

**THEATRE FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:  
A CASE STUDY OF DALIT PLAYS IN MAHARASHTRA**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*in partial fulfillment of the requirements*

*for the award of the degree of*

**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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**2018**



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**DECLARATION**

I do hereby declare that this dissertation entitled, "Theatre for Social Transformation: A Case Study of Dalit Plays in Maharashtra" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.

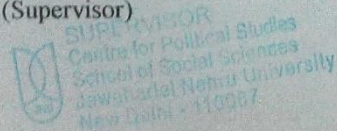
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## **Acknowledgement**

The writing of this dissertation was not possible without the support, suggestion, assessment and guidance of several individuals who stood by my side in this journey. I own my gratitude to all those people.

First of all, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Harish Wankhede. I am indebted for his guidance, supervision and providing all necessary support. I will be obliged all my life for his intellectual and moral support which made this work possible.

I am thankful to my friends Ramala, Khadeeja, and Priya for the thought provoking discussions and Aryn and Laxmi for moral and emotional support. I would like to express my highest respect and gratitude for my beloved family for their unconditional help and support. I am thankful to my friend Surendra for my research field work. I wish to express my gratitude for Virendra Ganveer and Premanand Gazvi, who provided all necessary information for my research in short time span.

I sincerely thank all those who believed in me and showed their well wishes.

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## Introduction

Social transformation and theatre are intimately connected with each other. Theatre space has unique potential in accelerating the process of social transformation. Although people who are involved in cultural productions like playwrights, actors, spectators, etc. are ordinary people who may not have direct legislative or political power to enact or implement social and political changes but through performance and writings, they have ability to impact ideas and feelings which can influence people's attitude, temperament and psyche and through performances, they can address needs and challenges of people. In Dima Hassan's words, theatre is a place where actors, playwrights, spectators becomes indirect activists, where they address their own social and individual issues, in such scenario theatre goes beyond entertainment and becomes vehicle of communicating social and political messages. cursory glance at the development of socially relevant theatre in past few decades at global level has manifested this intense and intimate relationship between theatre and social transformation. For instance, Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (1970-80s) which was used as a tool to make people learn about how to resist oppression in day to day life and how political and social change can be promoted, Black theatre in United States and Africa, extended the struggle for civil rights movement, anti-racisms and anti-apartheid movements, Bertolt Brecht's Epic theatre, which created new-political theatre, motivated spectators to suspend their beliefs and introspect about the movements on stage apart from that in contemporary period's forum theatre such as The Arab School Playback Theatre, etc. which helps in generating awareness about injustice and oppression prevalent on society.<sup>1</sup>

Dalit theatre extended similar kind of struggle against caste oppression and imposed subjectivity by undemocratic social system. What is essential in the 'act of writing' from marginalized standpoint is to see critically Indian popular and nationalist discourse of all sorts. As far as formal process of social transformation of Indian society is concerned, it began with transition into parliamentary democracy and adoption of constitution. Democracy, freedom, equality and justice, etc. are basic fundamental values which motivates this social change. Although these normative

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<sup>1</sup> Hassan, D. A. (n.d.). *the-role-of-theater-in-promoting-social-change*. Retrieved from hariri-foundation.or: <http://hariri-foundation.org/the-role-of-theater-in-promoting-social-change/>

principles forms base of this new model of social transformation but it hardly percolated at the hierarchical social order of Indian society. In marginalized writings in India, like Dalit literature and theatre, we see the main preoccupation is with the critical diagnosis of this undemocratic hierarchical oppressive structure of pre-colonial society which continued to exist in post-independence period as well. Dalit theatre and literary movement was not only an answer back to the mainstream narrative but also engaged fellow Dalits in critical thinking process. It was an attempt to counter the mainstream literary, theatrical discourse and also about engaging with fellow Dalits and contemporary Dalit milieu. What was the milieu within which these plays were produced? We should remember that Dalit theatre movement was at peak during the period 1970s and 80s. By familiarizing with post-independence Dalit history, we will know that this was the period which was marked by the Dalit Panther movement's agitations and assertions that sweeping across the Maharashtra. These plays were written at a time when the process of social-political assertion of Dalits in Maharashtra was at peak. It was also the time when Dalits were facing brutal atrocities, mass killings, harassment, discrimination, Dalit women were getting raped, paraded naked and so on, all kind of brutal violence was inflicted on Dalits at all levels because of such atmosphere Dalit social-political groups began to voice their dissent through various means. Dalit literary movement was one fiery example of that. And it is in this milieu, when caste Hindu structure was being discarded by majority of Dalits in Maharashtra due to anti-caste movement inspired by Dr. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule, etc., the search for self-respect, self-esteem, humanization, withering away of caste stigma, and expectation of dignified existence, gain impetus. In other words, complete social transformation became central ethos of Dalit socio-cultural movement. Opposite to nationalistic desire to return back to the golden age of Indian culture, Marathi Dalit plays began to reveal many fault lines and contradictions that plagued the Indian culture and social system.

Traditional center of Indian society and prevalent discourses in every field did not accommodate and acknowledge marginalized lives and their experiences, what Marathi Dalit plays seems to suggest therefore is that there is no credibility in ancient Hindu social order and they are meant to marginalize Dalits in every sphere. Marathi Dalit plays were mainly critical pursuit of caste order and its resultant suppression and brutalization. It seems to suggest us that going back to the 'golden

Indian cultural past', which was/is also a project of Indian state to promote 'Indian culture' at various stages through state sponsorship and various academic projects, is detrimental for marginalized sections of society. Dalit Marathi plays also attempts to highlight the fact that the propagation of prevalent cultural practices by Indian state under the umbrella term 'Indian culture' is basically promoting upper caste Brahminical cultural ethos. This is working as a hegemonic technique of the ruling class to maintain its dominance. Therefore, phenomenon of Marathi Dalit theatre and its plays, compels us to think about the crisis undermine the caste Hindu social order, caste cultural practices and its adverse impact on Dalit marginalized population. This crisis is not an external; rather there were/are many things wrong internally in Indian hierarchical social order.

Mainstream Marathi theatre plays were written from Marathi middle class perspective to cater the middle and elite upper caste and class spectators, whereas Marathi Dalit plays by Dalit/Bahujan playwrights were written from Dalit/Bahujan perspective and from their standpoint. Dalit theatre is represented by playwrights from all sections of Dalit-Bahujan castes (SC/ST and OBC) who were inspired by Ambedkar, Phule philosophy and took up the issues across all caste communities, for example, in *Kirvant* untouchability and Dalitness of *Kirvant* brahman is been presented by *Premanand Gazvi*, in *Abhayaranyatil Sasa* deplorable condition of *Chambhar* caste is portrayed, in *Utara*, imposed repressive Hindu religious traditions on *Mang* caste and their situation is depicted, so on and so forth, this suggest that, Dalit-Bahujan playwrights did not restrict Dalitness merely to any specific caste or caste consciousness, they were more democratic in their approach in the process of portraying pain of humanity.

To understand the discourse of Marathi theatre, two important things we need to look at: primarily, Marathi plays were mainly written mainly by upper caste middle or elite class people, for example just try and think of any major playwright of mainstream Marathi theatre like, *Vishnudas Bhave*, *Bal Gandharva*, *Vijay Tendulkar*, *Jauavant Dalwi*, *Prabodhnakar Thakrey*, *G.P. Deshpande*, *Satish Alekar*, etc. and secondly, it managed to associate itself with 'unified Marathi cultural theatrical expressions'. Although major contemporary Marathi playwrights remained sensitive towards the inclusion of all sections of society in their plays but the nature of depiction is a matter of debate. Under such scenario, emergence of Dalit writings of



any form was an act of defiance, resistance and assertion. Dalit theatre is indirectly suggesting us that 'Indian' tendency towards popular cultural expression which is simplistic attempt to return to the glorious, fabled past to preserve and promote 'national' culture, is no solution for the present problems rather it has marginalizes and hegemonies oppressed sections of India.

This study is indisputably within the idea of social and cultural transformation particularly with respect to Dalit in Maharashtra. Social transformation is not a new term, according to Polanyi<sup>2</sup> (1944), it is a process by which society and culture changes mainly due to various factors such as, war, economic conditions, political revolution, etc. Many major events in history like industrialization, modernization, decolonization and formation of nation-state, etc. have triggered social transformation. Instead of seeing social transformation from developmental studies perspective (Castles, 2001)<sup>3</sup>, we would see social transformation as a phenomenon from emancipatory social science perspective. One of the important tasks of emancipatory social science is to elaborate the theory of social transformation. It lingers over the idea of moving from present situation towards better possible future. This is the main ethos of the present study; that is the desire of moving from present oppressive condition to the possible future which would be having enabling conditions for Dalits, where they can achieve full human status. According to Eric Olin Wright, mechanism of such transformation begins with diagnosis of present and past society (Wright, 2010). This study premise on the idea that social and cultural productions of Dalits are emancipatory in nature and creates democratic space on which issues concerning humanity is been discussed. This would be addressed extensively during initial discussion of the study.

What do we mean by 'emancipation' in general context and with regards to Dalits? Literal meaning of emancipation is 'to liberate', 'to set free'. From 1960s onwards this term took precedence in social science studies. By replacing the older notions of the term, emancipation began to imply that the reorganization of welfare state must be along with individualistic lines while limiting rules which would guarantee

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<sup>2</sup> Polanyi, K. (1944). *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

<sup>3</sup> Castles, S. (2001). Studying Social Transformation. *International Political Science Review*, 22(1), 13-32.

freedom of individuals who would be having control on their own lives (Vermeulen, 1996, p.25)<sup>4</sup>. Dalits have been chained by undemocratic social caste order at various stages. Cultural production of Dalits speaks the language of emancipation; emancipation from imposed subjectivity, sub-human status, dehumanization, defacement and indignity. For instance, Asmitadarsha<sup>5</sup>, quarterly and a master piece of literary acumen of Dalit writers, which was initiated by Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane, reflects humanistic values and scientific perspective along with that it reflects equality, freedom and fraternity which are fundamental principles of Indian constitution. Apart from that, Dalit theatre, which is inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy which stood for annihilation of caste, discrediting caste based social order which is an impediment in acquiring full human and equal status for Dalits<sup>6</sup>.

Dalits, who are severely marginalized by the system, have initiated the process of systematic diagnosis of society. Many scholars, social reformers, saints have dissected the Hindu social order and exposed evils lies its underneath. This gave new consciousness to Dalits who became aware of their oppression by Caste Hindus. But in spite of the implementation of Democratic political set-up in post-independence period, conditions of Dalits remained deplorable to the large extent. The focus would be on to understand, how Dalit plays in Maharashtra have dealt with sensitive Dalit issues and how Dalits hope and struggle to come out of the perils of caste oppression.

Central aim of the study is primarily to see the nature of the inherent notion of emancipation in cultural production of Dalits in Maharashtra whose goal is 'social transformation'. This would be achieved by doing careful analysis of Dalit plays. To do that, we must begin with social issues presented in Dalit plays. Emancipation is always in relation to escaping the present oppressive conditions. Similarly, oppressive caste conditions portrayed by Dalit playwrights gives us the scenario of prevalent social problems, while doing that, playwrights also show struggles and

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<sup>4</sup> Vermeulen, H. (1996). The Concept of Emancipation in Ethnic Studies. *Proceedings of the Seventh International Symposium on the History and Culture of the Jews in the Netherlands*, 30(1), 21-32.

<sup>5</sup> Kirawale, D. K. (2012). 21st Asmitadarsha Literaty Convention. Jalgaon.

<sup>6</sup> Pawade, S. (2017, August 25th). *Dalit Theatre and Ambedkar*. Retrieved from Indianculturalforum: <http://indianculturalforum.in/2017/08/25/dalit-theatre-and-ambedkar/>

aspiration for freedom of victims. Through play analysis, we would see how these aspirations are articulated through characterization. For instance, issues of denial of civic dignity and imposition of stigmatized label, etc. are at the core of Dalit lives, which can be seen through the characterizations in plays. This opens up the domain of civic dignity and stigma discourse, where it can be discussed as what it is to be like of having dignified life for Dalits and in what ways civic dignity is been denied to them, what kind of conditions are created for Dalits because of stigma ridden identity, and what are the ways by which emancipation is possible, etc.

Another important aspect of social transformation theory is to envision the possible future. Dalit's idea of social transformation is not only individualistic but also 'social' and 'collective' in sense. Dalits have high regard for individual autonomy but at the same time collective emancipation and liberation of entire Dalit community is central tradition of Dalit discourse. Dalits nurture the desire of transformation and emancipation due to the persistent oppression, this desire is rooted in the epistemic social location of Dalit. Imagined alternative aspired by Dalits is emancipatory and empowering in nature. This is a human tendency, to always hope for better future. In this study, I have tried to understand how Dalits envision their future, which is largely, depends on subjective position such as socio-cultural conditionings, immediate life goals and community aspirations, etc.

Present study problematizes the idea of social transformation through Dalit plays. By addressing brief review of cultural identity of Dalits, this study tries to make proposition that contemporary Dalit-Bahujan theatre's attempt should be seen as an effort for 'creating' and 'recreating' distinct cultural memory of Bahujan culture on the basis of Buddhist cultural past. It will be argued in the study that, contemporary development in Buddhist-Ambedkarite plays is an attempt of the reconstruction of Buddhist cultural identity for the project of social transformation and it could be proved as a pragmatic attempt because of two important factors, firstly, it lay down normative principles for the path of transformation based on the values of non-violence and constitutional means and secondly, it can create a unifying force due to distinct Buddhist collective cultural memory.

Dalits in India have always been deprived of resources of all kinds. Even at intellectual sphere their participation is meagre due to various systemic barriers. In

such scenario, artistic expressions became significant tool for Dalits to articulate their experiences which are filled with pain and pathos. Studying Dalit plays would be an important endeavour to reach up to Dalit lives and their concerns. Studying Dalit plays becomes important in two ways; firstly the very act of writing Dalit plays is a protest against mainstream literary and popular art tradition and secondly, it reflects social problems of Dalit lives which motivates us to think about how grave these issues are which mainstream have been neglecting since ages. Present theatre discourse on Dalit theatre is inclined towards the former whereas this study would treat Dalit plays as kaleidoscopic instrument to see various aspects of Dalit lives, their struggles, their aspirations and means to achieve those aspirations.

### **Objective of the study**

Central research objective of the study is to analyse relationship between theatre and social transformation. This research objective will be achieved with the help of Dalit-Bahujan plays in Maharashtra. It will see how theatre has reflected back over the social questions of Dalits in Maharashtra. At the end, present study would decode cultural identity of Dalits and process of creation of distinct identity through theatre performances based on the principles of Buddhist and philosophy of Ambedkar. This research aimed at contributing in Dalit theatre discourse of Maharashtra.

### **Hypothesis**

Social transformation and popular cultural expression like theatre has intrinsic relationships. Artistic expression of humans vents out through various mediums. Theatre is one of such medium which showcases ideas, entertainment, conflicts, dilemmas and struggle. No society in the world is without theatre. Theatre is an integral part of social, cultural, political life. Both social transformation and theatre foreground the issue of identity. Ideological positions are well reflected in theatrical performances. Theatre of mainstream and Indian classical performances reflects brahminical ideological position. In that sense, theatre is used as a tool of creation and reinforcement of cultural capital for upper caste. Counter response to that, Dalit theatre came into being. Dalit theatre emerged as a protest theatre and began cultural movement, however, Dalit theatre remained problem oriented theatre. It could not entail the characteristics of creating cultural identity based on Buddhism. Work of Bahujan Rangbhoomi and Bodhi Natya Parishad creates distinct cultural memory of

Buddhist past which in turn helps in creating unique cultural and social identity for Dalit-Bahujan.

### **Scope of the study**

Scope of the study confine to Dalit plays in Maharashtra and would be only used to understand Dalit social issues and cultural identity. This study is based on the study of Dalit plays in Maharashtra. Term Dalit, Bahujan, Buddhist and Ambedkarite have been used in combination at various occasions. When we say ‘Dalit’ plays it would include plays which contain issues of Dalits, which might be written by non-Dalit writers, which is subject to exclusive research on the ‘representation’. This issue we have dealt in second chapter at certain degree, which might be covered in detail in separate study. But central question of the research revolves around transformative potential of Dalit plays through its portrayal of various issues pertaining to Dalit lives. Plays of 1970s and 80s are available in literary form; very few plays are digitally documented. Therefore initial section of study dealt with literary analysis of plays whereas plays from 1990 onwards are accessible in digital and in literature form.

### **Research Questions**

The present study would attempt to deal with following research question:

- How Dalit plays deal with the issue of social transformation and creation of unique cultural identity?
- How Dalit plays diagnose social structure and society by reflecting on the issue of Dalit civic dignity and stigma?
- How Dalit plays have dealt with the ‘path of transformation and emancipation’?
- What is the role of emancipatory imagination of Dalit playwrights on the course of social transformation?
- What is the role of social collective memory for the construction of socio-cultural identity of Dalit-Bahujan?

## **Research Methodology, Sources and Theoretical Perspective**

Proposed study would be analytical in its approach. Information had accumulated through Primary and secondary sources. Primary sources would be analyzed such as documented plays, archival records of conference and literary festival speeches, etc. The journal articles, books, newspaper articles, etc. will be referred as the secondary sources. The libraries of Jawaharlal Nehru University, University of Mumbai, Mumbai Marathi Grantha Sangrahalay etc. will be accessed.

Observation Method: To evaluate books and documents pertaining to Dalit theatre and contemporary Dalit/Bahujan theatrical performances and their photo archives. Some plays are available in visual recording and documentary format others are as printed texts.

The objective of the study is to reflect and analyse values of social transformation with the help of Dalit plays. Theory of transformation entails diagnosis of society, search for alternative and critical analysis of path to attain particular imagined alternative. To diagnose society, various concepts of sociology, psychoanalysis have been used on textual sources, while giving emphasis on the issue of caste oppression, civic dignity, and stigmatization. Available and accessible texts on Indian classical texts, nationalistic narrative and Dalit theatre discourse have read with contrapuntal approach to get alternative perspective. Some of the principles of critical theory and emancipatory social science have been used to understand notion of emancipation in Dalit playwrights. Some contradictions have come on surface while doing that. Dalit agency issue is seen through stand-point theory approach. Qualitative methodology would be used to contextualize available data. Reason for choosing qualitative methodology lies in the fact that, Dalit lives do not exist independently, their social realities reach up to us through meanings. The context about which we are talking about is not existing in data rather we can derive that context from the general analysis of social and cultural processes. For instance, discrimination and oppression done by caste Hindu is an existed phenomenon, in other words, available data, but similar phenomenon can be understood with the help of moral disengagement concept

## Literature Review

Literature pertaining to Marathi and Dalit theatre is available in various forms, such as, books, journals, play scripts, performances, archives, etc.

Organized body of Marathi theatre narrative have always treated Marathi Dalit plays as another strand of Marathi theatre. Such treatment is visible in the works of Arvind Vaman Kulkarni (2008) and Makrand Sathe (2011), in which Dalit drama is seen as an extension of realistic trend in theatre. Work of Maya Sardesai<sup>7</sup> deals with mainly the history of Marathi plays. Marathi theatre historiography is a problematic phenomenon; it do not contain comprehensive and critical attitude while dealing with Marathi theatre performances, rather it has been more reverent and nostalgic when document about old Marathi plays. Instead of becoming a site of contestation, it remained upholder of nostalgic traditional classic/ Brahminical past. For example, various acts such as, doing *Ganapati* salutation or offerings made towards characters who performed 'Sati' were never critiqued by Marathi theatre historians, rather Kulkarni audaciously proclaim that such acts were not meant for religious purposes but rather merely a religious side of spectators who feels to revere gods (Kulkarni, 2008)<sup>8</sup>. Critical analysis of such acts signifies that, they have a potential to reinforce the mechanism of caste cultural memory and caste identity. Apart from that, national theatre discourse indulges in glorifying fabled past and performances based on mythical stories (Sharma, 2003)<sup>9</sup>. This state of dismay pertaining to the theatre historiography is not only limited to Marathi theatre rather it is also includes classical Sanskrit 'national' theatre as well.

Although we find paucity of good critical studies in Marathi theatre discourse, despite that there is a small body of Dalit theatre studies offer us noteworthy insights (Mokashi, 2006; Dangle, 1978; Kardak, 1978; Phadke, 1982). These studies elaborate past chronological events of Dalit theatre by enunciating significance of Dalit literary and theatre movement.

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<sup>7</sup> Sardesai, M. (n.d.). *Bhartiya Rangbhoomichi Parampara*. Pune: Snehavardhan Publication.

<sup>8</sup> Kulkarni, A. V. (2008). *Marathi Natak ani Rangbhoomi: Kahi Vichar*. Pune: Pratima Publication.

<sup>9</sup> Sharma, G., & Sharma, A. (2003). *Sanskrit*. Varanasi: Chaukhamba Surbharti Publication.

B.S. Shinde expresses his views in Dalit theatre by stating that, Dalit theatre has come up as a modern in its approach. With the foundations of Tamasha folk art form, Satyashodhaki and Ambedkarite Jalsa along with scientific perspective, Dalit plays portrayed Dalit problems and issues. Dalit theatre emerged as response to upper caste oppression with an aim of portraying Dalit issues in simple language, so as it can engage common Dalit mass.

Madhusudan Gaikwad expresses his views by stating that, this theatre (Dalit theatre) envision the reconstruction of society based on the principles of equality, fraternity and freedom. It portrays the plight of marginalized and oppressed and moves ahead with progressive thoughts<sup>10</sup>.

Professor Ajit Dalwi states that, theatre which portrays issues of oppressed, deprived people, must be considered as Dalit theatre.

According to Professor, Laxman Deshpande, Dalit theatre is meant for social awareness, to fight back Varna system, to establish its own position and to create unity among Dalit people. It strives to create society based on the principles freedom, equality and fraternity. It breaks down the barrier of caste, religion, and creed<sup>11</sup>.

It is a telling fact that a renowned Marathi Dalit playwright Premanad Gazvi (Gazvi, 2017) has expressed that, lack of good play critic culture is absent from Dalit theatre , except Gangadhar Pantawne's contribution of critiquing Dalit plays in *Asmitadarsha*. Gazvi lamented over the fact that, failure of producing good theatre critique is one of the major reason for the decline of Dalit theatre, whereas Dr Madhukar Mokashi, explains that lack of newness, inability to face challenges of changing times, and lacking enthusiasm are some of the core reason for the decline of Dalit theatre. Lack of credible critiques could be one of the reasons why Dalit plays could not reflect back on their own artistic creations and couldn't cope up with the changing time. Present academic researches on Dalit theatre most of the time remained uncritical and nostalgic towards Dalit theatre (Waghmare, 2010; Khare 2010; Bhandare, 2010). To put this together, these studies refrain from seeing Dalit theatre critically. What needs

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<sup>10</sup> Gaikwad, M. (n.d.). Second All India Literary Convention. Ahmadnagar.

<sup>11</sup> Waghmare, P. B. (2010). *Dalit Rangbhoomi*. Kolhapur: Shivaji University.



to be done is to see Dalit plays from theoretically oriented critical perspective for the analysis of plays, apart from that we need to do is to contextualize plays with reference to the nature, evolution and character of particular play while registering the observations of various characters. There is no any ready discourse to refer to give such treatment to Dalit plays, therefore many theories, conceptual frameworks, perspectives from different disciplines can be used.

### **Overview of Chapters**

Design of this study follows pattern of doing thematic study of Dalit plays and particular issues that are raised in those plays followed by elaborate discourse on the said issue. It requires identification of the issues of caste oppression to raise meaningful question about social transformation of Dalit. Study needs to understand strength of Dalit theatre in highlighting concerned issues which persist even in contemporary period. These chapters would reveal Dalit marginalized performances' affinity towards spirit of social transformation.

### **Chapter One: Dalit Social Location, Dignity and Theatre**

This chapter will discuss epistemological understanding of Dalit social location and issue of civic dignity, with standpoint theory approach. It argues that, egalitarian and emancipatory thought process is inherent characteristic of Dalit social location which facilitates and generates mechanism of social transformation. This chapter tries to show how selective Dalit plays reflect Dalit philosophy. Dalit philosophy is primarily based on the principle of transformation and emancipation, therefore, Dalit plays also entails similar properties. This chapter exposes issue of caste based discrimination and denial of dignity to Dalits through the systematic detection of social problems. In the present study, focus would be to understand what does civic dignity means to Dalits and what is its significance and how this issue has been addressed in present discourse. Last section of the chapter would try to propose means to resolve this issue by addressing significance of human rights.

## Chapter 1

### Dalit Social location, Civic Dignity and Theatre

In chapter, focus would be on the epistemological understanding of Dalit social location from Dalit standpoint and way in which Dalit performances reflect Dalit philosophy of social transformation. Some Dalit plays in Maharashtra would be used as a case study to analyse how these plays portray issues of Dalit civic dignity. Realization of civic dignity is an essential part of human being but Dalits are denied that due to their association with peculiar social location and caste identity. In such scenario, Dalits are deprived of life choices and chances. Last section of the chapter would talk about the possible remedial measure for Dalits to transform their life.

#### I.

Marathi theatre tradition is an old phenomenon and it is expanding ever since. Theatre and drama has always been receptive for the new changes crop up in the field. Challenging theatre endeavors have always been the primary characteristic of the visible and subtle changes that take place in the theatre tradition. Marathi theatre, in particular, has experienced and continued to witness these changes in the form of workers theatre, children's theatre, feminist theatre and Dalit theatre. Cultural production of Dalit theatre like plays written by Premanand Gazvi, Datta Bhagat, etc. is a unit of this study. Basically, examining and analyzing process of social transformation with the help of cultural units is a unique way of doing social analysis. By studying plays of social relevance, we can come across social problems prevalent at that time, we can see reflection of milieu within which these plays were written, we can understand trend of emancipatory imagination of playwrights, and accordingly can make analysis over particular presented problem in contemporary period. For instance, issues related to civic dignity depicted in Dalit plays many decades back but Dalits still can relate with such issues, as these problems persisted even in contemporary period.

Theatre has always been an important medium of mass communication and that is the reason why it was used for mass mobilization by many, for instance, Mahatma Jotiba Phule wrote *Tritiya Ratna* in 1855, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar wrote and published *Sangeet Ushap* in 1927, apart from that many *Jalsa* performers (*Satyashodhaki Jalsa*,

*Ambedkari Jalsa*); *jalsa* literary meaning celebratory songs, progressive left theatre groups (IPTA) used performances to create awareness among spectators about exploitation, oppression by ruling classes and government. Each of these theatre endeavors had their own methods, approaches and concerns towards the community. Their concerns, methods and approaches make them different from each another.

Dramatic creation is not merely something of leisure pursuit. This is very well enunciated by marginal performances in India, unlike elitist idea of art which considers artistic creation simply as an act of entertainment. When there was an apparent dissent among Dalit marginal group about their exploitation and oppression at social level and absence of their experiences in traditional popular Marathi theatre, they had to nurture the idea of their own theatre where, their concerns, experiences and issues were addressed, which were invisible from the concerns of established Marathi theatre practitioners. Dalits were influenced by Dr. Ambedkar, Mahatma Phule's progressive thoughts and had strong belief in modern democratic system; these two became driving force of Dalits to struggle for social transformation.

Constellation of scholars, intellectuals and thinkers has studied Dalit theatre in details. All of them have contributed immensely in dealing with the subject. Among them, works of some scholars such as Madhukar Mokashi, Bhalchandra Phadke, Hemangi Bhagat, B.S.Shinde, etc. have been taken into consideration in understanding Dalit theatre. Many of them have attempted to define Dalit theatre. Professor Sarika Bhandare refers many scholars, like Professor Bhagwan Thakur, Dr Bhalchandra Phadke, Shilpa Mumbriskar, Dr. Yashvant Manohar, B.S.Shinde, etc. for the definition of Dalit theatre (Bhandare, 2010, p. 31-33). While analyzing these definitions, apparently some common notions, perceptions, concerns and ideas these scholars share, concurrently they also posit some important issues which need serious intellectual pursuit.

All these scholars and theatre practitioners were on common footings over the idea that, Dalit theatre portrays issues of Dalits, their oppression, exploitation through artistic medium, for example, professor Ajit Dalvi and professor Yashwant Kelkar propounds that Dalit theatre is a space where specific questions of marginalized are to be addressed. They also presuppose that Dalit theatre is influenced by revolutionary thoughts of The Buddha, Phule and Ambedkar. What is more

interesting is to focus on issues of Dalit representation and Dalit consciousness, which was raised by Professor Bhagwan Thakur, Shilpa Mubriskar and Premanand Gazvi, respectively. Mubriskar and Thakur assert that Dalit theatre is constructed for Dalits, by Dalits to address Dalit experiences and Dalitness on theatrical space, whereas Gazvi, postulates that Dalit term is innate to a particular kind of consciousness, which emerged due to similar kind of oppressive experience (Bhandare, 2010).

From the above definitions, it is clear that certain premises of the Dalit theatre performances of post-independence period in Maharashtra marked by the revolutionary emancipatory ideas, which were highly influenced and motivated by ideologies of Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar, Kabir, Gautama Buddha. It is been argued that Dalit theatre was a social and cultural movement since it was pillared by various socio-political events of Dalit movement such as, Dalit Panther's politics, Ambedkarism, *Namantar Andolan*, religious conversion. This attempt of theatrical democratization is to be celebrated from postmodern perspective as it celebrates fragmentation and de-centeredness and laments over the hegemonizing tendencies of metanarrative. According to Jean Francois Lyotard, metanarratives believes in unity and order (Lyotard, 1979). Metanarrative is an account through which culture tells us about practices and beliefs are standard.

Theatrical discourse in India in general and Maharashtra in particular, propagates brahmanical agenda of creating cultural hegemony and brahminical social order through various performative practices. Dalit theatrical performances try to understand these cultural metanarratives, which tries to hide negate and silences the instabilities and evils inherent in Indian social system. Dalit theatre, in a way articulate idea of postmodernism through Dalit plays by unsettling mainstream conventions of narrative structure and characterization. For example, *Satyashodhaki Jalsa* performances began with worship of formless and shapeless god and fifth George instead of *Ganpati* (Elephant headed Hindu god). On the same line, Ambedkari Jalsas broke certain traditional performative conventions for instance; they replaced 'mavshi' character for being too orthodox and conservative with 'songadya' (joker or mimic) to propagate Ambedkar's thoughts among Dalit oppressed masses during Ambedkar's anti-caste social-political movement in Maharashtra.

Above evaluation of Dalit performances is very brief, for the in-depth understanding of the nature of Dalit theatre we need to undertake examination of Dalit performances to decode egalitarian and emancipatory values of its performances. Social transformation and Dalit social location are interconnected. This we will understand with the help of standpoint theory. At this social location, Dalit experiences atrocious realities of life due to caste oppression therefore, such experience constitute as universal reality of Dalit, which apparently reflect in their cultural expressions of all sorts for instance, emergence of Dalit theatre. Dalits are denied dignity in this social location by caste Hindus. Dalits struggle to transform this situation. Our aim is to see how issue of Dalit dignity is addressed in Dalit plays but prior to that, we must address characteristics of Dalit social location, which inherit transformative potential in itself.

## II

What do we mean by social location? And why it becomes important to study it? In Sociology, social location is defined as the social position which an individual holds in social structure and based on the higher social characteristics, it deemed to be holding an important position in society. Some of the social characteristic may include social class position, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, caste and so on. It is argued by sociologists that social location determines and profoundly influences our personality, pattern of interaction with others, self-perception, etc. People belong to particular group because of their place and position in history and society. Role of social location is predominant, as Kelly Zaytoun argues, in determining self-concept, self-in-relationship with others and constructing of social consciousness and activism (Zaytoun, 2006, p. 52-72). Standpoint theory can be proved as useful tool to explore how sense of self and psychological growth are constructed within particular social location and how role of culture is essential in determining potential and boundaries for person who perceives themselves in relationship to their surroundings. Considering the inversion thesis of standpoint theory (Wylie, 2003, p. 26-40), Dalit who are subjected to the structure of domination which systematically marginalize and oppresses them, epistemologically put them at position where they experience cultural and performative wisdom which has high regard for humanistic values. This we will discuss in detail while philosophizing about Dalit performances. Let us first understand Dalit location.

According to Dorothy Smith, individual's own socio-political experiences shape their perspective. She further states that, hierarchies naturally create ignorance about social reality and one who is at the bottom of the ladder has a perspective that makes easier to explain social problem (Campbell, 2003). Seeing things from subordinated perspective is encompassing intellectual exercise. Similar views expressed by Guru, by stating that, less powerful members of society, like marginalized groups, have more comprehensive view of social reality than others because their marginalized and disadvantaged position enable them epistemic privilege over other (Guru, 1995).

In particular historical context Dalit social location develops sense of self and self-identity which determines to a large extent life choices and life chances. Dalit social location involves collective experiences in human communities; it includes interaction with all other caste communities, institutions and organizations, etc. Making analysis of Dalit plays from Dalit standpoint gives us crucial insights into the specific circumstances. The concept of social location is essential to understand the personal and communal identity of Dalits. Dalit social location is a communitarian location and not just an individual one. Dalits were unwillingly pushed towards this location which stands outside the caste order, but also forced to operate within it as free servant.

Imagination of Dalit playwrights is highly sociological and political in nature. They invariably examine social structure by explaining why Dalits and caste Hindus think, act and feel the way they do. Social location of Dalits makes them aware about their position in larger social structure. Social location answers reasons for human behavior and refers to the place of person occupies in social structure. Social location of Dalit shapes their ideas about their self-identity, it also envision what they wish to attain in life and how their lives are influenced by society and how social forces affect our behavior.

Being in that location generates consciousness which is counter to the hegemonic forces. Dalit is conscious about the fact that social force like caste and cultural constraints determines and affects life choices and chances. Dalits foregrounded their subjectivity in that location as oppressed, exploited, and dehumanized which they aspire to transform.

Dalit location, like any other marginalized location is very complex web of hybrid and inter-textual world. To have a glimpse of this location we can take help of their pattern of aesthetic expressions. Dalit location is constantly in the making due to various interactions between identities; identities which are imposed from outside or emerged from inside. In short, this location a resultant conflict created by status quo and obliteration of the very status. Status quo wants to be maintained by those who get benefits from the caste system whereas Dalits aspire and attempts for annihilation of caste hierarchy. For instance, Dalit play called *Ghotbhar Pani*, written by Premanand Gazvi in 1980, in which thirsty Dalits come to fill water from village public well but village caste Hindus beat them for polluting water. Gazvi vigorously pen down the harsh caste realities of the time, especially in rural India where dehumanizing caste practice was/is very strong. In such brahmanical casteist social system, upper caste wished to protect their privilege hierarchical position, irrespective of mandated rights prescribed in Indian constitution for Dalits and other marginalized.

Another instance we can see in play called *Utara* (Gazvi, 1990), in which on the day of *Ashadhi Ekadashi* (according to Hindu religion, eleventh day of Vedic lunar month) people from *Mang* caste carry sins of the village on their head and throw it outside, not doing so would cause calamities on village and *Mangs* would be blamed for that. This was the age old superstitious custom which had to be followed by *Mang* caste people. Village priest diligently preserve such traditions but Dalit protagonist 'Prakash' who studied in urban region aims to break such regressive traditions which were creating hurdles in Dalit emancipation and liberation and story goes on, resulting in uprooting the tradition. Further, when famine hit the village, *Mangs* were blamed for such natural calamity. Upper caste Hindus to the village unequivocally decides that *Mangs* needs to be sacrificed to bring relief to the village. To escape the horrendous mass killing, *Mangs* had to submit to the whims of upper caste wishes and continue the practice. Apparently it ends tragically with the murder of Prakash but seed of rebellion and revolt passed on to Suklya *Mang* (another *Mang* caste youth).

Both the stories, tells something about social location and subjugation of Dalits in particular historical context. Issue of water accessibility has political connotation in the lives of Dalits and was a prominent issue in Dalit anti-caste movement. In caste

society, prevalent social practice of untouchability prevented Dalits from accessing water and many other essential resources. Ambedkar challenged these regressive customs and asserted his right to drink water from public well in *Mahad*. But what the subtext of *Ghotbhar Pani* portrays and touches is the issue of continuity of oppression, untouchability in democratic political set-up. Themes of Gazvi's plays are socially, politically relevant. It portrays social handicap imposed on Dalits by upper caste Hindus. Gazvi strategically frame the question of Dalit with caste location in post-independence period.

Plot of both the plays portrays experiences of Dalits, who face humiliation, indignity and exclusion on every day basis. Dalit lives face consistent insecurity and atrocities from upper castes. For any trivial reasons, Dalits meet with harshest treatment. This is evident in both the dramas; *Utara* and *Ghotbhar Pani*.

Dalit problems depicted in the plays were not only social and political in nature but also deals with kind of cultural damage inflicted by caste Hindus on Dalita. In *Utara*, Dalits were subjected in two senses. Cultural identity of Dalits was constructed according to the whims of the dominant upper caste social groups, for instance, Dalits were compelled to give their accord to the superstitious, unethical Hindu tradition of carrying sin of the village on their head which were meant to grant them no less than subhuman status. Ironically, there was no resistance or any dissent from *Mang* community till the time Prakash arrived on theatre space. Considering the power relations operating along the lines of caste, Dalits in *Utara* internalized their caste role as a divine compulsory duty. Brahmins and non-Brahmin dominant castes convincingly allotted certain tasks to marginalized groups and it was mandatory for Dalits to obey them in everyday practices, which apparently internalized by Dalits to some extent. They identified themselves through the vision of upper caste. At this subjected social position, Dalit agency acquires limited autonomy. In spite of facing difficulties while surviving multiple problems of everyday life, Dalit agency remained limited in power and autonomy. This limitation was mainly cause by two reasons; firstly, *Mangs* were never conscious about their oppressive subjected position. Therefore rising up as revolt against brahminical authority could not take place and Dalit agency in that sense could not operationalize its fullest potential. Secondly, identification of/with Dalit location was mainly done by external impositions, for example, calling caste names, attaching stigmas to Dalit identity, etc.



created psychological and moral burden on Dalits. Apart from that, with the application of some cunning strategies, upper caste managed to manipulate Dalits culturally. For instance, superstitious acts of carrying sin outside village became cultural symbols of Dalits, whereas true Dalit culture is far more transformative, revolutionary and emancipatory in nature. This kind of cultural defacement of Dalit symbolic culture through cultural manipulations became hurdle in Dalit emancipation and formation of cultural identity.

In second sense, Dalits acquired their subject position, in the context of liberal political theory, as 'doer'. In this sense, Dalit as a subject is capable of self-direction and independent action. This second subject position of Dalit portrayed in the character of Prakash and Suklya; Prakash is exposed to urban life and is well educated, Suklya, although not urban educated but still could grasp the significance and essence of Prakash's struggle for self-respect and dignity after the murder of Prakash. In existing democratic political setup, he is a follower of liberal values, driven by scientific perspective of life and wants to live life of dignity. Here modern liberal education has enabled him to see evils of hierarchical casteist social order. He wished to transform oppressed subject position of Dalit by refuting superstitious traditions and created awareness among Mang caste people about their oppression through caste cultural practices. Here we can see educated Dalit youth agency is fully operationalize by assuming complete autonomy. But it is not facile enough to bring change into the system. Due to the death threat by upper caste, *Mang* Dalits had to submit to the whims of upper caste Hindus.

From the above account we can see the conflicting complexities in Dalit subjectivity, is portrayed by playwright. We see multiple cases of atrocities against Dalits in India, which has similar mechanism of power-relations.

Structures of caste domination at micro level are unable to provide basic human and fundamental rights to Dalits in village, which was evident in the *Ghotbhar Pani*. Play also depicts scathing indictment of everyday experiences of inequality and injustice in caste dominated social set up. Exploration of everydayness of Dalit lives raised much larger questions on the functioning of liberal welfare state. Dysfunctional or ill functional mechanism of state operations exposes dominance of ruling class and caste

over the over state functioning and how institutions are run by caste dominant majority and marginalize other groups.

### III

What is the philosophy of Dalit performances?

There was one instance in play *Utara* where Dalits internalized caste Hindu superstitious practices. This is a reality of Dalit lives. Majority of Dalits are followers of Hindu religion and consider themselves as an integral part of the social order. But we need to understand Dalit culture of past as an elaborate category. For that, primary task would be to get rid of the general notion of Dalit culture as derived from *aryanized* folk art forms. The reason for doing so is to think about Dalit performances and cultural identity without brahminical cultural priming. Dalit culture is a fragmented and diverse category. But certain characteristics are central to it such as principle of revolution and transformation. But what is unique and positive about Dalit plays is Dalits' awakened consciousness about modern social, political rights and their struggle to achieve them. This mainly took place due to the introduction with progressive western enlightening and progressive values through Ambedkar. To understand inherent potential of transformation in Dalit performances, I would refer the work of J.J Pallanth, who has worked on Dalit and non-Dalit cultures, Dalit symbols and myths, etc. (Channa & Mencheser, 2013). Dalit consciousness and Social location are epistemic facilitator to see the world from different view point; worldview which is accommodative. Because of the suffering and depravity, Dalits are sensitive towards human agonies. It can be claimed that the real essence of that lies in the Dalitness or Dalit consciousness.

Culture and art are two sides of the same coin. They are reflecting on each other in intricate ways. As J.J Pallanth says, culture is a way of living life and thinking about any object in particular way. It is a way to perceive the existence of significant other in a certain way (Channa & Mencheser, 2013). In any human society, dominant sections bracket others who are less powerful. And methods use to accomplish their desire to control and subjugate them is by declaring culture of that significant others as rough, uncouth or even stating as cultureless, for instance, Hindu nationalist of Bengal during colonial period proclaimed Hindu as cultured people and Muslims as low culture group or even cultureless. This technique has ability to make community

psychologically and morally paralyzed and even keep them systematically excluded from major opportunities of life. This is also true in case of Dalits. When it comes to Dalits situation is more complex and hybrid.

Culture is an important category to explore. It helps us to understand social relations and therefore, there is a need of critical evaluation of culture. While evaluating culture certain parameters need to keep in mind such as; what are the symbolic and dominant values of that culture, what kind of worldview those values develop; because it creates great impact on society as whole. .

In academics, we can see there are various attempts to see performances and culture of marginalized receiving intellectual attention (Gokhle, 2008; Deshpande, 2007; Sardesai; Alone; Kulkarni, 2008; Raut, 2011; Koli, 2012; Kulkarni,2010; Naya, 2017; Nair, 2017; Alone, 2006-08; Bhagat,2014; Wankhede, 2013) . This is a welcoming step. To understand Dalit performance from philosophical perspective, as suggested earlier, we need to deviate a little away from folk art forms, like *Potraj*, *Lalite*, *Dashavtari Khel*, etc. These art forms are considered to be a backbone of present day Dalit culture. But I would like to question this belief as what are those elements which can be traced and can be called as a spirit of Dalit theatre. To understand this from Dalit standpoint, I would like to analyze and evaluate culture on the basis of its dominant cultural ethics, what kind of world view those ethics constitute which influences peoples thoughts and behaviors. What is the collective psychological make-up of those who hold particular cultural values and what kind of outlook it develops, whether; humanizing or dehumanizing, through values, customs and norms?

Representation of symbols, analysis of rituals and characteristics of their traditional folklores carries universal appeal of struggle, humanity. Dalit symbols are rich with earth bound animals and planets. Dalit rituals were dynamic in nature, it were highly emotive. They express agony and aspirations of society. These ritualistic celebrations and performances were collective in nature. Bond between community people was strong and through performances, they express their rebellion towards hierarchical and oppressive social setup. In Victor Turner's terms, Dalit ritual celebrations were liminal in nature. In liminal period there is separation from norms. This concept is mainly denotes the transition in life, that after trespassing that stage, there will be

more enlightened phase where individual would different status altogether<sup>12</sup>. For example, *Potten Theyyam* folk performances of North Kerala. As mentioned earlier, behind every ritualistic and symbolic celebratory performance there is a myth. *Potten Theyyam* is a form of social resistance to social evils that re-enacted in ritualistic manner about the fighter who laid down their life for social cause. The myth goes back to *Shankaracharya*, who was going to get ‘throne of knowledge’, *Pottem*, a disguise form of Shiv intervened but *Shankaracharya* asked him to go away and not to pollute him by coming near. *Pottem* engaged into argument with *Shankaracharya* in which he exposed hollowness of caste system which has divided humanity. After the departure of *Shankaracharya*, his disciples killed *Pottem*.

Predominant ideas of liberation and transformation are essence of Dalit performances. In the act, *Pottem* wants to engage in debate with dominant *Shankaracharya*, which is the democratic means of social and political communication. He raises question of his exclusion and efficacy of caste system. There is an adherence and aspiration towards co-existence of all human and liberation through change. (Such art forms raise multiple questions as well; such as, why till today it is performed by lower caste group member only, why does it perform in temple premise or is it, in real sense, empowering Dalits in changing times and what is the efficacy of these art forms in today’s time? This is a matter of exclusive research. )

Since present study is pertaining to Dalit plays in Maharashtra, we can apply similar parameters of liberation and transformation to evaluate cultural and protest performances of Dalits. In Maharashtra, dissent against caste and Brahminism manifested through religious traditions, such as Buddhism, Ajivika, Jainism, etc. later it expressed through Bhakti movement. P. Champakalakshmi explains the evolution of *Bhakti* movement and how it developed into protest movement against social inequalities and Brahman orthodoxy (Champakalakshmi, 1996, pg. 143). In *Bhakti* movement, surrender to god was expected and equality before god was the aspiring

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<sup>12</sup> Victor claims that, is found in all societies, where change is bound up with biological and meteorological rhythm. For more elaborate explanation and context, please refer to Turner, V. (1994). *Betwix and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage*. In L. C. Mahdi, S. Foster, & S. Little, *Betwix and Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*. Peru: Open Court Publishing Company

emancipatory method so that human being could live happily. But saints of *Bhakti* movement failed to understand intricacies of social mechanism of Hindu society.

In Maharashtra, folk art can be traced back to Chandrashekhhar Swami's *Mahanubhav Panth* in 13<sup>th</sup> century, which admitted people from any caste and religion and taught them Krishna poem in simple language. Another major thrust that began with *Bhavarthadipika*; that is translation of *Bhagvatgeeta*, written by Sant Dnyaneshwar and in later period his successors like Namdev, Eknath, Tukaram, Ramdas composed devotional literature. But most of them were Brahmins, and their creations like *Bharud*, *Kirtan*, *Gaulan*, *Abhangas* were in accordance with brahminical ideology, although they are famous as a champions of pro-equality. Even Dalit saints such as Visoba, Chokhamela, Janabai, etc. remained within Bhakti fold and created songs of devotion towards god and *Varkari* tradition. During 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Tamasha* and *Shahiri* performances became focal point of Marathi culture. Most of the performers were from lower caste such as *Mali*, *Kunbi*, *Mahar*, *Mang*, etc. Philosophical and aesthetic schemes of *Tamasha* incorporated romantic and comic *rasa* through *Lavani*, propagation of bravery and masculinity through *Powada*, and devotion through bhakti tradition. Unlike *Pottem Theyyam*, Marathi folklore majorly carried brahmanical project in cultural sphere.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can see revolutionaries took up *shahiri* for the cause of freedom and class struggle. Many Shahirs like Amar Shaik, Annabhau Sathe, etc. in pre-independence period and Shahir Sable, Shahir Hinge, etc. continued the tradition of *Shahiri*. Revolutionary *shahiri* was different from the *shahiri* of early phase because of its content and purpose. They were dedicated solely to the social and political causes. Except *Shahiri* performances which were influenced by Ambedkar and Marx ideologies, other folk art of Maharashtra did not make sound statement of rebellion against cruel caste practices and challenged to demolish caste structured social order. Instead, all saints wanted to remain in Hindu fold and demanded equality under the spiritual and devotional wings.

But Dalit theatre was a medium of sound rebellion and resistance in cultural field. To see the way it carried revolution in cultural arena and implanted seeds of social transformation, we must see how Dalit plays reflect Dalit philosophy.

Ideals of Dalit philosophy (Channa, Mencher, 2013)) are based on the four important principles: idea of transformation, emancipation of suffering people, principal of revolution and social justice and religion based on principle of equality. Post-independence Dalit theatre to what extent is reflecting these philosophical ideals, is a question which Dalit theatre must answer. Dalit philosophy of life and death has emerged due to particular human experience. As we discussed while explaining Dalit social location, experience derived out of that location is dehumanizing, defacing and dishonoring. Dalit theatre and overall Dalit performances of post-independence period seems to have problematized Dalit subject location. We must not confuse Dalit theatre with overall Dalit performances. Dalit performances include all folk performances based on similar old patterns and themes, like *Tamasha*, *lavani*, *Potraj* or *kadak laxmi*, etc. Although these traditional performances are performed by Dalit people, but they do not reflect any egalitarian principles in any form, on contrary to that revolutionary *shahiri*, *Ambedkari*, *satyashodhaki jalsa* performances which can be termed as real inspiration behind emergence of Dalit theatre, which fulfilled their political and social function, and adhered to the principle of transformation and revolution. Most of the pre-independence period performances of *jalsas* emerged out of social need of communication and mobilization. They were swept by the social cause of anti-caste Dalit movement of Ambedkar. They used to create awareness about superstition, brahminial exploitation, eradication of caste system or social justice and equality.

As far as Dalit theatre is concerned, it had to take departure from earlier techniques of Dalit performances; it did not remain force of mobilization but rather became medium of expression of their exploitation, oppression on the face of atrocities. Why this change did take place? And does it mean they did not remain sincere to the egalitarian principles<sup>13</sup> of Dalit philosophy?

In post-independence period, due to the change into representative democracy and implementation of constitution, Dalits acquired various constitutional rights. Democratization of all spheres of life was the consequential phenomenon. Dalits assertion to claim their rights became reason to frustrate upper caste 'lords' for

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<sup>13</sup> Term used by Prof. Gopal Guru. Here it is used in the context of humanizing potential and attitude of Dalit world view, which forms egalitarian principles of Dalit Philosophy. 'E Guru, G. (2002). How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(50), 5003-5009.

transgressing traditional caste boundaries. The concept of universalization of space was applicable in legal realm but was denied in social and civic realm, due to undemocratic nature of India caste social order. Increased assertion of Dalits to claim their constitutional rights resulted in numerous barbaric atrocities on them. Dalit theatre and literature portrayed human suffering; reason to say human suffering and not only Dalit suffering is that, it not only depicted problem of Dalits rather took up various other sections of society who were facing oppression, for example, in play name *Kirvant*, Gazvi portrayed issues of *kirvant brahmins* who performs funeral rites of dead, face untouchability from other Brahmin castes. This addresses the fact that Dalit theatre is confirming to the basic egalitarian principle of Dalit philosophy that is emancipation of suffering people, irrespective of caste and religion. Dalit plays began crusade against various evil social practices, like, superstitions, human sacrifices, problems of endogamy in order to fight for social justice, equality, and dignity. For instance, Namdev Vhatkar's *Vat Chukli* deals with issue of annihilation of caste and problem of untouchability, Annabhau Sathe's *Inamdar* portrays Dalitva of farmers and realistic presentation of rural life, Shilpa Mumbriskar's *Jhada Jhadati and Bayachya Janmachi* deals with double exploitation of Dalit women and crusade against superstition and alcoholism, respectively, so on and so forth. These plays are varied in their issues, themes, characterization, plot, story, style and context but all Dalit plays keep internal conflict and tensions alive. This important technique of displaying interwoven internal conflict between Dalit and 'savarna' or upper caste, encourage spectator to examine and re-examine his/her thoughts on the line of caste division and oppression in society.

Symbolic representation of suffering, death, exploitation, killings, etc. are not ideal characteristic of drama art form according to Bharata's *Natyashastra* (Deshpande, 2010) but we need not to take into consideration of *Natyashastra's* parameters while judging aesthetic and cultural expressions of Dalits because concerns, issues, and intentions of Dalit performances had never become concerns of savarna artistic expressions. In effect, *Natyashastra* should be blamed for promoting and sustaining caste and gender division through its rules and theatrical practices<sup>14</sup>. Dalits portrayal of suffering and oppression on stage is not to be considered as disfiguring ontological

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<sup>14</sup> Example: women and lower caste characters would speak prakrit and nayak must be high born person. Deshpande, S. D. (2007). Bharatmuninche Natyashastra. In *Natyashastra Parichay* (pp. 9-14). Pune: Snehavardhan Publication

human dignity, rather it is a symbolical representation of life without social, civic dignity. To elaborate on this we can take reference of Pramod Nayar's work on the question of Dalit dignity in cultural texts, where he argues that "*self-conscious and agential enactment of life-as-death and the performance of death enables the Dalit text to establish the dignity of the Dalit body*" (Nayar, 2017). Similar kind of characterization we can see in the plays of Anton Chekhov (*Seagull*, 2013; Director-Geoffrey Horne)<sup>15</sup>, where his plays immersed in mundane details of life, lives of characters have been kind of death and their inner conflicts are always significant to understand projection of life. In the *Seagull* Chekhov shows socialist side of protagonist Nina an aspiring actress from Russian poor countryside. Nina's repression at home is a representation of oppression of Russian people under the emperor. *Seagull* gives us an insight to the historical undercurrents in the Russian society. To understand the depth of the enactment of Dalit presentation of suffering and oppression on stage, we need to glance at the everydayness of Dalits life.

Various autobiographies, plays, stories and articles throw light on plight and fight for dignity of Dalits in everyday life existence and how upper caste Hindus create 'otherness' towards Dalit through daily interactions. Sharan Kumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi*, Omprakash Valmiki's *Jhootan*, plays of Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadan*, Jayavant Dalvi's *Suryast*, Datta Bhagat's *Kheliya*, etc. are heart wrenching accounts of Dalit experiences and disguised perception about Dalits. Limbale's *Akkarmashi* has been adapted by many in drama form<sup>16</sup>. Play was a nerve numbing account of humiliation and fractured identity. It shows darker side of Indian society after independence. In *Akkarmashi*, for survival, Dalits depend on left-over food, on menial occupation, grappled with caste-councils, practice of Hindu traditions and customs and sexual exploitation of Dalit women by upper caste men, etc., In *Kheliya*, play written by Datta Bhagat, Dalit Narayana adopted by Dadasaheb Deshmukh for his political tactics. Play depicts coveted and emotional exploitation of Dalits by upper caste for the sustenance of political dominance, as plot goes ahead; Narayana gets murdered by Deshmukh for revolting against him. Such vitriolic and scathing

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<sup>15</sup> Chekhov, A. (n.d.). *Seagull*. (G. Horne, Director, B. Andersson, & B. Boniver, Performers) Retrieved November 23, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cu-x2-WSk6A>

<sup>16</sup> Limbale, S. (2016, March 8). *Akkarmashi*. (L. Jain, Performer) New Delhi. Retrieved January 3, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Be2UJXJaREw>



portrayal of Dalit experiences became the core of Dalit cultural expression in post-independence period. Defying the norms of traditional Marathi Theater, which had always turned blind eyed towards the existence of Dalits and their marginal condition, Dalit theatre used performance as a medium to express their anguish. Symbolic portrayal of suffering and life of indignity on stage is not death of Dalit self-esteem rather it subtly makes statement on prevalent and growing oppression by upper caste Hindus and desire to transform that situation into more just society. Therefore, Dalit theatre righteously adopts stand that work towards revolution and transformation of unjust society into just and equal society where Dalits would enjoy equal status. That is the real essence of Dalit Theater. But the mechanism by which it should be transformed and how the collective identity of Dalits to be assumed still remained obscured in Dalit plays of till 1990. But the important achievement of Dalit plays was to create Dalit consciousness and articulation of Dalit experiences, just the way Dalit literature gives the way to Dalit public identity and consciousness. Most importantly it problematizes question of civic dignity of Dalit.

## V

Figuratively and literally, in both sense living with dignity means having equal worth as of other, with whom you interact. Dignity can be defined as non-humiliation. We lose our dignity when our presence is not acknowledge, when we become subject to the other's will and when we no more, can use our agency to make reasons. Dignity is not merely how individual perceive oneself, rather it involve how we are viewed by others and how we are treated by others as well. In democracy, political conditions like, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, right to equality, etc. are obtained to people.

These political conditions are foregrounded in civic dignity (Ober, 2009). Civic dignity is the foundation of stable democracy. When every citizen of the country enjoys civic dignity, aspirations held by constitution towards Indian democracy would be fulfilled. There is interplay between civic dignity and democracy. Ideally, democracy should defend every citizen's civic dignity through institutional apparatus but it also need to accompany by free citizens who protect civic dignity of each other and enjoy equality before law. Indian journey towards civic dignity is from graded unequal society to effective liberal democratic social setup. Prof. Guru has identified

approaches to assess liberal democracy, in which he suggested that, structured aspect of inequality and distributional aspect of injustice won't be adequate parameters to judge liberal democracy. He proposed new approach which would focus on self-esteem and self-respect (Guru, 2011)

As Nayar examined and problematized question of civic dignity in cultural texts, we would try to find out how Dalit plays in Maharashtra addressed the issue of civic dignity through its plays named, *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, *Tanmajori* and *Shuddha Bijapoti*<sup>17</sup>. All these plays were written by renowned playwright Premanand Gazvi. Why did we choose these three stories is the first question? And second question is how it is related to civic dignity issue of Dalits? Each play deals with specific issue of assertion, self-respect and civic dignity, which is denied by the upper caste Hindus.

Play *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, depicts occupational rigidity in caste based society. Ambedkar inspired Dalits to live life with self-respect and dignity. All caste based occupations were told to abandon. In play, protagonist Madhya belong to *Chambhar* caste (scheduled caste in Maharashtra). He decides to leave the occupation of mending shoe and begin to earn from different work. Once Brahmin of village wanted Madhya to mend his shoe but Madhya refused. Infuriated Brahmin decides to take revenge and remind Madhya his place in society. To do so, Brahmin rapes Bayja, Madhya's wife and made Madhya to get convicted by court against many false charges. There are three issues have come up in this story, Madhya was unable to change his occupation in spite of his will because of upper caste could not accept his deviation from traditional occupation, apparently it would have been a big challenge to their dominant position in village. Second is, when Madhya refused to accept the dictates, Brahman raped his wife. This clearly shows how women is the focal point of family honor, if one wants to bring shame and insult to another family then woman is the first to be attacked. Those who can protect their 'honor' are considered to be indomitable. Dalits, being structurally and socially crippled, experience handicapped before this tactic of upper caste. The problem is with the fact that upper caste Hindus would not allow Dalits to share similar social and civic podium, as an equal human being.

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<sup>17</sup> Gazvi, performed in Yashwant Theatre, Matunga, Mumbai, 29<sup>th</sup> Aug 2008. Initial name was '*Kalokhachi Lek*' published in Asmitadarsh

Living dignified life means having an opportunity of choice and taking risks. When public authority couldn't protect our opportunity of choice and taking risks then it can be termed as an assault on our dignity. In this power machinery is in the nexus with upper caste Hindus, who creates a complex mechanism under which Dalits could not make choices and take risks. (When we say that 'public authority need not to be a paternalistic and should allow us to explore our choices' that doesn't mean, issues like civic rules related to traffic, driving, etc. would be termed as paternalism). Situation in *Abhayaranyatil Sasa* shows crisis between liberty and equality, where choice (liberty) is to be compromised on the basis of denial of opportunity in spite of having equal worth (equality). Both liberty and equality has come into conflict in this case.

Equal standing of all citizens as members of political community and limited scope of paternalism of legitimate authority becomes the base of civic dignity. In India, situation becomes complex when socially dominated groups, with close proximity with legitimate authority coercively deny civic liberty to Dalits and other marginalized groups. By not doing so, what whole society is missing is the possibility of innovation and participatory decision making process in democracy which will make it not only political but also social in nature.

*Tanmajori* is Gazvi's internationally successful and critically acclaimed play. Title of the play is very symbolic. It signifies that, weed which grows along with crop, need to be removed as early as possible otherwise it ruins entire standing crop field, in a similar note Gazvi wants to suggest that, we need to eradicate all outdated traditions and exploitative practices, not doing so would be detrimental for whole country. In the play, landlord of village, who symbolically shown as one who keeps his head always high and make all other characters to stand and walk bending before him at any given time. He enforced bounded labor practice on Dalits. Among them, protagonist Vashya, due to the enlightening intervention of Ingale Master, gets conscious about his exploitation and injustice. Due to Ingale Master's intervention Dalits realized the state of their exploitation and begin to understand importance of 'self'. Vashya due to the consciousness of 'self', angered against the exploitative and oppressive system of landlord and kills him. Unlike *Abhayaranyatic Sasa*, protagonist of *Tanmajori*, revolts and kills landlord who was keeping bounded labors, whereas practice of bounded labor is illegal in India. But the way upper caste Hindus,

practice such old evil practices without impunity exhibits their apathy towards constitutional and legal mandates. Gazvi acknowledges that, Ambedkar's slogan that 'let slave be aware of slavery, he will revolt against it' is the inspiration behind this play (Gazvi, 2017). Ingale Master intervenes and tries to educate laborers about their exploitation. Resultant revolt of Vashya is the testimony of that.

*Shuddha Bijapoti*, play depicts inter-caste love between Brahmin girl Vedika and Dalit boy Samyak Kamble. Vedika's father, Prof. Bal Peshwe wants her daughter marry 'aryavanshi' man but she falls in love with *nagvanshi* Samyak Kamble. After becoming aware about *Vanvashi Kalyan Ashram's* exploitative practices against tribals, Kamble unravel all the deeds of Peshwe before Vedika and tribals. At the end Vedika decides to go with Samyak Kamble.

These plays revolve around the similar notion of upper caste diseased psyche of not letting significant 'other' to share equal stage. Unlike *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, later two plays shows the operationalization of Dalit consciousness of 'self' which manifest into the very act of rebellion, for instance, Vashya kills landlord and Kamble exposes Prof. Peshwe for his malicious activities. It implies that, Dalits do not want to remain at the victim position; they choose to retaliate in their own way. These plays are not fiction based or simply an imagination of a playwright. But rather these situations are much prevalent in Indian society. Cases of atrocities against Dalits and other minorities keep appearing in newspapers. Violation of human dignity and civic dignity of Dalit is a widespread phenomenon in India<sup>18</sup>. Documented evidences of caste practices and untouchability show intricate and hidden nature of Indian apartheid. In everyday life Dalits are denied equal status, equal opportunities, they get degraded treatment from upper caste people.

In spite of having liberal democracy, public authority is unable to protect dignity of Dalits and other marginalized sections in society. To live a life of happiness and self-worth, civic dignity is a prerequisite condition of existence of human beings; otherwise the whole structure of liberal democracy would crumble. It should not merely limit to the state rhetoric, rather percolate in the psyche of each citizen.

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<sup>18</sup> *Untouchability & Casteism (Castes) Still EXISTS even Today in India- 2017* (2017). [Motion Picture]. India. Retrieved January 6, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKZxAAAiJdg>

Composition of Indian psyche is very problematic, it is caste driven and functions through caste lines in every sphere.

Dignity is inherent property of a person and denying that would shake the very possibility of having stable democracy. By birth every person has human rights. Democracy and rule of law should be the order of land and should protect human and civic dignity (Ober, 2009).

Adopting human rights as a part of constitution is necessary step towards that. Human rights would provide protected environment within which civic dignity would be guaranteed. Major social transformation in India took place with the implementation of Indian constitution. It changed undemocratic caste social equations with the inclusion of Fundamental Rights in Indian constitution. Theory of dignity comes from the philosophy of Human Rights, which reflects in the preamble of Indian Constitution. It is been argued that, entire Indian constitution reflects human rights and it indirectly manifest in fundamental rights various rights. But there is a difference between Fundamental Rights and Human Rights. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948<sup>19</sup>, states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights which is the foundation of freedom, peace and justice in the world. It is not using word 'citizen' rather using term, 'human'. Fundamental rights can only be guaranteed against state by citizens who do not include private entities, non-state actors, but Human Rights are applied to all human beings and can be invoked against state, public-private authorities and non-state actors. India is a signatory to the Charter of United Nations and International Bill of Human Rights, which protect first, second and third generation rights of human being. But in spite of that, India has not incorporated Human Rights in Fundamental Rights, part three of the constitution. Instead of that, Indian state enacted The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1993<sup>20</sup> but this act is not a remedy for the realization of Human Rights. This act do not define Human Rights, provisions of violations, even remedies against the violation of Human rights are absent. Therefore, it is not capable to protect civic and

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<sup>19</sup> Rights, U. D. (n.d.). *UNITED NATIONS*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> The Protection of Human Rights Act, 1. (n.d.). *National Human Rights Commission*. Retrieved from [http://nhrc.nic.in/documents/Publications/TheProtectionofHumanRightsAct1993\\_Eng.pdf](http://nhrc.nic.in/documents/Publications/TheProtectionofHumanRightsAct1993_Eng.pdf)

social dignity of Dalits. Those who think that they can rule by caste supremacist attitude would face deterrence with the incorporation of human rights in righteous sense. But that seems to be the projected utopian aspiration which needs further detailed research.

## VI

### **Conclusion**

Understanding and realization of emancipatory and egalitarian thought process enables a person to act in a righteous way in society. Such person would recognize the value of human existence and dignity. Dalits, being at the peculiar social location, expose to the distinct epistemic perspective to internalize this basic human need of existence. This reflects in their cultural expression and social acts. For example, we saw certain art forms like *Pottem Theyyam*, revolutionary *Shahiri*, *Satyashodaki* and *Ambedkari Jalse*, etc., which carries egalitarian principles. In Indian context, perception of dignity varies from caste to caste. For upper caste people of any religion, dignity and honor lies in ruling over marginalized sections of society. It gives then sense of social pride and prevents the erosion of their socio-political and cultural privileges. For instance, in *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, erosion of dignity and honor of Brahmin lies in the defiance of lower caste group. We see similar situations in reality as well where Dalits assertion and claim of social entitlements like growing mustache, riding horse or wearing good cloths and political assertions like heading village Panchayats, etc. infuriate upper caste people, as these actions of Dalits are considered as act of defiance against their authority whereas dignity for Dalits lies in the principle of equality and liberty and life without exploitation. For instance, in *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, Madhya denied choice of doing work and Vashya in *Tanmajori*, revolted against exploitative practices of landlord. In both the plays, there is a strong desire shown in Dalit characters to obtain freedom from caste obligations and exploitation.

Discourse of civic dignity is well addressed by Dalit plays. Showing bloodshed, death and scathing realities of Dalit life is not erosion of their human status, rather it is a method by which Dalits claim space, mark their visibility and articulate their experiences by breaking major conventions of Marathi theatrical practices. This articulation opens realm of human rights and civic dignity discourse.

In political and social sphere, we see, Dalits and other marginalized groups are pro to acquire human rights and civil rights to live dignified life. For stable democracy, protection of civic dignity is requisite condition (Ober, 2009). Legitimate authority of state and cultural habits of people fashioned the discourse of civic dignity in India. Cultural and social barriers imposed by upper caste have prohibited Dalits from operationalizing their own agency which we saw in *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, how social and occupational barriers became hurdle for Madhya when he rebelled, he was silenced by unlawful means.

Civic dignity is valuable as it can help to regulate theoretical and moral claims of egalitarianism. Guru has evaluated moral claims of liberal democracy by keeping focus on self-respect and self-esteem.

I would propose that, human rights should be an integral part of Indian constitution. Merely projecting spirit of human right in the form of basic fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy won't be adequate, as we see continuous rise in atrocities on Dalits. There is a great possibility that human rights can provide protected environment in which civic dignity would be guaranteed to each citizen, members of political state.

This proposition of mine would be a matter of legal discourse on human rights and civic dignity. But considering the atrocities on Dalits and minorities; violation of human and civic dignity would invoke aggression hatred and vengeance of Dalits and other marginalized and that would lay the foundation of weakening of democracy. Therefore, Dalits and other marginalized groups in India need special protection of public authority as immediate measure because removing diseased caste mind from Indian social scene in daunting task, and Dalits cannot be left on waiting period of moral transformation of upper caste mentality and caste abolition, although it is much essential for establishing social democracy .

## Chapter 2

### Caste, Stigma and Path towards Justice

This chapter deals with the analysis of Dalit plays namely, *Utara*, *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, *Kheliya* and *Wata Palwata*, *Suryasta*, *Purush*, *Kanyadan*, etc; at the backdrop of prevalent socio-political and economic conditions of contemporary period. Analysis mainly focuses on the ‘stigma of caste’, ‘moral disengagement of upper caste’ and ‘critical analysis of path of revolution and transformation adopted by Dalits’. These plays capture peculiarity of post-independence socio-political circumstances and their effects on Dalit lives. Writings of Dalit playwrights problematized Dalit social location at different layers in relation to upper caste social interactions. We will divide chapter into three sections: first section deals with the conceptualizing stigma in relation to caste location in India with reference to Dalit plays. Second section would discuss overt and covert moral disengagement of upper caste by problematizing the post-independence liberal political setup. Finale section closely and critically discusses and evaluates how Dalits cope up with the ‘social ecology’<sup>21</sup> constructed by social and political conditions, to transform their lives.

#### I

Dalit plays in Maharashtra, for instance, *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, *Utara*, *Kheliya*, *Suryasta*, *Purush*, *Kanyadan*, and *Wata-Palwata*, delineate the issue of stigma in an explicit manner.

*Kheliya* (Bhagat, 1987) is a story of rural Dalit youth Narayan, who stays with Bhaskar Deshmukh, a landlord and a lawyer. Bhaskar has brought Narayana for creating his prolific and compassionate image before lower caste people in village, but the real motive behind his action was to compete with his village opponents, Shivanand and others. Various events in the play underline dark sides of Dalit stigmatization. In one of the incident, Narayan revolt against tea vendor for using separate utensils for Dalits in the village. Narayan attempts to find legal measure to get justice, but due to Bhaskar Deshmukh’s intervention to defend the tea vendor,

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<sup>21</sup> Term ‘Social Ecology’ used by Prof. Gopal Guru in his article:Guru, G. (2013, March 9). Freedom of Expression and Life of the Dalit Mind,. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 48(10).



Narayan lose the case. Narayan gets hurt because of such betrayal from Deshmukh and laments over the fact that, Dalits are helpless to voice for injustice and when they revolt and try to seek justice through democratic means, system fails them. In response to that, outraged village Dalit youths, use violent means and fires up the tea hotel.

Another incidence is worth noting is from the play called, *Utara*. In *Utara*, Mang caste was forced to perform degraded jobs under the pretext of divine ordeal of Hindu religion and culture. Here entire particular Dalit community forced to engage in stigmatized activity. For which, protagonist Prakash although revolted and succeeded in awakening Mangs, (Dalit caste) was barbarously murdered by Hindu upper caste villagers.

*Wata-Palwata* (Routs and Escape Routes) written by Datta Bhagat, portrays multiple layered conflicts of three generations but while depicting that, it subtly raises many issues related to the Dalit lives, such as issue of identity, stigma and about Dalit movement where different approaches have been adopted for the attainment of social justice, about the dilemma between means and ends, etc. Therefore this play is much of significance from the subaltern discourse point view.

These plays were written during 1970s and 1980s. That was the period when Dalit atrocities were at the peak in rural India in most blatant form, whereas caste discrimination and incidence of ostracizing was regular in social life of Dalits, social and political movements of Dalit groups were posing serious challenges to state machinery. Dalit playwrights used theatre as a medium to articulate their experiences on stage. Their experiences were of oppression and sensitivities towards human suffering. This is well reflected in their artistic productions.

Stigmatization of everyday life of Dalits had no place in national popular cultural discourse. Post-colonial criticism of British Empire from 'middle-class nationalist'<sup>22</sup>, did not bother much to address caste as a major problem. Such discourses contributed in marginalizing, already deprived and oppressed population. Under the pre-text of that, we can understand the emergence of Dalit cultural symbols, which operationalize the mechanism of the construction of Dalit 'self' in a more humanistic

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<sup>22</sup> Sarkar, S. (1983). *Modern India 1885-1947*. St. Martin's Press.

manner. This construction of 'self' is constantly in the process of making and remaking. Caste stigma is an important aspect of the construction of Dalit 'self'. The issue of stigmatization is multi-layered which is portrayed and discussed in *Utara, Abhayaranyatil Sasa, Kheliya* and *Wata-Palwata*. Although it is multilayered, it sustains the essence of caste hierarchy intact, without much deviance.

Stigma as a category of social science research is getting impetus. Study of stigma mainly focuses on how cognitive categories are constructed and are linked to the stereotypical views and beliefs. Stigma comprises various components such as, labeling, stereotyping, discrimination, loss of status, exclusion, etc. According to Oxford dictionary,<sup>23</sup> 'Stigma' is a "mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstances, quality, or person". It was originally used to refer criminals who get branded or pricked marked on skin. There was a general disgrace associated with those circumstance, quality or person. Goffman, defines stigma as 'attribute that is deeply discrediting' and that reduces bearer "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one" (Link and Phelan, 2001, pg. 364). Whereas some scholars indicate that, "stigmatized person possess or are believed to possess some attribute, or characteristic, that convey a social identity that is devalued in a particular context (Crocker et al, )

On the basis of above definitions, we can conceptualize 'stigma' category, as per our research interest. We would approach this concept in relation to caste identity. Caste stigmatization has substantial bearing on each human being who belongs to a particular caste, therefore we need to be clear, about the meaning of the term 'stigma', when it is used in relation to caste and caste practices. Caste is in true essence, a psychological phenomenon whose implications we witness in material world in the form of exclusion, discrimination and atrocities.

Anupama Rao<sup>24</sup> attempts to mark a productive and unresolved tension regarding adjacencies between labor and stigma in her work on caste and stigma. Here stigma, in relation to caste, is aligned with particular kind of physical labor. Hindu caste system meticulously divides caste functions as per divine ordinance. It has spiritual

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<sup>23</sup> *Oxford Dictionary*. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/stigma>

<sup>24</sup> Rao, A. (2018, Jan). *Stigma and labour: remembering Dalit Marxism*. Retrieved from [www.india-seminar.com](http://www.india-seminar.com): [http://www.india-seminar.com/2012/633/633\\_anupama\\_rao.htm](http://www.india-seminar.com/2012/633/633_anupama_rao.htm)

legitimacy. Physical labor, which involves hard work, generally ascribed to lower castes communities. Former “Shudra” caste occupationally engaged as potter, cobbler, barbers, etc. Those who were compelled to do menial, dirty, ritually impure jobs, including work associated with death of humans and animals, funerary work, leather work, were “untouchables”. These untouchables became untouchables in permanent way. Eventually, they segregated from ownership rights of land, common water resources, tea shops, classrooms, etc. (Moose, 2018).

Why are we talking about issue of ‘caste stigma’? What is its relevance of it in contemporary time? Although the period and context in which these plays were written were of past decades but the temporal concern must not be a hindrance to pursue the issue of stigma in present time. There are well documented issues of caste stigmatization and atrocities being reported in contemporary time as well. Especially, on the wake of dilution of Prevention of Atrocities Act, 1989, it has become even more relevant to study caste stigma as an important social problem.

Identity Process Theory (IPT) would help us to understand better the social stability and change (Jaspal, 2011). Underlying assumption of this theory is that individual identity processes are related to the processes of social representation. In fact according to Glynic Breakwell , it is impossible to understand how individual identities are constructed without understanding social representation processes operate (Beakwell, 2015). Memberships into social category, interpersonal relationships, exposure to social representation, etc. are encompassing elements of one’s identity and these elements are derived from one’s experiences. To understand dynamics of caste identity and conception of Dalit ‘self’, IPT framework would be helpful.

According to Dr. B.R Ambedkar:

...Education received by untouchables in the army...gave them a new vision and new value. They became conscious that the low self-esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priest. They felt the same of it as they never did before and were determined to get rid of it (Zelliot, 2015, pg. 31).

Dalits in Maharashtra are politically active, socially aware and assertive in social and civic realm. They have, in some sense, benefited from social and political provisions to uplift themselves. Those who<sup>25</sup> have converted to Buddhism, are better off in literacy and well-being. In other words, they have, in some sense improved their social and economic status. Here, I would highlight the idea of imposed stigma by higher caste group on untouchables in the basis of one's occupation, with reference to Mahar Watan abolishment. Since caste stigma is still a harsh reality of independent India, we need to understand exact mechanism of its operation.

*Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, depicts occupation related stigma. Protagonist Madhya wants to change his traditional occupation of mending shoes to some other respectable job. But priest of the village opposes tooth and nail to confirm Madhya to traditional Chambhar caste work. Caste based stigma to a large extent foregrounded in the idea of predetermined caste occupation theory. Mahar caste, like other lower castes in India, were responsible to serve village as servants and were compelled to perform jobs such as carrying dead animals, carrying messages to other villages, mending walls of villages, etc. apart from that, they were expected to eat flesh of the cattle carcasses. They were watandars, as they were holding land but not as agriculturist. In such system, plot was owned by landlord in return for protection and right to work on field. Under the Bombay Inferior Village Watan Abolition Act 1959<sup>26</sup>, Mahar Watan was abolished. This resulted into Mahars gaining self-respect and new ambitions and opportunity of breaking from trifling menial jobs (Ray, 2011). Unlike Mahars, other Dalit castes remained engaged with traditional occupations, like, potter engaged in pottery, chambhar caste in mending shoes, in leather industry, or their women working as midwives.

Leaving demeaning caste occupation is an important step towards acquiring self-respect and self-esteem. Madhya wants to create different identity for himself but his individual agency was subjected to societal constraints, such as dominant social

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<sup>25</sup> Dalits who converted to Buddhism better off in literacy and well-being. (2017, July 02). *www.business-standard.com*. Retrieved from [https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/dalits-who-converted-to-buddhism-better-off-in-literacy-and-well-being-117070200141\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ians/dalits-who-converted-to-buddhism-better-off-in-literacy-and-well-being-117070200141_1.html)

<sup>26</sup> DEPARTMENT, ". O. (n.d.). *THE MAHARASHTRA INFERIOR VILLAGE WATANS ABOLITION ACT*. Retrieved from [www.bombayhighcourt.nic.in](http://www.bombayhighcourt.nic.in): <http://bombayhighcourt.nic.in/libweb/acts/1959.01.pdf>

representation and function in particular social context. For Brahmin, Chambhar caste must engage in mending shoes, he couldn't normalize to see Madhya in other role. This is deeply rooted in the psyche of all members in caste society.

Datta Bhagat, projects stigma of caste to upper caste brahmins and Dalits. He problematizes question of caste. In one of the scene, in which Hema, daughter-in-law of Kaka, lament over the fact that she is being called Brahmin repeatedly, which she doesn't like, in response to that, Kaka who has worked throughout his life with Dr Ambedkar in anti-caste movement raise issue that merely by not talking about caste, caste doesn't wither away. Here Hema's inter-caste marriage with Satish, a Buddhist professor, couldn't solve caste problem rather it became even more complex, although Hema's point need attention too. Here, the issue of caste label becomes prominent one. Whereas, in another scene, upper caste Dasrao, a freedom fighter and teacher, agrees to offer Satish a flat on rent but when he comes to know that Satish is a Buddhist, he finds excuse and breaks his commitment.

Similar kind of incidence we can see in *Kheliya*, where Dalits are being offered tea in separate utensils. Here caste is seen through the lens of economy. Dasrao in *Wata-Palwata* and a Muslim tea vendor in *Kheliya*, extend excuse that if Dalits are being given equal treatment then their business would severely affected and they are bound to follow caste practices for the sake of the existence of their business.

Madhya wants to leave his Chambhar caste occupation of mending shoes but he was brutally prohibited by upper caste desires, whereas, Dalits who are capable to pay for tea, as same amount as paid by upper castes, but were given separate utensils under the idea of purity and pollution. Ironically, Satish, a professor who is Buddhist, had to face similar kind of experience. His profession did not do any wonder in caste psyche of Dasrao, who still consider him as untouchable, look down upon him and prefers to segregate him from mainstream. His identity still became the victim of caste stigma. Therefore addressing stigma becomes pertinent because it did not remain up to the abstract idea of segregation but rather it manifested in tangible, material realm.

There are certain identity principles, which enable identity formation processes, such as: continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy, self-esteem, belongingness, psychological coherence, and meaning. Deviations from these principles pose as a threat to the identity formation process. So, the maintenance of these principles is at

core in any human community, especially upper strata of society. Caste and stigma is to be perceivable within this framework of identity formation principles.

As per the Crocker's<sup>27</sup> conception of stigma, stigmatized person is devalued, spoiled or flawed in the eye of other. Whereas Davidio suggested that, stigma is intricately linked to the values attributed to social identities. According to Crocker's understanding of stigma, caste group membership likely to provide a primary schema through which everything about a member of particular community is understood. This understanding of a person is either, positive or negative depending on person's social status. Lower caste people's social status is equalizes with stigmatized attributes. As per the popular conception of stigma, stigma is either physical or concealed, depending upon its apparent characteristics. But in case of caste stigma, this rigid framework is inadequate to grasp the intensity of caste intricacies. To some extent, physical attributes or characterization becomes basis for stigmatization in case of some communities in present context, for instance, communities like Valmiki, Chambhars, etc. are engaged in manual scavenging, menial jobs, leather making work for survival, are stigmatized due to occupational characteristics which becomes part of their physical identification. But peculiarity of caste stigma is that, it is more 'social' than 'physical' (Naik, 2016). When we say it is 'social' this implies that caste stigma transcends the very category of 'physical'. In past Dalits in Maharashtra (untouchables) were engaged in degrading and demeaning jobs but with the socio-political transformations, they acquired better status for themselves. Similarly, Satish, in spite of becoming professor, in eye of Dasrao, remain untouchable and met with discriminatory treatment. Satish's deviance from his historical traditional caste role wasn't enough to get rid of his caste stigma.

Indian society is divided into caste groups. Their position in social hierarchy determines their differential social status (Ghurye, 1969). These caste groups provides basis for social identity formation. Here, aim is not to provide encompassing account of caste identity formation but rather to see why and how stigmatization is taking place in Indian social system.

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<sup>27</sup> Crocker, J., Major, B., & C, S. (1998). Social Stigma. *The Handbook of Psychology*, 504-53

According to Rusi Jaspal (Jaspal, 2011), “socio-psychological process of categorization is clearly an important prerequisite for the segmental division of caste group”. In social groups, occupational titles are attached according to their historical status. Lower caste groups get demeaning and disrespectful titles. This emphasizes ‘meaning’ principle of identity process theory, which is to be understood in terms of the kind of social significance acquired by castes of higher order in comparison with lower caste group. Positive or negative meaning generation is principally located in social position of one’s group. Every caste group makes comparison with lower caste group members, thereby enhancing their self-esteem. That’s how ‘self-esteem’ in respective caste groups is generated. This kind of meaning generation, social comparison and assumption of higher self-esteem in relation to lower caste, are basic characteristics of Hindu social identity formation.

Madhya, Narayan, Santosh and Hema tried to disrupt this static process of caste based categorization which consequentially it outraged higher caste people, who then tried to reinforce caste-based categorization to restore identity principle. This is the usual coping mechanism of upper class dominant communities who sense threat in loosening their privileged position.

Higher castes essentialism pertaining to their caste is an important aspect of caste identity formation. This also implies that social mobility is dependent on the essentialism of caste. It has been argued that identity more salient among the high caste individuals who have the belief that they have been born with positive image of whereas low caste individuals lacks that salient characteristic due to their low social position in caste hierarchy (Sankaran, Sekerdej, & Hecker, 2017). This self-essentializing principle among higher caste ensures that lower castes association with stigmatized work or as ‘polluting’ object remains intact. In that case, in spite of their disassociation with the particular kind of menial jobs, stigma of caste would remain with them. Social representation with scheduled castes with menial jobs is necessary among orthodox upper castes, despite the fact that many have abandoned their traditional caste roles, to distance them from ‘pure’ caste group. Orthodox upper caste bears this thing in mind, at all occasions.

This ultimately increases self-esteem in upper castes, due to constant comparison with lower caste groups, through particular kind of behavioral mechanism by

establishing positive meaning and essence with their own identity and social location. Religious scriptures plays crucial role in legitimizing this claim of upper castes. Constant social comparisons, inferiority complex among lower caste individual increases and reflects in many areas. For instance, in recent reports, published by renowned weekly, which surveyed to understand how caste affects students perception, comes up with result showing negative perception holds back individuals and group. Lower caste devalue their own intelligence, develops negative attitude towards oneself, which is off course induced due to hierarchical system of caste, which takes away all possible resources through which they can develop themselves (Pandey & Pandey, 2018). Indian constitution has made all provisions to create and restore self-worth among disadvantaged group in India, but due to the undemocratic nature of caste order it remains daunting task for lower caste groups to realize self-respect and dignity.

Essentializing one's own caste and stigmatizing others do not remain in the social or religious realm. It takes political turn, when lower castes assert themselves in political realm with help of electoral system but face brutal suppression and atrocities by upper caste groups, who mainly want protect principle of distinctiveness of caste identity and to retain privileges and power that comes along with it.

Caste stigmatization, being a harsh reality of Indian society never captures the attention of mainstream playwrights, they write social plays based on women's issues, cultural impoverishment by to western value system, on freedom struggle, on inter and intra family relations, etc. but not on caste. Caste remained taboo subject for playwrights to tackle with. This absolute absence of lower caste issues from mainstream narrative is also a characteristic of mainstream narrative. Contrapuntal reading<sup>28</sup> of such narrative gave Dalit and other marginalized playwrights and writers to see reality from different perspective, from their 'own' perspective (Said, 1993). As far as Dalit performances are concerned, it always has element of seeing the reality in more encompassing manner. For example, *Satyashodhaki*, *Ambedkari Jalsa* performances, *Ambedkari Shahiri*, etc. initiated the contrapuntal analysis of upper caste artistic and cultural productions which decoded every element of its

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<sup>28</sup> In contrapuntal reading approach, we take into account intertwined histories and perspectives. This approach was developed by Edward Said to interpret colonial texts. Contrapuntal reading means, reading the text with understanding of what is involved when author wrote the text, interest revolves around it, etc.



composition. This, to a large extent had shaken the hegemony of upper caste culture. Upper caste artistic creations never acknowledged Dalit marginal communities' experiences in sensitive manner; rather they tried to deface Dalit characters with similar stereotypical, stigmatized manner. For instance, Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadan*<sup>29</sup> (Tendulkar, 1996) deals with theme of inter-caste marriage between upper caste girl Jyoti, a daughter of MLA Nath Devlalikar and Arun Athavle, Dalit youth. Arun is stereotypically shown as drunken man who oppresses his wife and lives on her wealth as a parasite, and who is hypocrite enough to write about oppression of lower caste but on contrary to that treats his wife miserably. Another renowned playwright, Jayavant Dalvi in his plays, namely, *Suryast*<sup>30</sup> and *Purush*<sup>31</sup> depicts 'Gaikwad' as spineless drunken man and Siddharth as typical male chauvinist respectively. Bothe the characters are happened to be Dalits. Santaram's elder brother Eknath rapes Gaikwad's sister and when Gaikwad's father rebels against it, Santaram's father kills him. In spite of this gross injustice and cruelty, it is shown that Gaikwad gets allured to job which gives him monthly seven hundred rupees as remuneration, offered by Santaram as an act of repentance. Eventually Gaikwad becomes puppet of Santaram. Gaikwad's body language i.e, kneeling down and preparing tea for Santaram, not laughing loudly as it may offend Santaram, etc. reflects Gaikwad's psychological submission to his master who has provided him bread and butter but in return expects his voiceless-ness. Play delineate that Gaikwad although has anguish against this gross injustice, which becomes vocal when he is drunk and dormant when he is absolute sane, signifies that Dalit agency is so impuissant and volatile that it can fall for even meagre fancies provided by upper caste. In *Purush*, Siddharth, who is Dalit activist, is shown as typical male chauvinist who use Ambu's money for his expenses and ultimately refuse to marry her because she gets raped by politician. This portrays, how unethical and futile Dalit activism is and state of moral degradation of Dalit activist. On the same line, in Tendulkar's

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<sup>29</sup> Tendulkar, V. (1996). *Kanyadan*. USA: Oxford University Press. Retrived Dec 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x0BHU9PzWeM> & <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8QgStj48Xg>

<sup>3030</sup> Dalvi, J. (n.d.). *Suryasta*. (J. Sawarkar, & R. Naik, Performers) Retrieved Dec 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXJcS98yQZk>

*Kanyadan*, Arun Athavle is also morally and ethically degraded who preaches the language of Dalit emancipation but hypocritically tortures his wife.

Mainstream failed to capture the essence of Dalit lives and their experiences. It did not seek reasons ethically, rather merely portrays popular beliefs about Dalit. Their vision to see Dalit lives are maligned and stereotypical. It is not the case that Dalit playwrights have merely glorified Dalit struggle and their means of justice. For instance, in *Wata-Palwata*, Bhagat has touched nuances of Dalit lives subtly. While describing Kaka, Santosh and Anil, who stand opposite to each other in many ways, Bhagat critical engages with each of them's perspectives. Similarly, In *Kheliya*, Narayan is not shown as infallible. Bhagat has portrayed the importance of strong Dalit social movement in India and depicts ground realities of sufferings of Dalit activists.

Social locations of these playwrights play an important role in their articulation. Dalit playwrights' attempt and aspiration to go away the stigma is much visible in their efforts, which are worth noting whereas non-Dalit playwrights seems to have lost the sight of the need of self-worth and self-respect among Dalits. Narrow understanding of mainstream about Dalits created image of maligned and corrupt Dalit youth and ignored all social and historical references, which could have helped them to get comprehensive understanding Dalit lives. On contrary to that mainstream reinforced stigma on Dalit lives, in new fashion and with new techniques whereas it portrays upper caste in bright picture, for instance, Appa (Neelu Phule's character in *Suryasts*), Anna (father of Ambu), are shown as liberal and socially concerned about citizen's problems. Appa rebels against his own son, who is Chief Minister, and Anna liberal enough to let her Brahmin daughter to marry Dalit boy Siddharth, in spite of his reservations against Dalits in general, whereas Siddharth's father is shown as drunkard, who repeatedly asks money from Anna and Anna seems to have more tolerating and attitude towards Siddharth's father.

From the above account it is clear that, Dalit playwrights have taken up the problem of caste stigma more appropriately and sincerely than the rest, whereas rest have merely tried to essentialise the upper caste position, in certain ways. However, it is

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<sup>31</sup> Dalwi, J. (n.d.). *Purush*. (V. Lad, Performer) Retrieved Dec 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkBQnmA4PfM>

applauding that Dalit playwrights, through their stories have raised much suppressed and tabooed issue of caste stigma, which are still relevant in contemporary period as well.

## II

As we saw, through the process of stigmatization and derogatory caste labeling, the socio-psychological methods of categorization becomes an important pre-condition for the sedimentary division of caste groups. To maintain the caste hierarchy, orthodox upper caste use violent means to resist any social mingling, accommodation and assimilation process and suppress political assertion of marginalized by all evil means.

Village upper caste community people murder Dalit protagonists; Narayan in *Kheliya*, because of his political assertions, Prakash in *Utara* for awakening and persuading Mang community people to abandon Hindu superstitious practices and Madhya in *Abhayranyatil Sasa*, for refusing to mend shoes of priest. These atrocities in plays are not mere fictional products of artistic imagination. These are highly inspired by real life conditions of Dalits.

Recently reported killings, mass lynching, atrocities, genocides of minorities, etc. need critical attention, and which compel us to revisit questions posed by these Dalit playwrights. Since atrocities at various places in India due to caste stigmatization are still a persistent phenomenon, therefore it becomes pertinent to discuss about moral psychological condition of orthodox upper caste psyche.

Albert Bandura's work on moral disengagement give us a framework to understand the development of upper caste moral self, standard adopted by individuals to decide right and wrong which serve as a guide and deterrent for one's conduct. According to Bandura, Moral standards of person decide what permissible acts are and what to refrain from. Positive and negative self-sanctions keep behavior in line. He also argue that in 'pervasive moral paradox' people in all walks of life behave harmfully and still maintain positive self-regard and live in peace with themselves. They do so by disengaging moral self-sanctions from their harmful practices. These psychosocial mechanisms operate at both individual and social system levels (Bandura, 1999). Hannah Arendt concludes in her book, *Eichman in Jerusalem*, that unspeakable evil

is not committed by human monsters but rather by normal people in a systematic unthinking manner devoid of moral qualms and codes. To which, Bandura term as moral disengagement, that is achieved by perverse moral justification, minimizing or hiding cruelty and dehumanizing or blaming the victim.

In this section we would find out how this works within caste matrix in India. We must begin with question that; why upper caste inflict violence on Dalits. Later we must move to seek answers to other questions such as; why do we need to say that atrocity and lynching of Dalits and other minorities as an act of moral disengagement? Why is this happening in India where democracy exists, which in principled sense must empower its citizens?

Why upper castes inflict violence on marginalized sections of society, like Dalits who are stigmatized due to their caste identity?

In India, caste violence<sup>32</sup> is widely discussed phenomenon in academic circle. It has increased in post-independence period due to increased assertion of marginalized sections in political, social, and cultural sphere. Dalit plays engage with socio-political problems of Dalits in everyday life. Issues of these plays raise diverse issues across the social, political and cultural spectrum. Each of them can contribute in the Dalit discourse. Among many other issues, pathology of caste stigmatization of Dalits and cognitive imperatives of upper caste behind violence needs special attention in academics. Dalit plays are not really artistic activism, unlike *jalsa* and *sahiri* performers who propagated Ambedkar, Phule philosophy and engaged illiterate masses in social awakening process but rather emerged sporadically on national theatrical discourse, mainly due to acute absence of social problems of Dalits from theatrical concerns of established upper caste artists. Significance of these plays lies in the fact that they staged such social issues, pertaining to Dalitness, which are compelling for spectators and intellectuals to think critically on them. Here, we would take critical take on plays with respect to moral degradation of upper caste in relation to caste stigma. Plays (as discussed previously) narrate Dalit issues related to caste violence, assertion, stigmatization, atrocities, etc.

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<sup>32</sup> Watch , H. R. (1999). *Broken People: Caste Violence Against India's "Untouchables"*. USA: Human Rights Watch .

Here I would like to decode and elucidate the process of moral disengagement behind the moral perversion of upper caste psyche which manages and manipulates social, cultural and political machinery of democratic political setup. Moral disengagement, in caste context, bears heavily on upper caste because their mechanism as perpetrator has unique way of managing and justifying absurd acts of violence and discrimination. These are subsequent mechanisms by which process of moral disengagement begins: firstly, by morally justifying the act by subverting narration of wrong doing, that is by emphasizing worthy claims through the violence. In other words, we can say that, it is a ways through which the very act of brutal crime would be converted into worthy event or worthy outcome.

In *Utara*, Mangs were threatened to get killed, in case of any calamity falling on village because they refused to carry sin of village on their head. This is not any isolated incident rather these religious and cultural baggage is part of Dalit lives<sup>33</sup>. Rationale extended for committing mass killing is obtained by divine ordinance, which created two possibilities for upper caste; on one hand it washed away responsibility from upper caste of the killing of Dalits and on the other hand, Mangs become duty bound to carry that work so as to confirm to their stigmatized caste identity whereas upper caste would emerge as a virtues protector of village who are concerned about village wellbeing more than anyone else. What does it signifies is that, through the moral justification, which was obtained from the divine and spiritual ‘orders’, the ideas of ‘perpetrator’ turned into an idea of ‘protector’ who cherishes values of humanity and village well-being. This is ingrained into human caste psyche so much so that they identify one and each other with caste roles and caste identities. Seeing such acts from upper caste social location, one would find that, the idea that spiritual duty is being executed by each one of them as per their caste roles makes the idea of universal moral values irrelevant and insignificant, which indirectly reinstates and asserts moral claims behind the very act of insidious crimes. Secondly, it is important to see the behavior of upper caste is compared against what? Under the pre-text of ‘exploiting contrast principle’ (Bandura, 1999) malicious and heinous

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<sup>33</sup> *Untouchability & Casteism (Castes) Still EXISTS even Today in India- 2017* (2017). [Motion Picture]. India. Retrieved January 6, 2018, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKZxAAAiJdg>

crimes are termed as righteous. For instance, terrorist see their self-less act of martyrdom against pressing cruelties by super-powers or as serving life protect religion. Similarly, in Indian context, many regional and communal militant groups like *Karni sens*, *Ranvir Sens*, *Gau-Rakshaks*, anti-Romeo squad, etc. inflict violence under the subtext of protection of Hindu religion and culture. Third one is related to the disregarding and denial towards injurious effects inflicted on Dalits.

Santaram: to Gaikwad... have you brought Dangle's file?

Gaikwad: Yes Sir!

Santaram: Ask Dangle, not to interfere in society's matter... result would be detrimental for him.

Gaikwad: Yes sir, I will inform him.

Baburao: denoting to Dangre....we need to ask him, whether he wants to stay outside or in jail?

Santaram: to Gaikwad.... He belong to your caste (Neo-Buddhist/ former caste converted into Buddhism). Settle matter personally....

Santaram: to Baburao.... If we put this Dangre in jail, like rascals in jail, they come out as leaders. Instead if we give them what they want then their voice will be silenced and democracy also will continue benefit us. (Dalvi, *Suryasta*)

Gaikwad (Neo-Buddhist) is timid and submissive towards Santaram. Within the framework of political democracy, Santaram expresses his desire to negotiate with Dangare, an activist and Neo-Buddhist, in return of not causing any political trouble to Santaram's political aspirations. Here upper caste is shown morally disengage by negating or rather by ignoring harm done towards Dalits at larger level. This is an acute mechanism adopted by upper caste to protect their social and political privileges.

Finally, by dehumanizing and attributing blame of suffering on Dalits for their action, is another mechanism by which upper caste keeps themselves morally distanced from their own acts. Reasons for atrocities are made related to the transgression of lower

castes and their act of defiance to caste norms. Recent case of Pune Scientist, Medha Vinayak Khole<sup>34</sup>, who filed complaint against her maid for allegedly lying her about her caste identity, whereas Khole wanted Brahmin married women as a cook. Here, scientist Khole weakened her moral control by minimizing and disregarding effects and dynamics of her own actions. This is also a matter of dehumanization and attribution of blame on victim itself. This is a mechanism through which it is reiterated that, victims are responsible for bringing suffering on themselves by their provocative behavior. With reference to such acts of victim blaming, perpetrators self-sensor their action but in such cases, the apparent reason behind such atrocious behavior also determined by the fact that where do they see the victim; whether it is at the lower pedestal or at higher rank, depending on that the behavior would be pre-determined. But why would upper caste behave in such manner with Dalits or with other marginalized groups? Generation of empathetic reaction is activated when we perceive another as human with common sense of humanity. In that case we refrain from mistreating other person with self-condemnation. It becomes feasible only when we consider other as lesser human being or with sub-human status. That's how it becomes easier to inflict cruelty on someone whom we think as low animal form. Thus, moral disengagement in upper caste brings out worst in them. This certainly is not a moral justification for the inhuman actions done by orthodox upper caste but rather an attempt to deconstruct the mechanisms of their behavior and actions.

### III

How are Dalits coping with this?

Due to the constant suppression and oppression, Dalits suffer. Suffering is caused due to the loss of property, loss of person, loss of dignity, due to violence and fear, etc. Dehumanization of Dalits takes place due to the segregation, as higher caste claim to be 'clean' and Dalits as 'unclean', geographical ostracism, which created sense of lower self among Dalits.

Due to constant oppression and crushed attempt of emancipation, Dalits gets expose to existential crises and cognitive problem of meaninglessness. How do Dalit cope up

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<sup>34</sup> Shinde, S. (2017, Sept 8). Pune scientist finds out her cook isn't Brahmin, files police complaint. *Hindustan Times, Pune*. Retrieved from <https://www.hindustantimes.com/pune-news/pune-imd-scientist-files-case-against-cook-for-lying-about-her-caste/story-bJMmDqE0aAKI4eri2vefGI.html>

with this, is a matter of study. To overcome their historical disadvantaged position, Dalits like other marginalized groups, with the help of constitutional rights began to assert themselves at every sphere. Their assertion becomes antithetical to caste ridden Indian society that is the reason why, Dalits have faced brutalities, inhuman treatment and discrimination. But the repeated use of the language of stigma and mechanism of moral disengagement of practiced by upper caste, reinstated and institutionalizes caste hierarchy. It engendered power relations in such a way that helps to sustain caste based cultural practices.

In *Purush*, Siddharth was shown as morally impoverished person, in *Suryasta*, Gaikwad is shown as someone allured by conventional material gains from jobs and compromised with his inner conflicts and anger towards Santaram. Such depiction of Dalits needs to be seen in two ways: firstly, who are the spectators of these plays and secondly, implications of depiction Dalits in this manner. Marathi play audience is mainly urban middle class people. Depiction in this manner compels audience to associate Dalit with physical menace and moral danger. In Guru's terms, "social (and cultural) production of such ecology firmly establishes an ontological link between the Dalit and the social ecology of distorted description"<sup>35</sup> (Guru, 2013). This resulted in the association of Dalits with dirt and filth in the eye of upper caste (especially urban middle and upper class/caste because urban social civic spaces are considered and claimed to be more liberal and secular unlike villages'; ill reputation of village towards caste oppression is well documented). Such perception of upper castes leads to the moral disengagement of upper caste towards Dalits and who have little or no empathy for victim's pain.

Dalits aren't born without potentials and abilities. Their vulnerabilities are not biological rather they are multigenerational impairments which are passed on from generations to generations. Social productions, like Ashish Nandi's controversial comment on SC/ST's involvement in corruption and cultural productions, like, distorted depiction of Dalits in various forms (here, in Marathi drama), in Prof. Guru's terms; provide elites an opportunity to repeat the ritual of humiliation and subjection of Dalits. Due to the stigmatization and humiliation in this manner, as far as Dalit's psychological state is concerned, experience 'distressful' condition. This

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<sup>35</sup> Professor Guru has used term 'social ecology' while responding to Ashish Nandi's controversial remark on SC/ST's involvement in corruption



‘distress’ need not to be individualized considering personal or phenomenological experience, rather it is a result of indignity inflicted by larger social, cultural and political system which indirectly or directly cause distress.

As Prof. Guru has rightly said that Dalit struggle is to break the ‘social ecology’ which is been constructed by upper caste discourse and language structure (Guru, 2013). To come out of humiliation and stigmatization, self-respect is an essential element. But caste ridden social system in India is composed of the language of obligation. In caste social system, self-respect and self-esteem is exclusively affiliated to upper caste, where lower castes are not its legitimate candidates. For self-respect to take place, language of humanism and rights, freedom, etc. needs to be the essential part of public discourse. Through the implementation of constitution, in formal sense, language of rights, freedom, equality began to penetrate in India society, but caste grammar do not allow any of such changes in language. In India, it is absent and therefore, Dalits location and role becomes non-transferable and becomes a condition which is constant and not changeable. For instance, Dalit caste labels are used as derogatory terms or abusive words, under such circumstances assuming self-respect is indomitable task for Dalits. Dominant sections of society who hold power in social and cultural sphere equally assert over marginalized communities politically as well, by trammeling their capacity to connect, to mobilize politically by all means. Due to the extensive project of domination over Dalits by stigmatization, dehumanization and ostracism, Dalits face negative consequences such as stereotype threat effects, negative impact on self-worth and fear of confirming to stereotyped norms. This causes chronic intergenerational distress.

Here I would discuss ways by which Dalit theatre plays have articulated response to caste oppression in order to achieve justice. Their idea of Dalit empowerment and social transformation needs special attention as it portrays dichotomy between constitutional and violent means. In *Kheliya*, Narayan used legal means to gain his rights but Baskar takes up Tea vendor’s case and wins it by cheating and bribing key witnesses. Although Narayan and every character in the play accepts court’s verdict but Dalit youths in the village, refuse to get tamed by dominant castes whims and burn Tea vendor’s shop. Although Bhagat does not endorse path of violence but definitely such depiction opens up issues about paths of transformation adopted by Dalits, within modern democratic state, one either can hope or distress.

Prevalent contemporary social-political conditions and the approach adopted by Dalit political organizations like Dalit Panther of the time is the testimony of that, where Dalits refused to live in distress and express their anger which turned into violence. Specialty of Bhagat's plays is such that, he does not draw any conclusion but leaves the question for the evaluation about the paths adopted by Dalits in search of human dignity, justice and self-respect, which we also see in *Wata-Palwata*. During the conversation between Satish and Anil, Anil reveals that Dasrao, upper caste, is getting housing benefit through corruptions, which were supposed to be given to Dalit flood victims. Anil points out to the fact that when modern democratic government offers any welfare policy for Dalits; real benefits never reach up to them. Under such condition Anil expresses to Satish about adopting illegal means to give houses to Dalit flood victims and he does so in spite of Satish's warning of not to disrespect law and rather fight peacefully. Satish is thinking about the consequences of such acts and kind of atrocities Dalits would have to experience afterwards. Here we see, Anil believe is violence for the transformation of deplorable condition of Dalits whereas Satish propounds peaceful, constitutional means. It has been proved time and again that violence is not a way to register one's protest in democracy; in fact violence is antithetical to the emancipatory project of Dalit struggle. But Dalit protests, movements or even spontaneous violent acts by Dalit groups needs to understand in a social context. Before judging the 'violence' expressed by Anil in *Wata-Palwata*, we need to understand the effect and destruction of violence inflicted by upper caste on Dalits which affected their reflexive world view. Physical, emotional, psychological violence has the ability to destruct the intentional openness of consciousness towards self, other and the world around. In phenomenological sense, violence is an act of intentionality by upper caste to inflict pain and injury on lower castes beings. This is done by keeping intact power structure in upper caste favor. Violence as an activity is performed to violate the symbolic and physical integrity of Dalit community. This determines the sense structure of the Dalit community, in other words, it develops antagonism and dissension towards existing caste social structure. Dalit, being a violated self, tried to revolt against such act of violence. There act of violence is to protect their integrity and self-respect and most importantly their existence and dignity. But one cannot negate the fact that, violence either caused by other or done by one, destruct the meaning ability of consciousness. It develops kind of alienation of the being with oneself and with other beings in the

world. It affects the sense structure of the person which helps one to make sense of the world around. Individual and communities lives exist in particular cultural milieu of the world, and they go through particular kind of experiences being in a particular social-cultural set up. Understanding the violence and the way it is serving the structure of consciousness would certainly help to find the deficit and meagerness of the very use of ‘violence’ and would want us to look for the different perspective.

Then what would be the alternative? Depressed and distressed entitlements caused by systemic stigmatization, and dehumanization can be remitted by participation and election of Dalit political parties. This would give positive experience to Dalit which would help them to gain self-respect and dignity because democracy has the ability to empower people at large scale. There is a mass awareness about democratic rights among Dalits. In such scenario, caste and politics are bound to hit each other violently in the struggle for power. Due to affirmative action and other constitutional measures, Dalits have got empowered to the extent, at least some sections of Dalits. Political assertions and social engineering by Mayavati in UP, and Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar has given some sense of political empowerment to Dalits (Pai,1997). Dominant castes who are losing their traditional hold are asserting in their own ways. Caste is operational since centuries, but due to the introduction of democracy as a liberal political set up, the entire caste social equations have changed. Democracy has succeeded in empowering Dalits to an extent but it has not been successful in eliminating casteism.

#### IV

**Conclusion:** The present chapter was undertaken with the idea of documenting the issues posed by Dalit plays and to make critical analysis of those issues. The generalized observation and evaluation of written Dalit plays created case against evil caste practices. The main objective of the chapter was to identify critical issues raised by Dalit plays which is been found in relation to caste stigma, moral disengagement of upper castes, and paths adopted by Dalits to cope up and revolt against their oppression.

Chapter begins with the analysis of some Marathi Dalit plays, in which various theatrical events have been identified, where stigmatization of Dalits on the name of caste and caste labels is apparent. It is concluded that, in the perception of higher castes, caste location is an unchangeable condition; condition which is non-transferable and un-redeemable. Therefore, caste in that sense, transcends temporality and space and creates stigma, which align with a person of Dalit caste all the time, at all places. Changing somebody's occupation of socio-economic status brings little or no change in the perception of upper castes, as we have seen in the case of Professor Satish, who in spite being into a respectable profession, finds it difficult to get rented house in the city due to his Buddhist identity. Chapter also highlights the fact that mere desire of leaving the stigmatized caste occupation by Dalits can infuriate upper caste people, who even apply brute force to resist the traditional breakage of caste order, where pre-determined occupation order is the essence of the caste system which is mainly done by upper caste to essentialize their caste location and associating of lower caste social location with dirt and filth.

Next section of the chapter deals with the moral disengagement of upper caste, which is a necessary condition to inflict caste based atrocities, violence and discrimination. This moral disengagement is done none other than by 'normal' 'ordinary' members of society, who otherwise appear compassionate and kind with their immediate fellow beings. Such behavior is basically determined by identity of the opposite person, in other words, by knowing who the other person is. We have concluded that, moral disengagement takes place by various reasons, such as by morally justifying the act of violence by subverting the narration of wrong doing and convincing worthy outcome of the particular violent act or by dehumanizing and attributing blame of the suffering on Dalits, etc. These issues in the chapter highlighted with the help of theatrical events.

The result of such stigmatization and moral disengagement produces stereotype threat and negative self-worth among Dalits which creates 'distressful' conditions. Generally these conditions are created by deliberately constructing flawed language of describing Dalits. Dalit struggle is to break these barriers and attain justice. With the help of play, *Kheliya* and *Wata-Palwata*, we have tried to show, Dalits devised various approaches to escape from the imposed stigma and injustice. Violent or constitutional/peaceful mean; either of the routes are assumed by characters. Analysis

of these approaches is been done in the last section. Violence, though is universally condemned phenomenon, need to understand differently in the context of Dalits. Dalit's violent acts are not to violate the physical and symbolic integrity of the any other individual but rather it is a response towards the imposed indignities, stigmas, defacement and dehumanization.

The chapter does not end with the moral justification of violence inflicted by Dalits but rather suggest that, conscious understanding of violence and the way it construct our structure of consciousness would help to find the deficit of the use of violence.

### Chapter 3

#### **Revival of Buddhism and Transformation of Dalit Cultural Identity:**

#### **With Reference to Bahujan Rangbhoomi and Bodhi Natya Parishad**

This Chapter would deal with the introduction of Buddhist theatre and revival of Buddhism in 'Dalit' plays in Maharashtra, post-1990s. This marked the departure point from the Dalit theatre. We would try to understand this departure with the help of work done by *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* (theatre group in Nagpur) and *Bodhi Natya Parishad* (led by Premanand Gazvi). Chapter would be divided into three sections: first section would deal with the reasons of the said departure, in which I would deal with decline of Dalit theatre and growing inclination towards Buddhism. Second section would deal with the implications of this departure, where the focus would be on Dalits' desire of redefining their own identity in Maharashtra. Last section would deal with the significance of this departure by focusing on emancipatory imagination of playwrights and effort of creating collective cultural memory by associating with recollecting Buddhist cultural past. Project is, basically to see how Buddhism as an ethical intervention in plays, helps in pragmatic construction of social-cultural and religious identity of Dalits in Maharashtra.

#### I

Dalit theatre in Maharashtra is undergoing radical shift and turning into Ambedkarite/Buddhist/Bahujan theatre. Dichotomy between Dalit and Bahujan terminology is well addressed and highlighted concept as far as the study of marginalized/oppressed (Dalit) people in India are concerned. These categories are well reflected and critically analyzed in political and intellectual field. Dalits, former untouchables are those who are crushed, oppressed and exploited historically. As popular discourse about the term 'Dalit' goes, it is argued that Dalit is not a specific caste based term. Dalits are those who are economically, socially, educationally backward and oppressed and do not have enough scope for intergenerational social, economic mobility due to the absence of resources and social-cultural capital. Many writers, intellectuals have interpreted term Dalits as per their perception. But the broader definition is been given by Dalit panther who defined Dalit stating that,

Dalits include scheduled caste, scheduled tribes, Buddhist, women, working class, landless labor, tribal, nomadic tribes, etc. (Bhandare, 2010, p. 21-25). This indeed increased the spectrum of the term Dalit to a large extent. Johannes Beltz has discussed in detail about the quest of a name for the social identity. Propagation of the term Dalit began in Maharashtra but it is the same place where it has been critiqued as well. There is an array of formulations pertaining to the use of the term Dalit, Buddhist, untouchables, oppressed, marginalized, etc. Engagement with these categories is mostly taken place in intellectual field. Beltz clears his position when he says that “these terms are not interchangeable and remarkably different from each other because each word has a history and represents specific experiences and identities”. He further suggests that these words can be used in combination with each other with specific connotation (Belz, 2005, p. 33).

As far as Dalit theatre in Maharashtra is concerned, it remained immune to this politics of label, almost till 1990, unlike literary field where identity contestation based on labels such as ‘Dalit’, ‘Buddhist’, and ‘Ambedkarite’ was on verge. But soon we see after post 1990, there was an emergence of Buddhist/Ambedkarite/Bahujan theatre and *Bodhi Natya Parishad*. Playwrights, artists, performers of new phase are asserting their Buddhist identity and wish to shun away from ‘Dalit’ label. Contemporary socio-political conditions and decline of Dalit theatre are seems to be responsible for the shift towards Buddhist/Ambedkarite theatre and change in labels. While analyzing the downfall of Dalit theatre, Madhukar Mokashi explains that, during the period of 1970 and 1990, Dalit theatre movement was at the peak. Dalit theatre was doing lot of successful performances across Maharashtra, and Theatre festivals were organized at larger scale but according to Mokashi, primarily, lack of newness, freshness of experience, inability of creating something new, and capturing nuances of changing time, discovering new paths, etc. and limitations of subject, expression, etc. are responsible for the decline of Dalit theatre.

Apart from that, apathy of established Dalit playwrights towards play writing is also one of the reasons why Dalit theatre couldn’t sustain its vigor. In one of the interview, Premamand Gazvi (Gazvi, 2017), highlighted this problem and expressed that most of the established Dalit playwrights could not maintain pace with the changing time and challenges of the changing period, therefore they lost the touch

with playwriting and new artistic creations. Mokashi, also laments over that fact that, Dalit theatre's cumulative historical documentation was absent, Dalit theatre festivals remained low key affairs rather it should have created cultural upheaval. Apart from that, according to him, library and archival records are essential, theatre publications are required, government aid and human resources are motivating, and Dalit theatre Academy as an independent body need to establish, etc. to flourish any movement. These are some of the important measures Dalit theatre practitioner must look into. Although these are valuable suggestion and need desperate attention for the sustenance of artistic movement but these do not take us at the center of the problem of the decline of the Dalit theatre. What is less apparent is the absence of the element of 'culture' from Dalit plays. Here culture is seen from both, historical and presence sense. Culture is something unites people, which reflect in their day to day life. Dalit theatre created a space where pathos and pain of oppressed could be articulated through performances, but it was far from being called culture in conventional sense. Firstly, roots of Dalit theatre are always remain contested and obscure. Some occasionally tried to establish its genealogy, sometimes with folk art forms and other times with *Satyashodhaki, Ambedkari Jalasa and Shahiri* (Mokashi, 2011, p. 16).

Dalit theatre tried to draw parallel with Black theatre at various occasions, and even adapted many Black theatre plays, like *Mulatto, Slavery, Raisin in the Sun*, etc. (Mahajan; Bagale, 2009) but search for the roots within folk art forms was not equally unifying and self-affirmation project for Dalits unlike Blacks in America. The reason for saying so lies in the fact, that most of the Indian folk arts are aryanized and carry brahminical ethos at its core. Relying on them was antithetical for the Dalit project of empowerment. And secondly, Dalit theatre, although was a great force for the articulation of Dalit sufferings and created legitimate space for Dalits but was not equally successful for creating cultural capital for Dalit community. According to Pierre Bourdieu<sup>36</sup>, cultural capital in general sense can be explained as, the cultural

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<sup>36</sup> Theory of capital states that, capital is currency that buys you higher position in society, it is the foundation of social life and that is what decides our role in social world. Capital is the result of labor and over the time the amount of capital we accumulate increases. Cultural capital is to know what you have and what you know.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). Forms of Capital. In J. G. Richardson, *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* ( pp. 241–258). NY: Greenwood Press.



knowledge that's serves as currency that help us navigate culture and alter our experiences and opportunities available to us. Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and cultural capital postulates that the culture of dominant class is transmitted and rewarded by the educational system and that dominant culture continue to exist because the value of cultural preferences and behaviors are defied relationally around structuring binary oppositions such as 'pure' and 'impure' or 'aesthetic' and 'vulgar', etc. It reflects in many forms such as cloths, language, food habits, artistic preferences, etc. Therefore, this becomes the site for punitive national culture. Bourdieu explains that, cultural capital can be acquired and it is marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition, which determines its distinctive value. Acquisition of caste cultural capital are rooted in the early condition of institutionalization and crystallization of caste Hindu culture, which later became the basis for national culture through nationalistic narrative which we will see in further course in relation to social collective memory. And lastly, at the political front when identity politics changed its course and vigor post 1990, formation and assertion of identities became important principle for the social mobilization, which also reflected in way various communities assert and expresses themselves, in such scenario reconstruction of identities on various grounds might have been a spontaneous response.

Theatre, being an important cultural expression also underwent into a radical shift. But what was it shifted to? It primarily shifted towards the Buddhism and reconstruction of theatre based on the ideals of The Buddha. Texas Gaikwad<sup>37</sup> states that, Prabuddha Rangbhoomi is different than *Dalit Rangbhoomi* and only *Prabuddha Rangbhoomi* can bring cultural prosperity in a revolutionary way (Mokashi, 2006, p. 85) because, Buddha's teaching propagates principles of equality, freedom, fraternity; Acharya Buddha Ghosh incorporated these principles in various artistic forms like, literature, sculpture, art, drama, etc. On the similar lines, Gaikwad affirms that, construction of *Prabuddha* (enlightened) citizens would be accelerated by establishing *Prabuddha* culture based on principles of Buddhism (p. 46). But do

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<sup>37</sup> Akhil Bhartiya Brabuddha Natya Sammekan, 17, 18 May 1997, Umapur, Karnataka, Speech by Texas Gaikwad

we mean by *Prabuddha Theatre* or Buddhist theatre?<sup>38</sup> In Maharashtra, Buddhist or Bahujan theatre is based on the principles of ‘Buddha and his Dhamma’ (p. 146). It reflects Buddhist philosophy of middle path and Dr B R Ambedkar’s philosophy of anti-caste movement. Many plays like *Tathagat*, *Chale Hum Prabuddha Bharat Ki Aur*, and *...ani Dhamma*, etc. portrays life of the Buddha and propagates values and characteristics of The Buddha. Through plays which are based on the issues related to caste, class, gender problems, it tries to perpetuate different perspective with intention to promote reflexive ability of spectators pertaining to the chosen path on the journey of justice. This *Prabuddha* and Bahujan-Buddhist Theatre is of different nature than the Buddhist drama performed across the world as it do not submit to Buddhist superstitious practices of tantric Buddhism through drama or Buddhist mask dance-drama culture, which takes place at many Asian Buddhist countries. This perhaps makes Bahujan-Buddhist theatre unique in its approach. Although it is less transcendental in its approach but while dealing with various issues it put the human agency at its maximum optimization.

Apart from accepting Buddhist principles, this new wave of radical theatre construction also rejected Bharatmuni’s *Natyashastra* as a base text for dramaturgy and rather accepted Acharaya Ashwaghodha’s *Natyashastra* as a standard reference text for dramas. Similar assertion has also been done by *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and Bodhi Theatre. Both these are also an important carrier of this new wave of reconstruction of Dalit-Bahujan marginalized<sup>39</sup> theatre’s social transformation project.

It is been 27 years now, *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* which was established in 1991 in Vidarbha region of Maharashtra, is flagbearer of Buddhist theatre movement. This group is involved in proscenium plays, children’s drama, street plays, one act plays, folk, etc. and also conducts many workshops and awareness performances for tribal and downtrodden communities. In an interview, Virendra Ganvir explains that ‘it is a

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<sup>38</sup> From ancient period, Buddhist dance and drama remained an essential part of Indian culture. Buddhist theatre or drama as a category is plural in nature depending on where it is performed. It includes stories of Buddhist legends, Jataka stories, special mask theatre, etc. For further details, follow below mention website

<http://disco.teak.fi/asia/gigaku-buddhist-mask-theatre/>

<sup>39</sup> Dalit term may not be appropriate as both these groups assert the departure from this terminology but I have used this term in the connotation of addressing Dalit as a community

mission and exercise of self-realization' (Ganvir, 2016). It is a creative activism. Their play, *Chale Hum Prabuddha Bharat Ki Aur* portrays story of Gautama Buddha from his birth to his *Mahaparinirvana* and his teaching of Buddhism, it also contains history of Ashoka, Phule, Ambedkar. It reiterates through plays the path of non-violence and propagates anti-war ideology. In *Main Phir Laut Aunga* issue of tribal oppression is portrayed. In which, Ambedkarite activists work for tribal empowerment in interiors of Maharashtra, many tribal youths are also part of this project. Landlord of the village, rapes, tribal youth's sister and kills his father. Satya (another tribal youth and also a part of Ambedkarite activist group) gets disheartened by the power operation in the case and tries to go ahead with Naxalite group to take revenge of landlord and police. But other Ambedkarite activist helps Satya, make him aware of his disillusionment and inspire him to opt for constitutional and legal measures to obtain justice. *Bharat Abhi Baki hai* play deals with caste based discrimination in higher education institutes, which is mainly influenced by recent incident of institutional murder of Rohit Vemula, a research scholar. This one act play ends with the thought provoking idea that system wants Dalit but not Ambedkarite and the moment you assert your identity, there will be a counter-attack from orthodox caste Hindus.

Apart from that, Premanand Gazvi's plays *Nagpadma*, *...Ani Dhamma*, *Mission*, and *The Buddha*, are highly influenced by Buddha's life and characters of his times.<sup>40</sup> Gazvi is one of the few 'Dalit' playwrights who have continued writing of plays till today. But we can see drastic shift in stories, themes, characterizations, subject, then the earlier plays of Gazvi, like *Kirvant*, *Tanmajori*, *Utara*, *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, etc. To understand this shift we need to focus on his concept of 'Bodhi' and 'art for knowledge. From the concept of *Bodhi*, Art for Knowledge concept took shape. *Bodhi* term is derived from Buddhist literature and therefore Gazvi calls this literature as Bodhi literature meaning 'literature of knowledge'. *Bodhi* is not just a synonym of knowledge but 'right knowledge' (Samyak Gyan). This word signifies consciousness, understanding, intellect, comprehensive knowledge, explanation, teaching, information, wisdom, compassion, etc. (Gazvi, 2013, p. 96). Gazvi, gives one metaphor to elaborate how this Bodhi concept is pragmatic in real material world, in which he says, when home is set on fire, artist who adores 'art for art' would pass on

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<sup>40</sup> Gazvi, P. (2016). *Ajintha Leni*. Mumbai: Bodhi Publication.

information simply saying that, 'home is set on fire' whereas artist who believes in 'art for life' would not only inform but will also suggest means to get rid of this calamity but Gazvi says that, Bodhi concept is beyond that, he says that, water is essential to extinguish fire the solution but what if person is not aware about how to extinguish fire from water? So imparting knowledge in rightful means is the right understanding of Bodhi. In similar way, art should inculcate right knowledge. To inculcate Bodhi-knowledge concept, institutional structure was required, so *Bodhi Natya Parishad* was established on 22 November 2003 at Mumbai. Further writing of plays, through *Bodhi Natya Parishad*, was motivated by the concept of 'art for knowledge'. According to Gazvi, *Bodhi* might be a new model for many contemporary people, but in actuality it is an old model, based in the ancient Buddhist culture and *Nag Sanskriti* (Nag Culture). But he suggests that, to fully utilize this model, old model of Hindu social culture must be demolished (Gazvi, 2017). In Maharashtra, *Bodhi Natya Parishad* began thirteen years before, within this time span; they have performed twenty two dramas, conducted many workshops and five drama festivals. Like, Gaikwad and Ganveer, Gazvi too rejected authority of Bharatmini's *Natyashastra* and asserted that Ashwaghosha's *Natyashashtra* as standard text on dramaturgy.

Buddhist culture has always been a counterculture which is always in opposition to the brahminical culture of the society. Buddhist culture breaking the idea of subculture as it does not recognize societal pattern of Hindu caste society. Contemporary developments in Marathi Dalit-Bahujan plays can be understood with the category of 'counterculture' and 'subculture'.

## II

The discussed shift from Dalit to Ambedkarite Buddhist theatre raises issue of cultural identity of Dalits. To see what kind of implications are visible at socio-cultural and political sphere, we will begin with Dalit cultural identity. It is inevitable for us to understand 'Dalit culture' in Maharashtra to understand the nature and implication of this cultural change.

Anthropological perspective sees culture as cultivation, process of transmission and acquisition of traditions as a result of which society is perpetuated (Brown, 1956). Culture exist in the mind of individual human beings who have learned it in their past

associations with other human beings and who use it to guide their own continuing interactions with others and once a culture is learned and accepted it tends to persist.

As far as Dalits are concerned, they do not have unique culture rather they are highly divided on caste lines with distinct caste cultural values. In that sense, to form an identity as Dalit, unique culture is not a necessary condition. Identities can be formed without cultural similarities between communities. For instance, generic identity of women, lesbian, etc. need not to have common culture within identity boundary. But this identity remains fluid and internally fragmented. Within Dalit identity, various castes obtain their cultural shield from Hindu caste culture. In such circumstances, Dalit cultural identity obtains status of subculture as it retain its own beliefs, values, norms, but they continue to exist within the ambit of mainstream culture.

In the context of Dalit culture in Maharashtra, Philip Constable states that, (Constable, 1997, p. 337), early Dalit culture was a cultural mixing, which integrated principles of Mahatma Phule and Mahar Chambhar *bhakti* Hindu practices and beliefs, which boils down to the idea that with such practices, Dalits intended to create their distinct group identity within Hinduism, basing their demands on socio-religious equality, access to Hindu social facilities and institutional representation. He argues that, early studies of Dalit culture in Maharashtra neglected this (intentionally). He further contends that Dalits are those whose culture was crushed by Varna Hindus. The struggle for independent cultural identity of Dalits traced back to 19<sup>th</sup> century when Gopal Baba Walangkar founded *Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal* (Association for Eliminating the Stigma of Untouchability) in 1888. Walangkar was inclined towards the revival of *bhakti* movement and wanted to establish genealogy of Mahars with *Kshatriyas* Varna. Establishment of *Mahar Sabha* in 1906 in Nagpur by Kisan Faguji Bansode also aimed at inculcating values of *bhakti*. He went further and appealed fellow Mahar people to remain faithful to Hinduism but discard certain practices like meat eating, refrain from drinking alcohol, selling and butchering cows, forsaking the untouchable women's involvement in *Tamasha*, etc. He was also against conversion into other religions.

The primary function of *Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal* was to create cultural awareness among the Mahar and Chambhar communities. Now what kind of culture they had perceived? It was primarily based on idea of Hinduism which was certainly

sort of different from the brahmanic ritual regulations (Manusmriti). Along with that they appealed to Mahar, Chambhar people to seek individual enlightenment on the path of *bhakti*. They were highly influenced by Phule's *Satyashodhak* movement, but according to Velankar, Mahar's oppression is not social but rather religious, therefore religious liberation through the path of *bhakti* is the only means for creating their own cultural identity. What is most interesting and needs desperate attention is the basis on which Valangkar based the Dalit cultural identity. Through the translation of Tukaram's *Jnyaneshwari* in Prakrit language, Hindu religious values reached up to Dalit/untouchable household. Walankar held high the status of Mahar Saint Chokhamela as the epitome of *bhakti*. The emancipatory imagination of Walangkar was seriously flawed as he wanted to remain in Hindu religion and desired to established 'Dalit (then untouchables) culture' with line of devotional individualized *bhakti* culture.

In later period, we can see a heavy reliance on folklore for establishing roots of Dalit culture in Maharashtra as far as performative activities are concerned. This idea is still widespread in Maharashtra. In post-independence period, much efforts made by governmental bodies and caste communities to establish genealogy of marginalized art forms with folk art.

Two important formulations which came out of this cultural assertion: firstly, untouchables' (Mahar and Chambhar) cultural roots are based in Hinduism and *bhakti* (spiritual liberation). Secondly, the imagination of liberation and emancipation had high Hindu moral underpinnings, which was largely based on seeking moral validity from caste Hindus

But here we need to problematize the idea of seeking liberation and emancipation through Hindu religious means and perils of situating Dalit cultural identity in Hindu Dharma. This mechanism by which Dalit cultural identity is accommodated within the Hindu fold created status of subculture for Dalits. Idea of emancipation is in the realm of consciousness, which was conditioned by Hindu *bhakti* religious grounds. When re-recruitment of Mahar, Chambhar and Mang community in military came on forth, Walangkar, for using political means for emancipation, made claim that Mahars belong to *Kshatriya* Varna (marshal race). Earlier efforts of constructing cultural identity of Dalits by than leaders marked by two important features;

appropriation and sanskritization. *Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal* emphasized on the equal education, and equal representation of untouchables in all public institutions. The nature of cultural assertion can be seen in the construction of separate religious bathing tank (*ghats*) for untouchables, creation of separate Mahar temple-shrine, etc. and these suggest that spatial, social and cultural claim of untouchables could be made within Hinduism. This reformist approach of early Dalit/untouchable Mahar leaders might be less appreciative and can be severely contested on the ground of causing more damage to Dalit cultural identity than doing good, as well as it created room for questioning the unnecessary reliance on Hindu culture for reconstructing their own distinct cultural identity but we cannot deny the fact that it has certainly paved the way for future Dalit struggle, by inculcating essence of rebellion, although not through radical revolution but through less respected Hindu reformist approach. It implanted the ideals of transformation and uplifting oppressed community through religious and political means. On one hand above mentioned attempts earned subculture status to untouchable cultural identity, on the other hand it reinforced mechanism by which oppression of untouchables would be institutionalized which became antithetical to the theory of social transformation. But revival of Buddhist culture through theatre performances is a counter attempt to create counterculture against brahminical hegemonic cultural identity.

But how *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Theatre* are creating and asserting distinct Buddhist identity of Dalit-Bahujans, to see that we need to understand caste cultural identity in relation to upper caste Hindu culture and Dalit subculture. Caste system in India is marked by cultural plurality means each caste has its own cultural identity. Process of caste construction is primarily aimed at maintaining cultural superiority of upper caste and downgrading the lower caste culturally. Attempt of stabilizing and structuring the order of superior culture and inferior culture was crucial in defining caste dominance. For that, culturally subjugated lower caste people are essential. In that case, seeking salvation and liberation under the high caste gods remain essential element. Mission of cultural subjugation involves making lower caste remain in the caste framework and awakening in them a desire to be like upper caste, which is well understood in terms of the process of Sanskritization and caste hegemony. In such system, lower castes remain lower caste but would carry brahmanical ethos in blood, opinion, taste and morals. But if lower castes attain exact character of upper caste

then there won't be any cultural gap, gap of purity, which in turn can destroy the logic of casteism, which would be antithetical for the sustenance of caste system. Although upper caste wants lower caste to imitate and look up for them but they never expect lower caste to catch up to their level. In that sense, lower caste would acquire 'casteist' character but would not become like upper caste in terms of superiority. This caveat is essential to maintain assumed cultural gap between the so called 'superior' upper caste and 'inferior' lower caste. If the gap completely closed down then the course of justification of caste system ends at that very point. The idea of caste identity is ultimately defined by a cultural essence which is unique to people who are bound in particular social, political and cultural boundary and which has remained unchanged for ages and which will continue to remain so in the future. What makes us belong to a particular caste, within a caste order is basically a caste cultural essence which is unchangeable, and which we share with people living in particular caste boundary, that has remained unchanged from past and has been forwarded to us, which we would forward unchanged to our future generations. This caste cultural essence connects people to people who share similar cultural essence and also determines our relationships with other castes in hierarchy.

Due to past centuries struggle and constant flux in social, cultural and political arena, lower caste communities are in exile, if not physically but temporally, which means, past centuries of struggle is allowing Dalits to drift away from their caste identities, which are being taught to hold on since childhood. Being in the exile, Dalits are expose to all cultures of the world by which lower caste communities could fashion their own cultural identity by experimenting with religions and cultures in the world, for instance, Dalit conversion to other religions (Pandey, 2006). So in that case, cultural identity of lower castes becomes dynamic process of transformation and gives Dalit complete agency to shape their own identity then is to be offered by the straightjacket of caste system and caste culture identity. So, it means that Dalits move from confined space of caste boundary to wider field of cultural experimentation.

We will use this as our starting point for our discussion of the cultural shift from Dalit performances to Ambedkarite Buddhist theatre. Bahujan Rangbhoomi and Bodhi Theatre are representatives of this cultural shift. But before that, we need to deal with the concept of 'cultural change'. 'Cultural change' or cultural shift is kind of an alternative search for the sense of belonging, which means, reconstruction of



cultural concept of society that stresses on social and cultural capital determinants and manner in which people interact with each other (Knott et al. , 2008).

The cultural shift and effects of the work done by Bahujan Rangbhoomi can be evaluated from three factors; political engagement, moral sharing and cultural commitment. In play, *Main Phir Laut Aunga*, political engagement is concerned with promoting the idea that citizen of India must be law abiding while performing their duties and seeking justice for any cause and should forward the cause for human rights. Ethical and moral engagement is explicitly portrayed in plays of *Bahujan Rangbhoomi*. It shows affinity towards upholding moral values of Buddhism. It comments on the path of non-violence and falsity of this path while promotes the adoption of constitutional values, for instance, Satya in *Main Phir Laut Aunga*, choose to join Naxalite movement but was persuaded by Ambedkarite activists. *Chale Hum Prabuddha Bharat ki Aur* propagates progressive ideals of Buddhism and all other progressive personalities, this can create sense of cultural belongingness among Dalit-Bahujan communities.

We need to understand particular context within which Gazvi and Ganveer write their plays. That specific context is the context of Buddhist cultural history and principles of Buddhism. This context situates Ganveer and Gazvi at a unique crossroad of cultural identities and to explore possibilities of cultural change and cultural exploration.

First we will talk about Buddhist cultural context and Buddhist principles. Presence of Buddhism in India is portrayed as counterculture to brahmanical social order. Therefore it received wrath from the orthodox upper caste Hindus. This is of course informed by caste orthodoxy of upper caste psyche who wanted lower castes to remain subjugated. As Gazvi explains that, the way in which Buddhism in ancient period stood as a challenge, its extinction and demolition of cultural and knowledge system was essential for Brahminical social order to maintain its supremacy. Extinction of Buddhism changed demographic profile of Indian subcontinent. So on one hand, original template of Buddhist culture was scrubbed clean by orthodox caste Hindus and on the other hand, it exposed lower caste oppressed communities to caste oppression.

However, as I mentioned earlier, *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Natya Parishad*, began to write about Buddhist culture, cultural attainments of Buddhism, which were vanished. This is an attempt to revive Buddhist culture. In this sense, we can say caste culture identity which was imposed on Dalits since ages amounted to cultural nothingness. This sense of cultural nothingness is associated with inherent subhuman status within the caste.

Dalit struggle is to come out of this space of cultural nothingness because in this space, Dalits have status no less than subhuman. But when we come to Bahujan Rangbhoomi and Bodhi Theatre, what we see a desire of cultural change and construction of space that provides Dalits a position of cultural strength. Both these groups use the notion of the Buddhist cultural past on blank slate which was acquired by departing from cultural nothingness in caste order, to create new identity which offers possibilities of attaining reputed human status.

Unlike caste cultural identity which is immovable, this new endeavor asserts Ambedkarite and Buddhist identity that opened up new possibilities of self-exploration. Through the performances Bahujan Rangbhoomi and Bodhi Theatre, this neo-Buddhist cultural identity is getting crystalized.

### III

Departure from Dalit theatre and journey towards Buddhist Ambedkarite theatre and its significance can be understood in five different ways: first is the very idea of breaking the old framework creates alternative and opportunity for innovation. Secondly, it aimed at not only presenting problems but also proposed solution. Third, it portrays emancipatory imagination of playwrights by exploring theory of social transformation. Lastly and most importantly, it gives jolt to Brahminical cultural hegemony by attempting to create social cultural memory of oppressed communities by associating with Buddhist cultural past.

Nagpur has always been the focal point of Ambedkarite movement and under such social and political environment, where *Bahujan Rangbhoomi's* cultural movement took shape. One of the founding members of this group, Virendra Ganvir had decided that this group would perform plays based on the philosophy of Ambedkar and The

Buddha. These Ambedkarite plays are based on the principles of freedom, equality, fraternity and justice. In every drama of this group, you can find reflection of this philosophy. Themes of these plays are based on the pressing problems of downtrodden. But important characteristics of these plays, which make them different from Dalit plays is that they are solution oriented. It's been more than a decade that *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* is working and researching on 'Buddhist culture'. The group has undertaken endeavor to deconstruct Hindu classic religious texts to unearth the hidden history of Indian drama. In this pursuit they have discovered that, Ashwaghosh was the first dramatist, later it reaches up to Phule and then to *Bodhi*. They have begun to organize Buddhist conference, first of which, was organized in 2015 at Nagpur. This group claim to represent entire Bahujan population, who were never got opportunity to nurture their artistic skills at large scale. Play *Ghayal Pakhara*, is one the most successful plays of Bahujan Rangbhoomi, written by Virendra Ganvir. It portrays issue of mentally and physically challenged boy, Bhima and his Dalit mother. This play, in real sense, touches upon tabooed issues such as, hardships of single mother, mistreatment of differently abled children, inter-caste marriages and honor killings. *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* says that, these stories are not imaginations rather they are taken from real life incidences. Ganveer's stories covers spectrum of subject, from acute political commentary to picking up daily life issues of Dalits, which were never touched. Play ends with hope that if differently abled treated with compassion then they can overcome their handicap.

This Ambedkarite theatre is increasing its spectrum over the period. Over the thirty years it is working consistently in field. While talking about *Bahujan Rangbhoomi*, Children's needs special attention. Overall in any movement, children's has always been neglected sphere. Ambedkarite plays within children's has certainly went beyond fairytale stories and has addressed questions of slum children, child human trafficking, child prostitution, child labor, problem of begging in children, etc. All these present day's problems are addressed by *Bahujan Rangbhoomi*. Some of the well popular plays are *Remand Home*, *Ghayal Pakhara*, *Naga Ra Baba Shala*, etc. Conducting children workshop, playwriting, etc. are some of the important projects that *Bahujan Rangabhoomi* has undertaken. Bahujan Rangbhoomi primarily focuses on street and children's. This group has performed number of street plays at Yavatmal, Vardha, Gondiya, etc. districts as awareness campaign over various socio-

political issues. It deals with the problems of Dalit, tribal, nomadic tribe, slum dwellers, working class even performers belong to similar communities.

Bahujan/ Buddhist are a cultural movement. In first national Buddhist Conference, Gazvi expresses his opinion that, *Nagvanshi* Ambedkarite Buddhist must strive hard to revive the glory of Buddhist. He quotes Ambedkar, and says that, lower caste communities are *Nagvanshi* and therefore we must find out our roots. Downfall of Indus civilization due to Aryan invasion led to the destruction of Buddhist culture. He asserts that, to revive Buddhist culture, Buddhist is an essential tool. He formulates that *Bodhi* literature and *Bodhi* art is knowledge literature and art. It has specific function and aim to achieve. In that sense, it wants people to obtain knowledge and should be away from wrong doings, this cease the idea that art is meant for only amusement. Gazvi calls it an old model which is been appropriated by *Bodhi* for propagation of Buddhist culture.

Here we can come across the emancipatory imagination of playwright. Critical theory is presented here as an interdisciplinary approach which hold on to belief that social problems often result from groups in society being constrained by social structures and processes that they themselves construct and maintain but in case of caste sub-groups within scheduled caste category, different caste group people envision different forms of emancipation as a response to the kind of domination. As we have seen every method of emancipation proposed by earlier Dalit groups and also from contemporary period Dalit Bahujan groups, often constitutes different form of domination in itself. Emancipatory imagination of Ganveer and Gazvi need to bring into focus. Eric Olin Wright states that, envisioning real utopias is a central component of a broader intellectual enterprise that is called emancipatory social sciences, which seeks to generate scientific knowledge relevant to the collective project of challenging various forms of human oppression (Wright, 2017, p. 03). Emancipatory project has to diagnose social institutions and social structures to find out the cause of oppression, discrimination and social injustice, which is followed by envisioning viable alternatives and understanding obstacles in the transformation. It systematically diagnosed the world around and envisions visible alternative. It captures dilemmas, obstacles and possibilities of transformation. Plays like, '*Remand Home*', '*Battalion 1818*', '*Ghayal Pakhara*', '*Hitler ki Adhi Maut*', '*Ujalalya Sarya Disha*', etc. and many one act plays, street plays, etc. are performed by Bahujan

Rangbhoomi. Actors, performers and technicians of this group belong to downtrodden society. Therefore, these artists can relate with the caste and class oppression closely. *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* has acquired character of creative activism. It defeats mainstream Marathi theatre intellectual and ideological level. As Graciela Montaldo said, “*artworks become emancipatory acts as they establish movements, displacements and new places of enunciation*” (Montaldo, 2014).

Understanding act of writers of writing socially committed texts is to be considered as a central to literary act (Satre, 1960). So in that sense, portrayal of language, action is means of action and medium of change. “Each word is a path of transcendence; it shapes our feeling, names them, and attribute them imaginary patronage who takes it upon himself to live them for us (p. 39). According to Satra, this liberator can transform praxis and his writing can emancipate reader. This idea is well accepted but also discredited by stating that language is not easy communicative medium. But when performances aims at doing the same, it is been well received by spectators, rather we can say that performances are easily comprehended by even laymen spectators.

In case of *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Theatre*, emancipation and performance goes hand in hand. They have invested themselves in ‘ethical obligation’. Therefore, when that emancipatory imagination is translated from literary medium to performative elements, it can create even higher impact then it was intended by writing. In this case, performances of any kind have higher volition of reach, even to non-readers. What needed to pointed out is the emancipatory imagination of playwrights. We had seen earlier, how earlier Dalit reformers seeks liberation through *Bhakti* (devotion) towards god but wanted to remain in Hindu fold, which we have already declared as futile reformative approach. However, *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* are taking stark departure from earlier practices with the aim of constructing cultural identity based on Buddhism. Religious conversion into Buddhism was taken place in 1956, but its reflection in performative practices can be seen from 1991 onwards. Gazvi laments over the fact that, Dalit playwrights should have taken up the issue of the construction of cultural identity seriously; it remained as a problem oriented drama. Rather realizing the potential of performative art as an effective tool of mass communication, Dalit should have ushered the inculcation of Buddhist ideals quite in an early stage. He also accepts that, being a part of Dalit

movement, he too couldn't realize it and went with the flow. But this realization of Gazvi, motivated him writing in contemporary period as well.

Literary tradition may have limitations but body as a site of transformation is an important from performative arts perspective. In such case *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* s's emancipatory project has high volition. But Paul Ricoeur's critique of social emancipatory project states that such endeavor are not value neutral and every emancipatory project draws support from the ideals, utopian objectives, normative ambitions it espouse and to which it consequently tied to. Social emancipatory project undertaken by *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* , if seen through the similar lens then can appear as tied to the normative ambition of creating Buddhist community culturally stronger. But I would argue that, understanding Buddhist principles and its pragmatic approach as basis of identity construction is the appropriate alternative that Dalits have. It doesn't fall under liberation theological model like Dalit Christian, which is foregrounded the idea that, God is struggling with Dalits for their liberation and this gives them sense of pride and hope. Emancipatory imagination of Dalit reformist and Dalit theologians, and other's as well, failed to situate human agency as a potential factor in their own emancipation. *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* base their model of emancipation on the ideals of Buddhism. To judge Buddhism on pragmatic grounds, it must pass the test of revolution, morality and equality, at both conceptual and theoretical level. As Ambedkar states that, philosophical foundation of Buddhism lies in the reality of change, embedded morality and equality; this makes Buddhism as an instrument of emancipation based on the notion of change and dynamism. Due performative practices based on Buddhist principles, *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* Theatre achieves two objectives; firstly, it creates its own position in which it counters Brahminical hegemonic values which are ingrained in the performative practices of upper castes and secondly, it indirectly provides model of political and moral acts, which contributes in shaping the ideals that inform our sense of justice. Operative role of the emancipatory imagination of these playwrights in reforming the social and political life in terms of critiquing social complexities which are entangled in ideological conditions and which highlights individual's conscious moral and political acts that determines its future course of action. Similar things we have seen, how Satya in *Main Phir Laut Aunga* was persuaded by Ambedkarite activists to

abandon the idea of non-violence and adopt constitutional means to obtain justice. Satya's conscious decision of choosing path of non-violence speaks for both; The Buddha's and Ambedkar's path of non-violence and adoption of lawful means to bring about transformation. Such depiction in plays, in phenomenological sense, compels spectators to reflect on their structure of consciousness. Such kind of emancipatory project not only provide model but also instill mind with hope and expectation. This expectation is of two kinds, on one hand it provides strength which is derived from the rooted cultural past, on the other hand it exposes abuse of power, its adverse effects and institutional form of violence and as a response to such abuse moral and political acts are suggested as a practical alternative in the form of social emancipatory project. Performative practices of such would develop kinship and establish normative ground for moral behavior.

Significance of cultural shift is also be understood in terms of Buddhist cultural identity as a project of creating collective social memory and its symbolic articulation in the form of popular theatrical expression. According to Paul Ricoeur, we are not just alone, we are contingent and constructed, we are a part of larger memory and we are constructed in a way to be a part of that larger memory. Memory is not only a source of personal identity but also an identity of large collectivities (Barah, 2012). To understand collective memory, we would adopt the conceptual framework proposed by James Wretch, which entails collective memory versus collective remembering, history verses collective memory and individual memory versus collective remembering (Wretch, 2008)

Understanding the complexities of memory production and suppression would reveal the reasons for Dalit Ambedkarite desire of creating and asserting distinct cultural identity based on Buddhist principles. Dalits' cultural memory of past is related to the oral or performative traditions, mainly folklore, ballads, etc. Therefore, they could only retain their culture and identity is through memory. As a part of collective memory of Dalits, satellite caste among Dalits, narrate alternative stories of Dalits who counters Brahminical hegemony (Jamgam, 2017). We do not find much written narrative of Dalit cultural memories. This was due to the fact that Dalits were kept away from all kind of intellectual pursuit. So those who had access to write history, with ulterior motives, depicted lower castes and other oppressed sections in distorted form. Therefore whatever historical and cultural narratives have documented

collective memories of each community, caste and religions in a particular way. When we analyze national popular narrative of the country, we find that Dalits are shown in degraded manner, in terms of their language, bodily features, intellectual capacities, moral degradation, etc. As Peter Burke says, to analyze collective memory of any community, we must need to go to the national historical and cultural narrative. National narrative of India; whether it is historiography or classical cultural text, it has done gross injustice with Dalit by marginalizing and showing them in evil form. For instance, Bharatmuni's *Natyashastra*, which is considered as authoritative text in drama tradition in India according to elites in India, specifies that hero of the drama must not belong to lower strata rather only king, Brahman or anyone who is high born (*Vikhyat vansh*) and lower caste characters must speak in *Prakrit*, use of Sanskrit was not allowed to anyone other than high born protagonist. Lower caste must be shown as serving, evil or bad person for instance, *Shabari* in Ramayana, or depiction of *Rakshasa* or *Danav* in holy fights of gods and goddess where gods shown as a epitome of 'good' kills '*Rakshasa*' that is epitome of 'bad' characteristics. Such type of national cultural and historical narratives creates positive memory for upper caste that makes them virtuous and pure in their character whereas memories towards Dalits are constructed as maligned, intellectually incapable, dirty and filthy in character. Association with achievements of the past gives one sense of pride similarly; association with disgrace brings sense of shame<sup>41</sup>. Generally, collective memories operates in two ways, on one hand it is related to the diffuse transmission of memories in everyday life thorough oral medium, like for instance, in caste context, higher caste person would pass caste slurs as a result of recollection of the collected memory assigned for that particular community which are associated with filth. On the other hand, there is a cultural memory which is basically embedded in rites, rituals, classical texts, monuments, popular media (Meckien, 2013)

Cultural memories are of great significance, because in cyclical sense, it has great influence on communicative memory. Upper caste elites' hold on the creation of cultural narrative has institutionalized and objectified collective cultural memories which ensures them privileges and creates cultural capital for them. There is a close link between cultural memory and identity construction, which is been propounded

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<sup>41</sup> Poole, R. (2008). Memory, Responsibility and Identity. *Social Research*, 263-286.



by Ricoeur in his book *The Role of Metaphor*, in which he explains that we create narrative of self in the frame of time. This suggests that, there is a close connection between construction of self and narrative presentation. In this sense, cultural memory allows our faculty to build up particular kind of picture about ourselves in narrative and through this process; image of particular being or community gets concretized. Brahminical narrative structure, such as classical texts or upper caste Hindu elite nationalists' national narrative attempted to alter the positive past memories of Dalit-Bahujan and replaced it with distorted account about lower castes. Chinnaiiah Jangam has challenged the singular narrative of nationalism. He has argued that, mainstream nationalism narrative is imbued with Brahminical consciousness and Dalit scholars, intellectuals and artists deciphering that (Jangam, 2017)

By going on similar lines, *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* are creating their own social cultural memories and wish to depart from the distorted popular perception of Dalits. They are doing by bringing into focus the concept of Buddhist theatre and creating collective social memory by recollecting humanistic Buddhist principles and cultural reflections. This task seems to be difficult because old cultural baggage is hard to shed off. Ricoeur's *Memory, History, Forgetting*, examines reciprocal relationships between remembering and forgetting, and shows how it affects our perception of historical experience and production of historical narrative. In the last section of his book, Ricoeur explains forgetting as a necessary condition for the possibility of remembering. *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi* are trying to reconnect with Buddhist cultural past with their efforts, but it is essential for Dalits to depart, if not forget, with their oppressive cultural baggage which they are carrying since ages. But certainly restoration of collective memory through such symbolic institutionalized heritage of Buddhism facilitates Dalits to change their perceptions about themselves. It would give them cultural lineage which can also be proved as collective unifying force.

Collective Social memory and myth are used as tools for social dominance, they have very significant role in politics of assertion. Dalits holds on to different memories, pertaining to their caste cultural identity. These are used as mechanism to downplay Dalit politics by dominant caste in India. Those who are at power position make effective use of social memory to spread hegemony and intentionally scrub off

narrative of resistance. Upper castes have been attacking social memories of Dalits, for example, *Bhima Koregaon*. Such social memories are metaphor of triumph for lower castes. Celebration of such memories of glory and victory by lower castes diminishes morals of dominant castes. Reproduction of Buddhist cultural past on the stage by *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi*, is an attempt to amend cultural memory of Dalits and establish their association with Buddhist cultural past.

#### IV

First of all, we will make the analysis of Buddhist practices as a phenomenon in relation to wider social spectrum of Dalits in Maharashtra. There can be some questions that have been raised while understanding Buddhist Ambedkarite Theater, such as, can all Dalits relate with Buddhist and *Bodhi* concept? If not then what keeps them divided? Let's begin with understanding Dalit 'self'. Human personality is composed of self. Self as an object, constitute one's attitude, traits, abilities, feelings, weaknesses, how one feel about oneself, etc. whereas self as a process, determines individual's executive function like how they cope up with various situations, respond to the world, how one perceive oneself in relation of the world, etc. (Arles, 2005). Dalit 'self' in a generic category called 'Dalit'. Dalit as a category is both homogeneous and heterogeneous in some sense. They are homogenous in the sense that they share similar experiences of stigma, pathos and pain but they differ in faith and culture, which makes them heterogeneous and it is intrinsically connected to the way every caste and community associate themselves with unique collective cultural memory. Therefore, in spite of having almost similar experiences of stigmatization and suffering, Dalits differ invariably in their response to the injustice thrust on them. This is symbolically evident in their means to acquire justice and articulating popular expression. There arises conflicting and contradictory consciousness among Dalits, which determine their responses and this contradictory consciousness is well reflected in the voice and dissent against caste system, humiliation and stigmatization. Some choose to imitate the behavior of socio-cultural practices of caste, by demanding moderate changes such as religious, spiritual equality, like right to enter into a temple, abolition of untouchability, etc. by keeping their faith and culture intact in Hinduism. Some choose methods, such as migration or religious conversion to leave caste identities behind. Some of them chose to accept their caste

identity and feel proud and embrace century old slur.<sup>42</sup> All these methods have their own dynamics. Under such scenario, it would be untenable to say that not all Dalits can relate themselves with unified Buddhist cultural project, although in Maharashtra, larger Scheduled caste population belongs to Neo-Buddhist community, so in certain way this new approach can have immense impact in consolidating Buddhist cultural identity. In Maharashtra, Neo-Buddhist community is very assertive and has been beneficiaries of constitutional provisions. It constitutes almost nine percent of total SC population, which make them largest scheduled caste community in Maharashtra. Whereas other three percent comprised of Chambhar , Mang and other. Therefore, there is a possibility that only Neo-Buddhist by and large associate themselves with Buddhist cultural assertion by various means. But Dalits all over India assert themselves in different way. In Punjab, chamar, Jat, etc casts takes pride in asserting their caste identity. This Paramjeet Judge, calls the exclusiveness of caste identity in Indian democracy (Judge, 2015). Some convert to Islam or Christianity. Now these two assertions need to see in the light of larger political and social scenario. Either Dalits (non neo-Buddhist) assert themselves through religious conversion and by claiming their caste identity and feeling proud about it. Both these groups hold different perception about emancipation and empowerment.

Whatsoever, the reason for non-uniformity in Dalit self-assertion is because of the variation in collective cultural memories. There is a variation in the perception and construction of collective self-representation. According to De Bois's theory of 'double consciousness', identity of person divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible to have one unified identity. Although Be Bois spoke about this theory pertaining to the race relations in Unites States, but tension between various identities is one of the peculiar problems in post-colonial societies. Dalits being marginalized at the core have been fighting this battle of identity since long. Dalits being a part of post-colonial society is facing similar kind of multiple consciousness syndromes. It is segmented into various parts on several grounds, under such circumstances, Bahujan Rangbhoomi and Bodhi has begun movement in Maharashtra, which has potential to mobilize Dalit Bahujan communities.

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<sup>42</sup> Laxmi, R. (2016, Sept 30). *Lower caste Indian singer embraces centuries-old slur. Caste pride is driving her success.* Retrieved from [www.washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/lower-caste-indian-singer-embraces-centuries-old-slur-caste-pride-is-driving-her-success/2016/09/29/8c68bef0-84c6-11e6-b57d-dd49277af02f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ece3eb983d13): [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/lower-caste-indian-singer-embraces-centuries-old-slur-caste-pride-is-driving-her-success/2016/09/29/8c68bef0-84c6-11e6-b57d-dd49277af02f\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.ece3eb983d13](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/lower-caste-indian-singer-embraces-centuries-old-slur-caste-pride-is-driving-her-success/2016/09/29/8c68bef0-84c6-11e6-b57d-dd49277af02f_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.ece3eb983d13)

**Conclusion:** Central concern of the chapter was to analyze the departure from Dalit theatre to Buddhist theatre with the help of *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Theatre*. Initially we discussed reasons of the departure and need for the rejuvenation of theatre practices, by concluding that after the decline of Dalit theatre, theatre based on the Buddhist principles would be the appropriate alternative for theatre artists. Further we discussed about the related implications of this shift, in which we discussed about historical perception of Dalit cultural identity how Buddhist theatre is far different and egalitarian in its principles and moral values. Finally, we attempted to discuss about the significance of Buddhist theatre as an alternative for cultural identity formation. There are certain important parameters on which Bahujan theatre and *Bodi Theatre*'s activities have been judged. In that we found that, this new theatre endeavor reflects Buddhist cultural past and Ambedkarite philosophy and aims to create social collective memory of humanity to which Dalits can relate them with. This idea seems to be very important in cultural and political sense. Leaving the baggage of old oppressive cultural memories would give Dalits sense of pride and achievement which is very important for attaining self-respect, dignity and self-esteem. As Ricoeur says, forgetting old memories is an essential precondition even to remember new memories. Dalits' effort should be to distance themselves from caste cultural identities unless that the possibility of acquiring new humanistic collective cultural memory based on Buddhist principle would be unendurable.

## Conclusion

The current research project manifest the transformative potential of Dalit plays in Maharashtra. The inherent transformative characteristics of Dalit social location manifest itself into an informed statement about Dalit-Bahujan theatre, by stating it as a carrier of the elements of social transformation. I began with sensitively observing play's themes, character and context of available scripts. Brief survey of Marathi theatre and national theatre left overwhelming impression, as it hardly seems to bother about depicting caste realities in sensitive manner, with powerful context. Marathi theatre's realism was confined to either adaptation of *Ebsen*, *Shaksphere* or other family drama. It did not engage critically with caste question, as if caste reality was some non-existent phenomenon (Kanade, 2010). The uniqueness of Dalit plays, lies in the fact that it applies the spirit of critical dismantling towards mainstream Marathi literature and drama itself. Absence of caste question from 'mainstream' Marathi drama, leads us to the raised question as why Dalit everydayness couldn't capture sight of mainstream Marathi playwrights. These uncomfortable questions lead us to study of Dalit plays that depict problems of Dalit lives and portray their experiences, dilemmas, aspirations and vision.

Dalits had to resort on their own cultural enterprises to articulate their voice, in their own way. Dalit literature and theatre emerged as a counter force before Marathi theatre

Theatre as an institution is a much localized cultural expression. It is a local way of seeing things. In Maharashtra, although theatre existed since 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards but it acquired primacy as a cultural space mainly due to colonial patronage by newly English educated middle classes and propagated due to print culture. This class mainly constituted by upper caste Brahmins. Due to colonial intervention Dalits began to get education and became familiar with western modern values simultaneously we see emergence of various regional, local and vernacular literary and cultural movements. Marginalized began to acquire space and agency, although in limited way. At this point I would recall Grogan Haggan's remarks which he notes down in the, introduction to his 2008 book titled, *Interdisciplinary Measures: Literature and the Future of Post-colonial Studies* in which he attempts to make an argument for the value of literature in conceiving ethical action. He states that,

literature is a tool for the decolonization of mind. In continuing struggle, to create new possibilities of thinking, as well as living, for previously exploited and dispossessed peoples, Literature plays a formative role. So, the study of literature, remains invaluable, to understand ethical action, to understand how to guide the action of exploited and disposed people. Although we studied Dalit plays but since they are available to us in literary format for analysis, Haggan's remark are of more relevant and also his argument can be extended to Dalit performances as well. Dalit plays' critical intervention as a phenomenon was a spontaneous manifestation of Dalit anger and frustration due to brutal cruelties inflicted by upper caste and dominant class groups. Through the literature and artistic representations, Dalits protested and created counter voice to mark their presence.

Dalit's quest for humanization, social justice and equality in all spheres are primary objective of their struggle. Existing society was/is undemocratic in nature; under such scenario, democratic political system remained ineffective to protect Dalits dignity and integrity. For the project of social transformation, in order to achieve above mention objectives, Dalit plays have depicted critical diagnosis of social and cultural productions of dominant castes and have found fault lines and gaps in such productions.

### **Chapter Summary**

Present study covers three chapters. Each chapter deals with the particular issue which is interlinked with the spirit of social transformation. For instance, first chapter is based on the issue of social location, civic dignity and theatre plays. Second chapter, deals with stigma, moral disengagement of upper caste and paths adopted by Dalits, to achieve above mentioned objectives whereas, third chapter mainly focuses on relationship between cultural identity and revival of Buddhism in Dalit-Bahujan plays. These chapters' deals with the epistemic location of Dalits, diagnosis of society, envisioned alternatives or future and means for achieving those alternatives. For instance, first chapter talks about Dalit social location form stand point theory which claims that, being in that location, one has different perspective altogether to look at social realities. It also talks about how Dalits being in that location experience dehumanization, defacement, exclusion and discrimination, such deprived experience gives them refined view to see the pain of others and aspire for freedom. Considering

the inherent essence of transformation that lies in the Dalit social location, Dalit plays such as *Abhayaranyatil Sasa, Utara, Kirvant*, etc. which portrays brutal reality of caste system and perils of oppressive Brahminical social order, it comments on the issue of denial of civic dignity of Dalits by upper caste. Chapter highlights what is the meaning of dignity for Dalits and how it is essential for their existence. Here Dalits uphold the principle of change and desired for the just social order. Discourse of civic dignity is addressed by Dalit plays but to claim this dignity killing, murder, or death is shown on the stage. But showing such 'violence' seems inappropriate for classical theatre sympathizers, but such portrayal must be seen as reclamation of civic dignity lost human status. First chapter argues that, civic dignity is a precondition of stable democracy and concludes that to transform this state of dismay, protection of dignity of each individual of the state is necessary. Chapter suggests that, discourse on human rights has the ability to curb rampant misuse of dominant power against Dalits and other marginalized.

The present chapter was undertaken with the idea of documenting the issues posed by Dalit plays and to make critical analysis of those issues. The generalized observation and evaluation of written Dalit plays created case against evil caste practices. The main objective of the chapter was to identify critical issues raised by Dalit plays which have been found in relation to caste stigma, moral disengagement of upper castes, and paths adopted by Dalits to cope up and revolt against their oppression.

Second chapter various theatrical events have been identified, where stigmatization of Dalits on the name of caste and caste labels is apparent. It is concluded in the chapter that, higher caste perception towards lower caste remains unchanged irrespective of achieved merit. Chapter concludes that, upper caste mainly essentialize their caste location which gives them positive feeling about their own caste, at the same time, lower caste location also been essentialize by upper caste but in degraded form, by associating Dalit caste location with filth. This exercise is essential for upper caste to maintain their dominance and power.

Further is it explained in the chapter that, how upper caste manage to inflict caste related violence on lower marginalized sections of society. Explanation is offered with the help of framework provided by Albert Bandura on moral disengagement. This disengagement is taken place through set pattern which includes moral

justification of brutal act by subverting narration, by reducing accountability for detrimental practices, or by blaming victim for bringing such harm. It further talks about how stigmatization and moral disengagement produces stereotype threat and negative self-worth among Dalits and creates 'distressful' conditions. Generally these conditions are created by deliberately constructing flawed language of describing Dalits. Dalit struggle is to break these barriers and attain justice. Dalits devised various approaches to escape from the imposed stigma and injustice. Violent or constitutional/peaceful mean; either of the routes is assumed by characters. Violence, though is universally condemned phenomenon, need to understand differently in the context of Dalits. Dalit's violent acts are not to violate the physical and symbolic integrity of the any other individual but rather it is a response towards the imposed indignities, stigmas, defacement and dehumanization.

Violence inflicted by Dalits has not been justified in the chapter but rather it is been suggested that reflecting on conscious understanding of violence and the way it construct our structure of consciousness would see motivate Dalits to alter their path to achieve justice and equality.

Third chapter analyzed the departure from Dalit theatre to Buddhist theatre with the help of *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Theatre*; initially we discussed reasons of the departure and need for the rejuvenation of theatre practices, by concluding that after the decline of Dalit theatre, theatre based on the Buddhist principles would be the appropriate alternative for theatre artists. Further we discussed about the related implications of this shift, in which we discussed about historical perception of Dalit cultural identity how Buddhist theatre is far different and egalitarian in its principles and moral values. Buddhist theatre as an alternative for cultural identity formation is very significant. Activities of these new theatre endeavor reflects Buddhist cultural past and Ambedkarite philosophy and aims to create social collective memory of humanity to which Dalits can relate them with. This idea seems to be very important in cultural and political sense. Leaving the baggage of old oppressive cultural memories would give Dalits sense of pride and achievement which is very important for attaining self-respect, dignity and self-esteem. As Ricoeur says, forgetting old memories is an essential precondition even to remember new memories. Dalits' effort should be to distance themselves from caste cultural identities unless that the



possibility of acquiring new humanistic collective cultural memory based on Buddhist principle would not be possible.

### **Reflection and Analysis**

Overall I would like to highlight on some of the prominent features of Dalit theatre in general (Mokashi, 2011; Bhandare, 210)

- 1) Dalit plays were modern, scientific, and progressive in nature and discarded religious fervor, superstitions, rituals, culture discrimination. It has been accepting progressive thought process.
- 2) General themes of Dalit plays are based on feudalism, poverty, unemployment, hunger, etc. Protagonists of Dalit plays fight against oppression and feel proud of their Dalit identity.
- 3) Non-Dalits have also tried to portray Dalit subject on stage, but except few, many couldn't depict Dalit lives sensibly. It seems, such plays were written either out of pity or with paternalistic attitude. On contrary to that, it seems Dalit playwrights have successfully managed to portray Dalit pain, suffering and experiences effectively.
- 4) Dalit playwrights openly and categorically condemn Hindu caste system and uphold the Buddhist conversion. Dalit playwrights clear their position on that stating, that the religion which even can deny water to another being can do no good to Dalits, untouchables.
- 5) Titles of Dalit plays are very meaningful, suggestive and open up space of Dalit suffering. Some titles, such as *Abhayaranyatil Sasa*, *Ghotbhar Pani Khalokhachya Garbhat*, etc. are farcical and satirical in nature.
- 6) Although Dalit playwrights belong to different caste groups but all are inspired by Buddha-Phule-Ambedkar's humanistic ideology.

Culture and identity are basic building block to any society. Through the construction of identity and reconstruction of culture one can address the boundaries and meanings of who I am? Many of the Dalit performances paved the way for the assertion and assumption of identities. Dalit theatre plays were not direct intervention at political activism for sure but it was certainly created space which mirrored socio-political conditions of the time. Dalit theatre was nothing but a byproduct of Dalit agency which was constructed due to the strong anti-caste movement in Maharashtra and

Phule-Ambedkar philosophy. Through the discussed Dalit plays, it is clear that it was not an attempt of creating caste based identity, rather they had more comprehensive approach in assimilating and embracing 'Dalit' and 'Dalit consciousness' as its spirit. Dalit theatre gave Dalits a space and agency of their own, although at physical level Dalits did not hold material resources but at conscious level they were independent. Perceived generic 'Dalit' identity became the ethos of Dalit theatre which also conceptualizes emancipatory imagination of Dalit playwrights. To critique that, Gazvi says, 'Dalit consciousness' is a conglomeration of various 'caste consciousness', therefore we cannot have one unified identity as 'Dalit'. Thus he suggests that, we must depart from the 'Dalit' terminology and look for unifying project through theatre (Gazvi, 2017).

Emancipatory social science in general and emancipatory imagination in particular aims at viable alternative, in other words, look for transformation. The credible theory of alternatives would eliminate or significantly mitigate the harm and injustice of the society (Wright, 2010). According to Victor D'Souza social transformation does not mean to effect any change but rather it is a process by which new social order to be brought with the vision of creating just society. (D'Souza, 1988) But what could be that just society? As delineated in *Wata-Palwata* for instance, Anil, Kaka and Satish, all wanted society should be based on just principles where justice would be served to underprivileged sections of the society. To achieve that aim, frustrated because of corruption and government system, Anil adopts violent method. Now, here, Bhagat do not imagine violence as a form of emancipation but rather, he is merely posing various tendencies prevalent in society, when play was written.

I would like to bring into focus some of the prominent ideas discussed in the chapters, such as, path of transformation, emancipatory imagination of playwrights and collective cultural memory and identity of Dalit-Bahujan.

In first chapter, we discussed about the way Dalits face indignity and stigmatization which cause them 'distressful' condition. Dalit struggle is to come out of such condition, for which they apply various methods. We have seen violent upsurge of Dalits against oppression in Maharashtra during 1970s and 80s. Such means have not garner long term result for Dalits. Datta Bhagat, describe the condition of multi-generational conflict in adoption of means to get justice. 'But violence is not the way

is suggested in this study. Instead I have tried to introduce various other means for social transformation, such as adoption of Human Rights in part three of Indian constitution, participation in Political democracy to combat the growing distressful conditions. Each of these methods can be contested for their pros and cons. For instance, it is can be argued that Human Rights are the spirit of Indian constitution then what is the need for separate incorporation as Fundamental Rights. As we discussed earlier, Fundamental Rights are invoked only against state whereas Human Rights are universal and applicable to all state and non-state actors, so its scope is much wider. When Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed, its primary tenet was that irrespective of political beliefs, region and religion; we must protect Human Rights of all people across the world, all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

Through literature and other artistic mediums we can understand nuances associated with Dalit social location. Plays of Dalit playwrights began to give us insight of Dalit lives and critically approached society. Emancipatory imagination presented in plays indicates intensions of social transformation of authors of their times, depending on the prevalent socio-political conditions. Their writings reflect turbulence in social life of Dalits. They kept writing about social institutions and society, their perspective was critical and constructive which allowed their emancipatory imagination flourish on theatrical canvas. Their imagination was critiquing society and present ramifications of the present havoc in the caste laden society. *Datta Bhagat*, paid attention to contradictory sides of achieving justice in *Wata-Palwata*. Their characters are ordinary Dalits in village or urban Dalits who live mundane life and what exploited things happen to them are themes of the plays. It was an attempt to show indignity experience by Dalits, primarily to claim dignity.

If we see the work of *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Natya Parishad*, it brings about the positive change or alternative in perception of Dalit-Bahujan identity. Their writing is emancipatory due to their choice of themes and character. They tried to write by keeping in mind the idea of creating distinct cultural memory for Dalit-Bahujan. Recent developments in the Ambedkarite cultural sphere suggest of creating unique cultural identity basing their lineage to ancient *Nagvansi* indigenous tribe and Buddhism, who were considered to be very progressive and liberal in their way of living. This attempt is very important in the context of forgetting and remembering

their cultural past. According to Ricoeur, forgetting is a necessary condition for the possibility of remembering. In that sense, work of *Bahujan Rangbhoomi* and *Bodhi Natya Parishad* can be seen through the same lens where it is seen as a deliberate attempt of Dalits to forget or rather discards their Hindu caste cultural identity, for that matter, even 'Dalit' individual caste identity and creating and remembering their old forgotten past. It is mentioned in the study that, association with positive memory of past and achievements gives an individual and community a psychological confidence. There are various conferences and research communities are conducted by contemporary Ambedkarite-Buddhist theatre groups to research in the field of Buddhism. This attempt is to counter hegemonic understanding of Hindu culture, which was extended to Dalits in distorted form. Dalits had also internalized it and associated themselves with caste names, this is happening in contemporary period as well. It has become necessary for Dalits to look beyond their caste association and aspire for the annihilation of castes in India. Not doing so, they are merely carrying forward the caste Hindu project of hierarchical division.

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## **Conclusion**

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## APPENDIX: 1

### Images





Figure 1: Play, Kirvant,



Figure 2: Ghotbhar Pani, 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1988

## Bodhi Natya Parishad

 **हार्दिक निगंत्रण** 

महाराष्ट्राची मराठी ! अभिजात मराठी !!  
ज्ञानासाठी कला !!  
बोधी नाट्य परिषद, मुंबई  
आयोजित

**बोधी कला संगिती २०१५**  
दररोज सायं. ७.३० वा., शिवाजी मंदिर, दादर, मुंबई.  
उद्घाटन दि. ९ डिसेंबर २०१५, सायं. ७.३० वा.  
उद्घाटक : ताराचंद्र खंडेकर (विवेकवादी विचारवंत, नागपूर)  
अध्यक्ष : प्रा. डॉ. पुष्पलता राजापुरे-तापस  
(विवेकवादी वाङ्मय समीक्षकार)  
सहभाग : राज बाळदकर, अशोक हंडोरे, प्रा. डॉ. सुरेश मेथ्राम, प्रेमानंद गज्वी  
शास्त्रीय गायन  
गायक : साक्षात, तुषार आनंद (सादरकर्ते : स्वामी स्वर - रूप)  
द बुध्दा  
लेखक : प्रेमानंद गज्वी  
नाट्याभिवाचन : प्रशांत हिरे आणि कलावंत (नाशिक)  
दि. १० डिसेंबर २०१५, सायं. ७.३० वा.  
संवाद १ : जातक कथा नितीकथा आहेत !  
संवादक : इ. मो. नारनवरे (सुप्रसिद्ध काव्यकार, नागपूर)  
संवाद २ : विज्ञान आणि आजचा समाज  
संवादक : मा. श्रीराम सिधये (सुप्रसिद्ध पत्रकार)  
प्रकाशन समारंभ  
अभिजात जंतू लेखक : प्रेमानंद गज्वी  
सहभाग : अधिराम भडकमकर, प्रा. आदित्य देसाई, शरद सावंत, वामन पंडित,  
प्रा. डॉ. सुरेश मेथ्राम, प्रेमानंद गज्वी, प्रा. डॉ. अनंत देशमुख.

Figure 3: This is a celebration poster of Bodhi Kala Sangiti (2015), obtained from Bodhi Natya Parishad: Courtesy Premanand Gazvi



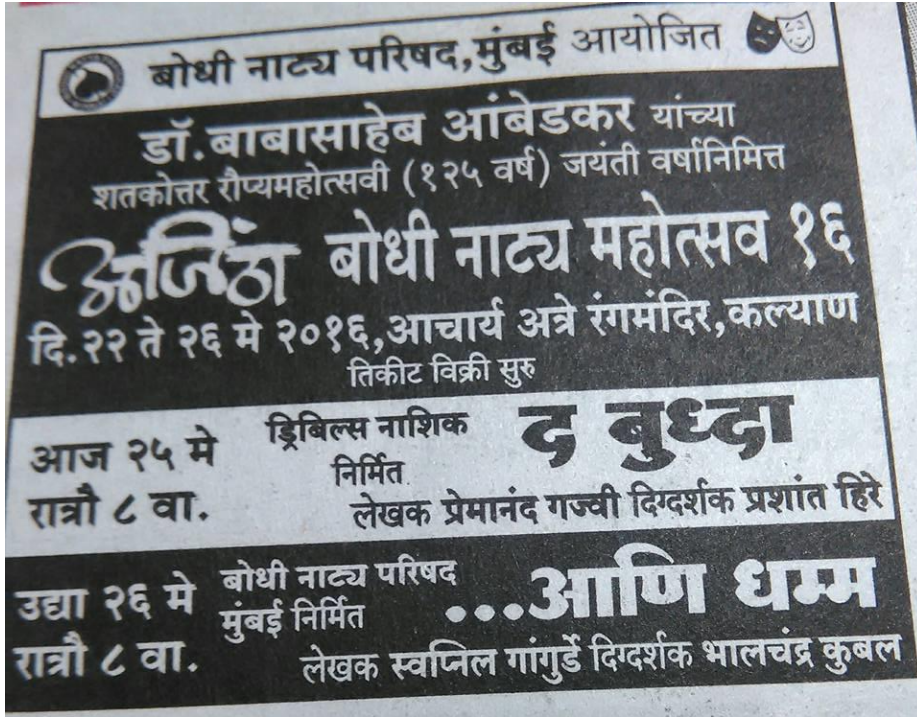


Figure 4: Advertisement of play, *The Buddha & .... Ani Dhamma*



Figure 5: Images taken from ongoing National Buddhist Theatre Research Conference-2015

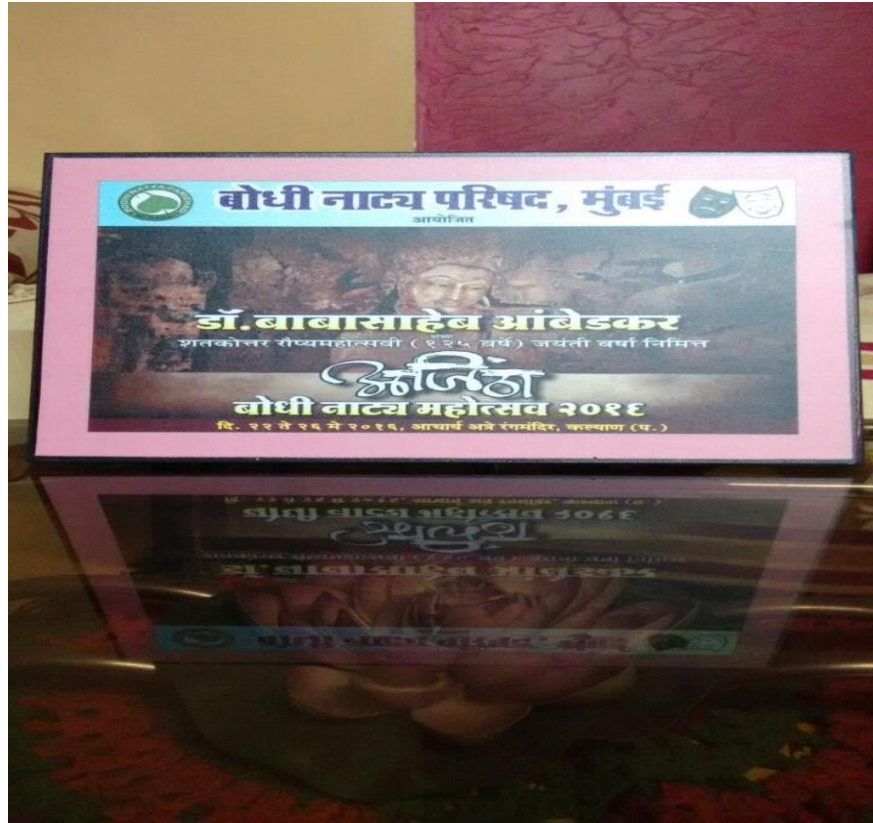


Figure 6: Poster of Annual Bodhi Natya Festival



Figure 7: Hording of Bodhi Natya Parishad, celebrating Indian Art Day on 1st January 2011

## Bahujan Rangbhoomi



Figure 8: Chale Hum Prabuddha Bharat Ki Aur



Figure 9: Bharat Abhi Baki Hai



Figure 11: Bharat Abhi Baki Hai



Figure 12: Ghayal Pakhara



Figure 13: Street Play



Figure 14: 29<sup>th</sup> Jan 1999 Theatre Festival



Figure 15: Street Play



Figure 16: Street Play



Figure 17: Street Play