements. He maintained this position throughout his life and supported various movements led by the non-Brahmin leaders. He writes in his introduction to *Who Were The Shudras? The Untouchables*, “It is well known that there has been a non-Brahmin Movement in this country which is a political movement of the Shudras. It is also well known that I have been connected with it” (1989, 9-19).

Ambedkar read the difference between the Gandhian approach and non-Brahmin movement very clearly. In his view, Gandhian approach was about the removal of untouchability alone while the non-Brahmin Movement laid out the logic of a movement that is essentially anti-caste.

Ambedkar defined the problem in terms of building an independent political identity for Dalits in the structures of social, economic and political power, whereas for Gandhi it was purely a religious question, and that too an internal one for Hinduism. He did not at all take kindly to the challenge thrown by this new position aggressively represented by Ambedkar.

In the first issue of *Harijan* on 11 February 1933, both Ambedkar and Gandhi stated their views on the question of untouchability and the caste system. In this issue, Ambedkar asked few poignant questions to Gandhi: “Why do you restrict the movement to the removal of

untouchability only? Why not do away with the caste system altogether? If there is a difference between caste and caste and caste and untouchability, is it not one only of degree?" (Vol. I, No. 1,

1) Gandhi replied thus in the same issue:

Untouchability as it is practiced today in Hinduism in my opinion, is a sin against God and man and is, therefore like a poison slowly eating into the very vitals of Hinduism. There are innumerable castes in India. They are social institutions and at one time they served a very useful purpose, as, perhaps, they are even doing now to a certain extent. There is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are laboring under them. They are no bar to spiritual progress. The difference, therefore, between the caste system and untouchability is one of the degree, but of kind. (Vol. I, No. 1, 2)

One can easily see that Gandhi is working on the philosophical and spiritual ground. He is much more worried about the spiritual self than the physical one. Ambedkar's agenda consists of civil rights (Mahad Tank Satyagraha and Chawdar Lake Satyagraha), political power, and economic opportunity (the Round Table Conferences, and the Poona Pact) for the deprived classes. Ambedkar's approach was to integrate the untouchables into mainstream society by fulfilling their physical needs i.e. food, cloth, and shelter and to fulfill these needs education and political rights are mandatory. For him the caste system is an economic system which permits the upper castes Hindus to exploit the Dalits.

The system of Untouchability is a gold mine to the Hindus. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables to serve as their retinue to enable the Hindus to maintain pomp and ceremony and to cultivate a feeling of pride and dignity befitting a master class, which cannot be fostered and sustained unless there is beneath it a servile class to look down upon. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables to be used as forced labourers and because of their state of complete destitution and helplessness can be compelled to work on a mere pittance or sometimes on nothing at all. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have 60 millions of Untouchables to do the dirty work of scavengers and sweepers which the Hindu is debarred by his religion to do

and which must be done by non-Hindus who could be no others than Untouchables. In it the 240 millions of Hindus have the 60 millions of Untouchables who can be used as shock-absorbers in slumps and dead-weights in booms, for in slumps it is the Untouchable who is fired first and the Hindu is fired last and in booms the Hindu is employed first and the Untouchable is employed last. (1991, 196)

Gandhi's belief in Varnashramadharma has been characterized as being at the core of his conservative social philosophy. The upper caste people have seen the positive aspects of the caste system, as it is beneficial to them and act as a marker of an identity. However, for the Dalits the picture is radically different. Instead of offering a sense of identity and security, the caste system constantly threatens them with humiliation and insult. Similarly, the problem of identity carries a stigma that cannot be easily erased. Against this background, any attempt to defend or show the caste system in a positive light is suspicious from the viewpoint of the Dalit Movement. It is this position that Ambedkar has articulated in the first issue of *Harijan*. "The outcaste is a by-product of the caste system. There will be outcastes as there are castes. Nothing can emancipate the outcaste except the destruction of the caste-system. Nothing can help to save Hindus and ensure their survival in the coming struggle except the purging of this odious and vicious dogma...." (Vol. I, No. 1, 3).

Gandhi has used Hindu symbols that have been drawn from the mainstream Hinduism. On the other hand, Ambedkar argues that it is the religion that bears out such a culture of inequality and humiliation, so it has to be thrown out. Therefore, one cannot adopt the method that is prescribed by Gandhi. In Ambedkar's view, it is a complicated and ineffective method. D.R. Nagaraj has observed Ambedkar's analysis which shows how, "developing such inwardness towards Hinduism could easily degenerate into pious and mild grumbling about caste hierarchy" (34) and this is what happened with the majority of the followers of Gandhi.

Lord Bhikhu Parekh stated, “Gandhi, in his dislike of the dehumanizing tendencies of modern civilization, became somewhat soft towards the equally dangerous structures of caste society” (26). Gandhi did not find any fault with the constitutive rules of the caste system and his conviction was that something went wrong with the regulative aspects of it. In his view, only a strong reformatory movement could correct this, thus restoring its original vitality. Nevertheless, the fact though Gandhi had talked about a strong movement he did not initiate any movement for the removal of evils of the Hinduism. Ambedkar wanted to define and articulate different sets of rules that could easily throw away the previous rules as one could see in his discussions for the demand of the separate electorates in the Round Table Conferences.

Interestingly Gandhi and Ambedkar both saw the problem of Dalit, as a problem of value structure, but their ways of application is almost contradictory. The school of value structure began with a Bhakti Movement and still today it has remained the most powerful and relevant way of understanding the problem of Dalits and untouchability. The value school had looked at untouchability as a problem equally related to both Dalit and caste Hindu societies, and it maintained that the value systems of both these societies should undergo radical change.

Gandhi wanted to revolutionize the whole of Hindu society by altering the concept of status. He visualized his society that as hierarchical but there was no difference between a Brahmin and a Dalit. Both would have same status. It was totally against what all major socialists had described. All of them believed that it is the status which played a crucial role in making a Brahmin more powerful than a Kshatriya as being a king also he had to have blessings of a Brahmin otherwise he could not be considered as a ruler until and unless coronation ceremony is not carried out by a Brahmin. What Gandhi wanted to say was that a Brahmin

should not feel great about his status and work. In his eyes, both a Brahmin and a Scavenger offer their services for the betterment of a society.

For Gandhi, the mutual interdependence of Dalit and caste Hindu societies is very crucial. Gandhi invested the inseparability of the self and the other, which has been the philosophical mainstay of the Bhakti Movement, with a new kind of radical militancy. According to Gandhi, there are two selves of a Man: first, physical self that is “I” and second, spiritual self that is “other”. In order to eradicate untouchability, the other should change. There is no point in changing “myself” excluding the “other”. The “other” should also experience a process of change. What Gandhi is suggesting through his self-purification or change of heart approach is that a Brahmin who has established his way of work as a pure and thus given birth to the concept of untouchability has to change his notion of understanding as far as work ideology is concerned. A Brahmin has to consider his work as a work and not as pure or impure. Thus, he has to consider work of all components of a varna system as equally important as they are interdependent. Thus, if a Brahmin will start degrading his so called concept of status then one day a Dalit will feel the change which bore out of his Brahminical work ideology. Thus, untouchability will be eradicated forever. Thus, Gandhi wants to equalize the all parts of the varna system.

In my view, it is an over enthusiastic way to eradicate untouchability because of change of heart of not only Brahmins but also the remaining three Varnas will take infinite time. Gandhi has shown us a way but not exactly the time limit. Untouchables have been suffering for ages from social ostracism, which seriously affected their all arenas of life i.e. political, economic, and cultural also. So now, they are not ready to wait for time immemorial for the change of heart which is an ideal condition.

Ambedkar's approach also comes from the school of value but his way of dealing with the problem of untouchability is realistic. As a realist, he wants to create self-respect and a new sensibility for a Dalit. For him, the Dalit is primarily a humiliated person. Hence, we can see his repeated emphasis on education and a new personality. For Ambedkar, the entire caste Hindu society is an anathema. He cannot accept any identification with the symbols and ethos of the caste Hindu society: they are nothing but evil. Ambedkar ruled out the path of interaction with the other, the path of an inevitable clinging to other. If Dalit society becomes aggressive, caste Hindu society will be forced to come to its senses. This is the logic of Ambedkarite method. In a fundamental sense, this mode of action has rejected the Gandhian obsession with the "other" that is spiritual self totally. For Ambedkar, if a man who is satisfied with his/her physical needs s/he will automatically move towards the spiritual self. It will not require any kind of effort to move towards spiritual self. Because of this, even today the rallying point for Dalits is Ambedkar not Gandhi. Gandhi is considered pious but he is politically not useful as Ambedkar is. For Dalits, Gandhian approach dealt more with the metaphysical world, which is not important to them as that of the physical world.

Ambedkar rejected the Gandhian model of the caste system but he used Gandhian methods of satyagraha for the temple entry movements. Ambedkar believed that the temple is the symbol of Hinduism and its constitutive sets of rules. Therefore, he wanted to have entry for all in it as all the Dalits were part of Hinduism. Ambedkar led two-temple entry satyagrahas. The first satyagraha was at the Parvati temple in Poona in 1929 while the second was at the Kalaram temple in Nasik from 1930 to 1935. Eleanor Zelliot had described the importance of these satyagrahas thus,

The effort was conducted in the Gandhian style, but it was not approved by Gandhi or by the Congress. Gandhi's name was not mentioned but the technique and inspiration for the satyagraha

undoubtedly were drawn from Gandhi's teachings. Organized by Ambedkar and local Mahar leaders, the Kalaram Satyagraha involved thousands of untouchables in intermittent efforts to enter the temple and to participate in the annual temple procession. As in the case of Parvati Satyagraha of Poona the attempt was unsuccessful. The outcome of the Kalaram Satyagraha, however was not only further disillusionment with the Satyagraha method and the attitude of the Congress, but also a rejection of Hinduism and strengthening of the separatist political stance then developing among the Untouchables. (1992 b, 164-65)

Gandhi responded to the Kalaram Satyagraha in *Young India* thus,

“...Now a word to the untouchables. I have advised them and I repeat the advice that it is wholly unnecessary for them to seek to force entry into the orthodox temples even through the method of Satyagraha. It is the duty of the ‘touchable’ Hindus to secure for the ‘untouchables’ to offer Satyagraha when the time is ripe If they realize the truth of the statements I have made they will at least suspend the (Kalaram) Satyagraha pending the struggle even if the whole mass of them will not join it as some of them have already done.” (*CWMG*, VOL.14, 504-05)

Even on the issue of the temple entry Gandhi kept changing his position. After a year he led a much-glorified campaign of temple entry for the untouchables in 1933. Gandhi also commented on the Temple Entry Satyagraha of the Dalits in *Harijan*, “What mattered was not so much the entry of Harijans to temples as the conversion of the orthodox to the belief that it is wrong to prevent Harijans from entering temples” (Vol. I, No. 4, 1). Here Gandhi talked about self-purification or change of heart theory. But he had no hesitation to write in the *Harijan* of 23 February 1934:

I have absolutely no desire that the temple should be opened to Harijans, until caste Hindu opinion is ripe for the opening. It is not a question of Harijans asserting their right of temple entry or claiming it. They may or may not want to enter that temple even when it is declared open to them. But it is the bounden duty of every caste Hindu to secure that opening for Harijans. (Vol. II, No. 28, 3)

Ambedkar and other radical critics were of the opinion that the heart of the caste Hindu was scattered all over in land, wealth, property, socio-political power. Unless these were transformed, it was difficult to effect a conversion of the heart among the caste Hindus. He was closely watching Gandhi's wavering ideas on the issue of the temple entry. He charted out Gandhi's ideas thus,

Mr. Gandhi begins as an opponent of Temple Entry. When the Untouchables put forth a demand for political rights, he changes his position and becomes a supporter of Temple Entry. When the Hindus threaten to defeat the Congress in the election, if it pursues the matter to a conclusion, Mr. Gandhi, in order to preserve political power in the hands of the Congress, gives up Temple entry! Is this sincerity? Does this show conviction? Was the 'agony of soul' which Mr. Gandhi spoke of more than a phrase? (1991, 125)

Ambedkar believed that Hinduism is the very embodiment of *avidya* or ignorance and can never be rejuvenated. D.R. Nagaraj also talked about these Satyagrahas,

playing along with the Gandhian rule, Babasaheb soon realized both the bad faith dimension and the paradoxes involved in this movement, for he had already been tormented by cruel doubts about the very desirability of seeking solutions to the problems of untouchables within the framework of Hinduism. So he decided to bid goodbye to Hinduism in 1935. (42-3)

Ambedkar had no option but to reject the Gandhian mode for the eradication of untouchability. He realized that this model had successfully transformed Harijans as objects in a ritual of self-purification, with the ritual being performed by those who had larger heroic notions of their individual selves.

Ambedkar strongly opposed Gandhian view. In his view just the removal of physical untouchability should not be considered as eradication of untouchability. It should be eradicated from the source of origin i.e. Varna Vyastha. However, Gandhi has been not in favor of it. In his view, sweeper has to work as a sweeper even though he has taken education of a lawyer, a doctor

or an engineer. Thus, Gandhi wants to bring back golden days of Hinduism. i.e. *Manusmriti* era but with a small change of removal of physical untouchability. He has been well aware of the fact that the untouchability is a product of the work that one performs. For him Varna Vyavastha is nothing but division of labour, while for Ambedkar it is not only division of labour but also division of labourers. Gandhi cannot understand this difference at all throughout his life. He wants to glorify the work so that people will consider all works and ways of earning livelihood with same status. In his view nothing is bad, everything is good.

D. R. Nagaraj mentioned, “Ambedkar totally disagreed with Gandhi’s position of organic community. He was in favor of civil rights and equal opportunity in economic matters and social intercourse. Gandhi’s first fast was precisely against this” (48). Thus, Nagaraj also agreed with Ambedkar’s position that Gandhi’s views were against the upliftment of Dalits. Gandhi's view were based on spiritual aspect of self-purification of caste Hindus i.e. almost 70 percent of population of the India which was a kind of an idealism. Ambedkar knew this fact very well and thus he wanted to have constitutional safeguards for the Dalits so that they will uplift themselves with the help of constitutional rights and not on the pity of the upper caste people.

Ambedkar also argued that Gandhi went on fast for 21 times throughout his life but he had never gone on fast for the purpose of eradication of untouchability e.g. the Guruvayur Temple entry Satyagraha and the Vaikom Satyagraha.

Gandhi called himself a Sanatani Hindu and he strongly believed in Hinduism and its norms. He opposed only untouchability and worked to eradicate it. Initially Gandhi was not in favor of inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriages that is in 1921. However, in 1936, he changed his views, started propagating inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages. He declared that he would attend only those marriages, which will be inter-caste. This showed impact of

Ambedkar and his ideology for the betterment of Dalits on Gandhi. It also showed what Ambedkar was proposing from 1925 onwards was quite correct for the eradication of untouchability. Gandhi saw that Ambedkarian norms would help to change the society and its views towards untouchability. However, Gandhi did not change his views on the Varnavyavastha and Hinduism at all throughout his life.

Ambedkar and Gandhi both wanted to remove/eradicate untouchability. Ambedkar read the Indian Society and its castiest structure very well in comparison to Gandhi. This I could say based on the pivotal role caste played in today's politics. Ambedkar wanted to strengthen the Dalits through separate electorates and as it was mentioned in the Poona Pact, they were for twenty years only. While Gandhi opted, for "change of heart" which was based on upper caste concern and thus there was no time limit given for this provision by Gandhi. For me, Ambedkar was more practical and visionary than Gandhi.

1.3: Rise and Development of the Dalit Movement in India

After independence for almost two decades, Congress (I) ruled almost in each part of India. However, the situation changed in 1970s when the Shudra especially landowning and land-tilling communities started to understand the value of political rights. They understood their demography very well and thus started to demand their share of political benefits. Congress (I) did not pay attention to these voices and started to lose ground in 1970s. The denial of separate electorates and a forced acceptance of reservations for Dalits in 1932 became a route to the reclamation of lost ground. This led to caste politics in 1970s. Congress (I) which just treated Shudras and Dalits as a vote bank was forced to rethink its strategy. It realized that Shudras population could wrest political power from Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas very easily. Secondly the Congress (I) realized that if it allowed the Shudra-ati-Shudra combine to

consolidate itself then it would fulfill Phule and Ambedkar's vision rather than that of Gandhi. Therefore, Congress (I) used caste as a weapon to divide Shudras and ati-Shudras or Dalit and allowed Shudras access to political power. In order to survive, Congress (I) opened the gates of political power for landowner and land-tiller communities as they had become economically powerful after the Green Revolution. Moreover, Congress (I) won their heart by passing a resolution of ownership of land in favour of land-tiller community that was predominantly Shudras. Those who were tilling land became the owners of that land and thus they sidelined the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas.

A section of Shudra landowners enjoyed all the advantages of life and started to move upwards. The Other Backward Castes (OBCs) saw this progression and they raised their demands on this basis. Ambedkar had written political and social rights to this community into the Constitution itself but Congress (I) had not implemented it in any substantial way. The OBCs also started to demand reservation in the mid sixties, and Congress (I) had formed various committees for granting the reservations to OBCs. However, there was no effort to implement a reservation policy for OBCs. Indira Gandhi set up Mandal Commission that submitted its report in 1982. However, Indira Gandhi did not take any decision regarding this. After her assassination in 1984, her successor Rajiv Gandhi also sidelined it.

In Gujarat, the Congress (I) led government had appointed Commissions to inquire into the need for reservations for OBCs as one could see in the formation of the Baxi Commission. Though the Congress (I) was attracting landowning communities through delaying reservation policy for the OBCs at the national level, at the state level the Congress (I) was attracting the OBCs by appointing state level commissions. Thus, the Congress (I) manipulated the caste according to the state population and maintained its rule successfully. However, from 1980s

onwards, when OBCs' demand for the benefits of reservations became vigorous, the Congress (I) was forced to implement it. In 1981, in the Gujarat State, for example, the government declared 5% seats reserved for SEBCs (state nomenclature for OBCs) in government sector services and in educational institutions though the population of the SEBCs was 40%. However, the upper castes and Patels (landowning community in Gujarat) opposed the reservation policy for SEBCs most vehemently. They blamed Dalits for the expansion of the policy of reservations.

The government had to withdraw its decision owing to upper caste protest. The upper castes and Patels also demanded the removal of reservations for SCs and STs. However, the government could not take such a decision as it was given as a constitutional right to SCs and STs.

However, the scenario changed when the then Prime Minister Mr. V. P. Singh took the decision on 13 August 1990 to implement Mandal Commission Report and declared 27% reservation for OBCs in central government institutions. Across India, Shudras especially land owning community and other upper caste people opposed this and these protests were transformed into a massive anti-reservation agitation on an unprecedented scale. The agitation, spearheaded and dominated by students, was quick and spontaneous. Delhi was the hub of the anti-Mandal agitation and it remained so till the end of the stir. These protests closed roads, highways, transportation services, government services, schools, and businesses of India. The agitation had rapidly engulfed the North India and later spread to the south as well. The violent resistance to OBC reservations culminated in the unprecedented phenomena of self-immolations. And the nation got polarized into pro and anti-reservation camps.

The decade of 1990s had seen a tremendous growth of OBCs in terms of political mobilization. The major political parties Congress (I) and Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) that were

until then upper caste parties had to change their stand as the regional parties were becoming strong on the basis of the caste lines. In order to sideline the Shudras–ati-Shudras combine they started to appease OBCs by including them in frontline politics. Indeed, as Yogendra Yadav (1999) and Suhas Palshikar (2004) argue

“During the decades of 1980s and 1990s the Indian polity witnessed a shift from the ‘politics of ideology’ to the ‘politics of representation.’” (Vol.34, 2393-99 and Vol.39, 1477-80)

Ambedkar devoted the last years of his life to two institutions that he saw as necessary for the liberation of his people and the welfare of the country: Buddhism—a spiritual force, and the Republican Party of India (RPI) —a political force. For religious and cultural change, he hoped that all of India would become ‘Prabuddha Bharat’ and experience a cultural renaissance. T. Tripathi Rao and Y. B. Abbasayulu have pointed out in their article that “The Republican Party of India (RPI) came into existence on 3 October 1957 out of the All India Scheduled Caste Federation by changing its name was the major political event for the Dalits” (266). The RPI was the first political party formed by the post-Ambedkar leadership in India. Sanjay Paswan and Paramanshi Jaideva have stated in their book that, “The objective of the party was to organize the Dalits across the country and to fight against the atrocities committed on them. It took up many issues that appealed to the Dalits. It also argued that idle and wasteland must go to the landless labourers and full justice be done under the untouchability Act to them” (Vol.1, 315). For political struggle, Ambedkar hoped that the RPI would be a vehicle for all who sought to achieve the great goals, surpassing the narrow confines of the Scheduled Caste Federation. However, this did not happen. Ambedkar himself could not really establish either the RPI or the organizational form of Buddhism as he passed away in 1956.

Gail Omvedt mentions the fate of Buddhism,

Both, Buddhism in India and the RPI remained not simply 'Dalit' institutions, but institutions limited to specific jatis among Dalits: Mahars in Maharashtra and scattered groups of Chamars (known as Jatavas in the 20th century) in Uttar Pradesh. Buddhist conversion allowed for a tremendous change in the consciousness of ex-untouchables but it did not produce much of a change in their social identity. Almost no caste Hindus followed them in converting, and the result was that Buddhism itself became rather 'untouchable' in India. (2001, 150)

In the case of the RPI, though it had enough of a base in Uttar Pradesh and elsewhere to achieve the status of an 'all-India party' (its elephant symbol today, though, has been taken over by the BSP), in Maharashtra it not only remained a party of Mahars, but factions within it were based upon sub-castes. The RPI had genuine radical moments as Gail Omvedt describes,

....under the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad, when it joined socialists and communists (under the leadership of Nana Patil) in land Satyagrahas in 1956 and 1965, aimed at gaining access to forest land and 'common' lands for cultivation by Dalits and other landless. However, by the late 1960s, it had subsided into a co-opted and stagnant party, with some alliance with the Congress in exchange for patronage, and with membership and leadership drawn only from ex-Mahars. Thus, even in Maharashtra, the centre of Ambedkar's efforts, the Dalit movement remained confined within the boundaries of jati. (2001, 150-51)

The creative and transformatory potential of the Dalit movement, however, was shown by the fact that it took only a little over 10 years after Ambedkar's death for the stalemate to be shattered. Following the stagnation in the first decades of independence, about the same time as the upsurge of Naxalism in the 1960s, came the beginnings of a powerful poetry of protest in Maharashtra, the Dalit Sahitya Movement.

In the 1960s, the Dalit movement took a new turn. The context was not different, in the sense that the SCs had obtained constitutional protection. Nevertheless, they continued to experience caste discrimination in civil society in much the same way as they did during colonial

rule. Overall, the revival of the Dalit movement may be seen as a reaction to the contradiction that had arisen.

In Maharashtra, Dalit Sahitya and Dalit Panthers as, Eleanor Zelliot mentions, may be seen as two sides of the same coin. Dalit authors and poets wrote Dalit literature prolifically from the 1950s but it was at end of the 1960s that Dalit Sahitya (literature) achieved the status of a school of literature (1992 b, 274). The authors and poets in Dalit Sahitya were closely linked with the social and political activities of the Dalit Panthers an organization formally organized in 1972. In other cases Dalit Panther members, not writers themselves, were strongly influenced by the literature and poetry; likewise, the poets and authors came to be influenced by sociopolitical activities taking place and this was reflected in their writings.

After the death of Ambedkar, the Dalit movement began to lose its vitality which was revived only with the birth of the Dalit Panthers. There were material reasons for the emergence of Dalit Panthers as it could be for any other episode or event. Children of the Ambedkarian movement had started coming out of universities in large numbers in the later part of 1960s, just to face the blank future staring at them. The much-publicized Constitutional provisions for them turned out to be a mirage. Their political vehicle was getting deeper and deeper into the marsh of parliamentary politics. It ceased to see the real problems of people. The air of militant insurgency that had blown all over the world during those days also provided them the source material to articulate their anger.

The Panthers chose to pattern their programme on the ten-point programme of the Black Panther Party (BPP) in the USA, which was the basic inspiration for their formation, it would not have been any less radical. The amount of emphasis on the material aspects of life that one could find in the party programme of the BPP could still have been inimical to the established icon of

Ambedkar. Radicalism was the premise for the very existence of the Dalit Panthers and hence the quarrel over its programme reflected the clash between the established icon of Ambedkar and his radical version proposed in the programme. They spoke the language of defiance and militancy, which created waves. These waves shook the foundations of the established order in the country and in essence demonstrated what the wrath of the wretched could be! It provided a valuable insight that was pathetically missing in the Dalit politics. Going by their manifesto,⁹ Dalit Panthers had broken many new grounds in terms of radicalizing the political space for the Dalit movement. The fact that for the first time the Dalit Panther exposed Dalits to a radical Ambedkar and brought a section of Dalit youth nearer to accepting it certainly marked its positive contribution to the Dalit movement.

The Panthers' militancy largely remained confined to their speeches and writings. One of the reasons for its stagnation was certainly its incapability to escape the petit bourgeois ideological trap built up with the icons of Ambedkar. It would not get over the ideological ambivalence represented by them. Eventually, the petit-bourgeois 'icon' of Ambedkar prevailed and extinguished the sparkle of new revolutionary challenge. It was completely sapped of its rebellious image and its vitality and soon was corrupted with a prefix 'Bharatiya' to it. It survived as another living monument to the ideological bankruptcy and the degeneration of the Dalit leadership. It went the RPI way and what remained of it were the numerous fractions engaged in squabbles under the sly hands of the ruling classes.

1.4: Rise and Development of the Dalit Movement in Gujarat

⁹ The manifesto was issued in 1973 after a year of the foundation of the Dalit Panthers. It combines the Ambedkarite spirit with a broader Marxist framework. For details of the manifesto of the Dalit Panthers, refer chapter 7 *Dalit Panthers Manifesto* in K.Satynarayana and Susie Tharu ed. *The Exercise of Freedom*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013.

The path to modernity for the Dalits in Gujarat was difficult. Neither the rapid urbanization nor industrialization made their entry into the modern sector easy. Nevertheless, change took place as the literacy data of the census of 1991 had reflected that the percentage of literacy amongst the Dalits of Gujarat was similar to the literacy levels in other communities. However, there was a wide gulf, which separated Dalits from other communities in secondary and higher education. A tiny section of Dalits became teachers, clerks, cashiers, mamlatdar, judges, MLAs, MPs, even Ministers because of the reservation system that played an important role in the birth of the Dalit middle class.

Achyut Yagnik stated, “Till the 1980s, the Dalit middle class believed that they had successfully entered the modern space and the transition for the rest of the community would be far less tortuous” (23). This Dalit middle class had snapped ties with their community and behaved like a “Dalit Brahmin”. However, the anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985 brought the folly of their belief into sharp focus. In a desperate attempt to reestablish their ties with the community, some resorted to join the Hindutva organizations while some tried to provide modern leadership to their caste organizations. In the following section, I have talked about gradual progression of Dalits as a community and their attempts to launch a movement for dignified life and honorable identity.

The crucial question of self-identity is faced by the Dalits of Gujarat. The pain and anger of social stigma of deprivation and oppression is a part of this quest. The Savarna response to the Dalits during the nineteenth century was as ambivalent as it is today. On one hand, it has been marked by empathy and an attempt to understand the Dalit communities, on the other hand apathy and indifference dominated.

The earliest printed reference to the Dalits in Gujarat occurred in the diary of Durgaram Mehta in 1843. Achyut Yagnik pointed out in his essay,

Durgaram Mehta established the *Manav Dharma Sabha* in Surat in 1843. This was perhaps the first organization in modern times, which sought to go beyond boundaries of caste. In this entry, Durgaram not only recognized the pain of untouchability but also tried to establish the principle of equality and significantly referred to the Dalit as 'Mahetar' and not the widely prevalent insulting 'dhed'. (2002, 26)

Yagnik had also referred Dalpatram's views on caste,

In 1851, Dalpatram Dayabhai in his prize winning, *Gnati Nibandh* 'An Essay on Caste' asserted that caste is not created by God, caste is determined not by birth but by occupation, and that there was historical proof on this kind of sub-divisions of caste. He negated the widely prevalent Vedic belief that castes were created by God from different parts of the body of the Purusha as poetic fancy. It is also significant that Dalpatram alluded to the fact that the Brahmins deprived Dalits of knowledge and their present state is largely due to this deprivation. (2002, 26)

I think Dalpatram was the first upper caste person who criticized upper caste psyche and rejected the *Purushashukta* belief of different castes.

However, Govardhanram Tripathi halted the call for the equality of all human beings given by Durgaram and Dalpatram as Achyut Yagnik writes,

Govardhanram who through his novel *Saraswatichandra* provided a powerful critique of British colonial presence....He viewed the caste system as a practical arrangement governed by performance of duties by castes to each other. While taking such a position, he disregarded the oppression and injustice done to the Dalits through the caste system of mutual performance of duties. (2002, 26)

His views reflected the resemblance of Gandhi's views.

The Swaminarayana sect which had 3.21 lakh followers in 1872, emerged in the early part of the nineteenth century as a splinter group of Vaishnavism. It was started in the early

nineteenth century by Sahajanand Swami (1781-1830), a Brahmin belonging to Chhapiya, a village near by Ayodhya. Sahajanand started performing miracles and brought his subject to a state of trance. Besides this, he was a charismatic teacher and leader and he used simple Hindi and Gujarati to communicate with the rural folk. He also pacified unruly Bhils and Kolis and fought against sati and female infanticide, so the British officials too respected him. With these kinds of activities, he attracted a large number of followers including the Shudras and the members of 'criminal tribes' such as Bhils and Kolis. Trying to keep the caste system intact, he nevertheless, appealed to the people to love each other and to live in harmony.

The Swaminarayana sect thus emerged as a powerful organization during Sahajanand Swami's lifetime and more so after his death. In keeping with the organizational tradition of the Hindus, the sect kept the untouchables at arm's length. In this manner, the sect won the sympathy of the high caste Hindus as well as the Shudras. The sect's following began to grow in size.

The Kanbis who were resourceful peasants joined the Swaminarayana sect during Sahajanand's lifetime. The Swami absorbed and Sanskritised them. Previously Brahminical Hindus and the prestigious sects looked them down, but they acquired acceptance within the Swaminarayana fold after sometime. The sect recognized them and gave them recognition which totally differed from the ordinary Shudras. In the twentieth century, they emerged as commercial farmers and industrialists on a modest scale. Some of them acquired wealth in the African countries. The Sanskritization process together with these worldly achievements enabled the Kanbis to emerge as Patidars.¹⁰ They became the pillars of the Swaminarayana sect.

¹⁰ For details how Kanbis transformed their title into Patidar or Patel refer David Pocock. *Kanbi and Patidar: A Study of Patidar Community in Gujarat*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1972.

Gandhi criticized both the Swaminarayana sect and the Vallabha sect for propagating the values that he thought were contrary to the true spirit of Vaishnavism. In his letter dated 25 July 1918 to Maganlal Gandhi, he said:

To be sure, I have felt in all seriousness that Swaminarayana and Vallabhacharya have robbed us of our manliness. It was all to the good, of course, which people gave up drinking, smoking, etc. However, this is not an end in itself it is only a means. The love taught by Swaminarayana and Vallabha is all sentimentalism. They have made an undesirable effect on Gujarat. (*CWMG*, Vol.14, 504-05)

With the aid of the British education, the Dalit community in Gujarat was stirring and attempting to break free from age-old shackles. This led to agitations based on the change of Dalit caste names.¹¹ Makanji Kuber Makvana led one such agitation. Makanji Kuber Makvana was born in Ahmedabad in 1849. He led the movement for self-worth and self-identity amongst the educated sections of the Dalit society. Makanji's father was initially settled in Surat and later moved to Bombay. At the age of fifteen, Makanji learnt painting from an English artist in Bombay and became a painter. He opened a painting unit of his own and amassed considerable wealth.

Makanji tried to establish that Dheds or Vankars were originally Mayavat Rajputs and should be recognized as Mahyavanshis. In 1908, he wrote *Mayavat Rajputs Prakash* and in 1911 wrote *Mahyavanshi Atle* and *Mayavat Rajputoday Arthat Mahyavanshino Udai*. With his initiative and effort, a 'Panch Sudharak Committee' was formed in 1907-1908 to frame rules and regulations of the Mahyavanshi caste that later came into existence as *Mahyavanshi Rajput Gnyatina Kayda*. Further, he helped various castes councils in Bombay, Navsari, Parchhola, Chikhali, Umargam, Daman, Bharuch, Baroda, Ahmedabad, Karachi, Johannesburg, Pretoria,

¹¹ This section is mainly based on my reading of Y. A. Parmar, *The Mahyavanshi: The Success Story of a Scheduled Caste*, New Delhi: Mittal Publications. 1987. p. 90-94.

Durban and the United Kingdom to frame rules and regulations for the caste. He anchored movement for claiming Kshatriya status. Even after his death in 1924, the movement continued. Largely due to its efforts, the government officially recognized the word Mahyavanshi. In 1939, the Government of Bombay declared that from then on, the word 'dhed' would be discontinued from all government correspondence and instead, Mahyavanshi would be used.

Like the Vankars of Surat, the Khalpa (Chamar) caste in Surat was also agitating for a change of name from Khalpa to Rohit. During the fourth decade of twentieth century, the leaders of the 'Surat Jeela (Rohit) Kshatriya Pracharak Committee' were active in changing the names from Khalpa to Rohit. In 1940, a meeting of this committee was held at Navsari under the chairmanship of Purshottam L. Chauhan, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of the erstwhile Bombay State. In his views, Khalpas were loyal to the Congress, but still their demand to change their name was not accepted. The committee passed a resolution as Parmar mentioned, "in spite of sending a memorandum to the Government of Bombay to change their names from Khalpa to Rohit, from Dhed to Mahyavanshi, from Garuda to Guru and from Bhangi to Rishi, the Government recognized only the name Mahyavanshi, whereas other names were not changed" (Parmar 1994, 91).

The 'Mahyavanshi' movement was a significant departure in the quest for Dalit self-identity because it tried to give a new self-image to the community, and tried to install caste reforms and forge unity amongst various castes of the Dalit community. These attempts revealed how Dalits of Gujarat were keen to reshape their own identity.

The Gandhian approach emphasizes the upliftment of Dalits and places equal emphasis on the change of heart of Savarna Hindus. The establishment of the Gujarat Harijan Sevak Sangh (GHSS) in 1932 was an experiment in this direction. The GHSS desired to abolish untouchability

in all forms, eradicate all forms of social and religious inequalities, and establish an equal, non-violent social order. They called upon the Savarna Hindus to be active agents of change. Despite the committed efforts of individuals such as Thakkarbapa and Parikshitlal Majumdar did not meet with much success. Achyut Yagnik pointed out this fact in his *Introduction to The Stepchild*, “Majumdar in a letter to Gandhi in 1937 confesses, “Barring one or two exceptions, no temples or wells have been opened to the Harijans”. Responding to this Gandhi wrote in *Harijan Bandhu* that henceforth he would stay in Bhangi colonies during his travels.” (2004, xxv-xxvi)

Thus, the ‘change of heart’ or Gandhi’s process of integration has not been an easy process for the Dalits to follow as I have already mentioned earlier in the chapter. The post-independence political processes have made this approach even more difficult to actualize. The language of ‘soul force’ or of ‘change of heart’ has no space in the political discourse. The upliftment of Dalits is seen largely as an administrative task as a statement of Shri Ramlal Parikh, the ex-Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapeeth, exemplifies it. In an interview, he has commented upon the continuing practice of making the disposal of human waste by the members of the Dalit community “This is an administrative task. We do not believe that it is our responsibility. I feel that our responsibility is to do constructive work” (“Upliftment of Dalits, 3).

The arrival of Ambedkarite Ideology to Gujarat was quite early when Ambedkar founded the Bahishkrut Hitkarini Sabha in 1924 in Bombay, a few Gujarati Dalits like Dr. P. G. Solanki and Govindji Parmar were appointed as members of the managing committee. They were able to influence a few Gujarati Dalits through the Ambedkarite ideology, although the real Ambedkarite storm overcame Gujarat only in 1931 with the arrival of Ambedkar in Ahmedabad. Ambedkar appealed to Dalits to work for revolution to have a change in social behaviour of the upper castes. As a result, the Dalits of Gujarat announced agitations like ‘Enter Temples’, ‘Enter

Hotels' and 'Enter Buses'¹² and thereby challenged not only the Savarnas but also Gandhian ideology as Gandhi was against using Satyagraha for removal of untouchability programmes.¹³

As Makrand Mehta mentioned "The Bombay government had passed the *Hotel Entry Law* in 1938. Based on this, the collector of Ahmedabad, Mr. Drew, made a public declaration to inform the hotel owners that they would not be able to prohibit any Dalit from entering their hotel and if they did, their license would be confiscated." (145) The Hotel Entry Law enhanced the courage of the Ambedkarite Dalits of Ahmedabad. Makrand Mehta stated further,

The Citizens' Rights Protection Committee for Scheduled Castes was established, and on 25 July 1938, groups of Dalits planned to enter the well-known hotels of Ahmedabad. The owners of Radio Hotel in Delhi Chakla, Chandravilas and Lakshmivilas on Gandhi Road, Shankar-Vijay in Karanj and Surti Khaman House in Raipur, locked their hotels to save themselves from the onslaught of the Dalits. A hotel owner in Bhatwada locality of Shahpur area took to beating the Dalits in a show of fearlessness. The Dalits retaliated with full force and filed a police case against the hotel owner. On the other hand, when the Dalits made a mass entry into Rajnagar Hotel outside Kalupur Gate, the Savarnas eating in the hotel fled in haste. (147)

There was uproar throughout the city about the Dalits having defiled the upper castes. Jyotikar also mentions, "The owner of Ramvilas Hindu Hotel and Lodge in Raipur committed the terrible act of pouring scalding oil on the Dalit Satyagrahis" (267). The Dalits in their struggle for self-respect did not leave out a single hotel. In just one week, the police registered cases against nearly 150 hotels for having discriminated against the Dalits.

¹² For detailed study of The 'Enter Hotels' agitation, The 'Enter Bus' agitation, and The 'Enter temple' agitation of the Dalits in Gujarat refer Makrand Mehta, *Hindu Varna Vyavastha –Samaj Parivartan ane Dalito* Ahmedabad: Ami Publishers. 1995 and P.G. Jyotikar, *Gujarat Ni Ambedkari Chalval No Itihas: 1920-1970*. Gandhinagar: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Janma Shatabdi Uajavani Samiti, 1991.

¹³ Gandhi responded to the Kalaram Satyagraha in *Young India* thus, "...Now a word to the untouchables. I have advised them and I repeat the advice that it is wholly unnecessary for them to seek to force early into the orthodox temples even through the method of Satyagraha. It is the duty of the 'touchable' Hindus to secure for the 'untouchables' to offer Satyagraha when the time is ripe If they realize the truth of the statements I have made they will at least suspend the (Kalaram) Satyagraha pending the struggle even if the whole mass of them will not join it as some of them have already done." (*CWMG*, VOL.14, 504-05)

The agitation was taking a violent turn and whenever even a single hotel opened its doors, hordes of Dalits would make a dash for it. Gandhian organizations like Majoor Mahajan and Harijan Sevak Sangh began to feel,

“As if the ‘Enter Hotels agitation of the Dalits’ was privileging the Ambedkar ideology over Gandhian ideology, and hence they started offering advice to the Dalits in an effort to divert them from the agitation. ‘Wear clean clothes before going to any hotel, do not fight back if they forbid you to enter, just come to our organization and file a complaint.’ The agitated Dalits were in no mood to be pacified and retorted: ‘Do we go to the hotels to fight? Do not we have a bath? Do not we wear clean clothes? If you are so bent upon offering earnest advice to us, why don’t you do the same to numerous Savarnas who visit hotels with dirty clothes and unclean bodies?’ (Mehta Makrand, 148).

Jyotikar also highlighted the impact of the negative attitude of the Gandhian organizations on the Dalits,

A large number of Dalits became annoyed with Gandhian ideology and this move reinforced their ‘Ambedkarite identity’. The ‘Enter Hotels agitation’ lasted for nearly a fortnight in Ahmedabad. Eminent Ambedkarites Mohanbhai Dunganbhai Parmar (Mohanlal Ambedkarite), Keshavji Ranchhodji Vaghela as well as other leaders were forerunners of this ‘Satyagraha’ (267).

The impact of ‘Enter Hotel’ agitation in Ahmedabad reached to other towns of Gujarat as Makrand Mehta states that, “Following the events in Ahmedabad, clashes between Savarnas and Dalits were reported in Nadiad, Dholka, Viramgam and Rajkot caused great upheavals throughout the state” (151). That the doors of hotels opened for Dalits was of little material consequence, but that the Dalits could cross over boundaries of subservience and be associated with a struggle for self-respect was of consequence.

Another agitation by Dalits that gripped the Gujarat of the pre-independence period was the “Enter Bus” agitation. The British had enacted laws that enabled Dalits to access public

transportation. However, like in other cases, the British did not stand by Dalits when forced with Savarna resistance. In what follows I offer a few accounts of Dalit agitations around access to public conveyance. In 1931, Jyotikar notes there was an attempt to enter public conveyance at Naroda, Ahmedabad. He writes, “It was on 15 September 1931 that Dalits in Ahmedabad tried, for the first time, to board a bus in the Naroda area, under the leadership of Premdas Sadhu and Krishnadev Sharma. Although they had to undergo many difficulties, at the end of a continuous struggle the Dalits were able to travel in the bus with raised heads and dignity” (157).

In a similar way, there was an ‘Enter Bus’ agitation at Sardhav, district Mehsana. The ‘Enter Bus’ agitation at Sardhav began as Mehta mentions, “In 1947, Muldas Vaishya, the President of the Mehsana District (Prant) Panchayat and a senior Gandhian, was stopped from boarding a bus at Umta by a police officer” (163). The denial of a seat to this well-known Dalit leader in the public transport bus led to the agitation. The ‘Sardhav Bus Satyagraha’ gave Dalits courage to overthrow castiest elements who claimed sole right over public buses and who treated Dalits so contemptuously. The programme was successful enough to provide an example for the struggle for self-dignity and protection of rights to the entire country.

Jyotikar attributes the ‘Enter Bus’ agitation to the following reasons,

Scores of Dalits from neighboring villages used to come as workers to three mills in Kalol. Many of them resided in Kalol. However, they had to go to their villages frequently. The facility of railway was not available. Bus service was there but the Dalits were prohibited from travelling in buses at Sardhav, Kalol and interior parts of the region. It was on 13 December 1946 that the Sardhav Bus Satyagraha was launched on behalf of the despised Dalits under the leadership of Govindji Shamji Parmar, a leading member of the Scheduled Caste Federation. (191)

The passing of the Harijan Social Disability Act by the Bombay government in 1947 strengthened the agitation. The course of the agitation as described by Makrand Mehta as follows,

“Dalits divided themselves into groups and dispersed, to various villages and boarded buses; eminent Ambedkarites Ramjibhai Meowala, Ganpatbhai Makwana, Karsanbhai Leuva, Ratilal Rathod, Ghelabhai Saijawala and Gandhian workers such as Shankarbhai Arya, Trikambhai Bhagat, Tejabhai and Viraji Manaji Bhagat provided leadership” (164).

The villagers would gather in crowds, heckle the Dalits, and hit them with bricks and stones, yet the Dalits would fearlessly board the buses. People would often come to blows and sometimes the Savarnas would even let loose snakes and frogs in the buses, but the Dalits were not be deterred in the least. On 5 January 1947, some Dalits of Sardhav village under the leadership of Dungarji Parmar, Jethalal Chamar, Bhanabhai and Haribhai formed groups and caused great commotion at the bus-stand and the village chowk or square. Neither exhortations nor threats from villagers could deter the Satyagrahis from their goal. Two Dalits Viraji Manaji Bhagat and Ghelabhai Saija boarded a village bus after much confrontation. Since it was a token Satyagraha, they got down at Kotha village. As soon as they came down the bus, the villagers surrounded them and beat them up. Later, Viraji Bhagat died because of the injuries he had received.

Tension on both sides was on the rise. The Savarnas of Sardhav went about instigating the villagers of neighboring villages to beat up the Dalits. Makrand Mehta also mentioned the news published between 7 March 1947 to 9 April 1947 in *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* on the prevailing tensions between the upper castes and Harijans. His account tells us that,

Several Dalits in Mokasan village were beaten until they bled, so much so that one of them had to be admitted in the Kalol hospital (*Sandesh*, 7 March 1947). In Mokasan again, piles of hay belonging to the Dalits were set on fire (*Gujarat Samachar*, 9 April 1947). The Dalits retaliated by indulging in stone throwing and burning (*Sandesh*, 29 March 1947). Dungarji of Sardhav was

assaulted with sticks in a Patel's house in Dediyan. According to Revabhai Chamar, 'In spite of the Savarnas having boycotted the Dalits socially, the latter did not bow down to them.' (165)

A crowd of Savarnas surrounded the Dalits aboard the Sardhav village bus. It was in the midst of such unbearable torture and suffering that the Dalits provided momentum to the bus satyagraha without fearing for their lives. Dalits in villages such as Sardhav, Moti Bhojan and Kotha even became victims of physical violence. The Satyagraha continued to receive guidance and support from Nagjibhai Arya of Baroda, Parikshitlal Majumdar, secretary of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, and V. T. Parmar, an Ambedkarite follower.

Simultaneous with this new Dalit assertion were struggles to enter temples. Ambedkar led the Kalaram Mandir Entry Satyagraha in Nasik in March 1930 and it may have inspired the 'Enter Temple Agitation' in Gujarat. The Act passed in the Bombay Legislative Assembly on 11 September 1947, granting entry to Harijans in temples was a legal circular, but for the Dalits it was an affirmation of Dalit identity.

In the 1940s, the population of Ahmedabad was 5.91 lakhs. There were 71 textile mills with a labour force of 1.30 lakh including 8829 female textile mill workers. About 33000 Vankars (Weavers) worked in the spinning and the throstle departments. According to the census conducted by the Ahmedabad Municipality in 1931-32, the population of the untouchables, inhabiting the city was as follows: 23760 Vankars, 11229 Chamars, 4729 Bhangis, 1214 Shenvas, and 989 Garodas. That makes a total population of as many as 41,921 untouchables.¹⁴ The Textile Labour Association (TLA) with its total recorded membership of 51,485 controlled the labour force of Ahmedabad. Although Marxist leaders like Dinkar Mehta, Dhanvant Oza and Ranchhod Patel had organized the Ahmedabad Mill Mazdur Union in 1933, its numerical

¹⁴ Ahmedabad Municipality. 1934. *A Report on the census of the Ahmedabad City*. Ahmedabad: Ahmedabad Municipality. p. 2-15.

strength was not more than about 3000 workers. The TLA was a respectable Gandhian labour union and its influence prevailed among even the workers who had not formally become its members. In any case, Ahmedabad had emerged as a major urban textile centre with a heterogeneous population, by the time the temple entry Satyagraha took place.

The first Temple Entry satyagraha was organized by Gandhian Sarvodaya workers like Ravishankar Maharaj, Mamasahab Phadake, Parixital Majumdar and the Harijan leader Muldas Vaishya. They went to Dakor (Kheda district) and together with the local Congress leaders organized a Ranchhodraji temple Satyagraha on 12 January 1948. This created tension because of the thousands of the Savarna Satyagrahis guarded the famous Ranchhodraji temple. This upset 800 untouchables, and their leader Ravisankar Maharaj declared that he would not leave the place until the Harijans were allowed to enter the temple; Ravishankar had been an Arya Samaji before he met Gandhi. During the freedom movement under Gandhi he had changed the hearts of a large number of outlaws and had turned them into peace loving civilians. He was highly respected among the people of the Kheda district because of his constructive activities. However, the Savarna Satyagrahis were not prepared to listen to him. The jeering crowd beat him and his co-workers with sticks and kicks. The Maharaj, therefore declared a fast unto death. This led the local leaders to look for solutions. They contacted the temple authorities and it was decided to allow untouchables into the temple. They entered the temple the next day, but soon after, the pujaris purified it with the Ganga water as reported in Ahmedabad edition of *Sandesh* on 16 January 1948. The Harijans and their leaders succeeded in a similar manner with respect to the Surat and the Nadiad temples.

The Kalupur Swaminarayan Mandir Entry Agitation was another important Dalit agitation.

The Kalupur Swaminarayan Temple prohibited Dalits from entering the temple. As Makrand Mehta mentions,

However, though the Swaminarayan sect had been working for the welfare of the Backward castes community, a board at the temple gates till 1938, said 'Only for Savarna Hindus'. With the commencement of the Enter Temple Satyagraha, the old board was removed and a new board in its place read: 'Entry to this temple is open for devotees of the Swaminarayan sect alone. (213)

Five hundred Dalit Satyagrahis gathered at the gate of the Kalupur Swaminarayan Temple on 14 January 1948 as part of the programme of the Harijan Temple Entry Management Committee, established under the Presidentship of Keshavji Vaghela, Muldas Vaishya, Nathabhai Vaghela and Shankarlal Vaghela, only to have the massive gates shut in their face and locked. The news spread like wildfire in the entire city and within no time, a large number of Dalits came rushing to the temple.

When they reached the Swaminarayana temple they discovered that the temple authorities had secretly obtained a court injunction for preventing the entry of the Harijans. They had pleaded that they were not Hindus but followers of an entirely different religion and hence the Harijan Temple Entry Act did not apply to the Swaminarayana sect. They hung up a board at the temple gates stating: "Not for all the Hindus. Entry restricted only to the Satsangis, followers of the Swaminarayana sect." This put Manibhai Shah (Municipal Corporation President), Khandubhai Desai (General Secretary of the TLA), Muldas Vaishya (President, Maha Gujarat Dalit (Harijan) Samaj) and other leaders into a considerably embarrassing situation. Kishorlal Mashruwala, a Gandhian intellectual, and a staunch follower of the Swaminarayana sect wrote an article in the *Harijan Bandhu* on 14 January 1948 that it was a pity that his sect had forgotten the original tenets of Sahajanand Swami. He added that the sect had always stood for love, non-violence, universal unity, and human equality and that the Harijans were the true brothers of the

Hindus. They must be allowed to worship the Lord. However, what he added was more significant as he admonished the Harijans for their “malicious political ambition” (“Harijan Mandir Pravesh,” 316). He added, “Why should the Harijans go to the temples at all? It is true that under the act, those who did prevent the entry of the untouchables into the temple can be legally sued, but the untouchables should neither launch a Satyagraha nor should they take resort to the law for their narrow political goals” (“Harijan Mandir Pravesh,” 316-17).

However, the untouchables sat in Dharna and took a vow that they would not leave the place until they succeeded. The next day big crowds of about 25,000 Dalits from the city and the surrounding areas gathered. To the utter surprise of the TLA leaders, the Vankar demonstrators declared a strike in the textile mills. This opened a new dimension to the satyagraha. The TLA leaders were scared as the strike prolonged for more than a week. The municipal Bhangis also created a problem of public health as they refused to do their jobs until they were allowed entry into the temple. In the meantime, Acharya Krishnadasji Maharaj of the Vallabha sect visited Dakor and Vadtal and after contacting the acharyas of these temples, he came to Ahmedabad. Here he met Yagnapurushdasji, the *acharya* of the Swaminarayana temple. He, thus, mobilized the orthodox forces. In his public speech in Ahmedabad, he declared that he would fight until death against the Harijan Temple Entry Act. He added as reported in the *Sandesh*: “It is a sin to allow untouchables into the Hindu temple. We are passing through a critical period. The internal invasion is from the untouchables and the external one is from the Muslims and Pakistan. I am not advising you to murder Muslims, but at least show them that we are now awakened and united” (“Harijan Mandir Pravesh Kaydani”, 1).

The Swaminarayana temple thus witnessed two satyagrahas, one from outside the premises and the other from within. About 250 *sadhus* and *sants* undertook a fast. This was the

situation when one of the untouchables informed Gandhi about the grim situation and requested him to give justice to the untouchable satyagrahis. However, Gandhi responded as he did in 1930 when Ambedkar undertook the Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha by expressing remorse in a letter, “Those who undertake the Satyagraha even for religious purposes are doing great disservice to the Hindu religion. The act of Satyagraha for the temple entry is irreligious and sinful” (*CWMMG*, Vol. 90, 499-500).

Here the effect of Gandhi’s vision is quite clear. On one hand, he raised the expectations of the untouchables to be one with the mainstream while on the other he did not allow them to use satyagraha to achieve their goal. For me this kind of attitude is morally unjustifiable.

Nevertheless, things had changed. The Harijans fasting near the temple had also declared a strike to pressurize the temple authorities as well as their own TLA and Congress leaders. They declared strike because it was not a religious issue for them but the question of their civic rights and cultural freedom, and that they wanted to assert themselves to protect and preserve their dignity and honour as the common citizens of the country.

Thus, the satyagraha took a dramatic turn with the religious and economic issues being mixed up. The mill owners started pressurizing the TLA, and the latter started advising the satyagrahis not to link the ‘spiritual’ with ‘worldly’ matters. Makrand Mehta pointed out Dalits’ resentment against Gandhi’s approach to the satyagraha in his article, “Gandhi had himself launches satyagraha against British rule. The present Satyagraha is based on the Gandhian method of peace and non-violence” (2002, 14). The Congress and the TLA leaders therefore, tried to put pressure on Acharya Yagnapurushdas and the trustees of the Swaminarayana temple. However, they remained adamant. Kishorlal Mashruwala failed to convince those who controlled

the temple. He and like-minded nationalists and Swaminarayans had no advantage with the temple management.

The textile mill strike had already created a problem. However, the situation worsened when the Vankar textile mill workers in Kadi and Kalol (north Gujarat) and Petlad (Kheda district) declared a token strike to express sympathy with their untouchable brethren.

The situation got so tense that it led Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, then the Home and the Deputy Prime Minister of India to rush to Ahmedabad on 22 January 1948. The visit of the Sardar created an electrifying effect as Makrand Mehta described in his article,

In his characteristic style, he took everyone to task. He scolded the TLA leaders for leading the workers strike on a non-economic issue. He passed acid remarks against the Swaminarayana sect. He said as reported in *Prajabandhu* of 20 January 1948 “The Swaminarayanis have imprisoned God. Ambedkar is a member of our cabinet. If he visits your temple, are you going to stop him? Do not force us to break open the gates of your temple. I advise the trustees to pressurize the Acharya and the Sadhus.” (2002, 15)

In another speech, the Sardar admonished the satyagrahis. The presence of the Iron-Man of India yielded the desired effect. However, this was one sided. Whereas Acharya Yagnapurushdasji, and the Swaminarayana sadhus stuck to their guns, the Dalits suffering from guilt bowed down. The striking Dalits like Narsinh Makwana, Keshavlal Sonara, and Jayantibhai Arya sipped the fruit juice lovingly offered by Ravishankar Maharaj. The *Sandesh* published from Ahmedabad, flashed the news that the “Harijan Satyagrahis have been convinced, and returned to their work. The mills have started functioning” (“Harijan Satyagrahio Sammat”, 1).

Conversion of religion is the least selected option by the Dalits of Gujarat. Despite the apparent advantages that conversion to Christianity promised, only about 10% of Dalits in Gujarat have converted to Christianity. Not only has conversion to Christianity been limited, but

also Ambedkar's call to convert to Buddhism and create a neo-Buddhist identity has not found much resonance amongst the Dalits of Gujarat.

While analyzing Dalits' quest for self-identity during the first five decades of the twentieth century I have found four distinct modes. In their quest for self-identity, the first mode adopted by the Dalits was to organize their castes and establish federation with other Dalit castes, to institute process of reform within the caste and seek a higher social status by changing the caste name. The second mode was conversion, by means of adopting Christianity. The third path attempted to transform social movements into political ones. Though this process had started before Gandhi, during the movement for freedom, it gained significant momentum as large number of Dalits joined the struggle for freedom. The significant presence of Dalit youths in the Dandi March is an indication of this process. The fourth process was to assert self-identity as Dalit, for which the principal moving spirit was Ambedkar.

One of the most significant sociological developments in the post-Independence period was the emergence of Savarna ideology. During the sixth decade when a separate state of Gujarat was formed, two significant caste-based mobilizations took place. The Kanbi community came out of its Shudra status and acquired the status of 'Patidar' or 'Patel'. On the other hand, due to the efforts of organizations like the Kshatriya Mahasabha, lower Kshatriya communities like Koli and Thakor were striving to achieve Rajput status and forge a larger Kshatriya identity. I have discussed the crystallization of 'Patel' and 'Kshatriya' identity in the fourth chapter of the thesis "First Anti-Reservation Agitation (1981) and Dalit Writing."

This crystallization of the Patel and Kshtriya castes led the Gujarat polity and society to form two caste-based alliances. One of the groups was of Brahmin, Bania, and Patels. The process of rapid urbanization and industrialization also helped to cement the new Savarna

identity. Brahmin and Vaishyas in Gujarat had lost their ownership of land in the sixth decade, due to the process of land reforms. These communities joined the emerging service sector while the Patidars, with the help of surplus capital from land were making rapid strides towards industrialization. A collusion of interests helped these communities to forge a larger Savarna identity.

The middle class (in whom no SC-ST members were included) launched the Navnirman agitation. The students led by Achyut Yagnik and Manishi Jani on 10 January 1974 launched it. The agitation began when students and professors at Gujarat University in Ahmedabad launched protests against the increase in the food bill of college hostels. The federation of college and university teachers led by S. R. Shastri resolved to discontinue all teaching activity until the students and the government satisfied the people of Gujarat. The bandh erupted in violence all around. The Congress (O) and Jan Sangh were smarting under electoral reverses of 1972, watched with glee the developing scenario and jumped atop the bandwagon of escalating agitation to embarrass the ruling party with obvious political advantages to themselves. The Jan Sangh led the agitation in Saurashtra and North Gujarat, while Congress (O) in the central Gujarat picked up the leadership. The agitation continued for more than ten weeks. In the course of these agitations 103 people died. The struggle in Ahmedabad initially reflected a consolidation of middle-class grievances and did not include participation by mill workers. Under the growing pressure of the students and the opposition parties, Chimanbhai Patel resigned on 9 February 1974.

After the Navnirman agitation of the 1974, the Congress (I), to recapture power, forged an alliance of Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasis, and Muslims (KHAM), which was the second group. The Dalit community, included in this alliance as Harijans, became a crucial link in this alliance.

The political success in the KHAM formation in the 1980 and 1985 state assembly elections had challenged the political domination of Savarna groups. This identity and the perceived political deprivation in the Savarna community erupted in the form of Anti-Reservation agitations in 1981 and 1985. Gujarat witnessed the worst forms of caste oppression and brutality during the agitations in which Dalits were centrally targeted.¹⁵ It is important to note here that what the rest of the country saw in the form of ‘anti-Mandal agitations’ in 1990 was witnessed by Gujarat at least a decade earlier in the form of anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1985.

However, neither of these agitations led to the formation of larger identity amongst the backward KHAM communities. The reasons for this failure lie in the nature of the KHAM alliance and the policies of the governments comprising KHAM leadership itself. Even after capturing more than 80% seats on the basis of KHAM in the 1980 Assembly elections, the Congress (I) Government did not take any policy measures which helped the KHAM communities to develop further. The ‘inter-changeability’ of reservations amongst the Dalits and Adivasis was abolished, thus precluding any possibility of these communities forging a permanent alliance beyond caste and community boundaries. On the other hand, the Government policies that favored rapid industrialization benefited the Savarna communities.

The last twenty years of the twentieth century in Gujarat witnessed the rapid transformation of Savarna identity into a larger ‘Hindu’ identity. The main agenda behind this transformation was to gain electoral power.

The 1980 election was the first election in which Congress (I) applied KHAM formula and won 80 percent seats. It was the major blow to the newly cemented Savarna identity. In the 1980 elections Janta Party and BJP’s vote share were 22.74 and 14.08 percent respectively. In

¹⁵ A detailed account of agitations is given in 4th and 5th chapter of this thesis.

order to break the KHAM the weakest part of the chain i.e. Harijans or Dalits were targeted by the upper caste trio—Brahmin, Bania, and Patel—in the riots that began in December 1980, which lasted for six months. In these riots, Muslims remained totally aloof. After targeting Dalits in the first anti-reservation agitations of 1981 the combined vote share of Janta Party and BJP was decreased by 3 percent in 1985 elections. The policy of targeting the Dalits was boomeranged as the vote share of the Congress (I) increased by 4.5 percent. Therefore, after 1985 elections, the Janta Party and BJP changed their strategy in order to gain electoral success.

The national leadership of the BJP became conscious of the growing anti-BJP feeling among Dalits, and it systematically started co-opting Dalit and Adivasi communities. The party started the co-opting programme with the Dalits. The party's anti-reservation stance was also corrected, and after 1985, the Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP)¹⁶ started talking in favour of a reservation system for the Dalits and the Adivasis. "The following year, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), in one of its Hindu Yuva Sammelans, asked the youth to dedicate themselves to the abolition of untouchability. They were also asked to work for the all-round development of the 'socially and economically backward Hindu brothers'" (Nandy A, 103).

By the mid-1980s the message of the VHP, that the idea of Savarna had to be supplanted by that of Hindutva as the binding cement for Hindus, had spread.¹⁷ Earlier the ultimate symbolic target of hate was the Dalit; now it was the Muslim. At last, the Gujarati middle class spread out over large cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara, and Surat and more than forty other large towns, and consisting mainly of Savarna, but also Dalit and Adivasi government servants, teachers and petty contractors had begun to find security within the ideology of Hindutva. Cut off from older

¹⁶ Significantly, the ABVP, the student wing of the BJP, was the first organization to raise a banner of protest against reservations in post-graduate medical studies introduced by the Gujarat government in 1981. The ABVP not only initiated the agitation but also had taken it to the middle class localities of Ahmedabad.

¹⁷ I have drawn my ideas based on my reading Ashish Nandy, Shikha Trivedi, Shail Mayaram and Achyut Yagnik. *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and the Fear of the Self*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. 1995. 100-09.

cultural and social ties, the class had learnt to use the ideology as a ready cure for rootlessness and as a substitute for traditions. Hindutva had become for this class a new *Purana* to validate their pre-eminence. This new *Purana* of Hindutva was supplemented by various strategies of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and VHP. One of the strategies was the Ekatmata Yatra in 1983.

Ashish Nandy and others have covered the Ekatmata Yatra in their book. They had stated the chart of the Ekatmata Yatra thus,

The VHP planned three major 'pilgrimages' between 16 November and 16 December 1983, for the whole of India; the Gangajal or Ekatmata Yatra from Haridwar in the foothills of the Himalayas to Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu; the Ekatmata Yatra from Pashupatinath in Nepal to Kanyakumari; and the Ekatmata Yatra from Gangasagar on West Bengal to Somnath in Gujarat. Twenty-three subsidiary pilgrimages were planned for Gujarat. They were to originate from different places and merge with one of the main ones from Gangasagar to Somnath. Their aim was to rise above caste, sect and denominational differences and invoke the spirit of unity amongst the Hindus. Signatories to the appeal to join the Yatras included the ABVP, the RSS, the Arya Samaj, the Rotary Club, the Lions Club and also, more notably, the Jain Sampradaya, Vaishnava Parivar, Sikh Sampradaya, Buddha Sampradaya and Bhartiya Dalit Varga Sangh. In other words, an attempt was made to associate virtually all the non-Hindu communities with the yatras and thus to isolate the Muslims. (107)

The Yatras were charted to touch the maximum number of shrines and centers of pilgrimage of not only one sect of Hinduism but it tried to cover maximum numbers of shrines of all the major sects of Hinduism.

The low caste appeasement programme started with the Dalits shifted its target and started to woo the tribes. The BJP workers in Gujarat started developmental and relief work in tribal areas. It took place throughout Gujarat including the tribal areas. The second yatra was the

RamJanaki Dharma Yatra in 1987. The stated aim was to transcend caste and sect differences in the worship of Lord Ramchandra and to affirm the unity of the Hindus.

Ashis Nandy and others very well captured the meaning of the unity of the Hindus,

Virpur is a small town at the junction of Kheda, Sabarkantha and Panchmahal districts of Gujarat.

On the day the Ram-Janaki Dharma Yatra was to pass through it, the town witnessed violent clashes between the local Hindus and Muslims and, for the first time in Gujarat, the tribals of nearby villages rushed in to attack Muslim localities and burn down Muslim shops and houses.

(108)

The VHP organized in 1989 the Ramshila Pujan - worship of sanctified bricks meant for the proposed Ram temple at Ayodhya was the third effort. The Pujan was highly successful as the small villages with no more than fifty to a hundred houses participated in the worship enthusiastically. The VHP collected vast sums of money as a charity through the Pujan. The Pujan was carried out without any kind of caste barriers.

With the rise of the 'Hindutva' ideology across the country, the country has also seen an emergence a 'Dalit-Bahujan' identity in some parts of the country. Thus, the Indian polity has placed two choices before the dalit communities: one, either to support the 'Hindutva' thrust and hope to be integrated within the larger Hindu formations or the second, to play a pivotal role in consolidating the Dalit Bahujan Samaj. Their choice will determine the nature of their quest for self-identity.

Since 1975, the process of literary self-articulation amongst the Dalit has taken the form of a movement through Dalit literature.

A quest for self-identity and self-articulation was the anchor and moving spirit of Dalit literature. Dalit literature began its journey with poetry, which continues to be its most powerful

form of self-expression.¹⁸ The Dalit literature has acquired a distinct voice and made noticeable contribution in almost all genres: Poetry, novel, drama, autobiographies and prose.

Dr. Nathabhai Gohil's *Saurashtra Harijan Bhakta Kavio* (1987) and Dr. Dalpat Shrimali's *Harijan Sant and Lok Sahitya Kanthasth Thi Granthasth* (1989) created a new historical awareness by taking of Dalit expression seriously. The documentation of folk and oral literature gave new dimension to the search of identity and filled Dalits with pride. This pride had a positive impact on the Dalit writing. Dalit writers had not restricted themselves to the historical arenas but also entered the sociological arena. Maheshchandra Pandya's *Sabarkantha Na Garo* (1984) and V. A. Parmar's *The Mahyavanshis: the Success Story of a Scheduled Caste* (1987) are two studies which suggest that Dalit intellectuals understood their social formations through their own categories. These studies added a new dimension to their notions of self and its relation to larger societal processes.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Dalits in Gujarat were still the economically deprived section, as they did not have either land or business to fulfill daily needs. The community had to take support of the land-owning community. When the government machinery failed to provide them their rights and opportunities for economic development, they launched a movement against the government. During the 1970s, the Dalit Panthers Movement helped the community to re-establish and strengthen ties with the legacy of Ambedkar. From this movement Dalits learnt how to respond and react to instances of oppression and injustice.

However, unlike Maharashtra the movement was not able to acquire institutional dimensions in Gujarat. The specific caste organizations played a crucial role in the Dalit search for upward mobility and self-identity. Dalits who historically suffered systematic oppression and structural deprivation is bound to be inward looking, for both sustenance and identity. The

¹⁸ For detailed information on the development of Dalit literature in Gujarat, see third chapter of the thesis.

leadership among Dalit communities largely comprised individuals who belonged to educated urban sections. Aspirations of the urban middle class governed the aspirations of both the leadership as well as the community in which demands and the desires of the rural Dalits were forgotten.

After 1985 anti-reservation agitation Dalits were attracted towards the rubric of Hindutva as described earlier but after 1996 they have found it was just a mirage as after a decade also not a single facet of their life had changed. It was not unlike what they found during the period the political coalition of KHAM. Mobilization based on Marxist tradition had never been a viable mode of politics or social reform in Gujarat.

The data given by the National Bureau of Crime, New Delhi every year clearly suggests that the situation of Dalits remained the same as it was before independence. The number of severe atrocities in fact has increased. Dalits are still economically backward because they have only 2% of cultivable land in proportion to their population. Their selection for employment is made only against the reserved seat in the government sector. The private sector has fixed notions about them i.e. Dalits are not intelligent, average performers, etc. The caste syndrome does affect Dalit mobilization in the private sector and that is why Dalits are now demanding reservations in the private sector. In the post-independence India Dalits have chosen literature as a tool to raise Dalit consciousness and have been able to keep the movement alive. The next chapter explores the role of literature in the spread and reach of the Dalit movement and its achievements.