

# **SOCIO-POLITICAL ASSERTION THROUGH ART FORMS: A CASE STUDY OF DALITS IN INDIA AND NEPAL**

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## **DECLARATION**

I, Laxman singh, student of Ph.D. hereby declare that the thesis titled “Socio-political Assertion through Art forms: A case study Of Dalits in India and Nepal” which is submitted by me to the MMAJ Academy of international Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associate ship, Fellowship of other similar title or recognition. This is to declare further that I have also fulfilled the requirements of Para 8 (viii and ix) of the Ph.D. ordinance, the details of which are enclosed at the end of thesis.

Place: New Delhi

Laxman Singh

*DEDICATED*

*TO*

*MY PARENTS*

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## **ABBREVIATION**

- BSP - Bahujan Samaj Party
- BAMCEF - All India Backward and Minority Communities Employess Fedration
- FBI - Federal Bureau of investigation
- BJP - Bhartiya Janta Party
- RSS - Rashtriy savyam Sevak Sangh
- JMC - Jagran Media Centre
- FEDO - Feminist Dalit Orgnization
- DSS - Dalit Seva Sangh



## **Introduction**

After the globalization spread of democratic values has touched the life of downtrodden around the world. Art practices in modern times are far beyond recreational and ritualistic functions. In south Asian context Dalits a community who are socially segregated on the basis of scriptures, job purity, power and social hierarchical structure are coming forward to claim their rights and dignity.

Democratic values have inspired them to opted peaceful means of protest and politics. With the success of Bahujan samaj party scholars have realised the importance of downtrodden Dalit castes in the electoral success .this electoral success did not come suddenly to Bahujan Samaj party .though this work is beyond the success of Bahujan samaj party as it including other states as well as another nation, Nepal for study of Dalits socio political assertion. Uttar Pradesh in terms of population can be considered seventh largest nation and Bahujan Samaj party 4 times got succeed in making government in this hugely populated state. Dalit assertion started long ago in ancient times. Earlier it was in the form of theological and spiritual movements. In ancient times sage like Makkhli Goshal of Ajivak sect and Mahatma Buddha paved path for Dalit emancipation in medieval times bhakti saints like Tukaram, kabir, Ravidas, Garibdas influenced Dalits in a positive way. Temple entry was not allowed to Dalits in medieval time still in present days temple entry is banned in latent way in many places of India for lower caste Dalit people. When temple entry was not allowed and Hindu scriptures supported discrimination against Dalits, Bhakti period saints challenged the authority of Brahminical hegemony of God and religion and challenged them in a spiritual and theological form. Many bhakti period saints were poets too. Through their poetry they claimed their right on God and on spiritual matters which was the one of the most powerful deriving force of society at that times. Nowadays

society is driven by market forces and political institution though religion is still having a large stake in influencing the society. Bhakti period poet saints like Tukaram were the pioneer of street performance long before Russian revolution. Russian revolution period is considered the beginning of street plays and performances. Though Tukaram's message was more spiritual but social message was clearly visible in his poetry. Tukaram was born into a backward caste. Saint poet Tukaram was from Kunbi (Shudra) caste.<sup>1</sup> Tukaram said that "pride of caste never made any man holy", "the Vedas and Shashtra have said that for the service of God, castes do not matter", "castes do not matter, it is God's name that matters", and "an outcast who loves the Name of God is verily a Brahmin; in him have tranquillity, forbearance, compassion and courage made their home".<sup>2</sup>

In north India kabir gave a hard blow to casteism and Brahminical domination on spirituality through his poetry and teachings. Challenge to Brahman Varna domination was always presented by people of rest of varnas, like Kshatriya, Vaishyas, and shudras and Antyaj<sup>3</sup>. This assertion in many forms was continued by Dalits and backward caste people. In Indian social system caste turned into class. Dalits were socially, religiously marginalised. Discriminatory practices prevented them access to education, and position into power structure. In medieval times due to this discrimination many Dalits converted to Islam. Later they found solace in Christianity in British period and after Dr. Ambedkar Buddhism paved a path for them for total religious spiritual emancipation. At the time of independence Buddhism was virtually extinct in main land India. Some Buddhists were found only in Laddakh,

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<sup>1</sup> Dabre, Thomas. 1987. *The God-Experience of Tukaram : A Study in Religious Symbolism* Pune : Jana-Deepa Vidyapeeth, p.11

<sup>2</sup> Ranade,R.D. (1994), *Tukaram*, State University of New York Press, , pages 154-156

<sup>3</sup> Here the word antyaj denotes to Dalits .Dalits are out of varna fold,that's why they are never called savarna. savarna means a person which has varna

Arunachal Pradesh and in Tamilnadu. When 6 lakh Dalits converted to Buddhism along with Dr. Ambedkar in 1956, Dalits virtually become inheritor of Buddhist cultural heritage .Buddhist architecture, Buddhist paintings and other monuments inspired Dalit Buddhists to create a new genre of art. Buddhist path defined by Dr. Ambedkar was called Navayana Buddhism by many scholars. This Navayana Buddhism incorporated Ambedkar's socio-political ideology and strong opposition to Hindu Sanatan dharma.

Along with Dalit Buddhist movement, many other movements also flourished like Ravidasi movement of Punjab. Ravidassia of Punjab established a lot of centres to promote ideology of Ravidas around the world. Many Ravidasi temples are built around the world (cities like London, Paris, Newyork, Vienna and Toronto).

"Caste is an institutionalized hegemonic system in which a minority is enabled through the Brahminical socio-religious structure, which is, to use Gramsci's expression, 'a permanently organized force'. Caste ideology has been made 'an interiorized force' or an 'external law taken into psyche' so that 'culture becomes nature and individual learns to affirm and to reproduce the reality principle from within himself through his instinct'. Each person is born into a caste and is there by either superior or inferior to someone else"<sup>4</sup>

The Dalit cultural identities and practices have come under increasing attack in the past few decades. As I have mentioned in further chapters how performances of Chuharmal and Reshma was attacked by upper caste goons. Statues of Ambedkar were vandalised to demean Dalit people. Their cultural space is increasingly squeezed out.

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<sup>4</sup> Mani Ranjan Braj. 2005 *Debrahmanising History: Dominance and Resistance in Indian*. New Delhi: Manohar Publication., p.53

It takes Dalit art two broad forms conventional and contemporary, Dalit artistic expression into account and explores their emergence in socio-cultural and political context in Dalit community of two nations of India and Nepal respectively. These art forms include visual arts as well performing arts like theatre, songs, dance–drama, political imagery, architecture. The conventional Dalit arts have been rooted in Dalit cultural tradition whereas modern Dalit arts in India have been more influenced by Ambedkar’s ideology. The modern Dalit art forms have been successfully able to establish its new form which can depict their various collective socio-cultural and political manifestations.

In accordance with text and forms, Dalit Theatre consists of its two major parts. In first part, Dalit theatre represents itself in its original shapes comprising of folk theatre and dances. In North India, these cultural traditions are known as “*Kahrawa*”. It is caste and community based performances which are known as *Dhobia Nritya* , *Chamarnacha*, *Ahir Nritya*, *Aalha*, *Dhimar Nirtya* ,*Panthi Nacha* and several other. In these performances, performers and audiences come from same caste or community and time and space for such performances are decided by them, which depend on the availability of duo. These performances directly transmit oral traditions, narratives, social values and beliefs of their society. Such Dalit performances have a long chain and are spread out all over India.

Second type of Dalit theatre is based on primarily Ambedkar’s ideology. It mainly emphasises on caste annihilation, equality, Dalit empowerment and total denial of Brahminical religion, history, myth and institutions prevailed in Indian society. This new form of Dalit Theatre is emerging as a Modern Dalit Theatre. “It is the theatre of those who have been denied status as human beings: It is the theatre which concerns with the pain, sorrows and sufferings of these neglected people. It is the theatre of

protest which aspires to get back basic human dignity for those from whom it was snatched away. It is the theatre which offers a challenge to the Brahminical social order. It exposes and presents the social reality of injustice and atrocities.”

Furthermore, contemporary Dalit Theatre links the day-to-day affairs of Dalits, encourages the participation spirits of the people with emancipatory impulse, re-evaluates Dalit art and restructures/reconstitutes the misinterpretation made by the dominating castes. Additionally, it provides an alternative forum against the sacred arts boundaries of the dominant castes, accelerates the reaction against the demeaning endeavours of the dominant castes towards the Dalits, and retells the history, culture and life style of Dalits. Dalit theatre tries to disseminate the liberation idea and ideologies among Dalits and Non-Dalits.

Parallel to the Modern Dalit Theatrical genres, several Dalits folk form such as *Panthisong* has been used by untouchables to depict their distinct socio-cultural manifestations. This folk form helped them to form their separate socio-cultural identity. There is a vast plethora of music and dance for different social and religious occasions. For these performances there is no formal period of apprenticeship where the students are able to devote their entire life to learning the music/dance, the economics of rural life does not permit this sort of thing. The practitioners must still attend to their normal duties of agriculture, domestic, household works, manual labour or whatever their chosen profession is.

In the Indian modern theatre history, Dalit theatre never found its space. In India, the emergence and development of Dalit theatre is deeply inherent as an immense reaction towards different cultural institutions and other theatre practices such as progressive and communist practices in which untouchables rarely found their role and representation on stage. At the thematic level, caste structure never caught the

imagination in progressive theatres. Since 1970s, Dalit creativity has been marked by the short stories, novels, poetry and autobiographies. Indeed Dalit theatre followed close on the heels of Dalit poetry and short stories. Ambedkar's ideology has played an important role to recreate or reconstitute the Dalit folk traditions for Dalit socio-political and cultural manifestations. Dalit Theatre has indeed passed through different stages and finally emerged as strong tool for social resistance. In Maharashtra Dalit Rangabhoomi emerged as a first Dalit theatre, which was based in Pune, has been followed by dozens of others, both in Maharashtra and outside the state.

In mid 1980s, several new Dalit theatre groups were established in north India. In 1987, "Ahwan Theatre" - a cinema and mass media group of Delhi committed to giving exposure to the rich cultural heritage of Dalits in the country. They staged a Hindi play "*Dev Dashi*" which manifested the plight and unworthy life conditions of temple dancers (Dalit Women).

Arjak Sangh, a group of some highly motivated Dalits formed cultural wings and staged many plays in north India, especially in Uttar Pradesh. Arjak Sangh played an important role for creating a base for cultural resistance.

In Uttar Pradesh HariNath Bahujan has established Bahujan Jagriti Dasta in 1984 to propagate Bahujan Samaj Party's ideology in Ajamgarh. He staged "*Ved Bolte Hain Bhed Kholte Hain*". Indeed it was a performance which raised Dalit issues and created a separate cultural and aesthetical space to counter Brahminical cultural and aesthetical. Latter on several Bahujan Jagriti Dastas [group] were constituted in all over Uttar Pradesh. These squads consist of writers, playwrights, poets, artists and so on, whose job to write songs, ballads, plays and paint pictures about Dalit consciousness and transmit these messages to the villages through various cultural

performances of that region. Often they pick up the folk songs and ballads popular in particular regions and rewrite them with words carrying political nuances that will evoke the people at the grass roots. These performances narrate the glory of Dalit icons like Ambedkar, Phule, Kanshiram, UdaDevi, Jhalkaribai, Bijli Pasi, Avantibai, Mahaviridevi, Mayawati, etc.

Dev Kumar, in 1992, founded Dalit theatre in Uttar Pradesh, which is very much popular in Allahabad, Banaras, Bareilly, Jhansi and Kanpur region of Uttar Pradesh. He has been the pioneer of Dalit experimental theatre in that state. He formed several groups of Dalit youth performers who performed theatre in streets and stage related the problems of Dalit. This whole process ultimately helped Dalits to unite into a Dalit socio-cultural and political movement. These production such *Dastaa*(1994), *Supa Bhagat*(1994), *Bhadra Angilima*(1996), *Harijan Seva*(1997), *Nihang*(1998), *Agayat-Itihash*(2003) *Veerangna*(2004), *DandiYatra*(2005), *Rastra Nayak Dr. Ambedkar*(2005), *Kapat*(2005,) *Bhangi*(2005) ,*Ham Bhi Dil Rakhte Hain*(2005)based on Dalit women issues,*Yaad Karo Kurbani*(2008) *focuses on Dalit contribution in 1857 war of Independence*,*Mathe Maila* (2008) and *Trifla mein Trilok*(2009)based on Guru Ravidas's life events were highly appreciated by the Dalits.

Primarily folk performances are held in very traditional ways accompanied with both community based audiences and spaces. The styles and forms of such performance depend on interaction between performers and audiences. Indeed such performances are interdependent on each other (performers and audiences). From socio-religious and cultural contexts up to political contexts, these performances take shapes accordingly to represent their distinct identity. These performances not only celebrate socio-cultural events but also serve as a tool of social resistance against the oppression and exploitation.

In Punjab, Dalit singers are making caste assertion as their theme. One of the most popular Punjabi Singer Ms. Pooja has sung a song elaborating political ideology of Guru Ravidas Begampura (a place where is no sorrow) that we have to establish Begampura. This concept of Begampura is very much similar to ‘Utopia’.

Apart from these performing arts, Dalits have started making their own imagery using their own socio-political symbols. Installation of Ambedkar Statue is one of them. After BSP gained power in Uttar Pradesh, Ms. Mayawati established many monuments to commemorate Dalit Heroes. These monuments are based on Buddhist Architecture. The main basis of new Dalit visual aesthetics is “Buddhism”.

Researching about assertion of Nepali Dalits through arts was a difficult task. Because as per my knowledge no one has done any research on this topic. I visited Tribhuvan University Kathmandu, hub of higher education in Nepal, met various activists from Nepal who are working for Dalits. I enquired about my topic but I got nothing which is directly related to my research. Working on such maiden theme is really exciting as well tough job. Because I had to go into the remotest corners of Nepal to search about material related to my research. I was excited and happy for this challenging job. Even no article is available on this topic. I searched internet got some pages regarding Dalit artists but not got anything which deals with their social and political art. Though Nepal is a country adjunct my home state Uttar Pradesh but I really did not knew much about Nepali Dalit art. Though I presented a paper on Nepali politics during my M.phil days, but writing one term paper and going deep into the society to search a particular subject on which none has done has any research is really a tough task.

Regarding Nepal Dalit art forms is really an unexplored area .very few academic works are available to study about arts of Nepalese Dalits. It definitely requires



primary information which is possible only by meeting with performers and watching their performance as I am also unaware of Nepali language so there is field study is must.

In Nepal after the Maoist insurgency, Dalits started asserting their identity through performing arts like songs and play. Their songs depict their sorrow that why they have become Dalit and why they are not as much privilege as upper caste. These songs also have the sense of political assertion as they want to create a classless & casteless society. Most of these songs are available in popular compact disks and very popular among urban youths.

Ukhans (legend songs) of Raute<sup>5</sup>, a Marginalised nomadic community of Nepal, presents a good example of socio assertion. Rautes are good example of caste to tribe continuum. Pariyar caste of Nepal, who are dalit, play Panchai Baja, Panchai Baja is a band of musicians. Pariyar people are appointed as musician to play at different ceremonies. Gayne [Gandhrva] of Nepal are totally based on singing and playing Sarangi for livelihood. They use to work as bards.

New assertive Dalit art of Nepal is mostly supported and created by different NGO, working for Dalits. Jagran media centre of Kathmandu composed many songs on social assertion of Dalits. Jagran media centre also made a TV drama *DALAN* on Dalits. Kachahari theatre is being used by Nepalese Dalits as a tool of catharsis. Painters like Aruna hingmang giving a Dalit touch to modern Nepalese art sphere, which include performance of various groups, interviews, visual clippings, CD's, cassettes, pamphlets, news paper cuttings, books, journals, etc.

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<sup>5</sup> Rautes are not considered untouchables in Nepal neither they have Dalit status.

Culture is men made environment. Cultural trait reflects ideology. Different art forms depict ideology of respective artists. In south Asia marginalised sections are using art forms for their socio-political assertion. Democracy and globalization has affected art forms in a big way. Dalits society of India and Nepal are at the bottom of social structure asserting them in every way. Their assertion through art forms is subject of study of proposed research. The period of this Research is after 1990s. The main areas of research will be north India states like Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh as well as Nepal.

### **Review of Literature:**

Verbal arts are not simply memorized and performed but rather emerge through the dialectic play between text and context. Anthropologists and folklorists have come to understand verbal art as something which interacts with each particular social situation and is shaped into a unique performance in which they high-caste status and in general validate the social caste hierarchy. Among high castes, these assertions of high general validate the social caste hierarchy. One of the important books, *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery* about this topic is compiled and edited by Gary Michael Tartakov. In this book Gary enquires the root and impact of Dalit Art in Indian context. Dev Kumar opines that “It is very difficult to break caste based hegemony and Brahminical supremacy immediately. There is a need to mobilize Dalits to on the cultural basis to stand against these social evils. Theatre plays important role to spreading social, cultural and political consciousness as well. We are intending to break and in annihilate caste from Indian society through theatre. In another stance these theatres have raised voices against other social bad practices also. Such as anti alcohol campaign, anti -slavery, educational rights for all Dalits, Dalit Women empowerment and so on.”

Sourbh Dubey while commenting on new Dalit visual imagery says “Sawarkar is recognizable as an established artist, of national and international venues, Triennales and the National Gallery of Modern Art in New Delhi. He is also recognized prominently as a Dalit artist, who specializes in themes with Dalit interests. Where conventional art interpretation often tends to see symbols as autonomous bearers of meaning, everyday image interpretation is always interested in who is producing an image. The fact of Sawarkar’s being a Dalit does not tell us exactly what his personal point of view is, but when set alongside the image we cannot help seeing that it colours our understanding of Manu’s menace.

Sawarkar’s Manu is a work of art, a work of inescapable skill. Coarse, even brutal, its technique and its impact is implacable: Manu is depicted as hate-filled and hateful. It is a work of appreciable form as well as a work of searing content.”

There is a plenty of literatures available on dalit aesthetics but when we talk about the lesser known or new forms of Dalit art forms, material is scarce, there is need to collect correct reference source, that’s only possible through field study.

### **Objectives**

1. Study of the role of Indian and Nepalese Dalits in art history
2. Connection of artistic expression with socio-political assertion
3. To examine the Nature and genre of art forms as political tool

### **Research question and problem**

1. South Asian society is divided on the basis of caste and relation with cultural practices.
2. How have Dalits created their cultural capital and using it for social assertion?
3. To identify social function of Art practices of Dalits.

4. How politics and art affecting each other?
5. Role of symbols in electoral politics hypothesis.

Dalits of India and Nepal created and reformed their cultural capital in the form of art practices to get a higher status and political power.

### **Mode of Investigation**

To understand the subject deeply apart from secondary sources an extensive field study of Nepal and India will be done to meet Dalit artists. Visit of different Bahujan Melas and Dalit Mela will also be part of field study. Secondary sources like journals, pamphlets, booklets will be essential part of research.

### **Chapter scheme**

1. First chapter is about identity formation of Dalits and formation of Dalit aesthetics. This chapter also includes history of Dalit movement in India and role of Ambedkar in Dalit assertion.
2. Second chapter is about performing art practices and Dalits based on extensive field study of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Maharashtra. Singers of left ideology as well as Dalit theatre are also included in this chapter.
3. Third chapter is about visual arts and Dalit intervention. Mithila paintings, Dalit Buddhist imagery, individual painters like Savi Savarkar are depicted in detail in this chapter.
4. Fourth or the last chapter is about Nepalese Dalit artistic intervention and its impact on Dalit society. This chapter is based on field study of Nepal. More than hundred Dalit songs were collected during field study.

## Chapter one

### Introduction to Formation of Dalit identity and Aesthetics

The issues concerning the Dalits<sup>6</sup> have appeared significantly on the agenda of south Asian discourses along with question of race. Caste is presenting a unique challenge to academician to study and research. Unlike race, caste is a typical south Asian phenomenon. Though there are some communities in some counties which are very similar to Indian Dalits like Burakumin of Japan<sup>7</sup>.

In the South Asian context, the issue of Dalits has become one of the major areas of studies related to culture, politics, media and economy. In every nation there are segments of society who suffer from the process of marginalization, suppression and oppression because each society is based on basic structure of power and politics. The power holders on the basis of culture, economic and political power dominate the people. Power has its own dynamics and it is not static. At the time both the suppresser and suppressed are the equal parts in the structure of power relation.

There is always dialectical struggle between these groups, that's why changing process continues sometimes slow, sometimes with fast pace. Changes are brought by many factors in society and these economical, geographical and cultural factors are very dominant. Cultural factor is most important in the making of human psyche. Cultural factors like art practices bring new ideas, aspiration and liberation. The

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<sup>6</sup> The literal meaning of Dalit [Dalits =plural form of Dalit ] is the person who is suppressed .in the context of south Asia ,Dalit is a common term used to address the socially marginalized people or community who are on the lowest strata of caste hierarchy and considered polluted and on this pretext discriminated by other caste people in various forms .

<sup>7</sup> Burakumin, meaning "hamlet people", dates back to the feudal era. It originally referred to the segregated communities made up of labourers working in occupations that were considered impure or tainted by death, such as executioners, butchers and undertakers.

The lowest of these outcasts, known as Eta, meaning "abundance of filth", could be killed with impunity by members of the Samurai if they had committed a crime. As recently as the mid-19th Century a magistrate is recorded as declaring that "an Eta is worth one seventh of an ordinary person".

URL- <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34615972>

liberation is most of the times comes in form of new thoughts, new ideas, which paves way for new establishment.

Art is manifestation of ideas imaginations, aspiration and hidden desire which come out in the form of art. In contemporary world art has become a tool of socio political expression. Art practices are playing a major role in socio political propaganda and expression. Some political parties are having their cultural wing those don't have hire professional groups. Street plays are becoming major tool for political propaganda.<sup>8</sup>

Art is an essential to our survival as food, shelter, medicine, and the natural environment. It offers a powerful way of learning and communicating knowledge. The principles and practice of the arts give us ways to enact symbolically the most destructive impulses in our beings, and create new forms of truth, beauty, and inspiration. We are physical, emotional, and mental beings driven as much as by our desire to create our tendencies to destroy. We are individual We are physical, emotional, and mental beings and also interdependent selves, dancing between the call to be with others and the need to create a solo expression of who we are and who we want to be. The body, movement, and art all call us into an active and creative, relationship with ourselves, with one another, and with the world. The integration of the body, movement, art, and healing is rightly part of our ethical criteria for a sustainable life<sup>9</sup>. Halprin says art is must for modern human life as other essential things like food and shelter. Imagination joined with creativity brings new

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<sup>8</sup> With an objective to reach masses with simple and effective communication skills, street plays, also known as *nukkad natak*, have been in great demand this election season in Bihar. Several candidates as well as parties are using the drama form to reach the voters ahead of Bihar Assembly Elections 2015. Leftist parties have always been known to use street plays to raise issues that concern ordinary citizens. Other major parties who used this medium of campaigning in 2009 general elections, have come back to it this year. Demand for street play artists from different parties have been on a high too, reports *BBC*. URL- <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-demand-for-street-play-artists-increases-ahead-of-bihar-elections-2015-2132049>

<sup>9</sup> Halprin, Daria,[ 2003].*The Expressive Body in Life, Art, and Therapy : Working with Movement, Metaphor, and Meaning*.London ,Jessica kingsley publishers. pp.44

ideas and brings positivity as well as when it works as catharsis it removes negative thoughts on its way to shun the anger in a positive way.

There are several modes of protest and some mode of protest around the world like burning of flag of any country, burning of effigies of government officials and eminent person's and beat effigies to purge out the anger. Though burning of flag or effigy is not an act of art but has some symbolic meanings. Symbolic acts when combined with creativity and imagination brings refined thoughts, disciplined any social movement

In the case of Dalits of South Asia it has played a vital role in identity formation and as well as in assertion. Blacks in America have also developed art movement which is against racial injustice. Afro Americans under the banner of black panthers attempted to recreate symbolic culture they began to have widespread influences on the changes taking place in afro American culture and aesthetics.

The Black Panther Party (BPP) was a radical political organisation in United States of America. Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale founded the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California, in 1966. The chief goal was to protect African Americans from police actions which many Blacks considered cruel. Later the Black Panthers dropped the 'Self Defence' label with their name. The organisation became more of a Marxist-Communist group that favoured violent revolution, if necessary, to bring changes in society. That was the time of cold war when soviet Russia was leader of communist bloc, unfathomable power of Soviet war machine was enigma for American bloc. Communist's socialism was a high hope around the world at that time.

In the mid-1960s, the Black Panthers called for neighbourhood control of such services as education and law enforcement. They supported the use of guns; both for self-defence and to retaliate against people to whom they believed are oppressing the poor. This led to increase hostility between the Panthers and the police, which led to several shoot-outs. During the late 1960s, the Black Panthers began to work with White radical and revolutionary groups that shared their goals. This policy brought the Panthers into conflict with some other African-American groups that regarded the struggle of Blacks as chiefly racial. According to the Panthers, the basic problem was economic exploitation of both Blacks and Whites by profit-seeking capitalists. They called for a fairer distribution of jobs and other economic resources.

In 1973, Bobby Seale, who was a founder member of the BPP, contested for the post of Mayor of Oakland although he had lost but got around one third of the total votes. This campaign indicated that the Panthers were turning towards more traditional political means to achieve their goals. They also began to stress service to the Black community. The Panthers ran a free food program, health clinic and elementary school in the Oakland area. The radical Peace and Freedom Party, which was founded in Michigan, has been active largely in California - the only state where it appeared on the ballot in 1996. From the outset the party worked with the California Black Panther Party to oppose US involvement in the Vietnam war and espoused Black nationalism and other so-called 'new Left' causes. The first Peace and Freedom nominee for President in 1968 was Black Panther leader Elbridge Cleaver. Running with various Vice-presidential Candidates, Cleaver received 36,563 votes. In the mid-1970s, the Black Panther Party had ceased to exist.

The Party's ideals and activities were so radical it was at one time assailed by then FBI chief, J. Edgar Hoover, as "the greatest threat to the internal security of the



United States<sup>10</sup>. Richard Pryor who was with Black Panther party declared in his autobiography ‘I knew that I could stir up more shit on stage than in revolution’<sup>11</sup>. Pryor embodied the ways in which the cultural politics like the Black Panther party were influencing a developing afro-American pop culture. The panther’s belief was performative action could serve not only as a heuristic tool but also as a provocation to revolution beyond military action. The Black Panther party emphasized on lower class urban vernacular culture as the expression of real blackness validated celebration of aesthetics of a lower class. Black radical culture of 60s would continually seek out and define the symbolic language and visual tools that could convey the potential for social and political revolution to Afro-American who had grown facing racial oppression.

On the pattern of black panthers of United States of America, in Maharashtra some Dalit youth organized themselves under the banner of “Dalit panther”<sup>12</sup> Dalits have been deprived of power since thousands of years. Hierarchy based varna/caste system put them at the lowest end of the ladder of social hierarchy. To gain equality and power Dalits have created their cultural capital. Dalits cultural capital is rich and they display it in various forms. Culture, material or non materials both are significant in making of a democratically developed society. Every cultural trait is significant and it

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<sup>10</sup> URL-<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-Panther-Party>

<sup>11</sup> Cross reference from spectacular blackness .34 .pryor convictions

<sup>12</sup> The Black Arts Movement (BAM) was a radical, Afro centric cultural movement whose participants sought to transform the political, economic, and cultural conditions of African Americans and oppressed people around the world during a particularly volatile moment in the history of racist imperialism. During its most visible period, 1965–1974, BAM artists and activists created dozens of independent, nationally or regionally funded cultural institutions that focused on the needs and aspirations of African Americans; journals dedicated to politics, culture, theatre, and poetry (including a special issue of *TDR* in the spring of 1968); numberless community events featuring artists and activists both nationally known and locally loved; and a noteworthy body of Dramatic literature, painting, choreography, poetry, music, and performance. This varied effort reflected the nationalist and internationalist goals of the movement, the strong regionalist tendencies in the African American multicultural

has symbols, which may contain multiple hidden meanings and message for the audience.

Democracy has given more freedom to artists to express themselves. Not like leisure art, it is clearly an expression of human aspiration, goal and achievements. Democratic freedom is very new for Nepali society . Monarchy ended up in Nepal in 2005. Indians are having democratic setup since 1947, though democratic values are still not very strong among Indian masses. People are divided on many lines, religion, region, caste, class, language and so many other bases. But still there is possibility in this democratic framework for subaltern to raise their voice.

Goldfarb says:

“1. Culture, as the arts and sciences, is a structural feature of modern social orders that has a relative autonomy from the other structures in the social order, particularly from the structures of reproduction of the social order that is from the state and the economy.

2 .Cultural freedoms is a definitive characteristic of modern social life”<sup>13</sup>.

This cultural freedom about which Goldfarb talks about has come from the democracy. In Indian context this cultural freedom was enriched by various institutions. Capitalism has also played a major role in the making of cultural freedom. Many organizations mainly NGO working in South Asia are encouraging artists to produce art work, which is politically and socially motivated. This art work has a clear cut goal to address the issue of subalterns.

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<sup>13</sup> Goldfarb, Jeffrey C. 2012. *Reinventing political cultur: the power versus the culture of power*. Cambridge University Press. *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 1/2, *The NewSociological Imagination II* (Dec., 2005), p11

Sometimes enemies of cultural freedom want to annihilate this freedom as we have seen in the case of Bant Singh a Dalit singer from Indian state of Punjab was mauled and amputated by upper caste people.

Cultural critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's well known argument is about the subaltern who cannot speak for him/her because the very structure of colonial power prevents the speaking<sup>14</sup>. Here the term colonial may be replaced by dominating or hegemonic thought that Gayatri's argument is in context of colonialism for many Dalit Bahujan<sup>15</sup> thinkers, Hindu upper caste led by Brahmin considers foreigner who came as invader and colonized India. Contrary to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's argument, Subalterns of south Asia can now speak for themselves. They are armed with voice and using it in cultural war with dominating groups.

In south Asian countries like India and Nepal, Dalit society is using art forms for their socio-political movements. There are multiple aspects of this cultural politics of Dalits. First is Dalits are rewriting their history through literature, drama, song, painting, sculptors and tableaux. What role can the arts play in the bringing about the possibility of social change? Initially we have to understand art making within the broader perspective of poiesis<sup>16</sup>. The arts are a particular form of making that differentiate them by showing themselves as have been made. We could say that, as something that shows, art needs to be seen; we could even say in this sense that art is always performative even visual art is performed in the viewing of it. By showing itself in the mode of existing as being seen, art indicates its quality of irreality, its ability to create an alternative world of the imagination. The quality of irreality does

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<sup>14</sup>, Nayar, Pramod .k [2011]An introduction to cultural studies .New Delhi .viva books p.57

<sup>15</sup> Bahujan means majority people .in this context Dalit Bahujan includes all Dalits, tribes and backward and religious minority people .

<sup>16</sup> 'Poiesis' is a Greek word meaning 'to create/ to make'. This word was first a verb depicting 'An action that transforms and continues the world.' Our guiding philosophy is to contribute to society by developing our young children and youth into Powerful, Determined and Happy Achievers.

not make it any less effective; on the contrary, the limitation from realistic constrains means that the work can affect us on an even deeper level than the actual event that it depicts.<sup>17</sup>

The main argument of Levine is art influence spectator in a psychological way sometimes art piece does not depicts reality but somehow it touches the inner most thoughts of spectator. As in case of statue of Ambedkar, I have quoted before it gives Dalits a feeling of proud that they belongs to his community a learned man who drafted the constitution of India.

Cultural resistance can also be thought of as a political resistance and some theorists argue that politics is essentially a cultural discourse. A shared set of symbols and meanings, which we all abide by, if this is true then the rewriting of that discourse – which is essentially what cultural resistance does-is a political act in itself<sup>18</sup>

Duncombe clearly state that cultural is somehow synonym of politics. Power and culture are interrelated. Dominate culture is most of the times belongs to ruling class. He further argues taking a more pessimistic view cultural resistance can be seen as an escape from politics and a way to release discontent that might otherwise be expressed through political activity from this vantage point. Cultural resistance is a creation of a sort of safe sanctuary, a heaven in a heartless world and the pessimistic slide, you can argue that cultural resistance does not and cannot exist. This dominant system is one of such complete ideological and material hegemony than any cultural expression, even if it appears rebellion, or soon will be repackaged and transformed into a component of status quo, from this perspective cultural resistance as a political

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<sup>17</sup> Levine, Stephen K.2011.Art in Action: Expressive Art therapy and Social Change.London:Jessica kingsley publishers.pp112-116

<sup>18</sup> Duncombe,stephen 2012 , *cultural resistence reader* , New Delhi,Adarsh publication .pp.6

practice is at best a waste of time and at worst a delusional detour from real political resistance.<sup>19</sup>

Duncombe's argument is false in the context of Dalit Bahujan cultural politics of India. In India Dalit Bahujan people created cultural capital and started a movement which in Antonio Gramsci emphasizes the institutional and cultural bases of ideology. Ideology may be in any form: political propaganda, sermons, folklore and popular songs. Ideology is not false consciousness, simply because for Gramsci popular songs and superstitions are themselves material forces. He develops the concept of hegemony to demonstrate how ideology works. Hegemony is the nexus of material and ideological instruments through which the dominant classes maintain their power. Hegemony thus mediates between the ruling ideas and the subjects.

History is what we make of what is made of us, as Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy continually reminds us, within the framework of expressive art, we could say that poiesis implies the capacity to respond to the world in which we found ourselves, we suffer, both individually and collectively, when we find ourselves unable to respond, when this capacity for poietic action is restricted and we experience ourselves as being in a helpless situation. It is precisely because we are capable of making our world in a different way that we experience ourselves as helpless when we are unable to do so. The work of the change agent in the field of expressive arts, then, is to restore the capacity for poiesis that the individual or community has lost, and to help them expand the range of play within which they can act<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Levine, Stephen K.[2011]Art in Action: Expressive Art therapy and Social Change.London:Jessica kingsley publishersp.23

In this process, art can play a good role, by creating an alternative world of the imagination, the artwork shows possibilities that are absent or dormant within our everyday awareness. Moreover, the work takes us away from this everyday world within which we experience ourselves as unable to act: we could say that it “decenters” us from this world. In doing so it frees us up for new possibilities that were not apparent within our limited horizon of understanding.

Here Levine defining function of art as a solace for them who lost freedom of expression. and more importantly poiesis [greek word, means=to create]. When we see the history of oppressed people we can identify some examples that how in sheer suppression oppressed classes expressed themselves. One example is tap dance which as originated in South America by black slaves.

In South Asian countries like India and Nepal, Dalits society is using art forms for their socio political movements. There are multiple aspects of this cultural politics of Dalits. First is Dalits are rewriting their history through literature, drama, song painting, sculptors and tableaus.

This is cultural resistance against hierarchical varna<sup>21</sup>/caste system, attempt to create cultural capital. There is something innate about the presence of art within society.

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16 The ancient culture of India was based upon a system of social diversification according to spiritual development.

Four orders of society were recognized based upon the four main goals of human beings and established society accordingly. These four groups were the Brahmins, the priests or spiritual class; the Kshatriya, the nobility or ruling class; the Vaishya, the merchants and farmers; and the Shudras or servants.

These four orders of society were called "varna", which has two meanings; first it means "color"; and second it means a "veil". As color it does not refer to the color of the skin of people, but to the qualities or energies of human nature. As a veil it shows the four different ways in which the Divine Self is hidden in human beings.

In ancient India, these divisions were not based on birth but based on qualifications. According to the Bhagavad Gita this Aryan family system broke down in India over three thousand years ago at the time of Krishna. Hence after three thousand years this system of determining natural aptitude has degenerated into the caste system which resembles it now only in form.

From the prehistoric paintings on the cave walls of Lascaux in southwest France to Plato's thoughts on art's ability to enlighten the mind<sup>22</sup>

Art has consistently driven and inspired society. Throughout time, art has brought people and societies together, offering a sense of solidarity. Great piece of art impact in human brain is in a very positive way. Professor Samir Zaki, the father of Neuroaesthetics says "viewing great art, triggers a surge of the feel –good chemical, dopamine, in the orbitofrontal cortex of brain—which is involved in the cognitive processing of decision making resulting in feelings of intense pleasure<sup>23</sup> .

Art works in a way to purge out anger, aggression and relaxes mind and body. Art therapy are becoming very popular in healing many problem especially psychological Whether to record the daily rituals of Paleolithic life or to further one's knowledge in a field, people have used art to improve, organize, and promote their societies. Members of society still benefit from awareness of and participation in the arts.

Like economic capital, the possession or lack of cultural capital has a profound effect on individuals and societies. Groups become separated according to their artistic knowledge and taste. Highbrow tastes are legitimized tastes typically associated with members of dominant groups and higher social status. Conversely lowbrow tastes or mass and/or popular art tastes are used collectively by the lower classes. Lowbrow tastes are viewed by members of the upper class as not legitimized or justifiable. This hierarchy results in a constant struggle for cultural resources that provide symbolic power. Here we can compare this economical hierarchy with caste hierarchy. This has a ladder type structure. Dalits have their own parameter of aesthetics .Which defies the popular notion of art for art sake. Dalit aesthetics has a special aim. Dalit

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<sup>22</sup> Harrington, A. (2004).(p. 14) Art and social theory. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

<sup>23</sup> A thing of beauty is a ploy forever .The Hindu .28 February .2016

aesthetics is not only about catharsis emission of Dalit pain but also about resistance to gain political power and social status. The power is denied to them since ages.

New Dalit aesthetics has root in contemporary Dalit literature. In most of the Indian languages Dalit authors wrote their life experiences, autobiographies, memoirs, poetries, plays etc. This Dalit literature is influenced by ideology of Ambedkar: the main ideologue of Dalit world.

Many people have rejected the idea of Dalit literature and there is also a debate why can't a non Dalit write a piece of Dalit literature in the form of poetry, story, novel etc? Why can't non Dalit depict pain and agony of Dalit? These are the very important questions, from this point of view as my research includes only those Dalits artists who are working on Dalit themes. If a Dalit painter makes some painting, if a Dalit poet writes a poetry about common life and does not mention Dalit life, its agony, pain, struggle and any things related to Dalit, that is not the part my research. My argument is only a Dalit can depicts Dalit feeling in true sense just like a woman can write feminist literature or a woman artist can make a feminist artifacts only'.

A person who belongs from Dalit community is capable of expressing and capturing the Dalit experience. A masterpiece of Dalit literature is possible only when Dalit life is portrayed from the 'Dalit point of view'. The Dalit cause can be taken up by anyone. One can write about equality and demand social justice for all even from outside the Dalit community. Their experience however, cannot be equated with Dalit's life; it is not synonymous with Dalit experience. Understanding is possible only when one's (Dalit) life is lived in its totality of experiences. In other words an authentic Dalit experience is possible only if a person 'lives' as Dalit only a lived experience becomes authentic, real and true. To support this argument there is saying "only the person who wears the shoe knows where it pinches"



## **Formation of Dalit Aesthetics**

Contrary to popular notion of aesthetics Dalits have created their own aesthetics. It's rebellious in nature and it has unique qualities which do not fit in Swarna or elite aesthetics. This notion of Dalit aesthetics is also influenced by Marxist aesthetics. That rejects notion of "art for art sake"

Dalit aesthetics has created new paradigms in field of Art. This genus of aesthetics has a purpose and that leads to emancipation of Dalits. There are two types of emancipation of Dalits got through formation of new Dalit aesthetics. One is emancipation from pre conceived aesthetics based Brahminical notions and second is Dalits willingness and zeal to create their own cultural symbols and identity.

In this process Dalits have even rejected some points of their own saint poets whose poetry was in favor of discriminatory rebirth and hierarchical caste system. One example is of Chokha Mela'.

Meera koshmabi says "the writing of the medieval untouchable saints has had a profound effect on Dalit movements in the past, and their work carries a message which is relevant even today. In Maharashtra, Chokhamela and his family were beloved Members of their circle of saints, and proved through their creative poetry that untouchables were significant contributors to the region's culture. Chokhamela is no longer an effective role model for Dalits, because of his acceptance of 'karma' as the reason for his low birth and because of his devotional tradition's lack of concern with social change. However, the poetry created by him and his family are a treasury of social comment on the times, and also contain moving criticism of society and of

hypocritical religion. Thus they are the partial forerunners of today's Dalit poetry and can provide considerable strength to Dalit movement in its quest for equality”<sup>24</sup>

Dalit thinkers like Sharan Kumar Limbale defines Dalit aesthetics in terms of Dalit literature “which artistically portray the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. Every human being must find liberty, honour, security and freedom from intimidation by the powerful elements of society. These values are now being articulated in a particular kind of literature, its name being Dalit literature”<sup>25</sup>.

There is one pertinent question arises .why can't a non Dalit writes Dalit literature for which Limbale says “Dalit literature is that literature, which is written by one who is Dalit by birth.”<sup>26</sup>

Dalit aesthetics is based on real experiences. Sometimes it may create symbols but sometimes it presents a gloomy nakedness of human hierarchies. We can see the characteristic of Dalit aesthetics in Dalit literature. Dalits literature is self expression of Dalit people. It has stories of agony, struggle and caste atrocities. This Dalit literature is written by Dalits themselves. There is a huge debate that why non Dalits can't can write Dalit literature? Sometimes they (critics) give examples of Premchand's stories which are the good examples on Dalits life. But these stories are based on the views of a spectator and that is an outsider. He may felt the pain and misery of Dalits by heart but it's almost impossible to experience or feel the pain of

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<sup>24</sup> Continuities and Discontinuities in Maharashtra's Socio-Cultural Scene Meera Kosambi Source: Economic

and Political Weekly, Vol. 28, No. 38 (Sep. 18, 1993), pp. 1977-1979

<sup>25</sup> Limbale, Sharankumar. [2004](Tr. Alok Mukhetjee) *Towards on Aesthetic of Dalit Literature. History,*

*Controversies, and Consideration.* New Delhi: Orient Longman, p.15

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.p105

other people. Dalit literature in has created new debates in literary circle by its new paradigms and experimenting forms of expression.

To know the essence of Dalit aesthetics we must examine Dalit literature and arguments given by some claimed Dalit writer about Dalit aesthetics. Literary art is based on many art forms. It must to see what a Dalit writer says about their sense of Dalit aesthetics.

The aesthetic of Marathi literature has given primacy to the pleasure of the aesthetic and the traditional theory of beauty seems abstruse and spiritualistic. According to this theory the beauty of an artistic creation lies in its expression of world consciousness or other worldliness. This traditional theory is universalistic and spiritualistic as the aesthetic, which proposed that the beauty of a work is its artistic rendering of reality which is materialistic. Dalit literature rejects spiritualism and abstraction, its aesthetics is materialistic rather than spiritual<sup>27</sup>

Sharankumar Limbale forward the idea of Dalit aesthetic based on self respect and search for liberation has an important aesthetic aspect of Dalit literature. Over the last two decades, there has been a markedly increased production of Dalit cultural capital in the form of literature, statues, paintings, theater and songs. Each political or social art work articulates the particular concerns of the writer, poet or political propaganda and also creates the shared social space of what it means to be a Dalit. It must be understood despite the vast differences of language, region, castes and class, the idea of the Dalit is organized on the shared experience of exclusion and suffering and on the principles of egalitarian change. The aesthetics of Dalit therefore, needs to situate itself within this dynamism and creation of it is capable to articulate its experiences, recognize its moral positioning.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.p 116

Milind says the central concern of the aesthetics of Dalit is how to represent the real experience of Dalits. Dalit expression is historical in fact some of the recent literature in the recent times has been able to analyze the caste –class dialectics by interrogating the margins and another essential characteristic of the Dalit literature is that, it is not originally and essentially a literary exercise .<sup>28</sup>

The main concern of Dalit aesthetics is not to please senses but to evoke aspiration and consciousness which could later lead to greater social changes. The aesthetics of Dalit is outcome of an experience that has been denied access to any form of legitimacy, literary or otherwise. It has been represented as a stagnant experience.

### **Socio-Political Aspects of Dalit Aesthetics**

Dalit Consciousness is a fundamental component of an emerging theory of aesthetics of Dalit

Sharankumar Limbale in *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* writes, "By Dalit literature mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness".<sup>29</sup> He goes onto define "Dalit 'consciousness' as 'the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. Ambedkrite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery. Dalit consciousness is an important seed for Dalit literature. It is separable and distinct from the consciousness of other writers. Dalit literature is demarcated as unique because of this consciousness".<sup>30</sup> Limbale is clear that Dalit consciousness is an indispensable attribute of the Dalit literary aesthetic. It is intimately tied to the emancipatory'

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<sup>28</sup> Awad, Milind.E. 2009. P.11 *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalits*. New Delhi , PhD, Jawaharlal Nehru University

<sup>29</sup> Limbale, Sharankumar. [2004](Tr. Alok Mukhetjee) *Towards on Aesthetic of Dalit Literature. History,*

*Controversies, and Consideration*. New Delhi: Orient Longman, p.28

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p12

ideology of B.R. Ambedkar, and it is the yardstick by which the Dalitness of Dalit literature is measured.

All these constitutive elements and situate themselves within a framework of "Equality" as morality. The reason being equality is the regulative principle of justice. It is a principle of criticism under which every scheme of justice stands. "Equal justice" is the best approximation of the "human principle". The rule of equality includes both concerns for process and also for equality, as a substantive goal and admiring Dalits will have to have the following in its framework an ideology of life and an aesthetic of resistance. Aesthetics of Dalit must also help in stoking the consciences of the Dalits to the fact that they are ramparts of a casteless community, based upon a divided established principle of equality. The aesthetics of Dalits have to raise their consciousness about the fact that their assigned inferior status is neither of their creation nor a divinely created reality, but it is imposed upon them by a humanly created system. Therefore, aesthetics of Dalits have to prepare the Dalits to reject the old caste based religious order, which has perpetuated their condition, because this will pave a way towards their aestheticism.<sup>31</sup>

Artists always influenced society through their art product. Greek philosopher Plato thought that sometimes an art work may impact society negatively so he wanted to banish some type of artists from his ideal type of society because he thought their work encouraged immorality or portrayed base characters and that certain music compositions may cause laziness and incite people to immoral actions.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Awad, Milind.E., 2009. *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalits*. New Delhi ,Jawaharlal Nehru University, p.153

<sup>32</sup> Peyton, Richter. 1990 . *Perspectives in Aesthetics: Plato to Camus*. California: University of California, p32

Milind defines if we look into aesthetics philosophy of Buddhism once again the underlying metaphysic departs radically from western individualism indeed it departs as radically as it is possible to depart. So far, no other philosophy in the world has explored the idea of impermanence (*aniccata* in Pali) as extensively as Buddhism. The Buddhist universe is one in which the conception of enduring individuals of any kind is regarded as totally false. They are an appearance only, the first step on the path to salvation is to grasp deeply the transience of all conditioned phenomena, i.e., all phenomena which are formed or arise from other phenomena, whose origination is (in Buddhist language) dependent.<sup>33</sup>

The goal of Buddhism is the release of all sentient beings from suffering. In the case of human beings, it is held that the source of suffering is desire to be free from suffering we must free ourselves from desire and a realization of the unreality of our own self is one of the major steps on the path to such release, the attainment of which is nirvana. Since the individual self is unreal, there is no special reason to be attached to it and its dissipation is not quite the bizarre sacrifice it might at first seem. Hence, in Buddhism all elements of the human condition are valued according as they help or hinder release from the self and its suffering and the aesthetic is no exception. The ways in which the aesthetic aspect of life can help are varied.

Social mobility and assertion is clearly visible in Dalit literature .identity formation by Dalit literature is one of the important aspect of Dalit literature .this identity formation has the aim to get rid of discriminatory caste hierarchy system. This identity formation and making cultural capital is done by though various means. Non material culture is vital of this new Dalit indemnity formation. Switching to another religion

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<sup>33</sup> Awad,Milind.E. 2009. *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalits*. New Delhi , PhD, Jawaharlal Nehru University, p. 16

and adopting its culture has always been part of this strategy, especially conversion to Buddhism.

Another way to improve their lot is conversion to another religion, especially Christianity and also to Buddhism, Islam or Sikhism. Even here the attained results do not match the expectations. Besides other problems, the social change that the conversion brought about is limited, Dalits have not been accepted by their co-religionists and discrimination against Dalits occurred even within these religions.

Conscious building of Dalit identity could be divided into two phases. During the first phase the Dalit thinkers tried to provide for the ideological background upon which an independent Dalit identity could be built. They maintained that their culture and history were in the mainstream representation purposely devalued and obliterated and tried to rediscover them. According to their interpretations of history, Dalits were the autochthonous inhabitants of the country. They argued that they had had an equalitarian society but then the Aryans came, subdued them, imposed on them the caste order and bereft them of their land. Such ideas gained wide currency in 1920s especially in the south (the movements of Adi-Dravida, Adi-Karnataka, or Adi-Andhra) but also in the north (the movement of Adi-Hindu, or Ad-Dharm). Some thinkers claimed that Dalits were originally Buddhists (Iyothee Thass, Ambedkar) followers of an equalitarian religion which was quashed by Brahmanism. In pursuit of the golden Dalit past they reclaimed great figures of history who were of Dalit origin such as Nandanar, Ravidas or Chokhamela and challenged the upper caste tradition by reinterpretation of several myths, often in a radical way. For example the myth about the king Bali or the myth of Rama and Ravana could be mentioned. During the second phase the efforts were extended from reinterpretation of history to other spheres as well. Dalit leaders began to assert Dalit ethnicity distinct from the

majority society not only by its origins but also in terms of art and culture. They began to claim that in spite of the efforts to stigmatize and efface them, their culture has a lot of remarkable aspects that should not be forgotten but preserved and encouraged. They have tried to transform some of the practices that had been hitherto considered polluting into positive ones. In this respect very insightful is the book “Constructing Dalit Identity”,<sup>34</sup> by Joe Arun who argues that Paraiyars “ deconstruct the polluting and negative meaning of these [identity] symbols, and construct a new meaning for them by evolving counter myths that portray them positively, and by which they can de-pollute themselves.” Specifically he mentions beef eating and drumming. “[Paraiyars] decide not to play the drum at the funerals of the higher castes rather they would like to play it on auspicious occasions like marriages and festivals. Along with that, they narrate myths about the drum being once upon a time an art and used for the proclamation of war. Earlier beef-eating was pollution, but now to make it their social and cultural custom they have communal meals with a celebration of beef-eating publicly to do away with the stigma of pollution. Alongside this, they also create stories of people being cured of serious illness and of people becoming healthy and brave by eating beef.”

Among the Dalit movements in Kerala, the movement by Ayyankali was of great success in constructing Dalit identity. Ayyankali, an illiterate Dalit, unlike Sree Narayan Guru was not philosophical. His movement was humanistic and democratic. To him, socio-cultural issues were more important than the economic issues. Ayyankali fought for the rights of his people to use public space and for education. By doing so, Ayyankali successfully contributed to the formation of the individual identity. Ayyankali established open school in Vengannoor in 1904 but faced severe

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<sup>34</sup> Arun, Joe. 2007. Constructing Dalit Identity, Rawat publications, Jaipur, pp45-52



resistance from the caste Hindus. He gathered the scheduled castes to go on strike and continued it for one full year. To protect the strikers against criminal elements recruited by landlords, a small group of youth known as “Ayyankali Pada” was formed under his organization. Another element that Ayyankali movement concentrated on was performing folk arts. Ayyankali collected small band of youth belonging to his caste and trained them in martial and folk arts like Pattukachery, Parijakali, Kolkali, Kurathiattom, Kakkarassi drama and Valli drama. This was his first attempt for identity construction. Formation of Sadhu Jana Paripalana Sangam (SJPS) was another significant form of identity formation in the Ayyankali movement. It was democratic in character and gender sensitive. Kerala Pulayar Maha Sabha by TT Kesava Shashtri, son-in-law of Ayyankali, obtained the four basic rights for the Dalits: right to appear in public places decently dressed, right to education, cultural rights and the right to be represented in the government. These were the subtle forms of the assertion of the Dalit identity.

As refers to Dalit art and folklore many organizations and artists on this subject have recently appeared, festivals of Dalit art are being organized. For example the Dalit resource centre in Madurai has among its objectives the promotion of the Dalit arts. On their pages they say: *“One of the main thrust of the DRC is to revive Dalit arts and to bring back the social status of the Dalit artists. Keeping this in mind Dalit art and street theatre trainings are conducted outside the centre. In these trainings not only the art is thought but to use the Dalit arts to bring social transformation and tools to eradicate caste system. No society has got liberation without the contribution of art, literature and politics.”* And a bit further they mention as one of the aims: *“Making*

*the non-Dalit to play parai and help to eliminate the idea that those who play parai are untouchables.*<sup>35</sup>

Dalit thinkers thus voiced final and resolute ‘no’ to fawning on higher castes. It’s very difficult to judge how widespread these attitudes among common people are. We can now turn our attention to Dalit literature itself. It has often been criticized besides others for being monotonous, propagandistic or at least largely ideologically tinged, resentful and self-pitying, for using vulgar language, or lacking literary merit. Mendelsohn and Vicziany in their publication simply say: “*Clearly the Dalit literature is an intensely political body of writing, some of it infused more with passion than with concern for literary effect.*”<sup>36</sup>

Judging by comments made recently by some Dalit writers it seems possible to say that at least some of them are aware of these drawbacks, or to be more correct, are not satisfied with the prevailing form of Dalit writing. They reject too close connection between Dalit literatures and politics and try to enhance its contents and experiment with literary techniques to achieve more refined style. For example Dharman is careful not to portray Dalits only as victims of society and aggrieved fighters for freedom. He says about contemporary Dalit literature in Tamil Nadu: “*By birth I am a Dalit; not by writing. The Dalit literature written thus far in Tamil Nadu has not impressed me, maybe because I am a Dalit and I know the society of my community. That Dalit writer is yet to come who will artistically depict Dalit social reality. I can also try. Thus far, as far as I can see, the depiction has been one-dimensional – Dalits appear wearing dirty clothes, stinking, easily falling among people given to violence;*

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<sup>35</sup> [http://www.drctts.com/DRC\\_htm/Aims.htm](http://www.drctts.com/DRC_htm/Aims.htm)

<sup>36</sup> Oliver, Mendelsohn and Vicziany, Marika. (1998). *The Untouchables: Subordination, Poverty and the State in Modern India*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.44.

*they are illiterate, coolies without property, submissive people who struggle only for food and wage. All this is the distorted view of Marxist writers. The funny thing is that some Dalit writers are also doing this. What we have to do is document the multidimensional Dalit, his soul/being/essence.”*

His most recent novel Kūkai (published 2005) is an evidence of it. In this novel Dharman likens Dalits to a nocturnal bird, seeing this bird and hearing its voice are considered inauspicious. Even though this bird is very powerful, it is not aware of its strength and gets often attacked by other not so strong birds. In the novel the depictions of Dalit oppression are intertwined with imaginative parts focused on birds, by which author achieves remarkable result. There are many others who consciously try to create works that could be considered a piece of literature but still would preserve basic ideas of Dalit movement. Some of them have even given up Dalit dialect that has been until recently one of the typical features of Dalit writings. The reason for this was that they perceived it as a limiting factor. Azhagiya Periyavan plainly states: “People tend to believe that Dalits are ugly and that we use an unrefined Cheri Bhasha. I want to respond to those criticisms by writing consciously in a literary style about Dalit life.”

But Dalit literature has new meaning which depict self expressions, experiences rather than relying on imagination and fictitious characters and incidents. The developments in style go hand in hand with developments in contents. Authors want to offer to readers something more than a depiction of atrocities on Dalits and trenchant call for retaliation. At the same time they still strive to appeal to Dalit readers and rally their spirits. I have already mentioned the efforts to promote Dalit forms of arts. Even in literature we often come across appraisal of Dalit folklore. Authors also strengthen

Dalit identity by celebration of some other features that are typical of the Dalit life. We can now have looked at a few of them.

Kalyana Rao's novel, *Untouchable spring*, is a celebration of Dalits' dance and music with very nice descriptions of inner feelings that make the singer to produce the songs. Besides that it also praises the Dalit life and Dalit vitality with occasional exaltations of very ordinary Dalit crafts such as wood carving and sewing, or a bit surprisingly even skinning of dead cattle: "*How wonderfully the folklorist has said that art is only for the masses. To think of it, what is hidden in people's lives is not small, insignificant art. What wonderful artist is Poladu who skins the hide of a buffalo skilfully with ease, Pittodu who carves wood, and Yenkatanarsu who makes the thread dance in myriad ways!*" It is surprising because skinning of dead cattle was one of the reasons why Dalits were considered polluted and not only by higher castes. Until recently Dalits themselves considered it an unclean practice that should be avoided.

According to Badri Narayan, "In recent decades historically oppressed and untouchable communities of North India, especially in the state of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have created a new political space through their own cultural resources and traditions."<sup>37</sup> This process of carving out a public space of their own against the persisting domination of Brahmanism has also led to development of conflicts, contradictions and renegotiations among upper castes, OBCs and the Dalits. It primarily emerged with the articulation of contestation, conflict and negotiation in the political sphere around the issue of *Izzat*. Different oral forms of communication like community-based Nautanki have been instrumental in facilitating this struggle.

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<sup>37</sup> Badrinarayan. (2001). *Documenting Dissent, Contesting Fables. Contested Memories and Dalit Political Discourse*, Shimla: Indian Institute of Advance Study.pp.34

Nautanki has not only instilled 'we-feeling' within the marginalized communities but also has become a vehicle through which the multiple voices of the community reach to the millions of people.

Dalits used to make religious places as artisans. They were stone cutters, painters, dancers as well as labourers. Through this historical process in India and Nepal many Dalit castes emerged as traditional performers like Bedia caste of India and its parallel Badi in Nepal. Bedias are traditional performers who are into dancing and singing since ages. Bedias are even mentioned in Valmiki Ramayana. The purpose of art is not only to portray the different aspects of life or to create sensual pleasure but also to clarify the subjects which are being depicted by art form.

The most effective function of a work of art is not the capability of the most sophisticated work to attract our attention and visual pleasure, or of the most handsome work to please us, but of every recognizable image to identify its subject. The erection of life - sized images of a Dalit heroes in a town square or at a village bus stop has, like the election of a Dalit President of the republic, symbolic power so great that it can influence people's perceptions, and so their actions, in the world in which they live. When a symbol of the people violently restricted for centuries from public participation appears - standing upright and proud - in the town square, it is evidence that they will not be kept from participation in public life. It is proof that they belong.

Art is an important way of communicating the ideas of Dalit movement not only to Dalits but also to broader public. In the last few years we can witness interesting developments in style and contents of some Dalit art these changes are interconnected with the development of Dalit consciousness and reflect the efforts of building of Dalit identity.

This identity formation is directly linked to socio-political assertion of Dalits. In traditional caste hierarchy Dalits are at the bottom of Hindu society. The identity formation includes the rewriting of history and asserting that Dalits are not the part of this system and due to multiple conspiracies they were trapped in this hierarchal system.

Social assertion is creating a niche for them in society and they are getting respect as well as new recognition in society. Installation of Ambedkar statue in public places of cities and in village give Dalit a feeling of self confidence as well as it changes the perception of rest of the society about Dalit stereotypes of being uneducated, rustic.

Political assertion is regarding gaining power through electoral politics as well as through lobbies' and civil society and sometime by other radical means: radical means, Dalit youths from the area of Bihar and central India, sometimes join Maoist cadres. In recent past Dalits have become quite successful politically due to this new identity formation.

These strategies can be roughly classified as building of Dalit identity and creating cultural capital. Cultural transformation also took place within Dalit society. We can mention adoption of religious rituals and worship of higher God, becoming vegetarians, changing caste names, or cremation of the dead instead of burial.<sup>38</sup> Important aspect of this strategy was giving up some traditional habits for which Dalits were considered unclean, such as eating beef, drinking alcohol, removing dead cattle, working with leather and so on. In spite of these efforts the caste Hindus did not accept them as their equals and mostly consider Dalits only imitators of high caste culture. Rustom Bharucha argues "The hegemony of 'regional culture', in which tribal

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<sup>38</sup> Some rituals of cremation are also done by a particular class of Brahman, although they are not untouchable but considers as lower class Brahman.

and Dalit cultures are conveniently subsumed with no adequate representation, is justified on the grounds that it is resistant to the homogenizing influences of nationalism and globalization.<sup>39</sup>

### **Historical Background of Dalit Iconoclasm and Social Movements**

To look deep into issue we will have to relook historical process of formation of Dalit identity and history of Indian caste system.

To examine the historical background of Dalit social movements first, we will have to look the social status of Dalit in Hindu Society. This is essential to go into this topic to understand why there was a need to assert socially and politically? Why they had have been subject of Untouchability and segregation? For this we will have to re-look into the interpretation according to scripture as well as description of Hindu society in historical documents. These religious scriptures include four Vedas, Upanishad, Brahmin texts, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Smritis, Jain and Buddhists scriptures and other sources. Some other sources also include works of literature, travelogue by foreign travelers, and depiction in visual art forms.

According to Vaidik social system Hindu society is categorized in Varna order, though the literal meaning of Sanskrit word Varna is color but actually the meaning of Varna defines hierarchical Hindu social divisions.

This categorical hierarchy is first time mentioned in Vedas. Rig-Veda is the oldest and the most sacred scripture of Hindus. Vedas are considered “Apoureshey” {non human}. It means Vedas are the knowledge directly given by the supreme God and not created by men. It also means that the Varna order is given by God, the Vedas

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<sup>39</sup> The Shifting Sites of Secularism: Cultural Politics and Activism in India Today  
Rustom Bharucha  
Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 33, No. 4 (Jan. 24-30, 1998), pp. 167-180

contains hymen dedicated to God and Goddesses. Now look at what is mentioned about Varna order in Vedas, about the social structure of vaidik society. Varna order is first defined in Purusha sukt of Rig-Veda. The Purusha Sukta in the Rig-Veda refers to the four principal varnas described in Manu's code, viz. Brahmins, Khastriyas, Vaishyas, and Shudras. They are compared to the body of the "primordial man" or Purusha: "The Brâhmana was his mouth, of both his arms was the Kshatriya. His thighs became the Vaishya from his feet the Shudra was produced." (Rig-Veda 10:90:12) this model is often cited for its hierarchical ordering of the varnas since Brahmins being the head are placed higher than the shudras who constitute the feet.

According to this definition Dalits are the lowest in social order as they were considered 'Atishudras'. Dalits were always considered Atishudras or Pancham (fifth) Varna. Even today the word swarna (the one who has Varna) is never used for Harijan or Dalit. It clearly shows that popular media (newspapers, television) and upper caste Hindus still consider them out of Varna order. Now look at what is mentioned about Varna order in Purush-sukat of Veda. Brahmins are born from the mouth of Brahma, Khastriyas from Shoulder, Vaishyas from 'Thigh' and Shudras from 'feet'. So in this hierarchy, shudras or Dalit are born from feet means they have the lowest status in society based upon Varna Order. According to Varna Order duties are also defined. As the duty of Brahmin is performing religious rituals and teachings, the work of Kshatriya is to fight and protect society, duty of Vaishyas is agriculture and mercantile, so the duty of shudra is to serve all these three varnas. Shudra's works are extensive like scavenging, carpentry, blacksmith, leather work, barber, washer man, fisherman etc. There is also sub-category among shudras and they are called Ati-shudras. Ati-shudras are those people who are involved in impure or dirty work considered by higher varnas like work of a scavenger and leather related work. Indeed



today's Dalits are decedents of these Ati-shudras. There are lot of contradictions and debate about how Varna is defined. According to some scholars it is birth based and according to some it is based on what work a person does. We found many contradictory stories about Varna. Is it birth based or based on deed?

One famous story depicting Varna is from epic Mahabharata the story of "Karna". Though Karna was born to a royal lady 'Kunti', the mother of Mahabharata,s famous protagonists "Pandavas". When she gave birth to Karna, she was unmarried, due to social pressure, she abandoned him. Karna was brought up in a chariot's driver house. Karna was keen to acquire the Brahmastra mantra from the great teacher Parshuram. However, he knew that Parshuram gave instructions to Brahmins (the priestly class) only. So he disguised as a Brahmin and beseeched Parshuram to accept him as a shishya (disciple). Parshuram accepted him as such and started giving him instructions. One day when Parshuram was resting in Karna's lap, it so happened that a bee stung Karna on the lower portion of his thigh. It was very painful and he started bleeding. However, fearing that if he moved his legs, he would awaken Parshuram, he did not move at all and continued to suffer. When Parshuram woke up, he saw Karna bleeding. He asked, "Son tell me truthfully who you are? A Brahmin cannot suffer so much physical pain. Only a Kshatriya (the warrior tribe) can endure so much discomfort". Karna was obliged to disclose his identity. Parshuram was greatly annoyed because he was a sworn enemy of the Kshatriya. He therefore cursed Karna that as he had learnt through deceit, he shall forget the vidya (skill) which Parshuram had taught him at the crucial juncture. This incident shows us enmity between different varnas at that time. By birth Parshuram was a Brahmin but he also used to teach armoury it means he was not performing his Brahmincal work. It makes us clear that Varna system was birth based.

Again when Karna became the king with the help of Duryodhana, he was not allowed to enter in “Draupadi’s bridegroom selection contest, just because he was not from Kshatriya family. It is clearly evident that though Karna was expert in weaponry and knew all the martial arts-a natural trait of Kshatriya-but just because he belonged to a shudras family, he was discriminated. His all Kshatriya like qualities could not make him Kshatriya.

Same thing happened with “Eklavya”<sup>40</sup> a tribal boy who was an archery prodigy. Eklavya asked Dronacharya to teach him archery but he refused to teach him because he used only to teach Kshatriya. Eklavya was under heavy influence of Dronacharya so he made a statue of Dronacharya as an inspiration and started practicing archery in front of that statute.

After a long time when Dronacharya came to know about him, he enquired about his master who taught him this skill when he replied that his guru was “Dronacharya”, he was shocked to know about this. Eklavya told him the entire story. Dronacharya replied that “I am Dronacharya and this is the time to give me “Guru-dakshina”<sup>41</sup>”. Dronacharya was afraid of Eklavya’s skill and he had promised Arjun that no one could ever surpass him in the skill of archery so he asked Eklavya to cut his right thumb and give the same as guru-dakshina. So, the intention of Dronacharya was very clear that he never wanted to see the best archer amongst the Shudras.

One of the most heinous example of discriminatory is from epic “Ramayana” when Ram, the hero of most popular epic, killed a Shudras’ Sage “Shambuk” just because he wanted to attain a higher spiritual level through meditation and it was a rule in

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<sup>40</sup> Eklavya is also a symbol of subaltern resistance., former dacoit turned politician Phoolan Devi formed Eklavya Sena to protect rights of tribal and women

<sup>41</sup> Ritualistic fee given by disciples

Ram Rajya that no one can change his/her Varna they have to follow birth-based Varna order.

Another example is of Ravana, the main villain of Ramayana. Ravana was a demon, who did many monstrous acts like kidnapping Rama's wife "Sita", but when Rama killed Ravana, he was bound to perform a ritual to relieve himself from the sin of killing of a Brahmin because by birth Ravana was a Brahmin. The roots of this discriminatory Varna system lie in the clash of races. Fair complexioned Aryan hoards which started invading India through the North West around 1500 B.C. They vanquished and subjugated the dark complexioned earlier settlers. And they started birth-based-class-system. Aryans regarded the non Aryans as non-human and beyond the pale of human society. But soon it became clear to the Aryans that it was more advantageous to assign them a low position within the society and exploit them on permanent basis. This was achieved through myths and metaphysics. 'Dr. Ambedkar did not believe in theory of Karma even when he embraced Buddhism. He clearly stated and redefined theory of karma.' The metaphysical doctrine of karma has provided a powerful rationalization for inequality based on birth, and made it acceptable to the wide masses. According to the karma doctrine, this life is just one link in the infinite chain of birth and rebirths, and each being is born in a specific position according to his deeds in past lives. He can improve the prospects for his later births only by adhering to, and performing well, the role proper to stratum in which he is born. Paradoxically, the doctrine of karma and of moksa (salvation from the cycle of birth and rebirth) arose in the process of protest against Brahminic supremacy and its extravagant ritualism.

To look deep into the origin of Varna order we should go into Aryan invasion theory, which came to India from Europe or some other place. Which place was it is not

cleared till date .The Aryan hordes were quite conscious of their cultural and ethnic identity and looked down upon the dark complex Ned earlier settlers? These people are referred to in the Rig-Veda as Dasa and Panis. These are described as dark complexned (Krishna Varna).the word Dasa seems to be connected with the Iranian word “Dahae” which means “countrymen”.

Sometime during 1600-1500 B.C. a barbaric, avaricious, illiterate and vandal pastoral group who called themselves Devatas, Aryan or Brahmins invaded the highly advanced and urban civilization in the very vast areas of North Western Sectors of India, They destroyed cities and culture belonged to a race called Assura. These autochthon Indian Assuras were also called Dasas, Dashuys, or Panis. The foreign intruders fought most of their battles on Indian soil with the Assura kings of India. This Assura race of India established ancient Indian urban civilization. After complete destruction of Indian ancient civilization, culture and religion, the Ayran and the Devtas consolidated their colonial rule and composed the colonial constitution named the Vedas, The Vedic literature, as a source material of history; provide us the entire picture of those battles and destruction of Assura- civilization of India. These Devata Aryans introduced Caste System or Caste stratified society.

The victor Aryans in their reconstituted society placed the defeated aboriginal Indians in the lowest strata of society and declared them as the “human cattle”. They have been described as “two footed animals” along with the “four footed animals” in several mantras of the Vedic literature. This could continue only through the institutional mechanism of Untouchability. Untouchability is the most extreme form of de-humanization process and Untouchables are the caste away people of Hindu society. They next strata were the Shudra. The Shudras are also equally subjected to torture and hatred; exploitation and oppression; discrimination and deprivation. They

were also trampled down like non-human beings. The difference between the Untouchables and the Shudras is of degree only and not of kind. A group of Indian autochthon avoided all connection with the victors and the Brahminical society and remained at a distance from the Aryan culture. They are now known as tribals. N.K. Verma of Bihar Transport Department discovered that Santhals of Sahebganj have still been using the script of the Harappa period<sup>42</sup>. It might just happen that these tribes are the descendants of the Assura race. In the state of Jharkhand there is scheduled tribe which still bears the name of Assura.

In the beginning Aryans hunted and looted the non-Aryans. The poet Vasvmitra prays to Indra to destroy the blacks through his brilliance. At one place a poet says that Indra has destroyed black armies. At another place we find that Indra has killed fifty thousand blacks. It seems that Dasas were militant people. They gave a tough fight to the Aryans. A poet praises Indra for killing Dasas Sambara, a dweller of the mountains in the fortieth autumn. But finally they were vanquished and were either absorbed in the lower rungs of society or driven away from their dwellings and had to take shelter in the dense forests and other inhospitable regions. A poet says “Indra kills Dasas and increases the might of the Aryans.

Most of the pre Aryan people were city dwellers and traders rather than warriors. The Aryans were war mongering and they massacred these peace loving people. The Aryan God Indra is credited with demolition of ninety nine cities of Dasa king Sambar.

Due to different racial features the disdain of the Aryans towards the Dasas was so great that they were called Amanusa or “non human” and since the Dasas were considered non human all in human behaviours towards them was justified by Aryans.

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<sup>42</sup> Verma,N.k.; Echoes of Indus valley ‘ 1993, janaki prkashan, Patna. PP.13-45

In a hymen of Rig-Veda we find “you (Indra) subdued Pipru and powerful Margayu for Rjisvan, the son of Vidathin, you smote down fifty thousand dark once, you shattered cities as old age shatters good looks”. Fire was the most effective and powerful weapon of the Aryans. And they used it very often against Dasas.

This theory of inter racial conflict and invasion by Aryan people is supported by most of the scholars. According to sociologist, G.S. Ghurye, who has written extensively on caste system in India, Aryan people were invader to India. Ghurye’s book “caste and race in India” is a slandered text for a historical understanding of Varna vayvastha (Varna system). Ghurye traces this in Rig-Veda<sup>43</sup>. Shudra people countered Aryan people with the help of culture support of theology as well as culturally. Aryans used to perform yagya and gave offering to many Gods like Varun Devata (God of water and rain), Indra Devata (chief of Aryan and of Gods), Agni (God of fire), etc. Their rituals were also very different. Shiva or Pashupati was earlier God of only Atishudras but later Aryans also assimilated Shiva to their band of gods and gave him a respectable status. According to Dalit thinkers Rama worshipped Shiva at Rameshwaram, the southernmost part of India just to gain acceptance of Darvid<sup>44</sup>. Later on Shiva became one of the major deities in Hindu Dharma. It shows that there was clearly a confrontation between Aryan and non-Aryans culturally and theologically but on the other hand a process of assimilation and cross cultural interaction was also going on. Aryan people adopted Pipal tree worshipping and some other rituals from non-Aryan people from India. Indeed Pashupati and Pipal and bull worshipping were not part of Aryan culture.

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<sup>43</sup> Ghurye, G.S., Caste and Race in India, Popular prkashan, New Delhi, 1969, pp.9-12

<sup>44</sup> Aborigines of south india and according to some scholar Darvids are who fled to south Indian from the fear of Aryan attackers.

Later victor Aryan dehumanized aborigines [Dalits] people of Indian peninsula. About the process of dehumanization Leo Kupers says.<sup>45</sup>

“Dehumanization is the most common process in the characterization of subordinate races by a dominant race. It is expressed, in its extreme form, in conceptions of the subject race as animals or demons or objects, and in a less extreme form, in the conception that the subject race is characterized by a falling-off from the fullness of human quality and human dignity.”

According to Dr. Ambedkar Shudras and Untouchables are semi-Hinduised aboriginal Indians and the non-Hinduised indigenous tribal from the major chunk of the Bahujan Dalits. The demarcation line, as drawn by the Baba Saheb may be seen as follows: “Every Brahmin does believe in the Philosophy of Brahmanism propounded by his forefathers. He is an alien element in the Hindu society. The Brahmin vis-à-vis the Shudras and the Untouchables is as foreign as the German is to the French, as the Jew is to the Gentile or as the While is to the Negro. There is a real gulf between him and the lower classes of Shudras and the Untouchables. He is not only alien to them but he is also hostile to them, in relationship with them, there is in him no room for conscience and no call for justice”.

In the above passage, Dr. Ambedkar declared that the Brahmins belonged to a different race just as the Whiles and the Negros. The conquerors also belonged to a different religious group just as the Jew and the Gentile were distinctly different. They had different nationality as the French and the German. Above all, they were natural enemy of land hostile to the Indian autochthon called the Shudras, Untouchables and the Tribals. Aryan (Bhudevatas), Brahmin-Devata. The evidence of the later Vedic literature show that the descendents of the Assura race who suffered defeat at the

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<sup>45</sup> Kuper, Leo.p.11. 1974. *Race, Class, and Power*. London. Duckworth

hands of the Aryans in the protracted and numberless Deva-Assura battles, were subjected to Shudrahood. The aboriginal Indian were civilization builders, the owners of the magnificent metropolis like Harappa, Mohenjo-Daro, Dholavira and Daimabad and the operators of the ports and docks like in Lothal. The Assuras, the major segment of ruling class of ancient India, were the potentates and defenders (Rakshasas) of the country. The Taittiriya Brahmin gives evidence: “Daivya vo Brahmina, Assura Shudra...” “Devatas become Brahmins and the Assuras were made Shudras...”

Present day in Jharkhand one tribes is named Asuras. They might be descendent of ancient Asuras.

In later Vedic age Untouchability and caste system was very clearly observed by some foreign travelers, many historical accounts prove it. Foreign travelers like fahiyen and Greek ambassador in Moryan court Megasthenese gave the details of Indian social structure. They said in their account, that there was a birth based hierarchy in Indian society and shudra people used to live in segregated part of cities or villages.

The first open resistance to Brahminical social order came in the form of Buddhism in fifth century B.C. Though Gautama Buddha was Kshatriya by Varna system but he criticized Varna order and condemned Brahminical rituals like animal sacrifice and vaidik ritualistic practices. Influenced by egalitarian and rational ideas of Buddha many people from the all Varna embraced Buddhism. For centuries Buddhism was the dominant religion of India but it came to decline in 8th century A.D. when Shankaracharya a supporter of Vedanta order<sup>46</sup> countered Buddhism and asked many Hindu kings to kill Buddhists and to destroy Buddhist monasteries and stupas. Buddhist philosophy is always regarded by Dalit thinkers as a source of inspiration

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<sup>46</sup> A form of Hindu philosophy



and counter ideology of Brahminical ideas till date. From Baba Saheb Bhim Rav Ambedkar, Budh Priya Maurya, Uditraj and many other Dalit leader embraced Buddhism.

The real resistance of Brahminical ideas from the real shudra Dalit community came in medieval times. In medieval times caste system and untouchability was in its height. Though this resistance was devotional in nature but it also had messages to change the social order. This resistance was initiated by Bhakti<sup>47</sup>-saint-poets; most of them were from shudra and untouchable castes. Chokhamela, Kabir, Ravidas, Guru Nanak, Namdev, Tukaram are some of prominent saint poet of that time. They used to create devotional poetry and in poetry there was message of equality, purification of soul and rejection of discriminatory system. One of the examples of this genre of poetry is given by early Bhakti saint Chokhamela.

Chokha questions pollution and Untouchability. Consider the following poem:

**Vedas and The Shastras**  
**Polluted; Puranas Inauspicious**  
**Impure; The body, The Soul**  
**Contaminated; The Manifest**  
**Being is the same.**  
**Brahma polluted, Vishnu too;**  
**Shankar is impure, inauspicious.**  
**Birth impure, dying is impure:<sup>48</sup>**

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<sup>47</sup> Bhakti is sanskrit word means devotion

Chokha says pollution stretches without beginning and end. He is too intelligent not to perceive the self-interest of the powerful classes behind the façade of religion, but such instances of pure anger are rare. This Bhakti movement had a small impact on Hindu society until Britishers arrived in India there was a halt in Dalit movements. Though some Hindu social Reformers took the issue of Untouchability and condemned birth based Varna system, like Raja Ram Mohan Rai and Swami Dayanand.

An autonomous Dalit leadership in India has always been perceived as synonymous to the leadership of Babasahab Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Though it is a well known fact that Ambedkar was the first Dalit leader who had an all India following, the autonomous Dalit leadership of several varieties existed much before he came on the horizon of the Dalit liberation. Such leadership had existed in different parts of the country. For instances Dalits had organized demonstration in Poona and Madras against the functioning of the National Congress way back in 1895 and had even burnt its effigy. But they had carried out more organized movements for achieving their goals of equality, self respect, self right etc. in different parts of the country since the 1920's onwards.

No doubt there was very limited Dalit independent organizing before the 1920s; hence, leadership had yet produced a number of leaders with a large following throughout India. For instance, early known Dalit leaders in Maharashtra were Kisan Faguji Bansode (1870-1947), Gopal Baba Walankar, V. Ravji Moonj Pundit (1860-1924), Shivram Janba Kamble, Kalicharan Nandagawali (1886-1962), G.A. Gawai (1888-1974) and others (Omvedi 1994). Similarly, in South India M.C. Rajah, the leader of the Adi-Dravida movement was the Madras legislative Council in 1926. The Adi-Dravida movement had been active in Madras since 1918.

The first independent Dalit political movement in India was launched in 1910 when the All India Depressed Classes Federation was established in Maharashtra under the encouragement of the Bombay Presidency Social Reform Association. Its purpose was to pressurize the Indian National Congress to include in its main planks the removal of Untouchability. Consequently, the Indian National Congress had incorporated this in its agenda, adopted in its annual session held at Calcutta in 1917. It is interesting to note that the Indian National Congress after 32 years of its formation had adopted the agenda of the removal of Untouchability.

The Government of India Act 1919 explicitly provided for communal representations in the Indian Parliament. This stimulated the formation of new Dalit organizations, which aimed not only to secure benefits for the Depressed Classes or the Dalits but also to organize them into coherent political blocks.

Proper understanding of the nature and social composition of the Dalit leadership in the past it is necessary to analyze it region-wise. In south, the independent Dalit leadership emerged in the 1920s. Here, the agricultural commercialization laid the basis for a wide spread movement of the rural Dalits unlike their movements in the urban industrial centers found in the Western and other parts of the India<sup>49</sup>. The Dalit leadership emerged more distinctively in seven districts of the Coastal Andhra (Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, East and West Godavari, Ongole, Guntur and Nellore) and four districts of Rayalseema (Kurnool, Chittoor, Anantapur and Cuddapah) which were included in the Madras presidency during the colonial rule. Being influenced by the non-Brahman movement in the region, Dalit movements concentrated on the agrarian issues like their rights over land, wages etc. More precisely there emerged

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<sup>49</sup> Omvedt, Gail 1994. Dalits and the democratic revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit movement in colonial India, sage publication, New Delhi, p.114

the non-Brahman movements (both of the Dalits and the middle level castes) in 1917 in the Madras Presidency which challenged the dominance of the Brahman elites in Indian National Congress. It also rejected the Brahman dominance in the almost every walk of life and laid the basis for the Dalit leadership and its movements including that for a non-Aryan or Dravidian identity.

The term 'Adi-Andhra' rose in the past 1917 period when Dalits in the South influenced by the 'non-Aryan' theme of the Dravidian movement, were identifying themselves as Adi-Dravidians, Adi-Andhras and Adi-Karnatakas—the original sons of the soil. Their identities were accepted by the government.

Dalit leadership emerged during the 1920s in Hyderabad, the largest state of the British regime in India, here the Dalit movement developed within an already dangerously polarized Hindu-Muslim communal tension. As stated by Omvedt, "In some way there was closeness in Dalit and Muslims relations in the Hyderabad area itself. Yet, it was a closeness characterized by ambiguity<sup>50</sup>." In this narrow and communalized framework, a small but vigorous Dalit (Malas) movement was organized in 1910 in Hyderabad. Two important leaders who stood at the centre of it were Bhagyareddy Verma and Arigay Ramaswamy. It was Baghyareddy (1888-1939) who presided over not only the momentous conferences of the Molas at Vijaywada in 1913 when the "PANCHAMA" identity was rejected but he also headed over number of other conferences thereafter. His organizing activity began in 1912 when he formed the Adi Hindu Jatiyonnati Sabha and Many Sangam. These organizations were formed with the help of the Dalit employees of the both government and Nizam of Hyderabad which also indicated the emergence of a 'Dalit Middle Class<sup>51</sup>'.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid p120

<sup>51</sup> Ibid .p.122

The radicalization among Dalits throughout south India brought with it the 'Adi Ideology'. Four Adi Hindu conferences were organized in Hyderabad itself between 1912 and 1924. Baghyareddy transformed his Many Sangam into the Adi-Hindu Social Service League, which became the main organization of the Dalits in Hyderabad. The term 'Adi-Hindu' was spreading among a sizeable number of north Indian Chamars during this time. This appeal of the Adi Hindu identity in the north was the result of Bhagyareddy's close connection with north India Adi Hindu movements. In fact, Baghyareddy himself had travelled and attended notably two conferences organized in 1927 and 1930 in north India which had described the Depressed Classes Adi-Hindus<sup>52</sup>.

The Dalit striving in south India was also witnessed in Kerala where Pulayas-the untouchables had organized, since the beginning of this century their social-cultural revolts under the able leadership of Ayyankali and Vellikkara Choti. The aim of such revolts initially was not for economic gain but for entry into educational institutions and other public places. Consequently, the Pulayas won the freedom to walk along public roads and entry of their children to school by 1900. But that was not fully accepted by caste Hindus and others. Therefore, Ayyankali and Vellikkara Chot had organized again another movement in 1914 for school entry of Pulaya children with considerable amount of resistance by caste Hindus. Another leader Gopala das fought against the custom of wearing bead necklaces by the Pulaya women. Thus the social revolts of the Pulayas brought a new awakening to which also coincided with a widespread political development in the State with the representation of the Dalit leaders in the Assembly and Legislative Council in 1911 and 1926 respectively.

Consequently the voice of the Pulayas was heard first time in the political space of the state.

There was some limited independent Dalit organizing in western India before the 1920s. For instance Gopal Baba Walangkar a retired army officer led the Ratnagiri based group and sent a petition to the government as early as in 1890. This was the beginning of articulating the protest of Mahars against the socio-religious disabilities and powerlessness. Walanhkar highlighted the grievances of the Dalits by writing the 'Dinbandhu' and 'Sudharak' Marathi newspapers in which he argued that casteism and untouchability had no any religious base and were monsters created by the Hindus. To prove his thesis, he published a booklet titled, 'Vital Vidwansak'. In 1918 he formed the 'Anarya Doshpariharak Mandali' (non Aryan group for removal of wrongs) at Dapoli in the localities of Ratangiri district where untouchable castes such as Chmabhar and Mahar army pensioners lived.

Earlier, the Mahars, Mangas and Chmabhars were recruited in the army of the East India Company but around 1890-91 their recruitment ceased. Those already in service were also asked to leave. Enraged over this, Walangkar filed a petition in July 1890 requesting re-acceptance of them in the Army.

In this mission, Walangkar secured little support from his followers. Thus, with his effort a new era had emerged in the Dalits' struggle for securing their rights and social justice. He then may be termed as the first social thinker, the first revolutionary, and the first initiator of the Dalit Movement in Maharashtra.<sup>53</sup> The pre-Ambedkar era saw the emergence of Shivrsam Janab Kamble, another Dalit leader in Maharashtra who had formed the Oppressed India Association in Nagpur. Kamble formed a Mahar

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<sup>53</sup> Jogdand, P.G. (ed.), (1995). *Dalit Women: Issues and Perspectives*. New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, p.46

caste association and published the 'somvansh Mitra' a Marathi Newspaper, he was the leading figure in the 'Parvati Temple satyagraha' organized by the Dalits and few caste Hindu in 1929. He also fought against the customary practices of the Devdasi system prevalent among the Mahars and Margs. When Ambedkar appeared on the public scene in the 1920s, Kamble welcomed him as a leader of the Dalits. Both often met and discussed on the different issues. They had, however, differences with regard to the 1937 election procedures which ultimately led Kamble's dissociation from Ambedkar.

Kisan Fogji Bansole was another Dalit leader from Nagpur who founded in 1903 the 'Sanmarg Bodhak Nirashrit Samaj' (Depressed Class Society showing right path). The Samaj existed for showing the principals of Right 'Panth' to Mahars. Besides founding many educational institutions including a school for girls in 1907, he started several newspapers like the Nirikshak Hindu Nagrik (1910), Vithal Vidhvansak (1913), Mazur Patrika (1918) and Chokha Mela (1931).

The most significant role in Dalit movements is played by Dr. Babasahab Bhim Rao Ambedkar. He ignited the new socio-political awareness among Dalit. Ambedkar programs were intended to integrate the untouchables from a state of dehumanization and slavery into one the equality through the use of modern methods based on education and exercise legal and political rights. Bhimrao Ambedkar, the fourteenth child of Ramji and Bhimabai Sakpal Ambavedkar, was born in Mhow, in western Madhya Pradesh, on April 14, 1891 into the "untouchable" Mahar caste. His father and grandfather Maloji were in the British Army. The Government of the day required all Army personnel and their families to be educated, and ran schools for this purpose. Thus the Sakpal family was fortunate to see their children receive a good education, which otherwise would have been denied to them.

When Bhim was six years old, his mother died, and he was brought up by his father's sister Meerabai until Ramji remarried. His father was a strict, pious man, and avoided meat and drink. Along with his children, he often sang devotional songs composed by Namdev, Tukaram, Moropant and Mukteshwar, and read stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. When he retired from the army as a Subedar-Major of the Second Grenadiers after 14 years of service, the family moved to Dapoli in Konkan and then to Satara. Bhim and his older brother Anand were enrolled in the cantonment school, Government High School.

Despite the opportunity that education permitted, Bhim began to taste the bitter reality of his birth. He had to sit on the floor in one corner in the classroom. Teachers would not touch his notebooks. If Bhim felt thirsty, he could only drink water if someone else poured water into his mouth. Once provoked by an uncontrollable fit of thirst, Bhim drank from the public reservoir. He was found out and beaten by the higher caste Hindus. These experiences were permanently etched onto his mind. He realized that this was the plight of anyone born "untouchable." When many of his classmates left for good jobs in Bombay, he too longed to be independent. He realized that if he ever were to be successful, he would have to concentrate more on his studies. He became interested in reading, and read not just the prescribed books in school but much more. His father wasn't pleased when he digressed from school books but he never said "no" when Bhim wanted a book. Bhim enrolled in the Elphinstone High School in Bombay. Even there, one of his teachers constantly mocked him, saying that of what use an educated Mahar was. Bhim swallowed these insults and controlled his anger. He passed his matriculation examination in 1907. The Mahars felicitated him on his achievement. Bhim joined the Elphinstone College for further education. After completing his Intermediate course, Bhim received a scholarship from the



Maharaja of Baroda, Sayaji Rao, and attained a bachelor in Arts in 1912. The February of next year, Ramji died; Bhimrao had lost his father and mentor.

Sayaji Rao selected Bhim to be sent to America on a scholarship for higher studies. In return, Bhim Rao would have to serve the State of Baroda for ten years. Bhim Rao reached New York in July 1913. For the first time in his life, Bhim Rao was not demeaned for being a Mahar. He put his heart into his studies and received a degree in Master of Arts and a Doctorate in Philosophy from Columbia University in 1916 for his thesis "National Dividend of India: A Historical and Analytical Study." From America, Dr. Ambedkar proceeded to London to study economics and political science. The Government of Baroda terminated his scholarship and recalled him to Baroda. Bhim Rao vowed to return to London to complete his studies. The Maharaja appointed him Military Secretary but no one would take orders from an "untouchable" Mahar. He could not even get lodging and not even the Prime Minister appointed by the Maharaja could help him find a place to live; Ambedkar returned to Bombay in November 1917. With the help of Shahu Maharaj of Kolhapur, a sympathizer of the cause for the upliftment of the depressed classes, he started a fortnightly newspaper, the Mooknayak (Leader of the Dumb) on January 31, 1920. The Maharaja also convened many meetings and conferences of the "untouchables" which Bhimrao addressed. Impressed by Ambedkar, the Maharaja declared at one meeting, "You have found your saviour in Ambedkar. I am confident he will break your shackles." In September 1920, after accumulating sufficient funds, Ambedkar returned to London to complete his studies. He became a barrister and got a Doctorate in Law. He now considered himself fully equipped to fight the evil of "untouchability." In July 1924, Ambedkar founded the *Bahishkrut Hitkaraini Sabha*, aimed at scrapping the caste system from the Hindu religion. The Sabha started free

school for the young and the old and ran reading rooms and libraries. Dr. Ambedkar took the grievances of the "untouchables" to court, seeking justice and equality. Soon he became a father-figure to the poor and downtrodden and was respectfully called "Babasaheb."

In March 1927, attendees at a conference of the depressed classes held at Mahad, decided to implement the resolution passed 4 years earlier to open public places to all regardless of religion, caste or creed by drinking from the Chavdar Taley (Sweet-water Tank). They walked to the tank and drank from its water. Higher caste Hindus attacked them; pulling down the conference pulpit, they threw away all the cooked food and broke all the vessels. Ambedkar told his people to stay calm and not retaliate. Later the higher-caste Hindus performed rituals to "purify" the "defiled" water. Ambedkar vowed to offer a Satyagraha and re-establish his people's right to use the water tank.

On December 25 of the same year, thousands responded to Ambedkar's call. Speaker after speaker spoke, passions rose and the vast gathering waited for the Satyagraha to begin with intense anticipation. The Satyagraha was deferred when the matter was referred to the court. At the end of conference, a copy of the Manusmriti, the age-old code of the Hindus that gave rise to the caste system, was ceremoniously burnt. In a thundering voice, Ambedkar demanded in its place a new smriti, devoid of all social stratification. This act sent shockwaves through the nation. In 1929, Ambedkar made the controversial decision to co-operate with the all-British Simon Commission to look into setting up a responsible Indian Government in India. The Congress decided to boycott the Commission and drafted its own version of a constitution for free India. The Congress version made no provisions for the depressed classes. Ambedkar

became more skeptical of the Congress's commitment to safeguard the rights of the depressed classes. He pressed for a separate electorate for the depressed classes.

When a separate electorate was announced for the depressed classes, Gandhiji went on a fast unto death against this decision. Leaders rushed to Dr. Ambedkar to drop his demand. Ambedkar held fast and did not buckle under the immense pressure. Finally on September 24, 1932, Ambedkar and Gandhiji signed the Poona Pact. According to the pact the separate electorate demand was replaced with special concessions like reserved seats in the regional legislative assemblies and Central Council of States.

On October 13, 1935, at a conference at Nasik, Dr. Ambedkar reviewed the progress made on the condition of the "untouchables" in the decade since Ambedkar started his agitation. Ambedkar declared that their efforts had not borne the kind of results he had expected. He then made his dramatic appeal to the "untouchables.", encouraging them to forsake the Hindu religion and convert to a religion where they would be treated with equality. The nation was shocked. The British Government agreed to hold elections on the provincial level in 1937. The Congress, Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha started gearing up for the elections. Dr. Ambedkar set up the Independent Labour Party in August 1936 to contest the elections in the Bombay province. On February 17, 1937, Ambedkar and many of his candidates won this a thumping majority. Around the same time, the Chavdar Taley water dispute which was referred to the Bombay High Court in 1927 finally handed down its verdict in favor of the depressed classes. Dr. Ambedkar also introduced Bills in 1937 to abolish the "khoti" system of land tenure in the Konkan region, the serfdom of agricultural tenants and the Mahar "watan" system of working for the Government as slaves. The Constituent Assembly of Independent India appointed a Drafting Committee with Dr. Ambedkar as its Chairman to draft the Constitution of India. In February 1948, Dr. Ambedkar

presented the Draft Constitution before the people of India; it adopted Article 11, abolished untouchability in all forms on November 26, 1949 with all its 356 Articles and 8 Schedules.. In May 1956, shortly before his death, Dr. Ambedkar announced that he was embracing Buddhism. With him his wife and some three lakh followers also converted to the faith. When asked why, Dr. Ambedkar replied, "Why can't you ask this question to yourself and... your forefathers...?"

### **Ambedkar as Ideologue of Dalit Movements**

Modern Dalit movement revolves around the work ideas of Ambedkar so to understand this in a better way we will look how Ambedkar has shaped and forwarded Dalit movement. It is irrefutable that the Dalit liberation movements especially in the last three decades or so have been centered on Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. This allegiance became all the more essential for the Dalits because the life and the struggles of Dr. Ambedkar unleashed a new awareness among the Dalits. This awareness led to the search for a culture of freedom, a political agenda for emancipation, a social order devoid of exclusion, and non-dependent economic engagement. Hence, the writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar became the ideological underpinnings of Dalit liberation movement. Eleanor Zelliot based on the study of Dalit movements, documents the symbolic relevance that the statue of Dr. Ambedkar represents; education, success, contribution to the political world of India, courage, empowerment through reservations, protection through a relationship to government, 'one of 'us' who was not only important personally but was important to India. This overpowering image of Dr. Ambedkar does not obliterate other 'roots of Dalit consciousness'. Rather it encourages Dalits to look for the abilities, the talents, the triumphs, both of the historic past and at the folklore of the village as well. In a special way, the writings and speeches of Dr. Ambedkar has become the rallying

point of Dalit emancipation. Valerian Rodriguez writing about Dr. Ambedkar portrays him as 'Scholar, politician, constitutionalist, teacher, lawyer, parliamentarian, administrator, journalist, negotiator, agitationists and leader'. Dr. Ambedkar privileged the written word. The written world enabled him to reach out to a larger world, conferring some degree of permanence or immortality and allowing him to usurp some of the Brahminical authority. In his writings Dr. Ambedkar resorted to various modes of expression-dissertations, records, papers, documents, outlines, notes early drafts, statements, briefs, memoranda, disputations and investigations. There are also speeches delivered by Dr. Ambedkar for various occasions and different forum, from the Constituent Assembly to mobilization gatherings. Born an 'untouchable', Dr. Ambedkar became India's foremost opponent of the evil of untouchability and formulated the basis of affirmative action through his advocacy of fair and equal terms of social association.

Dr. Anand Teltumbde in his study of Ambedkar and Post-Ambedkar Dalit Movements emphatically states that Dr. Ambedkar has undoubtedly been the central figure in the epistemology of the Dalit universe. It is difficult to imagine anything serious or important in their collective life that is totally untouched by Dr. Ambedkar. For the Dalit masses, he is everything together, a scholar par excellence in the realm of scholarship, a Moses or messiah who led his people out of bondage and ignominy on to the path of pride, and a Bodhisattva in the pantheon of Buddhism. He is always bedecked with superlatives, quite like God, whatever may be the context in Dalit circles. Dr. Ambedkar heavily influenced most of the contemporary Dalit leaders of India. He created a political language for Dalit as well as countered hierarchy based caste system with Buddhism. In further chapters I will describe how the image of Ambedkar and Buddhism propagated by Dalits.

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This formation of Dalit Bahujan identity paved path for political and social assertion of Dalits. This assertion got huge success when Mayawati leader of Bahujan Samaj party become chief minister of India's most populace state Uttar Pradesh. Bahujan samaj party along with Bmcef had a clear agenda of creating cultural capital to awaken Dalit masses. For this they had rejuvenated many Dalit historical personalities. They were myths earlier .Bahujan samaj party promoted performances and visual arts respective to these historical figures. In this context Badri Narayan says, "Very often myths are more influential than reality and very often myths give new meaning to reality .memories too often help people triumph over an oppressive present and the past is often invented in new forms to overcome such a represent<sup>54</sup> .

Here Badrinarayan's argument is very true in terms of Hindu nationalists who claim we had all modern knowledge kept in our ancient Sanskrit books, Europeans came and took away all of our knowledge.

Dalits are not in position to rule because they do not possess the qualities that rulers and kings need. The upper castes believe that since the lower castes have always been

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<sup>54</sup> Badrinarayan [2006]women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India. New Delhi.Sage Publication. P.15

menial workers serving them, they were not fit to rule. The narrative construction of King Bijli Pasi in which tries to depict the qualities of Bijli Pasi and the fact that they had been ruling communities for many centuries are meant to break this preconceived notion, they also want to support Bahujan samaj party and want to see Mayawati as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh.

### **AMBEDKAR'S NATIONALISM AND DALIT ART**

Dr Ambedkar was a nationalist and firm believer in democracy. He always asked Dalits to opt democratic means to oppose caste oppression. Art forms are the best way of peaceful assertion. Art practices enrich a person with delicacy creativity and patience, contrary to any other means; art practices provide a plethora of modes of resistance. People can pen down their experiences in the form of autobiographies, they can write poetry, draw, paint their surreal imagination and experiences further practices of arts promote social stature of practitioners. Creating a parallel cultural capital and enriching it with daily experiences and forms establish a new psyche. Theatre plays a very important role in releasing pain and agony. Catharsis through acting is best way to release hidden aggression and desires.

He sought the inclusion of Dharm chakra into the national flag of India. He also advocated making Ashok stambha to be national emblem of India. Creating socio-political art is just like designing a mode of protest in a best way possible. It has multiple meanings and easily attracts the receiver. People generally tend to stay away from books which depict agony and pain but art practices like song and dramas attracts them well.

## **UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ASSERTION OF DALITS**

Social assertion is all about upgrading or claiming a higher social status and equalizing with other communities of society. As we know Dalits are at the bottom of society. They are considered polluted and mean people, who have lack of intelligence and so, cannot be creative. Practices Arts requires ideas, creativity, imagination as well as ideology. The main motive of Dalit art is to reclaim dignity and a equal status in society, that's why they criticize varna system, caste system and question divinity of such discrimination. The impact of social discrimination is manifold and it is not easy to define and measure. It has many dimensions. It is felt and experienced and, at times, impossible to express or exhibit. The discrimination certainly leads to: 1.Deprivation 2.Mental Block 3.Humiliation 4.Inferiority Complex 5.Communication Gap 6.Escapism 7.We and they feeling 8.Suspicion 9.Poor Performance 10.Crisis and Conflict.

These are the forms of discrimination recognized by National confederation of Dalit organization<sup>55</sup>.

### **Forms of Discrimination**

Injustice and inequality in India exist in the worst form by way of social stratification and hierarchy that are directly linked to religion and caste. An analysis of intersecting ways in which institutions and practices built upon caste system reproduced norms and beliefs about the social inferiority (and consequent economic and political inferiority of certain castes) and thus also explain how social and economic privileges are distributed, who gains and who is excluded. We identify the following forms of discrimination:

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<sup>55</sup> <http://www.nacdor.org/forms-of-discrimination.html>



### **Caste-Intensified Discrimination**

Caste-specific discrimination refers to specific form of discrimination based on cultural norms, beliefs, practices and customs deriving its legitimacy from the principles of caste system and religion. Thus, graded inequality embedded in the caste system dictates that certain occupations like performing Pooja, teaching-learning and agriculture are considered pure and superior and upper castes only have the 'rightful' right to perform, while occupations like scavenging, sweeping, shoemaking, haircutting are impure and polluting and are performed by lower castes. Further, this understanding of purity and pollution also throws up the practice of untouchability, physical/social distance/segregation, private/public life, language demeaning to intrinsic human value.

### **Caste-Imposed Discrimination**

Caste-imposed discrimination refers to the fact that caste inequality has been socially constructed through age-old norms, customs and practices to protect social, political and economic interests. This has given more power to some social groups. These groups try to dictate and are successful to an extent in imposing their own world-view, their own norms, beliefs and cultural practices on other depressed social groups. This leaves little chance of multi-cultural community to co-exist peacefully and democratically.

### **Self-Imposed Caste Discrimination**

The last category refers to the fact that caste inequality, practice of untouchability etc. may have been socially constructed but the members of the lower castes have internalized it and consider this position divinely given in the human order. This makes them willingly submit to the dictates of upper caste whims and fancies.

Thus, the combinations of forms of discrimination discussed above help to socially construct and get accepted a particular nature of formal and informal social, political and economic institutions which favour certain social group over others. This results in some social groups to command and control public goods, get hierarchies of power and decision making and consequent less of social status and less access to related tangible (educational qualification, white collar jobs, productive resources etc.) and intangible (pride in one's own cultural practices and customs, identity etc.) assets to depressed social groups. NGOs like NACDOR are creating a good research on Dalits issues and trying to solve them through democratic means. Dalits are claiming this social status through two ways.

First is to claim the equal status within Hindu society and second is creating their own theology and by abandoning Hindu religion.

Remarks, proverbs and myths that are derogatory about Dalits are challenged by songs, dramas as well as in the forms of paintings.

Political assertion is about getting share in power. Dalits earlier voted for different parties and in return these parties made some schemes for the upliftment of Dalits.

But now Dalits are claiming equal power proportionate to their population in power structure. There is a famous BSP slogan *VOTE HAMARA RAAJ TUMHARA.NAHI CHALEGA, NAHI CHALEGA.*

This means we cast vote for you to rule, but now we want to rule with our vote.

Political assertion is also visible in the form of democratization of Dalits especially those who are influenced by ideology of Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Dr. Ambedkar was staunch supporter of democracy and he advised Dalits to shun other radical means to get political power. Post-independence period in India has seen assertion of Dalits

divided into three phases—the phase of Republican Party of India; the phase of Dalit Panther and the phase of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

Since this assertion took place after the death of Ambedkar all these phases belong to the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement. The focus of Dalit movement in the preceding period had been on the temple entry, restoration of self-respect, and getting reservation for the Dalits in the political and government institutions. The post – Ambedkar Dalit movement took multiple forms — socio-cultural, economic and political. Due to their assertion Dalits have been able to get the recognition as a distinct social and political group. Their assertion is reflected through various ways such as foundation of social, cultural and political organizations, conversion to other religion and increasing political participation<sup>56</sup>.

Dalits in some areas dominated by higher caste are still not allowed to cast their votes in election. Sometimes they are forced to vote for the candidate of the dominating caste, to counter such situation Bahujan samaj party coined a slogan [चढ़ गुंडों की छाती पे, बटन दबाओ हाथी पे] “chadh gundo ki chhati pe batton dabao, haathi pe”, Lets counter the goons, and cast vote for BSP. Such types of incidents take place in thousands of polling booths in many states<sup>57</sup>.

Another way of social assertion is in the form of creating alternative Dalit theology. Since Hindu Sanatan theology and scriptures are sources’ of validity of discrimination, radical Dalits have denounced all these scripture and have found solace and libration in the teachings of Bhakti Saints and Mahatma Buddha. Dr.

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<sup>56</sup> <https://veronetwork.wordpress.com/2013/09/06/assertion-of-Dalits-and-backward-castes/>

<sup>57</sup> News published by The Times of india .16april 2009.Patna edition .SARAN. Even in constituencies represented by high-profile politicians like Lalu Prasad and Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Dalits are not allowed to vote. On Thursday, a group of Dalits blocked the Patna-Chhapra road angry at not being able to vote.

Ambedkar was born into a Kabir panthi<sup>58</sup> family. One of his uncles turned a Kabir panthi Sadhu<sup>59</sup>. Ambedkar was influenced by kabir a lot. Kabir was a theist saint. Who believed in formless and omnipresent God? Ambedkar finally found Buddhism most suitable religion for Dalits. In 1935 in a speech he said though he is born into a Hindu family but he does not want to die a Hindu. Ambedkar defined Buddhism in a new way where there is no place for karma theory, which held responsible past life deeds for present life's condition.

Philosophy of Gautama Buddha is far more progressive than kabir. Mahatma Buddha was an agnostic, some sources quote him as a strict atheist. By adopting Buddhism Ambedkar paved a path for emancipation for Dalits. Because there is no God who could heal mundane wounds by just praying and by other ritualistic means. Philosophy of Buddhism is far more advanced. The message of Buddha *appo dippo bhav* [be your light] opens a gate of liberation and self exploration for mankind. A preconceived view prevalent among the upper caste people, they cannot think much, their world view is limited and modernity is confined to some classes only.

Nowadays Dalits are evaluating their culture. The new concept of *MOOL NIVASI*<sup>60</sup> is engulfed in young Dalit minds. Theory of Aryan invasion is engulfed in young Dalit Bahujan minds. Dalits are reinterpreting their ancient cultural concept of Begampura given by saint Ravidas is giving a new ideological basis of Dalit political socialist thinking.

Assertion is working in many ways one is denying Brahminical supremacy and caste hierarchy, reinterpretation of history, establishing a new parallel theology and

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<sup>58</sup> followers of medieval bhakti saint poet Kabir.

<sup>59</sup> A man who has devoted his life for spiritual upliftment

<sup>60</sup> Concept of Moolnivasi is being propagated by BAMCEF. It means Bahujan are aborigines of India and upper caste people [Brahmin, Kshatriya, vaishya] are foreigners who invaded India and destroyed its aborigine culture.

spiritual ideology inspired by Gautama Buddha and saint Ravidas and kabir, and most important is capturing the state power. Kanshiram, founder of Bahujan samaj party said सत्ता सभी तालो की मास्टर चाबी है = “political rule is key of all locks. His hair Miss Mayawati become chief minister 4 times in the state of Uttar Pradesh and made many significant change.

In this context it is interesting to note that BSP’s presence had made qualitative difference for the Dalits in the grassroots institutions as well. The institutions like rural and urban local bodies, Police Stations & Chowkis etc. were almost out of bound for the Dalits. They never dared to enter these institutions as people’s representatives. They were always at the mercy of the ‘upper castes’ to raise and negotiate their issue at these forums. They used to stand meters away from the police station while the ‘upper castes’ manipulated the law and rules.

The Constables and Police Inspector rarely bothered to listen to Dalits. With the emergence of BSP at the grassroots the aforesaid realities have changed to a certain extent. Why it has happened. The local BSP leader’s role has made the difference. With the coming to power four times these grassroots functionaries have become more powerful with their approach directly in the highest echelons of administration. If any government official did not respond, the local BSP leader directly approached the state party headquarters and lodged its complaints. And it was very surprising that immediate action was taken on these complaints which kept the government officials on their toes.

Secondly the passage of 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment bills which reserved seats for the Dalits in rural and urban local bodies were passed and BSP contested these elections seriously for the first time and on their symbols in the year

1995. The party gained substantially in these elections and further improved its performance in the elections held in the year 2000 for these bodies.<sup>61</sup> The whole process made BSP members represent themselves and direct the programmes, policies and funds for their own Bastees (colony) and villages. They were not begging and pursuing their case from an ‘upper caste’. In the same vein at the Thana (Police Station) level BSP regime, in 1997, passed an order thereby reserving 25 per cent of Station Officer (Thana Adhyaksha) post for the scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe Officers. This order in confluence with the emergence of local Dalit leadership made a qualitative difference. Now Dalit felt empowered as they thought they can get justice and even if they do not get justice at least they will not be inflicted with injustice for having courage to file a complaint against an ‘upper caste’ or any other powerful person of the area. Today Dalits have started directly entering erstwhile out of bound territory of Thanas either because of fear or high-handedness of the police. Is it not a case of structural change, especially in the grassroots institutions, which once served only the upper strata of the society, though there are several officers of scheduled caste in these departments but they were always afraid of upper caste officers hegemony and rarely dared to do some work for their caste brethren. One of the major programs that gained support for BSP regime among Dalits was to Ambedkar Village Scheme.

One of the most interesting note regarding this move is when police had started to lodge first information report of Dalits, upper caste dominated media raised a hue and cry that “atrocities on Dalits are increasing during the reign of BSP”. Previously Dalits would not lodge FIRs, however, this particular move led to increasing number

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<sup>61</sup>Kumar,Vivek.2000 (2013), Dalit Assertion and Bahujan Samaj Party, New Delhi: Samyak Prakashan.pp128

of dalit victims registering complaints against atrocities which are inflicted on them. This gave the impression that atrocities on Dalits have increased.<sup>62</sup>.

### **POLITICS OF SYMBOLS BY BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY**

Bahujan samaj party invested a lot of money on image making. They have made many parks dedicated to Dalit–Bahujan great personalities like Chhatrpati Shahuji Maharaj, Jyotiba Phule, Guru Ravidas, Kabir, Savitri Bayi, and most notable Dr .Ambedkar.

When I enquired some Dalit thinkers regarding building of monuments by BSP, they said there is not a single monument in India where Dalits can go and feel the sense of pride belongingness. Bahujan samaj party filled this gap. Now Dalits can also go to Ambedkar park of Lucknow and feel proud of their Socio-political assertion. Though due to huge money spent on such monuments Mayawati came under fire of media and from the opponents who criticised her for spending public money on monuments. More than 5thousand caror rupees were spent on these monuments across Uttar Pradesh.

### **Role of NGOs in the promotion of Dalit art and Culture**

In India just like Nepal many NGOs are promoting Dalit culture and art. These NGOs are working for Dalit rights, advocacy. Many Dalit communities are traditionally into art forms, they are art practicners, art practices are means of livelihood for them. Most notable are Dalit foundation, Indian institute of Dalit studies. Indian institute of Dalit studies even supported one American researcher Gary Michael Tartakov to research about Indian Dalit art in its socio-political context.

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<sup>62</sup> URL-<http://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/article25005.ece>

NACDOR [National Confederation of Dalit Organisations] has also requested government of India to support Dalit arts and culture. In a letter to ministry of finance they have requested that government should encourage Dalits engaged into art practices and should also establish centre for Dalit art and culture. Ministry of culture should organize Dalit utsav where literary and artistic activities of Dalit artists should be held.

Dalit foundation is promoting Godna style of Madhubani painting. They are providing funds and support too many people to train them in this style. In 2011, Dalit foundation also organized a Dalit cultural festival to promote Dalit artists.



## Chapter Two

### Dalits and their Performances and Social Assertion

“We have dreams, but our life runs out in search of existence. We flavour our story of untouchability with the touch of reality. Dalit theatre captures different realities from Dalit perspective and tunes a dance of Dalit dreams”<sup>63</sup>

Performing arts are always practiced by Dalit people, performers like singers, dancers and Bards have always been part of Dalit society. Some Dalit artisans use to make musical instruments like Dholak, drum, leather is major component of all percussion instruments. In most of the India drum beaters, and other musician belongs to Dalit communities. Dalits play drum during different social and religious ceremony since ages.

Many Dalit castes like Nat have had performing art as their main occupation. The Nats of India are professional dancers, singers and acrobats by tradition. They like to be known as Raj-Nat as they claim to have Rajput origins and originate from Rajasthan. They are also called Bhanmati, meaning something amazing. Nat people are also mentioned in Valmiki Ramayana, as Shailush<sup>64</sup>. Their main profession was to entertain caste/high class people through dance and drama. Later many Nat entertainers turned into some particular castes like in the case of Bedia caste. According to legend Bedias are one of the offshoots of Nat in central India bedia women are into prostitution and singing and dancing. Nepali Badi is considered one of the branches of Bedias of India who came to Nepal in 16<sup>th</sup> century to entertain aristocrats.

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<sup>63</sup> Tagline of -South Indian Dalit Theatre Festival-URL-<http://www.chindu.org/pdfs/SIDTF-brochure.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> Valmiki Ramayan. Ayodhya kaand.Geeta Press,Gorakhpur.p318

As drama was considered impure and practice of theatre was considered polluted; polluted castes are treated as untouchables. There is one exception in this case, Brahmins of some parts of India who are into dance practice, especially of Kathak, are not considered polluted.<sup>65</sup> They enjoy high prestige associated within Brahmin caste. Performing arts in India were practiced by lower castes but now due to prestige associated with some art forms like classical dance, Brahmins and Kayastha women now dominate the classical dance sphere in India.

### **“Deras” Socio-religious centre: creation and promotion of cultural capital**

Dalits of Punjab have established their own deras (centres) to promote their parallel theology. Guru Ravidas's poetry is placed in “Guru Granth Sahib” the holy book of Sikhs. In Sikhism Guru Ravidas is considered a **BAHAGT** [a worshipper of high order] but not the Guru. Guru means master or preacher. In Sikhism only 10 Gurus are accepted and rest of saints mentioned in *Guru Granth Sahib* are Bhagats. Gurus are considered of a higher grade than Bhagats. Dalit Sikhs began to consider Ravidas as a Guru instead of Bhagat. This practice angered the higher caste Sikhs. Gradually, due to discrimination Dalit Sikhs have started distancing themselves from mainstream Sikhism and re-established Ravidas as Guru. Guru Ravidas was also from a Dalit caste, “Chamar”. He asserted on his Chamar identity in his poetry also.

Dalits of Punjab got inspired by poetry of Guru Ravidas and composed many songs on Guru Ravidas and his teachings. They established their own Ravidas temples and stopped going to Gurudwaras. This rift in Sikhism has angered other Sikhs especially upper caste ones from Jat caste. Many feuds erupted in many cities of Punjab and this rift was widened with the murder of Guru Ramanand in Vienna, Austria. After this

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<sup>65</sup> Birju maharaj ,famous Kathak Dancer belongs to Brahmin caste[vats gotra]. His forfathers migrated to Lucknow to serve Nawab of Awadh. Based on my findings of my field study[2january.2013] of village Kichkila,Handiya Tehsil,Aallahabad.

incident Dalits have composed their own scripture and founded a new religious order Ravidassia Dharm.

Dera Sachkhand Ballan, also known as Dera Shri 108 Sant Sarwan Dass Ji Maharaj Sachkhand Ballan is situated at village Ballan: seven miles north of Jalandhar city. This Dera is a spiritual and social centre of Chamar caste people. This Dera has played an important role in the assertion of Dalits of Punjab. Most of them are Sikh Dalits. In Punjab, Dalit Sikh societies are discriminated by Upper caste. They have created their own scripture based on teachings of Guru Ravidas "*Amritbani Satguru Ravidass Maharajji*" and they started putting it up besides Guru Granth sahib in Ravidassia Gurudwaras. This move by Dera Sachkhand Balla angered many hardliners upper caste Sikh and in 2009 in Vienna, Austria they have killed saint Ramanand of Dera Balla. After the killing of saint Ramanand in Vienna, Dera Balla has announced a new religion and a new holy book which would replace Guru Granth sahib<sup>66</sup>. This chasm among Sikhs has exposed the castiest side of Sikh religion, that how an egalitarian monotheistic religion was manipulated for caste domination. Jat Sikhs are dominating Sikh religion in Punjab. Most of the Gurudwaras, their management committee are in hands of Jat Sikhs. Jats always hated the Brahminical domination of Hindu Sanatan dharma but within Sikh-fold they imitated the same domination over the Dalits. One Punjabi Jat singer Surjeet Bindrakhia even mentions in song "Bhamna di nayi eh jaat di yaari [Brahmins are not worthy of becoming good friends]."<sup>67</sup> Sikhism was a new religion in 15th century. Its monotheistic and egalitarian views attracted many people of intermediate and Dalit castes. Jats wanted a niche in a newly found religion. In the first place they embraced Sikhism mainly because of its egalitarian nature but later they created a hierarchy within Sikhism.

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<sup>66</sup> [http://www.global.ucsb.edu/Punjab/journal/v16\\_1/articles/RonkiRam16\\_1.pdf](http://www.global.ucsb.edu/Punjab/journal/v16_1/articles/RonkiRam16_1.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> <http://Punjabijanta.com/bhangra-Punjabi-lyrics/surjit-bindrakhia-lyrics/>

Founder of Sikh religion Guru Nanak was from Khatri [Kshatriya] caste and rest of the Sikh Gurus were also Khatri.

Kanshiram, Founder of Bahujan Samaj Party was from a Dalit Sikh family of Ropad district of Punjab though he never denounced Sikhism but he was never got much respect by upper caste Sikhs. They do not mentioned him among all time great Sikhs like they mention Bhagat Singh although he got his hair cut and proclaimed him as an atheist. But due to his Jat ancestry he became the part of great Sikh tradition. As the upper caste Sikhs dominate the powerful high bodies, they make sure to keep Dalits off from their representation into such bodies, leading to the alienation of Dalits. Man feud erupted due to this domination. In Talhan [Punjab] a feud was erupted for inclusion of Dalits in Gurudwara committee.

These Deras were instrumental in bringing social consciousness among the Dalits of Punjab<sup>68</sup>. Mangoo Ram, the founder of the Ad Dharm movement, visited the Dera Ballan and sought its support in popularizing the image of Ravidass among the Dalits of Punjab.<sup>69</sup> The association of the Dera with the Ad Dharm movement became further clear from the fact that Sant Sarwan Dass, the then head of the Dera Ballan (October 11, 1928- June 11, 1972), offered juice to Mangoo Ram to open his fast-unto-death undertaken by him as a counter measure to that of Mahatma Gandhi's against the communal award in 1932. Although this movement petered out after the first general election in independent India, Deras such as that of Sarwan Das remain popular destinations for pilgrimage in the Punjab. Dera Ballan also hosted the mammoth Dalit conference (13th December, 1970) Organised by Mangu Ram Jaspal, namesake of the famous Mangoo Ram to revive the Ad Dharm movement.

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<sup>68</sup>Juergensmeyer, / Mark . [1988]Religion as social vision : the movement against untouchability in 20th century Punjab . University of California Press. Berkeley p.84

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.p.85

It was during this conference that the legendary Mangoo Ram and many other prominent leaders of the Ad Dharm movement commended the contribution of Saints of Dera Ballan towards the emancipation and empowerment of Dalits. Sant Sarwan Dass also met Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in 1948 in Delhi at his residence and supported his fight for the emancipation of the Dalits, When Dr. Ambedkar's visited Punjab in 1951, Sant Sarwan Dass sent a message wishing him success in his struggle for the Dalits.<sup>70</sup>

The Saints of Dera Ballan (especially the slain Sant Ramanand) have prepared a number of cassettes, compact discs, and video compact discs of the Bani [teachings] of Guru Ravidass for their followers. Some of the most popular cassettes are: Mission Guru Ravidass Ji (Mission of Guru Ravidass), Kanshi wich chan chariya (Moon in Kanshi) Begampura Shaher Ka Nau (City Named Begumpura) Rabb Dharti Te(God on the Earth)SatGuru Da Updesh (Sermon of the Guru)Kanshi Ballan Wich Farak Na Koe (No Difference between Kanshi and Ballan) Har ke Naam Bin (Without the Name of God)Amrit Bani Shri Guru Ravidass Ji(Immortal Bani of Guru Ravidass) Duniya de Loko Nek Bano (Became nice, Peoples of the World)Jai SatiGuru Ravidass (Victory to Guru Ravidass)Darshan SatGuru de Kar Lau (Be face to face with the Guru) Begumpur de Wasia (Residence of the Begumpur) Guru Da Jehrey Nam Japde (Those who Remember the Name of the Guru) and Ban ke Messiah Aya (Came as a Messiah) Eh Janam Tumhare Lekhe (This Life is for You)Begampure Diyan Raunkan (Festivities of Begumpura)Shri Guru Ravidass Amrit Bani Dohae (Couplets of the Immortal bani of Guru Ravidass) and Satsang Mahina Cheet (company of the Saints in first month of the Hindu calendar) are some of the most popular VCDs. The six-

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<sup>70</sup> Ram,ronki,Ravidass Deras and Social Protest: Making Sense of Dalit Consciousness in Punjab (India)  
The Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. 67, No. 4 (Nov., 2008), pp. 1341-1364

volumes set of „Amrit Bani of Guru Ravidass Ji“ is the most popular among the CDs. They are available at Dera Ballan on nominal rates and are also given as souvenir to the devotees.

The Dera has also composed a Gurbani programme based on the Bani of Guru Ravidass. The program is called „Amrit Bani: Shri Guru Ravidass ji“, was telecasted on Jalandhar Doordarshan since October 13, 2003. The programme is produced in the newly built hi-tech studio in the premises of the Dera through which live telecast of the satsang is also beamed to several countries. It has unique Importance for the Dalit is who in the past were forbidden to read and hear the sacred text. It has contributed significantly in building their self-esteem and Confidence that in turn has sharpened their social and political consciousness.

### **Emergence of Dalit Pop**

#### **Assertion through songs in Punjab: Rise of Dalit Pop Music**

Punjab region of India has highest percentage of Dalits in India than any other state. This is around 28.3 %. Punjabi Dalits are mostly upwardly mobile. Due to influence of Sikh religion Dalit is of Punjab face less untouchability compared to other Indian states, But the social institutions like management committee of Gurudwaras and other religious bodies are dominated by upper caste Sikhs, especially by Jats. In Punjab it is a common phenomenon in every village that there are two Gurudwaras - one is for Dalit Sikhs and second for upper caste Sikhs. Many Dalit is of Punjab have migrated to abroad in search of well paid job opportunities. With the growing economic status Dalit is of Punjab have asserted well.

This division is visible in abroad also .In countries like United Kingdome ,United States of America and Canada Dalits are have their separate Gurudwaras .In terms of dominance and power sharing they face gross discrimination, due to democratic space and economic prosperity Dalits of Punjab are asserting in every sphere. To counter the hegemonic culture of upper caste, they have created and reformed cultural symbols. This assertion is visible in the form of Dalit Pop Music.

In Punjab Dalit songs are seen as counter culture to dominant castes especially Jats. Jats used to assert their socio political position through songs. There are many exemplary songs which assert Jat identity. Jats enjoy the high and dominating caste status among Sikhs in Punjab. Their songs revolve around the romance of Jat men, feuds, rivalry and status. To counter this Jat culture Dalit singers have created their own songs which depicts the goodness of Dalit people, their lifestyle, bravery and assertion.

One example of such song is  
Balmikiyan ke munde nahin darde  
Majhabi Sikha de munde nahin darde  
Balmiki boys are not afraid  
Majhabi Sikh boys are not afraid

There are lots of Dalit singers who are releasing their albums. At the recent launch of his fourth album Hummur 2, Dalit singer Roop Lal Dhir crooned lines from a track in the CD — "Kharka dharka karna kamm Ravidassian da, aiven nahin hunde charche Chamaran de (To create loud noises and ruffle feathers is what the followers of Ravidass do; it is not for nothing that Chamars are being talked about).he told that after making this album he got many threat calls from other caste people you asked him. "How dare a Chamar think he can make a noise and ruffle feathers? We will set

you right," Dhir lal says that I too reply them in their-language. Dhir is a part of "Mission singers" — Dalit singers who produce albums not for entertainment, but for a "Mission", that of reassertion of Dalit identity. They surfaced two years ago, when half a dozen Dalit singers launched audio and video CDs to counter Jatt pop music that rules Punjab. The initial lot included singer/writer SS Azad, Kaler Kanth, Harbhajan Tajpuri and Pamma Sunarh among others. While some like Sunarh launched themselves with Mission music, others like Dhir, who was a folk singer crooning about landless labourers, and Azad, who would paeans to Chamar saint Guru Ravidass at functions, transformed into Mission singers. They travel around the world for concerts.

"Our music is pro-Dalit, not anti-Jatt. The word 'Chamar' finds mention in the Gurbaani. If the Gurus have given us respect, why should we not be proud of ourselves?" says Azad, the pioneer of Chamar pop in Punjab. Azad's debut album was called *Anakhi Putt Chamaran De* (Proud Sons of Chamars). Released in 2010, it was a direct challenge to the prevailing 'putt Jattan de' (sons of Jatts) culture. Yet, despite it is effort to counter Jatt pop, Chamar pop took to aping it, by glorifying carrying weapons, driving big cars and going to Chandigarh to study. Sample Pamma Sunarh's hit song from his first album *The Fighter Chamar* (2011): "Hath leke hathiyar, jad nikle Chamar, pher vekheyo pataka kiven pao mitro, aj dekhde pana keda lao mitro (When Chamars walk out with weapons in their hands, watch the fireworks, friends, we'll see who can cross our path then)". Some 20,000 copies of the album were sold, despite being available only at small music shops in towns in Jalandhar district. "The whole point is to show that we are equal to them in every way. If they can flaunt biceps, so can we. The Chamar is not the poor, lowly man anymore. He is educated and doing well economically," says Sunarh.



But Chamar pop is not a mirror image of Jatt pop. For example, unlike several Jatt songs that extol boys going to Chandigarh to check out girls and not study, the Gabru Chamar Munda video in Hummer shows a young boy studying in Chandigarh while a girl tries to divert his attention. The Chamar boy says, "Padh likh ke main banunga SP ya DC ya phir kisi university da VC (I will study and became a DC SP or the VC of a university)."

The Chamars' exertion of identity through pop music has not been spared discrimination. An ugly Jatt vs Chamar battle is raging online. Hate videos by Jatts abusing Chamars flood YouTube. Under direct fire are not just Chamar singers, but also Dalit spiritual leaders. The Dalits have retorted with their own set of abusive videos. Sunarh, though, sees this as a phase that shall pass, and that "a balance between the two kinds of pop will emerge "Jatt singers are now open to performing with us. At a small rural show, where a Jatt singer was performing, I was also called on stage to sing," he says

Chamar pop, too, has mellowed — from just reacting to Jatt music, it now also seeks to revive the glory of Dalit history in Punjab. Sunarh's album Aarhab Chamar (Stubborn Chamar), has songs glorifying historical Chamar figures. "I have sung about Jai Singh Khalkhat, a Chamar who was hanged to death by the Mughal' s after he refused to renounce Sikhism. It goes, 'Gallan karoonga main sada sach kharian bhanve lag jaan mere hathkarian, bhanve Jai Singh vaang puthi khal den utaar aiselayee saanu aakhde badhe raab Chamar (I will always straight-talk even if I am jailed, and even if I am hanged upside down like Jai Singh, that is why I am called the stubborn Chamar).

Sunarh says Chamar pop has "widened" its cause. "It is no longer just a reaction to Jatt pop. It now also aims to protect the interest of the Dalits and help them not feel

inferior," he says. In their "widening" effort, Mission singers now avoid using the word 'Chamar', preferring the more generic 'Ravidassia' — followers of Guru Ravidass<sup>71</sup>.

While Jatt pop's appeal cuts across castes and extends beyond Punjab, Chamar pop attracts only its own community, not just in terms of audience, but also producers. No music company is willing to produce their albums, and no music channel airs their videos. And it is not because they are Dalits, but because they sing about Dalits. Their branding as Mission singers has ensured that they are no longer invited to perform at sabhyacharak melas, rural fairs that give local talent an opportunity to perform, generally at the expense of the singer. There is acceptability of Jats pop but not of Dalit pop in general masses.

The fact that no music company wants to produce their songs, or so they allege, has led them to start their own firms. "I had to open my own company to launch my CD. But we are not going to give up. We are not doing these songs to earn money," says Dhir. On the other hand, the internet has made up for the lack of telecasting opportunity, and many Dalit singers now upload their music videos on YouTube. "We are in the market because of the internet, where our songs are a super hit," Dalits living overseas often fund production of their music, buy their CDs, and invite them to perform abroad.

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<sup>71</sup> [http://articles.economicstimes.Indiatimes.com/2012-01-26/news/30666860\\_1\\_Punjab-Dalits-Dalit-assertion-manuwadi](http://articles.economicstimes.Indiatimes.com/2012-01-26/news/30666860_1_Punjab-Dalits-Dalit-assertion-manuwadi)

## MISS POOJA

Punjabi pop songs too have a flavour of Dalit socio-political theological assertion. There are many songs which clearly assert for new order like “BEGAMPURA” song by famous Punjabi Dalit singer Miss Pooja .Miss Pooja is most saleable singer of Punjabi and belongs to Chamar caste.

English translation of this song is given below

Let's unite for the establishment of Begampura

We are not afraid of thorns but of flowers

We have made many mistakes

We have to learn lessons from those

The real Begampura verse by Ravidas is like this

The regal realm with the sorrow less name

they call it Begampura, a place with no pain,

no taxes or cares, none owns property there,

no wrongdoing, worry, terror, or torture.

Oh my brother, I've come to take it as my own,

my distant home, where everything is right...

They do this or that, they walk where they wish,

they stroll through fabled palaces unchallenged.

Oh, says Ravidas, a tanner now set free,

those who walk beside me are my friends.

Ravidas's utopia was also significantly different from some of the other later writings on a “desirable land produced by people like Mahatma Gandhi. Ravidas was the first to formulate an Indian version of utopia in his song” Begampura “Begampura the city without sorrow is a casteless, classless society; a modern society, one without a

mention of temples; an urban society as contrasted with Gandhi's village utopia of Ramrajya

### **Interview of Paramjeet Singh Pamma**

During my investigation of Dalit singers of Punjab I have interviewed Dalit singer Paramjeet Singh Pamma in Fagwada. Paramjeet is around 45 he started singing since 12 years of age. Pamma started singing Dalit songs since 2009. He was shocked and touched by the life of Guru Ramanand .Ramanand was a Dalit saint from Punjab who was killed by some upper caste Sikhs in Vienna [Austria] Ramanand along with his senior saint Niranjana Das used to preach more about teachings of Guru Ravidas than other Sikh saints. He created a new scripture for Ravidasi. Guru Ramanand asked his followers to build their separate Gurudwaras. This move and especially creating a new scripture angered upper caste Sikhs and they conspired to kill him. He was shot in Vienna in a Ravidasi Gurudwara .Pamma said that we used to consider Guru Granth sahib our scripture but later we have created our own scripture. It was guided and inspired by Guru Niranjana Das and Guru Ramanand. Earlier there were mostly single Gurudwara in most of the villages, but these Gurudwaras were controlled and managed by upper caste [Jats] only, Dalit Sikhs used to feel discriminated at many level in these Gurudwaras bodies. They were never given any posts in managing committees of Gurudwaras.

Singer Paramjeet Singh Pamma pointed out that earlier even Jats were not accepted as elites but with their growing economic and political power they have made a niche for themselves in society are began to be accepted. Paramjeet says "if someone says we are creating chasm in society through our songs then why people do not object other songs which mentions some other castes .He said popular Hindi film actor Dharmendra asserted on his Jat identity and was featured as a Jat in the song "main

Jatt yamla pagla diwaana” in film Partigya [oath], then why there is problem with Dalit songs. We are not against any particular caste or any caste in general. It is our way of assertion that we are also able to produce good music and songs then why we should dance on others tunes.

He further states that earlier Jats were considered rustic but later many Jat performers, mainly singers, have sung several songs of self admiration. They have mentioned word the Jat in their songs and highlighted it. These songs gave a new confidence to Jat community and gradually the songs over Jats began to be accepted and listened by all castes .Now the same will happen with Dalit songs but it will take time”.

He also said these Dalit songs are sometimes played by other castes too but it is rare and humble beginning. Paramjeet Singh Pamma said a new singer identity has given him wealth as well as helped him to become popular. Sometimes people invite him to sing at their different functions. Many Dalit singers go to countries like Canada, United States of America and England. Overseas Dalit community has been promoting a lot for these artists<sup>72</sup>.

The most famous assertion through songs was presented by Punjabi Dalit singer Bant Singh .Bant Singh is from Mazhabi caste. Bant Singh was a labourer and singer .who used to sing song of revolution and emancipation. His daughter was raped by some men of upper caste. When he protested and wanted to lodge a case in police some people beat him severely and his both arms were amputated but he did not quit singing and continued to sing the revolutionary songs. His songs revolve around plight of poor people and their economic exploitation. Bant Singh was given huge support from some artists like DJs and some musicians of Mumbai and Delhi. They

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<sup>72</sup> Interview was taken at Nawa shahr ,Punjab, On 11 a.m.12 april 2015

came to help him and went to his village to record his songs. They recorded his Punjabi songs and started a project to help him. It is called Bant Singh project.

Ronaki ram points out “The recent spate of Jat-Dalit conflicts in the north Indian state of Punjab has exploded the myth of the casteless character of the Sikh society. Dalit is in Punjab are no longer better than their counterpart in other parts of India. However, what distinguished Punjab from the rest of country is that caste inequity persists here more in terms of landownership, social identification and dominant cultural patterns than of Brahminical orthodoxy. Though over the years the Dalit is of Punjab have strengthened their economic position through sheer hard work, enterprise and affirmative action but they failed to achieve a commensurate improvement in their social status. Armed with the weapon of improved economic conditions and social consciousness, the Dalit is mustered enough strength to ask for a concomitant rise in their social status. Such moves of the marginalized find staunch critics among the Jats who often view Dalit assertion as a form of challenge to their dominant status in the agrarian society of Punjab. This in turn has sharpened the contradictions between Jats and Dalits that ultimately led to a series of violent clashes between them.<sup>73</sup>

Dalits of Punjab have strengthened their economic position through sheer hard work and enterprise. Although the constitutional affirmative action played a vital role in the upliftment of the Dalits, in general, the monopoly of the Dalits on the leather business in the well-known Boota Mandi in the Doaba sub-region of Punjab, and remittances turned out to be of crucial importance in overcoming their economic hardships. In addition, they have also been politicized to a large extent by the socio-political activities of the famous Ad Dharm movement and Ravidasi deras.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.Ambedkartimes.com/page6.html>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

These songs sometimes can provoke violence against Dalits as I have discussed in the case of Reshma and Chuharmal.

In a incident in Maharashtra a 23- year-old Dalit youth was beaten to death because his phone had the ringtone of a song praising Babasaheb Ambedkar. The police said that nursing student Sagar Shejwal was beaten to death at a liquor shop in Shirdi by seven men belonging to the Maratha and Other Backward Classes communities on Saturday after they heard his phone proclaim, “Tumhi Karare Kitihi Halaa, Lay Mazboot Bhimacha Killa” – the meaning of first line of song is “attack as much as you may, long live Ambedkar”<sup>75</sup>. This incident is evident is this assertion through songs in the form of songs is not acceptable to some people belonging to upper castes.

In the same Ahmednagar district just months before this incident a 17- year old Dalit boy Sunil Aage was brutally killed and then hanged from a tree following a love affair with a minor girl from an upper caste in Kharada

### **Chindu Madigas and Their Art**

Dalits of Andhra Pradesh and Telngana Along with questioning the institutionalize patterns of discrimination they also made independent claim to cultural identification in a way that only further complemented the redistributive struggles. They took up a series of cultural issue to transform the social patterns of symbolic injustice perpetrated through cultural domination, non recognition and disrespect. to begin with they try to covert the signification attached to the term Madiga from being one of abuse and filth to that of re-presenting it by arguing that it is derived from the

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<sup>75</sup> <http://scroll.in/article/729270/Dalit-man-in-ahmednagar-killed-for-ringtone-praising-Ambedkar>

combination of MAHA(very)+ADI(from the beginning)+GA(moving)by popularizing Madigas as the aborigine kings of India.

MRPS (Madiga reservation porata samithi) claimed a separate identity as well a separate status for themselves on the basis of historical legends and mythology.

Similarly reworking the symbols and tradition which are an important component of any culture, the MRPS made their traditional musical instrument the drum the symbol of their movement, which was in fact called “DANDORA” referring to the practice of drumbeating. The MRPS argued that traditionally the drumbeating was carried out in service of the village jajmani system but it would now symbolize the “CRY FOR JUSTICE”.

The sub caste movement by Madigas ,similarly ,resurrected their own caste deity ,and publicly worshipped MATHAMMA, a form of Adishakti ,as a symbol of energy and capacity to speak “truth to the power ”that the DANDORA movement stands for .they claimed their historical legacy during the anti –colonial and anti –caste struggle by revoking the memory of Babu Jagjivan Ram ,as against an exclusive emphasis on the role and ideas of Dr.Ambedkar .however ,the MRPS was careful not to denounce or decry the ideas and formulations by Ambedkar but in fact referred to them .

Madiga is a Dalit caste of Andhra Pradesh/Telngana. Madigas have developed their own aesthetics through performing arts like of music, dance and theatre. Madiga community is so much connected to performing arts that they have supported five bards sections like Chindu, Masti, Baidla, Nulakachandayyas and Dakkali. the Nulakachandayyas maintain the genealogies of the Madigas and are regarded as priests .No other caste in the varna system supports as many caste groups as this community does .It shows the affections for arts by the Madigas .the bards of Madigas



are expert in playing musical instrument like Tappeta, Pamba, Kinnera and kommu ,which includes percussion ,string and wind .

Chindu community is fully into theatrical performance. Their art is still very popular in Telngana and Andhra Pradesh. There are two types of performance in the Chindu tradition .first is caste-myth performance such *JAMABAPURANAM* and *YELLAMA VESHAM* .Which tell of the caste's roles and its relationship of the Cindu and their Madiga patrons .Cindu Madigas have established Dappu as there cultural symbols. Dappu is a percussion instrument. It is very similar to DHOL (drum) of north India. They play Dappu whenever they go for any protest. Dappu has become a symbol of protest of Madiga community .The playing of Dappu is used as a war cry .may be this war cry is against shackles of Dalit bondages. Chindu Madigas are using Dappu as their weapon of protest. at every occasion they play Dappu .

One of the most significant events of Dalit protests though Dappu was at the World Conference against Racism at Durban in 2001. People who are discriminated against converged and gave vent to their pain at being treated like pariahs. For the first time in history, people from the oppressed communities voiced their concerns at a UN conference.Protest through Dappu also took place on many occasions.

One of the groups that participated from India was the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, a forum of members of 250-odd Dalit groups. Among these was the organisation "Dappu" from Hyderabad. Dappu, say Diwakar, symbolises the assertion and celebration of Dalit groups and Dalit empowerment.

Diwakar is the convenor of Dappu. A very significant part of the Dappu collective is the cultural body "Chindu" perhaps the only Dalit cultural forum of its kind in Hyderabad, which participated in the world summit at Durban. Chindu came into

existence as a Dalit cultural resource centre in erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in the year 2000. Earlier Chindu was part of Dappu.

Chindu is a Telugu word, which literally means a ‘dance step’ Chindu is also name of a Dalit community which performs a Dalit art form called “Chindu Bhagvatam”. Traditionally story, song, Dappu, dance, dialogue and drama comprise key elements of Dalit communities. The vision of Chindu is to celebrate life in all its fullness and promoting art and culture to each individual.

Chindu literally enlivened the summit with the sounds of the Dappu, a musical instrument closely associated with the Dalit isof Andhra Pradesh. Although we have numerous cultural evenings in Hyderabad, there are few instances where we see performances of these forms of art that recount the rich history of Dalits except, of course, in the shows organised by the administrative units of the government, where tribal and folk dances and other related art forms get centre stage, Diwakar said. Chindu, in association with Dappu, was set up about one-and-a half-years back. According to Suresh, convenor of Chindu organization, who returned recently from Durban, We are not a mouthpiece of any organisation, as cultural unit is generally are. Chindu treats Dalit art and art forms as a way of life, as a part of history and culture. He informs that Chindu also conducts research and documentation of Dalit art forms. The aim is to build a parallel Dalit culture. As Chindu website states<sup>76</sup>

Chindu concerns itself primarily with Dalits. It seeks to influence Dalits in a manner that new meanings and values of resurgent Dalit cultures became manifest in their beliefs and lifestyles. Chindu is committed to deepening these new cultural perspectives and practices among Dalit communities. Simultaneously it interfaces with other marginalised communities and movements to create a space for mutual

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.chindu.org/focus.html>

learning through cultural interaction, leading to a shared vision. In all its interventions, Chindu emphasises a centrality of focus on women and children.

The organisation imparts training in Dappu dance and recently started the concept of playback theatre. In this kind of theatre, the audience writes its own play, and the actors perform spontaneously. The actors stand in the midst of a group of people and enact a story based on their real-life experiences.

People recall real events and share moments of anguish, pain, joy they felt, and Chindu actors enact it for them. Chindu has staged such shows in many of the 14 districts of the State, besides Bangalore, Chennai and at the Hyderabad Central University.

Suresh says of his Durban experience, It was a tremendous boost for us. The Zulus and the South Africans have such a tremendous body rhythm. We communicated with them through our own Dappus. They all understood the historic link between Dappu and the Dalit issue of Andhra. Meanwhile, Chindu is busy preparing its future course of cultural activities on the Dalit issue. Here is depiction of activities of Chindu.

Intercaste rivalry and up-gradation of social status

Brahmanism divided Indian people into various endogamous caste groups, placing them in a graded hierarchy, and monopolised education, means and political power in the hands of few upper castes. This inequality produced the Dalit movement in India. As a result, reservation policy came into being for providing equality of opportunities for SCs and STs. But this policy could not distribute reservation benefit equally among 59 Scheduled Castes in A.P. as the vertically structured organism placed one Scheduled Caste below and above the other. Consequently new inequalities developed amongst Dalits in the form of reservation benefits. Brahmanism produced the Dalit

movement. Similarly Dalit Brahmanism which believed in a monopoly of one or two Scheduled Castes produced the Dandora movement in A.P., creating divisions in the Dalit movement. It is caught in a paradoxical situation having to unite the Dalits against the upper castes and to confront divisions within the Dalits. In other words, the Dalit movement in A.P. is caught in dividing and uniting factors. *Varnadharm*a determined social distance between castes based on gradation of occupations.

The traditional occupation of Madigas is tanning the leather, making chappals, and leather goods production. The traditional profession of Malas is weaving, village watchmen, and they are engaged as agricultural labourers. The profession of Madigas was graded as unclean and of Malas was graded as clean. This determined distance between residential quarters of Madigas and Malas, symbol of their divisions. Notions of purity and pollution associated with their traditional occupation determined social and physical distance between them. The living quarters of untouchables are constructed at a respectable distance from the living quarters of Savarnas and Shudras in A.P. Malas live next to Shudras. Madigas live a little away from Malas Dakkals live a little away from Madiga living quarters.

Geographical distance between castes' residential quarters, of various castes, is designed in accordance with the strategy of Brahmanism to separate one from another, indicating the cleavages between Malas and Madigas. The structural cleavages are responsible for the birth of Dandora Movement in Andhra Pradesh and necessitated the movement for a separate Association for Madigas. Leadership is a dividing factor of the Dalit movement in A.P. Every caste has a distinct Identity and its specific problems. The internal cleavages give ample scope for doubting the Integrity of the leader of a particular caste by other castes. This lays a foundation for the other castes to develop their own leaders to attend to their specific problems and

to work for the development of their own caste. In the 1930s, the pioneering leader of Dalits, Sri Bhagya Reddy Varma's pro-Mala leadership sowed the seeds of separate leadership culture for each of sub-castes. The leading personality of the Arundhatiya Mahasabha, Mudigonda Laxmaiah, emerged as a leader of Madigas and carried on the separate leadership culture into the post-Independence period. The leadership of the Arundhatiya Banduseva Mandali was the product of this culture. Today, P.V. Rao of Mala Mahanadu and M. Krishna Madiga of M.R.P.S. represent the two sections of Bhagya Reddy Varma and Mudigonda Laxmaiah of the pre-Independence Dalit wings. These two wings are sharpening the idea of a need for separate associations. The emergence of sub-caste leadership as the foundation for separate identity on separate problems is unavoidable as long as these identities are continued in the hierarchically structured Indian society. Dalits have been divided on Party lines as well. Party spirit plays a divisive role as its origin is in the varied outlook and interests of peoples. A political Party is rooted in the social and economic system. It also divides people as it represents the various interests of different section of society. We can see three types of divisions among the Dalits due to the mischief of Party spirit: first, accommodations of Dalit leaders in political parties; second, encouraging Dalit associations as their sister organisations; third, splitting Dalit organisations and converting them into their sister organisations. Mala leaders were the first beneficiaries in the accommodative politics of Congress Party. Dalit leaders who belonged to the first generation stream of the educated were accommodated into the Congress Party during the 1930s. Arigay Ramaswamy and B.S. Venkat Rao were the first to join. They continued in the Congress Party even in the post-Independence period From the Madiga section, Shankar Deve and Mudigonda Laxmaiah were the prominent leaders who were accommodated by the Congress Party as the leaders of

Madigas. During post-Independence period the Madigas and Malas worked in different social organisations. The social organisations of Madigas carried on their activities with the blessings of Babu Jagjeevan Ram, while the Mala social organisations carried on their activities with the blessings of former Chief Minister of A.P., late Damodaram Sanjeeviah. The view is that the Congress Party wanted separate organisations as this served the interests of the ruling Party. Only in the 1980s, T.D.P. [Telugu Desham Party] made it clear policy to make best use of already divided organisations for its political advantage and support the Madigas' cause of categorisation. As against T.D.P., the Congress Party silently supported Mala Mahanadu against categorisation. Political parties clearly used the divisions among the Dalits to their own benefit. In the 1998 Parliamentary elections Dandora supported T.D.P. while Mala Mahanadu supported the Congress Party. Untouchability, as a 'touch me not' manifested itself in the form of social discrimination suffered by untouchables, gives them a feeling of "WE THE SUFFERERS OF UNTOUCHABILITY". Even after 50 years of independence, Scheduled Castes Suffering from disabilities of untouchability in various forms in Andhra Pradesh. Dalit consciousness – the realization of loss of prestige, societal benefits and need for togetherness to fight for lost rights, exists among the Dalits in Andhra Pradesh. This consciousness is slowly growing to a stage where it breaks upper caste hegemony. The ideas of Phule, Periyar, Ramasami Naiker and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar are sowing the seeds of fraternity and unity among Dalits. In a way their ideas are providing an ideological umbrella for Dalit consciousness against casteism in Andhra Pradesh.

In a number of cases Dalits fought against upper castes atrocities against the untouchables.

Atrocities committed on them created a feeling of 'WE-NESS' among Dalits. This feeling was witnessed in incidents like Karamchedu and Chundururu, the major atrocities on Dalits Committed in the post-Independence period in Andhra Pradesh. In Karamchedu, Madigas were killed by Kammas, while in Chundururu Malas were killed by Reddys. Forgetting their sub-caste feeling, they proved that they are one and can fight the upper castes whenever the occasion demands. There was an attempt to murder Gadar, a Mala, popular singer and prominent leader of the People's War Group in 1997. Dandora took the lead to oppose the ruling class and its attempt to murder Gadar. The Dalits have been proving their unity whenever atrocities are committed on them. *Stopping drum beating*: Until very recently, the Malas showed their resistance towards high castes and the Madigas in a different way.

The Christian Malas could stop the drum beating of Madigas near their worship place, the church. There was a norm that all religious places should be honoured by not making any kind of noise, including drum beating by people of other religions. According to this norm, the Mala converts demanded that the Madigas should stop their drum beating during processions near the church. This demand was supported by Missionaries who maintained good relations with the British administrators. The high castes also had to respect the church of the Malas. In some cases where the Malas and the Madigas had good relations, the Madigas supported the demand of the Malas. They stopped drum beating even before they were asked to stop, despite the high castes' insistence that they keep playing drums as processions approached the church. The Madigas defied the orders of the high castes for a moment, taking the pretext of the Malas' cause. *Symbolic gestures*: The Malas of Chinna komerla explained that *Chindu*, a traditional dance of the Madigas, is a form of resistance to the domination of the Malas and the high castes. *Chindu* is performed by other castes also but most

frequently by the Madigas the latter love to perform this dance. The performance of *chindu* consists of a rhythmic stamping of legs, moving of hands, and putting up ferocious face as if the dance is inviting the observer to a fight. This performance takes place during the marriage processions of high castes and during village rituals. On these occasions, *chindu* is performed by a Madiga while three to six other Madigas beat their circular drums, the *thappetlu*. During this performance, the *chindu* player raises one of his legs and stamps it to the ground. I was told that, sometimes, he raises his leg against high caste people who witness the dance but do not notice because they are in a jubilant mood. By raising and stamping his leg, the Madiga man symbolically crushes the high castes under his foot. Malas would never allow Madigas to play this *chindu* in their locality or in any of their rituals. Even in Anthatipuram the same practice exists. As explained to me, *chindu* was originally played by the Malas alone; a Mala used to have a knife in his right hand, a red piece of cloth in his left hand, a piece of cloth tied around his waist as a girdle and anklets with small bells on his ankles.

The knife is like a sword and the red cloth symbolizes blood, therefore, the dance symbolizes a fight or war. According to the story, a Mala man developed an illicit liaison with a Madiga woman. One day he went to her with the above insignia. While he was sleeping in her house, he was spotted by Madiga men. When he was about to be beaten up he escaped, leaving behind his insignia. The Madigas appropriated these insignia and started playing *chindu* mocking the fleeing Mala who displayed courage in *chindu*. It also exposed the illicit behaviour of the Malas who claimed themselves superior over the Madigas. From then onwards the Malas stopped playing *chindu* out of shame, and that is the reason why the Malas do not like the Madigas to play *chindu* in their rituals.



Chindu organization is working to promote and recreate cultural capital of Dalits. Dalit experiences reflecting the mood and the spirit of the community through songs comprise a significant aspect of Chindu's activities. Expressing the rhythm of Dalit emotions with traditional and modern instruments, the songs vibrantly echo the joy and celebration of Dalit lives as well as the grief and agony of existence.<sup>77</sup>

By above depiction we can understand that Chindu is committed for overall cultural upliftment of Dalit people, not only they want to create a parallel culture but also want to achieve a distinguished social status through this cultural capital. The tagline of Chindu is "a culture of celebration and liberation" it clearly state that that Dalit liberation is directly associated with celebration. Because this is an occasion of happiness and success.

### **PANTHI SONG AND DANCE: CREATION OF PARLLEL THEOLOGY IN CHATTISHGARH**

Satnamis are one of the branches of Chamar caste<sup>78</sup>. In medieval times they proclaimed themselves as Satnamis. Satnam movement was started by Guru Ghasidas [1756-1850]. Guru Ghasidas was a Saint who would preach about caste equality to people. Panthi songs and dance is a way to depict Guru Ghasidass life, his achievements and his sympathy towards society and his egalitarian philosophy.

*"MAN NA RANGAYE JOGI,RANGAYE JOGI KAPDA"*

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<sup>77</sup> <http://www.chindu.org/whatwedo.html>

<sup>78</sup> The Satnamis in Chhattisgarh in central India are the largest 'ex-untouchable' community in that state. In rural areas, the Satnamis live segregated from all other castes and are still considered by Brahmins and others belonging to the OBC (Other Backward Classes) castes to be 'polluted'. Those castes practise 'distancing' towards the Satnamis and do not allow them to share the same sources of water. They even assign them to a separate area for bathing in village ponds. Restrictions on sharing food (commensality) and cross-caste marriage are also prevalent in everyday village life. Although the practice of untouchability has become more subtle and has been mitigated in many ways, the Satnamis remain at the bottom of the village caste hierarchy.

*Satnami Self-Assertion and Dalit Activism: everyday life and caste in rural Chhattisgarh (central India)* Ph.D. thesis by Yasna Singh.2013, London School of Economics

“Do not colour ideas, just colour cloths” is a saying and Panthi dance is just opposite of this idea. Panthi dance inspires society for egalitarianism without exploitation and for purity so it could make real the dream of Guru Ghasidas,s. Panthi dance indeed is a career of cultural renaissance of downtrodden .Panthi dance has its roots in Bhakti movement and very similar to it is contemporary movements such as Sufi. In Bhakti movement music and dance have always been a part to reach the masses .saints of Bhakti movements have formed art forms which are not Margi (classical) or even desi (folk).Bhakti movement has helped in evolving new art forms at pan India level . In north India Kabirpanth has adopted “chowka Geet “ to popularize teachings of Kabir . Ravidas, Dadu, Nanak and Meera also adopted kirtan forms to preach masses .whole India was inspired by Bhakti movement. in eastern India Chaitanya and Sundar das pioneered devotional folk music and folk dance .the impact of this creativity is seen in movements of Satnamis .Satnamis movement borrowed a lot from it is contemporary Bhakti movement which not only enriched Panthi dance but also gave a new aesthetics to it is philosophical and spiritual base .

The origin of Panthi dance is from Satnam panth (sect).followers of Satnam panth perform this dance .through this they recite litany on social ,religious and spiritual teachings of Guru Ghasi das .Panthi dance is essential part of Satnam panth which makes it is distinct identity in Indian social system and also gave them a new cultural expression .according to Motilal Bhaskar “the meaning of Panthi is traveller .the followers of true path are immersed in true love of life and they go to true life when they feel ecstasy .there are many views about the historical

## **HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF DALIT THEATRE**

Tradition of theatre begins with ritualistic dance. To please other worldly powers people used to dance .it was also a form of entertainment. To get rid of illness, famine, flood people used to perform dance with different masks. They used to have props like bushes, hair, and skin .it was the ancient form of theatre. During the time of sage Bharat Muni who authored well known text on theatre namely Natyashahstra two different genre of theatre appeared. First was metaphysical and second, physical.

Bharat Muni tried to incorporate many tales of Brahminical superiority in Natyashahstra. He created a hypothetical RANG-DEVTA [god of theatre] and he was worshipped by Brahmins.

Worship of Rang Devta was condition of successful play. Viewers used to seat according to their varna. Brahmins used to seat in first row, Khasatriyas in second ,Vaishyas in third and shudras in fourth, depiction Brahmins was of fine character depiction, Khasatriyas were depicted as mindless ,Vaishyas as immoral and shudras as poor .

Hajari Prasad Divedi wrote “those days many dance and dance drama were in vogue ,people used to appreciate those but highly moralistic Brahmin people used to abstain from these events ,though they would have accepted entertaining aspect of dramatics but never considered good for aristocrats .

Kotilya has written in Arthshashtra “Nat should be out of bound of state, because the create problems. After the creation of Natyashahstra, scriptures and other texts turned hostile toward Nats. There were looked as inferior people .according to Manusmriti Nats are one among seven untouchables castes. There are also many coastwise version of these folk arts forms like Dhobiyavva { washer -man ,Kahrava {kahaar } ,

Chamrovva{Chamar } there are four elements in Dalit folk theatre 1.Folk music  
2.Folk song 3.Folk dance 4.Folklore.

Now days also many artists are organising plays in folk forms. Folk theatre is more appealing to masses than modern theatre folk theatre use rustic language and more appealing. In western Uttar Pradesh folk theatre forms like SWANG and DHOLA are still popular in rural mass.

Political Theatre Thus culture emerges as an important site of representation of dominant political forces but this study also brings to the forefront culture as an important site of counter-hegemonic struggle by the alter-Native forces. The hegemonic claim of dominant political forces was unsettled with an alternative tradition of explicitly political theatre of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). IPTA originated and continued to develop in the context of a growing Marxism and communism in India where culture was seen as organisable and a site for class struggle, rather than as a matter of individual creativity and spontaneity. IPTA turned to indigenous popular traditions and folk forms which had been driven to oblivion under the valorisation of colonial cultural norms and the consequent denigration of indigenous aesthetic values. By shifting from 'high' realism to a 'popular' social realism, the IPTA took the plays beyond the confines of the profit-oriented commercial theatre in cities, to its target audience - 'the people' - and made their struggles open for intervention. IPTA's close interactions with the 'people' forced open the problems of women and Dalit is.

Theatre includes both dramatic literature and dramatic performance .it is used as a means of expressing and communicating protest against injustice, exploitation and oppression as well as creating new perception of society. Theatre is more potent form of protest than books or films because, it has a greater reach. They lack the live

contact of theatre which makes for more intimate and intense communication .theatre not only makes audience conscious but also arouses immediate reaction.

Political theatre and social theatre both are interwoven .socially concerned theatre may raises consciousness about social problems .political theatre dealing with political ideas and concepts usually in an attempt to attack or support a particular political view ,has become popular largely since Russian revolution.

### **Drama of Chuharmal and Reshma**

Musahar people of Mungher district of Bihar worship a particular godling named Murkatwa. He is considered ghost of a Musahar man who was killed by some upper caste .he was killed under peculiarly tragic circumstances. Murkatwa was a labourer who used to work in the farm of a upper caste landlord .it is said that the landlord sent him to his house to fetch some seedlings .when Murkatwa returned ,the landlord noticed a spot of vermilion [sindoor]on his forehead ,and concluded that he had had a sexual relation with his married daughter who was visiting her Natal family .Murkatwa was innocent but the landlord ,in a fit of rage ,killed him ,since than Murkatwa is worshipped as a martyr by Musahar people .in Gaya district of south Bihar ,Raghuni ,a feudal belonging to the upper caste killed his daughter and one of the his hereditary serfs whom he had sent to fetch a basket of seeds from his house, when he found streaks of vermillion on the serf's body ,he than committed suicide. The ghosts of all these three persons are now collectively called Raghuni dak and are widely worshipped throughout the district of Gaya.

These legends are widely circulated in the villages of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and still alive in the form of oral narratives in rural areas of north India. Though it is very difficult to know the actual facts behind these legends but oral values projected by the

myth are still prevalent in these communities .these areas are dominated by patriarchal and Brahminical norms. Even today many incident of inter-caste marriage are happening in whole India. The real story of Chuharmal and Reshma is difficult to ascertain, but it is believed that the events described in the legend took place in the Magadha and Bhojpuri regions of Bihar.

The lower caste people recite it as a folk ballad and perform it as a Nautanki [folk theatre] named “Rani Reshma Chuharmal ka khela : every year in the Hindu month of Chaitra ,a fair is held at Charadih near Mokama in remembrance of the Dusadh hero of this story .this story has many versions ,most of which conflicting with one another .the story is now a base of confrontation ,an issue of conflict and violence between Bhumihars and the lower castes ,especially the Dusadhs .The way in which the story is remembered by the Dusadhs makes it a constitutive element in their identity formation .it is a story of rich past tradition of Dusadh community .Chuharmal is the hero and god of the lower caste of the region and the folk legend is symbol of the victory of Dusadh over the Bhumihars ,but Bhumihars have their own version of story and interpret Dusadhs,s version as a conscious attempt by the lower caste to insult them .they are trying hard to erase the story through violence .many times Bhumihars attacked on the actors who were performing this play. On the other hand lower caste are struggling hard to preserve and save it .this tussle over differing interpretation of the story led to four caste –riots in Bihar between 1970 and 1990.

On 19 June 1978 in Ekauni village in Aurangabad district of Bihar ,a marriage Party had just arrived at the house of Nonu Sahu .A folk theatre [Nautanki] was being performed in the courtyard ,just as the love scene of Reshma and Chuharmal started to be enacted ,a bullet was fired from among the spectators ,which entered the chest of the actor playing the role of Chuharmal .

This real incident took place in the district Aurangabad .two groups were formed in the village .one was led by Bhumiars and the other group comprised lower caste .like Bania ,koiri ,Chamar ,Dusadh and others .the whole village was tense for many days .the bullet was fired by a youth of Bhumiars caste because Reshma ,the heroine of the play ,belonged to this caste .Bhumiars perceived this depiction as insult to their caste ,on the other hand lower caste accepted this same myth as a mode of protest against the feudal .five murders occurred during this prolonged tension and conflict ,as well as many minor conflicts .

In other region of Bihar like Rohtash and Bhojpur similar incidents took place. During the performance of a drama a song sung by a Sutradhar provoked the upper caste of region leading to caste conflict and caste tension in this district.

It is worth mentioning here that, in terms of inciting mobilisation and violence, the myths constructed around such social events are no less influential or contested than other folk narratives. The heroes carved out of these myths are as powerful as real life heroes for the communities that create them. In most of these communities, there was no single hero who could mobilise the entire community to inspire them to struggle against the oppressive dominance of the forward castes, although some leadership developed autonomously in some sections. Thus the creation of these heroes from myths was often the outcome of this search for a person who could lead the struggle against this form of oppression. These legendary heroes were transformed into a role model for the community and his stories and narratives were widely circulated and narrated among the members<sup>79</sup>.

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<sup>79</sup> URL-<http://www.museIndia.com/focuscontent.asp?issid=38&id=2726>-article by Badri Narayan

One such hero was created by a folk ballad that was based on an asymmetrical love relationship between a boy of a Dalit caste (Chuharmal, who belonged to the Dusadh caste) and a girl belonging to an upper caste (Reshma, who belonged to the Bhumihaar caste). Firstly, due to the unfinished project of modernisation in rural Indian societies, especially in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, society is still deeply influenced by Brahminical and patriarchal norms, inter-caste love relations in general and, especially, asymmetrical love relations involving a girl belonging to a higher caste and a boy belonging to a lower caste, are still not tolerated. This situation gives rise to caste violence and feuds. The violence and conflicts take place at two levels at the level of memory, narrative and imagination and in people's real lives. Secondly, apart from its entertainment value, folklore also acts as a record of social events and processes. Myths thus act as social texts which record the various kinds of conflict, negotiation, and human and social relations that take place in society. This folklore carries within it social memory, but it also creates memory for the people. That is why it can become the bone of contention between communities.

Thirdly, the memory related to a conflict that took place in a society that has been transformed into myth and narrative and is again being circulated among the common people, gets changed, selectively edited and recreated in the process of inter-personal and inter-group communication<sup>80</sup>.

Inter-caste love affairs involving girl of high caste and boy of lower caste are not tolerated in rural India. There are thousands of incidents every year where such couples face rage of their family and community. Many Dalit boys have been killed for such reason because they have had relation with a upper caste girls. Sometimes they

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*



also killed their daughters because they have brought shame to their family and caste by falling in love with a lower caste boy.

Myths, commemorative monuments, religious rituals, folk tales and family lore are the vehicle of collective memory. The way in which the past is recalled depends upon the power of the group that frames it is (collective, traditional) memory. Memory (historical memory) is the constitutive element of the identity of the group.

Chuharmal and Reshma The actual story of Chuharmal and Reshma is difficult to ascertain, but it is believed that the events described in the story took place in the Magadh and Bhojpuri regions of Bihar. The *nichli kaumen* (lower caste people) recite it as a folk ballad and perform it as a *Nautanki* (folk theatre) named " Rani Reshma Chuharmal ka khela". Every year in the *chaityamah* (month of Chait of the Indian calendar), a fair is held at Charadih near Mokama in *yaadgari* (remembrance) of the Dusadh hero of this story. This story has many versions, most of which conflict with one another. The story is now a bone of contention, an issue of conflict and violence between the Bhumihars and the lower castes, especially the Dusadhs, of that region. The manner in which the story is remembered by the Dusadhs makes it a constitutive element in their identity formation. It is a story of their glorious past and the rich tradition of their community. Chuharmal is a hero and god of the lower castes of the region and the folk legend is a symbol of the victory of the Dusadhs over the Bhumihars. though Bhumihars have their version of story of Chuharmal<sup>81</sup>.

by the lower castes to insult them. They are trying hard to erase this story through the use of violence, while the lower castes are struggling hard to save and preserve it. This conflict over differing interpretations of the story led to four caste-riots in central Bihar between 1970 and 1990. Theatrical Performances Inciting Violence On 19th

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid

June, 1978, in Ekauni village, near Daudnagar in the Aurangabad district of Bihar, a marriage Party (*barat*) had just arrived at the house of Nonu Sahu. A folk theatre (*Nautanki*) was being performed in the *khalihan* (a neat and clean place in the village where grain is extracted from paddy husk). Just as the love scene of Reshma and Chuharmal started to be enacted, a bullet was fired from among the spectators, which entered the chest of the actor playing the role of Chuharmal. A roaring sound echoed, "Stop this nonsense", and there followed a stampede among the spectators.

The people of the village have given the event the name of "Ekauni-Kand", which is now imprinted in their memory. *Kand* is an event that contains flashing elements, the memory of which lasts long.

Theatrical performances' are an effective mode of expressing the myths and legends, narratives and folklore of the lower castes .most of the oral traditions contain strong dramatically parts .the visual performance elements attached with the lower caste oral narratives have a strong impact on the viewers and this form is often used for imprinting memories in the psyche of the masses .the folk theatres like Nautanki are real cultural representation of the people and play a significant role in the forming of social memory of society. in ancient Indian texts such as Natay Shashtra ,Manu smiriti, Arth Shashtra theatrical performances ,dance and other entertaining activities were considered to be inferior acts that were socially grading for the upper castes . that was why these performances were restricted only to the lower caste ,who performed them publicly during social and religious ceremonies .even today it is rare that any upper caste person is part of such dance company though some theatre companies include some members of upper caste .rural theatre is still perceived as an inferior activity involving lower caste actor predominantly. This fact provides the lower caste the privilege of making their oral narratives more expressive and powerful

in terms of the influence they wield on the viewers .these narrative are now weapon of Dalit is consciously Dalit people select dramas whose content and context challenge the feudal castes and their establishment .sometimes they have to face opposition when they enact their dramas without considering the social structure of village. They are able to conclude their overnight performances only where the population of upper caste is not dominated, places where feudal castes dominates they often face threats .

Apart from the performances of theatre troupes there are also violent attacks on theatrical performance by socio-political activist groups ,they too try to highlight oppression and injustice of the feudal castes through their dramas .

There are many versions of this Chuharmal and Reshma story. As can be seen from the examples of the multiple versions, the original story of Reshma and Chuharmal has undergone a large number of changes .the different versions of the story conflict with one another .

Badri Narayan says “Yet another community may portray the female as the one who seduced the hero with her youth and beauty and forced him to fall in love with her. Myths thus transgress the boundaries of reality and reality is gradually transformed into myth. It is worth mentioning here that, in terms of inciting mobilisation and violence, the myths constructed around such social events are no less influential or contested than other folk narratives. The heroes carved out of these myths are as powerful as real life heroes for the Dalit communities, s that create them. In most of these communities, there was no single hero who could mobilise the entire community to inspire them to struggle against the oppressive dominance of the forward castes, although some leadership developed autonomously in some sections. Thus the creation of these heroes from myths was often the outcome of this search for a person who could lead the struggle against this form of oppression. These legendary

heroes were transformed into a role model for the community and his stories and narratives were widely circulated and narrated among the members.

Badri Narayan Misses the point that in Indian patriarchal and caste society women are represented as flag bearer of owner. it is rare that any man wants to share pleasure[sexual] with other man. sexual jealousy of men ,which considered their womenfolk as property and associate their women sexual chastity with honour is the root cause of problem .caste is a inter marriage group .having relation with other caste's lady is also revolutionary and leads to social change .

Inter-caste marriages are only remedy of casteism .having inter-caste marriages is the only solution of casteism .inter -dining cant abolish caste system alone .even Ambedkar supported inter caste marriage. Ambedkar emphatically declares that intermarriage Alone can abolish caste. Fusion of blood alone can create the feeling of being kith and kin and dissolve the feeling of separateness created by castes. In the words of Ambedkar: "The real remedy for breaking castes is inter-marriage. Nothing else will serve as the solvent of Caste".<sup>82</sup>

### **New language of Dalit theatre in Maharashtra**

According to Suryanarayan Ransubhe “to protect dignity and for identity making modern conscious Dalits have rejected discriminatory social system and want to establish an egalitarian society ,but his struggle has very short history. in contrast to this history of discrimination ,exploitation is much longer. In achieving this goal Dalits are fighting at two levels, one is to fight with their ignorance and poverty and other problems and second to fight with higher castes”

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<sup>82</sup> Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji. *Annihilation of Caste. Collected Works of Dr. B. R Ambedkar Vol. 1.* Mumbai: Education Department Govt. of Maharashtra, 1987 P.211

Maharashtrian theatre played a very important role in the formation of Dalit theatre. Most of the folk theatre forms of Maharashtra are developed and practiced by Dalit communities. “*KALGI-TURRA*” and “*TAMASHA*” are some examples. These folk forms are used by propagation of modern ideas in 20<sup>th</sup> century. On the occasion of Ambedkrite procession forms like “*POVADE*” played an important role of establishing the dignity of Dalits historically.

The first playwright of this school was Kishan Fagu Bansode who wrote “*HINDUDHARMACHA PANCHRANGI TAMASHA*” (five colour play of Hinduism) in 1932 .it was very famous pioneer work.

Later on play writes like Annabhau Sathe and Sahir Amar Sheikh did very good work. Some progressive upper caste Hindu playwrights also worked on Dalit theme .from 1930 to 1960,s Mama Varegkar, Acharya Anne, Sane Guruji, Parbodhankar Thakrey also highlights problems of Dalits in their plays ,but these plays were mere pity or sympathy to the problems of Dalits. Dalit consciousness and Dalit assertion is totally absent from these plays.

The theme of these play most of the time was sympathised to Dalits. There was not sign of dissent or rebellion from hegemonic system

### **Hindi Dalit Theatre of Uttar Pradesh**

Dalit theatre in Uttar Pradesh has a long history and this can be divided in many parts. it is inspired by Dalit folklore, oral tradition, and different socio-political movements of Dalits. due to all these factors Dalit theatre in Hindi belt has created a new Dalit aesthetics .resistance is very much visible in Dalit theatre of Uttar Pradesh. Dalit theatre of Uttar Pradesh is heavily influenced by ideology of Dr.Ambedkar as well as

aspiration to achieve respectable social status and dignity .This Dalit theatre is created by self experience and ,caste consciousness and effect of modern literature.

Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh is heavily influenced by Dalit movement of Maharashtra. In the second and third decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century Dalit begin to revolt against Brahminical system and oppressive Hindu caste system. During this time Swami Achhutanand started mobilising Dalit at large scale in Uttar Pradesh.

He was against idol worship, rebirth, fatalism .due to tireless effort of swami Achhutanand Dalits in north India became aware of their plight within Hindu society. After swami Achhutanand at all India level struggle was led by Dr. Ambedkar and later Dalit political movements led Arjak Sangh ,Kanshiram ,BAMCEF heavily influenced Dalit theatre of Uttar Pradesh .These movements gave creative inputs and dynamism to Dalit theatre .Indeed Dalit theatre of Uttar Pradesh is expression of different social changes .

Modern Dalit theatre in north India create a separate cultural and aesthetical models by redefining and reinterpreting Dalit myths ,histories, symbols and values .It has carved out new category of audiences who come from middle class and educated family. This newly emerged category is more fascinating about Dalit cultural traditions and they promote such performances by inviting Dalit troupes. Most of the performances are being held in semi-urban and urban spaces around the year. Modern Dalit Theatre like Apna Theatre (Kanpur) is giving more emphasis on experiments as a result a new performance space is emerging. This theatre is trying to reshape conventional Dalit theatres into modern Dalit theatre. Dev Kumar has brought this theatre from street to proscenium such a way in which he has designed separate forms, style, space, costume text and so on to represent its distinct artistic and aesthetical position in parallel theatre traditions. It is often seen the tone of these text

are very aggressive because it serves as a counter mechanism against the social inequality, caste based exploitation and hierarchy. These theatre practices are usually organized during community based Mela(Fairs) such as Shahuji Maharaj Mela, Ambedkar Mela and other several social occasions .In Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad, Jhansi, Agra , Banaras and other cities such performances can be seen frequently round the year. In village spaces, these groups usually go from invitation village communities. They organize street plays and sometimes on stage according to resources arranged by villagers. Plays begin with slogans of Dalit unity and slogans of long lives of Dr. Ambedkar and other Dalit Heroes. Then the self composed or construct text is performed according to its cast and given space. On the occasion of first war of 1857 on “12 January 2008 in Kanpur “*Jara Yad Karo Kurban*” a street performance was performed by *Apna Theatre* group in which the glory and importance of *Mata din Bhangi*, an untouchable water carrier in British army who ignited Mangal Pandey to revolt against Colonial dominance was performed. It was an initiative to put Dalit contribution in first war of independence and reinterpret Dalit history and glorifying glorious past of Dalit.<sup>83</sup> Performers are being taken from the Dalit community only and they are provided training and improvisations. These performers consists mainly Dalit youths and working persons who carry their education and profession as well. These practitioners are being paid in the form of the shares which is generated theatrical performances. For instance Apna theatre adopted Nautanki style in its theatre for separate identity formation. While talking to Dev Kumar he argues that we have our own rich cultural traditions why should we depend on others. Time has come to revive these traditions and protect them from others who are vulgarizing it. *Apna theatre* has developed own text which is composed in various

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<sup>83</sup> (Dainik Jagran:Meerut.13 January 2008).

styles of Nautanki singing because its popularity among the Dalit community. All dialogues are composed in Chaubola, Tabeel, Gazal, Addha, Tarana and kawwali singing styles and performed with Naqqara (Leather made drum) accompanying two minor Naqqaras (naqadia), Harmonium and Dholak.

### **Swami Achhutanand His Plays and Dalit Consciousness Movement**

Founder of Adi Hindu movement and source of inspiration of Dalits 'swami Achhutanand' took birth in a time when Dalit society was suffering badly.

India was British colony. Hinduism was heavily influenced by idea of caste purity, hierarchy, untouchability. Society was declining in every aspects. At that time swami Achhutanand pioneered Dalit is through his revolutionary ideas. He instigated self confidence into them and led them for socio-political and struggle.

Swami Achhutanand was born in 1879, in district Mainpuri and died on 20 July 1933 in Kanpur. One of the speciality of swami Achhutanand was that he considered Achhut (untouchables) the best people of India. He said that Dalits are aborigines of India. In 1927 he published and edited a newspaper by the name of "Adi Hindu". In 1930-32 he sent hundreds of telegrams to support Dr. Ambedkar claim against Gandhiji that Ambedkar is the original representative of Dalits of India, not Mahatma Gandhi. He organized thousands of meetings of Dalits in Delhi, Punjab, and Rajasthan. He recreated and invented cultural capital of Dalits. He considered that cultural capital is must to boost any socio-political movement. He has wrote many plays, poems, songs. From 1910 to 1927 he has written many plays. Some of his famous plays are Ramrajya Natak, Mayanand Balidan. ACHHUT PUKAAR (collection of poems), *PAKAHND KHANDINI* (ESSAYS), *ADIVANSH KA DANKA* (POEMS) are his other literary creation.



He may be considered the pioneer of modern Dalit literature. the speciality of his work is that his all work contains assertive and challenging voice .That was the same time when Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi was publishing cry of HEERA DOM. English translation of poem written by Heera Dom is below.

### **Untouchable's Complaint**

Day and night we are suffering,  
We will share our grief with the ruler.  
Even god is not listening to our problems  
Do not know how long will we suffer.  
We go to churchman's court and  
Became English after conversion.  
Oh lord, conversion doesn't work  
How to show our face, we impious.

Broke the pillar and saved Prahlada,  
Rescued Gajraj from the clutches of Graha.  
Where Duryodhna's brother pulled Sari,  
Appeared there and provided clothing.  
Killed Ravan and supported Vibhishna,  
Raised the mountain on finger tip.  
Do not know where, now you sleep,  
You have became heedless to our pain.  
It appears you dislike our contact  
As you know that we are Dom.

We do labor day and night,  
And earn two rupees for that.  
Thakurs have comfort sleep at their home,  
We plough fields then pay we get.

The ruler's battalion is deployed and  
We get caught to serve them unpaid.  
Such job we do with closed mouth,  
To the government, this will be said.

We won't beg like Brahmin begs  
Won't stir lathi like Thakur stirs  
Won't cheat like Sahu does while measuring  
Won't steal cow like Ahir gets away with  
Won't write poems like a bard  
Won't go to Court wearing turban  
We'll shed sweat to live our life,  
Together at home we share our food.  
Our body is made of flesh and bone,  
Similar body the Brahmin has got.  
He is worshipped in every house,  
As the whole region has become his host.  
We do not go close to well,  
We get drinking water from mud.

Some scholars of Hindi literature like Ramnika Gupta, S.S. Bechain<sup>84</sup> and others have Acclaimed Hira Dom as the first Dalit poet in UP. Another group of Dalit intellectuals like Guru Prasad Madan suggest that Hira Dom was not a Dalit poet at all. They claimed that there was no real literary individual with the name of Hira Dom and that the name was the invention of caste Hindus to mobilize untouchables for the 'Nationalist' stream of literature. Madan further argues that we have only one poem by Hira Dom informed by no distinct historical content or consciousness. It is simply a complaint to God for the ill treatment inflicted on him by the caste Hindus. There is no evidence of his other poems. If such a person actually existed, we would have probably found his other poems also. In addition, Madan has claimed that Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi, editor of *Sarasvati*, himself nursed a bias against Dalit literature. If he was a litterateur in the real sense then he would respond to or at least consider the literary discourse of Swami Achhutanand because both were contemporaries.<sup>85</sup>

*RAM RAJY NAYAAY* and *SHAMBUK VADH* by swami Achhutanand were very important play who could give message to Dalit is that they are victim of Brahminical conspiracy. Both these plays became very famous. these play are still considered of high class due to popularity .Theme of play was to expose idealistic notion of RamRajay about which Sanatani people used to say that all sorrow were vanished during RAMRAJY. Contrary to that swami Achhutanand portrayed RAMRAJAY as exploitative and based on discriminatory hierarchical society .the story is Shambuk is

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<sup>84</sup> Sheoraj Singh Bechain; Hindi Ki Dalit Patrakarita Par Patrakar Ambedkar Ka Prabhav (Impact of Journalist

Ambedkar on Dalit Journalism of Hindi) New Delhi: Samta Prakashan, 1997

<sup>85</sup> Guru Prasad Madan; "Hira Dom Se Pahle Swami Acchutanand 'Harihar' Evam Unke Samakalin Dalit

Sahityakar", (Before Hira Dom Swami Acchutanand 'Harihar' and His Contemporary Dalit Litterateurs) paper

presented in a seminar entitled 'Samkalin Bhartiya Sahitya Mein Samajik Nyay Ki Avdharna: Vishesh Sandarbh

Dalit Sahitya' at Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla on 14-16 November, 2007

following. When Ram returned from Lanka to Ayodhya to rule but his decision to exile Sita to forest made him desolate. Meanwhile two incidents considered to be unnatural by Brahmins occurred. A severe drought struck his kingdom and an old Brahmin lost his young son. The Brahmin shaken by his son's death went to Ram and questioned his integrity as a ruler. A disturbed Ram consulted seer Vashisth about it. Vashisth advised Ram to kill Shambuk, a Non-Aryan, who was accused of performing yajna, prohibited to the Shudras, as per Varna Ashram Dharma. The request of Vashisth was further reinforced by Laxman. Ram, caught up in a dilemma finally killed Shambuk. He was rebuked by the assassin's wife, Tungabhadra, who otherwise held Ram in high esteem. Her regard for him withered away after his horrendous act. Shambuk was killed for no crime of his, except that he was a Shudra.

Gandhi expressed his ideas about establishing a *Ram Rajya* in India. He believed in respect for work/labour. In this play too, we find reference to freedom, individuality and right to choose one's professions. But they are all through the filter of the Varna system. This idea is itself against the true spirit of the democracy. Gandhi and his caste Hindus did not really want to take a step forward; they were effectively defending backwardness and outmoded practices.

Gandhi praised lord Ram for his benevolent rule and his rule was appreciated for 'the welfare of people'. Gandhi wanted to restore that *Ram Rajya* in modern times. Gandhi wrote, "*Ram Rajya* can be religiously translated a 'kingdom of God on Earth', Mahatma Gandhi was supporter of birth based Varna system, and this play directly challenged the notion of Ram Rajay

Play "*SACH KAHNE WALA SHUDRA HAI*" is written by Suraj Pal Chohan. This play is full of satirical language and reasons. This play reminds parodies of Ramayana performed in Bihar and Jharkhand .in the beginning this play one priest is preaching

Dalits to cheat than one conscious Dalit asked him five questions. The priest retaliates and said “you are a shudra only a shudra can ask such question.

The first question of Dalit was “how come bow of Shiva was lifted by Sita when many prominent fighters could not lift that?

The second question “in Ramayana Sugreev and Bali both are monkeys than how come their wives are pretty human females?

Priest shouts –cut his tongue

The third question was “how Ram was born when his mother just ate a fruit? Than what is the utility of marriage?

The fourth question was “how come Sita gave birth to a baby with the grass? Then again priest retaliate –this learned shudra know everything after learning .he must be killed .Dalit asked the last question .Panditji you say “that we should say it with proud that we are Hindus “” than those who are born without father and through air, sun is it the real appoint of proud This play shows that how come learned Dalits are questioning Brahmincal, Varna based authority as well as applying reason in examining mythology instead of accepting it blindly.

Ramnika Gupta says Dalit plays can be dividing into six categories.

1. Play based on historical, mythological marginal characters.
2. Play based on life of Dr. B.R .Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule and Savitri Bai Phule.
3. Play about exposing propaganda of political parties who claims to be pro-Dalit.
4. Play based on atrocities on Dalit is
5. Play based on swarna caste mentality and for social change
6. Play exposing socio-religious malpractice and rituals

Here Ramnika Gupta missed one important point. There are many Dalit characters that do not fit into the any given category. There are many Dalit characters like Daku sultana and Dacoit queen Putli Bayi who left a impact on Dalit society in terms of social assertion and many plays were based on them and were quite popular among Dalits and rest of the society.

Many Nautanki were based on life of Daku Sultana.<sup>86</sup>

Sultana was from Bhantu caste, a marginalised minority Dalit caste from north India. He was born and brought up in early 20century, district Bijnor [Uttar Pradesh]. He used to rob people and later he used to distribute surplus booty to the poor people. According to the legends he never bothered any poor man or woman. He got a status like Robin Hood. Daku sultana is heroic figure for many Dalit people. His heroic acts and good behaviour still give a boost to Dalits of western Uttar Pradesh

These plays give a new life to the marginal characters especially of Ramayana and Mahabharata. These plays recreate myths and challenge to the Varna hierarchy.

These series were pioneered by founders of Adi Hindu movement “Swami Achhutanand”

Harihar points out of these four plays two were never published .the first play of this series is “RAM RAJAY NAYAAAY” about the marginal character of Ramayana “Shambuk” who was killed by ram. Thousands of people used to come to watch this play.

Achhutanand’s play “Shambuk”, Mayanand balidaan, paarkh pad, Bali chhalam, are based on Hindu scriptures. Achhutanand also exposed Ram in *Bali chhalam*.

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<sup>86</sup> Morya,Sarvesh.k. 2015,*Dalit Lok Natak*. Swaraj Prakashan .New Delhi, p.211.

In these play characters like Shambuk and Bali are redefined as challenge to hegemony and godly character of Ram. The language on these play is simple Hindustani .they have adopted both prose and poetry that is suitable for masses and especially Dalit is “*ANTHEEN BEDIYAN*”(timeless shackles )written by Dalit politician Mata Prasad is also a remarkable play on Dalit theme .indeed it is a set of various plays which are performed jointly in a continuation . it portray socio-religious history of India since 2000b.c.e. to 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It exposes unethical formation of hierarchical Varna system. This play is a combination of myths and reality based on written history. Mata Prasad has redefined human values. Characters like Shambuk, Eklavya are used as a symbol of assertion.

Shambuk statement to Ram is remarkable when he said “you can kill me but history would not forgive you”.

The language of this play is suits to time, characters, incidents This play portray the series of suppression. This play begin at the location of Taxila and conversation of Sumitr and Aalgi revolves around descendents of Aryan and non- Aryan. The next part jumps from time of Mahmud Ghajnavi to Dalit devotional saints and than comes the time of revolt led by Birsa Munda. It mentions questions posed by Heera Dom about degradation of Dalits in a historical process.

It mentions the struggle of Dalits in Bengal, dialogues between DR.B.R.Ambedkar, YogendraNath Mandal, Shahuji maharaja, Mahatma Gandhi, Tara Singh, Bihari Lal Harit, Jawaharlal Nehru regarding Dalits. Later this play mentions of many meetings and friendly conversation about Dalit movements and ideas of Ambedkar.

According to Ramnath Chahvan “Dalit theatre works as a form of resistance it wants to re-establish dignity of Dalit community .it questions the authority of caste system

and caste discrimination. It has a negative approach toward religion and concept of god most of the time .it questions about sufferings of Dalits,. This theatre demands truth and justice and nothing else except this”.

Dalit theatre in Maharashtra begun in 1980,s and now it is in a developed state. Dalit theatre of Maharashtra is heavily influenced by ideology of Dr.Ambedkar and Jyotiba Phule.From the beginning Dalit theatre is having a militant approach in Maharashtra .this militant approach was outcome of prolonged atrocities on Dalits and impact of western education. When they knew about their plight after getting modern education they were no more ready to accept atrocities and discrimination. Traditional Marathi theatre had only one approach and that was to protect middle class values. It did not ever want to counter social question or posing them.

### **PUNJABI DALIT THEATRE**

Dalit consciousness begins in Punjabi theatre since 1980. Earlier most of Dalits were secondary characters in plays. Many Dalit plays have been considered finest in Punjabi literature. Charandas Siddhu is a prominent Dalit playwright of Punjabi language .Dalit consciousness is clearly visible in various aspects in the plays of Charandas siddhu. Social relation, kinship, rituals, superstitions all are subjects of Siddhus’s plays.

“JAWAR BHATA” is symbol of Dalit unity. In which Dalits takes a stand against atrocities committed by upper caste people.

Guru Dayal Singh “*ful*” play revolves around caste hierarchies, caste discrimination, untouchability .Another prominent Punjabi playwright is Ajmer Singh Aulakh. In his plays Dalit is landless labourers, economic hardship are main themes. *Sukhi kokh*, “*Nich Aurat ke santap ki vaytha*” *Ek Ramayana or Aurat*” “*Jaati par anaitikta ki*



*thaap*”, *Begaane bargad ki chhanv*”, are main plays which depicts various aspects of Dalit life and caste based discrimination, exploitation by landlords and government officials.

Another assertive play” *Dalit Dashta*” by S.L.virdi has depiction of plight of Dalit isin pre-Ambedkar era. It is very vivid play in showing various types of caste discrimination like terror of landlords, Brahminical hierarchy, misbehaviour with Dalit women, rapes, bonded labour.

It also shows how Ambedkrite Dalits have formed militant organization “DALIT PANTHER” to fight against atrocities on Dalits. “*SACH KI LOU*”(light of truth)is another radical play which shows plight of Dalits who are trapped in spirituality and superstitions. Here S.L. Virdi calls for a cultural revolution to fight against socioeconomic, religious, political exploitation “*DALIT INQELAB* “ is another play by S.L. Virdi which asks Dalits to recreate their history and to recognize friends and foes and for creation of a joint platform to fight .

“*SIKH SANGHARSH*” is stated as a form of Dalit assertion by S.L. Virdi because the early base of Sikh religion were downtrodden people of society and most of them were from Dalit untouchable caste .after the demise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh Sikh religion was hegemonies by upper caste who again initiated practice of hierarchical caste system in Sikh community.

Viridi says “the contemporary Sikh society is Brahminical by Natur. S.L. Virdi is the most radical and assertive Punjabi Dalit playwright of our times. “*MADYAN*” by Baldev Singh Bambiha shows the beginning of civilization to modern era. This play arises self confidence among human and aspire to bring human from darkness to light.

This play exposes ideology of sins, good deeds and rebirth .past birth deeds which are considered responsible for our present state .this ideology supports misery and exploitation.

“*SHAMBUK RISHI KA MAHAN BHASHAN*”(GREAT SPEECH BY SAGE SHAMBOOK) is another Punjabi play based on poetry of Sant ram Udashi “*KAMIYAN DI VIHDA*” portray assertion of Dalits. Pushpa Sundar wrote “what is called protest theatre in the different regions of India is theatre for raising the consciousness of the middle-class intelligentsia or the oppressed poor; seldom is it theatre performed by the disadvantaged. Almost the only exception to this is the Dalit theatre of Maharashtra, typified by such groups as the Dalit Rangabhoomi of Pune. Dalits are former untouchables who under the leadership of Dr B.R. Ambedkar became converts to Buddhism. The Dalit movement began in 1927, originally as a literary movement to awaken the Dalits to their rights; later, however, it gained a political dimension. Literary and political protest merged in the form of theatre, and now the Dalit theatre serves both as a vehicle of creative expression for a much-denied people, as well as a conscientisation exercise and a political statement. Judged by traditional aesthetic standards it is yet to reach literary or theatrical heights but it is undoubtedly an important form of protest and deserves encouragement”.<sup>87</sup>

### **Dalit assertion through performance in Maharashtra**

Cultural assertion in the pre-Ambedkar phase, Even though the fact that within the feudal caste-based order the Mahars had to play music for the entertainment of the dominant castes, there are ample examples of these 'songs' being the modes of resistance when performed within the confines of the maharwada. This phase is

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<sup>87</sup> Pushpa Sundar: India InterNational Centre Quarterly, Vol. 16, No. 2 (SUMMER 1989), Published by: India InterNational Centre, pp. 123-138

particularly marked by the 'powada' (ballad) about Shalini: a Dalit woman who it is believed killed the landlord who wanted to rape her. The valorisation of Shalini became a significant source for the 'shahirs' (composers of ballads) is apparent from the numerous ballads available within the oral tradition on this theme. There is reason to believe that the Bhakti tradition proved to be an important source for the shahirs, both in terms of the content and the form. Bhakti movement had a great impact on Indian masses, many saint poet from backward and untouchable castes came forward and challenged Brahminical dominance theologically. This continued to be so even in the Ambedkarian phase of the movement. This phase is marked by the 'Kalapathaks', the performing troupes' of Dalit cultural activists 'going public' and taking up issues beyond the immediate relevance. Cultural activists such as Keruba Gaikwad, Dinbandhu, Srawan Bapu, played an important role in spreading Ambedkar message of revolt against enforced caste-based occupations, and inculcating the value of modern education, science and rationality in Dalit community. They would ask people to leave their dirty profession of scavenging and inspired them to pick up pain as Baba Saheb Ambedkar did. Particularly significant are the assertions that popularised the greeting, 'Jai Bhim'. Contested the notion of 'harijan', and critiqued the demand for a separate state of Vidarbha. The popularity and expanse of the Kalapathaks reached its peak between the periods of 1957-75. There were more than 25 Kalapathaks performing during this period. The themes were mainly centred across the teachings of Buddhism, the land-grab movement led by Dadasaheb Gaikwad, the material exploitation of Dalits by rich farmers, and the much needed support for the candidates of the Republican Party of India. If earlier the local cultural activists had drawn upon the compositions of the more urban based shahirs, this phase saw the strengthening of the local resources in scripting and organising of the Kalapathaks. The Kalapathaks

also took up the issue of Dalit women's harassment by the in-laws, and projected the militant daughter-in-law against the Brahminical reformist rendering of the always-victimised-woman. Yet, as Guru Points out "...this form also fulfilled the hidden patriarchal agenda and the need of keeping the female out of the Kalapathak tradition". The author almost justifies this by arguing that it was the "hangover of the 'tamasha' in which the Dalit women performed dance in order to entertain the feudal lords...these memories...led the Dalit patriarchy to impose cultural restrictions on Dalit women who did not play female part in the Kalapathak programmes". Such an explanation overlooks important gender issues involved even in a politically progressive appropriation of cultural forms, and has important clues for understanding the collusions and contestations between savarna and Dalit patriarchies. To recognise the fact that the 'jalsa' came to be marked out as a politically progressive form as against the tamasha, after it came to be 'de-sexualised' via the exclusion of

The 'nachees' (female performers), is in no way an undermining of its political significance. On the contrary, it underlines the hegemony of the Brahminical and bourgeois patriarchal values that operate on the dichotomies of wife/whore and nachhi/nartaki. The last section charts the decline of the Kalapathak tradition in the 1970s. The colonisation of the Dalit movement by the state, the decline of the Dalit political movement and the invasion of the electronic media are responsible for of The decline in the male Kalapathak tradition is marked by the breaking of 'cultural silence' by Dalit women of the Vidarbha region. Guru presents a collection of 'ovi' and 'palana' (traditionally female forms of expression) composed by Dalit women. In a significant contribution, he draws attention to the changes in the cultural idioms that women composers brought about, and highlights the vast 'political' canvas of these compositions. Particularly interesting are the comparisons between Nehru and

Ambedkar, and the regional variations in the Dalit women's notion of Babasaheb's marriage to a Brahman woman. The first hand documentation of the oral tradition of ovis and palanas composed by women has revealed the important facts about the emergence of these compositions from the mahila Mandals.<sup>88</sup> Many Dalits think only Ambedkar was capable of making of a constitution as he was the most learned among all the prominent Indian leaders. These Dalit cultural women activists draw upon the rich repertoire of the male composers, and significantly radicalise the content even as they keep to the given 'female' forms of cultural expressions, is a significant point to note.<sup>89</sup>

### **Interview of Dalit theatre director Ramendra Chakrwardi**

When I asked why he chose Dalit themes Ramendra replied “Dalits are fundamental part of Indian society, most of them are agriculture labourers, peasants and they do all type of menial jobs. So we can say that Dalits are integral part of our society and whole structure is somehow dependent on Dalits. Dalits and Adiwasis are predominant practicers of folk arts. I have seen atrocities upon Dalits, so I wanted to become their voice through my theatre.”<sup>90</sup>

He continued, “ till now I have directed and wrote 3 plays .My first play is *Mook Nayak*. *Mook Nayak* is about life of Ambedkar. In this play I wanted to depict how Ambedkar’s thoughts are influenced by Mahatma Buddha. Only forms and ways of discrimination have changed .Dalits are still being discriminated. Second play *Itihas* was based on historical Gandhi -Ambedkar debate. How Ambedkar fought for

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<sup>88</sup> Mandal[Hindi ] =group

<sup>89</sup>GURU,GOPAL, Dalit Cultural Movement and Dialectics of Dalit Politics in Maharashtra ; Vikas Adhyayan Kcndra, Munlbai, 1997.

<sup>90</sup> Interview was held on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2015, time 7 PM

Dalits's rights. How he asked Dalits to write on their wall 'that no longer we are going to bear your atrocities.

The third play was "*Vaiklpik Itihas* ;this play is about the legend of Shambuk ,a Shudra sage who was killed by Rama on the pretext because he was performing worship of god and wanted to attain nirvana which was prohibited for shudra .In this play Ramendra depicted modern society's way of discrimination and resistance of Dalits. We have depicted raja Bali."

One of Ramendra, s plays is about Gulab Bayi. Gulab Bayi was a prominent performer of Nautanki. Another play of Ramendra is about Uda Devi. Uda Devi was a Dalit lady who killed more than 36 British troops in Sikandra Bagh, Lucknow during the 1857 rebellion .She positioned herself atop on thick tree and shot more than 36 British soldiers. She was even praised by Britishers for this bravery. This play is real depiction of the fact that Dalits and not the least Dalit women are no less in bravery and they know how to fight and nobody can underestimate their fighting skill.

Another play by Ramendra is about Jhalkari Bayi Kori, she was close associate of Rani Laxmi Bayi of Jhansi. During rebellion of 1857, on many fronts she impostred Rani Laxmibayi in the battle field .she matched Rani Laxmi Bayi in physical structure and in appearance, making it easier for her to play an imposter of the queen.

### **Stagecraft and , Avant-Grade Aesthetics of Dalit Theatre**

In terms of pre –established aesthetic parameters Dalit theatre tries to imitate the content of popular mainstream theatre .Many young and emerging talented Dalit theatre directors like Ramendra Chakrwardi and Dev Kumar are experimenting with stage-craft and innovation. Sometimes plays takes place at an unusual setting .Ramendra Chakrwardi once staged a play Vaiklpik Itihas at a parking lot .There was a

huge space to perform .This huge space is symbol of newfound freedom of Dalit theatre directors and clearly states that we are not bound to pre-established norms of theatre art. Here new found freedom means Dalit theatre directors are very open in terms of selecting themes and storyline of their performances though there are some limit of a presentation but innovation makes a form rich .

### **Trends and impact of Dalit Theatre movement**

Dalits are organizing many theatre festivals now .Dalit theatre festivals were held at Lucknow and Ranchi. Now days in a year at least 4 Dalit theatre festivals are taking place. These events are being criticized by many critics .Even some newspapers refused to publish about these festivals, and whenever some newspaper published about these theatre festivals, reports would be very negative or biased. Critics of Dalit theatre festival said that these festivals are creating chasm in society. These types of theatre festivals on the lines of community and caste were never held in India and this is an attempt to infect the theatre with the virus of casteism, this is an attempt to divide theatre in the name of caste. Rightist and Leftist both the dramatists raise these questions about Dalit theatre.

One notable play '*DOM PAHALWAN* :[scavenger wrestler ] was performed during a conference organized by 'Centre for Dalit Literature and Art' on 29th June 2012 at convention centre of Jawaharlal Nehru university (confrence on Dalit And Adiwasi art, 2012). This play was organized by Dalit Natay Academy, Lucknow and directed by noted director Shayam Kumar. The storyline of play was that a Dalit youth prepares himself for wrestling. As soon as he announces that he will take part in a wrestling tournament, some angry people attacked and mauled him .Than some angry people attack him and mauled him. Despite his wounds he comes to tournaments and challenges the domination. There is a drastic evolution in this play regarding

storyline. Now Dalits are also asserting themselves in fields reserved for upper caste. Wrestling is one of them. Dalits are considered meek but now they are into gym culture. Many of the Punjabi Dalit songs depict videos of Dalit youths in gym and flaunting their gym built body. Some of the critics felt offended at such lucid depiction of caste based plays and that's, why they began to question aesthetics of such plays.

Dalit dramatist Ramendra says "they do not have any logic to counter Dalit theatre festivals that's why, they are trying to shun the voice of Dalit is by attacking Dalit theatre festival. If someone raises these issues there must be some basis for them. Who can deny that Indian society is based on caste structure. Indian society has always been divided on the basis of caste /varnas. Let us see who is opposing Dalit theatre? Indian theatre is divided in two groups. One is only depicting higher and middle class ambitions, frustrations and aspirations. The sole motto of these groups are entertainment, there is no space for masses, there is no space for the pain and agony of the downtrodden. They take grants from NGO, government bodies and from corporations and dance to their tunes. Sometimes subject of their plays seems progressive but internally that always supports the system. Sometimes they pick some foreign play which has no resemblance with Indian society and its problems. This is the best way to fool the audience in the name of cosmopolitan culture. By this they succeed in saving themselves from being labelled as rightists as well as cleverly avoid ground realities of social problems, most of the times they remain mute on social issues when someone tries to break their hegemony they leave no chance to attack their ideological opponents. There is no doubt that Varna and class both exist in Indian society. If someone is thinking about class, it is also impossible to avoid caste/varna. They must explain why leadership is not coming from the tribal and Dalit groups and also that



why leadership is always monopolised by the upper caste? The second group is one which always talks in terms of class perspective.

Concept of the Dalit theatre has been making its mark gradually. It is simply the expressive revolt of subaltern. Though Dalit theatre still has a sheer criticism of caste oppression, Dalit, tribal's theatre which is marginalised nowadays one day will take its place. Where is the depiction of caste problems in mainstream Indian theatre? Ramendra further asks.<sup>91</sup>

If we look back into history of Indian theatre we have found that varna division was also clearly visible even during the times of Bharata Muni, creator of *Natyashastra*. It is said when Bharata Muni performed the play *ASUR PARAJAY* [defeat of Asuras] many gods came to earth from heaven to see this performance. This play was depiction of how Devas have defeated Asuras. This play by Bharata Muni was not a mere performance it was depiction of confrontation of two different cultures. It wanted to prove that Dev Sanskriti is superior to Asur Sanskriti. Present day Hindu mythology is also larger and vivid description of such struggle to some extent. Aryan people never liked Asur culture and when Aryan culture wanted to intrude into Asura's culture, this attempt was resisted. When Devas wanted to depict this struggle in their play, Asuras got angry. When Asuras attacked on this performance Devas killed them on stage. Then Devas decided to build a theatre for such performances to avoid any further disruption by Asuras in the middle of performances. In ancient India in Sanskrit theatre women and shudra character used to speak dialogue in Prakrit language, which was considered a rustic and inferior language than Sanskrit.

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<sup>91</sup>Part of Interview of Dalit dramatis t Dr. Ramendra Chakrwardi

In 2012 in Uttar Pradesh a play was not permitted by some officials because it was against Brahminical values. The play was prepared by Bhartendu Natay academy, which is a government institution and comes under ministry of culture, Uttar Pradesh government .The logic not to allow to perform such play was that it was considered anti- establishment and it may anger upper caste people because it is criticising Brahminical social system. Though that play was not in modern context , it was based on the life of Guru Ravidas<sup>92</sup>.

In city of Kanpur young Dalit dramatist Dev Kumar who is born into Bhangi caste has formed a Dalit theatre group named “*Apna Theatre*” in 1992. Most of the his plays directly challenge Brahminical system, corrupt administration as well as on social evils prevalent in Dalit society. Due to his efforts more than 150 Dalit youths have been rehabilitated who were into clutch of drugs. He uses techniques of theatre to divert energy of youths, a very good example of therapeutic art and social mobilization. He used the following methods for his theureptic theatre.

Through the steps discussed below, Dev Kumar’s attempt at reaching out to people and rehabilitating them from substance abuse (drugs and alcohol) through the medium of theatre can be closely related to a therapeutic approach.

**Step 1: *Exploration*** – The first step taken by the team is to venture out in the field area and find out what the main issue or problem in the area is.

**Step 2: *Identification and Prioritising of the Problem*** – They pick up issues, prioritise them and conceive plays that present solutions to the problems.

**Step 3: *Confrontation*** – Using their theatrical and musical approach they confront people and make them realise that there is an issue to be dealt with. Another part of

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<sup>92</sup> Dalit Asmita ,journal ,December 2012 . article-dastak deta Dalit rangmanch . auth. Rajesh kumar.63  
issn no .2278-8077

this step is Motivational Interview or in this case a Motivational Speech. It stirs up in the people a yearning for change.

**Step 4: *Internalisation*** – Confrontation leads to internalisation. The issue comes to be understood and accepted and the realisation for a change occurs.

**Step 5: *Responsibility for Change*** – The most important step in therapy is one's own responsibility to initiate the change without which there can be no difference. Rehabilitation mostly depends on the individual's determination for change.

**Step 6: *Strategic Intervention*** – Dev Kumar and his team at Apna Theatre collect the people who are willing to take responsibility and make them a part of their group where they get to enact the role of addicts. The play depicts the lives of the people around the addicts and the result of the addiction on the addict. Finally they depict a life free from such sufferings. Role-play allows one to feel the experience (and practice) of living one's life from another perspective. The artificiality of the task tends to free people up to take it on. Having acted out a role of giving up drugs or alcohol, people then have the experience they need to integrate desirable aspects of that role into their normal selves.

**Step 7: *Preventing Relapse*** – These people are absorbed by the theatre group, which continues to spread the message ahead in different communities. This way they became part of a group, which supports them to maintain an alcohol free life. Being part of the group they are employed, as well as the reasons of Discontinuing substance abuse are constantly reinforced in them.

*Dalits have often been found to find recluse in drugs and alcohol to escape the mental harassments of their daily lives, which may range from undesirable occupations such as scavenging, abuse and assault at the hands of upper castes, unemployment and*

*poverty. Using this approach, Apna Theatre (Kanpur) has been successful in rehabilitation of 150 addicts and is still aiming to free many more from the web of substance abuse. They use nukkads, naataks, nautankies and dance dramas to address different Dalit issues.*

### **Dalit theatre in Delhi**

Dalit theatre in Delhi is influenced by IPTA and by other leftist cultural groups. Karmsheel Bharatiya, founder of Dalit Natay Manch in Delhi recalls how he had a tough time in establishing this Dalit theatre. He used to roam in local Dalit colonies of Delhi and he encountered many Dalit youths and told them about the plight of Dalit society across India and he said ‘peaceful democratic way is the best way to caste oppression and protest through art is the best way of propaganda .It releases catharsis and remind us the real situation .it polishes the talents of Dalit youths and make them feel proud that they are also part of some art forms.

He organized many Dalit youths, had theatre workshop with them and performed many street plays and dramas in theatre. His colony is adjunct to Jawaharlal Nehru university and many cultural fronts are active over there, which influenced him and this is how he started his own group. When I asked him if he see any change in his viewers after watching his plays ,he told me that through this medium he was capable of educating people about various forms of caste discrimination and about the various ways to fight with such problems. He confessed that these methods leave only a limited impact on society but at least he was playing his role as per his capacity as a political artist .with limited resources and without any patronage he pioneered this theatre which became a voice of subalterns.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Based on interview held at 11am. 11 march 2015.New Delhi

## **Political propaganda through songs of Bahujan Samaj Party**

Bahujan Samaj Party to fulfil its political endeavour created many cultural wings to spread awareness and political education among Dalit masses. Many cultural squads were created.

BSP think tanks searched many local heroes who could fit into their narratives and logic. The most important work was to give these heroes a face .sometimes the image of hero appeared from the description of narrative itself ,but often they needed to create an image that would fit into description when no photograph or other visual sources was available. Dalit heroes like UdaDevi Pasi, Jhalkaribai, Suhaldevi and Bijli Pasi have been installed at important places in the cities of Uttar Pradesh.

There was once a *chhiwuli* tree in Ayodhya near the palace of King Dasharath, under which a deer was weeping. When Rani Kaushalya heard the crying, she came out to find out why the deer was weeping. The deer replied that King Dasharath had taken away her cub and killed it. The deer wanted its skin back so that she could fill it with sawdust and pretend it was real so that her milk, which had dried up, could flow again. This way the gnawing pain inside her heart would be released. On this the queen said that she could not do so since the skin was needed to make a musical instrument (*khanjari*) for Lord Rama, who was then a baby, to play with. The Dalits of today are the descendants of this female deer and even today they are being oppressed by the upper-caste feudal landlords. This story was narrated by a folk singer of Jagriti Dasta of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) at a political rally in Karchhana Tahsil, Allahabad district<sup>94</sup>,

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<sup>94</sup> Badrinarayan [2006] *women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India*. New Delhi. Sage Publication. p.20.

This is an example how BSP formed many cultural wings to spread Dalit Bahujan ideology .folktales and political aspiration are combined together against discriminatory social system .The best way to organize masses goes through cultural symbols which appeals them .during Indian freedom struggle leaders like Lokmany Bal Gangadhar Tilak used Ganeshotsv to organize people. Motive of organizing Ganeshotsv was to mobilize people against British rule. This is also an attempt to redefine history, culture.

The new narratives of Dalit politics, which appear as cultural narratives of identity and self-respect are filled with memories of dissent against dominance and oppression. The language too is filled more with cultural and social symbols and metaphors than with economic ones. It borrows heavily from folk culture and is a mixture of power, authority, dissenting folk culture and the popular memory of Dalits. When it is expressed through their own cultural symbols, it evokes their collective memory and constructs their identity in a new way.

The use of the cultural idiom through these narratives is seen to facilitate the acquisition of political power through capture of state power. A political consciousness is being created among the target group, which has significantly helped in their mobilization. In this process, their consciousness became not only cultural but also political. The BSP has been successfully using these new narratives as influential tools for mobilizing the communities that form its electoral base. It would be interesting to investigate the sources of these narratives, the resources from which they are drawn, the main constituents of these narratives and the language in which they are written<sup>95</sup> it is very clear by these lines of Badrinarayan Dalits wanted to have some heroes who could fill the vacuum of their cultural capital . Uda Devi Pasi, who

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid. p.40

alone killed more than 36 British soldiers in the battle of Sikandra Bagh, is one of them. An example of how a marginalized caste picks up an icon and uses it to carve their identity history can be seen in the case of the Bhangis. Mahaviri Devi has emerged as an important marker of the identity of the Bhangi community. It is interesting to know that with the growing needs of Dalit politics of the BSP, the narrative on her story was extended to the entire Dalit community.

Mahaviri Devi was from scavenger caste. She was born into Bhangi caste Bhangi caste's main occupation is scavenging. She was a very brave lady .she was from village Bhaju, district Muzaffarnagar. During rebellion of 1857 she organized women against British troupes and fought bravely and killed around 22 British soldiers. Many songs and plays are based on her life story. Popular folk singer Arjun Gayak of Agra sings:

*Mahaviri Bhangin ke ganwa bhaiya gave ke pari San sattavan ke gadar mein di usne kurbani Angrezon ke samne usne haar kabhi na maani*

(Translated)

(Brother, you will have to sing the song of Mahaviri Bhangin She sacrificed her life in the 1857 Rebellion She never accepted defeat before the British.) Deval Kavi, a poet born in Muzaffarnagar but settled in Agra, recites the following poem:

Chamak uthi san sattavan ki vah talwar purani

Mahaviri Bhangin thi bari mardani.

Mahaviri Devi became a martyr while fighting against British. living up to her name which means “very brave” .she was daring .she stood up against British soldiers and fought them undaunted. There was once a Dalit king in the Pratapgarh Zila. The king was a *Chakravarty* (king of a very large territory). His glory used to be sung all over

the land. He was just and kind and everybody had work, food and clothes. The king had all the qualities necessary in a good king and, under his supervision, the moral code used to be followed. The king had a minister who was a Thakur<sup>96</sup>. He was a great conspirator. The king was intelligent but not a good strategist. The minister conspired against the king, removed him from the throne and usurped the throne for himself instead. He also banished the king, who took shelter in a forest. Today's modern-day kings are the descendants of the conspiring minister and we are the descendants of the Dalit king who was exiled to the forest. 'Dalit Samrajya,' A Nautanki composed by Babulal Bhanwra, a member of the Jagriti Dasta, BSP

Following song is part of propoganda of Bahujan Samaj Party , which has already got National level Party long ago<sup>97</sup>.

जय भीम! जय भीम! जय भीम!  
चढ़ गुंडों की छाती पे  
बटन दबेगा हाथी पे  
फिर से होगा नया सवेरा  
नया सवेरा, नया सवेरा  
फिर से होगा नया सवेरा  
सबको छत, कपडा और राशन होगा  
बसपा की सरकार होगी  
बहन जी का अब शासन होगा  
चढ़ गुंडों की छाती पे  
बटन दबेगा हाथी पे  
जय भीम, जय भीम, जय-जय भीम

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<sup>96</sup> Thakur [hindi]=a person from upper caste Rajput community.

<sup>97</sup> In 1997 BSP got national level status by election commission of india



जाति के आधार पर न अब शोषण कोई कर पायेगा

हर एक गुंडा मायाराज में सीधा जेल जायेगा

चढ़ गुंडों की छाती पे

बटन दबेगा हाथी पे

Hail to Bheema! Hail to Bheema! Hail to Bheema!

Crush these antisocial

Must press button for the elephant

New beginning shall be there again

New sunrise, new sunrise

New beginning must be there

Food, clothes and shelter for everyone

There shall be the government of the BSP

Bahan Jee shall rule, now

Crush these antisocial

Must press button for the elephant

Hail to Bheema! Hail to Bheema! Hail to Bheema!

No one can exploit, now in the name of caste

In Maya government, all antisocial shall be pushed behind the bars

Crush these antisocial

Must press button for the elephant.

The First line of this song is praising and paying respect to Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar. Here it is asking to counter goons in a militant way, because in many areas of india, Dalits cant not vote against the wish of dominant caste of the area.

Here there is clear message to counter those people .Here song is promising to give shelter, food and clothing for all .You must vote for BSP by pressing button of

elephant. Elephant is Party symbol of Bahujan Samaj Party. In the next few lines it is mentioned every rowdy will be behind the bars when Mayawati will be in power .This line is very correct to some extent. As during the administration of Mayawati , the regime deals very strictly with criminals .Whenever Mayawati comes to power criminals run away from the Uttar Pradesh and if they do not leave state they would be behind the bars.

Some example of Bahujan samaj party's propoganda are like this. Not all songs are officially produced by cultural wings of BSP .Some of songs were released in the form of CD by supporters.

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आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
ये वोट है जख्मों का मरहम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
ये वोट है जख्मों का मरहम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
आया है चुनावों का मौसम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
हाथी पर, हाथी पर, हाथी पर बटन दबाओ बीएसपी को जिताओ  
हाथी पर, हाथी पर, हाथी पर बटन दबाओ बीएसपी को जिताओ  
कुछ लोग करेंगे अब वादे, कुछ ख्वाब तुम दिखलाएंगे  
कुछ धन से तुम्हे, कुछ दारू से कुछ प्यार से भी बहकाएंगे  
कुछ लोग करेंगे अब वादे, कुछ ख्वाब तुम दिखलाएंगे  
कुछ धन से तुम्हे, कुछ दारू से कुछ प्यार से भी बहकाएंगे

कुछ लगा देंगे दमखम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
 ये वोट है जख्मों का मरहम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
 आया है चुनावों का मौसममममम, हाथी पर, हाथी पर, हाथी पर बटन दबाओ बीएसपी को  
 जिताओ  
 हाथी पर, हाथी पर, हाथी पर बटन दबाओ बीएसपी को जिताओ  
 तुम लोग हो 85 फीसद, सरकार बनाने की सोचो  
 इस वक्त को अपना कर लो तुम, जीवन को सजाने की सोचो  
 तुम लोग हो 85 फीसद, सरकार बनाने की सोचो  
 इस वक्त को अपना कर लो तुम, जीवन को सजाने की सोचो  
 .....चेंज करो अपना आलम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
 ये वोट है जख्मों का मरहम गुमराह नहीं हो जाना तुम  
 आया है चुनावों का मौसममममम, हाथी पर, हाथी पर, हाथी पर बटन दबाओ बीएसपी को  
 जिताओ  
 हाथी पर, हाथी पर, हाथी पर बटन दबाओ बीएसपी को जिताओ  
 हक पाओ निज राज से एएएएएएए, पाओ खुशी अपाअअअअआर  
 जागो बहुजन साथियों वक्त की हैएएएएए पुकार, वक्त की है पुकार

2

नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 नीला झंडा, हाथी हथियार चाहिए ये नीला झंडाअअअ  
 नीला झंडा, हाथी, हथियार चाहिए अब दिल्ली में बीएसपी की सरकार चाहिए  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 दिल्ली में बीएसपी की सरकार चाहिए  
 ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 हाथी बिना नहीं हो गुजारा अपना, हाथी बिना कोई न सहारा अपना

हाथी बिना नहीं हो गुजारा अपना, हाथी बिना कोई न सहारा अपना  
 बीजेपी और कांग्रेस की हार चाहिए, अब दिल्ली में बीएसपी की सरकार चाहिए।  
 ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 कि अब दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 ओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 ओ म्हरे दरद में कौन सुने, बसपा बिना नहीं बात बने  
 हां म्हरे दरद में कौण सुने, बसपा बिना नहीं बात बने  
 बहन जी से यही पुरस्कार चाहिए, कि दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
 कि अब दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए।  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
 ओओ नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा  
 21वीं सदी तेरी होगी, बाबा ने कहा तेरी होगी  
 21वीं सदी तेरी होगी, बाबा ने कहा न तेरी होगी  
 पर आपस के मा भाईचारा, प्यार चाहिए  
 पर कि अब दिल्ली में बहुजन की सरकार चाहिए।  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
 कि अब दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए।  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
 आ गया है हाथी तूफान बनके, छक्के छुड़ा देगा दुश्मन के  
 ओ गया है हाथी तूफान बनके, छक्के छुड़ा देगा दुश्मन के  
 .....कहरा.....बसपा का प्रचार चाहिए, प्रधानमंत्री बहनजी इस बार चाहिए।  
 नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
 हां नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा

कि अब दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए  
नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा, नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
नीला झंडा, हाथी, हथियार चाहिए नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
नीला झंडा, हाथी, हथियार चाहिए कि अब दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए  
नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा  
अब दिल्ली में बसपा की सरकार चाहिए  
नीला झंडा आआ नीला झंडा ओ नीला झंडा नीला झंडा

3

अपने विचारों के चुनकर दो और सरपंच बनाओ ग्राम पंचायत में  
मेंबर सभापति बनाओ अपना, अपने सभापति पंचायत समिति में  
अपने विचारों का अध्यक्ष बनाओ, जिले के जिला परिषद में  
विधान परिषद, विधानसभा अपनी, हो मुख्यमंत्री अपना अपने स्टेट में  
स.....दार हो अपने हों मंत्री अपने, प्रधानमंत्री हो अपना अपने देश में  
जिस दिन हम कर पायेंगे ये अपने देश में,  
हम राजा होंगे इस देश के अपने भारत देश में  
बाबा साहब ने लिखे संविधान पर अमल होगा उस दिन अपने देश में  
जिस दिन बहुजन सत्ता की गद्दी पर बैठेगा ये भारत अपने देश में

कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
काशीराम जी.....हकदार, भारत के बहुजनों के वो थे सरदार  
बहनजी को सौंप दी उन्होंने बागडोर, पार्लियामेंट में दिखाए सबने लगा गे जोर  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी

बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
कांग्रेस भाजप वाले सारे निकले यहां चोर  
बीएसपी की ताकत देखकर मचा रहे शोर  
कांग्रेस भाजप वाले सारे निकले यहां चोर  
बीएसपी की ताकत देखकर मचा रहे शोर  
आश्वासन इनके जनता हो गई है बोर,  
आश्वासन इनके जनता हो गई है बोर,  
इनको सत्ता से हटाने लगाएंगे जोओओओओर  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
हमे पढ़ने-लिखने की इजाजत न थी  
अज्ञानी रहे, गरीब हुए न थी आजादी  
हमे पढ़ने-लिखने की इजाजत न थी  
अज्ञानी रहे, गरीब हुए न थी आजादी  
की है जिन्होंने हमारी इतनी बर्बादी  
की है जिन्होंने हमारी इतनी बर्बादी  
बीएसपी को घबराए वो.....यहां चेक करें  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
सम्राट अशोक का भारत हम करेंगे निर्माण  
भारत की जमी सारे रहेंगे इंसान  
सम्राट अशोक का भारत हम करेंगे निर्माण  
भारत की जमी सारे रहेंगे इंसान

समता का हक हमें देता संविधान  
समता का हक हमें देता संविधान  
तिरंगे के साथ होगी हाथी की पहचान  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
क्या तुम खूब गीत लिखते हो .....साहब  
सुन के खुश होते थे वो कांशीराम साहब

क्या तुम खूब गीत लिखते हो .....साहब  
सुन के खुश होते थे वो कांशीराम साहब  
हुनर दे के चले गए अंबेडकर साहब  
हुनर दे के चले गए अंबेडकर साहब  
सत्ता हासिल कर लो अब बहन जी के साथ  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
कहते हम भारतवासी, भारत के मूल निवासी  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर  
बहनजी हमारी प्राइम मिनिस्टर

Now it is clear how BSP is using songs for promotion for their political ideology.  
Hundreds of CD, s are being released every year in support of BSP.

### **Influence of radical left on Dalits: Kabir Kala Manch**

After Independence cultural wings of left parties influenced a lot politics in India.  
Communist parties in India took interest in the problems of peasants, industrial labour. Communists devoted their strength to the task of uniting and organizing

workers in trade unions, peasants, students, youth and women in their union. It was due to these efforts that mass organisations like the all India Kisan Sabha and the all India student federation were founded and the all India trade union congress formed. Dalits are mostly peasants and labour class. So it was Natural for them to get attracted to communist ideology. Though Indian communist never recognized caste seriously, for them class was the basis of society which does not depict Indian society in its true sense. Dr.Ambedkar once was influenced by communist ideology to some extent as Independent Labour Party (ILP) was an Indian political organisation formed under his leadership in August 1936 against the Brahminical and capitalist structures in the society. ILP argued for Indian labour class while also stressing on the Nature of caste structures and need for its annihilation

- State Sponsored industrialisation was given high priority.
- It demanded strong labour laws to protect factory workers. It favoured legislation to provide remunerative wages, to fix maximum hours of work, leave with pay and a sanitary dwelling at reasonable amount.
- It stressed the need for abolition of the Jagirdari system
- It advocated an extensive programme for the improvement of educational facility in technical institute.
- It also voiced against the exclusion of Dalits from the lucrative jobs in industries.

Soon Ambedkar realised that labour are also divided on caste lines so he got disillusioned with the idea of class. Although Dalit is took active part in the activities of communist Party in states like Kerala , west Bengal, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh , they were rarely given leadership .After Naxalbadi movement many Dalits found emancipation in Maoist thoughts and joined them on large scale. There were some



Dalit is who thought that ideas of Ambedkar and Marx could be united to counter Brahminical and capitalist structure . Maoist movement in India is active in the tribal belt of India. They got training in their respective communist parties. Communist Party of India [Liberation] once upon a time was called “Chamar Party” in Bihar region, due to abundance of Chamar [Dalit] caste cadre in the Party. In some regions like Bhojpur and Magadha [Bihar] Maoist really fought well for the Dalit rights. Marxist idea influenced many Dalit youths and they mingled Ambedkarism and communism.

In this process some youths, majority of them were Dalits formed a cultural wing named “Kabir Kala Manch” . Kabir Kala Manch was founded in Pune in 2002 in the wake of the Gujarat riots .through music, poetry and theatre, it is spreading an anti-caste, pro democracy message to the society. Most of the members of Kabir Kala Manch are students and young professional who perform protest poetry and plays in the slums and streets. Their revolutionary message became famous very soon .this cultural group came into news when activists of the Kabir Kala Manch were framed under the unlawful activities act as being Maoist and Naxalites by the state government in may 2011. Some activists of Kabir Kala Manch were arrested by anti terrorism squad of Maharashtra Police. Artists of Kabir Kala Manch were attacked by Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad activists after they performed in a programme at National film archive of India organized by the students of Film and Television Institute of India, Pune.

I went to Pune for my field study and interviewed one member of Kabir Kala Manch, Rupali Jadhav<sup>98</sup>. When I asked her how she got involved into this group. She told since the childhood she had faced caste and gender oppression .I have found that

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<sup>98</sup> .interview was held on 26january .11 am at Pune

only Marxist idea reconciled with Ambedkarism can solve the problems of Dalits. She is from Matang caste .Matangs are regarded at the lowest rung even among Dalits.

She says as a Dalit only we can express our pain in a more effective way because we do not need to act what we face in everyday life. it is a routine for us , its catharsis for us. When as Dalit artist we perform at front of Dalit viewers it is more effective. They can connect well with us due to same social background. After Khairlanji<sup>99</sup> massacre we have shifted our focus more on Dalit issues.

She recites a song.--

Let's ignite a fire in your heart

That will burn the caste system one day..

Another song by Kabir Kala Manch is like this

Shackles are shouting since ages. .

We need a blow

Break it ,break it

Chains of caste

It is the time now

To blow hard

Intervention of groups like Kabir Kala Manch is unique in many ways .Their language is not soft .They are a bit aggressive, assertive, though Rupali told me that in theory

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<sup>99</sup> On 29 September 2006, four members of the Bhotmange family belonging to a Dalit caste were murdered. The women of the family, Surekha and Priyanka, were paraded naked in public before being murdered. The Indian media did not cover this incident until the Nagpur riots by the Dalits. The criminal act was in fact carried out by assailants from the politically powerful Kunbi caste (classified as Other Backward Classes for "opposing" the requisition of their field to have a road built over it. Initial reports suggested that the women were gang-raped before being murdered. Though CBI investigations concluded that the women were not raped, there were allegations of bribery of doctors who performed the post-mortem, and of corruption.--url --  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khairlanji\\_massacre](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khairlanji_massacre)

and practice too Kabir Kala Manch did believe in democracy and stayed away from any type of political violence and extremism .Some members of Kabir Kala Manch are in jail for charge of some links with Maoists and instigating terrorism. She said sometimes when democratic institutions fail, people are bound to take some militant steps to protect their dignity and life. Government institutions in India are lame or puppets of capitalist demons; in such an environment our organization is doing its best to awaken the masses for a more egalitarian and welfare state.

Rupali narrated -let's see why some Dalits are being attracted to radical left ideology .Even today despite all government mechanism atrocities on Dalits are still prevalent in India. Police rarely lodge any complaint of atrocities on Dalits. Due to misbehaviour of Police, poor Dalits do not dare to enter into Police premises. If they succeed to lodge a case of atrocities it is very difficult for them to fight the case in courts so most of the times they withdraw the case and are left in tears and agony.

### **GADAR-Poet of Masses**

One of the most important Dalit poet who is also a Marxist is Telugu poet and singer Gadar. Gummadi Vittal Rao came to be know as Gadar as a tribute to the pre-independence revolutionist Gadar Party. Born in 1949 in Medak district, Gadar comes from a poor Dalit family. He dropped out of Osmania University after his first year of engineering to earn a living and in 1969, joined the struggle for a separate Telngana state and formed a Burrakatha (a kind of folk art) troupe.

In early 1970s, Gadar got associated with 'Art Lovers Association', formed by Narsing Rao, who was linked to the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist). In the mid 1980s, Gadar started voicing his protest against the killing of several Dalits

by upper caste landlords in Prakasam district and went underground after the police raided his house.

During exile, he started spreading the revolutionary ideology through folk arts, adapting folk forms such as Oggu Katha, Veedhi Bhagotham and Yellamma Katha. After four-and-a-half years of exile Gadar emerged from hiding. He was shot at on April 6, 1997, but survived. In 2001 and 2004, he was among those named by the Peoples' War Group as its Missionaries for peace.

### **Interview of Ravindra Randhawa: Dalit playwright and director**

One of the emerging Dalit playwright who is creating exemplary productions and with a balanced tone of Marxist and Dalit ideology is Ravindra Randhawa. He was born into a Dalit Sikh family of Punjab and now settled in Mumbai . I had a conversation with him regarding his views on the question of caste and role of performing arts.

Q. how you got associated with Marxist cultural wing?

Ravindra: when I joined Jawaharlal Nehru University in 1996 I came into contact with Indian people's theatre association. I always wanted to pursue creative and meaningful art practices. With the glorious and progressive past of IPTA along with my friends I have thought on the issue of caste and class. Though due to economic liberalization and due to pressure of markets nowadays scope of progressive art is facing a challenge but we will have to comprehend.

Q. what you have produced till now which address the issue of caste and class ?

Ravindra.-- Under the banner of IPTA I have directed many plays which deals with the issue of caste . I can tell you about one particular play named "*Hamri Jaat*". In this play I wanted to show that how due to caste discrimination people are getting alienated and turning into a emotionless human. As well as overlapping identity of

caste and class are also challenging in a new way which is very difficult to comprehend, though till now the left movement in India did not ever address the issue of caste beyond the class dimension but now due to electoral success of BSP, Dalit agenda is prime for many left parties especially for radical left. Though I do not associate myself with any particular left Party but I think there is a need for a radical change within the Indian power structure and that is only possible through the people's mass movement. The economic policies of all power-holding parties are same, just their flags are different. Liberalization and loot of *Jal, Jungle and Jameen* one day will be concluded by the final assault on capitalism by the masses organized under class formation. The slogan of Jai Bheem Comrade, the synthesis of left and radical Dalit ideology will bring some change in India.

### **Interview of Harikesh Bairwa :Modern Dalit ballad from Rajasthan**

Rajasthan has been a stagnant society since British period. Princely states did nothing for social reforms. In terms of caste discrimination and caste atrocities Rajasthan is one of the topmost among Indian states. Social structure of Rajasthan is feudal. Untouchability is still in practice in many corners of Rajasthan. Dalits are still forbidden to ride a mare during marriage procession.<sup>100</sup> In such a feudal setting it was

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#### **<sup>100</sup>Rajasthan village tense as Dalit bride wants groom to ride a mare**

When she became the first girl from her family to become a graduate, 25-year-old Neetu Meghwal wished that her groom came riding a mare, something that no Dalit in her village had dared to do.

Now a constable with the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and posted at Bangalore airport, she shared the dream with a cousin who wrote to the chief minister's office about Neetu's wish. Soon, her wish reached the National Commission for the Scheduled Castes (NCSC) that asked district authorities to take necessary steps. Cousin Laxman Sariyala said he alerted authorities because he knew upper castes villagers would not allow a Dalit to ride a mare during a wedding procession. Rajasthan has witnessed violent incidents in the past, especially in Bhilwara and some parts of Alwar and Jaipur where Dalit grooms were assaulted for riding a mare during weddings. She studied with us in Pali and has been the only girl among five siblings to get educated and a government job. Her four brothers are daily wage labourers in Goa and a younger sister is illiterate. She had the will to break caste stereotypes but it looks very difficult."

His fears came true. Neetu's wish has triggered tension in her Native village, Khimda, near Somesar railway station, 350km from Jaipur. Khimda has around 400 households; 30% of them belonging to the scheduled caste. Most Dalit work as farmhands in fields of rich farmers.

really difficult for Harikesh to raise voice against injustice. Harikesh is a graduate from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

He has founded *MUKTIGAAN*, a cultural organization predominantly of Dalit youths to promote revolutionary ideology in his area falling in District Karouli.

Q. what motivated you to start this organization named MuktiGaan?

Harikesh- I was born and brought up in a village where there was feudal mentality was predominant and people of lower classes used to face discrimination and atrocities in many forms .When I joined Jawaharlal Nehru university in early 1990s,I came in touch with some leftist cultural groups . I joined them and started singing revolutionary songs. Whenever I thought about my village ,s life I would get tensed by the plight of Dalit who were denied rights in many fundamental ways. After finishing my study I came to my village and formed a group of youths from all castes and trained them in theatre and singing revolutionary songs.

Q. what is the outcome of your organization's activity? How it has changed the mindset of rural folks?

Harikesh: "let me tell you, I did not get success in changing radically the mentality of people who had been fed the discriminatory poison since ages, But to some extent I succeeded in forming an alliance of youth from all castes under one umbrella. Though predominantly majority of members in our group are from Dalit castes, by interacting

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A day before her wedding, police took a written undertaking from the family that it doesn't want Neetu's groom to ride a mare — considered a traditional prerogative of the village's upper caste inhabitants whose grooms come on horseback to the wedding venue, mostly the bride's home. A mare is preferred because it is considered auspicious. Elder brother Champa Lal said the family didn't want the groom to ride a mare during bindoli, a ritual where he takes a round of the village. "We want to follow the old tradition where groom comes with the marriage procession, not riding a mare," he said. Neetu's phone was switched off on Thursday. Mahavir Mevada, a resident, said the bride told him she was scared but keen that her groom rode a mare.

Source-URL- <http://www.hindustantimes.com/India/rajasthan-village-tense-as-Dalit-bride-wants->

with youths of other caste we got success in establishing a communication line which helped us to solve many Intercaste rural feuds .Our songs were appreciated by the young generation. We sang song about equality of human race and against discriminatory practices”.

Q. what difficulty you faced in your cultural endeavour?

Harikesh: “I was once beaten by youths of upper caste who were angry of my cultural troupe. Police also came to me and threatened to fabricate me as a Naxalite in a false case. But I was fearless and within the democratic framework I resisted these obstacles and our caravan is progressing, we can not bring change in a day . This infection of casteism has been in society since thousands of years .it will take time to vanish.”

One song by Harikesh

अब तो हद हो गई इसलिए कह रहा हूँ आज सदियों से तूने हमसे किया है घात । ऊँची जाति होने का भरते हैं दम ,ये द्विज जात, हम को कुत्ता बिल्ली से बदतर समझते हैं आप । जनेऊ चोटी, पोथी वाली जात जिन्होंने सदियों से छीना है हम से इज्जत भात । वाह रे भाई,द्विज जात।। हमारे साथे से भी हो जाते हैं नापाक,तुम्हारी जात।वाह रे भाई द्विजजात

### **Interview of Dalit political singer and lyricist Dr Veeramani**

Dr. Veeramani is an emerging Dalit singer. He sings and compose Dalit political songs .which are against caste oppression . Tamil is his mother tongue but he also sings in Hindi and in other Indian languages like Punjabi and Hindi. hem and at times even been irritated by their presence. But behind that s

Dr Veeramani.S hail from the state of Tamil Nadu. Folk and people singer who takes up the contemporary as well as historical issues surrounded with downtrodden community such as Dalits in India. Widely performed across Tamil Nadu state since from childhood. His Guru was Prof K.A Gunasekeran ,former Dean of School of

performing arts, Pondicherry Central University. Dr Veeramani have been performing people's music in universities such as JNU. I had a conversation with him regarding his art and its connection with socio-politics of Dalits.<sup>101</sup>

Q. Please tell me about your passion about music people

Veera- I come from very small village called Andippalayam, in Villupuram district of Tamil Nadu. Only 25 Dalit settlement in the villages, rest of the houses are Caste Hindus. My family is landless family and we used to work in the field as coolie and earned our bread. In case if we don't go for single day work, our stomach goes empty and remain famine till we get work. In such circumstances, I remember very much that my mother used to sing lots of folk songs to make us sleep. Still we used to fight for food asking my parents, such circumstances are long time story in my village. I can say that I learnt music from my mother's womb as my mother sings songs while working in agricultural field, many people turn for work if mother goes to the field. My father used to play music instrument called Parai, its history can be traced back to Indus Valley civilisation and Sangam age. During temple festival our people belong to Parayar community ( SC) play music with six to seven folk music instruments in which parai is the lead instrument. The folk and people music is in our blood which we use as weapon to express our dissent against atrocities, discrimination arise out of caste.

Q. How do you connect the people music with social movement such as Dalit movement? but ?

Veeramani- Music is most powerful art form to express both pain as well pressure. For an example if any Dalit women beaten by her drunkard husband, she cannot attack him back physically or talk directly in the male dominated society. In such situation,

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<sup>101</sup> Interview was taken on 12 April, 7pm, 2015 at Delhi



she sings songs such as requiem what we call in Tamil ' Oppari or Soga Paattu or Savu Pattu. and when come to Caste based atrocity and Discrimination against Dalits in India, Music plays vital role in mobilize Dalits to fight against atrocities. Economically, socially weaker people can always use music as weapon to fight for their cause.

Q.Do you face any problem while representing Dalit art forms.?

Veeramani- Yes, Not from all sections of the society, But from the Caste-ridden, religious fundamentalist groups because they dont like when their establishment is questioned. They can go to any extreme to protect their conservative/ caste based society. There are many cases where Dalit artists, poets, singers are harassed, beaten and also risk to lose life.

Q. What type of issues you raise through your music ?

Veeramani- I raise three types of issues 1. Rural Dalits, 2. Urban Dalits, 3.Dalit students. In rural villages rape, women abuse, killing Dalits, fight for minimum wages ( Keezh venmani case for an example), dignity and self respect in all sphere of rural society, But there is hardly any changes in the rural society, hence my music will continues to address the these issues. When come to Urban area, Dalits face different types of discrimination access to employment, housing, educational rights, etc., In the campuses , Dalit students face huge discrimination , the recent Rohit Vemula case for an example, I compose poems, songs on such issues and perform whenever any programme organised. When I was a student at JNU, I used to organise National folk music festival where I call many singers to sing folk and people music. I had the organisation in JNU such as Students' Liberation, Student for Campus Development (SCD) which was mainly created to address the migrant workers issues at JNU

campus. Because our constant fights for justice through music, documentary film, the migrant labour issues in JNU have become very popular.

### **Different songs used by Dalit parties**

Apart from BSP many other dalit parties are also using propaganda songs .Here are some examples

बहुजन हो तो बहुजन को फिर मुक्त कराओ  
बहुजन हो तो बहुजन को सशक्त कराओ  
भारत के ओ मूलनिवासी अब सुनो पुकार  
बहुजन हिताय बहुजन सुखाय करो स्वप्न साकार  
सदियों से हमको फँसाया है  
हर वक्त हमारा लेकिन आया है  
सही फैसला अभी तू करले  
वक्त तो तूने बड़ा गँवाया है  
मनुवाद ये बहुत भ्रष्ट है  
इनके हेतु है स्पष्ट हेतु-  
दुष्ट बड़े ये दुष्ट हैं  
इनके कारण कष्ट है  
बहुजन हो तो बहुजन के फिर कष्ट मिटाओ  
भूमिपुत्र ओ मूलनिवासी जहाँ भी जाओ  
जहाँ भी जाओ, जहाँ भी जाओ, जहाँ भी जाओ  
अब गलत किसी को चुनना न  
अब झूठे वादे सुनना न  
अब उठो, अब जागो, अब बहुजन तुझको पुकारती  
बहुजन मुक्ति पार्टी, बहुजन मुक्ति पार्टी

If you are a Bahujan then please help liberate your fellow Bahujan  
If you are a Bahujan then please help empower your fellow Bahujan  
O moolniwasi of Bharat, now, pay attention to our call  
Let's realize our dream of Bahujan's interest and Bahujan's prosperity  
They have chained us, since centuries  
However, our time has reckoned again and again  
It is the time to make up your mind  
You have wasted a lot of opportunities  
This Manuvad is very corrupt  
Their every purpose is very clear  
They are the most wicked  
They are the roots of our misery  
If you are a Bahujan then please help relieve pain of your fellow Bahujan  
O son of the soil! O moolniwasi! Wherever you go  
Never elect any dubious person, now  
Never get lured by any false promises, now  
Now, arise! Now, awake! Now, Bahujan are calling you  
Bahujan Mukti Party, Bahujan Mukti Party

This propaganda song is used by cultural wing of Bahujan Mukti Party. Political wing of BAMCEF [All India Backward (SC, ST, OBC) and Minority Communities Employees' Federation]. Here the message is clear as the song is asking Bahujan to be united on the line of caste and liberate the Bahujan Samaj from the clutch of Brahman dominated society. Bahujan is a socio political term used to depict 85% people of India which belong to schedule caste, schedule tribes, minorities and other backward castes .The next line is that there should be welfare of majority of people.

## Chapter Three

### Dalit Visual Art: Forms and Functions

Dalits have been art practitioners since ages ,they were artisan and artists .They made big temples as labourer and artisans .Played an important role in creating cultural history of India They did wonderful work all times through their labour and creativity. They never had a chance to depict their life through their works. The art which deals with Dalit question is Dalit art. There are many questions arises like” where are the depiction of Dalits in art forms? This question become very important when it is known that Dalits are around 17% of India’s population .Dalit intervention in visual arts is relatively a new phenomena .Modern Dalit painters are drawing and painting on Dalit themes. Some of them have become very successful in art field .their art objects depicts multiple aspects of Dalit life .Dalit life which is full of oppression, sorrows, and struggle of life.

Whatever we see in the public sphere related to Dalits is “statues and paintings of Dr. Ambedkar. Vandalism of Dr. Ambedkar statue has become common news nowadays. Many feuds erupts between Dalits and Hindu upper caste <sup>102</sup> due to vandalization of Dr. Ambedkar statutes .After most of the incidents of vandalization of Dr. Ambedkar, s statue Dalit assemble and organize protests .This gathering creates a feeling of unity among Dalits who comes forward to defend the honour of Dalit idol Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar .for Dalits Ambedkar is symbol of proud in terms of his education and his service toward Indian nation. Indeed Ambedkar played a great role in formation of Dalit socio-political thoughts. For some Ambedkar is at centre of

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<sup>102</sup> Most of the times unknown people vandalise statue of Ambedkar .so its uncertain those people who have vandalised statue belong to which caste ?but Dalit people assume that this must be done by upper caste Hindus .because dr Ambedkar challenged hegemonic hierarchical Hindu caste system as well as upper caste people are biggest beneficiaries of hierarchical caste system

Dalit ideology. Ambedkar always favoured democracy and peaceful means for politics. Art has played a very important role in peaceful protests and assertion. It has worked as a catharsis<sup>103</sup>.

This catharsis is innovative the sublime depiction of human life in various forms. The most important point of this catharsis is it has always boosted the democratic values and faith in constitution drafted by Dr. Ambedkar.

Last year a statue of Dr Ambedkar was vandalized in Badayun, Uttar Pradesh .Many people gathered to lodge protest. Some years ago over vandalization of Ambedkar, s statue in Mumbai so many Dalits started protesting in a violent way, police wanted to control the mob and opened fire. 10 Dalits were killed. “The firing may unite the state's various Dalit factions.” this was the headline of times of India that this may unite Dalits. Further newspaper state that “The crux of the problem lies in the fact that in the recent past the Dalits have been unable to focus their strength. They form about 10 percent of the state's population and can swing electoral fortunes in at least a dozen parliamentary seats. Numerically, they have the might to match the Sena. Yet, they are scattered across seven groups, some led by former Congressmen, others close to the Janta Dal leadership, still others with wavering loyalties.

For Dalits Ambedkar is a common uniting factor .they are one on the issue of disrespect of Ambedkar .it unites them and they feel as one.

Generally Dalits don't appear in popular media .it may be said that anonymity of most of the individuals depiction may seem that Dalits are included along with rest of the society. It is a pre occupied notion that people depicted in advertisement or in other media must be from high caste. Most of the times the title of people depicted in

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<sup>103</sup> **Catharsis** (from Greek κάθαρσις katharsis meaning "purification" or "cleansing") is the purification and purgation of emotions—especially pity and fear—through art or any extreme change in emotion that results in renewal and restoration.

advertisements or in films [in case of Hindi films ] are Sharma, Saxena, Verma and Gupta .it is a evidence of that Dalits are not part of mainstream popular society.

In visual imagery Dalit epitome as invisible. It has always been an issue to avoid upper caste dominated artists don't want to discuss or depicts Dalits in their art works. Though there are visual representations of upper castes (Brahmin and Khastriyas).

It is a point to be noted that there had been very little written on India's, s art with relation to caste question. Hierarchy is clearly visible in temple architecture, where we see lesser and greater gods .recently many scholars pointed out emergence of caste consciousness and social justice in artistic discourse. Scholars are going beyond . Recently some scholars with the emergence of subaltern studies researchers are coming forward to study about subaltern groups and their relation with art forms. Range of artistic subject is also widening from paintings to cinema and installation art. even painting on vehicle everything has become subject of study .subjects of art forms are also widening from religious iconography ,literature and portraiture of themes, social ,political and historical development ,feminism and nationalism .

Tartakov <sup>104</sup>point out “New Dalit imagery in modern India was not of purely aesthetic in nature but political. Monumental statutes of Dr. Ambedkar become symbol of power for Dalits . Tartakov is very true when he says this point indeed Dalit imagery is sometimes more symbolic and less aesthetic. At many places I have seen statue of Ambedkar are very crude and incoherent .this type of statue are mostly visible in the colonies of poor Dalits who do not have sufficient funds to have a aesthetically built statue of Ambedkar .

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<sup>104</sup> Tartakov,Gary(2012)*Dalit Art And Visual Imagery* .New Delhi :Oxford University Press.pp112-124

This genre of civil monuments was introduced by the British in India, who installed statues of generals, viceroys and members of British monarchy and after independence Indian too raised their own images like of politicians, historical heroes and heroes of freedom movement.

As we know Britishers have started installing statute of important English people in India, this tradition was carried forwarded in independent India. Many statues of Shivajee, Mahatma Gandhi and of so many great personalities were installed at important places in Indian cities. Dr.Ambedkar as an emancipator of Dalit and architect of constitution also begin to appear in public places. Though this process in beginning was initiated

The motives behind installation of Dr .Ambedkar statues are multiple. First to commemorate the struggle of Dr. Ambedkar. Second to get inspiration from the persona of Dr. Ambedkar, the third is to make Dr. Ambedkar a symbol of social and political assertion of Dalits.

NICOLAS JAOUJ says The Ambedkar statue stands as a major feature of the Dalit movement. In the media, the Dalit emphasis on symbolic politics has been dismissed as mere tokenism, and the Ambedkar icon has been denigrated as Westernized, Despite attempts at studying Dalit politics since the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) became one of the key players in Uttar Pradesh (UP), there has been a lack of scholarly attention to the deeper social changes involved in the Dalits' relationship with the state. The assumption is that the Dalits' struggles for the imposition of their symbol in public places can contribute to an understanding of the manner in which Dalits have imagined the state and engineered strategies towards it. These statues seem to be the focal point for renewed aspirations towards democracy, while the ceremonies organized around them have provided these deprived citizens the

opportunities to build some support within the state<sup>105</sup>.

After the emergence of BSP as a major political force in north India many Dalits have installed statue of Ambedkar at their colonies as well as used to have atleast one photos of Ambedkar at their home's wall. Ceramic tiles of Ambedkar, which can be used for planting on house's wall and at the door, key ring with photos of Ambedkar, various poster depicting life of Dr. Ambedkar are in vogue among Dalits

To install statue of Ambedkar Dalits have sometimes fought many battle .sometimes physical as well as legal and socio-political. There are hundreds of incidents when feuds occurred due to installation on Ambedkar,s statues by Dalits.

Political symbols play a major part in the way a nation is depicted and fed into the imagination of its citizens. This symbolic work emerges generally from the official realm but, it may also derive from the initiatives of political parties and social organizations. Thus, different actors involved in the public sphere insist on particular symbols or 'great men' that express their different ideologies, different ideas of the nation, and identity struggles. These political symbols appeal to people at a more private level, reflecting the internalization of political imaginaries that contradicts the usual notion of fixed boundaries between state and society.

The Ambedkar icon, which has become the symbol of Dalit identity, is a good example of political imagery. Notice to the meanings associated with symbols like the Ambedkar statues by those who mobilize around them thus assists our understanding of grassroots perceptions of Indian democracy. In the context of poverty and illiteracy where they operate, such symbolic means have profound political implications, promoting ideals of citizenship and nationhood among the politically destitute where

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<sup>105</sup> Jaoul p.22(2012)*Dalit Art And Visual Imagery* .New Delhi :Oxford University Press.pp165-169



the state has partially failed emphasizes the pedagogic dimension of the symbol, which 'is part of the emergence of a political language, enabling larger numbers of people to define themselves in relation to the state, if you will to make sense of the state'. O'Brien's argument can be extended to other post colonial contexts, where the politicization of the lower orders and the use of religious symbols often go hand in hand. O'Brien takes the example of the Indian struggle for freedom, in which Gandhi used Hindu symbols to appeal to the rural masses and bring them together with the Congress against the colonial state. He also notes how this political pedagogy alienated Indian Muslims who were unable to find themselves reflected in a nation defined by Hindu symbols, thus contributing to the communalization process that led to Partition. This argument can also be applied to the case of the radical 'untouchables'/Scheduled Castes,<sup>6</sup> led by B.R. Ambedkar ,who distrusted Gandhi's charitable attitude towards them. The latter's reformed Hinduism was still too close to caste hierarchy to be acceptable to those who suffered from untouchability, and whose leaders feared for their future in an upper caste - dominated independent India.

Ambedkar,s relentless and bitter struggle against Gandhi on the question of the recognition of the 'untouchables' as a separate group left its mark on their collective destiny at several levels. At the social level, the policy of positive discrimination that resulted from the compromise between the two leaders (known as the Poona Pact, 1932) encouraged education and social mobility. At the political level, Ambedkar,s nomination as the head of the Constitution Drafting Committee was a reconciliatory act by Gandhi, designed to involve the Scheduled Castes in the process of nation - building and thereby to sustain national integration.<sup>8</sup> However, despite this momentary and partial reconciliation with the Congress, Ambedkar,s struggles against Gandhi left their slur on Dalit politics. Even though they were depicted negatively in

mainstream Indian historiography, these struggles were remembered in Ambedkrite circles as a landmark episode, because of which a distinct Dalit political identity could be kept alive and nurtured after Independence.

Although Ambedkar had warned his admirers against making a cult of his personality, a move that had started in his home state of Maharashtra even before his death, the statue, perhaps inevitably, became a tool for political mobilization after he died. The little blue statues of Ambedkar wearing a business suit and holding the Indian Constitution have indeed become a common sight in contemporary slums and villages in many parts of the country.

The case of UP is especially interesting as far as Ambedkar statues are concerned. First, the statues have played an instrumental role in the BSP's successful mobilizations, confirming the popular appeal of symbolic politics in a state where the Ayodhya campaign had already helped the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) to power in the early 1990s. Second, once in power the BSP put great emphasis on the official installation of statues, which in turn motivated Dalits to install more statues in their villages. The way the state and society have emulated each other brings an interesting perspective to bear on symbolic politics and on the evolution of relations between Dalits and the state. That is, the influence of the official Ambedkar iconography on the popular statues, along with the imitation of official ceremonies in villages, reflects a process of popular learning of symbolic skills.

### **Democracy and imagery**

A conscious recognition of caste biases in visual imagery and in the interpretation of visual images can lead to a lucid understanding of the world ,both in representation

and in material life .as we become more conscious of how caste is depicted it becomes less and less comfortable to go along with it and more and more essential to counter it and act democratically .as long as display of caste hierarchy is allowed to pass unnoticed in public ,the longer it will continue to be accepted and institutionalized . the simple understand find is for a conscious nation its not good to overlook fundamental realities of caste .the more we will face the problem of caste ,more shackles of castes will be perished .The fact is being invisible means being unnoted and so unthought and unattended too. In a dialectically complementary way, failure to focus on Dalit issues leaves us organizing our lives around established caste interests. Though caste influences nearly every aspect of our life in India, we try to hide the identity of caste from over selves as much as we have hidden ourselves from it and so the full and pervasive meaning and importance of the caste system has been obscured and the reality of Dalit in particular reduced to being acknowledged when necessary but otherwise never noticed in its material reality .

The most important and powerful function of a art piece is not attract viewers or attract attention, but of every recognizable image to identify its subject matter.

### **New Buddhist imagery and Architecture**

One of the important development in the field of Dalit art occurred in the times of Bahujan samaj party's rule in Uttar Pradesh. Four times BSP came into power in Uttar Pradesh .BSP is having a clear cut agenda of Dalit assertion and pioneer of BSP Kanshiram stated that "power is the master key of all the doors". To fulfil this agenda Bahujan samaj party and other organization like BAMCEF recreated Dalit heroes and heroines and made them popularized among Dalit masses through various forms.

The purpose of making these monuments was social as well as political. The images of Dalit Bahujan heroes was representing subaltern social section as well as showing the power of how BSP has built various monuments on huge prime land within city space in various cities of Uttar Pradesh like Lucknow, Kanpur, and Noida.

The motive is clearly politically of making these monuments. Crispin Sartwell argues “every political regime uses the arts for propaganda purposes, consciously deploys the arts to try to shape the consciousness of their populations. And every resistance movement does the same, often with much better aesthetic results than those procured by the state, the arts of which are often gigantically yet excruciatingly dull. Political power has shaped the discipline of art history to an incalculable extent, and the art that survives from eras past is whatever the authorities permitted to persist. The history of art is, hence, by and large the history of monuments and of artworks compatible with capitulation”<sup>106</sup>

BSP regimes have made various monuments to commemorate Dalit Bahujan heroes’ .these Dalit Bahujan; leaders are from various socio-geographical background of India. BSP regime has established many parks and plazas to commemorate Dalit Bahujan heroes. Most notable of these parks is Ambedkar Park in Lucknow. Political symbols play a major role in a a nation is depicted and fed into imagination of its people. Symbolic work emanates generally from the official realm .it may also derive from the acts of political parties and social organizations .different actors involved in the public sphere insist on particular symbols ,that express their different ideas of nation and identity .these political symbols appeal to people at a private level

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<sup>106</sup> Sartwell, Crispin, *Art and Politics*, by, AMERICAN SOCIETY and Association for Aesthetics, Criticism and Theory of the Arts, Volume 30 Number 3 Winter 2010

.reflecting the internalization of a political imaginaries that contradicts the usual notion of boundaries between nation and society.

The motive behind establishing these parks and other monuments to is to re-establish heroes of Dalit Bahujan samaj in Indian history. Ambedkar park is based on Buddhist architecture .most of the monuments built by Bahujan samaj party are based on Buddhist architecture .the reason is Conversion of Dr. Ambedkar into Buddhism and later on millions of Dalit followed the path shown by Dr Ambedkar. Ambedkar asked Dalits not to get entangled in the existing branches of Buddhism, and called his version Navayana or 'Neo-Buddhism'. Ambedkar would die less than two months later, just after finishing his definitive work on Buddhism.

The iconography, which represents Ambedkar as a man of international stature, rather than in traditional Indian costume has attracted a wide range of critics of different backgrounds. From Marxist to Gandhian and nationalist Hindus .Everyone is claiming on Ambedkar. Though there are many reasons to claim on Ambedkar .Dalit constitutes 17 percent of India's population .most of the Dalits feel themselves attached to Dr Ambedkar now days.,even Bharatiya Janta party ,an organization which wants to make India a Hindu Rashtra [Hindu nation]put Ambedkar in the line of their great personalities. In RSS schools Dr. Ambedkar is also remembered as a great man in daily students prayer which is in Sanskrit . Ambedkar wrote a book named "Riddles of Hinduism" which was banned in some Indian states for long time. In this book Ambedkar asked many questions about Hindu gods, goddesses .his book angered many upper caste Hindus when it was published later after 1990 many state government lifted ban on this book. It was very rare that any upper caste Hindu of BJP or RSS openly criticised Dr. Ambedkar .The fierce criticism of Ambedkar came in the form of a book in late 1990,s . "Worshipping False god "a book written by

Arun Shouri ,a journalist and a bjp member who has also served as a cabinet minister in BJP government . Arun shouri main argument is Ambedkar never participated in any movement which was against British Raj. Indeed Ambedkar was very clear that his immediate goal is not to liberate India from the clutch of Britishers.

Its liberation of Dalits from the clutch of Brahminical hierarchical social system and discrimination. Ambedkar said it has been only 100years of British rule ,but we untouchables are slave of this system since last 3thousand years. My goal is not liberation of Indian from Britishers .my goal is to liberate Dalits from Hinduism. Ambedkar said this to a member of British cabinet mission member A.V. Alexander in may 1946 *“All me to say that the British have a moral responsibility towards the scheduled castes.*

*They may have moral responsibilities towards all minorities. But it can never transcend the moral responsibility which rests on them in respect of the untouchables. It is a pity how few Britishers are aware of it and how fewer are prepared to discharge it. British rule in India owes its very existence to the help rendered by the untouchables. Many Britishers think that India was conquered by the Clives, Hastings, Coats and so on. Nothing can be a greater mistake. India was conquered by an army of Indians and the Indians who formed the army were all untouchables. British rule in India would have been impossible if the untouchables had not helped the British to conquer India. Take the Battle of Plassey which laid the beginning of British rule or the battle of Kirkee which completed the conquest of India. In both these fateful battles the soldiers who fought for the British were all untouchables..<sup>107</sup>.*

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<sup>107</sup> URL-<http://www.rediff.com/freedom/29ambed.htm>

In the battle of Plassey Duple fought from the side of Britishers and in the battle of Koregaon ,Mahar under British command defeated Peshwa army ,defeat of Koregaon ended Maratha rule . The **Battle of Koregaon** was fought on 1 January 1818 between the British East India Company and the Peshwa faction of the Maratha Confederacy, at Koregaon Bhima. The 25,000-strong Marathas, led

To counter book of Arun shouri many Dalit intellectuals and other responded Arun shouri through writing books and articles. This criticism of Ambedkar only came when Dalit Bahujan politics was in peak. Bahujan samaj party, a party based on Ambedkarism got status of national party .and third largest party in India, in terms of vote share. People opposing Dalit Bahujan discourse were attacking in every way to counter new awakening. Sometimes they vandalized statue of Ambedkar.This new Buddhist imagery is unique in many features .it also includes Dalit Bahujan great men because they all fought against Brahmincal hegemony. Theses leader are Periyar Rama Swami Nayakar who led a very long and successful protest against Brahmin,s dominance in Tamilnadu. Second is saint Ravidas who was born in a untouchable Chamar family, who is main saint and source of inspiration of Dalit people, especially of Chamars.

Guru Ravidas was a North Indian Guru mystic of the Bhakti movement who was active in the 15th century CE. Venerated in the region of Uttar Pradesh as well as in another Indian states like Punjab Haryana, Bihar and other., his devotional songs and verses made a lasting impact upon the Bhakti movement. He is often given the honorific *Guru*. He was a socio-religious reformer, a thinker, a theosophist, a humanist, a poet, a traveller, a pacifist and a spiritual figure before who even head-priests of Banaras lay prostrate to pay homage.

Guru Ravidass Ji was a shoemaker of the Kutbandhla Chamar caste. His devotional songs were included in the Sikh holy book. There is also a larger body of hymns

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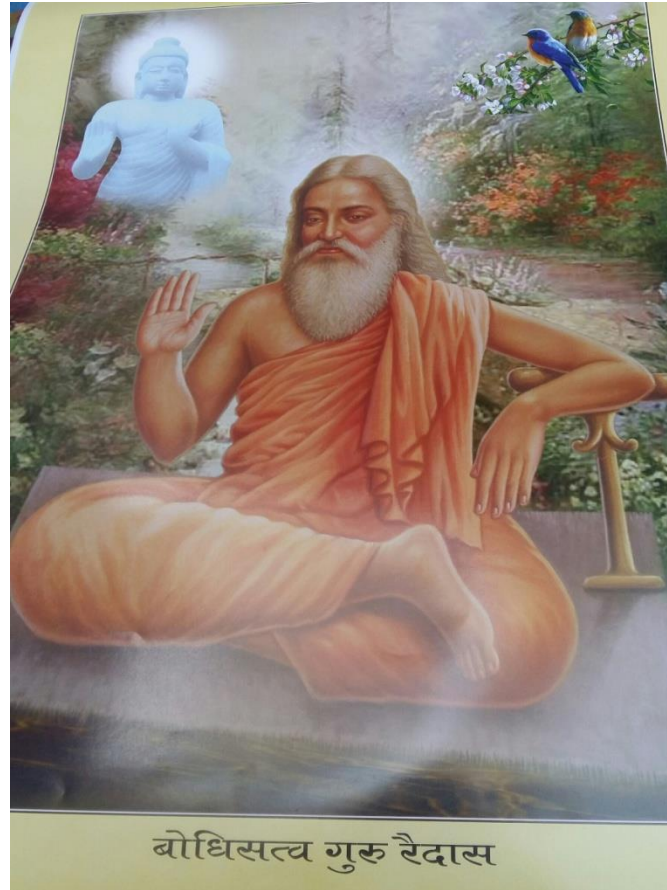
by Peshwa Baji Rao II intended to attack Pune. On their way, they were met by a 800-strong Company force that was on its way to reinforce the British troops in Pune. The Peshwa dispatched around 2,000 soldiers to attack the Company force stationed in Koregaon. Led by Captain Francis Staunton, the Company troops defended their position for nearly 12 hours. The Marathas ultimately withdrew, fearing the arrival of a larger British force led by General Joseph Smith.

The Company troops included predominantly Mahar Dalit soldiers belonging to the Bombay Native Infantry, and therefore the Dalit activists regard the battle as a heroic episode in Dalit history.

passed on independently that is claimed and attributed to Guru Ravidass Ji. Guru Ravidass was subversive in that his devotionism implied a levelling of the social divisions of caste and gender, yet ecumenical in that it tended to promote crossing of sectarian divides in the name of a higher spiritual unity.

Guru Ravidas taught that one is distinguished not by one's caste but by one's actions (karma) and that every person has the right to worship God and read holy texts. He opened a frontal attack against the system of Untouchability. He rejected the tradition of Brahmin mediator to reach the Supreme Being. He also said that one need not to hide his caste or leave his low profession to reach God. He became a model for his fellow beings to overcome the hierarchical barriers of Brahminical social order and to establish Begampura - a state without fear and sorrows. Guru Ravidas elevated the status of the labour by emphasizing on the fact that honest labour is empowering. Dalit Buddhists organizing fairs and cultural festival regularly in Delhi. Last year in 2015 2 such grand Dalit Buddhist fair were organized in Delhi. Saint Ravidas and some other factors are presenting a new dilemma for some Dalit Buddhists of north India. In north India most of the Dalit Buddhists are converted from Chamar caste. Ravidas is matter of pride them , and they do not want to leave Ravidas and his legacy. There are many Dalits who are trying to portray Ravidas as a Bodhisattva , this poster is depicting dilemma of these dalit Buddhist. However there is no evidence to prove that Ravidas a Dalit Buddhist. Sometimes these neo Buddhist found it difficult to abstain from the temptation to celebrate Hindu festivals.





[Guru Ravidas is being Brand as a Buddhist, although there is not valid base available for this assumption. photo taken by me at Jantar-Mantar .New Delhi.]

Other personality given space in these Dalit Bahujan monuments are Chhatrpati Shahuji Maharaj. Shahuji Maharaj initiated policy of reservation in jobs for Dalits and Muslims. He is pioneer of reservation policy in India.

There are many personalities in BSP's great men list who are from intermediate castes [OBC]. Due to this agenda of BSP some backward caste like Saini Mali [Gardner] also got their heroes in the form of Jyotiba Phule.

Thus Ambedkar's image is neither a novelty nor a bit of superficial decoration. Indeed, the physical attacks on Ambedkar images by lawbreakers, whether in Mumbai or Harsul, are testimony to that power. So, it is not unimportant that Ambedkar's image is not controlled by either non - Dalits or a small number of Dalit leaders. It is

an image that has been formed and continues to be recreated, B.R. Ambedkar is the one who stood up and spoke out. the teacher who wrote the book. Thus he is mainly portrayed as the literate man in the urban business suit, who points the way to an emancipation most fit for those who would abandon the life of the, landless labourer of the countryside.

The society which was kept aside for centuries sees these statues as a tool of emancipation. The location of statue is a common at a common public place creates a felling of assertion.

### **Savi Savarkar: Painting is my weapon**

Savi Savarkar is a veteran artist, who belongs to Maharashtra, is a pioneer of Dalit paintings in India .He had to face a lot of struggle to establish his space as a Dalit artist. Currently He is world renowned and a pioneer Dalit artist, he introduced the issue of Dalits in the mainstream contemporary art world

Savi not only challenged the boundaries' of main stream aesthetics in terms of weaving visual signifiers that have altogether a different connotations and defies the hegemony. His works located in the realm of countering the dominant Brahminical culture. Savi Savarkar is from Nagpur, Maharashtra .Hub of Ambedkrite movement in India .he was brought up in a strong radical Dalit movement environment. Since his childhood he has learnt about Ambedkarism. The society was highly receptive to the new changes that were initiated by Ambedkar and Savi absorbed those change from the beginning.

Since he was born in a poor family, most of the times he was unable to buy colours for his paintings, therefore most of the time he would draw with pencil. Savi Savarkar is considered the most prominent painter working on Dalit themes. He is a

Dalit himself and as a Dalit he can express dalit theme effectively. The most notable feature of his art is, it depicts the subject passionately and eloquently in support of all downtrodden and in condemnation of all those who continue to degrade the society . Savarkar represents the protest identity pole of Dalit art in contrast to the more general decorative integrationist pole seen in the most artists dealing with India's contemporary social condition .His intention is clear as he wants to achieve acceptance into the celebrated circle of art display ,but to do so while denouncing the identities of the very elite whom are controlling art world . Many times he was denied space for exhibiting his paintings, however he relentlessly tried and finally find space for exhibition.

He is a model revolutionary, who shows us that it can be done .In his work we can see vociferous assertion of anger at the historic oppression of Dalits and the women. His art speaks fearlessly about the Dalits<sup>108</sup> . He is the first Indian painter who depicted life of Devdasis through his paintings.

Noted art critic Tartakov says about Savi “I could gather the idea that many, if not most, artists are revolutionaries both in terms of their formal development and their social attitudes. Serious space is dedicated to the political and social protest found in Goya, Delacroix, Manet, Picasso and others. But, as anyone who looks through the bodies of their work will quickly notice, these artists actually produced very little social interest or impact. Whoever it was that Delacroix sought to serve with his Liberty Guiding the People, he never turned in their direction again. For all his enthralling colourism and figurative form,

Delacroix was an anti-democratic reactionary in his politics and his art. Picasso's Guernica is similarly unusual within his vast production. And this is our conundrum

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<sup>108</sup> Based on the telephonic conversation with Savi Savarkar .on 4 pm 21 December 2013

visible here and useful as a reminder of our own situation. How can one create revolutionary art in a medium institutionally dominated by the reigning elite? Contrary to the accepted wisdom, it is not only difficult, but relatively impossible to convince the elite to willingly sponsor their own indictment. For these reasons we must salute him<sup>109</sup>.”



A painting by Savi Savarkar

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<sup>109</sup> URL-<http://www.Savisawarkar.arttimes.in/critic%20view.html>



Brahmin man and Dalit woman By Savi Savarkar .

### **DALIT MITHILA PAINTINGS**

Mithila paintings have become a vogue in art circle. Mithila paintings are famous for their Mithila paintings first came into focus in 1934 when William G Archer, a British official, stumbled upon them while inspecting the damage caused by an earthquake discovered wall and floor paintings in the interiors of houses.

From 1936 to 1940 he photographed some of these paintings, some of which are at display at the British Library in London. In 1946 Archer published an article on these

paintings and later in 1977, his wife Mildred Archer provided further information and some interpretations of the paintings.

A major turning point however came in 1966 when following a massive draught, the All India Handicrafts Board, in an attempt to rebuild the draught stricken economy encouraged the women of Mithila to transfer their wall and floor paintings (of gods from the Hindu pantheon, floral and geometric designs known as aripan and large colourful images of lotuses surrounded by paired fish, turtles snakes and love birds indicating fertility known as kohbar) onto paper so that they can sell them and generate income for their families. Most commonly these paintings at that time were done by the wealthy Brahmin and Kayastha women. Ganga Devi from the Kayastha caste and Sita Devi from the Brahmin Caste were the two pioneers of Mithila paintings on paper and their art was received enthusiastically by the public. They evolved two distinctive styles of painting. Ganga Devi did extremely detailed kanchi or line paintings using fine nib pens and only black and red ink, producing a kind of painting that came to be associated with the Kayastha community. Sita Devi developed the bharni style or filled associate with the Brahmin community.

This style depicts large, colourful figures made using a straw or a bamboo stick either frayed at the end, or with a rag or wad of cotton at the tip, to serve as a reservoir for the paint. Through the 80s and 90s many other women of their caste followed their lead.

Between 1972 and 78 Erika Moser, a German anthropologist, made several visits to Sita Devi s village, Jitwarpur to study and film the crafts and rituals of the Dusadhs, a Dalit community. Moser urged the Dusadh women to also start painting on paper to generate additional income for the house. Unfamiliar with the complex imagery used by the Kayastha and Brahmin women, the Dusadh women encouraged by Moser,

began to take inspiration from their own oral, cosmological and aesthetic traditions and created their own three distinctive styles and techniques. The first, initiated by Chano Devi derived from the tattoo images many of them had on their arms and legs.

This style came to be known as Godna (tattoo) paintings. These paintings largely composed of rows and concentric circles of flowers, fields, animals, figures and spirits drawn with a pointed bamboo pen and lampblack ink. This style was adopted by many Dusadh women and soon was further innovated to include the use of bamboo brushes and a range of colours made from flowers, leaves, barks, berries, etc. The themes of the paintings also expanded and they came to include complex scenes from their daily village life and ritual practices. The tree of life, images of Hindu Gods and the 27 legendary hero of the Dusadhs Raja Salhesh have also started appearing commonly in the paintings of Chano Devi and other artists using the Godna technique.<sup>110</sup>

Till date Godna remains the most popular style used by Dusadh artists. Chano Devi and her husband Rodi Paswan in their attempts to popularize and mainstream this art form have trained several artists. Ganeshwar Paswan, a fellow of Dalit Foundation is an artist trained by Chano Devi. Paswan has in turn trained five women namely with assistance from Dalit Foundation and is in the process of training 10 more in Madhubani.

Inspired by the resolve of these artists, Dalit Foundation aims to create a training centre where more and more Dalits can be trained in Godna art and be thus equipped to earn a decent livelihood. Dalit Foundation has also arranged for Chano Devi to train and guide five more Dalit women in Godna with each of them producing three

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<sup>110</sup> Szanton, L. David. Mithila painting :the Dalit Intervention .Dalit art and visual imagery. Edi.gary.m.tartakov.2012.New Delhi .Oxford University Press,pp.221

paintings a month. Through this programme the Foundation aims to link Godna artists with the mainstream market in order to provide them with a sustainable source of livelihood and to cut out from the process the commission of the exploitative middle men<sup>111</sup>.

The second Dalit style of paintings was initiated by Jamuna Devi from the Chamar caste and was quickly adapted by Dusadh women as well. This style of painting produces large colourful images of deities and legendary figures using the frayed end of a bamboo stick. The most distinguishable feature of this style is the drawing of two lines with gohar (cow dung) with black dots between the lines to mark the frame as well as all around the depicted figures. In the 1980s Jamuna Devi innovated her style further by preparing the entire surface of the white paper with a light gohar wash to suggest the texture of a mud wall. Though this process caused some dismay earlier, due to its aesthetic and commercial success, it has now become a standard procedure for almost all Dusadh and some upper caste painters. The third style of painting developed by Dusadh artists was geru (brown) painting. This style was used only by two or three artists in the late 70s and 80s. The paintings depicted bold figures of deities, animals and plants mostly in brown with a few bright color contrasts. However this style did not attract buyers and soon disappeared from the repertoire<sup>112</sup>.

These examples prove that if given chance and facilities Dalits are no less than any in terms of artistic expression.

As can be discerned from the above tract, Dusadh painters have been extremely innovative and experimental in their styles and techniques and have been rapidly expanding the scope of their art. Images of Hindu deities especially Krishna and

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<sup>111</sup> URL-<http://www.Dalitfoundation.org/godna.htm>

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.



Shiva; the sun and the moon; various Dusadh rituals; Rahu, the Dusadh Sun God; of the life and adventures of Raja Salhesh; and the Tree of Life often filled with animals, birds, insects and sometimes even people are common imagery used by Dusadh artists conveying the variety of subjects in their art. Dusadh paintings have been both influenced by and have in turn influenced the paintings of other Maithili communities. In fact, they have also become part of the national mainstream art as several urban artists from other communities in India have been incorporating Godna images into their paintings.

Due to this Dalit venture into Madhubani paintings these Dalit women got respectable place with other swarna caste women. Madhubani paintings has paved a path for them for earning as well as they become famous .they were subject of research as well as uplifted their status in society. They got a chance to participate in conference, art fair, festival and recognition not only in India but also abroad.

This new found empowerment though Madhubani painting has paved path for Dalit women to display there skill .it has boosted their confidence brought them money, which is essential for social promotion.

During my investigation I interviewed one young Dalit Mithila artist ,Malvika raj from Patna ,Bihar<sup>113</sup>.

#### **INTERVIEW OF DALIT MITHILA PAINTER: Malvika Raj**

She is a self taught artist and has made a whole series on Buddha's life. Her work is wonderful. When I asked her what has motivated her to paint .she replied –that arts especially fine art in India are dominated by a certain class. they think its their

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<sup>113</sup> Interview was held on 2 january,2016 in New Delhi at 11a.m.

hegemony on all practices . Paintings with growing gallery and exhibition culture has become a symbol of elite culture. i want to break this hegemony as an artist and especially as a Dalit artist. On painting about Buddha ,s life she said she wanted to depict life of Buddha as an inspiration to Dalits .Ambedkar has taught us to follow the path of Buddha .which is not like other religion ,it has its own unparallel rationality and in the coming era the thoughts of Buddha and religion of Buddha will be most suitable as it does not contradict with rationality and modernity .by adopting Dalits may feel proud that they are follower of a modern ideology ,which on the other hand freed them with the quote of Buddha “APPO DIPO BHAV” =be your light.

Her depiction of Dalit life is vivid, impressive and surreal .she uses dark shades for her paintings . she has revolutionized Madhubani art scene by her thought provoking themes .Malvika is inspired by her father who is a devout Buddhist<sup>114</sup> .

Recalling an incident, she says, ‘I remember once in Patna Art College where I was exhibiting my paintings; a man in monks saffron robe walked in and without even viewing all my paintings, he started questioning me with his foul comments as how can I divert Madhubani from its original forms of Hindu gods and goddesses to Buddha’ These incidents happen, but she brushes them off by saying, ‘I paint Mahatma Buddha’s stories in Madhubani because I think first of all Buddha stays in my heart. The starting reason might be my father who himself is a Buddhist. We kids often heard stories about Buddha and his preaching from him. Later on I studied some literature on Buddha too.’”

When I asked her how “Buddha can bring change to Dalit society she said “Buddha was rational and practical. As a follower I too believe in rationality and modernity and

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<sup>114</sup> URL-<http://www.lionsroar.com/Indian-artist-malvika-raj-challenges-tradition-and-caste-to-paint-scenes-from-the-Buddhas-life/>

these ideas of Buddha will be intact even in the age of ultra modernization and scientific development. As followers of Buddha we try to rationalize trivial questions about life and definitely this rationality escapes us from many useless energy wasting, time consuming rituals and activities and thoughts .

Painting: life of an untouchable BY Malvika Raj. This painting depicts the life of untouchables who were forced to hang a pitcher in their neck so they could spit in and would not pollute the road. A broom is tied to his waist so he can wipe off his footprints from the road. This is not a mere imagery; this was real. This sort of discrimination was imposed on Dalits during the reign of Peshwas, who wanted to establish Hindu Padshahi in India.



*Dalit Man with his son* by Malvika Raj

Peshwas forced Dalits of Maharashtra's to a sub-human category ,later Mahar soldiers led by Britishers defeated Marathas in the battle of Koregaon .this was the most decisive battle for Marathas. Peshwas,s army's defeat in this battle ended the Peshwa Maratha rule from Maharashtra. Battle of Koregaon is a moment of pride for Dalits . every year lakhs of dalit gather at the battle field of Koregaon to commemorate those 900 Dalit Mahar soldiers who routed a strong army of 20,000 Peshwa soldiers. According to General Thomas Hislop called the battle "one of the most heroic and brilliant achievements ever recorded on the annals of the army".<sup>115</sup>

British army built a pillar to commemorate this victory .every year on the battle of Koregaon day lakhs of dalit gathers to pay homage to those brave Dalit soldiers.

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<sup>115</sup> [\*Gazetteer of the Bombay.Presidency\*](#) Government Central Press. 1885. pp. 244–247.



Photo: Koregaon pillar built by British army to commemorate the win. This place is now a pilgrimage for Dalits. Dharma chakra in blue colour is visible .symbol of Dalit Buddhist movement of India. Most of the Maharashtrian Mahar Dalits have embraced Buddhism.

### **Visual production By Chindu**

Chindu records the deep-rooted cultural values, artistic traditions and changing experiences of Dalit life through its documentaries and short films. It uses the medium of film as a platform for critical debate and construction of opinions in building a positive image of Dalit life.



In addition to documentaries and short films, Chindu has initiated plans to document folk songs, musical instruments, traditional knowledge systems and practices, which are fast disappearing.

Chindu is uniting Dalit youths to take part in creative activities like dance and drama. Chindu is organizing cultural festivals of Dalits . Chindu is creating a parallel culture to cater the need of Dalits.



A painting By Chindu: artist unknown



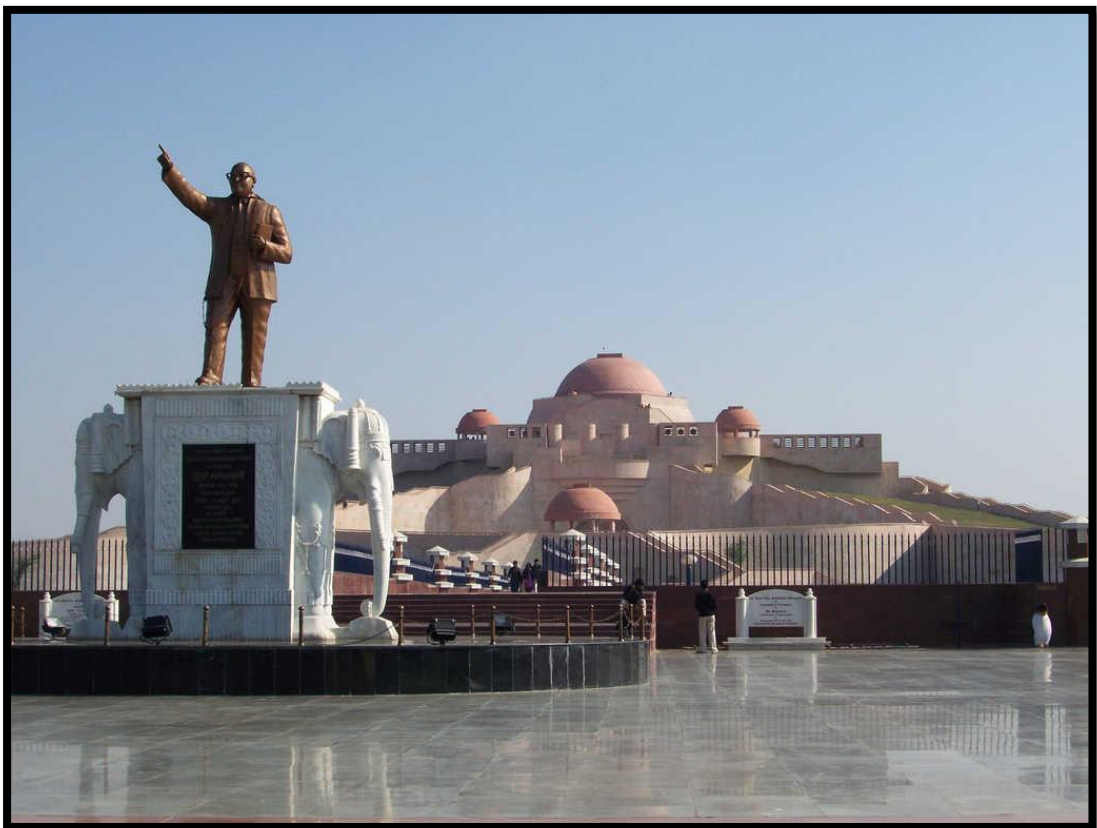
A painting By Chindu: artist unknown

### **Dalit –Bahujan monuments built by Bahujan samaj party**

Bahujan samaj party came into power in 1995. With a clear agenda of Dalit emancipation and holding the power key Bahujan samaj party did well all sorts of activities to boost Dalit proud. In India Dalits have no place where they could feel proud ,most of the religious centres were prohibited for them till recently to commemorate Bahujan icons Mayawati built several monuments . The most notable of these monuments is Ambedkar park of Lucknow.



To commemorate different leaders of Bahujan Samaj [society] ,BSP built several monuments across the Uttar Pradesh . Along with building the monuments BSP also changed names of many districts and gave them new name inspired by Bahujan personalities. Newly given name of districts are Sant kabir Nagar, Ravidas Nagar, Gautama Buddha Nagar, Mahamaya Nagar, a new district ,Shaheed Udham Singh Nagar<sup>116</sup> was created to commemorate dalit sikh revolutionary



A view of Ambedkar Park at Lucknow: Built in regim of chief minister of Uttar Pradesh Ms Mayawati

Many monuments were given name Bahujan Prerna Sthal बहुजन प्रेरणा स्थल, means a place for inspiration for Bahujan people. These grand structure were mostly based on Buddhist architecture, Ambedkar park of Lucknow is built like a Buddhist Stupa.

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<sup>116</sup> Now part of state of Uttrakhand

Many stone images Elephant Party symbol of BSP are installed at this park. One branch of Bodhi tree is also planted at one corner of park.

#### Individual Dalit painters

Paintings of P. Selvakumar depicts discrimination in a vivid way with just a coconut shell on a table with use-and-throw tumblers strewn around. In a painting, water pumped from the ground was fetched in two containers - a tumbler and a coconut shell. This painting is clearly showing and challenging the concept of sacred and profane . In old times people did not accepted water from Dalits. This practice is still present in many parts of India like Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Tamilnadu and karnatka<sup>117</sup> .

V. Senthilselvan depicted headless human beings. Poverty was another theme that was vibrantly portrayed in a woman in tears with rats and a cat enjoying their time in a kitchen. These two painters of Tamilnadu are trying hard to assert their identity in the form of their work<sup>118</sup> . The colourful depiction narrated a history soaked in prejudice. The colours and figures that dominated the paintings were black and red, swords, rural scenes, impoverished workers and village deities. The Dalit Resource Centre provided space for the painters who had captured moments of the oppressed community that usually escaped the eyes of many. To encourage emerging Dalit art

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<sup>117</sup> The Hindu ,April 3,2008- GULBARGA: The social boycott of the Dalits in Bairamadagi village in Afsalpur taluk in Gulbarga district, for more than a week by the “upper castes” in the village, has come to light now.

Senior Dalit leaders, including National Vice-President of the Republic Party of India Shivaram Moga, former GDA Chairman Vittal Doddamani, Dalit Sangharsha Samiti District Convener Suresh Hadimani, Dalit Sena Chief Hanumanth Yelsangi and other Dalit leaders told presspersons here today that the social boycott of the Dalits had come to their knowledge two days ago and a delegation of the Dalit leaders were leaving for the village to study the situation and chalk out the future course of action.

Mr. Moga said that the practice of untouchability was still prevailing in Bairamadagi village and the Dalits were denied entry into the hotels and were served tea in separate cups. During the Holi celebrations, the Dalits had reportedly entered the hotel and demanded to be served tea like everyone else.

<sup>118</sup> The Hindu, 18March 2007 (www.chindu.org, 2012)

and identity. The Dalit Resource Centre, a department of the Tamil Theological Institute at Madurai, has brought together artists and encouraged them to paint Dalit themes. In Kerala, a new ethnological museum, Adikalakendra, displays the extreme importance of the preservation of Scheduled Castes art and Scheduled Tribe's plethora of primitive art.

#### Culture of Dalit panther

In the late 1970 number of educated unemployed youth suddenly emerged .indeed some youth were Dalit too. This situation brought radicalism among youths .this was the time when Naxaladi movement had been started .times were not good .radicalism and rebellion was becoming of motto of youths around the world. Hippie movement started in early sixties . They countryside of Uttar Pradesh witnessed many caste feuds .land reforms were halted. Kulaks just begin to accumulate wealth. during this period rising Dalit atrocities against the Dalits were generally provoked by the assertive acts of this new generation of educated Dalits who openly defied caste hierarchies .their assertive acts not only worried upper caste employers who relied on a submissive labour force . Panther played an important role in formation of new radical Dalit indemnity.



A poster,s comparison of dalit panther and Black panther of America. Dalit panther borrowed ideology from Black panther

## Chapter Four

### Art of Identity and Resistance by Nepalese Dalits

#### Locating and Identifying Nepali Dalits

Social construction of Nepal is quite similar of India. Nepal and India have so much shared history. Varna system same as India is present in Nepal, may be in more crude form as we know monarch had a great faith in Manu smiriti. Manu smiriti is a Hindu scripture which clearly supports birth based varna system and advocates discriminatory practices against Dalits . Dalit people of Nepal are very similar to Indian Dalits in structure and in castes. There is barely any Dalit caste which is not found in India. According to many scholars people of non-Mongolied race migrated from india to Nepal . Nepalese Mongolied those who call themselves KHASA claim to be aborigines of land. 17% of Nepalese population is Dalit according to some sources. Though there are many views on exact population of Dalits in Nepal, but government recognized Dalits constitutes 17% population of Nepal. in Nepal the word Dalit is used in governments documents and the word Dalit is official ,unlike india where Dalits are recognized as scheduled castes by government .

The term Dalits means the oppressed groups but it is highly politicized and contested nature of caste discourse in Nepal in recent years. Dalit is a self-inscriptive term recently adopted by leadership of various formerly low caste groups to distinguish themselves from the Hindu high castes. Dalits is used to refer only to those groups categorized by the law and who belong to formerly untouchable castes. Mary Cameron<sup>119</sup> in her ethnographic article titled 'Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a New Nepal', examines the articulation between two kinds of discursive realms (Urban

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<sup>119</sup>, Cameron, Mary M. 2010. Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a new Nepal. In Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice. Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books.pp34-42

activists' quest for political identity and rural Dalit agency emerges from inter caste exchanges in mixed caste communities) involving Dalit identity and caste relations in Nepal. She presents a case of an old, rural Dalit woman from Bajhang, waiting outside the doorway of a Thakuri home for *riti maagnay* (economic and social transaction between artisan and high caste farmers). This is an example how caste is still dominant factor in Nepalese society. The woman was asking small handful of salt and a piece of turmeric root. On the contrary, Dalits intellectual claimed that they have been discriminated socially, culturally, economically and religiously and some of them have been working within the caste reform or dismantle movement and asked that their real name be used to differentiate Dalits from other group in the name of identity. Explicitly, importance of caste eradication and intermingling needs of rural Dalits and perpetuation of Dalit category for the politics of identity are undergoing among activist Dalits in Nepal. Dalit activists are dynamically negotiating the symbols of identity politics, agency as political identity with attendant desires for power, in the country's post revolution democracy.

I would like to Analyzes genesis of the term Dalit, etymological meaning and its usage among intellectuals, academia and everyday life world of common people. The term was first introduced to Nepal by India's most famous untouchable, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar when he visited Nepal in 1956. It was used in the name of the first organization in Nepal to address untouchable issues, Rashtriya Nepal Dalit Jana Vikash Parishad in 1967. The term Dalit is still unfamiliar to people and Dalit themselves in many rural communities in Nepal. The two sets of discourses for and against the continuation of Dalit symbols are presented throughout her writing. By presenting discussions of the internet community, Nepaldalinfo,<sup>120</sup> the author vividly

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<sup>120</sup> URL-<http://www.Nepaldalinfo.20m.com/>

analyzes for the retaining and elimination of the symbol Dalit. Some activists argued that the term is regarded as a symbol of pride and heritage rather than emblem of scorn, and one that presents and unifies different groups of people with similar history of oppression. Therefore the word Dalit captures the legacy of unique oppression and experience for separate identity in Nepal. In the defence of the criticism of the term an Indian product, the author quotes Om Prakash VK Gahatraj "it is right, many things are imported from India including foods, and culture, because we are an open border. Truly when Baba Saheb Ambedkar came in Nepal on 1956 and had important discussions with the Dalit leaders of Nepal, since then the word Dalit was used to address this community"<sup>121</sup>. On the objection of the use of the symbol Dalit, the author quotes many activists. For instance, Prakash Nepal said, "when someone calls Dalit, I feel humiliated no matter how qualified I am...A doctor, an engineer, a scientist, a teacher, no matter who we are, we are tagged as Dalit...which will make our generation shameful forever" . Similarly, Dr. Ramesh Sunar said, "I do dislike the term Dalit. It comes across like a gaali (insult) to me. No one is born Dalit. We are made to be Dalit...by describing yourself Dalit you are propagating the belief the other side forced upon us and accepting your position in the society" . This type of dialogue is still undergoing among Dalit intellectuals in Kathmandu. Urban activists' identity discourse and the case of rural Dalit appear asymmetrical connection because the roles of rural artisan on social change, livelihood strategies and new identity seem invisible in the mainstream identity politics that needs further study on micro-macro and agency-structure linkage of identity processes among Dalits of Nepal. My argument is that asserting Dalit identity does not create similar meaning for different categories, socioeconomic status and strategic location of Dalits.

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<sup>121</sup> Folmar, Steven. 2010. *Identity among Dalits in Nepal*. In *Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice*. Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books p.18

Steven Flomar fleshed out dimensions of Dalit identity politics, including a set of actions that are called the politics of anonymity to attempt to further comprehend Dalit resistance to their social oppression.

Flomar has reviewed renowned academic literature of caste system and summarized his ethnographic observation he has made on issues of Dalit agency, or 'their culturally constrained ability to act'. It indicates to a particular kind of socio-political action that is akin to identity politics, within which domain as he indicates the multiple ways identity is managed, and how each action was employed as a strategy to regulate relations with others. Flomar presents case of a Brahmin (Acharya), who lives nearby Dalits' settlement and shares meat(foods) with Damai and Sharki on holidays and freely entered each others' house in Jharuwarasi. As the author presented, it could be argued that informal education classes, foreign labor migration, migration also changed orthodox caste system in the local level. Dalit models of identity are various in local levels that Flomar called 'everything is experiment'. My argument is that identity politics is very much strategic and contextual with local understanding of life success and long term livelihood in the particular community.

Dumont believes that the logic of caste hierarchy is based on a synchronic ideology of ritual status not on the "historical processes of exploitation and discriminations"<sup>122</sup>. But in the historical process and the genesis of the performance rituals, we find that the basic contradiction between the so called caste purity and the perpetuation of the process of exploitation by relegating to the Dalits their roles to handle the performing arts and yet remain segregated from the mainstream culture dominated by the Brahminic ideology, continues to form the basic pattern of domination

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<sup>122</sup> Cited in Mary M. Cameron, *on the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste in Nepal* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) p.11.



On the other hand new generations of Dalits have entered the process of advocating greater freedom, access and respect in public discourse.<sup>123</sup>

Dalits do not constitute a homogenous group. Like other ethnic/caste groups in Nepal, their population is fragmented and their heterogeneity extends to region, language, religion and culture. Moreover, there is a clear caste hierarchy within their ranks. Among Dalits, one group claims to be superior to another in terms of life-cycle rituals and many aspects of their day-to-day life. It can be said that Dalits themselves perpetuate the caste hierarchy despite opposing the practices of higher castes. More specifically their heterogeneity and hierarchy can be better explained in the following three broad regional groups identified by Dahal.

To understand the Nepalese society we must keep in mind that Nepal is a landlocked country with high mountains. There are mainly three geographical regions 1. Terayi - Terayi area is adjunct to India and people residing here have more than 90% similarities with Indian society in terms of social structure, language as well as culture. 2. Pahad-second region is called *PAHAD* means hilly region. In this region many Mongoloid tribes like Kirati, Newari reside. Third region is *PARAVAT-Parvat* means mountain. This region is a high altitude area, with some of the highest mountain in the world. People from all over the world visit this region for the purpose of tracking. This mountainous region dominated by Mongoloids and the population of Dalits is extremely low. In Nepal due to thousands of years of cross breeding it's common to see any Dalit with Mongoloid features.

(1) Dalits in the hill community: Broadly speaking this group comprises three major Hill Dalit groups in the Eastern and Central Regions: *Kami* (blacksmith or

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<sup>123</sup> Folmar, Steven. 2010. Identity among Dalits in Nepal. In *Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice*. Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books.

ironworkers), *Sarki* (cobblers or leather workers) and *Damai* (Tailors and Musicians). In the Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western Development Regions, there are many groups within them such as *Gaine* (singers and musicians) and *Badi* (entertainers and dancers), and many subgroups within the broad cultural groups of *Kami*, *Damai*, and *Sarki*. Linguistically, the mother tongue of this Dalit community is the Nepalese language and they follow the Hindu religion.

2) Dalits in the Tarai community: The Tarai Dalit community as a whole can be grouped into three broad linguistic groups: *Maithili*, *Bhojpuri* and *Awadhi*. The Dalits of the Eastern and Central regions speak Maithili as their mother tongue whereas the Dalit part of the Central and Western regions speak Bhojpuri and the Dalits of the Western and Far-Western regions speak Awadhi as their mother tongue. By tradition, they are Hindus and employ their own priests to perform rituals. The Dalits or untouchable groups in the Tarai community are as follows: *Tatma*, *Khatwe (Mandal)*, *Paswan (Dushad)*, *Mushahar*, *Batar*, *Dhobi (Baitha)*, *Chamar (Ram, Mochi)*, *Dom*, and *Halkhor*.

3) Dalits in the *Newari* community: *Newars* are considered to be the earliest Inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. The Dalit Development Committee identified the following *Newar* groups as Dalits – *Kusule* (death specialists, musicians and tailors), *Khadgi* (butchers and milk sellers), *Pode* (public sweepers), *Chyame or Chyamkhala* (sweepers, scavengers) and *Halahalu* (scavengers).

3 Although *Kami* is commonly translated as blacksmith or ironworkers, I prefer to use the term metal workers as this group also includes castes involved in working with

gold and other metal such as copper and bronze. For a detailed listing of the low caste Hindu groups or untouchables recorded in the Far-Western Hill region.<sup>124</sup>

5 Most *Tarai* untouchable castes are landless castes who work for higher castes as agricultural laborers. The issue of whether groups belonging to the *Newari* community should be called Dalits has been under controversy with the momentum of the *Newari* indigenous (*Adivasi*) movement, the complexity of the inter-sectionality of caste and ethnicity in Nepal in the case of *Newars*. The *Newars* of Kathmandu Valley represent a particular case. They have their own intra-ethnic caste ranking from Brahmins down to untouchables and are the heirs of a centuries-old high culture shaped by Buddhism and Hinduism. Ethnographic studies that have been done on *Newars* highlight the complex caste hierarchy and caste-based practices among *Newars* in the Kathmandu Valley<sup>125</sup>

The leaders of the *Newari* adivasi movement have now been successful in categorizing *Newars* as an indigenous nationality of Nepal. Their main contention is that the *Newars* are the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley who speak a Tibeto-Burmese language (*Newari*) and have their own culture and customs, but who were forced into the four-fold Hindu *Varna* system by Rana rulers. Hence they have been denied their cultural and linguistic rights and do not have adequate representation in government.

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<sup>124</sup> Dahal, Dilli R. 2010. Hindu Nationalism and Untouchable Reform: The Status of Dalits in Nepalese Society. in *SASON Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. Dilli R. Dahal and Laya P. Uprety eds. Volume 1. Kathmandu: SASON. P.p.9-13.

<sup>125</sup> (<http://www.nefin.org.np/component/content/article/115-information/347-indigenous-nationalities-ofNepal>).

While other ethnic groups without a caste hierarchy were clear about being called Indigenous groups or nationalities, whether *Newars* should be called indigenous or not became controversial. Some *Newars* and many non-*Newars* opposed their inclusion in the first official list, on the grounds that they were neither backward nor a homogeneous cultural group. Moreover, *Newars* as a whole have the highest developmental indicators, even higher than those of upper-caste Bahuns and Chhettris. The Nepal Human Development Report 1998 shows that *Newars* are economically better off than any other Nepalese community. Therefore, there was an economic argument for the de-listing of *Newars*. Despite the controversy, *Newars* are now on the list of Indigenous nationalities of Nepal.

What complicates the situation for a group like the sweeper caste (*Deulas*) who is listed as an untouchable caste under the old legal code and were considered Dalits is the question of where this group fits in the *Newari* indigenous movement, since, clearly, they are still stigmatized and excluded because of their caste-based occupation. Originally, the Ministry of Local Development had included the names of *Newar* Dalit castes like Khadgi (Kasai), Kapali (Kusule), Kuche, and Dhobi. However, *Newar* activists and some *Newar* Dalit groups made a petition to the National Dalit Commission in 2003 to exclude their names from the Dalit category, asserting that *Newars* were an indigenous group. They also argued that castes like *Khadgis* or *Kasai* and *Kusules* were categorized under “impure but touchable castes” and could not be put under the Dalit category. The National Dalit Commission excluded their names from the Dalit category. Subsequently, they did not register themselves as Dalits in the 2001 census.

The sweeper caste group petitioned to be kept within this category. In 2010, they were listed under the Dalit category in the list compiled by the Dalit NGO Federation and

were also registered as Dalits in the 2001 census. Despite this, the issue of whether a *Newar* group like the *Deulas* belongs to the category of Dalits remains ambiguous, the controversy of wanting or not wanting to be labelled as Dalits still continues to swirl. Recently, the Deula Society carried out a demonstration saying that they will resort to violence if the government does not include them among the Dalit group.

An activist from the sweeper community raised concerns about the issue of representation of low caste *Newars*, pointing to the fact that the *Newar* Indigenous movement is led by affluent and high-caste *Newars*. He was concerned that the advocates of this movement were trying to integrate all *Newar* groups into the *Newar* Indigenous movement without addressing the caste issue. Some pertinent questions he raised were: What are the long-term implications of not being called Dalits even though one might still face caste-based discriminatory practices, for example, in the case of sweepers, because of one's stigmatized occupational caste status? Who has the right to speak on behalf of lower castes *Newars* like *Deulas*? What benefits will they get from being called indigenous (*adivasi*) as opposed to being called Dalit? How will a distinction be made between affluent *Newars* and non-affluent *Newars*? Can non-Dalit *Newars* speak on behalf of the historically oppressed lower caste *Newar* groups?

Where does a group like sweepers (*Deulas*) fit within this movement? In this regard the current leaders have not been able to effectively address the heterogeneity of the *Newar* communities. The case of the sweeper caste is an example of how a formerly untouchable group is caught between classifications as an indigenous group and as a caste group, although they fit in both groups. This complex inter-sectionality has not been addressed by the leaders. It remains to be seen whether this community will be successful in getting their names included as Dalits because such categorization has far reaching implications. NEFIN has tried to justify the diversity by saying they will

give priority to economically oppressed groups, although they do not say how. For example, the NEFIN website's categorization of Indigenous nationalities of Nepal includes the following: endangered group highly marginalized group, marginalized group, disadvantaged group and advanced group. *Newars* are categorized under "advanced group." There is no sub-categorization under the advanced group even though *Newars* are a heterogeneous group. What is unclear is how they will make a distinction between different classes without alluding to occupational and hence caste statuses of groups like sweepers and those below them. In other words, will the fight for cultural and linguistic rights trump the caste status of communities like *Deulas*? The latter speak *Newari* and suffer language discrimination, are deprived of their cultural rights but are at the same time discriminated against because of their caste status. What happens if Dalits are granted more representative rights and if *Deulas* are disallowed under the category of Dalits and instead categorized under indigenous group? Some of my respondents in the field were concerned that they would have to face long term consequences if they lost their Dalit status, especially if the new constitution has a more favourable proportional representation/affirmative action policy for Dalits.

The case of the sweeper community then speaks directly to the complexities of questions of identity and resistance. Given this basic historical contextualization of the research problem, the following section provides a brief explanation of the empirical parameters used for this research.

The Nepal Dalit Commission (NDC) identified and listed three categories of Dalits of Nepal. Among them Terai Dalits are most marginalized sections and among them Musahars is the lowest socio-economic group. Dahal presents cases of upward social mobility of Dalits by radical improvement of their economic situation. With

references of case studies of Teli, Sudi and Kalwar from Tarai; and Kasai from Kathmandu, Dahal claims that economic status supports upward caste mobility<sup>126</sup>. His point is caste and socio economic statuses of people are complementary to each other. The author concluded that Dalits themselves have the deep rooted psychological inferiority complex, encouraging the social exclusion model within their structure. Relatively better educated and rich Dalit groups practice social exclusion within Dalits. Economic improvement plays important roles to enhance political and social status and gradually upward social mobility from the untouchable to analyze Dahal's argument, it is clear that Dalit is neither socio economically homogeneous caste groups nor culturally unchangeable throughout history. There are so-called Dalits who are socioeconomically and politically higher status than so called high caste groups. Their heterogeneity and hierarchy can be better explained into three broad regional groups: Hill Dalits, Tarai Dalits and Newar Dalits. Among Hill Dalits, Kamis are treated highest in social rank and they have better economic status too. The Badis are the lowest hierarchy and the most marginalized among Hill Dalits. Among Tarai Dalit Halkhor, Dhobi, Chidimar and Dushad are better position than Musahar and Dom. Their literacy rate is also indicator to show socio economic status of the group. The highest literacy rate among Tarai Dalits is the Halkhor (31.3%) and the lowest is the Musahar (7.3%) In terms of social exclusion, Krisha B. Bhattachan analyzes that practices of untouchability, in his term "greatest crime against humanity" is one of hallmarks of Dalits' exclusion in Nepalese society Since Dalits are still struggling for the elimination of all form of caste-based discriminations, proportional representation at all levels and reservation in politics, education and employment; he claims that the

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<sup>126</sup> Dahal, Dilli R. 2010. Hindu Nationalism and Untouchable Reform: The Status of Dalits in Nepalese Society. in *SASON Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*. Dilli R. Dahal and Laya P. Uprety eds. Volume 1. Kathmandu: SASON

discourse of social inclusion is like "old wine in a new bottle" in Nepal. In the eastern Tarai majority of plain migrants are of poor low caste but are dominated by minority high caste migrants' leadership wherever they settle." As important to the question of hill or plain cultural dominance in the Tarai as the factor of caste ranking is the factor of economic status. The two are related, that is, low caste migrants virtually have low economic status".<sup>127</sup> Economic categories like farm labourer, caste–occupation are poor, low caste people, who have little capacity to exert influence in local community affairs. "Such affairs are, as a rule, the domain of the largest of the landowners and occasionally shopkeeper's importance".<sup>128</sup> Increasing job opportunities create decreasing economic dependence on high caste landowners and further forebode a social and political independence as well. Socially and economically marginalized section of people were ranked on bottom of hierarchy, called untouchable in course of nation-state formation. Aahuti has focused on historical materialistic relationship and economy is the infrastructure of caste based discrimination by imposing fatalistic religious ethos. Higher caste categories tend to legitimize the existing caste system by giving it an aura of divine origin; both genuine personal beliefs and bad faith to perpetuate the status quo act on the creation of this sentiment. Dalit intellectuals are divided on main approaches of emancipation and many of them are projected in international NGOs that weakened Dalit liberation movement in Nepal. Contemporary forms of lower castes labour in Nepal are a historical consequence of their positions in society. This historical perspective on labour, attempts to bring into "increasingly

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<sup>127</sup> Gaize, Frederick H. 1975. P.78 *Regionalism and National Unity in Nepal*. Delhi: Vikash Publishing House PVT.LTD.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.p.80



complex patterns of occupational multiplicity in the category of 'agricultural labourer'".<sup>129</sup>

There is no doubt that NGO's are playing a major role in the upliftment of Dalits, they are into advocacy, making plans and strategy for them. But due project nature of NGO's it is difficult for them to carry forward any long term or social, political agenda. Their works are confined to the limits of given project.

To begin with categorical opposition between the pure and the impure Louis Dumont holds through that it entails two aspects. The first aspect is hierarchy by which he means that the pure is superior to the impure and that the two are in complementary relationship; the second aspect is separation, whereby the pure must necessarily be kept apart from the impure central interest is to ask how untouchables of today's India go about making a positive conception of self for themselves, while simultaneously launching a deep critique of core Hindu values. His concern is with the problem of self making of the untouchable under condition of adversity. He tries to us content, form and style of a way of thinking that has been fashioned by Chamars to take advantages of the opportunities for social redress afforded them by democratic ideology of India. Chamars ideology is contrasted by themselves, of who they are and who they wish to be. The author depicts that how Chamars of Lucknow turn social dependence into a strategic political resource, and how they 'compose a tenable, coherent voice from within their dependent culture'<sup>130</sup> Steven Parish points out in the context of caste societies of South Asia, people are not merely Homo Hierarchicus – to use the gloss of French Structuralist Louis Dumont- though they are certainly influenced by the

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<sup>129</sup> Cameron, Mary M. 2010. P. 217 *Many Dalits: Debating Identity in a new Nepal. In Dalits of Nepal: Towards Dignity, Citizenship and Justice.* Arjun Guneratne ed. Lalitpur: Himal Books.

<sup>130</sup> Khare, S.R. 1984. *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamar.* Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. P. 17

values of hierarchy; they are not solely constituted by hierarchical premises, but also have moments of insight into the social order as a constructed political order<sup>131</sup> Gopal Guru depicts Dalit Movement in Indian that was total alienation of Dalit groups from natural and human resources. This economic deprivation geared multidimensional marginalization of Dalits. There has been continuous erosion of Dalit corporate identity after Ambedkar on the other hand there have been constant attempts on the part of the Hindu communal forces to Hinduised Ambedkar for the subsequent assimilation of Dalits into Hindu fold.

Economic liberalization and globalization phenomena develop new class. The traditional hierarchy of caste based consumer culture has been diluting day by day. In this globalization context of peripheral culture, Katharine argued a person may be 'low caste' in the context of traditional patronage relations, but upon earning a cash income and accumulating 'modern' consumer goods, the same person may identify and ultimately become identified as 'middle class'. As they enter into wage relations outside their neighbourhoods, that is, low castes loosen the patronage bonds assigned at birth, thus transforming the meaning of their caste identity and local landscape of power<sup>132</sup>.

The story of caste based discrimination is same as of India. As Nepal is a majority Hindu society and they follow a strict Hindu ritualistic life which declares Dalits as outcaste. As well as Nepal is heavily influenced by Manu smiriti: the code of Manu, which has been considered the rule book of caste based discrimination in south Asia.

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<sup>131</sup> Parish, Steven M. ( 1997). *Hierarchy and its Discoutents: Culture and the Politics of Consciousness in Caste Society*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.56

<sup>132</sup> Rankin, Katharine N. 2004. *The Cultural Politics of Markets: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal*. London: Pluto Press. P.14

Dr Ambedkar is also considered ideologue of Dalit movement in Nepal. Nepalese society, culture and politics are heavily influenced by India. Many of the top Nepalese leaders have studied in India or have been to India. Nepalese Maoists have close connections with Indian Maoists. Social structure of Terayi region of Nepal and India is almost same, same caste, same language like Maithili is spoken in some districts of Nepal, though Nepalese nationalists are critic of Indian role in Nepal and always sceptical about role of Indians in Nepalese politics. In Nepal India is seen as a aggressor country by many Nepalese as well as by Nepalese masses. Even there was an anti-india wave during Maoists heydays and it is still present in Nepalese people disputes like *KALA PANI* and other petty border disputes have also severed Indian Nepalese relations. Though there is harmonious relation among Nepalese and Indian Dalits because of same issue and caste similarities. One lady activist of there is acceptance of Dr Baba Saheb Ambedkar in the Dalit movement in Nepal and many claim themselves as Ambedkrite but there are very few among them who want to convert to Buddhism as a change. Most of them want to remain with their caste identities or fight without being religious. Dr Ambedkar had visited Nepal in 1956 to attend World Buddhist Conference and was very disturbed to see the plight of the untouchables there. He visited many Dalits villages and colonies in Lalitpur and Deopatan area of Kathmandu and expressed his disappointment. One of the great Dalit leaders Late Mohan Lal Kapali took Dr Ambedkar to various places where living conditions were utterly pathetic. According to Om Prakash Gahatraj, a leading Ambedkarite in Nepal,<sup>133</sup> ‘When Baba Saheb visited Dalit Basti (Area) and saw the worst condition of Dalits; he became angered against the attitude of Nepal Govt. towards Dalits of Nepal. Seeing the anger mood of Baba Sahib, the liaison officer

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<sup>133</sup>Ravat ,vidyabhushan Dilemma of Dalit movement in Nepal  
URL-<http://www.countercurrents.org/rawat120514.htm>

who was associated on behalf of Govt. in the visit reported the anger of Baba Saheb to the Prime Minister of Nepal (Mr. Tanka Prasad Acharya). After the return of Baba Saheb to the Guest House (Sital Nivas), Then Prime Minister Hon. Acharya invited Baba Saheb to his residence to talk about this matter. When Baba Saheb showed his reluctance to go in his residence, Hon Acharya himself came to the Sital Nivas and assured to Baba Saheb to give due attention to the development of Dalits’.

### **Fundamentals of Nepalese Dalit Aesthetics**

Aesthetics is study of nature, human society and its interrelation with arts. When beauty of nature and human society interact it produce wonderful results. In terms of social consciousness and Marxist perspective it looks into social class formation. Depiction of social life and is must for evolutionary people oriented arts. Sense of aesthetics grows from lower to higher level, and this is the basis of development of aesthetic theory.

Here in Nepal many Dalit thinkers and activist are in favour of amalgamation of Marxist perspective with Dalit aesthetics. Maoist and other left movements in Nepal paved a path for Dalit emancipation in Nepal. In Nepal Maoist also used to have their cultural wing. Many Dalits were active in those cultural wings. The work of cultural wing was to educate masses through songs, skit about class consciousness.

Ghanshayam Dhakal asks “who needs Dalit aesthetics?”<sup>134</sup> What is the relevance of Dalit aesthetics? This is indeed a peculiar question. Dalits are oppressed class. Hindu caste system has created classes in the form of castes. The way of Dalit liberation is simple and straight. Dalit liberation is similar to class liberation. They should fight a fully fledged war with oppressor in the form of cultural production and counter

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<sup>134</sup> Dalit soundary shashtr , 2014.sambhavna re swarup .edi.maharjan ,rajendr.samta foundation.p.65

culture. Marxist aesthetics is most suitable for resistance. The idea of class liberation is more approachable for a Dalits rather than arguing them about Hindu social system. Both Dalit question and class question can catalyst each other. He further argues that without Marxist perspective, Dalit aesthetics are baseless. Ghanshayam Dhakal, here seeing Dalit problem from the Marxist perspectives. For him this is all about class. But he forgot to interpret that caste overlaps class and no matter how rich is a Dalit, he remains untouchables in the views of supporters of upper caste people.

The contradiction of the caste- based society and be seen in the very process of relegating different roles to Dalit groups in the society. The greatest contradiction and the hypocritical foundation of the Brahminic religious-aesthetic construct can be seen in the role of performances assigned to the social classes like the Damais, Gaines and Badis. Each of these castes has been traditionally assigned roles in the performance culture of this country. The main components of the performance are related to music, musical instruments, dancing and drama.

Dalit performances do not follow dialogical texts, nor do they follow any improvisations of dramatic nature. The interactive power of the Dalit performance is acquired through the dynamism of the moments and occasions. The recipients are those who recreate their thrills for the festivals or occasions like wedding, *rites de passage* or any other such moments. Dalit performance art does bring the community together, creates a *mélange* of various socio-cultural practices, and brings the deities and the humans and future hopes and present reality together. The theatre of the performance is thus a space as well as the psyche of the audience who wake up to a new reality of life, for example, when the performers create music, perform dances or present short plays. The most important performance in the hills the music created by the Damais *Panchai Baja* band. But the contradiction is that a caste-created gulf

separates the performers and the recipients. Despite all the closeness that people feel on the occasion when the performances are made, ensemble of musical instruments is played and dances are performed to the music, upper caste groups maintain a distance with the performers who are considered lower in caste, who nevertheless perform the most important role to reinvigorate people's spirits on the occasion. Now Damais are using Panchai Baja as a tool of protest.

There are many practices in the plains Nepal too, which follow similar patterns as practiced in the Indian rural areas like the Dalit performers coming to present dance-dramas, not too long in duration, on various happy occasions like wedding and birth, especially that of a male gender.

Groups of people and social classes who have been assigned the roles of performances, especially in the domains of music, dance, singing and dramatic presentations on different occasions in the ritual cycles have for long been performing the roles as part of their caste privileges. But the privileges they have been perpetuating for centuries and even for millennia have served as the means in the hands of those who wield power through ruling and maintaining religion-cultural superiority to perpetuate an institution of oppression and domination in the society. The patterns of such domination can be seen not only in Nepalese society but also in other countries of South Asia, especially in India where various forms of performance art and dramatic presentations have been the sole responsibilities of the class of people in the society who have taken up their roles as performers, which shows their caste groupings and their status in the society. The roles relegated to them are thus taken as their 'hallowed' professions in the society.

Ironically, performance culture and arts have been the life sustaining professions of people in different cultures. The minorities in the society and those who have for

generations been denied any access to power and role in the administration and social works have taken up music, singing and entertainment as their main professions. Such groups abound in India where the caste system works at all levels of the society. The 'Gypsies' and minstrel groups in Europe and Asia always taken up the performance culture by staying on the periphery of the central social norm dominated by the privileged or high caste people. The Gypsies performance culture is a matter of exigency, the principle mode of sustenance and survival. The tradition of performing art among the Gypsies has survived on the periphery of the metropolitan cultures that they encounter, and they present their performances under tents and open places, caravans and stages.

Thus the groups of people who play music and perform dances and plays are said to be ritually less pure in the caste hierarchy. But paradoxically, the people of the lower *Varna* group has occupations with what they consider as defiling features perform music and dance at the time of the rites of passage and different ritually purifying occasions of the people of the upper castes.

Nepalese Dalits like the Dalits in the Indic socio-cultural structure are part of the cultural formation as strongly as the people of the upper caste groups. They are not alien nor are they travellers like the Gypsies or other visiting cultural groups. The Dalits From the integral part of culture, and paradoxically, the roles they play within the system of the rituals is as central as those played by the priests. But a differentiation is maintained through what Mary M. Cameron calls 'material resource asymmetry and the perpetuation of privilege'. She believes that people remain dominated not through the force of ideology alone but also through the practices and

techniques of domination..... and the material advantage of the dominant'.<sup>135</sup> Dalit who have taken up music and performance present their arts as part of the tacit acceptance of the domination.

Though Nepalese Dalit society is quite similar to Indian Dalits in terms of Caste and social structures but still there is a scope of differentiation due to geographical and social and political factor. Indian Dalits have had different socio cultural background as compared to Nepalese Dalits. During Muslim and British reign many movements of Dalits occurred but in Nepal it was passive. Due to monarchy Nepalese Dalits had had a relative tough time in comparisons to Indian Dalits. *Muluki-Aine*, Nepali constitution was influenced by Manu smiriti. Intermingling with Mongolied<sup>136</sup> races created a new Dalits in Nepal.

If we only take an example of the role of the Damai-music and the inevitability of the presence of the Damai musician on important occasions in the ritual cycles of life of the Brahmans, Kshetriyas and other caste groups higher than the musical performers, we can see the nature of the contradiction between the roles of the Dalit performers and that of the caste-based society. The Panchai Baja is played on all auspicious

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<sup>135</sup> Mary M. Cameron, *On the Edge of the Auspicious: Gender and Caste In Nepal* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) P. 51. Cameron in her book focuses on the status and position of women within the Dalit groups. In her very interesting analysis she examines the position of women within the Varna-Caste nexus. I particularly find her study interesting because she has analysed the problematic of the caste hierarchy and gender relations in a society where the position of women across caste groups relations in a society where the position of women across caste groups bear strong resemblances with one another and the character of the male-dominated society shares a number of features when we talk in terms of the predicament of women in the society. To my mind, a strong analogy with the Dalit women would be the position of the African American women whose black community is, as Richard Rorry said in one lecture given at the Himal Association in Kathmandu in September, 2011, looked upon as a caste groups by the white American society.

The Dalit women do not play any significant role in the performing arts. The musical groups like the Damais and Ganes assign women their roles in the households. Except for a few cases where women play some light instruments, I have not seen women taking part in the performances. On the auspicious occasions when the *Panchai Baja* band is played women are not given any share, which reflects the sexual prejudice within both the society of the Dalits as well as those of the other caste groups in the society.

<sup>136</sup> Though there are Mongolied Dalits also in Nepal. In Newari community which is also Mongolied has a good stock of Dalits within. Here in context is racial mingling of Dalits with communities like Kirat, Rai, Limbu, and Gurung.



occasions of the higher caste groups. In all the *rites de passage* of the Hindus like wedding, sacred thread investiture ceremony of upper caste group boy, known as *Vratibandha*, and most of the festival in the calendrical and the agricultural cycles like *hile jatra* and *bethi Panchai Baja* is necessary. The contradiction can be seen when the Damais without whose performance no religious rite can be accomplished are given not only a role but also a space where to perform. They are not allowed to enter other spaces where the rituals are being performed. Carol Tingey rightly says, "In examples, such as these, the role of the musician could not be considered as either that of entertainer or status symbol, he could only have been fulfilling a ritual function".<sup>137</sup>

Gaines, the very well known troubadours in Nepalese society have a very historical association with the culture of this country. They are like the singers of Serbia and African countries who sing the saga of the nation, narratives of epic grandeur and the stories of the communities. *Gaines* are basically singers who visit people's houses and sing songs about historical incidents, love, faith and battles. Their presentation and the style of singing evoke social drama the stage of which is the mind of every listener.

The representation of the Dalits in various other forms of performances has been the accentuations of their stereotypical roles as performers. Their representation in the broader social dramas, most prominently the cinemas produced by the non-Dalit groups of people is made in the already constructed 'discursive spheres'. By citing Goldberg, Robyn Wiegman says, "race and ethnicity are social constructions linked to the specific discursive spheres within which they are used".<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Carol Tingey, *Heartbeat of Nepal. the Panchai Baja* (Kathmandu: Royal Nepal Academy, 1990) p. 178.

<sup>138</sup> Robyn Wiegman, "Race Ethnicity and Film" in Johan Hill and Pamela Church Gibson ed. *The Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 1998) p. 161.

Performance arts have strong folk base. The other very interesting feature of the Nepalese Dalit performing arts is its rural flavour. In earlier times the performance of the musical bands like the *Panchai baja* had purely attributive significance. The band is associated with the Damais class just as the fiddle Sarangi is attributed to the troubadours called Gaines. The Dalit roles are strongly maintained in the folk cultural and ritual practices but with the growth of urbanization, the roles of the Dalits have been taken over by the professional groups in the metropolitan areas. The wedding bands, for example are no longer comprised up of the Damais in the urban areas. Therefore, Dalit performing arts survive in the rural areas. The most important point to consider, I think, is the symbiosis that the Dalit performing arts have with the ritual and calendrical cycles of the festivals of the society, a fact that only reflects the paradox of the caste-culture nexus and the contradictions of the value system of the Brahaminic culture that has for millennia been sustaining a pattern of cleavage among the people of the society created to perpetuate a system of control and exploitation in different domains of the caste-ridden society.

But to assume that the Dalits have only been playing the shadow music to the Brahaminic society is to ignore the great traditions of theatre and dramaturgy that the Dalits have created especially in South Asia over the millennia, and their impact on the modern performing culture that is vibrant and creative.



[A government hoarding in Remote Mustang district asking not to practice untouchability. Imagery is impressive as you can see a dog besides the woman who is feeding water dalit from a safe distance. photo-taken by me.12june 2014]

### **Role of non-governmental organization in Dalit movement of Nepal**

Like other under-developed countries Nepal has become a hot-spot for international NGO's. Thousands of Ngos are working in the country on various issues, from human trafficking to Dalit empowerment. Every social movement is being guided by these organizations in Nepal. Unlike India instead of political parties and groups, in Nepal NGOs has become flag bearer of social movements. Since they have resources, they make strategies, plan and execute their programmes. Most of the NGOs' employees work as paid social activists. It's a profession for them. I have seen most of the workers of these Dalit oriented NGOS are themselves Dalits. They know the problems very well they know the society to whom they have to serve. Most of the funding to Nepalese Dalit NGOs' comes from western world, countries like United

States of America, Germany, Norway, United Kingdom have poured a lot of money in Nepal.

When I was roaming in Nepal, I came to know about Jagran media centre, an organization of young Dalits media professional who are working together and run a community radio. Jagran media centre has made so many programmes on Dalit theme like Songs, skits, plays and discussion.

They have a radio station at various places of Nepal and broadcast these programmes. They have recorded many songs which are against untouchability and talks of social equality. From Jagran media centre I got a collection of Dalit songs. These songs are about every aspect of life. From the new anti untouchability laws to inter-caste love affairs, range of these songs is very broad.

Organization like Jagran media centre are using visual and performing material to bring awareness among masses about evil of caste discrimination. They are regularly organizing radio programmes and engaging people in dialogues. Through there radio they have reached to almost 75% area of Nepal. Hindi translation of a Nepalese song

इंसान इंसान में क्या अंतर है ?

छाती पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा को इंसान इंसान में क्या अंतर है ?

छाती पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा पर हाथ रखिये

आत्मा को साक्षी बनाइये

सब इंसान एक हैं

कोई फर्क नहीं है

तुम भी वही हवा सूँघते हो जो हम सूँघते हैं

हम भी वही पानी पीते हैं जो तुम पीते हो

फिर क्यों भेदभाव करते हो ?

What is the difference among men?

Put your hand on chest

Put your hand on your soul

Make your soul witness

All human are same

There is no difference

You inhale the same air which we inhale

We drink the same water, which you drink

Then why do you discriminate



A Poster by Jagran Media Foundation

This song is composed and recorded by Jagran media centre. It directly questions caste based hierarchy. This is denial of all those scriptures which support hierarchy and discrimination on the basis of Verna/caste.

बदलियो रे संसार

संसार को बदलिये

मुझे ऐसे संसार में घूमना है

जहाँ जातीय भेदभाव ना हो

जुल्मी लोग क्यों जातीय भेदभाव करते हैं ?

Change this world

I have to roam in a world, free of caste discrimination

Why do people discriminate on the basis of castes?

Another song created by Jagran media centre educate people about new law established by government to curb discrimination on the basis of caste

विभेदा को नया कानून आयो

The meaning of this song is like this

A new regulation has been implemented to curb the discrimination

Be aware of this law

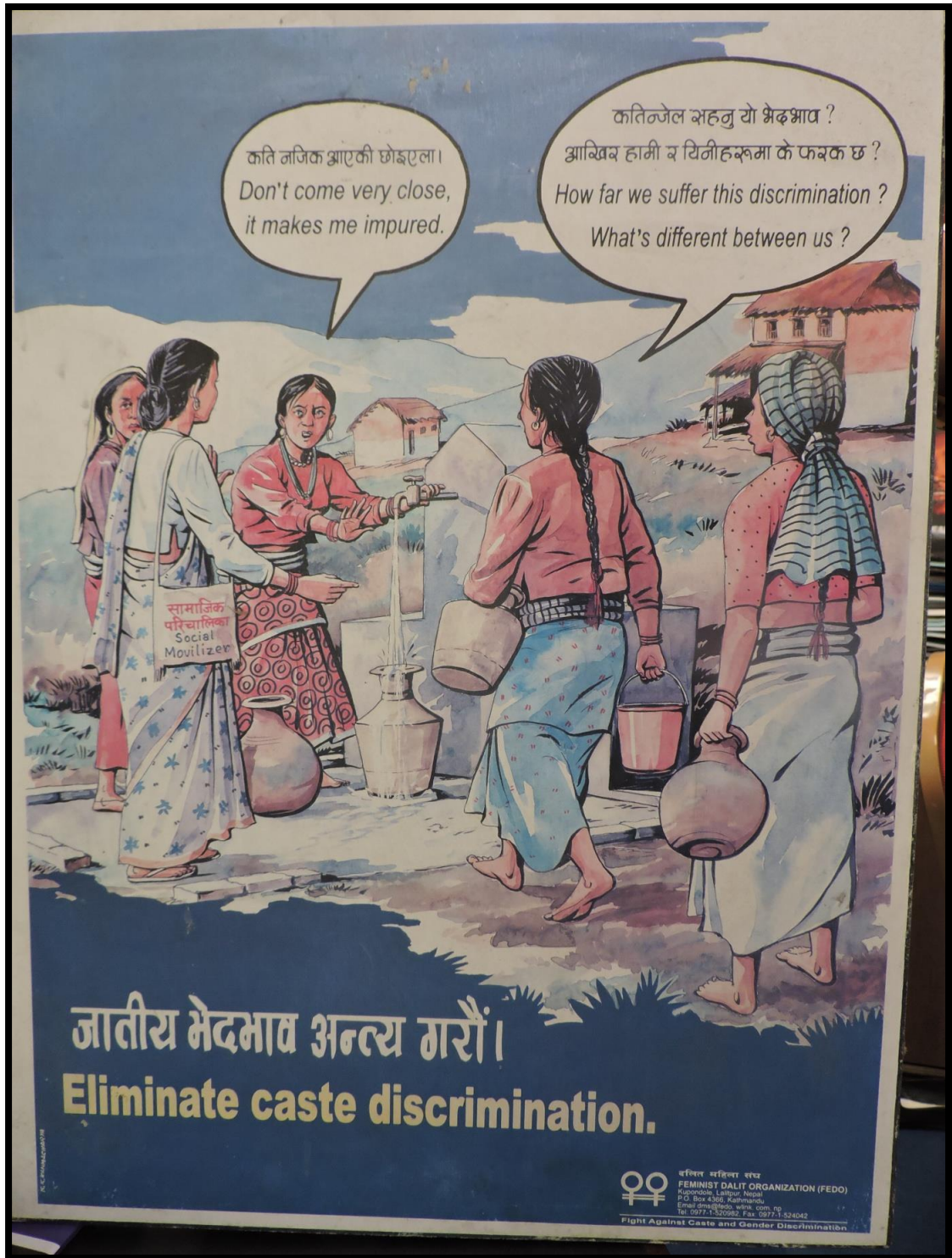
Administration is taking up action those who will discriminate on the basis of caste

20thausnand rupees penalty will be imposed on them who will not violate this law.

These types of songs are regularly aired by Jagran media centre's community radio which is operated in various districts of Nepal. These songs are very popular among Dalits of Nepal. These songs composed and aired by Jagran media centre's radio,



which is a good way to communicate with folks who are living in remote areas. The Jagran media centre which uses high tech community radio is good way to spread awareness and the message of emancipation among the locals.



A poster made by FEDO





A poster made by FEDO

## WANDERING GANDHRVAS

Gandhrva is a musician caste from Nepal. They are descendents of mythical Gandhrvas people who used to entertain gods and goddesses. Now their main occupation is petty jobs and playing Sarangi to entertain people. They are visible in markets of Nepal, they play Sarangi in moving vehicles and on pavements, people give them alms. I went to their organization's head office in Thamel area of Kathmandu. This head office serves as a meeting point and resting place for wandering Gandhrvas. Kamal Gandhrva told me that they have organized Gandhrvas under one banner and working for their upliftment and regularly demanding government for the welfare of Gandhrvas.



Gandhrvas at their union headquarter in Kathmandu. (photo taken by me )





Gandhrva Raju showing his skill (photo by me @village Bansgarhi, Butwal, district Rupandehi.Nepal)

Gandharvas, since time immemorial, have been recognised as the musician caste of Nepalese society. Long before television and radio came into existence, these people would travel around the villages playing music and spreading news, much in common to Europe's wandering minstrels, playing this musical instrument that looks vaguely similar to a violin, following tourists through the crowd hoping that one of them would buy their instrument. And some of you probably have been influenced by them and at times even been irritated by their presence. But behind that simple facade is a man desperately fighting for survival, not only of his own against poverty but that of the Nepalese musical tradition against the influence of increasing western musical culture. Competing with the blaring Bob Marley on the stereo being played in the restaurants, these nomadic musicians of Nepal sing songs that belong to every heartbeat of the Nepalese. He is a Gandharva with his Sarangi. King Prithvi Narayan

Shah, who unified the various scattered kingdoms to form the Kingdom of Nepal, employed Gandharvas to sing the glory of the Shah Dynasty. They were used as a means of propaganda during the unification period and were sent to villages to sing in favour of a unified Nepal. The Gandharvas learn to sing their unique songs and play the Sarangi in a traditional way – elders pass on their skills to younger generations. The Sarangi is a true Nepalese musical instrument. The name SARANGI is a combination of two words. ‘SA’ - the first note of music (parallel to DO as in DO, RE, ME .) and RANGI meaning colourful. So the instrument that colours up notes of music is called the Sarangi. Similar musical instrument can be found in other parts of the world. For example, the western violi Sarinda, the Indian musical instrument probably is the closest in resemblance to the Sarangi. The method of making the Sarangi is unique to itself. The Sarangi, a one-piece instrument having a neck and hollowed out body, is carved out from a very light wood, locally known as Khiro. The wood is cut into a length of about a foot. The body is carved into a hollow frame with two openings. The lower opening is then covered up with dried sheep-skin. The original strings were made out of sheep intestine. The village people allotted intestines of sheep, sacrificed during major festivals like Dasain, to the Gandharvas. The Gandharvas left the intestine in a pot for some days. Once the meat was fully rotten, it was pulled out, leaving behind the fine nerves of the intestine which were then woven to get the strings, which produced fine quality sound. However these days, readily available nylon and steel strings are more popular with Sarangi players as they do not have the time to prepare the traditional variety of strings. Wedge like keys are hammered on to the neck of the Sarangi to serve as screws for tightening the strings. Horse-tail hair was originally used for the bowstring of the Sarangi but these days nylon strings are preferred.

As a result of the wide exposure of our Nepalese society to the outside world and vice versa, over the past few decades, we have lost a lot of our traditional culture. The dominant western culture has slowly trickled into our society and hence everyday we seem to lose a little bit of our identity. For example, Harbaja, an instrument once popular among most of the old Gandharvas is not played anymore. The elders among the new generation Gandharvas recall the time 'when fairies danced to the tune of the songs and the Harbaja played by the Gandharvas'. The Sarangi could encounter the same fate as the Harbaja if nothing is done to preserve the tradition. Sadly, nothing is being done.

Socio-political assertion through art forms of Nepalese Dalits is based on my field study. To conduct my field study I first went to Butwal - headquarter of kapilvastu district. Kapilvastu is a place associated with birth of Buddha in Nepal. Some of my friend told me that I must visit Bansgarhi village 22 kilometres away from Butwal to meet Gayne people. Gayne caste is associated with singing and playing Sarangi. This is the main occupation of Gayne people of Nepal. Gayne people claim that they are decedents of mythical Gandhrvas. Gandhrvas was a species mentioned in ancient Hindu scriptures, the main work of Gandhrvas to entertain Devtas by singing and playing instruments.

After reaching Bansgarhi I enquired where I can meet Gayne people. Apart from Gaynes I also met some families of Pariyar caste. Pariyar are also into singing and dancing. They are traditional drum beaters of Nepal. They play drum on many occasions like outside temple in wedding ceremonies and on other occasions. But this is not fulltime profession of all Pariyar. Most of the Pariyar are into tailoring. They sew clothes for people, but nowadays they are also adopting other profession like labourer, coolie and some have migrated abroad in search of good jobs. Panchai Baja,

the symbol of Pariyar people is must for many religious, social occasions. It is giving them a new meaning, a new identity. Raju Nepali, one Gandhrva told me that earlier we had patronage, but now we are forced to beg for money on roadside. We are descendents of Gandhrvas, who used to entertain Gods. Many Gandhrvas got famous due to their singing skill. Jhalakman Gandhrva is such a personality, who became very famous for his songs all around Nepal. We sing every type of songs and our Sarangi is a tool for protest too. We are no less than any so called upper caste.

### **Kachahari Theatre of Nepal**

Though many Dalit ngos are using theatre especially street theatre to aware people about multiple issues faced by Dalits but one particular form of theatre attracted me a lot. Because it was theatre of oppressed by definition and really is being used by one of the most depressed people of the world this article was published by Guevara and I enquired about this while I was in Nepal. Guevara visited Sindhuli in 2005, when whole Nepal was burning in Maoist and government conflict. Guevara wanted to understand violence, performance theory and theatre activism. Maoists were using this theatre form for their propaganda throughout the Nepal, through Maoist it was introduced to Dalit activists of Nepal. They wanted to utilise this theatre of oppressed for social change. To bring social equality and to end caste based discrimination<sup>139</sup>. Kachahari theatre of Nepal is forum theatre. Forum theatre is a form of theatre. Forum theatre is a type of theatre created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal as part of what he calls his "Theatre of the Oppressed."<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup>URL- [https://www.griffith.edu.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/193876/Guevara.pdf](https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/193876/Guevara.pdf)

<sup>140</sup> **Forum theatre** is a type of theatre created by the innovative and influential practitioner Augusto Boal as part of what he calls his "Theatre of the Oppressed." Boal created Forum theatre as a forum for teaching people how to change their world. While practicing earlier in his career, Boal would apply 'simultaneous dramaturgy'. In this process the actors or audience members could stop a performance, often a short scene in which a character was being oppressed in some way. The audience would suggest different actions for the actors to carry out on-stage in an attempt to change the outcome of what they

In many countries this forum theatre has been used to counter racism<sup>141</sup> though this forum theatre of Sindhuli was particularly about violence which has erupted among.

This forum theatre is being used by many NGO's in Nepal for educating masses. Forum theatre is playing a very good role in spreading awareness and for boosting self confidence of Dalits.

### **Interview of Aruna Hingmang –Painter**

#### **Social assertion through Painting: Work of Aruna Hingmang**

During my Kathmandu trip I came to know about one Dalit lady who paints especially on Dalit and feminists themes. Sometimes she has mixed both topics together that means Dalit and feminism. Putting two issues together makes her work more

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were seeing. This was an attempt to undo the traditional actor partition and bring audience members into the performance, to have an input into the dramatic action they were watching. In 2006 it has been recorded as the most used way to help new people in the theatre.

Boal developed and practised an orthodox methodology for forum theatre based on the interaction between his actors and his so-called "spect-actors". The spect-actor attempts to overturn the oppression using some method unused by the actors, whilst the actors portraying the oppressors improvise to attempt to bring the production to its original, scripted ending. If the audience believes that the spect-actor's actions are too unrealistic to be utilized in reality, they may call out "magic!", and the spect-actor must modify their actions accordingly. If this spect-actor fails in overthrowing the oppression, the actor resumes their character, and continues the production until another spect-actor calls out "stop! or freeze!" and attempts a different method.

If and when the oppression has been overthrown by the spect-actors, the production changes again the spect-actors now have the opportunity to replace the oppressors, and find new ways of challenging the oppressed character. In this way a more realistic depiction of the oppression can be made by the audience, who are often victims of the oppression. The whole process is designed to come to a conclusion through the consideration of opposing arguments, rather than where an argument is one-sided and pushed from the actors with no chance of reply or counter-argument.

<http://dramaresource.com/strategies/forum-theatre>

<sup>141</sup> in 2012 theatre director Donna lamb organized a theatre workshop regarding racism problem The workshop continued to address issues of domination and oppression in the second part by looking specifically at how racial domination and oppression plays itself out in the lives of white Americas and the organizations they belong to.

Donna began by speaking about the fact that we can all just take it as a given that we are fallible human beings, and if we don't examine ourselves, our liabilities will interfere with what we hope to accomplish in our social justice work. She said, too, that due to the racist climate that permeates everything in the US either subtly or directly, to be a white American is to have racial issues. She told of several places she frequently sees racism working in herself and how necessary she believes it is for all whites to keep working on these issues and never feel they have graduated.

Everyone agreed that a major part of the solution is taking responsibility and being more aware of how racism shows itself in themselves and in their organizations, questioning what they see in society around them, stopping being so afraid to discuss racism openly both with other whites and with people of color, and looking for greater chances for cross-cultural dialogue.

interesting. She had no formal art education. She is a self taught artist. When I called her she invited me to her home which is also her studio to have a glimpse at her work. She is bright and her imagination is fantastic. She paints in oil on canvas. Her subjects are mostly around life of Dalit women. She told me that there is not much scope for painters in Nepal as market is very small so most of the painters want to migrate abroad and especially to India, where they can fetch good price for their work.

She has also made some amount by selling her paintings and she was featured on Nepal television, magazines and newspapers. But most of the media introduced her as a feminist painter not as a Dalit feminist painter.

She told me that she wanted to be more specific to Dalit women issues but there is a lot of struggle for a painter like her to be established as a Dalit woman painter so she also made some paintings on feminist themes.

Aruna's work is testimony of her struggle which she had throughout her life, her aspiration and her desire in a new democratic Nepal where Dalits are first times considered human in last 3 thousand years gave her a new inspiration and boost to dedicate work to the Dalits. Her philosophy, her definition of aesthetics is very simple. She wants her viewers to feel pain and agony felt by a Dalit and especially a Dalit woman.

Her paintings are published in many Dalit magazines and on the cover of books. Her art is self reflection as well as revolves around the Nepalese life. She is famous in Nepal for her painting revolving around life of Nepalese Dalit women, which depicts plight of a wife of a migrant worker, village women and social hierarchy. When I asked her about the Hindu scriptures which supports social hierarchy and



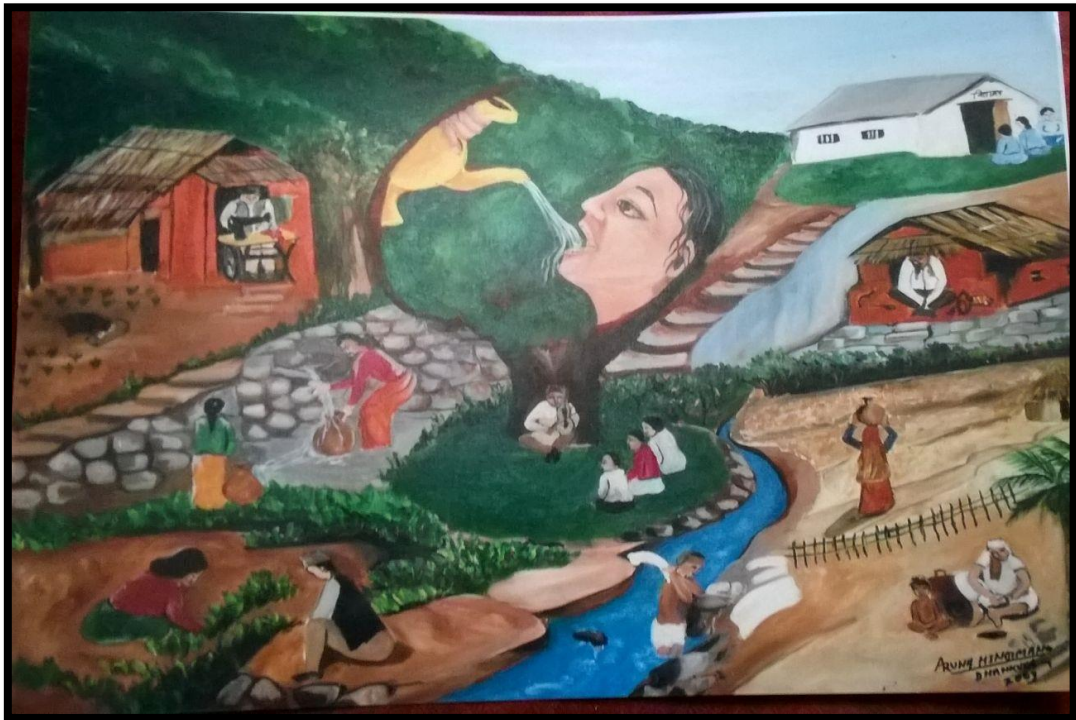
discrimination she replied she did not believe in such God which discriminated us on the basis of birth.

She advocates equal rights for women as well as for Dalits. She told me that in general Dalit women are more vulnerable in a castiest and patriarchal societies like that of Nepal and we must counter check it in different ways and the way I have chosen is art. She wants more facilities and support from the government to empower Dalit women. Aruna Hingmang is one of the few women who work exclusively on contemporary social themes. She said though it seems Dalits are progressing very fast in new and democratic Nepal but this is not reality as the pace of progress is very slow. She tells “I have faced severe criticism from the upper caste art critics. Most of the People are unable to understand my art in Nepal; they think I just paint on rubbish themes.” Aruna’s works reflect her personnel agony which she faced during her young days as a Dalit woman. She has tried to break the normal notion that Dalits are not creative and they do not have a fine taste for arts. In Nepal though opportunity for an artist like Aruna is quite limited, when I interacted with her I asked her what’s her views on Nepalese and Indian Dalits, she told me the situation is same in Nepal and India, but due to reservation Dalits have succeed in grabbing power in india and got stake in government jobs but on the other hand in Nepal Dalit have some different types of problems as they are not part of higher decision making bodies. She said Dalits have played an important role in the unification of Nepal they have joined king PrithviNarayan shah during his unification campaigns. It has already been mentioned that people of Gayne community played an important role in unification of Nepal<sup>142</sup>.

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<sup>142</sup> <https://jesiwagle.wordpress.com/2015/03/13/gaine-traditional-media-man/>

They used to roam around and sing ballades in the praise of Prithvi Narayan shah and his unification campaigns.<sup>143</sup>



[A very impressive painting By Aruna Hingmang. title “Dalit life and Nature” different caste person are depicted in this painting. One Damai [tailor] One Sharki [cobbler] one Gandhrva and One Dhobi [washerman] is visible in natural setting. One Dalit woman is waiting at a distance for her turn for fetching water. Aruna says Dalits are very close to nature, though they are not forest dweller but they are connected with mother nature on the other hand a monstrous mouth is scene which is grabbing all the water of a water stream into his mouth. Symbols of feudal upper caste]

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<sup>143</sup> Interview was held on 5 june, 2014,1pm ,Kathmandu,Nepal



[Painting by Aruna Hingmang on untouchability. A Dalit woman's pitcher is being poured by water from distance, pain and helplessness is visible in her eyes]

Many NGO,s especially Jagran media centre and feminist Dalit organization are working to promote Dalit culture through art forms like posters, songs and dramas. To enquire more about I have interviewed Durga Sob: founder of Feminist Dalit organization



Poster by FEDO

## **INTERVIEW OF DURGA SOB: FOUNDER OF FEMINIST DALIT ORGANIZATION**

FEDO is the most notable Dalit organization which was founded in 1994. Its founder Durga Sob told me “it is the first organization of its type in the whole Nepal, which represents the voices, problems and needs of Dalit women. Even after the establishment of democracy, the situation of Dalits remained unchanged. They are still facing problems such as caste discrimination. The plight of Nepalese women is miserable in general and the situation of Dalit women is even more deplorable. They face both gender and caste discrimination.”<sup>144</sup>

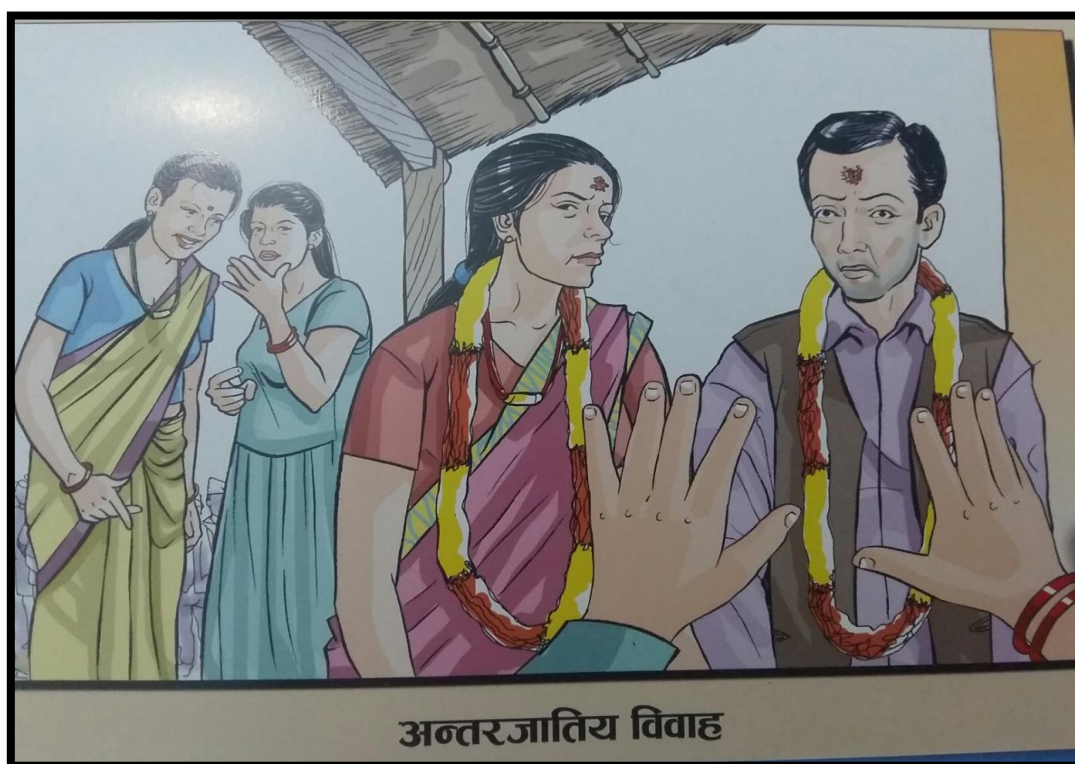
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<sup>144</sup> Interview of Durga Sob was held on 11 a.m. 4 June, 2014, Kathmandu, Nepal



She further states that “voice of Nepalese women has been neglected throughout history which continues till today. There is scarcity of resources that reflect the values of Dalit community and their contribution in nation formation. To deal with such situations we are trying hard to educate Dalit women about their rights, although the process is slow however there has been some success. On a regular basis we organize workshop of Dalit women. Women folk from all over Nepal come to our workshops and meetings. We have composed many songs and made several paintings and posters to educate them in an interactive way”.

I asked her what is the role of songs and posters in educating Dalit women about their rights, to this she replied “art is a very important tool to educate masses and visual medium is more powerful than the text. Painting is more appealing to the masses than a novel”.



Nepalese government is supporting Intercaste marriages with Dalits by giving 1 lakh rupees. [A poster made by FEDO]

### **Manish Harijan: Roaring paint brush**

Manish Harijan is a young painter from Nepal. He graduated in fine arts from Kathmandu University. Manish Harijan is a controversial contemporary Artist of Nepal. He was born in 1985, the western Himalayas village of Nepal in the poor family background. He did his **Bachelor Degree in Fine Art** from *Kathmandu University*, Kathmandu. Manish works is inspired by a childhood of destitution, social domination, cast discrimination and poverty. His sees his work as the voice of the speechless which he tries to represent in a modern way. In life he has struggled to exist within the traditional social limits, the discrimination in society and the traditional view of caste still dominant in Nepal, especially within the lives of ‘the Dalits.’<sup>145</sup>

Manish was in news in September 2012, when in an exhibition, some of his paintings were severely criticised by Vishav Hindu Parishad [Nepal]. He portrayed Hindu Gods and Goddesses with western super heroes. Manish is vocal against caste atrocities his community faced. He is young enthusiastic and rebellious. His work and medium also shows his rebel nature, sometimes he make mix-media for his work.

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<sup>145</sup> <http://www.hindustantimes.com/photos/world/nepal-calls-for-freedom-to-express/photo-6684Ru-5uPjmRxpQwgQ6WeK.html>



[Super Kali by Manish Harijan]

### **Cultural and Folk Songs of Musahar**

One of the most neglected and marginalised dalit community in Nepal is of Musahar.

The Musahar were traditionally rat catchers, and there is still uncertainty as to their exact origin. This Hindu Mythology story shows how they are perceived in the traditional Indian and Madhesi Nepalese society, Parmashwar (the Hindu creation God) created man and gave him a horse to ride. The first Musahar decided to dig holes in the belly of the horse to fix his feet as he rode. This offended Parmashwar, who punished them by making them rat catchers. They are found in eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and north Madhya Pradesh and Terai region of Nepal. The Musahar speak the Bhojpuri dialect of Hindi and Nepalese. The word Musahar is said to be derived from moos, a local Bhojpuri and Sanskrit [Moosak] word for a rat, on account of their traditional occupation as rat catchers. It is said that Musahars are culturally

rich. They have own deities, regular celebration of deity in each settlement is collective manifestation of devotion to deity. They have discrete lifecycle rituals. The following cultural songs communicate their cultural identity, rituals and domination.

Tirhut raj Maghai Nagariya...2 (Trihut state Maghada town...2)

Saibari ke santan yai (we are Sabari's descends)

Kul dev ke dhanjaa dekhu (Look the flag of Kul deity)

Musahar ke pahichan yai (it is Musahars' identity).

(The thematic translation of the stanza is Musahars are Sabari's descends from Trihut and Maghadha state. Their deity's flag in each settlement is their identity.)

Bacha Janma din dhami ojha (shaman and Ojha during child birth)

Bolake labia chi sojha (called them for assistance)

Parewa pathi aur phulpati (pigeon, female goat and flowers)

Magaichi laddu pan yai (sweet, Pan collected)

Panchs ghar ke daibhai milke (brothes of five house gathered)

Thali pite dhamsan yai (beat plate to aware child)

(The thematic meaning of the above stanza is shaman and Ojha are called during birthing period. Pigeon, female goat, flowers, sweets and Pan<sup>31</sup> are collected. Brothers of five houses beat plates to aware child.)<sup>146</sup>

Musahar in Nepal want to get rid of their Dalit identity. They want to assert that they are from rich region of Magadh and are not Dalits. Musahar are at the lowest strata of Dalit society in terms of resources and they are proud of their past. Musahar want to attain a new Non Dalit identity.

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<sup>146</sup> Report. Giri, Madhu, , 2009, Political Economic Dimensions of Marginalization and Arts of Resistance among the Musahars of East-Central Tarai. Social Inclusion Research Fund (SIRF) SNV Nepal. p.77



## **Badi of Nepal: Prostitution as livelihood**

Badi community of Nepal are around seventy thousand. They are scattered in Terayi district of Nepal. The etymology of word Badi is *VADAK* meaning of player of musical instrument. Job options are extremely limited for the Badis. Prostitution is traditional profession of Badi women, as it provides much needed income. As Badi girls are born into prostitution, raised to be prostitutes, or are sold into the very large sex slavery industry, Their main profession is singing and dancing and sex work and some Badi men survive on the earning of their female family members. Many NGOs have come forward to help Badis. I met some Badi women in Tulsipur, District Dang. I interview some Badi women.<sup>147</sup>

One Badi woman Savita [name changed] told me about herself and about her caste

Q. what do you think of Badi caste? Why they living such a miserable life?

Savita: This is our fate probably decided by God, that we are bound to live in such circumstances. Men from all caste come and pay us to have sex. I wish I born as a princess in next life.

Q. How much you earn per day?

Savita: It depends on how many customers I get a day. I charge at least two hundred rupees for one time sex. On average I get 3 customers per day? But this money is not enough to meet my ends as I have 5 children and alcoholic husband. I am trying hard that my 3 daughters never enter into this profession.

Q. What government did for you?

Savita: Government did nothing for us. People from one organization came and help us sometimes. They distribute condoms and tell about health safety. These people also teach our children.

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<sup>147</sup> Interview was held on 1june 2014 11a.m. at Tulsipur,district Dang

Some NGOs are seriously working for Badi people. Condition of Badi people is most pathetic compared to other Dalit caste. Though some NGOs are working with few of them but it seems it will take a long time when the condition of Badis will improve.

There are around 70 Badi women in Tulsipur who are into sex work. Most of them work from the age of 15 to 40 as sex workers. Many of them refused to interact. Many of them wants to go abroad to earn more money through sex trade. Socio-political assertion is rarely found in the arts of Badis, they are also into dancing but it's only for entertainment for their customers. Some Christian NGOs are trying hard to convert them and in this course sometimes they organize cultural programmes for them. These cultural programmes include forum theatre as well as skit and performance of dance. Most of the participants in these events are children of Badis.



[Badi women .photo from <http://okoboji200.org/why-we-ride/>]



Madhubani Painting by an unknown Dalit Nepali woman painter .depicting a woman a leader . A clear depiction of assertion in terms of gender and caste

## Conclusion

Sometimes History becomes weapon of ruling class. Most of the subaltern communities around the world fight with this factuality. Fine Arts, literature, philosophy, discourse and search for tradition and its positive writings are always must in this context.

The philosophy of liberation lies in the recognition of history and tradition. Tradition is binary; it may be destructive as well as constructive. It needs objectivity for a fair observation. Without lucidity evaluation of importance of multiple aspects of Dalit art is not possible. Most of the studies nowadays are being dictated by ruling powers. Dalit society is depicted as meek, mean and without any refined culture or as it is called Sanskriti (संस्कृति) in Sanskrit and Hindi. The portrayal of Dalit society without a refined culture is outcome of notion of ruling structure. Every Assiduous society has its own culture and art practice, though those are always defined and manipulated by ruling structure.

There are two ways to rule: First is war, which is used to gain and to maintain the powers and second is cultural dominance, which is instrumental to keep the rule stable. War is the way to get victory and culture dominance is for the stability. Cultural dominance plays very disastrous role. Due to cultural dominance people who are being ruled consider their conditions as their fate and it is really difficult to come out from such a mental bondage. They start believing that their conditions are the outcomes of their past life or present life deeds.

Religion, refined culture, arts and literature are collective thoughts of respective society. When it is used by dominating class, it is implemented as a tool to maintain dominance. Presently Dalits of India and Nepal are in the better position as compared

to the past but the caste atrocity news is still prevalent in the newspapers. Due to reservation in government jobs a small middle class has emerged, who has a lots of contribution in cultural production. Various magazines, newspapers dedicated to Dalit cause are being published.

Bahujan galas are being organized in various cities of India. Dalits are loaded with their new created cultural capital in the forms of songs, posters and autobiographies to assert themselves.

In nutshell, the problems of Dalits deprivation are their social status, substandard economic state and political power. Democracy provides them freedom to express themselves.

The genesis of Dalits discrimination lies in the ancient history of India. After the Aryans invasion, Aryans enslaved antecedents of Dalits and rest of the people fled to the jungles and started living there. Now they are called tribes and Adiwasis. RSS has a strong reservation by addressing schedule tribe people 'Adiwasis'. Adiwasis means the people who are dwelled here since ancient times. As RSS does not believe in Aryan invasion theory, they named them *Vanvasi* (one who lives in forest), despite the fact that there is blemish into the Aryan invasion theory but here there are so many accounts which proves that most of the upper caste Hindu persons are descendents of foreign invading Aryan.

Creation of Dalit cultural capital and expression were emerged in medieval period. Bhakti poet saints from Dalit and backward communities challenged Brahminical supremacy based on theological and spiritual matter. They started challenging the birth based supremacy.

There is plethora of Hindu religious text which supports birth based cast system. And this scripted text supported the caste discrimination with divine validity.

Base on this divine validity, work of every varna/caste was defined and interchangement of caste was not allowed. Although there were incidents where some people changed their caste/varna by propagating some myths and quoting some scripture sources. The creation of new caste/varna was mainly defined by the Brahmins; they had their dominance that time. Due to their dominance they put (whom they wanted) any community under the upper caste or lower caste and touchable or untouchable. And the good example of defying this Brahminical supremacy was presented by Kayastha caste, where they were considered untouchable, according to Parashar Smiriti, but Kayasthas always claimed that they were descendents of Kshatriya and they placed themselves at par with Brahmins in later medieval period due to their profession of maintaining records. They were into education and they did well in every sphere of knowledge.

There were historical precedents available where we can see some castes changed their status and most of them claimed their origin from Kshatriya like in case of Pasis, Kurmi, etc. Some castes earlier enjoyed status of higher Varna but later on they descended in Varna order. Some castes got schedule caste status in one state and backward status in another.

Jyotiba Phule was from a backward caste but he took up issue of Dalits discrimination very seriously. He exposed Brahminical conspiracy of establishing caste validity in his book *Ghulamgiri*. Dr Ambedkar always considered Jyotiba Phule his Guru and on his words he always challenged Brahminical social structure. Dr Ambedkar published some news papers like *Mooknayak* and *Bahishkrit Bharat*.

Swami Achhutanand initiated Dalit theatre in India. He directly challenged the caste system.

After findings the Indus valley civilization sites in north and north-west India it became evident that Aryan invasion theory has validity. Later on many Dalit Bahujan intellectuals developed this theory and claimed that they are aborigines of India. Some South Indian leaders like Ramamswami Periyar Nayakar opposed Hindu Sanatan dharma and Brahmin supremacy in a militant way and his movement was supported mostly by backward caste of Tamils in erstwhile madras province. He started self respect movement to finish the Brahminical supremacy.

Dalits of pan India were inspired by Cultural capital outcome Adi dharma movement. It was the first movement of Dalits which got popularity in many Indian states. After independence, Dalit people got some rights in constitution, untouchability was abolished and the practice of untouchability is now considered as a crime by Indian penal code. But the rural social structure remained infested by feudal castiest mind set up and still intact.

What did this cultural production do to improve life of the Dalits? Here the question arises; First of all, as we know that the movement of Dalit equality was based on denial of Brahminical social structure and creating their own parallel theology and the bhakti saint already paved a path for this emancipation on this basis in state of Punjab, we have an example of Doaba's<sup>148</sup> Dalits who had produced number of songs mentioning name of the caste and asserted them well in every aspects. Singer like Bant singh, whose hands were chopped off by some feudal jats, became the symbol of resistance. Caste names like Chamar and Mazhabi were considered foul before got a

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<sup>148</sup> Doab =land between two river. Though there are many Doabas in india but its referring to Doaba of Beas and Sutlej rivers

respectable place in the songs and gave Dalits a pride in assertion of their caste identity. Parallel theological and spiritual stream like of Saint Ravidas escalated the confidence of Dalits. Concept of Begampura can be considered as an earliest imagination of a socialist society even before Thomas Moor's utopia.

Later Bahujan samaj party surpassed all the earlier movements by getting success in the largest state of India, Uttar Pradesh to carry forward the Dalit Bahujan movement. Bahujan samaj party when came into power established many monuments of Dalit Bahujan heroes. Commemorated them in a dignified way and placed them at the prime location of city squares and in lavish parks. Dalits too feel proud now they have some places in india from where they can relate themselves.

Social assertion is placing themselves at equal and higher status in society and search for a new identity. Political assertion is all about power sharing. As Kanshiram said "power is master key of all locks". Cultural politics played an important role in the success of Bahujan samaj party.

Social and political assertion of Nepalese Dalits through art has different dynamics. After the restoration of democracy many NGOs and progressive political parties, especially left paved a path for cultural politics of Dalits. NGOs help Dalits to express their aspiration through art forms like dance, drama and songs. Individual Dalit artists are also leaving an impact on the art sphere of Nepal.



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## **Thesis**

Awad,Milind.E. 2009. *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalits*.New Delhi ,Jawaharlal Nehru  
University

Yasna singh,*Satnami Self-Assertion and Dalit Activism: everyday life and caste in  
rural Chhattisgarh (central India)*Ph.D. thesis by.2013, London School of  
Economics

### **Para 8 (viii and ix) of the Ph.D. Ordinance**

(viii) Every Ph.D. student shall give a Pre-Ph.D. Submission Seminar, at least, six months before the submission of the thesis. Provided that the Head/Dean/Director of the Department/Faculty/Centre concerned shall make the arrangements for the above presentation.

The Supervisor/Co-Supervisor of the said candidate shall ensure that the candidate includes the suggestions made during the Seminar presentation in his/her thesis before is finally submitted.

(ix) Before the Ph.D. Viva Voice examination of a Ph.D. student is held, he/she shall have to publish at least one research paper based on his/her Ph.D. research work in a refereed journal and present at least one research paper in a national/international conference/workshop, OR alternately, he/she shall have to publish at least two research papers based on his/her Ph.D. research work in refereed journal(s).