

**MODERN AND POSTMODERN UNDERSTANDING OF DALIT EMANCIPATION:
A THEORETICAL EXPLORATION**

*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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2010



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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation titled 'Modern and Postmodern Understanding of Dalit Emancipation: A Theoretical Exploration' submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements 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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CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take great pride in acknowledging my humble gratitude to my respected supervisor, Prof. Gopal Guru, for the scholarly guidance, encouragement, and moral support. I would like to extend my thanks to my entire faculty members who offered me a set of interesting and insightful courses from Masters onwards. These courses have not only equipped me with the academic vocabulary but also make me familiar with the various sets of arguments which facilitated me to work on such a theme. To an extent the completion of this work could not have been possible without exploring the writings of Prof. Valerian Rodrigues and Prof. Gopal Guru. Their writings have not only helped me to shape up my arguments but also provided me to gather an insightful analysis of the issues which I covered in my work.

I would also like to state my gratitude towards the professional zeal of Rahul Dev and Pia David and especially to Varuni Sinha for their assistance in the preparation of drafts; otherwise it would have become a cumbersome process for me.

My special thanks to Rajesh, Nishant, Lata and Dinesh who are always close to me. Interacting with them always helped me out of the stressful moments of my research.

I would not forget to acknowledge my colleagues who all are going through same tumultuous journey to accomplish their research, including Shekhar, Thangkhanlal, Madhura, Karan and others. We all shared each other's stress regarding our research work which sometimes helped me out in some of the strenuous moments in this journey. I express my appreciation to my friends, who academically supported me through various modes of timely and untimely discussions, especially Basil Philip who always offer helps enthusiastically.

I am thankful to my centre academic staff for their paper works and taking care of other administrative details during the whole process of my research. I am grateful to both the JNU Central Library and the CPS SAP library and their staffs for the smooth functioning of issuing and helping me out in finding the required books.

My acknowledgment would be incomplete without thanking UGC in showing interest in my academic credentials and helping me financially with RGNF for the whole period of my M.Phil Research.

Finally this scholastic research attempt would not have been possible without the constant support and encouragement of my family members. I am deeply thankful to them.

Dated: 27 July, 2010
New Delhi

Vagesh Pawaiya

INTRODUCTION

Working on a theme like Dalit emancipation in contemporary times is a challenging task. One of the reasons is that, today we are witnessing an innumerable conceptualization of it introduced by various sorts of 'isms'. Such as Gandhism, Environmentalism, Buddhism, Marxism, Communitarianism, etc. Essentially, such multiple theorization of Dalit emancipation has produced a discursive understanding of it. This scenario gets more complicated subsequently by the introduction of 'post' discourses like Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and post-structuralism. As a result of it, Dalit discourse is incessantly grappling with both enlightenment and post-enlightenment visions of Dalit emancipation in the contemporary times. In other words it is passing through a critical phase where scholars on Dalit discourse are divided on foundationalist and post-foundationalist positions and so forth on claims of universality and particularity.

The underlined work titled- *Modern and Postmodern Understanding of Dalit Emancipation: A Theoretical Exploration*, is an attempt to explore the above mentioned dimensions of Dalit emancipation. However this work exemplifies its nonparticipation in the cheerful celebration of post-foundationalism and anti-essentialism of the postmodern and postcolonial discourses. But more importantly trying to decipher their hollowness in those concrete material and existential realities where modernity in actual terms remained an unfinished project.

Theorizing emancipation is often a difficult exercise. Primarily, due to its invocation of multiple usages of a similar concept; usually they are defined as liberation, empowerment, resistance, freedom, etc. Therefore, the meaning of emancipation follows a turbulent path because, of its labeling as a generic category of the above concepts. A logical understanding of emancipation would trigger a set of questions, such as: emancipation for whom? For what and lastly, how? However, this set of queries varies according to the time and space where these questions have embarked upon. This implies that the nature of emancipation depends upon the identification of structures from which

one seeks emancipation. In literal terms, it is morally, ethically, and practically significant for us to recognize the very availability of such inhuman structures, which not only stand antithetical to the equality of the human being but also narrow down the essence or substance of human beings. In other words, these structures stand in opposition to those fundamental values and principles which are essentially tied-in with the existence of whole human race.

Philosophers from time to time have used multiple categories to understand the essentiality of human beings such as humanity, substance, nature, rationalism etc. The essential component of such categories is that they are mutually desirable for all, irrespective of class, race, caste, culture, nation, community, gender or any other accidental identification of human beings that exist in the limits of time and space. In general, these categories are profoundly articulated and best expressed in the modern times through the concepts like justice, equality, liberty and fraternity. Therefore, in many ways these abstract concepts have acquired a significant value in the various dimensions of human existence whether labeled in politics, economy or culture. By and large, one can say that these concepts stand as imperatives or judgments through which one can make out the distinction between desirable and non-desirable ways of living a life. In other words, they are the essential components of our ethical and moral lives. Their profundity lies in their nature of claiming an ontological equality across time and space. In modern times, claims of ontological equality are relatively tied-in with these imperatives. Both 'modern' and 'desired to be modern societies' having a foundation of these imperatives. In the absence of these imperatives they are either referred to as traditional or as conservative societies.

However, in contemporary times with the upcoming of 'post' discourses like postmodernism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism, the binaries of 'modern' and 'tradition' have been scrutinized with a critical gaze. One can infer that the significance of 'post' discourses lies in blurring such distinctions which modernity identified as essential between the 'rational and 'irrational'. This inevitably renders the understanding of emancipation as discursive, hybrid and heterogeneous. It has been observed that the

emergence of 'alternative modernity' in postcolonial societies like India succinctly explains this postmodern turn. Generally, the denouncement of Modernity by the postmodernist as a singular and the universal idea provides an impetus to rethink tradition as a particular manifestation of authentic consciousness relatively tied to a particular time and space. This voice of difference, apparent in postmodernism is exploited emphatically by postcolonial scholars in order to critique the euro-centrism of enlightenment ideals which until now have been identified as the hope of change and progress in postcolonial societies like India. One can infer that the essentiality of postcolonial discourse carries its forward march of emancipating their authentic *gestalt* from the colonial yoke, which can be better expressed by the phrase, of- 'decolonization of mind'. The foundations of such thought manifested in the anti-foundationalism of any universal concept or criteria which helps in making a distinction between modern and tradition or rational and irrational. More importantly, in such thought the criteria itself is localized, and therefore, it seeks to critique universalism of reason.

However, the postmodernist and the postcolonial positions are contested by many scholars. For example, Sumit Sarkar, who argued that a "totalized critique of reason might actually undercut the capacity of reason to be critical. All statements then become indistinguishable, from the point of view of relative probability or dubiousness, and we are left free to pick and choose, on grounds of pragmatic utility, aesthetic appeal, or sheer dogmatic belief. What gets strengthened are tendencies, otherwise rightly critiqued by postmodernism, towards instrumental rationality and dogmatic authoritarianism¹. Similarly, Meera Nanda, also launches a scathing criticism of postmodernism. While keeping the Indian context in mind she eloquently puts it as: "How did the

¹ See, Sumit Sarkar, *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva, History*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2007, p. 165. Also for Arif Dirlik "Postcolonialism's repudiation of structures and totality in the name of history ironically ends up not in the affirmation of historicity but in a self-referential, universalizing historicism that reintroduces through the back door an unexamined totality; it projects globally what are but local experiences. The problem here may be the problem of all historicism without a sense of structure. Without a web of translocal relationships, it is impossible to determine what different, heterogeneous, and local." See, Arif Dirlik "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism", in Padmini Mongia (eds.) *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Arnold, New York, 1996. p. 306.

postmodernist vision of post-Enlightenment 'alternative modernity' differ from that of the idea of 'Hindu modernity'?²

For Nanda carrying the banner of 'alternative modernity' is a sort of reactionary modernity constituted "on the less essentialist, pastiche-like state of 'hybridity', has served the function of reinterpreting modernity, of pouring new wine in old bottles".³

There is no denial that the voice of particularism and localism in the 'post' discourses affirms a kind of relentless struggle against the past manifested in various forms, and more importantly, in the form of consciousness and ideas. In the theory of postcolonialism this struggle against the past is deployed with the intention to erase the traces of colonial consciousness in the contemporary times. Similarly, in postmodernism the struggle is manifested at the level of critiquing the enlightenment ideals. As appropriately argued by Hardt and Negri, "the prefix post- should indicate, postmodernist and postcolonialist theorists never tire of critiquing and seeking liberation from the past forms of rules and their legacies in the present. Postmodernists continually return to the lingering influence of the Enlightenment as the source of domination; postcolonialist theorists combat the remnants of colonialist thinking"⁴.

Therefore one can argue that the theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism are persistently searching for those authentic forms of consciousness which are relatively tied to their own space and time. This claim to recover authentic is generally devoid of any form of imposition from above by any outsider or foreigner. Therefore the search for authenticity in 'post' discourses is well regulated on the lines of looking for those primordial identities which are relatively associated with particular culture, community, ethnicity and race. As precisely observed by Ellen Wood, that in postmodernism "if the standard of scientific "truth" resides not in the natural world itself but in the particular norms of specific communities, then the laws of nature might as well be nothing more

² See Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward- Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004, p. xii. This is a worthy question need to be asked, precisely because in contemporary times the implications of postmodernism around the globe produced the heterogeneity of science itself against the modern science.

³ Ibid, p. 263.

⁴ See, Michael Hardt & Anotonio Negri, "*Empire*", Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 137.

than what any particular community says they are at given time”.⁵ This relative turn in the discourses of human sciences not only challenges the unitary and universal principles of modernity but also identifies them as coercive and hegemonic for the play of ‘difference’.

However, scholars⁶ around the globe had already developed a suspicious attitude towards the vocabulary of localism, particularism, hybridity, difference, and discursivity that constitutes postmodernism and postcolonialism. Scholars have treated the emergence of such type of discourses as complimentary to the right wing conservatism around the world.⁷ For Aijaz Ahmad, “we have, on the one hand, so extreme a rhetoric against Reason and Universality, and such finalist ideas of cultural difference that each culture is said to be so discrete and self-referential, so autonomous in its own authority, as to be unavailable for cognition or criticism from a space outside itself, lest the outsider be seen as a bearer of that Enlightenment rationality which is said to be colonizing and repressive *tout court*”⁸. This cheerful celebration of incommensurability over dialogue among different cultures, bids farewell to the critical consciousness as ushered in by the Enlightenment rationality. Their festivity of cultural difference not only produced a similar logic of ‘us and them’ in a reverse kind of fashions but also takes it to its extremity which culminates in the fundamentalism of religion, culture, caste and race. As posited by Ahmad, that “the ideational logic of this cultural differentialism to privilege

⁵ See, Ellen Meiksins Wood, “What is the “postmodern” agenda”, in, *In Defense of History: Marxism And The Postmodern Agenda*, ed. by Ellen Meiksins Wood & John Bellamy Foster, Aakar Books, New Delhi, p.6. For Wood “not all intellectuals who think of themselves as “postmodernist” would knowingly subscribe to this kind of extreme epistemic relativism, even solipsism-though it seems an inevitable consequence of their epistemological assumptions. But at the very least, postmodernism implies an emphatic rejection of “totalizing” knowledge and of “universalistic” values- including Western conceptions of “rationality”, general ideas of equality, whether liberal or socialist, and the Marxist conception of general human emancipation. Instead, postmodernist emphasize “difference”: particular identities such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality; their various, particular, and separate oppressions and struggles; and particular “knowledges”, including even sciences particular to ethnic groups”.

⁶ It is now well accepted that that the discourse of postcolonialism in many ways an offshoot of postmodernism. Scholars like Aijaz Ahmad, Arif Dirlik, Leela Gandhi, Sumit Sarkar and Meera Nanda, had clarified the linkages among these two discourses.

⁷ In India, for example, the writings of Sumit Sarkar *Beyond Nationalist Frames: Relocating Postmodernism, Hindutva and History 2007* and Meera Nanda *Prophets Facing Backward- Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism, 2004* investigated the similar trends.

⁸ See Aijaz Ahmad, “Politics of literary Postcoloniality” in Padmini Mongia (eds), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Arnold, New York, 1996, p.289

self-representation over all other kinds of representation and to treat self-representation as a moment of absolute authenticity, as if between the self and its representation there could be no moment of bad faith or false consciousness. In its softer form, the logic of this position is that of pure identity politics; in the harder form, this same logic produces those many protofascisms that are stalking the world, from Iran to the former Yugoslavia, and from France to India”⁹.

The urgency of working on this theme is justified on the grounds that the ideas of postmodernism and postcolonialism had in many ways produced a contingent view of Dalit emancipation. More importantly, the idea is to locate why there is a necessity to highlight the postmodernist language of *difference*. Primarily, in a postcolonial society like India, where the language of indeterminacy, incoherency, inconsistency and ambiguity of postmodernism is untimely if not completely irrelevant for those who are still struggling for representation and recognition in such a society which still believes in reviving the traditional life-world against the modern and secular¹⁰.

The substantial nature of Dalit emancipation is that, its foundations are essentially based on modern ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity. It signals for the claims of ontological equality against the division of humans on the basis of accidental qualities and identities in terms of race, gender, caste, etc. Therefore, in the mainstream Dalit discourse there is a positive reception of modernity which stands in stark opposition to the contradictory reception of modernity by the mainstream nationalist discourse, as their foundation is deeply based on the cultural identity which Dalit discourse finds extremely oppressive.¹¹ The reception of modernity in Dalit discourse does not stand against tradition *per se*, but to those aspects of tradition where myths, superstitions, rituals and religious-world views

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ It is argued that the “Enlightenment thinkers deliberately sought to eschew any link with the past. While the earlier debates centered on abandonment of tradition in favor of reason, the contemporary focus is on its maintenance, reconstruction and revival. It is generally assumed that modernity rejects the past and Postmodernity accepts and recreates it”. See Kulwinder Kaur, “Tradition in the Postmodern Context: Revival or Reconstruction”, *The Eastern Anthropologist* 57:3-4 (2004).pp 303-325, p. 303.

¹¹ See Valerian Rodrigues, *Dalit-Bahujan Discourse in Modern India*, in ‘Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations’, ed- V.R Mehta and Thomas Pantham, vol. X Part 7, Sage Publications New Delhi, 2005, pp.54-57.

led to the oppression and marginalization of Dalits¹². In this way Dalit cherish those values and traditions which are reasonable and foster self-respect and dignity. So, the Dalits pursuit of modernity, as argued, 'should be seen in the context of their being provided the language of rights to equality, freedom and dignity, self-respect and recognition. This new language grew out of Dalits' rejection of the language of obligation that entailed negative rights'¹³. This is the prime reason why Dalits are in favor of resisting the ethics of postmodernism described in terms of care, benevolence, charity and unconditional obligation.

Dalits' reception of modernity has been entrenched in ambivalence because in India modernity was never actualized in its real terms. One can say that there is a lack of progress in terms of relations amongst the people. The language of self-respect and equality here is less focused in comparison to technological and consumerist aspects of modernity. It has often been argued that 'no society can be called modern if the way in which social relations are conducted and characterized by distance, patronage and an inability to share in one another's fate'¹⁴. In this way, Dalits are deeply suspicious of the instrumental reception of modernity vis-à-vis the 'alternative modernity' of postmodernism and postcolonialism in India.

The debate about the reception of modernity by Dalits in postcolonial India is further nuanced by the arguments of some of writers who identified modernity *per se* as deeply oppressive for Dalits, by taking a route of politics of difference, and thereby privileging particularism. This debate had gained momentum in Dalit discourse through 'standpoint epistemology'. As a better way for the understanding Dalits emancipation: through their own experiences and life worlds, the cultural and the aesthetic turn in the Dalit discourse represents the same. This has been elevated in recent Dalit academia where the issue of Dalit identity came into the forefront of Dalit discourses via Dalit culture or Dalit as a separate unit of consciousness. This can also be understood through their own

¹² Ibid

¹³ See Gopal Guru, *Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity*, in Romila Thapar, 'India: Another Millennium?' Viking and Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000, p. 123.

¹⁴ See Dipankar Gupta, *India's Unmodern Modernity*, in Romila Thapar, 'India: Another Millennium?' Viking and Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2000, p.104.

experiences and historical narratives. This has been a much celebrated theme which comes up in postcolonial theory and subaltern discourses, and which is regulated by the discourse of post-structuralism.

Therefore, it is now quite clear that the understanding of Dalit emancipation in contemporary times often vacillates between both the particular and the universal. This work is an attempt to consider a similar predisposition towards the theorization of emancipation, by keeping 'Dalit' as a referential category for this study. The nature of this work is conceptual; therefore, arguments are structured through literature, available on the discourses which are discussed here. As this work is investigating the implications of postmodernism and postcolonialism on Dalit emancipation so, its approach is mainly in a form of literature review.

The present work is built up around three specific arguments;

- Firstly, the postmodernist's notion of emancipation(s) underlies their ignorance of efficacy regarding the emancipatory potential of modern science in postcolonial societies. Their limitations are well captured by the modernist-revolutionary spirit initiated by those who suffered the worst form of indignities and humiliation, perpetuated by the 'local' dictums of Brahmanism. Therefore, the aesthetic and cultural turn of postmodernism remains facile for the emancipation of Dalits and untouchables in India. Perhaps, both Foucault's and Rorty's ethics of vacillation stays incomprehensible in those structures where the emancipation(s) in terms of 'self-cultivation' and 're-description' is a luxurious venture for Dalits and untouchables. In opposition to this, Dalit theory of emancipation rather than seeking shelter in postmodern ethics of care, benevolence and charity, seek to attain a subject-hood whose essentiality lies in claiming rationalism and so forth in universalism. Such a profound dimension of Dalit emancipation not only captures the objectivity of modern knowledge

systems but also upholds its success in the formation of truth through inter-subjectivity.

- Secondly, the postcolonialist voices of cultural difference, their celebration of Gandhism as 'non-derivative' and their critique of colonial modernity had ignored the legacy of modernist-revolutionary spirit of Ambedkar towards the emancipation of Dalits and untouchables in India. More importantly, their anti-essentialist understanding of Ambedkar and their declaration of Ambedkar as a founder of Dalit discursivity had reduced Ambedkar's vision towards the Dalit emancipation as contingent. Their selective appropriation of Ambedkar's ideas in order to place him within the fold of Heterogeneity is consciously ignorant of the universality of reason in Ambedkar's thoughts on Buddhism.
- Lastly, the atrophy in Dalit politics is the primary consequence of an anti-essentialist understanding of the Dalit category in both the theoretical and the practical domain. However, what is significant about Dalit as a category is that it is essentially tied-in with the category of substance in Aristotle's framework of categories. Therefore, its essentiality lies in claiming ontological equality in every aspect of human existence. It thus stands as a category of humanity which makes it a mutually desirable category across cultures and transcends from accidental identification attached with a particular caste, race, and gender.

First point has been discussed in the second chapter of this work titled as *Conceptualizing Emancipation vis-a-vis Postmodern Thought and Its implication on Dalit Emancipation*.

The division of thought of foundationalism and anti-foundationalism thinking towards emancipation raises fundamental oppositions like self vs. society, subjective vs. objective, universal vs. particular and other such binaries of modern and postmodern understanding towards emancipation. This chapter primarily focuses on a discussion of

these binaries. Secondly, this chapter seeks to build up an explanation about the implications of postmodernism and antifoundationalism for Dalit emancipation.

The arguments are built up by taking a cue from Jurgen Habermas, Richard Bernstein, Axel Honneth, Keith Topper, Gopal Guru, Mira Nanda and others. The reference to the works of these scholars becomes important to provide a clear view of modern and postmodern visions of emancipation. The chapter is divided into four parts: the first part will focus on the preliminary understanding of postmodern thought as is usually understood and described in the academic sphere. The second part will concretely discuss the anti-foundationalist thinking of emancipation by discussing the works of Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty and particularly by emphasizing the arguments of Richard Rorty at length. In this chapter an attempt will be made to show the limitations of their thought when they are practiced in concrete existential and material realities, like the structure of Brahmanism. The third part will try to comprehend that in Dalit emancipation there is an-built dimension of embracing modernity and foundationalism. Moreover, the distinctions of theoretical and non-theoretical or public and private authors tend to remain obscure. Significantly the public subsume the private sphere and privilege the public over the private for the quest of Dalit emancipation. The concluding part will focus on why there is a resistance towards ethics of care, benevolence, unconditional obligation, etc. of postmodernism and antifoundationalism by Dalits and why this language is antithetical to their project of emancipation.

The third chapter titled, *Understanding Ambedkar's Modernist reading of Dalit emancipation and its opposition within the postcolonial thought*; will cover the issues stated in the second point. The thrust of this chapter is to locate the differential approach of postcolonial thought pertaining to the issues of Dalit emancipation and how in this way postcolonial approaches have produced an alternative reading of Dr. Ambedkar's vision of emancipation for Dalits. The chapter will largely encompass some of the issues related to Ambedkar's understanding of emancipation, specifically his reference to scientific Buddhism and how this route of modernist emancipation of Ambedkar has been debated

in the past and present. Ambedkar's reference postulates the endorsement of Buddhism as a scientific religion and a rejection of mythical and non-egalitarian values of Hinduism for Dalits in particular and for the larger emancipation of Indian society in general. How and why Ambedkar together with his longstanding association with the notion of modernity and endorsement of the language of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity has been positively perceived in the Dalit discourse in terms of self-respect, dignity, recognition and social justice; echoing the motto of Enlightenment. For instance, man's release from his self incurred tutelage and *sapre aude!* (Have courage to use your reason), has been contradicted by some who declared Ambedkar as indeterminate, incoherent, and a spiritual leader of Dalit masses and as someone who neatly fits within the brackets of postmodernism.

The last argument regarding the essentialist and anti-essentialist understanding of the Dalit category and its nature of being substantial category within Aristotle's framework is discussed in the fourth chapter titled, *Theoretical identification of Dalit as a category of substance*. This chapter briefly explores the emergence of counteracting versions of Dalit emancipations within the Dalit discourse itself. It is argued that the classification of being called Dalit and non-Dalit rests on their very interaction and counter-interaction with the essence of the Dalit category itself. One can comprehend the essence of The Dalit category by tracing the historical arrival of this category and its efficacy for structural transformation for both the public and private domain, with particular reference to India. This raises a fundamental question about the very meaning of the word 'Dalit'. It is argued here that once we understand the meaning of the word, we will be in a position to assign a certain status to it, as the meaning of the word itself determines the status of category.

The chapter is divided into two parts. The First part briefly talks about the emergence of the Dalit category in contemporary times. This section further argues the emergence of Dalit as a category, in many ways, is a result of an anti-essentialist understanding of the category itself. The second part will discuss the theoretical structure in which one can

discern the status of Dalit as a category. Here, an attempt is made to try and map out whether it is possible to expand the meaning of Dalit as a category of substance within the Aristotelian framework which discusses categories by posing distinctions between the properties of essence and accident. This approach towards the understanding of the Dalit category not only provides us an adequate and universal understanding of it but also helps us avoid its reduction to merely a particular identity subject.

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUALIZING EMANCIPATION VIS-A-VIS POSTMODERN THOUGHT AND ITS IMPLICATION ON DALIT EMANCIPATION

There is no denial that a significant aspect of modern life is associated with the idea of 'change' and so, with the progress of time, change took place in collective human priorities. This is usually understood through particular vocabularies like empowerment, development, resistance, and others, where the issue is self or collective liberation from structures of oppression. This can be labeled under a generic category called emancipation and so forth as the thinking and rethinking of emancipation itself. However, emancipation itself in the words of Laclau and Mouffe "is a matter of critique and construction, of which resistance represents the first step and transformation, in the sense of structural change, the second".¹ This suggests that emancipation is not simply about resistance and empowerment, but more of a social creativity offered with new aims, norms and values.

In political language emancipation is largely associated with the progressive movement, towards the larger demands of equality and freedom, and in this way emancipation has descended from Enlightenment. However, contemporary authors on this theme have located emancipation as a concept broader than some general categories like class analysis. For Laclau and Mouffe it is described in the creation of a 'new democratic struggle', where democracy is utilized as a subversive concept that interrupts the practices and discourses of subordination.² It is because of the upsurge of a 'new democratic struggle' that the horizon of emancipation is converted into Emancipations. This suggests that the concept of emancipation must be 'a theory of relativity of the

¹ See, J.N Pieterse (eds.), *Emancipation, Modern and Postmodern*, Sage, New Delhi, 1992, p.13. For Further reading, See, E. Laclau, and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985.

² Ibid, p. 36, note no. 9

social' because emancipation challenges the existing codes within the particular social context.³ So, it has to be understood in terms of Emancipations rather than emancipation.⁴ The emergence of Emancipations (particular) in opposition to emancipation (universal) describes the fundamental difference between modern and postmodern versions of emancipation. The postmodern version of emancipation is antithetical to any form of foundations. In the words of Laclau "the central obstacles preventing the democratization of emancipatory discourses is the fact thatwhile ambiguity and indeterminacy are central features of democracy , emancipatory discourses tend to manifest themselves as total ideologies which seek to define and master the foundations of the social"⁵. Therefore, for Laclau emancipation which is tied to 'Democratic Universalism' is based on the 'universalism of indeterminacy'.⁶ This suggests that nowadays there is a clear distinction prevalent on the understanding of emancipation itself. It is no more restricted to the foundation of universal language as described in the Enlightenment project of Reason, Science, Equality and other liberal bourgeoisie conceptions of emancipations as argued by critics of enlightenment.

Describing or theorizing about the concept of emancipation often invokes other multiple and absorbed concepts like empowerment, recognition, self-respect, resistance, protest, opposition, revolution, petition and other categories that we often use in our daily life in order to give a profound and reflective dimension to the idea of change and progress. This suggests that the concept of emancipation has two inbuilt dimensions; one suggesting an antagonistic attitude towards negativities like humiliation, oppression, indignity, cruelty, subjugation, non-recognition, mis-recognition etc., and the other suggests the necessity to build a humane order which emerges from transcendence and the negativities of emancipation. It is precisely this quest or utopia to transcend or search

³ Ibid, p. 31

⁴ See, E. Laclau, and C.Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso, 1985, p. 225.

⁵ J.N Pieterse, op. cit., p 31-32.

⁶ Ibid.

for a more humane and just order which appears to be something gloomy for an anti-foundationalist philosopher like Richard Rorty.⁷

In the foundationalist language the concept of emancipation is foregrounded in the creative potentialities of human agencies. It is the human agencies which seek to avert structures that hamper realizing the goals of humanity. In some sense the concept is both practical, because of it being sensitive to particularities as it recognizes the subjects locations, and at the same time the universal for being a grand unified theme in realizing humanity. Therefore, it is also a utopian and abstract concept. Thus, the concept is both particular as well as universal, thereby suggesting the dual character of emancipation. Such a dual character of emancipation often makes it difficult to provide a comprehensive understanding of the former, as it involves both the particular and the universal. It is this dual nature of a concept which invokes a different understanding of the concept itself. However, emancipation as argued by some, means “liberation of creative potentialities from suffocating social structures or liberation from both natural and man-made shackles”.⁸ Emancipation, literally means, ‘becoming free’⁹, and this is the universal and general dimension of this concept. This means that the character of ‘being free’ depends on the factors that constraint it. It is at this moment that the element of difference enters in the concept and resists the universal urge of emancipation as located in the enlightenment project and other foundationalist projects like Marxism. This particular understanding raises a couple of questions, is emancipation restricted to self? Or is it a collective struggle on the part of an underprivileged or oppressed group? This raises a further Question: is ‘being free’ a collective initiative and a collective emancipation or an atomist venture? For Habermas, such an endeavor has to be collective and universal whereas for Foucault, Rorty and others, it is solely an individual quest.

⁷This can be located in his own works *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989), where the thrust on individual preservation or emancipation through one’s own imaginations, desire and self-description this all can be summed up by aestheticizing life by giving it a poetic dimension rather than on collective emancipation which is tied on certain foundations which are essential and universal. Those foundations for Rorty are always contingent and not suitable for Ironists.

⁸ J.N Pieterse, op. cit., p.9. For Further reading, See, W.F. Wertheim (eds.) *Emancipation in Asia: Positive and Negative Lessons from China*, Comparative Asian Studies Programme, Rotterdam, pp. 1-26.

⁹ J.N Pieterse, op. cit., p.9

The thrust of this chapter is to build an explanation against the postmodernist's theorization of emancipation and decipher their limitations especially in those societies where the modernity remained an 'unfinished project'. This I will discuss through four specific issues. Firstly what is the general understanding of postmodern discourse in the academic sphere, secondly what are the implications of reading Dalit emancipation with the anti-foundationalists vocabulary of 'cultivation of self', 'self-creation' and 'redescription' in the writings of Foucault and Rorty. Thirdly, how the distinction between public and private as anchored out by Rorty remains nebulous towards the public quest of Dalit emancipation and finally, what are the limitations of postmodern ethics of care and benevolence against the Dalit emancipation of attaining subject-hood. However this is not to claim that these parts exist in isolation. In fact, there is no neat and clean separations exist in the parts of this chapter and all the parts overlaps and supplement each other.

I

The conception of identity in the Enlightenment subject or the modern subject is "based on the conception of the human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with capacities of reason, consciousness and action".¹⁰ In this sense, modernity is not only defined as the experience of living with rapid, extensive and continuous change, but acquires a highly reflexive form of life in which social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thereby constitutively altering their character. In contrast to this, anti-modern thoughts like postcolonial, postmodern, poststructural and critical-traditionalists wish to disassociate from the modern knowledge system. In the words of a well known critical traditionalist, Ashis Nandy, "modern science is the basic model of domination of our time and is the

¹⁰ See, Stuart Hall, David Held & Tony Mcgrew (eds.), *Modernity and its Futures*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1992, p. 275.

ultimate justification for all institutionalized violence”.¹¹ So, it is the repudiation of modern science that has become the first principle of anti-modern discourses.

In postmodernism, subject identities are not fixed, essential or permanent. Here, identity becomes a moveable feast, formed and transformed continuously in relation to the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us.¹² The claim is that knowledge and experience are inextricably bound to each other and always culturally situated. By bringing the vocabulary of deconstruction, decentering, demystification, discontinuity and difference, postmodernists repudiate the idea of a rational coherent subject. In their view, the demise of this rational subject also entails the collapse of ‘Truth’, since ‘without a foundation in universal and objective knowledge, there cannot be a political project of universal emancipation through the rational pursuit of such knowledge because no such knowledge is achievable’.¹³

Viewed from this angle, the postmodernist and the antifoundationalist stands in opposition to the universality of reason or any other universal category. In opposition to universality, they uphold the celebration of nativism, localism, particularism, and other categories of cultural rootedness which often invokes the particularism of the concept of emancipation. Therefore, the concept of emancipation in postmodernism stands in difference to the totalizing tendencies of understanding emancipation as identified in the project of enlightenment and modernity. It is suggested that such an understanding of postmodernism ends with an incommensurable and agonistic pluralism, often described in suspicious attitudes towards the notion of rationality and consensus as the foundation.¹⁴

¹¹ See, Meera, Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward- Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004. pp. 182.

¹² Stuart Hall, David Held & Tony McGrew (eds.), op. cit., p. 277.

¹³ See, Philip Rice & Patricia Waugh (eds.), *Modern Literary Theory*, Arnold, London 2002, pg 345-346. For Further reading See, Patricia Waugh, ‘Postmodernism and Feminism?’ in S.Jackson and J. Jones (eds.) *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, 1998, pp. 177-92.

¹⁴ See, Ilan Kapoor, “Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism? The Relevance of the Habermas-Mouffe Debate for Third World Politics”, *Alternatives*, Vol.27, No.4, Jan-Mar 2002, P. 459-487.

This is a serious jolt provided by the postmodernists to break the linkage of emancipation with the Enlightenment tradition.¹⁵ So, the emancipatory project of postmodernism is to emancipate itself from the received notions of the Enlightenment tradition and to bring the question of 'Other' in the forefront by dis-identification with the one single universal culture and discourse. However, postmodernism and its emancipatory potential cannot be described easily. In the words of Patricia Waugh, 'the term postmodernism has now come to designate a bewilderingly diverse array of cultural practices, writers, artists, thinkers and theoretical accounts of late modernity. It also refers to a more general sense of radical change in the ways of thinking we have inherited from the eighteenth-century European Enlightenment'¹⁶.

The subjects in the postmodernist emancipatory project are 'plural', as here methods no more rely on class struggle, formal equality, party and mass line agitation, but are more profoundly located in local resistance, Deconstruction, struggle against totality, Difference and for the formation and upholding of little narratives. All such methods could be clustered in the fight for Democratic struggle. Such themes can be associated with Sandra Harding's proposal to 'reinvent ourselves as other'.¹⁷ This is similar to the well known arguments of feminist 'standpoint epistemology' where the idea is to develop an "'oppositional consciousness' to enlightenment humanism".¹⁸ The premises of postmodern thought has a declaration of 'end of philosophy', as Habermas concludes that "the drapery of philosophical concepts they display only serves as the cloak for scantily concealed end of philosophy"¹⁹ In this way, generally, the postmodernist denounces metanarratives, foundationalism and essentialism and maintains that both science and philosophy are ingrained with the search or enquiry of certain foundations or essences of entities. Therefore, the postmodern sensibilities are not reducible to one dimension or a

¹⁵ J.N Pieterse, op. cit., p. 6.

¹⁶ Philip Rice & Patricia Waugh (eds.) op. cit., p.344.

¹⁷ See, Sandra Harding, *Subjectivity, experience and Knowledge: An Epistemology from/for Rainbow Coalition Politics*, in J.N Pieterse (eds.) *Emancipation, Modern and Postmodern*, Sage, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 175-193.

¹⁸ Meera Nanda, op. cit., p. p.147.

¹⁹ See, Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Cambridge Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987. Quoted in David E. Cooper, 'Postmodernism and the end of Philosophy', James Good and Irving Velody (eds.), *Politics of Postmodernity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 61.

single view, their focus is on the collapse of grand narratives which Lyotard defined as “Incredulity towards meta-narratives”²⁰, into local incommensurable language games or little narrative or local narratives, culture and history. As for Lyotard the modern philosophy attempted to legitimize the discourses by foregrounding it in some foundational category or grand narrative. For Richard Rorty, Lyotard “used the term ‘modern’ to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind (i.e. ‘a discourse of legitimation with respect to its own status, a discourse called philosophy’) making an explicit appeal to some grand narratives, such as the dialectic of Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational working subject, or the creation of wealth”.²¹ According to Anthony Giddens, the meaning of metanarratives as defined by Lyotard is “Metanarratives are broad overarching theories or beliefs about the operation of society and the nature of social change. Marxism and functionalism are examples of metanarratives that have been employed by sociologists to explain how the world works. Postmodernists reject such ‘grand theories’, arguing that it is impossible to identify any fundamental truth underpinning human society”.²²

By invoking the idea of multivocality of the text, postmodernists radicalize the text itself by arguing that reading of the text always escapes the invincible “otherness” as any reading of the text is incomplete, therefore they affirm ambiguity, non-determination, plurality and inconsistency of the meanings and so the buzzword for them is the ‘continuous deconstruction’ of the meanings of the text in order to create new.²³ The slogan of ‘think globally, act locally’ is a significant aspect of the postmodern condition where the ‘local determinism’ and ‘local management’²⁴ are philosophical standpoints. In this way the postmodernist favors relative truths which at the same time are contingent, as there is a passionate acceptance of epistemological relativism by them, and so every

²⁰ See, J. F Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, pp. xxiv-xxv.

²¹ See, Richard Rorty, “Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity”, in Richard J. Bernstein, (eds.), *Habermas and Modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1985, p.161.

²² See, Anthony Giddens, *The consequences of Modernity*, Cambridge Polity Press 1990. Cited in S.L Doshi, *Modernity, Postmodernity and Neo-Sociological Theories*, Rawat Publications New Delhi, 2006, p.315.

²³ See, Gurpreet Mahajan, *Explanation and Understanding in Human Sciences*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1997, pp.110-114.

²⁴ J. F Lyotard, op. cit., pp.xxiv.

interpretation for them is unique and should be respected. Similarly, for David Harvey modernity is not only understood as ‘a ruthless break with any or all preceding conditions’, but is also ‘characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentations within itself’.²⁵ For Laclau as well modern societies are centreless as they are not organized or articulated on a single principle, as their centre is displaced by ‘a plurality of power centres’.²⁶

Therefore, for postmodernists like Lyotard, there is no single and unitary foundation of science. He describes the ‘sciences as so many games’²⁷ and the ‘rules’ of it are restricted to the specific and the particular knowledge of the social circle. For him, “the statements are only judged to be “good” because they conform to the relevant criterion...accepted in the social circle of the “knower’s” interlocutors”. Such an assertion of Lyotard simply abandons the quest for any discourse towards the attainment or foundation of the legitimization of truth through objectivity. This shortcoming of postmodernist thought is discussed in other parts of this chapter at length.

Going blatantly against the Enlightenment thoughts of reason and certainty, postmodernists draw their attention towards the ethnic and the oriental, and give impetus to postcolonial societies to speak for themselves through their own life-worlds. Therefore, the whole debate of ‘alternative modernity’ in postcolonial societies had gained momentum. The acceptance of heterogeneity in postmodernism accepts the cultural relativism which ends in the incommensurability and un-translatability of the life worlds, which ends Habermas’s quest for a perfect ‘dialogical’ society and affirms the postmodernists’ celebration of particularism, ‘difference’ and the centreless self.²⁸

The following part II will concretize the postmodern version of emancipation by discussing it with references from the writings of Foucault, and more centrally Richard

²⁵ See, David Harvey, *Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1989, p.12

²⁶ Stuart Hall, David Held & Tony McGrew (ed), op. cit., p .278.

²⁷ David E. Cooper, op. cit., pp 64-66.

²⁸ Gurpreet Mahajan, op. cit., p. 115

Rorty, which will show how their language of antifoundationalism falls apart when it interacts with the concrete structure of opposition like Brahmanism in India.

II

The ramifications of postmodern theorizing are significant in political theory precisely because of its turn to culture; some had taken it as a move away from politics whereas others perceived it as a reconceptualisation of the political. Primarily and significantly as argued, “postmodern perspectives on the political have tended to adopt non-topographical conceptions which are dynamic and fluid. Rather than focusing on institutions, these perspectives have highlighted discursive, linguistic, psychological and performative moments of political action. On this schema, the political is neither procedural, hermeneutic nor expressive, it is aesthetic”.²⁹ The theme of aestheticization of politics is quite central in the emancipation strategy of antifoundationalists. Here, I will briefly discuss the strategies of emancipation posited by Michel Foucault and Richard Rorty.

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Both, Foucault and Rorty are known as well established antifoundationalists, primarily because of their opposition to the notion of objectivity. Foucault, in his inaugural lecture talks about the desire for emancipation For him, desire says “I should not like to have to enter this risky order of discourse; I should not like to be involved in its peremptoriness and decisiveness; I should like it to be all around me like a calm, deep transparence, infinitely open, where others would fit in with my expectations, and from which truth would emerge one by one; I should only have to let myself be carried, within it and by it, like a happy wreck”.³⁰

²⁹ See, Judith Squires, “In different voices: deliberative democracy and aestheticist politics James Good and Irving Velody (eds.), *Politics of Postmodernity*, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.126.

³⁰ See, Michel, Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*. In Robert Young (eds.), *Untying the Text: A Poststructuralist Reader*. Routledge, London and New York, 1981. Quoted in A.T. Nuyen, “The Politics of Emancipation: From Self to Society”, *Human Studies*, Vol.21, No.1 (Jan. 1998), pp. 27-43, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20011175>, pp. 28-29.



Therefore, Foucault asserted that the task of emancipations largely rested on the way in which “the human being turns him-or herself in subjects.”³¹ Foucault’s this turning up into a subject, poses an antagonistic position towards the subject formation by the state and its institutions. This subjection for Foucault ignores the person individually; who he or she is. For Foucault, the task for the present is to imagine ourselves and what we could be. For him, “The conclusion would be that the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institution, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new form of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for centuries”.³² Foucault’s promotion of new forms of subjectivity involves an identification of a task adopted by an artist. In his volumes, of ‘History of Sexuality’, he deciphers the strategy of emancipation by taking an artist as a subject of emancipation. For him, an artist’s work is conducted not in accepting predetermined rules, but in accordance with his own imagination and creativity. In this sense an artist is not a docile subject who is submitted to rules. For him, this aesthetic model of freedom is called emancipation.

In *The Care of Self* (1986), Foucault asserted the “cultivating of self”, through the mode of aesthetics which for him, rightly discussed by the ancient Greeks and Romans. Foucault said, for them, the taking care of self is the universal principle.³³ Therefore, Foucault’s language of emancipation is totally an individual affair, since the construction of self in Foucault does not follow any objective and predetermined laws and norms. For Foucault the guidelines in the ‘care of self’ are subjective values derived from one’s own moral and aesthetic values rather on any objective guidelines. As Paul Veyne argues, “Foucault was a warrior in the trenches”³⁴ and a warrior is a man who continues to fight for his or her values without thinking or caring about how these values are assessed objectively. Foucault’s philosophy in this sense for Veyne, “takes away man’s reason to

³¹ Ibid., p.30

³² Ibid.

³³ See, Michel Foucault, *The Care of the Self*, New York, Vintage Books, 1986, pp.43.

³⁴ A.T Nuyen, op. cit., pp.34-35. For further reading See, Paul Veyne, “The Final Foucault” and his ethics, *Critical Enquiry* 20(1), pp 1-9.

fight because this philosophy itself fights without recourse to reason”.³⁵ The difficulty with Foucault’s strategy of emancipation, i.e. aesthetics of existence, lack the element of intersubjectivity, and this lack leads to closing oneself in constructing a prison or a wall of values which are incommensurable and which surely end in the worst kind of relativism.

On a similar terrain, Richard Rorty is not much different from Foucault when he used the vocabulary of *contingency* and *Irony* in his celebrated work, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989). Rorty’s version of emancipation is deeply rooted in the creation of ourselves as ‘strong poets’ rather than warriors, the priest, the sage, or the truth-seeking, ‘logical’, ‘objective’ scientist”.³⁶ This possibility for Rorty will take place only in such a culture where culture itself get ‘poeticized’ rather than ‘rationalized’ or ‘scientized’ as the Enlightenment thought so. This poeticized culture for Rorty is one “which has given us the attempt to unite one’s private ways of dealing with one’s finitude and one’s sense of obligation to other human beings”.³⁷ This is an equivalence of what Rorty suggests that, “we should try to get to a point where we no longer worship anything, where we treat nothing as a quasi divinity, where we treat everything – our language , our conscience, our community – as product of time and chance”.³⁸

Rorty’s claims sacrifice the universal foundations and essentialism which somewhere leads him to develop a criteria-less thought and find inspiration in Freud’s thoughts on the unconscious. One can claim that the vocabularies of ‘self-cultivation’ and ‘self-creation’ of Foucault and Rorty might share the Kantian Idea of ‘genius’³⁹. Well this can

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ See, Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1989, p.53.

³⁷ Ibid., p.68.

³⁸ Ibid.,p.22.

³⁹ “Genius is the talent...through which nature gives the rule to art”. Kant expand this argument by locating Genius is 1) a talent for producing that for which no determinate rule can be given, not a predisposition of skill for that which can be learned in accordance with some rule, consequently...originality must be its primary characteristics 2)...since there can also be original nonsense, its product must at the same time be models, i.e., exemplary, hence, while not themselves the result of imitation, they must yet serve others in that way, i.e., as a standard or a rule for judging. 3).. it cannot itself describe or indicate scientifically how it brings its product into being, but rather...it gives the rule of nature, and hence the author of a product that he owes to his genius does not know himself how the idea for it came to him, and also does not have it in

be related to another argument of Rorty, where he argued that, “the sort of autonomy which self-creating ironists like Nietzsche, Derrida, or Foucault seek is not the sort of thing that *could* ever be embodied in social institution”.⁴⁰ In this sense, the autonomy for Rorty is somewhat an extraordinary venture propelled forth only by self-creation and it’s not something that we all possess, and neither society can cultivate it by not repressing human beings. This for Rorty is a possibility which few can achieve.⁴¹ This is somewhat similar to a Kantian understanding of genius somebody who always stands as incomprehensible to others. In this way genius always posited a threat to an established order of reason. Kant, in his *Critique of Judgment* argued that, “genius cannot be restricted by rule or be limited to the understanding. Indeed, the genius is defined by *originality*, which for Kant merely means that the work cannot be capture within the confines of any systematic understanding”.⁴² For Kant, the “presence of genius, of radical incomprehensibility, is like the skeptical threat in that both reject the validity (one might say ‘finality’) of established practices and points of view. In both cases, the fear is that an authentic *sensus communis*- a legitimate point of view of reason- will be supplanted by something merely private, merely subjective, the *sensus privates*, a personal point of view”.⁴³

For Rorty, it was Freud “who democratized the genius by giving everybody a creative unconscious”.⁴⁴ One can argue that it’s the democratization of genius, probably the Kantian genius, which Kant had created and at the same time refuted by disciplining it through the rules or criteria of *taste*.⁴⁵ However, this similarity of Kant’s Genius with

his power to think up such things at will or according to a plan, and to communicate to others precepts that would put them in a position to produce similar products. (*Critique of Power of Judgment*, 46, 5: 307-8). Quoted in Paul Guyer, *Kant*, Routledge, London and New York, 2008, p.319.

⁴⁰ Richard Rorty, op. cit., p.65

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See, Tracy B. Strong and Frank Andreas Sposito, “Habermas Significant Other” in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen K. White, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 276

⁴³ Ibid., p.277-278.

⁴⁴ Richard Rorty, op. cit., p 36

⁴⁵ “Taste like the power of judgments in general, consists in disciplining (or training) genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it civilized, or polished, but at the sane time it gives it guidance as to how far and over what it may spread... It introduced clarity and order into wealth of thought, and hence makes it durable, fit for approval that is both lasting and universal, and fit for being followed by others and fit for every advancing culture”. *Critique of Judgment*, 50 p. 319. Quoted in Tracy B. Strong and Frank Andreas

Rorty's self-creation might be a distant possibility but more importantly, Rorty's concern was to bring the subject in front by dis-identifying it with any pre-given norm and values.

According to Rorty, it is Freud who released us from the Platonic and Kantian ideas of rationality, which demands that particular action needs to be brought under the universal principle for becoming moral. Freud for Rorty "de-universalizes the moral sense, making it as idiosyncratic as the poet's invention".⁴⁶ This invention for Freud in many ways develops singularly and particularly and is restricted to the self only. Freud explained this with a notion of love and guilt, which he argued varies from person to person, in certain specific ways, as there is no universal moral vocabulary which applies to individual cases, and this is actually a moment for Freud which gives us "equipment to construct or own private vocabularies of moral deliberation, which enable us to sketch a narrative of our own development, our idiosyncratic moral struggle, which is far more finely textured, far more custom-tailored to our individual case, than the moral vocabulary which the philosophical tradition offered us".⁴⁷

It is significantly from Freud, that Rorty developed a criteria-less thinking of redescription. He fails to provide a criteria to distinguish between the desirable and the non-desirable vocabulary for redescription.⁴⁸ As Rorty claimed that "to see a new vocabulary not as something which was supposed to replace all other vocabularies, something which claimed to represent reality, but simply as one more vocabulary, one more human project, one person's chosen metaphoric."⁴⁹ Rorty is critical of Habermas's

Sposito, "Habermas Significant Other" in Stephen K. White (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p .278.

⁴⁶ Richard Rorty, op. cit., p. 30.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ For Rorty "the temptation to look for criteria is a species of the more general temptation to think of the world, or the human self, as possessing an intrinsic nature, an essence. That is, it is the result of the temptation to privilege some one among the many languages in which we habitually describe the world or ourselves. As long as we think that there is some relation called 'fitting the world' or 'expressing the real nature of the self' which can be possessed or lacked by vocabularies-as-wholes, we shall continue the traditional search for a criterion to tell us which vocabularies have this desirable feature. But if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that most of reality is indifferent to our description of it, and that human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we should at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth is made rather than found."

Ibid, p. 7

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 39.

approach towards a public philosopher who looks for thoughts in reference to public needs and avoids the incoming of Irrationalism by accepting and granting rights to an “other to reason”.⁵⁰ Rorty is in search of abandoning the notion of universal foundation and essentialism which Habermas located in the Enlightenment project. For Rorty, when we abandon the notion that “‘reason’ is source of healing, reconciling, unifying power – the source of human solidarity. If there is no such source, if the idea of human solidarity is simply the fortunate happenstance creation of modern times, then we no longer need a notion of ‘communicative reason’ to substitute for that ‘subject-centered reason’”.⁵¹

The major shortcoming of Rorty’s thought on self-creation and redescription is that they are mostly regulated by his own vocabulary of Contingency and Irony. In fact, for Rorty, “redescription is a generic trait of the intellectual, not a specific mark of the ironist.”⁵² Rorty’s abandoning of Philosophical justifications surely makes him cancelling out any attempt of evaluating or comparing the positive and negative side of any project. In this way his thoughts posited an antithetical stance towards the process of argumentation and deliberation as a positive opportunity.⁵³ This Criteria-less construction of new

⁵⁰ Ibid, p 68.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rorty explanation of redescription is closely tied to his thought on ironism. This can be gathered from his distinction between an ironist and metaphysician. As Rorty argued that “the metaphysician in short, thinks that there is a connection between redescription and power, and that the right redescription can make us free. The ironist offers no similar assurance. She has to say that our chances of freedom depend on historical contingencies which are only occasionally influenced by our self-redescriptions. She knows of no power of the same size as the one with which the metaphysician claims acquaintances.....so I concludes that what the ironist is being blamed for is not an inclination to humiliate but an inability to empower. There is no reason the ironist cannot be a liberal, but she cannot be a ‘progressive’ and dynamic’ liberal in the sense in which liberal metaphysicians sometimes claims to be . For she cannot offer the same hope as metaphysicians offer. She cannot claim that adopting her redescription of yourself or your situation makes you better able to conquer the forces which are marshaled against you. On her account, that ability is a matter of weapons and luck, not a matter of having truth on your side, or having detected the ‘movement of history’” Ibid, pp. 90-91.

⁵³ Rorty’s antagonistic attitude towards philosophy as a method largely arises because for him an impediment towards the process of redescription which is not bounded by the criteria’s and parameters of justification. For Rorty philosophy “is the same as the ‘method’ of utopian politics or revolutionary science (as opposed to parliamentary politics or normal science). The method is to redescribe lots and lots of new things in new ways, until you have created a pattern of linguistic behavior which will tempt the rising generation to adopt it, thereby causing them to look for appropriate new forms of nonlinguistic behavior, for example, the adoption of new scientific equipment of new social institutions. This sort of philosophy does not work piece by piece, analyzing concept after concept, or testing thesis after thesis. Rather, it works holistically and pragmatically. It says things like ‘try thinking of it this way’ or more specifically, ‘try to ignore the apparently futile traditional questions by substituting the following new and possibly interesting questions’. It does not pretend to have a better candidate for doing the same old things which we did when

vocabularies for Rorty is merely a contingent promise of looking things fancily, as there is no certainty that redescription will be a 'right description'.⁵⁴ It is rightly put forward by McCumber that to ask Rorty "for a conceptually adequate account of redescription would be to demand a philosophically responsible account of irresponsibility"⁵⁵.

Rorty is much more concerned with maintaining a strict separation between private perfection and public commitment; towards justice and solidarity. This is the moment in Rorty's writing that begs questions for a practical justification of this separation, especially how it leads towards an emancipatory politics. For Topper, this is an "acrimonious conflict between 'writers on autonomy' and 'writers on justice', Rorty holds that the standard philosophical solution all seek to reconcile these antagonistic stances by uniting them under a single, more synthetic theoretical or philosophical view, one that would let us hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision".⁵⁶ However, Rorty maintained that these different visions are fundamentally opposed to each other and are "incommensurable". Their incommensurability lies in the different character of these two visions. For Rorty, "the vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared a medium for argumentative exchange."⁵⁷ This is the reason why Rorty found that the authors like Nietzsche, Heidegger, Proust and Nabokov are the exemplars of Self-creativity and autonomy and are different from authors like Marx, Dewey and Habermas who are public authors, concerned with public vocabularies like justice.

we spoke in the old way. Rather, it suggests that we might want to stop doing those things and do something else. But it does not argue for this suggestion on the basis of antecedent criteria common to the old and the new language games. For just insofar as the new language really is new, there will be no such criteria" Ibid. p.9.

⁵⁴"The practice of redescription is resolutely not an attempt to engage in, but to avoid, "normal" philosophical and conceptual argumentation, efforts to evaluate it on these grounds are in Rorty's view fundamentally misconceived. They are misconceived for the obvious reason that they presuppose precisely the normal vocabulary and practices of justification that the redescriber seeks to circumvent and replace". See, Keith Topper, "Richard Rorty, Liberalism and the Politics of Redescription", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Dec, 1995), pp. 954-965. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2082520> , p. 955.

⁵⁵ McCumber, John. 1990 "Reconnecting Rorty: The situation of Discourse in Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*." *Diacritics* 20:2-19. Quoted in Keith Topper, "Richard Rorty, Liberalism and the Politics of Redescription", *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 89, No. 4 (Dec, 1995), pp. 954-965. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2082520> , p. 955.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 956.

⁵⁷ Richard Rorty, op. cit., p.xiv.

The difficulty with Rorty is that he had given equal weightage to these two incommensurable concerns, but he failed to acknowledge that, in most cases, the private self-creation and redescription are often dependent on the space of public sphere and public vocabulary. Rorty's Ironist⁵⁸, is one, whose only task is to care about his own autonomy and self-creation.

The Ironist figures for Rorty are those who know about the contingency of their own vocabularies; in this way they already know about the seriousness of their own commitments towards the vocabularies. However, if the contingency is the filling factor in their commitments then it shows that they themselves should not take it seriously and therefore, their commitment towards self-creation and redescription is always a contingent one. As Topper pointed out, Rorty's use of the term contingency identified not with human innovations, but with notions of chance, luck, accident, randomness and fortuitousness. This is an evidence of Rorty's framework, where he decentered the connection of human subjectivity. It signals the notion of human powerlessness, and therefore, the meaning of contingency in his writing implies as Topper points out, regarding the "uncontrollable and unpredictable forces or events that shape our lives in decisive ways."⁵⁹

The most dangerous and anti-essentialist stance of Rorty can be seen when he said that "the idea of human solidarity is simply the fortunate happenstance creation of modern times"⁶⁰. However, the irony is that Rorty would accept, that his construction of contingency resists any potentiality of both individual and collective emancipation, however, if there is any possibility, then Rorty would prefer the private one at the expense of the collective one. As Topper pointed out that "Rorty vacillates between an 'anything goes' vision of human agency, in which our capacities for personal or social

⁵⁸ An "Ironist" for Rorty is someone who fulfills three conditions " 1) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; 2) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; 3) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself." Ibid., p. 73.

⁵⁹ Keith Topper, op. cit., pp 958-959.

⁶⁰ Richard Rorty, op. cit., p.68.

transformation are limited only by the powers of our individual or collective imaginations; and a vision in which efforts to shape one's self and one's world are every bit as uncontrollable as in the most deterministic and totalizing philosophical systems".⁶¹ This suggests that no such language of emancipation arises in Rorty's work, because contingency in some sort a 'foundational category' exists in his work which resists any meaningful foundation to build upon. Richard Bernstein is right when he remarked that "Rorty's own vision of the 'good society' is one where we will play, a type of *jouissance* where there is nonviolent tolerant celebration of our capacities for making and self-creation, where we would abandon 'the spirit of seriousness' and no longer think it is important to hold positions about 'truth', 'objectivity', 'rationality' and so on".⁶² It is this vision of Rorty which makes us strong poets when we accept the contingency of our commitment towards self-creation, which I would call Rorty's vision of contingency of emancipation. This is clearly evident when Rorty argued about the irrelevancy of ironist thinking for public life and political question. He asserted that the ironist self image is useless for political questions.⁶³

The question of freedom is so central to Rorty that, it itself does not require any consensus. In this way he is critical towards public intellectuals and their fascination with philosophy as a social discipline and problem solving method.⁶⁴ As Rorty is much more on the other side when he argues that "for ironist view I have been offering, there is no such thing as a 'natural' order of justification for beliefs or desires. Nor is there much occasion to use the distinctions between logic and rhetoric, or between philosophy and literature, or between rational and nonrational methods of changing other people's mind".⁶⁵ One can argue that, this is one of the major features that distinguish between the modern and the postmodern attitude. Habermas, himself posited that Enlightenment as a

⁶¹ Keith Topper, op. cit., p. 959.

⁶² See, Richard J. Bernstein, "Two Steps Backward: Richard Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy", *Political Theory*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (Nov., 1987), pp. 538-563. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/191689>, pp 541-542.

⁶³ Richard Rorty, op. cit., p. 83.

⁶⁴ Rorty in many senses critical towards Enlightenment theorist who pounces on rationality and universality as the best glue for bonding the plural societies. Therefore he accused Habermas and Marxists who assumed that philosophy has social function and the reference point of judging the social should be by the political and philosophical implication of thoughts. Ibid., p. 83

⁶⁵ Ibid.

project committed to 'develop objective science, universal morality and law, and autonomous art according to their own inner logic'.⁶⁶ In opposition to this, Postmodernism does not locate any separation between science, ethics and art, and therefore they deny any pursuit of universal and rational ethical principles.

Rorty and others, like Foucault, are so self occupied with terms like 'cultivation of self', 'self-creation' and 'redescription', through the process of imagination and playfulness, that they ignore that the thrust they are putting on agency to create life for themselves are often resisted by brutal structures that not only resist the impulses of imagination, but also create a wounded, humiliated self which perpetually ends while struggling with the oppressive structures. Therefore, the task of public writers is so central to the project of emancipation in identifying and locating those structures which comes in between the creation of self itself. The difference which Rorty created among the private writers and public writers and that he had given an equal weightage to them in their own domain, I would say, divides the human on the basis of giving him or her choice to take part in dismantling the oppressive public structures or lead their own private, solitary and fanciful formation of 'self-creation' and 'self-cultivation'. However, exercising the first choice in Rorty's thought has an instrumental value for the emergence of the second one. As one can argue, taking part in public life for Rorty has a utility to resist those structures which come in between the self- imagination. This is exactly what Rorty's Pragmatism means where we have commitments only for the sake of ourselves and have no moral obligation for others. Such a situation actually arises because Rorty does not provide any criteria or hierarchy of our commitments and this surely leads us towards a pragmatic approach; towards the social movements itself which are largely self-centered and self-interest based, and ends with a cheerful celebration of incommensurability over intersubjectivity.

The next part focuses on the critiques of Rorty's thought, particularly in the context and position of Dalits in India. We would further argue that how the whole antifoundationalist

⁶⁶ See, Jurgen Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib (1981), 'Modernity Versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique*, No.22 , pp. 3-14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/487859>. Accessed on 11/07/2008. p. 9.

version of emancipation of Rorty falls down when it directly interfaces with structures like 'Brahmanism' in India. More importantly, how the project of antifoundationalism and postmodernism further marginalizes the Dalits in India.

III

As mentioned Earlier, emancipation is a legitimate human interest. Thus, it could be argued that the task of philosophers, activists, revolutionaries, political leaders and also spiritual prophets is to speak for humanity and human emancipation. The task here is not to speak rhetoric but to speak about concrete realities and truth or those structures of oppression that hamper the project of emancipation. However, these structures of oppression have to be understood in concrete existential and material realities. This varies according to context. However, the difference in the contexts and spaces per se should not be used in an incommensurable way to talk about emancipation. There has to be some objective and transcendental vocabulary that commensurate and at the same time distinguish between emancipations which are desirable. The concrete (structures of oppression) have to be qualified with determinant categories and not some self-created categories which detach themselves from the universal and intersubjective formation.

Taking an incommensurable approach to emancipation, which antifoundationalists and postmodernists propel to do will eventually never lead to emancipation but to a status quo. Like for Dalits the emancipation would be to emancipate itself from the oppressive structure of caste and Brahmanism and simultaneously to get rid of the Brahminical, past by disallowing native and indigenous practices. But, at the same time in opposition to Dalit emancipation the emancipation of postcolonial India lies in to get rid of colonial consciousness by going back to the native tradition; Gandhi and cultural nationalists are the advocates of the same. For antifoundationalists, both sorts of emancipation are legitimate and therefore, respected. But, because of their being antithetical to foundation they are not able to provide emancipation which is more demanding. Therefore, failure to assign priorities to different emancipations will inevitably lead to a status quo situation,

as there is no objective and transcendental category to distinguish between the desirable and non-desirable emancipations.

This is actually a worrying situation for foundationalist like Habermas. For Habermas, the antifoundationalist approach like Lyotard's 'incredulity towards metanarrative' sounds conservative, because such an approach can only make sense when we at least preserve "one standard for (the) explanation of the corruption of all reasonable standards".⁶⁷ It is well understood that the Enlightenment project, through modernity is an emancipatory project because of its view of progress directed towards the notion of freedom and equality which is founded on 'reason' as a universal category, irrespective of different identities and cultures. For Habermas, such standards are significant for making distinctions between the 'naked and the masked, or between theory and ideology'.⁶⁸ Abandoning these distinctions which are propelled by reason for Habermas, as Rorty argued, would be akin to "give up the Enlightenment notion of rational criticism of existing institutions".⁶⁹ In his other writings Habermas agreed with Foucault that reason is a 'thing in this world'.⁷⁰ But, such understanding of reason of Foucault for Habermas does not prevent the difference between right and wrong. For Habermas, "the undeniable 'transcendence' of the claims they represent- their openness to critique and revision and their internal relation to intersubjective recognition brought about by the 'force of reason'. The ideas of reason, truth, and justice also serve as ideals with reference to which we can criticize the traditions we inherit; though never be reduced to any given set of such practices."⁷¹

It is well understandable that in non-western societies and postcolonial societies like India where the worst indignities, injustices and humiliation are suffered by the victims of their 'own' cultural-religious values, the Dalits and untouchables were the passionate supporter of the rationality of modern science. As Mira Nanda argued, rather than

⁶⁷ See, Jurgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *New German Critique*, 26 (1982), p. 28.

⁶⁸ Richard J. Bernstein (eds.), *Habermas and Modernity*, op. cit., p.161.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.161-162

⁷⁰ See, Habermas, J, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures*, trans. By Fredrick Lawrence, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987, p.x.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

accepting the objectivity and value–freedom of science as a ‘rude and brutal intrusion’ important ‘Dalit intellectuals have celebrated the contents and methods of modern natural science as a source of demystification of the elite Hindu understanding of nature as permeated with Brahman, the divine spirit’.⁷² The Prominent figure among the Dalits, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, who followed American Pragmatist John Dewey, was a great advocate and an ardent supporter of modern science, because of it’s being a ‘continuation of natural rationality of human beings in all historical epochs and in all cultures’⁷³, where its relation to society is judged by the consequences with the productive use of doubt and in predicting and controlling the course of nature.⁷⁴

It was Ambedkar who believed that with the advent of modern science, the scientific knowledge will ‘replace the supernatural, metaphysical knowledge, accessible only to the pure and the wise’.⁷⁵ As it is argued that Ambedkar himself is located in Cartesian standpoint, where men are endowed with the capacities of reason through which one can arrive at knowledge and certitude, in this sense ‘Ambedkar took overboard certain standard proposition of the enlightenment grid’.⁷⁶ The task for Ambedkar is to promote the spirit and content of modern science as the core value and from the standpoint of this modern scientific attitude one has to reconstruct the inherited cultural values and social ethics.

This sort of retaining a ‘theoretical approach’ like Ambedkar did retains the hopes for criticism which he employed against the brutal, demeaning and humiliating social structures of Brahminical Hindu culture. Therefore, for Habermas the theoretical approach is hallmark of the transformation and reform in the modern democracies for ‘the criticisms of the socio-economic institutions of both the free and the communist worlds’⁷⁷; and which can even commensurate with the hopes of the marginalized masses like Dalits in India. In this sense; the abandoning of such an approach considered as

⁷² See, Meera Nanda, *Prophet Facing Forward*, Critical Quest, New Delhi, 2006, p. 4.

⁷³ Meera Nanda, op. cit., p. 187.

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Meera Nanda, *Prophet Facing Forward*, op. cit., p. 5

⁷⁶ See, Valerian Rodrigues, *Gandhi-Ambedkar Debate*, in in A.K Narain and D.C Ahir (eds.) *Dr. Ambedkar Buddhism and Social Change*, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1994, p. 139.

⁷⁷ Richard J. Bernstein, (eds.) *Habermas and Modernity*, op. cit., p. 162.

“neoconservative” by Habermas makes some sense. As Rorty said “abandoning a standpoint which is, if not transcendental, at least ‘universalistic’, seems to Habermas to betray the social hopes which have been central to liberal politics”.⁷⁸

In the above pages, I discussed the thoughts of emancipation in the writings of Foucault and Rorty, and how for them the vision of emancipation can be appropriated through the vocabulary of ‘self-creation’ and ‘self-cultivation’. However, the difficulty is that both, Rorty and Foucault fail to understand that our ability of self-creation and self-cultivation are often limited and constituted by the location of oneself in past in terms of ascribed identities which are largely shaped by the cultural and social complexities. In this way, Rorty’s crying of originality and genius is itself largely shaped by the social location of the self. This is clearly evident in the case of categories like Dalits and Women, where their struggle for self-creation is largely determined by the hierarchies prevalent in the society. Therefore, Rorty’s thrust on controllable and unpredictable events in the life that shapes the course of our life is nothing else but, his own non serious engagement with concrete existential and material realities. His antithetical stance towards foundational and essentialist thought had actually put him in such a situation where he and his followers stand as the most opportunist in the garb of the language of Ironist and Pragmatic.

The structures of oppression like Caste, Brahmanism and Patriarchy are not uncontrollable and unanticipated events, but they are well thought by those who want self-cultivation and self-creation at the price of the exclusion of others. This can be equated with the idea of self-preservation in the Hobbesian sense, for Gopal Guru this is “ontologically related to the superior self”⁷⁹. Guru equated Hobbesian politics of self-preservation with Brahminhood. For him, the “politics of self-preservation in the Hobbesian sense, suggests an unwillingness to step out from brahminhood. Interestingly, brahminhood seeks to preserve itself through the process of Sanskritisation. Sanskritisation as a cultural process involves the efforts on the part of the people at the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See Gopal, Guru, “Archaeology of Untouchability”, *Economic & Political Weekly*, September 12, 2009, Vol. XLIV, No. 37. p.51.

lower layer to emulate brahminhood”.⁸⁰ This stands in stark opposition to the “ lower caste struggle achieving the principle of ‘ one person one value’ and so forth goes against the Aristotelian spirit of an interconnection between the private and public which is bound by the totality of moral qualities of the good ‘man’”.⁸¹ In such a scenario Rorty’s and Foucault’s version of emancipation and a creation of self would surely be described as a luxury for Dalits in Indian society, where the private and public distinction is fuzzy, and more importantly, what is private is the imposition of the public sphere regulated by the Brahminhood.

Therefore, it is significant to highlight that the mapping of public and private identity does not operate in Dalits, it is clearly evident that the private sphere of Dalits, which is often described through the non-conceptual medium or non-theoretical medium like literature, poetry, autobiographies or through the mode of fine arts does not preserve the neat and clear distinction of public and private. Their private life is the replication of public life which is only described and explained by the humiliating structures of Brahmanism that actually seize the ability for comprehending the private in Rorty’s and Foucault’s sense. It is significant to ask why the Dalits and Women are often caught in the dilemma of personal self-creation and quest for public justice. This is quite central to their ascribed identity that their quest for self-cultivation is often resisted by their social location. This is quite evident, especially in academic research, Dalits and Women are often caught in the streams of Dalit discourse and women studies; this is further applied in the realm of aesthetics whether literature or fine arts. This is typically called compartmentalization or ghettoisation of identities and asking them to remain perpetually within it. As Topper pointed out from a Carole Pateman argument that “the absence of any ‘great’ woman artists or philosophers in the standard canons of western culture reveals more about the ways in which categories like originality and genius have been constructed than about the artistic or intellectual talents of women”.⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid p. 51 & 56.

⁸² Keith Topper, op. cit., p. 959.

This is elaborated in detail in Pierre Bourdieu's study, in which an inspection of grades of various students in philosophy is carried out by professors of French academic institutions, where he found a "clear and visible relation between a *hierarchy of epithets (evaluative comments ranging from 'simplistic', 'silly' and 'insipid' to 'lively', 'cultivated', and 'masterly')* and a *hierarchy of social origins*, a ranking based on the 'importance of the cultural capital' that students inherited from their parents.⁸³

This can be generalized to the case of Dalits in India in reference to the poverty and the exclusionary nature of social sciences here. As Gopal Guru argued that with "the strict observance of a language code, protocols, body language and ground rules effectively converts seminar halls into a hostile structure that very often inflict humiliation on the Dalits who then feel nervous or intimidated to enter such structures. Ultimately, Dalits are denied access to knowledge and its articulation. They are also denied the critical faculty to interrogate the dominant mode of thinking."⁸⁴ However, this does not suggest that one should completely overhaul the setting of rules of argument but rules should be formulated in such a way that it enjoins the popular public mentality and not merely the power game of sophistication of language and snobbery which overpower the whole argumentative procedure.

It is precisely this lack of 'transformation of public sphere' which is the fundamental factor for Guru that restores the contingency among the Dalits regarding their powerlessness of pursuing theory and their embarking on a non-conceptual and private domain, especially poetry and autobiographical narratives. They use their experiences and portray them through metaphors which in many ways sensitizes and generates sympathy in the public domain and attempts to develop an inwardness, but as this

⁸³ Ibid., p. 960. "As Bourdieu notes, not only technical aptitudes, such as the capacity to construct an argument or to grasp the specialized vocabulary of particular authors, but also personal and physical qualities constitute part of the disparate criteria of professorial judgment. Especially in student's oral work, these latter 'external criteria' become prominent, and here too there is a tight connection between student's social origins (as expressed in accent, body language, and style of speaking) and professor's remarks on their work and talents". For Further reading See, Pierre, Bourdieu. *Homo Academics*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 1988.

⁸⁴ See, Gopal, Guru, "How Egalitarian are the Social Sciences in India?" *Economic & Political Weekly*, December, 14, 2002, p. 5006.

language lacks the dialectical power like the argumentation process involves, (as this process is based on objectivity and justificatory principles) this is the reason why for Guru “poetry helps Dalits in making a connection through metaphors but not through concepts”⁸⁵ and therefore poetry, for him lacks the conceptual power “to universalize the particular and particularize the universal”.⁸⁶ It is this freeing of Dalits from the particular, which Dalits themselves have essentialized through a non-conceptual medium that has frozen their identity and compartmentalized them into a single ‘Dalit’ entity and so also refused them to go along with their reflective capacities. However, this compartmentalization of Dalit to Dalit only, is partly shaped by using Guru’s term ‘theoretical Brahmins’, and partly by the Dalits themselves by essentialising or privileging narrative and metaphorical (like poetry, literature, and autobiographies) construction over theory.

The interesting aspect in Dalits construction of the non-conceptual domain is that it has an inbuilt dimension of universal language which actually transcends its particularity of experience and locates its solidarity with other oppressed, non-conceptual domains. It is significant to highlight that the aesthetics in the Dalit self through literature and other non-conceptual domains is well informed; not on the lines of pleasure and beauty but more on the thrust of social creativity. The creative aspect of the social lies in considering the essentiality of human beings and the truth structures of the society which can be comprehended on the revolutionary zeal of literature which promotes equality, freedom and justice. This frees the literature from private idiosyncrasies and stand as an exemplar for public value. As it is argued that “if pleasure giving- literature arouses joy and sympathy in people, revolutionary literature awaken consciousness of self-respect”.⁸⁷ As P. S. Rege argued that “it is not possible for literature to be larger than revolution”.⁸⁸ In this way, Dalit aesthetics provides a criticism of its situated self which is located in the structures of the Hindu society. For Baburao Bagul, “the established literature of India is Hindi literature. But it is Dalit literature which has the revolutionary power to accept new

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 5007

⁸⁶ Ibid

⁸⁷ See, SharanKumar Limbale, *Towards and Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, Translated by. Alok Mukherjee, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2004, p.119.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

science and technology and bring about a total transformation; it is revolution incarnate”.⁸⁹

It is argued that the aesthetics of Dalit literature represents “first, the artist’s social commitment; second, the life-affirming values present in the artistic creation; and third, the ability to raise the reader’s consciousness and fundamental values like equality, freedom, justice and fraternity”.⁹⁰ The significant aspect of the aesthetics of the oppressed is that it does not employ vocabularies like contingency and irony as Rorty’s private author applies.

In many ways, Dalits experience through the medium of a non-conceptual domain had intensified the theoretical domain of the Dalit discourse. The evidence of it can be identified in the writings of Ambedkar and others as they thoroughly collaborated their private with public and produced the most profound dimensions of understanding the questions of justice and equality, and added or contributed to the theoretical domain with new and alternative visions. This intensified dimension of Dalits doing theory actually poses a significant challenge to others to contest it on rational grounds. This inbuilt dimension of universality in the Dalit discourse resists the perceptions of Dalits by others in emotional language like of unconditional obligation, benevolence, charity and care which not only signals the powerlessness of Dalits in doing theory, but deprives them in perceiving an agency, which as Guru argued museumised them as amusing objects.⁹¹

⁸⁹ See “Dalit Literature is But Human literature”, Translated by. Milind Malshe, in, Arjun Dangle (eds.), *The Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Orient Longman, Bombay, 1992, p. 289. Similarly for Arjun Dangle “Dalit Literature is one which acquaints people with the caste system untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. Dalit is not caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys, and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum of society. It matures with a sociological point of view and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary”, Ibid, p.264-265.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p.120

⁹¹ Gopal Guru, “How Egalitarian are the Social Sciences in India?” op. cit., p. 5008.

IV

In the above part, it is argued that the distinction of public and private in reference to Dalit emancipation does not apply, because the dimensions of Dalit emancipation is itself dependent on the foundations of the universal norms. In this way, doing theory by Dalits as a problem solving exercise and looking for truths marks a significant way in their approach towards emancipation. It is primarily by this approach they transcend the moral and ethical dimensions of postmodern ethics of writers like Stephen White, Rorty, and Levinas, as discussed by Axel Honneth. For White the difficulty with modernity's ethical thinking is that it rested on the principle of "responsibility to act"⁹² which should culminate in the practical changing of the world or must be possessive of a contributory feature. This dynamism of acting within the universal norms resists the possibility of acknowledging the person's particularity. For White, as Honneth posits "under the pressure to act morally in an appropriate and 'responsible' manner, neither the other person nor the world in toto can be perceived in their inner diversity".⁹³ Also for White as Honneth put this reawakening of particularity can become a possibility "when sensitizing our perception of individual peculiarities are declared to be virtues, as it were".⁹⁴ Therefore, for White these virtues of sensitivity can be modeled in the language of our "ability to listen, the willingness to be emotionally involved, and finally, the capacity to accept-indeed, encourage- personal particularities".⁹⁵ This is finally described in the concept of "Care".⁹⁶

For Levinas this is described in terms of "face to face" relationship with the other. In this relationship, where at the sight of the face one is choice-less and "feel obligated to help

⁹² See, Stephen, K White, *Political Theory and Postmodernism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, pp. 20f. Cited in Axel Honneth, "The other of justice: Habermas and the ethical challenge of postmodernism", in in Stephen K. White (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995p. 298.

⁹³ Ibid, p. 299.

⁹⁴ Ibid

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 300

⁹⁶ Ibid.

this person immediately and to assist him or her in coping with existential problems”.⁹⁷ The thrust of Levinas ethics lies in the moment of ‘unintended deprivation of liberty’ which usually takes place at the sight of the face where obligation to take care of the other person dominates the individual autonomy and the sense of interest for oneself has a subordinate significance. This moment of ‘inner worldly experience of infinity’ for Levinas arises because of one’s incapacity of calculability at the sight of the face, and this experience of moral responsibility for Levinas produced an infinite task “of doing justice to the particularity of the other person by caring everlastingly”.⁹⁸

Both White and Levinas ethics of postmodernism commensurate with the ethics of Rorty where he puts thrust on the individual to aesthetically and artistically imagine the suffering of the other. For Rorty, in this sense solidarity is created not by reflection but created by “increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people”.⁹⁹ However, this approach of Rorty is not dissimilar to White’s sensitization and generation of sympathy and care. As Rorty puts forward while making a distinction between a liberal metaphysician and liberal ironist “that the recognition of a common susceptibility to humiliation is the *only* social bond that is needed. Whereas the metaphysician takes the morally relevant feature of the other human beings to be their relation to larger shared power- rationality, God, truth, or history”.¹⁰⁰ He further puts forward “the ironist takes the morally relevant definition of a person, a moral subject, to be ‘something that can be humiliated’. Her sense of human solidarity is based on a sense of a common danger, not on a common possession or a shared power.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ See, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969, pp 194ff. Quoted in Axel Honneth, “The other of justice: Habermas and the ethical challenge of postmodernism”, in Stephen K. White (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 312.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 312-313.

⁹⁹ Richard Rorty, *op. cit.*, p. xvi.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

This is starkly opposite to what Benhabib calls “the goal of reflection is emancipation from self-incurred bondage”.¹⁰² This goal of reflection actually essentializes to locate the enabling conditions of humiliation which might be produced by the history, society, psyche and other spaces where one can reflect upon and try to minimize those conditions which enables one to perceive humiliation. As argued, Rorty certainly promoted “a philosophical anthropology, an account of what it is to be a human being namely, that the self is ‘something which can be humiliated’”¹⁰³ and that by perceiving a person as a moral subject who can be humiliated. This does not mean Rorty essentialized some common and universal components of human nature, but for him the avoidance of humiliation and cruelty by promoting human solidarity is central because it is tied-in centrally to the value of autonomy which is considered as the highest value in liberal cultures of the constitutional democracies.¹⁰⁴ This does not justify for Rorty that these values are universal and essential in all other cultures.¹⁰⁵ Rorty’s praise for ‘Postmodern Bourgeois Liberalism’ lies in advantages of “recognizing and allowing individuals and cultures to get along with each other without intruding on each other’s privacy, without meddling with each other’s conceptions of good”¹⁰⁶, because such an outlook does not provide a totalistic and a deterministic outlook as a representative of all other cultures. In this way, Bernstein is right when he charged Rorty that he “ignores the *historical fact* that we are confronted with conflicting and incompatible practices- even in so-called liberal democracy”.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² See, Seyla Benhabib, “Epistemologies of Postmodernism: A Rejoinder to Jean- Francois Lyotard”, *New German Critique*, No. 33, *Modernity and Postmodernity (Autumn, 1984)*, pp. 103-126. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/488356>, pp. 109.

¹⁰³ See, David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason*, Sage Publications, London, 1995, pp.148-149.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 149

¹⁰⁵ For Rorty “There is no *neutral*, noncircular way to defend the liberal’s claim that cruelty is the worst thing we do, any more than there is a neutral way to back up Nietzsche’s assertion that this claim expresses a resentful, slavish attitude, or Heidegger’s that the idea of the ‘greatest happiness of the greatest number’ is just one more bit of ‘metaphysics, of the ‘forgetful of Being’”. Richard Rorty, *op. cit.*, pp. 197-198.

¹⁰⁶ See, Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers, Vol.1: Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p.209. Cited in David Owen, *Nietzsche, Politics and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason*, Sage Publications, London, 1995, p.149

¹⁰⁷ Richard J. Bernstein, “Two Steps Backward: Richard Rorty on Liberal Democracy and Philosophy” *op. cit.*, p 548.

If for Rorty, politics is an experimental discipline then one needs to identify and locate which political practices are favored, modified or eliminated; then for Bernstein this surely requires a criteria to judge. However; for Rorty this leads to 'bad' foundationalism.¹⁰⁸ This is the reason why Rorty's writing lacks any description of such social practices and institutions which cause misery and hopelessness on others.¹⁰⁹

The difficulty with Rorty's thought is that, by opposing foundationalism he fails to provide any concrete measure to avert those structures which perpetuates humiliation. His private project of sensitizing people by becoming private authors and strong poets merely reiterates the ethics of care and unconditional obligation of what Levinas and White argued. For Honneth, understanding and exploration of injustice for Rorty requires "the ability of the artist to creatively familiarize us with the possible suffering of the other person".¹¹⁰ As for Rorty it is the "aesthetic sensibility that constitutes the true motor of moral progress."¹¹¹

However, one can argue that the very possibility of knowing humiliation depends on our ability to inquire about what are the enabling conditions of causing humiliation, this directly leads us to know the spaces or structures that makes one feel about the very concept of humiliation. The very interaction of humiliation is tied-in well with the structures that generate the vocabulary of humiliation. Even the project of making oneself sensitive towards others regarding humiliation primarily requires a knowledge of those structures, and in this way is directly attracted towards the truth, that these structures cause humiliation. In this process, one already becomes a public author and nowhere remains a private author. This is the enabling moment of modernity where those, structures triggers one to act, and this action means one is able to recognize that he or she

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 549.

¹⁰⁹ This is rightly pointed out by Topper that "within the corpus of Rorty's writing there is almost *no* 'detailed description' of 'the effects of our social practices and institutions on others' and there are no 'detailed historical narratives' mapping the genesis and effects of those practices. In fact, it is striking that while Rorty acknowledge the existence of deep and disturbing social problems (e.g., 'the unending hopelessness and misery of the lives of the young blacks in American cities' he never describes in any detail the broader context or 'social field' in which those problems are embedded, nor does he locate particular social practices that contribute to an sustain these problems". See, Keith Topper, *op. cit.*, p. 960

¹¹⁰ Axel Honneth, *op. cit.*, p.300.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

is acting practically to avert those structures because they cause humiliation and stand in opposition to the equal treatment of all. This is the reason why abstract concepts like freedom, justice, rights and other foundationalist vocabulary exist because they provide a criteria on which one can judge that such and such act cause humiliation as it stands in opposition to these universal norms. And therefore, one's acting in defense of those universal norms makes one a moral being. This practical engagement of oneself with the universal norms is the modernity's ethical thinking which White tried to criticize.¹¹²

In many ways, postmodernists and antifoundationalists do injustice to the questions regarding Dalit emancipation by relegating it to the particular Domain; despite knowing that Dalit emancipation is crippled by the structures of humiliation like Brahmanism, untouchability and caste prejudices. These practices stand in opposition to the ideal and universal norms like justice, freedom, and liberty, etc. Primarily, it is this knowledge and understanding of these structures which makes the task of philosophy and theory, a problem solving exercise which antifoundationalist are critical of (because this exercise is hegemonic) because of their application of universal criteria to every particular problem. For Lyotard, it does not guarantee the protection of the heterogeneous because the validity of the particular can only be judged by the local norms the sphere to which the particular belong.¹¹³

In this way, the arguments of postcolonialists like Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee about 'the inside' and 'the outside' or 'inner' and 'outer' domain do appropriate the insights of antifoundationalists and postmodernists. Writers like Dipesh

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 298-299.

¹¹³ This is well put by Axel Honneth that for Lyotard " Reaching Understanding (verstandigung) in language is presented here as an anonymous process in which sentences are interlinked according to creation rules, enabling thereby and exchange between the sender and recipient, this process is characterized by the circumstances that a principle of strict incommensurability prevails between the various rule system according to which the specific possibility of linking sentences is measured: Every rule system or, as the *Differend* states, every genre of discourse follows a logic of argumentation that, in a strict sense, is incompatible with that of every other genre of discourse. For this reason, there can be no rationally verifiable transitions between the various language games whose employment obeys such a particular genre of discourse means a 'dispute' (widerstreit) in the sense that a comparison (of what ever kind) between them is no longer possible.....for if the two sentences belong to different genres of discourse, the validity claim of the second one, since the former can neither perceived nor articulate in the latter's logic." Ibid, pp. 292-293.

Chakrabarty, contested the domain of public in India primarily by privileging the private which is not infested by the language of modernity described by civic consciousness and citizen culture. For Chakrabarty “those who have engaged with issues related to citizen culture in India bring to bear on the scene the attitude of an outsider, ‘who does not inhabit the conceptual or theoretical framework of the actor who he or she observes’”¹¹⁴. Chakrabarty’s celebration of bazaar and his opposition of sanitizing it by the virtues of modernity actually represent the same what antifoundationalists proposed; that there can’t be a universal criteria to decide how the public space has to be defined as it should be judged on the local categories. Therefore, for him “state action favoring, public health or interest, will often take the form of a violent, intrusive, external force in the lives of the people”¹¹⁵. One can say that how such an active acceptance and resistance of not sanitizing the public with the universal norms of modernity perpetuated filth like untouchability in the public domain¹¹⁶.

It is significant to point out that all those who hold the native against the universal, especially in countries like India share the nostalgia of recreating a pure India by rejecting all those principles which are alien and incommensurable for them like the project of modernity. This not only dictates their non-seriousness with the question of caste and untouchability, but in many ways shows their nostalgia of maintaining Brahmanism. Their privileging of the local over the universal not only marginalizes the Dalit emancipation but also particularizes, as Mira Nanda called a ‘reactionary

¹¹⁴ See, Valerian Rodrigues, “Untouchability, Filth, and the Public Domain”, in Gopal Guru (eds.), *Humiliation: Claims and Context*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, pp. 113. One can also locate his obsession with native by Chakrabarty through eulogizing, *griha*, *grihalakshmi*, *adda*, etc. This can be better understood when he argued that Bengali’s actually marginalized the colonial state and civil society by maintaining a critical symbolic boundary between three spheres of involvement and action that defined life. These spheres were *daivakarma* (action to do with the realm of gods), *pitrikarma* (action to pertaining to ones male ancestors) and *vishayakarma* (actions undertaken in pursuit of worldly interests (p. 220-221). So Bengalis do participate in the third sphere which is the worldly sphere of civil society and state but at the same time they put the other two spheres separate and sacred from the third and so avoid the possibilities of *dosh*. Also self in the Bengali society was visualized as part of the male lineage. *Kula*, and was thus more tied to a mythic-religious practice of time rather than secular historical time. See, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001

¹¹⁵ Valerian Rodrigues, “Untouchability, Filth, and the Public Domain”, op. cit., p 114.

¹¹⁶ As rightly pointed out by Valerian Rodrigues that “the very survival of dirt which Chakrabarty celebrates as containing and checkmating the triumph of modernity in India is a demonstration of the continued existence of untouchability in India”. Ibid, p. 120.

modernism' a sort of 'hypermodernism' which culminates in opening the paths of communal violence by granting an agency to Hindutva, the communal forces in the country. As she argued that "it is the incompleteness of the project of Enlightenment, rather than an excess of it, that explains India's turn to reactionary modernism".¹¹⁷

The argument of Gopal Guru that Dalits need theory as a social and inner necessity in comparison to the non-theoretical domain makes sense, because it directly attaches others to act commonly and practically to avert the structures of humiliation because they are antithetical to those universal norms which we all share consensually and does not get crippled by our incommensurable life-worlds. As these norms had acquired an objectivity by virtue of being transcended from our incommensurable subjectivities.¹¹⁸ This suggests that our public domain should be a domain ruled by the idea of intersubjectivity, and not incommensurability of postmodernists and antifoundationalists like of Rorty and others. We have already put forward that without the availability of a clean public sphere our private domain always feels handicapped in terms of reflectivity and freedom and construction of 'self-creation' and 'self-cultivation'. This possible truth challenges Rorty's view that both public and private domains are separate, incommensurable and equally significant, but the truth is that the availability of the private is determined and dependent on the public sphere.

However, this does not mean that non-Dalits have no moral right of theorizing about Dalits but their theorization of Dalits should recognize and acknowledge the universal appeal in the Dalit discourse, and should not relegate them to particular domain of Dalit only. One should accept the rational dimension of it which in many ways enriches the public sphere. It is this rational and universal dimension of the Dalit discourse which is not mired with subjectivity and incommensurability as anti-foundationalist and postmodernists imposed on the Dalit discourse, but neatly fit in with intersubjective and communicative ethics as propounded by Habermas. Dalit's search for theory and foundations and the rejection of particularism as offered by postmodernists is the moment

¹¹⁷ Meera Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward- Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism* op. cit., pp. 42-43.

¹¹⁸ Gopal Guru, "How Egalitarian are the Social Sciences in India?", op. cit., pp. 5007-5009

of constructive emancipation for Dalits. Therefore Dalits search of emancipation is not rooted in the postmodern ethics of benevolence, care and charity, but more on gaining an agency or becoming a subject, by actively transforming the public sphere by democratizing it, so that the universality of their interests should not get sacrificed by the particularity of Brahmanism.

There is no disagreement with what Honneth said that “human beings who are physically or mentally unable to participate in practical discourse deserves at least the selfless care of those who are close to them via emotional ties. But, conversely, the moment the other person is recognized as an equal being among all others –in that he or she can participate in practical discourse- the unilateral relation of care must come to an end; an attitude of benevolence not permissible towards subjects who are able to articulate their beliefs and views publicly”.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ Axel Honneth, op. cit., pp. 319

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING AMBEDKAR'S MODERNIST READING OF DALIT EMANCIPATION AND ITS OPPOSITION IN THE POSTCOLONIAL THOUGHT

*"Dining with you would have been an act of violation of our social code. Could there be a stronger reason? Besides, consider what else we are left with. We have lost our political freedom, our religion is under your attack, our vernacular literature has not yet reached a level one can be proud of. What else have we got to give us a sense of pride or help maintain our (cultural) individuality? You may call it superstition or a social code, the system of caste and codes of ritual conduct are all that we know now. These I cannot abandon"*¹

Bhudev Mukhopadhyay

The above statement of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay was asserted when he declined to accept the dinner invitation of his European friend. Such an assertion of Bhudev signals the very loss of political and spiritual sovereignty of a Brahmin and an Indian over their own native sphere. Such an assertion not only signals his nostalgia about the re-creation of the past but also provides an impetus for a postcolonial revenge against the ethics and politics of colonial modernity. This chapter explores the imitation of such a revengeful attitude of Bhudev Mukhopadhyay by the postcolonial intellectuals in India. While they are seeking their revenge against the colonized mind by a process of purification with the native spiritualism, at the same time they are resisting the revolutionary-modernist spirit of Dalit emancipation, as there is principle forgetfulness among the postcolonial intellectuals that their revivalism of the past memories was well carved on the exploitation of those who are now called *Dalit-bahujans*.

In the previous chapter, the discussion was largely based on understanding the implications of postmodernist reading on Dalit emancipation. The idea was to locate why

¹ See, Tapan Raychaudhari, *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1988, p.49. Cited in Debjani Ganguly, *Caste and Dalit Lifeworlds-Postcolonial Perspectives*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005. p.1.

there is an urgency to highlight the language of *difference*. In India as it is now quite understandable, the postcolonial theory stands as an overarching body of thought which consistently examines and re-examines the theoretical dimensions of other discourses. One of the prior understandings of postcolonial thought in India is the denial of western oriented conception of modernity. Their search for the native viewpoint is largely regulated and understood as 'critics of modernity'.² Therefore, there is no denial that the debates of Dalit emancipation have to confront the viewpoints of postcolonial theory. In the previous chapter, there was an attempt to show the negative implications of postmodernism on Dalit emancipation, and also to demonstrate the ethics of postmodernism as antithetical towards the modernist understanding of Dalit emancipation, which is located in the acceptance of the rationality of modern science. This is because with the progressive use of modern science, Dalits can transcend themselves from the particularity and irrationality of Brahminical social and cultural values.

Therefore, in many ways postmodernism still remains a difficult terrain to be explained in terms of its emancipatory potential, as I have tried to show in the previous chapter. However, many identity related movements or 'new social movements' have actually used the postmodern language of 'politics of difference' and this is more specific to the issue of cultural identities, as they are marked with a confrontational attitude towards western civilization. This leads us to another significant issue which has gathered significant momentum within the academia and more centrally in the non-western societies, as to how one should look at modernity itself.

It is well understood that with the advent of modernity, humanity itself is addressed by the methodology of binaries like maturity/immaturity, progressive/primitive, civilization/barbarism, etc. On the broader plane this methodology of binaries is itself founded on the difference between the Universal and the Particular. One can often employ this language in our diverse societal lives, whether in politics, religion, identity,

² See Sarah Joseph, 'Modernity and its Critics: A Discussion of Some Contemporary Social and Political Theories', in V.R Mehta and Thomas Pantham (eds.) *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*, Vol. X Part 7, Sage Publications New Delhi, 2005, pp.419-436.

justice, etc. Even academic discourses are often caught within the difference of the Universal and the Particular and are sometimes wrestling with both, but this constant grappling with difference is difficult to avoid. The language of the universal is associated with modernity whereas the particular is ascribed to anti-modern thoughts like the postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial. Within the anti-modern thoughts, the notion of human emancipation is seen through the prism of difference and particularism.

However, their confrontational attitude towards western modernity is not per se to the modernity itself but one of the versions of modernity. As such there is a great urge to disassociate the hegemony or monopoly of the west on modernity by invoking “multiple” or “alternative” ‘modernity’s’ by taking up the language of difference and particularism so as to celebrate the plurality of modernity. This leads us to locate or identify the non-western conception of modernity as thought out by the postcolonial theorists.

There is no denial that postcolonialism shares much of the conceptual space of postmodernism, as it is argued that “it is through poststructuralism and postmodernism - and their deeply fraught and ambivalent relationship with Marxism- that postcolonialism starts to distil its particular provenance”.³ Also, Aijaz Ahmad has interestingly argued that “in order to be a properly *postcolonial discourse*, the discourse must be *postmodern*, mainly of the deconstructive kind, so that only those intellectuals can be truly *postcolonial* who are also *postmodern*”.⁴ Also for Sumit Sarkar, “the Subalternist historians- notably Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyanendra Pandey, and above all Partha Chatterjee have been quite central to formulations of theories of ‘postcoloniality’. Subaltern studies, which had attracted little attention outside India, in its initial radical

³ It is significant to argue that the legacies of postcolonialism is itself build in the poststructuralist environment, as the reference point of postcolonial theory largely emerged from the Edward Said’s *Orientalism 1978* which is profoundly based on the writings of poststructuralist figures like Foucault and Derrida. See, for further discussion Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 25-30.

⁴ For Aijaz Ahmad “who believe not only that colonialism has more or less ended but who also subscribe to the idea of the end of Marxism, nationalism, collective historical subjects and revolutionary possibility as such, are the true postcolonialists, while the rest of us, who o not quite accept this apocalyptic anti-marxism, are not postcolonial at all. In this formulation, then, that which is designated as postcolonial discourse presumes the prior consent to theoretical postmodernity”. See Aijaz Ahmad, “Politics of literary Postcoloniality” in Padmini Mongia (eds.), *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Arnold, New York, 1996, p.283-284.

and populist 'history-from-below' phase, is today a significant part of a kind of postmodernist counter-establishment-more precisely of that section within it which conjoins anti-enlightenment polemic with critiques of Eurocentrism and colonial knowledge"⁵.

For a postcolonial writer like Homi Bhabha who is critical of Habermas's thrust on the inexhaustible potential of modernity, for the more rational and human world, has argued that "Modernity cannot be assumed to be 'complete' (and to have been, therefore, succeeded by Postmodernity) because, the role the non-western world played in the construction of modernity has never been properly acknowledged"⁶. Bhabha's complaint against modernity lies in locating its foundations in ideas like "'Man', reason, progress and the nation which were developed by constructing the non-west in a differential fashion as 'premodern', not fully human, irrational, outside history or primitive/barbaric in terms of its social values and structures"⁷. Such an antithetical attitude of Bhabha towards modernity homogenizes the plural experience of modernity in India.

Therefore, it is significant to highlight how far the postcolonial conception of modernity can be universalized and commensurate with the plural or diverse historical nature of Indian society. This can be verified by highlighting the positive reception of western-colonial modernity among the underprivileged groups and its role in helping to overthrow the hierarchised and anti-human, local values of the Indian tradition which is regulated by the non-colonial subjectivity of Brahminhood. For Sumit Sarkar, "not everything in late-colonial subcontinental history can or should be reduced to a single colonial/anti-colonial frame. Evaluation in terms of contribution to anti-colonial politics or degree of cultural authenticity can be particularly constrictive for histories of gender and women's rights, as well as of subordinate caste movements. For such affirmations by the underprivileged among the colonized, often used as important resources, ideas derived from western-

⁵ See Sumit Sarkar, *op. cit.*, p.186.

⁶ Bhabha rearticulated the postmodernism through postcolonial experience by arguing that "that the project of modernity inaugurated by the Enlightenment has exhausted its promise in the face of catastrophic events of twentieth-century history. Secondly it has completed itself more or less satisfactorily, with the alleged global triumph of western models of social democracy and economic organization". See, Bart Moore-Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.122

⁷ *Ibid*, pp.122-123

colonial modernity, and sought assistance from the institutions of the colonial state”.⁸ This is one of the grey areas involved in locating the limitations of the universality of postcolonial discourse in Indian society. It can be argued that in the spirit of negating the universality of colonial modernity by postcolonialist’s through implicating the language of difference; they actually universalize the particular experience of colonial modernity which is echoed in the negativities of the colonial modernity. It is rightly pointed by Sumit Sarkar that “homogenization quite often operates nowadays through homogenized rejections”⁹. In many ways postcolonial thought is very much on the course of these lines.

This chapter broadly covers the issues related to the Ambedkar’s vision of Dalit emancipation vis-à-vis its contestation within the postcolonial thought. The chapter is divided into four broad parts, the first part will focus on the postcolonial scholars’ perversions towards the colonial modernity and how in their framework of ‘alternative modernity, Ambedkar inevitably stands as a foreigner. This part is further substantiated by the second part, where I discuss how in the postcolonial discourse, Gandhi stands as an authentic voice of native culture against Ambedkar’s essentialism of the colonial modernity. The third part will broadly cover the essential dimension of Ambedkar’s conversion into Buddhism and how postcolonialists have interpreted this event as site for ‘Dalit discursivity’ where Ambedkar was neatly portrayed by them as a figure of hybridity and of heterogeneous time. Lastly, the third part concludes with some critical remarks against the postcolonialist’s selective interpretation of Ambedkar in which they completely failed to prove him as a figure of heterogeneity.

I

The idea in this work is not to give a celebratory or idealistic reference to Ambedkar, but more importantly to produce a major and universal vocabulary of his thought out of the minor and diverse interpretations. It is significant that in contemporary times, there is a sudden interest in the academia towards Ambedkar. One interpretation of it may be that

⁸ See, Sumit Sarkar, op. cit., p. 3.

⁹ Ibid.

he was known as a minor figure, and in recent times there is a sudden fascination developing towards the presentation of minor discourses whether in terms of history, culture or politics. This is one of the central aspects within the postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial discourses (henceforth mentioned as simply 'post'). Deleuze and Guattari argued that "'minor' knowledges embody forms of thought and culture which have been violently 'deterritorialised' by major or dominant knowledge systems".¹⁰ Similarly, for Foucault the marginalized knowledge is disqualified on the grounds that they are "inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity".¹¹

In the 'post' discourses the vocabulary of minor is interchangeably used by another category called the 'Other'. The very possibility of understanding Ambedkar in the above sense catches Ambedkar within the essentialist trap of being a minor figure or 'other', as the very emergence of the 'post' discourses are essentially tied-in with eulogizing or celebrating the 'other'. So it's inevitable that within the readings of 'post' discourses the minor or the 'other' will be interpreted as the same, primarily because there is a cheerful celebration of incommensurability within the major and minor or 'other', which ends in essentialising a non-changeable 'other'.

It is significant to argue that an essentialist celebration of minor by the 'post' discourses inevitably affirms the particularities of both major and minor. As in the 'post' discourses there is no vocabulary or criteria which holds the commensurability or affirms the dialogical relations among the major and minor. This limitation of 'post' discourses is fatalistic for the very survival of the humanistic trend within the discourses of humanities.

¹⁰ "In this regard, Deleuze and Guattari suggest-somewhat elusively-that subjugated knowledges and literatures must resolutely replace the desire to become 'major' or canonical, with an opposite dream: 'a becoming-minor'". See Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F., *Kafka: Toward a minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1986. Quoted in Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 43.

¹¹ See Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, Harvester Press, Hertfordshire, 1980, p. 82. Quoted in Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999, p. 43.

However, there is no denial that 'Humanism' itself is a very contestable or diversely embedded term. It is rightly argued that "Christianity, the critique of Christianity, science, anti-science, Marxism, existentialism, personalism, National Socialism, and Stalinism have each won the label 'humanism' for a time".¹² In this sense, the very arrival of humanism relies on the unifying category in the diversity of experience through which one can discern "a universal and given human nature, and secondly to find it revealed in the common language of rationality"¹³. This perspective ties up rather tightly rationality with humanism as its very practice leads to a universal consensus. In opposition to this, postcolonial theory denies the possibility of consensus by arguing that "the very idea of 'rationality' and 'human nature' are historical constructions and therefore subject to historical investments and limitations."¹⁴ The difficulty with such an approach is that it hesitates and remains uncertain about the issues of ethics and politics¹⁵. This suggests the very stagnancy of postcolonial thought, in terms of the translatability of norms, values, and more importantly, cultures. By invoking the language of historical constructions, they are privileging an embedded social self which cannot be understood and viewed cross-culturally.

What is significant from the perspective of this work is the version of 'alternative modernity' pleaded by the postcolonialists in India. Before taking up this issue, we have to clarify the postcolonialist's problematic attitude towards the so called colonial modernity.

It is not surprising that postcolonial scholarship in India had maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the notion of modernity. This ambivalence is well demonstrated, in their

¹² See Bernauer, J. & Mahon, M, 'The ethics of Michel Foucault', in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gary Gutting, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, pp. 141-142.

¹³ Leela Gandhi, op. cit., p.27

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ It is argued that anti-humanist instances in 'post' discourses are ambivalent on "political mobilization and ethical principles, which for Marxist or any other universalistic philosophy requires cross-cultural consensus". In opposition to this for postmodernists like Lyotard this very reaching of consensus is vitiated by ' conversational imperialism' or for Postcolonialists like Dipesh Chakrabarty ' the dialogue is already projected towards some predetermined end-such as justice or rationality-it is always conducted within a field of possibilities that is already structured form the very beginning in favor of certain outcomes". Ibid, pp 27-28.

pragmatic instance of constant rejection and affirmation of modernity¹⁶. However, in postcolonial thought the affirmation of modernity gets co-opted or infused by the range of inbuilt diversity within the concept of 'alternative modernity', regulated by the vocabulary of improvisation. As Sudipto Kaviraj says, the making of modern political India involved three processes: "a reasoned attention to the historical precondition out of which modernity has to be created, the specific sequence of process, and in particular, the idea of modernization was not a blind imitation of western history or institutions, but a self conscious process of reflexive construction of society that should rationally assess principles from all sources and improvise institutions suitable for particular societies".¹⁷ It is the process of 'improvisation' rather than 'replication' that is asserted for the reception of modernity in India. This process of improvisation is often described by writers ranging from Tagore, Charles Taylor, and Dilip Gaonkar, in the language of 'autonomy of judgment'¹⁸, 'a cultural theory of modernity'¹⁹, and 'creative adaptation'²⁰.

¹⁶ It is argued that "in colonial India responses to modernity ranged from uncritical acceptance and admiration to nativism, and rejection. Both admiration and rejection could even be combined in the same person as was the case with many nationalist leaders whose objective was to end colonial rule but replace it with a modern Indian nation-state, development, modernization and other values of western liberalism. An alternative response was to claim that the most admirable qualities of modernity were already in the indigenous tradition". See Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p. 420.

¹⁷ See Sudipto, Kaviraj, 'Modernity and Politics in India', *New German Critique*, Vol. 129 No.1, pp. 137-162, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/487859>, p. 154

¹⁸ It is in these words that Sudipto Kaviraj puts the idea of autonomy of judgment of Tagore "Tagore defiantly declared that it was the principle of autonomy of judgment that constituted modernity, not mere imitation of European practice. Autonomy of judgment about sociopolitical institutions might lead to the considered decision that some forms of traditional institutions suited India social life better than importing Western forms. If such practices were retained out of choice, it would be the result of a modern decision". Ibid, p. 153.

¹⁹ For Charles Taylor a cultural theory of modernity can be understood when there is an acceptance that, "there is never atomistic and neutral self-understanding; there is only a constellation (ours) which tends to throw up the myth of this self-understanding as part of its imaginary. This is of the essence of a cultural theory of modernity". Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity", *Public Culture*, 11 (1); 153-174, Duke University press, 1999, p.174. Taylor described 'a cultural theory of modernity' in opposition to the acultural theory of modernity. For Taylor a cultural theory of modernity is structured with the constant interaction of past with the present and this interaction and its result varies with each society, primarily because of their differences in vantage point of the interaction. In Taylor's own words "what we might recognize as modernity, taking place in different civilizations, will produce different results that reflect their divergent starting points. Different cultures' understanding of the person, social relations, states of mind, goods and bads, virtues and vices, and the sacred and the profane are likely to be distinct. The future of our world will be one in which all societies will undergo change, in institutions and outlook, and some of these changes may be parallel, but they will not converge, because new differences will emerge from the old. Thus instead of speaking of modernity in the singular, we should better speak of "alternative modernities"". Ibid, p.162.

²⁰ The Idea of alternative modernities for Dilip Gaonkar "has its origin in the present and sometimes violent questioning of the present precisely because the present announces itself as the modern at every national

Common to them is the rejection of the 'acultural'²¹ theory of modernity. In India, both Nehru and Ambedkar are challenged because of their disregard for tradition. As believers in Enlightenment, they both took the charge of rescuing people from tradition by presenting modern rational life-world which opposed both Tagore's and Gandhi's assertion for improvisation of modernity with the native tradition. In general, the writers on alternative modernity had largely echoed the suggested alternative of Tagore and Gandhi.

The pragmatic stance of postcolonialists in India towards modernity is well described by the title 'critical traditionalists' shared by both Bhikhu Parekh and Ashis Nandy. As argued by Dilip Menon "under colonialism, the refashioning of tradition by the elites then becomes the national agenda: a 'critical traditionalism' emerges"²². Nandy's gaining of such a title embarks on absorbing and simultaneously negating the civilizational influences on other cultures. For Mira Nanda, 'critical traditionalism' "is both an intellectual argument and a political Programme adopted by numerous Gandhians, small-is-beautiful, alternative science/post-development movements in India. The gist of critical traditionalism lies in accepting the need to update inherited traditions with carefully chosen foreign inputs from science and technology, as long as they can be fitted into 'India's unique gestalt....its view of man and universe'"²³.

Nandy maintains that an appropriation of an alien culture does not alter the distinctive nature of the culture per se, as for him some of the alien influences are incommensurable.

and cultural site today". Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2001, p.14. Creative adaptation for Gaonkar "is not simply a matter of adjusting the form or recoding the practice to soften the impact of modernity; rather it points to the manifold ways in which people question the present. It is the site where people 'make' themselves modern, as opposed to being 'made' modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and destiny". Ibid, p. 18.

²¹ An acultural theory of modernity is the term used by Charles Taylor in opposition to a cultural theory of modernity, for Taylor acultural theory of modernity signifies neutrality towards cultures therefore it "conceives of modernity as the growth of reason, defined in various ways: for example, as the growth of scientific consciousness, or the development of a secular outlook, or the rise of instrumental rationality, or an ever-clearer distinction between fact-finding and evaluation". Charles Taylor, "Two Theories of Modernity", *Public Culture*, 11 (1); 153-174, Duke University press, 1999, p154.

²² See Dilip, M. Menon, *The Blindness of Insight: Essays on Caste in Modern India*, Navayana, Pondicherry, 2006, p.111.

²³ See, Meera, Nanda, *Prophets Facing Backward- Postmodernism, Science and Hindu Nationalism*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2004. p.168.

As rightly put by Sarah Joseph while interpreting Nandy, “absorption took place by the culture reorganizing its structures and practices to accommodate new elements. However, some alien influences remained unabsorbed. The encounter with western modernity was one such intercultural encounter in which much remained unabsorbed and alien.”²⁴ More importantly, for Nandy “even in defeat (the colonized cultures) should retain their authenticity”²⁵.

However, Nandy’s criticism of state sponsored secularism and his suggestion of deriving values of toleration from non-modern and traditional India repudiates some of the structural realities of the Indian tradition itself. His support of subaltern’s ways of life stems from their being not modernized and more close to nature, and their culture and religion makes them peaceful and harmonious rather than extremely violent. However, as the critics have argued, Nandy’s celebration of tradition through subaltern’s agency, fails to acknowledge the fact of active participation of Dalits and tribals in the communal violence in Gujarat²⁶. This is further pointed out by Dilip Menon, when he emphasizes the silence or reluctance of engaging in the question of organized violence embedded in Hinduism. As Menon further argues “the question needs to be: how has the deployment of violence against an internal Other (defined in terms of inherent inequality), the Dalit, been displaced as one of aggression against an external Other (defined in terms of inherent difference), the Muslim”²⁷. Similarly, Nandy’s criticism against the modernist’s material interpretation of Roop Kanwar’s sati, in 1987, at Deoarala evokes the argument of understanding the local within the beliefs and meanings familiar to the local life world. Nandy’s voice of difference in the Sati incident against the modernist agencies of intellectuals, feminists, social scientists, etc. shows his own condemnation against the approach of social science in India. For him, “a significant aspect of post-colonial

²⁴ See Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p.425.

²⁵ See Ashish Nandy, *Traditions, tyranny and utopias: Essays in political awareness*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1987, p 124. Cited in Mira Nanda, op. cit., p.168.

²⁶ See, Sarah Joseph, op. cit., pp. 426-427.

²⁷ For Menon “Hinduism- as religion, social system or way of life- is hierarchical, inegalitarian structure is largely accepted, but what has gone almost unacknowledged in academic discourse is both the casual brutality and the organized violence that it practices towards its subordinated sections. What we need to explore is the inner violence within Hinduism as much as the violence directed outwards against Muslims, and acknowledge that the former is historically prior”. See Dilip Menon, op. cit., p.2

structures of knowledge in the third world is a peculiar form of imperialism of categories. Under such imperialism a conceptual domain is sometimes hegemonized so effectively by a concept produced and honed in the west that the original domain vanishes from our awareness. Intellect and intelligence became IQ, the oral culture become cultures of the primitive or the preliterate, the oppressed become the proletariat, social change becomes development”²⁸. Nandy’s voice of difference, seeing sati as *pratha* and not *ghatana*²⁹, is much regulated by his phenomenological reading of religion in India which stands as religion-as-faith against the Nation state principle of secularism which looks religion-as-ideology.³⁰

Nandy’s assertion of nativism is not much different from the postmodernist claim of Lyotard who holds that “the statements are only judged to be “good” because they conform to the relevant criterion...accepted in the social circle of the “knower’s” interlocutors”³¹. Thus Nandy’s repudiation of invoking external criteria for the local one, challenges the title of the ‘critical traditionalist’ associated with him. It is rightly argued that “Nandy’s virtual endorsement of the sati raises questions about his claim to be a ‘critical’ traditionalist. He has maintained that critiques of cultural practices made from the perspective of another culture can never be other than external, and will therefore lack acceptance and authority”³². This raises a serious objection about Nandy’s aim of changing the tradition from within. One can argue that without having a comparative view towards one’s culture with the other, the very possibility of changing the tradition is not possible³³. Nandy’s critical stance towards tradition is much regulated by the ‘standpoint’ epistemology argument populated in minor discourses like feminism by the poststructuralism.

²⁸ See Ashis Nandy, ‘The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance’, in Venna Das (eds.), *Mirror of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia*, Delhi: Oxford, University Press, 1990, p. 69.

²⁹ See Debjani Ganguly, *Caste and Dalit Lifeworlds- Postcolonial Perspectives*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005. p.17

³⁰ Ibid, p.16.

³¹ See, David E. Cooper, ‘Postmodernism and the end of Philosophy’, in James Good and Irving Velody (eds.) *The politics of Postmodernity*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp 64-66

³² Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p.427.

³³ Ibid, as it is rightly pointed by Sarah Joseph that Nandy’s argument for sati should be understood in the “idiom of the local people, and presumably of the victim herself. But this need not constitute a critical standpoint towards tradition”.

However, the moot point is, if the possibility of criticality arises within the tradition in the local framework, then by what subjective agencies is it going to get regulated? It is arguable that in Nandy's framework, Ambedkar would always stand as alien and foreign, because Ambedkar's views of imbibing criticality within the particular culture is well regulated by privileging the intersubjectivity and dialogue among the different cultures. In such a viewpoint the very antagonistic and incommensurable relation between west and India as projected by Nandy does not hold.

It is interesting to note that Nandy's association of Gandhi with the critical insider's approach to the tradition³⁴ remains contestable and inappropriate in comparison to Ambedkar. Nandy's scheme of critical insider does not fit-in with Ambedkar, because the very possibility of being insider does not go well with Ambedkar. It is quite understood that, Ambedkar in his time he was not treated as an insider, more importantly, it is the very space of an insider that stands antithetical and oppressive to emancipation of Dalits in India. Ambedkar, throughout his life remained critical to the insider, and this he ended by getting converted to the outsider called scientific Buddhism in religion domain. Apart from this, his echoing of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity of the French Revolution in terms of politics also appropriates the outsider, alien or foreign.

Therefore, in Nandy's viewpoint Ambedkar's embracing of outside or foreign domain would be speaking the language of the colonized, conquered and occupied mind. In Nandy's view: "this colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In the process, it helps to generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The west is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds".³⁵

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ See Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self Under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1983, p. xi.

Similarly, Partha Chatterjee the historian, political theorist as well as the leading member of subaltern school of thought has located the very interaction between western modernity and indigenous culture as a site of limitation of western modernity in India. For him, as put by Sarah Joseph, “the introduction of alien, modern institutions, values and concepts into a traditional society like the Indian led to consequences which were unexpected and different from the effects of modernity on European societies. This he attributes to the persistence of indigenous life forms and practices in India and he sees it as a sign of difference, perhaps even a mode of resistance to the modern”³⁶.

Chatterjee’s thrust is to locate an alternative which is embedded in the continuous flow of tradition with modernity. For him the “concept and theories which emerged in the non-western world could perhaps be perceived as a sign of an alternative modernity”.³⁷ Chatterjee’s fascination with the relations based on community, in opposition to the relations like citizenship marked by the modern state institutions, pursue the distinction between ‘civil society’ and ‘political society’. Chatterjee relegated ‘civil society’ to the west, whereas the ‘political society’ with the subaltern groups in India, which includes women, outcasts and peasants. The other binary which has significant status in Chatterjee’s construction of postcolonial society is the distinction between the ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ domains. Here again, Chatterjee attributes the material domain to the western civilization and the ‘spiritual’ with the Indian. For him: “it was deemed necessary to cultivate and imitate the material accomplishments of western civilization, it was compulsory to simultaneously preserve and police the spiritual properties of national culture”.³⁸

Interestingly, the policing of native, spiritual and national for Chatterjee have no alternative to offer for women. For Chatterjee: “the home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world- and woman is its

³⁶ Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p.428.

³⁷ See Partha Chatterjee, *Nation and its Fragments*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994, p.227. Cited in Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p. 429.

³⁸ Leela Gandhi, op. cit., p. 96

representation”³⁹. In producing these two binaries, Chatterjee actually shows the distinct nature of modernity in India. This is regulated by the deep distinction between native and foreign, where the domain of native ‘political’ and ‘spiritual’ shows the resistance towards the ‘civil’ and ‘material’ of the foreign stated in western modernity. It is this antagonism between the native and foreign substantiates the case of alternative modernity in India. It is rightly pointed out by Dilip Menon, that the very trajectory of this alternative modernity of Chatterjee is “a strategic compromise is allowed by the creation of a dichotomous, even schizophrenic, consciousness”⁴⁰.

For Menon, the idea of survival of the tradition as a solace against the colonial modernity is maintained by Chatterjee through disallowing the western values in the ‘inner’, domain. Chatterjee here refers to the Bengali Bhadrakalok culture as a reference point of their miraculous escape from the polluted domain of colonial modernity.⁴¹ Such analysis of guarding the ‘inner’ or ‘spiritual’ by Chatterjee’s shows the very poverty or limitation of his thoughts towards the question of Dalit emancipation. Chatterjee’s such hegemonic and at the same time homogenized reading of colonial modernity restricts its plurality of experience in India. It proves the contradiction of postcolonialists own thoughts regarding their celebration of plurality, difference and heterogeneity. Such ‘blindness of insight’ of Chatterjee is well projected in the argument of Dilip Menon, that the spiritual or inner space collapses when it confronted with the radicalism of Dalits’ espousing of colonial modernity against the native tradition of Chatterjee. For Menon, the experience of colonial modernity by the subordinate castes abandons “the simple dichotomies of inner and outer, tradition and modernity that Chatterjee espouses collapse since the subordinated castes are excluded from the inner space of tradition. Their access to colonial modernity is mediated through the entrapment in the domain of a tradition within which they can only be subordinate or outcaste. On the other hand, it is this very

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ See Dilip, M. Menon, op. cit., p. 110.

⁴¹ It is argued by Menon that such “manoeuvre, so well charted by Partha Chatterjee in his studies concentrating on the Bengali bhadrakalok, allows a recognition of the superiority of western science and civilization in the material, ‘outer’ domain. Face, and soul, are saved by retreating into an ‘inner’ spiritual domain from which the colonial power is excluded. And it is from this ‘inner’ domain of national culture that ‘nationalism launches its most powerful, creative and historically significant project: to fashion a modern national culture that is nevertheless not western’”. Ibid, pp. 110-111.

modernity that allows them access to the knowledge of that which subordinates them. Tradition for them is, otherwise, not only a scarce resource but an inaccessible one”.⁴² One can argue that Chatterjee’s guarding of ‘spiritual’ concludes the emancipation he sought for postcolonial India. But, it’s very limitation has shown in the context of Ambedkar’s onslaught on the ‘spiritual’ which Chatterjee espouses. This shows that the very foundation of postcolonial thought shows the marginality towards the question of Dalits interaction with colonial modernity and their criticality towards the ‘spiritual’ of postcolonial thought. This is somewhat appropriately put forward by Menon, when he argued that “from Phule to Ambedkar, the ambivalence towards colonialism stems from this existential dilemma”⁴³.

Chatterjee’s valorization of ‘political society’ does not seem to be much different from Ranajit Guha’s assertion of stretching the ‘political’ or transcending it from the road maps or boundaries built by the European political thought.⁴⁴ As in the scheme of Guha’s thought the very presence of Gods, spirits and other supernatural in the modern political movement of peasants for self government resist the very logic of ‘secular-rational calculations inherent in the modern conception of the political’⁴⁵. Guha is critical of Hobsbawm’s historicist language which defines the peasant movement as ‘archaic’.⁴⁶ It is argued by him that Hobsbawm defined peasants as “‘pre-political’ who have not yet found, or only begun to find, a specific language in which to express themselves”.⁴⁷ Such assertions in postcolonial thought emerge from their critique of secular, homogenous, empty time of Walter Benjamin.⁴⁸ For postcolonialists like Chatterjee: “nation lives in

⁴² Ibid, p.112

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ See Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.12.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th centuries*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1978, pp. 2-3. cited in Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, pp 11-12

⁴⁷ Herein lies the Subaltern studies critique of Historicism, because it fails to acknowledge differences on which peasants actions are organized, as they are marked along the “ axes of kinship, religion, and caste, and involving Gods, spirits, and supernatural agents as actors alongside humans” which for historicist are not symptomatic with the ‘secular-institutional logic of political’. Ibid. pp. 11-12.

⁴⁸ See Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans- Harry Zohan, Fontana/Collins, New York, 1982, p. 263.

heterogeneous notions of time”.⁴⁹ Taking cue from Foucault, Chatterjee argued that “real space of modern life consists of heterotopia”.⁵⁰ It is this constant interaction of tradition with the colonial modernity which produces a much celebrated postmodernist solution of hybridization of life-world. This notion of Hybridity has come up in the writings of Dipesh Chakrabarty through Guha’s understanding of political modernity in India.

Dipesh Chakrabarty, in his major work, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2001, tries to locate the “difference” in the Indian modernity which has not abandoned its mythical-spiritual past. So, the feeling of community rather than European individuality rules the Indian society. This suggests that devices of community feeling through collective memory speak the non-historical and non-modern life-worlds. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, Guha visualized South Asian political modernity through joining two incommensurable logics of power; interestingly for Guha both stand as modern. One is the colonial “quasi-liberal legal and institutional framework” and the other one is where the Gods and spirits enter into the political and public domain and which speaks the non-secular language.⁵¹ For Chakrabarty, it is the combination of both analytic⁵² and hermeneutic⁵³ traditions is required in order to grasp South Asian political modernity. For him, it is the combination of these two traditions that is required in order to make sense of South Asian political modernity. Therefore History, 1 for Chakrabarty, in his work labeled analytical histories, where through the abstract categories of capital one can make all places exchangeable with one another, whereas History 2 are affective histories, which are filled with narratives of human belonging where life forms, although

⁴⁹ See Partha Chatterjee, ‘On Civil and Political Society in Postcolonial Democracies’, in Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani (eds), *Civil Society*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p.402-403.

⁵⁰ For Chatterjee “empty homogenous time is not located anywhere in real space-it is utopian.....Time here is heterogeneous, unevenly dense. Here, even industrial workers do not internalize the work-discipline of capitalism, and more curiously, even when they do, they do not do so in the same way. Politics here does not mean the same thing to all people. To ignore this is, I believe, to discard the real for the utopian”. See Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed: Reflections on Popular Politics in Most of the World*, Permanent Black, Delhi, 2004, p.7.

⁵¹ Dipesh Chakrabarty, op. cit., p.14.

⁵² For Dipesh “analytic social sciences fundamentally attempts to ‘demystify’ ideology in order to produce a critique that looks toward a more just social order.....tends to evacuate the local by assimilating it to some abstract universal”. Ibid, p.18.

⁵³ Hermeneutic for Dipesh Chakrabarty “produces a loving grasp detail in search of an understanding of the diversity of human life-worlds. It produces what may be called ‘affective histories’.....intimately tied to places and to particular forms of life”. Ibid, p.18.

porous to one another, don't seem exchangeable and it is this history 2 that always modifies history 1 and thus, act as the ground of claiming historical difference. With the History 2 Chakrabarty tried to situate the question of subaltern history within a postcolonial critique of modernity and of history itself. For him, the secular subject like history faces certain problems in handling those life-worlds where Gods and spirits have agency to impact the life of subalterns, and therefore, it is difficult for Chakrabarty, to recognize the idea of a Godless, empty and homogenous time. He argued that the labour which is considered as a universal and secular category in India is largely associated with the presence and agency of Gods or spirits in the performance of labour, for example *Hathiyar puja* or the "worship of tools" performed in Vishkarma festival is a common and familiar festival in many north Indian factories⁵⁴. He further draws some of the insights from the writings of Gyan Pandey, *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*-citing the life-world of Julahas, where the work and worship were two inseparable categories. In India *puja*, or worship are so deeply embedded in the material life of the people which renders the idea of secular history problematic. So, for him, "God for workers are as real as ideology is, as they are embedded in practices, their presence is collectively invoked by rituals rather than by conscious beliefs"⁵⁵.

But, history reading becomes highly contested for some scholars, representing different vantage points. For example, Mira Nanda argued that the "condition of postcoloniality is the condition of hybridity that disrupts the binaries between pure modernity and pure tradition. The colonized doesn't discard their tradition in toto when they become modern. Rather, traditions are a condition of becoming modern, and will always be with us. This Hybridity, moreover, is not a sign of defeat or a loss of authenticity. It signifies 'resistance', because by mimicking the West while holding on to its cultural universe, the postcolonial subject refuses to become the inferior, unchanging, traditional 'other' of the west".⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Ibid, pp.77-78

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Mira Nanda, op. cit., p.169

It is therefore, the celebration of hybridity within the postcolonial thought produces an alternative reading of Ambedkar, which gets easily co-opted in their framework. In the writings of Partha Chatterjee Ambedkar is interpreted as the voice of heterogeneity. This is put forward by Chatterjee, by arguing that Ambedkar himself is locked up in the utopianism of homogeneity and real heterogeneity which come up in his demand for equal citizenship vis-a vis demand for separate electorate⁵⁷.

But, more interestingly Chatterjee produces an ethnic separatist reading of Ambedkar on the basis of Ambedkar's idea of representation on the basis of caste. This he strategically located with his reading of two texts of Ambedkar, *Who were the Shudras* (1946) and *The Untouchables* (1948) and concluded that "the modern struggle for the abolition of caste was thus a quest for a return to that primary equality that was the original historical condition of the nation. The utopian search for homogeneity is thus made historical"⁵⁸. This search of Ambedkar for homogeneity is disturbed by Chatterjee by bringing the heterogeneous time of colonial governmentality. Significantly, for Ambedkar, the central issue of attaining equality lies in the potent use of citizenship. For Chatterjee this was handled by Ambedkar by arguing for the special needs and representations of the untouchables, which culminated in his demand of separate electorates for the untouchables. Finally, this was settled in the Poona pact after a dramatic confrontation between Ambedkar and Gandhi. Ambedkar's claim of difference from the upper caste of untouchables is firstly proved by Chatterjee by showing the historicist reading of Ambedkar in his two texts named above, where Ambedkar scientifically prove the original status of untouchables and secondly in Chatterjee's own words "the general representations of all citizens would not serve the special requirements of the untouchables, because given the prejudices and entrenched practices among the dominant

⁵⁷ This can be understood by these lines of Chatterjee, that Ambedkar "has been both celebrated and vilified for having strenuously fought for the separate political representation of the Dalits, for preferential reservation or affirmative action in their favor in education and government employment, and for constructing their distinct cultural identity going as far as conversion to another religion- Buddhism. At the same time, Ambedkar is also famous as the principle architect of the Indian constitution, a staunch advocate of the interventionist modernizing state and of the legal protection of the modern virtues of equal citizenship and secularism. Seldom has been the tension between utopian homogeneity and real heterogeneity played out more dramatically than in the intellectual and political career of B.R Ambedkar." See, Partha Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*, op. cit., p. 8

⁵⁸ Ibid, p.9

castes, there was no reason to expect that the latter would use the law to emancipate the untouchables”⁵⁹. One can argue that the logic of claiming separatism by Ambedkar on the basis of minority is read by Chatterjee as the claim of ethnic separatism. Therefore, for Chatterjee, the two texts named above was so central and primary for arriving at such a logic. Later, this was supported by another text in another context of separatism, in *Pakistan or the Partition of India* (1945).

Finally, Chatterjee’s selective and creative appropriation of Ambedkar within the postcolonial hybridity got settled and concluded by arguing that Ambedkar “is fully aware of the value of universal and equal citizenship and wholly endorses the ethical significance of unbound serialities. On the other hand, he realizes that the slogan of universality is often a mask to cover the perpetuation of real inequalitiesa strategic politics of groups, classes, communities, ethnicities-bound serialities of all sorts –is thus inevitable. Homogeneity is not thereby forsaken; on the contrary, in specific contexts, it can often supply the clue to a strategic solution, such as partition, to a problem of intractable heterogeneity. On the other hand, unlike the utopian claims of universalist nationalism, the politics of heterogeneity can never claim to yield a general formula for all peoples at all times: its solutions are always strategic, contextual, historically specific and inevitably, provisional”⁶⁰.

Such a reading of Ambedkar by Chatterjee produces a contingent view of Dalit emancipation; one can argue that in Chatterjee’s framework, Dalit emancipation is always described as “not yet” as it is trapped within the logic of historicism.⁶¹ Ambedkar’s constant assertion of annihilation of *caste* is an evidence to the postcolonial thought about Ambedkar being trapped within historicism. It is argued that “seen through the historicist lens, caste, as we have seen, appears as the most important signifier of

⁵⁹ As Ambedkar’s concern was “a legislature composed of high caste men will not pass a law removing untouchability, sanctioning intermarriages, removing the ban on the use of public streets, public temples, public schools.....This is not because they cannot, but chiefly because they will not”. Ibid, p.13

⁶⁰ Ibid, p.22.

⁶¹ The idea of “not yet” signifies one’s constant following of historicism, for Dipesh Chakrabarty to think of “not yet”, of the “now”, as a form of “unrealized actual” would be to remain trapped entirely within historicism”. The vocabulary of “not yet” primarily arises when one is looking for a totality in “now”. For Chakrabarty the acceptance of the fragmentary nature of “now” is a transcendence from the “not yet”.

India's not-yet-arrived-at-modernity".⁶² Therefore, in the framework of postcolonial thought the possibility of Dalit emancipation lies in transcending the logic of historicism by appropriating aesthetic. It is aesthetic against social scientific thought represents the location of caste within the heterogeneous formation of life-world. It is argued that the aesthetic "can help take us beyond the rational, disembodied, public self of modernity-which is the self that dictates social scientific discourse in South Asia".⁶³ It is in the same spirit that postcolonial scholars had interpreted Gandhi as the authentic voice of the country against Ambedkar's revolutionary-modernist spirit of *Annihilation of caste*.

II

The above reading of Ambedkar by Partha Chatterjee is further substantiated by Dipesh Chakrabarty, who has driven the criticism of historicism. The moot point for Chakrabarty: "that we cannot write history from within what we regard as their beliefs, we thus produce 'good' and not subversive histories, which confirms to the protocols of the discipline".⁶⁴ Therefore, for Chakrabarty producing subversive history demands a transcending attitude towards the notion of historicism. Precisely, because the practice of historicism is tightly connected with the narratives of writing a secular and rational version of history, therefore, it is through the rejection of historicism; Chakrabarty is trying to end the established dichotomy and binary of rational and irrational. The idea of historicism for Chakrabarty shares "the institutions of science, democracy, citizenship, and social justice, 'reason' had to prevail over all that was 'irrational' and 'superstitious' among its citizens"⁶⁵. For, Chakrabarty reason is elitist when it is employed as a universal

⁶² Debjani, Ganguly, op. cit., p.203.

⁶³ Ibid., pp.203-204.

⁶⁴ Thus for Chakrabarty "the writing of history must implicitly assume a plurality of time existing together, a disjuncture of the present with itself, making visible this disjuncture is what subaltern pasts allow us to do". Dipesh Chakrabarty, op. cit., p.109.

⁶⁵ However such assertion of Chakrabarty shows his antithesis to the universality of reason. For him "reason was transcendental and could be shared by all humans because of their shared ability to communicate. But even if one granted that proposition for argument's sake, would it follow that the story of the relationship between reason and theological thought and imagination would be the same the world over? Can we give to reason the same historical mission all over the world? Does the coming of reason necessarily give us the same universal way of being human—liberal and rational? Historicist thought makes out this development to be the story of modernity.....To struggle against historicism, then, is to try and tell a different history of reason".

vocabulary for judging rational from irrational, superstitious and backward. This for Chakrabarty is an essential feature of historicism or historicist thought⁶⁶.

Chakrabarty's tying of modern historical consciousness or political modernity with the past suggests a particular understanding of the past, where objectification of the past "is an expression of the desire to be free of the past, the desire to create what Paul de man once called 'the true present'"⁶⁷. This idea of 'true present' as argued is the "full idea of modernity"⁶⁸. Therefore Chakrabarty, put Ambedkar within the stream of historicism, as the task of historicist is to identify the causal structures or the formation of particular phenomenon in the past. In this way for Chakrabarty the main task of the historicist is to answer "why"⁶⁹. However, in Chakrabarty's scheme the idea of both historicism and decisionism⁷⁰ towards the past is modernist in nature. Therefore, Chakrabarty is suggesting that the very idea of choosing is a modernist attitude. However, there is uncertainty in Chakrabarty's thought about the nature of values and norms one chooses from the past, whether in his scheme of thought choosing myth over the history is still called modernist in outlook, if yes, then what would be the difference between Gandhi and Ambedkar on the question of caste and Hinduism. He put both Gandhi and Ambedkar within the framework of modernity, as for Chakrabarty, both of them are looking for the possibility of social justice for the future and argued that Gandhi fell back on the tradition for the creation of present whereas Ambedkar rejected the past as a resource for the future by constructing an alternative to a mythical past i.e., scientific Buddhism. However it is difficult to understand how within the framework of

⁶⁶ "For then we see our, superstitious' contemporaries as example of an 'earlier type', as human embodiments of the principle of anachronism. In the awakening of this sense of anachronism lies in the beginning of modern historical consciousness". Ibid, p. 238.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 244

⁶⁸ This 'idea of full modernity' for Paul de Man "lay in a 'desire to wipe out whatever come earlier', so as to achieve a 'a radically new departure, a point that could be a true present'". For Chakrabarty "it reflects the desire of the modern political subject to practice, in pursuit of the goal of social justice, a certain degree of freedom with respect to the past". Ibid, p. 244

⁶⁹ Ibid, p.248.

⁷⁰ Chakrabarty made a distinction between two attitudes towards the past, historicism and decisionism. For him in decisionism "critic is guided by his or her values to choose the most desirable, sane, and wise future for humanity, and looks to the past as a warehouse of resources on which to draw as needed. This relationship to the past incorporates the revolutionary-modernist position in which the reformer seeks to bring (a particular) history to nullity in order to build up society from scratch.....It uses 'tradition', but the use is guided by a critiques of the present. It thus represents a freedom from history as well as a freedom to respect the aspects of 'tradition' considered useful to building the desired future".

decisionism, like that of Gandhi and Nandy, one still falls within the structure of a modernist outlook.

In Chakrabarty's writings Gandhi fell within the decisionism primarily because of his attitude towards the past which serves as a warehouse of resources for a selection of the future. Such a relationship with the past for Chakrabarty "incorporates the revolutionary-modernist position in which the reformer seeks to bring (a particular) history to nullity in order to build up society from scratch".⁷¹ For Gandhi, the revivalism of Hinduism as a religion is a revolutionary modernist position, where the virtues of modernity which are western, replaced by the codes of Hinduism based on *dharma*.

Gandhi, in one of his speeches on the Indian Civilization said: that "European civilization is a satanic we see for ourselves. An obvious proof of this is the fierce war that is going on at present. It is so terrible that the Mahabharata War was nothing in comparison. This should be a warning to us and we should remember that our sages have given us the immutable and inviolate principles that our conduct should be godly and that it should be rooted in *dharma*. We should follow these principles alone. So long as we do not follow *dharma*, our wish will not be fulfilled, notwithstanding all the grandiose schemes we may devise. Even if Mr. Montagu offers us Swaraj today, we can in no way benefit from that Swaraj. We must make use of the legacy left us by our *rishis* and *munis*.....I pray to Suryanarayan that India may not turn away from her civilization"⁷².

Gandhi here is not much different from a revivalist who is looking for Hinduism as desubjectivation of foreign rule. For him, it is the subjection of foreign rule reduced the position of Hinduism in India. He said that the "varna system, as I have defined and described it, is not practiced by Hinduism today. Those who call themselves Brahmins have given up the pursuit of learning. They have taken to various other occupations. The same is true more or less of the other *varnas*. As a matter of fact, owing to our subjection of foreign rule, we are all slaves and are, in the eyes of the Westerners, untouchables

⁷¹ Ibid, p.247

⁷² See *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. XIV, 1965, pp.298-300

lower even than the Sudras”⁷³. Gandhi’s revival of Hinduism is best described by himself only during his project of assimilating untouchables within the Hindu fold of ‘*varnashrama dharma*’. For him, “I have no other end to serve than to see *Sanatana Dharma* revived and lived in its reality in the lives of millions who at present seem to me to deny it”.⁷⁴

For Chakrabarty, Gandhi is not concerned with the origin of caste, for him, “caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and *do not need to know* for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth”⁷⁵. What is significant here from Chakrabarty’s point of view is that, Gandhi’s search for social justice lies in drawing the values from the past i.e. through religion, Hinduism. As pointed out earlier, Partha Chatterjee selectively appropriated Ambedkar to make him fall within his own framework of heterogeneity. We can say so similarly about Chakrabarty on his reading of Gandhi. Chakrabarty failed to highlight that the very foundation of religion of Hinduism for Gandhi has firm foundations of the caste system⁷⁶. Even Gandhi’s declaration of caste as anachronism in

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 73-77.

⁷⁴ See M.K Gandhi, *My Soul’s Agony: Being Gandhiji’s Statement Issued from the Yeravada Prison on the Removal of Untouchability Among Hindus*, Bombay: Bombay Provincial Board, Servants of Untouchables Society, 1932, p.111.

⁷⁵ See M.K Gandhi, “A Vindication of Caste”, in B.R Ambedkar, *The Annihilation of Caste*, Bheem Patrika Publications, Jalandhar, 1936, pp.136-137. For Gandhi here “religion has to be judged not by its worst specimen but by the best it might have produced. For that and that alone can be used as that standards to aspire to, if not to improve upon.” Quoted in, Dipesh Chakrabarty, op. cit., p.246.

⁷⁶ Gandhi’s praise for caste system is well written in a Gujarathi Journal called *Nava-Jivan*. Some of his praises for caste system are listed below: 1. I believe that if Hindu Society has been able to stand it is because it is founded on the caste system. 2. The seeds of *Swaraj* are to be found in the caste system. Different castes are like sections of military divisions. Each division is working for the good of the whole. 3. A community which can create the caste system must be said to possess unique power of organization. 4. Caste has a political basis . it can work as an electorate for a representative body. Caste can perform judicial functions by electing persons to act as judges to decide disputes among members of the same caste. With caste it is easy to raise defense force by requiring each caste to raise a brigade. 5. Caste is another name for control. Caste puts a limit on enjoyment. Caste does not allow a person to transgress caste limits in pursuit of his enjoyment. That is the meaning of such caste restrictions as interdining and intermarriage. 8. “To destroy the caste system and adopt the Western European social means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system. Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him a Brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if everyday a Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Shudra is to be changed into Brahmin. 9. Caste system is a natural order of society. In India it has been given a religious coating. Other countries not having understood the utility of the caste system it existed only in a loose condition and consequently those countries have not derived from caste system the same degree of advantage which India has derived”. “These being my views I am opposed to all those who are out to

his later years, which probably flattened the Gandhian's and providing them the impetus to get even more close to Gandhi, has failed to understand that Gandhi's embracing of *varna* system is nothing different from the acceptance of caste system.⁷⁷ Gandhi's *varna* system is a new name for caste system. It is clear that Gandhi's opposition is not for the caste system but for the practices of untouchability. For him it is the maltreatment of caste below the fourth *varna* which is destructive for Hinduism. He accepted the lack of equality of opportunity in *Varnas*, for him *Varnas* are well established on the principle of equality of status. Gandhi's description of Hinduism lies in his statement that "one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your president. That, according to me, is Hinduism".⁷⁸

What is crucial for postcolonial discourse is the voice of difference and that too in the domain of culture, which makes make Gandhi undoubtedly their hero of hybridity, who is known one amongst the "most conspicuous modernizers of Indian politics"⁷⁹. Gandhi's revivalism here within the postcolonial thought echoes the authentic and indigenous voice of India. This image of Gandhi for Nandy spoke "outside the imperium and freed himself from an intimate enemy".⁸⁰ Similarly, for Partha Chatterjee, "Gandhi's discourse came closest to being non-derivative".⁸¹

It is perhaps the Gandhian 'decisionism' of reviving Sanatan *Dharma* from the past as a warehouse of resources, is the revolutionary-modernist position which Chakrabarty is hinting at. Which is nothing else but, bringing back again the militant orthodox

destroy the caste system". Quoted in, *The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 151-152.

⁷⁷ For a system detail of this account, See, Valerian Rodrigues, op. cit., pp. 171-172.

⁷⁸ See Eleanor Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p. 154. Quoted from *Harijan*, 6 March, 1937.

⁷⁹ It is Gandhi who attempted to fuses tradition with the modernity. It is for him some of the elements of traditions like caste system can be utilized in serving the modern functions. For Rudolph's this was carried by invoking the elements of bhakti in the domain of modern politics. See, Lloyd I. Rudolph & Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition: Political Development in India*, Chicago and London, The University of Chicago Press, 1967, p. 157.

⁸⁰ See, Lloyd I. Rudolph & Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essay: Gandhi in the World and at Home*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, p.32.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Hinduism.⁸² One can say that perhaps Gandhi's critique of western civilization and its alternative in *Hind Swaraj*, stands as the most appropriate and systematic intellectual legacies of the postcolonial thought in India. *Hind Swaraj* in many ways represents the creative and at the same time a radical alternative of *Spiritual* essence against the western *material* sphere.⁸³ It is this celebration of guarding the spiritual against the material that predominantly disposes the foundations of postcolonial thought in India. Perhaps, one can argue that it is this replacement of the material with the spiritual which reflects an attitude of 'alternative modernity' and gets popularized within the postcolonial thought as a protest and resistance against the colonial modernity.

Therefore, the possibility of attaining an authentic subject-hood within the postcolonial discourse much rest on the decolonization of mind. In this way, the route of emancipation within the postcolonial discourse is well elaborated on a community lines rather than on western-liberal rationalist idea of democracy. The very limitation of contractual ordering of political and social order in India, in comparison to the west, is shown in the writings of Partha Chatterjee. It is because the colonial order which is based on contractual relations and rights for Chatterjee is relatively absent within the subalterns in India. Therefore, for Postcolonialists like Chatterjee the idea of emancipation has a potential realization by embracing the non-colonial patterns of life-worlds which are available in the communitarian setup of subalterns. It is argued that community solidarities in the eastern society defends the traditional ties rather than fear as the westerns do, primarily because of their conflictual nature with the idea of citizenship. Such a valorization of the local and native on traditional life patterns provides a mode of resistance against the individual patterns of rights and so forth paves the way for establishing or reviving the communitarian modes of living.⁸⁴ Like Nandy, Chatterjee wants to defy the claim of

⁸²It is well argued that Gandhism is another name of Sanatanism. "There is caste in Hinduism, there is caste in Gandhism. Hinduism believes in the law of hereditary profession, so does Gandhism. Hinduism enjoins cow-worship. So does Gandhism. Hinduism upholds the law of *karma*, predestination of man's condition in this world, so does Gandhism. Hinduism accepts the authority of Shastras. So does Gandhism. Hinduism believes in *avatars* or incarnation of God. So does Gandhism. Hinduism believes in idols, so does Gandhism." See *The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2004, pp.170

⁸³ Leela Gandhi, op. cit., p. 96

⁸⁴ It is argued by Sarah Joseph that Chatterjee's "own vies of subaltern resistance in the contemporary period is of communities which comprise the most deprived groups in contemporary society, who are

state as an arbitrator of community differences. For him the western model of secularism where the individual rights are protected by the state should be replaced by the alternative model of toleration, which he called 'strategic politics of toleration'.⁸⁵ In such a model it is the community which will act as an arbiter of their member's individual rights. In order to defy the logic of liberal rationality of the west, Chatterjee used vocabulary of incommensurability to make the claim of cultural and religious difference. As put forward by Anupama Rao that "Partha Chatterjee has argued for the need to respect religious communities as forms of life even when they refuse to subscribe to the norms of reasoned debate, thus challenging the liberal rationality presumed by the politics of identity. By emphasizing the incommensurability of community practice with state reason, Chatterjee suggests that even when the *identity* of communities is incommensurable, they must be presumed to be commensurable (as political units) with respect to the state", such an argument of Chatterjee has put feminist scholars to argue that it's a pavement for patriarchal unfreedom..⁸⁶

The strategy of emancipation for a feminist is much based on their intervention, both, at the level of the state and the community. It is the reformation in both the domain which is the much needed task. For Rao "in India the problem is complicated by the fact that women must engage state and community simultaneously, albeit differently, since sexual rights-marriage, divorce, inheritance, maintenance- are regulated by religious personal laws, while the Indian state adjudicates other aspects of women's status"⁸⁷. This

excluded from the rights and duties of citizenship but are recognized by the state as possible subjects for welfare. Such communities have to function outside the framework of laws and policies which do not grant them full citizenship. To claim rights they have, perforce, to violate laws. But by functioning collectively, they are able to negotiate with the state and make claims on it by claiming collective rights. Thus communities find a place in contemporary society among the subalterns". Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p.431.

⁸⁵ See Partha Chatterjee, 1995 "Religious Minorities and the Secular State: Reflection on an Indian Impasse", *Public Culture*, No.8, pp. 11-39.

⁸⁶ See Anupama Rao, *The Caste Question: Dalits and the Politics of Modern India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2010, pp.280-281.

⁸⁷This is much regulated by a converging requirement among the women for both political equality and sexual equality within the domain of state and community respectively. More importantly for Rao is that such dual demands should ultimately render "'community' an unstable and illegible category, as caste radicals sought to do earlier in the century through interstate and political marriage. Rather than efforts to subsume community to the state, aligning sexual rights with political rights- and thereby challenging the stability of 'community'- might be the more salient method of intervention.....Introducing sexual difference as the site of social reproduction thus poses a serious challenge to the political status of community and the hegemony of the state".

approach is not much different from the one espoused by Dalit reformists. The idea of Dalit emancipation was also anchored on the dual strategies where the idea was to challenge both the idea of self and community; regulated on the lines of *dharma*. Strategies of Dalit emancipation enjoin the equalization of both the public and the private sphere. Therefore, their demand of political equalization through representation seeks material recognition in the domain of state. The same equalization is also asserted at the level of community and so forth in the domain of religious and spiritual. Dalits rejection of Hinduism over the acceptance of Buddhism should be considered as a radical assertion towards spiritual and religious equality. It is on the same lines that the ideas of Ambedkar need to be perceived. However, there is an alternative reading of Ambedkar popularized within postcolonial thought which in many ways goes against the modernist spirit of Ambedkar's thoughts and visions, towards religious and spiritual answers. The following part will cover some of these issues.

III

Ambedkar reasserted the words of Edmund Burke: that 'True religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true civil government rest, and gives them both their sanction'⁸⁸. In this sense the true religion for Ambedkar was Buddhism, he located Buddhism within the Rationalist and Humanist framework, as there are ample evidences of this outlook in his *The Buddha and his Dhamma*⁸⁹. Ambedkar by emphasizing the scientific temper as the central message of Buddha, reconstructed an alternative path of emancipation which goes through not by simply rejecting religion, but incorporating those values in religion, which are universalizable and can serve the goals of human freedom in the modern age. These values for Ambedkar are available in Buddhism. Here, it is significant to highlight that in the Gandhi-Ambedkar debate on the issue of building

⁸⁸ See B.R Ambedkar, 'Caste in India', in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1, Bombay, Govt. of Maharashtra, p. 78.

⁸⁹ The few examples like "Buddhism is nothing, if not rationalism" p. 250, "The Buddha argued that there must be proof before one can accept a thing to be reality", p. 256, "The Buddha's path is the path of reason, and his is the way of emancipation from superstition", p. 114, etc. See B.R Ambedkar, *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, Siddharth College Publication, Bombay 1957.

a genuine political order on moral foundations; for Gandhi this had to be realized through building a community on the foundations of religion. On this Gandhi chose Hinduism with a quest of campaigning against untouchability and with the dream of changing the heart of the upper caste Hindus, with regard to the untouchables, but at the same time maintaining the spirit of '*varnashrama dharma*'. He had gone to such an extent that he coined a new identity for them i.e. *Harijan*, which itself is based on the name of Hindu God. On the other side, for Ambedkar, it is the rationalization of the life-world with the scientific spirit, both in the material and spiritual domain and in the public and private spheres, provides the possibility of genuine moral and political order. Ambedkar had a universal project of emancipation for untouchables which is not only circumscribed to untouchables only but for both Hindus and non-Hindus i.e. embracing Buddhism.⁹⁰

It is significant that Ambedkar was always hesitant in accepting or endorsing the prevalent views of that time which are still endorsed by some Dalit intellectuals about the untouchables as 'original inhabitants' or 'pre-Aryan' or the myths like Bali, the king of low caste groups and the representative of pre-Aryan religion and culture.⁹¹ However, Ambedkar had never endorsed such myths, more importantly for him the division within 'the human society could only be replaced by unity and fellow feeling if that human society so chose'.⁹² For Ambedkar an Indian culture can only be expressed after the annihilation of caste which is deeply embedded in the Brahmanism. He argued: "The caste system prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindus from becoming a society with a unified life and consciousness of its being".⁹³ This was a serious attempt made by him for the Untouchables to convert themselves into Buddhism for their own self-respect and dignity. As it is argued that 'socially, the

⁹⁰ In 1935 in his most famous and daring speech he asserted that "*If you want to gain self-respect, change your religion. If you want to create a cooperating society, change your religion. If you want power, change your religion. If you want equality, change your religion. If you want independence, change your religion. If you want to make the world in which you live happy, change your religion*". See Dhananjay Keer, , *Dr.Ambedkar: Life and Mission*. Third Edition, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1971, pg. 255

⁹¹ See Eleanor Zelliot, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 323-324

⁹² Ibid P. 323

⁹³ See *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, Vol.1 (ed). Vasant, Moon, Bombay, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1979, p. 51.

untouchables will gain absolutely and immensely because by conversion the untouchables will be members of a community whose religion has universalized and equalized all values of life'⁹⁴, as it comes more closer to the universal values derived from the French Revolution, Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, which Ambedkar passionately asserted throughout his life.

However, many identified Ambedkar's conversion was a significant turning point turn in his life. For some his switching to the spiritual domain signifies the abandoning of scientific modes of reasoning. Like for D.R. Nagraj "Ambedkar's turn to mythography in his later writings was a sign of his tiredness with the social science modes of reasoning".⁹⁵ Also some of the scholars like Christopher Queen blatantly declared Ambedkar's leaning towards Buddhism as a sign of becoming a postmodern man.⁹⁶

Such readings of Ambedkar are well suited to the project of heterogeneity and hybridity of the postcolonialist's scholar in India. The postcolonialists' alternative reading of Ambedkar here fails to locate the essentialist dimension that commensurate the political and spiritual project of Ambedkar. It is precisely because there is a selective appropriation of Ambedkar within the postcolonial discourse, in order to place him within the paradigm of 'alternative modernity'. The very foundation of 'alternative modernity' popularized by the postcolonialists runs on the celebration of heterogeneity. So, there is an attempt to locate Ambedkar within the domain of heterogeneity. In this way the Postcolonialist reading of Ambedkar like for any other 'western' rationalist would be described as incoherent, incomplete and contradictory.

The recent work of the postcolonial scholar, Debjani, Ganguly has shown the appropriation of Ambedkar within the location of heterogeneity. One can say that her

⁹⁴ See *The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2004, pg.230.

⁹⁵ Quoted in, Debjani, Ganguly, op. cit., p.151

⁹⁶ See Christopher, S, Queen, *Ambedkar, Modernity and the Hermeneutics of Buddhist Liberation*, in 'Dr. Ambedkar Buddhism and Social Chang, ed. A.K Narain and D.C Ahir, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1994, pp. 99-100 & 119-121. For Queen, Ambedkar's transcending the authority of reason and scientific tradition in order to choose faith, justifies his leanings towards postmodernism. Queen suggest that choosing faith is considered as a salvage within the postmodern generation.

work represents the essence of one of the authentic and collective manifestations of postcolonial discourse in terms of their methodology and approach towards the question of caste written in India. She argued that Ambedkar's rational and secular understanding of Buddhism is highly contestable, precisely because Ambedkar himself built the mythographic narrative in the language of superstition, supernatural, spiritual, incantation and hypnotic in order to preach the rationality of Buddhism, which goes completely against the grain of Ambedkar's scientific/rationalist claim in Buddha and his Dhamma.⁹⁷ Such a reading of Ambedkar simply shows that the very engagement of Ambedkar with colonial modernity produced the incoherent results. Like, Dalit-Buddhists had not transcended religious practices, rituals followed in Hinduism, moreover, as Ambedkar was against the Bhakti tradition which in fact strengthened among the Dalits.⁹⁸ In such a reading of Postcolonialists, Ambedkar stands within the paradigm of 'alternative modernity'⁹⁹ and so forth in the heterogeneous time. It is argued that "Indian Modernity, through Ambedkar's efforts, been rendered multiyocal and less coercive. The 'modern' in such discourse is not disavowed or negated; but it is seen as inevitably contested, it also dares to speak the non-sociological, non-secular language of transcendence"¹⁰⁰.

The thrust of such alternative readings of Ambedkar is to show that Ambedkar's unified language of the modern values had failed to unsettle the post-secular presence that resists the abstractions of a secular and revolutionary Dalit-Buddhist narrative.

Before going into the contested debates of Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism, the primary task is to locate the very meaning of 'conversion' for Ambedkar. The essential meaning of conversion for Ambedkar lies in embracing democratic principles. Therefore

⁹⁷Debjani Ganguly, *Caste and Dalit Lifeworlds- Postcolonial Perspectives*, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 2005. pp.150 &164.

⁹⁸Debjani, Ganguly, op. cit., pp. 155-158 &171-175.

⁹⁹ It is argued that the very engagement of Ambedkar with the colonial modernity rests on one of the expression of 'alternative modernity' called "creative adaptation" of Dilip Gaonkar "Creative adaptation is not simply a matter of adjusting the form or recoding the practice to soften the impact of modernity; rather it points to the manifold ways in which people question the present. *It is the site where people 'make' themselves modern, as opposed to being 'made' modern by alien and impersonal forces, and where they give themselves an identity and destiny*". See Debjani Ganguly, "History's Implosions: A Benjaminian Reading of Ambedkar", *Journal of Narrative Theory*. Vol.32, No. 3(Fall, 2002), pp. 326-347 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30224586>, p. 343.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 344.

the thrust of conversion for Ambedkar is democracy. This can be gathered from his own words that “you must give a new doctrinal basis to your religion, a basis that will be in consonance with Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, in short, with democracy. It means a complete change in outlook and in attitude towards men and things. It means conversion”.¹⁰¹

This essentialism of democracy in the meaning of conversion is deeply regulated by the notions of rationality. Ambedkar’s conversion was humanistic in nature as it is ruled by the values based on reason and scientific knowledge. It is rightly put forward by Yashwant Sumant that “Ambedkar’s religious discourse shows that rationalism can be compassionate and compassion as a sentiment is not necessarily irrational and anti-rational”¹⁰² There are various instances in *The Buddha and his Dhamma*, referring to the essentiality of rationality in Buddhism like, “He (the Buddha) accepted that reality must rest on proof. Thinking must based on rationalism”¹⁰³ , “The Buddha’s path is the path of reason, and his is the way of emancipation from superstition”¹⁰⁴ , “In his (Buddha’s) opinion nothing was infallible and nothing could be final. Everything must be open to re-examination and reconsideration, whenever grounds for re-examination and reconsideration arise”¹⁰⁵ , “The Buddha argued that there must be proof before one can accept a thing to be a reality”¹⁰⁶ . Even in his article in *Maha Bodhi*, titled as *The Buddha and The Future of his religion (1950)*, he asserted the same, that, “Religion must be in accord with science. Religion is bound to lose respect, and therefore become the subject

¹⁰¹ See, B.R. Ambedkar, “Castes in India,” in *Writing and Speeches*, vol. 1, p.78. This further means to Ambedkar “a complete change in the fundamental notions of life. It means a complete change in the values of life. It means a complete change in outlook and in the attitude towards men and things. It means conversion; but if you do not like the word, I will say, it means new life. But a new life cannot enter a body that is dead. New life can enter only in a new body. The old body must die before new body can come into existence and new life can enter into it. To put it simply the old must cease to be operative before the new can begin to enliven and to pulsate. This is what I meant when I said you must discard the authority of the *Shastras* and destroy the religion of the *Shastras*”. Quoted from *The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 301-302.

¹⁰² See Yashwant Sumant, “Situating Religion in Ambedkar’s Political Discourse”, in *Reconstructing the World: B.R Ambedkar and Buddhism in India*, ed. Surendra Jondhale and Johannes Beltz, Oxford University, New Delhi, 2004, p.77.

¹⁰³ See, B.R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Siddharth College Publication, Bombay, 1957, p., p.86.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p.114.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p.89.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 256.

of ridicule; and thereby not merely lose its force as a governing principle of life but might, in course of time disintegrate and lapse, if it is not in accord with the science. In other words, religion, if it is to function, must be in accord with reason which is merely another name for Science”¹⁰⁷.

It is in the same spirit as mentioned above Ambedkar had located his arguments about the *Annihilation of Caste*. It was quite essential for Ambedkar that religion should be considered as a matter of principle and not rules. He considered that religious act should be an act of responsibility which fundamentally makes the religion a matter of principle. Because it is the responsibility which is the essential feature of religion; therefore for him without it, religion is nothing else but merely rules, commands and prohibitions. The nature of principle for him has a universal bearing, whereas rules are habits and prescriptions which one is told to follow as they are backed by commands, the same doesn't hold true in principles because by being of their objective nature.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, Ambedkar had opted for universal principles of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. He identified that these principles stand adversative to the religion of Hinduism. It is because Hinduism had failed to imbibe these rationalist principles in its religious framework. For Ambedkar it is reason and morality that provides a reflective attitude, without it the possibility of reform or change remains handicapped.¹⁰⁹ He further argued that, Hinduism is well constructed on the deprivation of these principles which perhaps characterized it as *Sanatan*. There are lots of references in his writing about the inimical attitude of Hinduism against reason.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in K.N Kadam, “Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism as an Instrument of Social Change”, in *Dr. Ambedkar Buddhism and Social Change*, ed. A.K Narain and D.C Ahir, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1994, p.41.

¹⁰⁸ While explaining the nature of Hindu religion Ambedkar argued that “the Hindu religion, as contained in the *Vedas* and the *Smritis*, is nothing but a mass of sacrificial, social, political and sanitary rules and regulations, all mixed up what is religion by the Hindus is nothing but all multitude of commands and prohibitions”. Valerian Rodrigues, op. cit., p.298.

¹⁰⁹ Ambedkar asserted “how are you going to break up caste if people are not free to consider whether it accords with morality? The wall built around caste is impregnable and the material, of which it is built, contains none of the combustible stuff of reason and morality.....if you wish to bring about breach in the system then you have got to apply the dynamite to the *Vedas* and the *Shastras*, which deny any part to reason, to *Vedas* and *Shastras*, which deny any part to morality. You must destroy the religion of the *Shruti* and the *Smritis*. Nothing else will avail. This is my considered view of matter”. Ibid, p. 298.

¹¹⁰ For Example in Manusmriti “there is no place for reason to play its part. A Hindu must follow either *Veda*, *Smiriti* or *Sadachar*. He cannot follow anything else”. Further “rationalism as a canon of interpreting

It is now a recognized fact that Ambedkar's ideas about rationality and science have influence of John Dewey, an American Pragmatist. He quoted Dewey extensively in his work. More importantly, Ambedkar's idea of living in the present is taken from Dewey. He criticized Hindu society because it is anti-history where Hindus still follows their old past, as a mode of living. It is *Sanatanism* of Hinduism for Ambedkar which portrays the present as a continuation of past, which Ambedkar find *extremely* anti-progressive. It is in the same spirit he Quoted John Dewey, "an individual can only live in the present. The present is not just something which comes after the past; much less something produced by it. It is what life is in leaving the past behind it. The study of past products will not help us to understand the present. A knowledge of the past and its heritage is of great significance when it enters into the present, but not otherwise. And the mistake of making the records and remains of the past the main material of education is that it tends to make the past a rival of the present and the present a more or less futile imitation of the past".¹¹¹

It is in the same context that Ambedkar argued for the destruction of Hinduism because of its character of finality and fixity. It is effectively put forward by Ambedkar that "happiness notoriously varies with the conditions and circumstances of a person, as well as with the conditions of different people and epochs. That being the case, how can humanity endure this code of eternal laws, without being cramped and without being crippled? I have, therefore no hesitation in saying that such a religion must be destroyed and I say, there is nothing irreligious in working for the destruction of such a religion. Indeed I hold that it your bounden duty to tear the mask, to remove the misrepresentation that is caused by misnaming this law as religion".¹¹²

the *Vedas* and *Smritis* is absolutely condemned. It is regarded to be as wicked as atheism and the punishment provided for its excommunication. Thus where a matter is cover by the *Vedas* or the *Smritis* a Hindu cannot resort to rational thinking. Even when there is a conflict between *Vedas* and *Smritis* on matters on which they have given positive injunction, the solution is not left to reason". Ibid, p. 295.

¹¹¹ See John Dewey, *Democracy and education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*, New York, The Macmillan Co., 1916, p.24. Quoted from, Valerian Rodrigues, op. cit., p.303

¹¹² Valerian Rodrigues, op. cit., p. 299. It is within these remarks Ambedkar asserted that "Hindus must consider whether the time has not come for them to recognize that there is nothing fixed, nothing eternal, nothing *Sanatan*; that everything is changing, that change is the law of life for individuals as well as for society. In a changing society, there must be a constant revolution of old values and the Hindus must

Ambedkar's rejection of the supernatural aptly describes him as an initiator of a secular consciousness, as the very process of secularization involves disengagement with the cosmic order. As Mira Nanda posits that for Charles Taylor it is the "naturalization or disenchantment of nature is a sine qua non for the creation of modern identity. For men and women to find their own meaning and develop their own unique potential, they first have to break away from (or in Taylor's words, 'become disengaged' from), the god-ordained cosmic order....it is only after morality ceases to have cosmic meanings, and conversely, natural phenomenon cease to have moral significance, the human beings can exercise their autonomy without the fear of cosmic consequences and divine (which is also societal) punishment".¹¹³ It is in this spirit that to move away or to get disengaged from the cosmic rulings of scripture that Ambedkar argued for the destructions of scriptures. In his own words, "the sanctity of caste and Varna can be destroyed only by disregarding the divine authority of the Shastras".¹¹⁴

It is quite central to Ambedkar that religion in modern society is based on the idea of justice in comparison to antique society where religion has a basis of utility. Ambedkar portrays the transition of religion from antique to the modern society as a form of revolution. He saw transition from savage to civilized society in a revolutionary spirit which replaced the universality of the god with the mān. Therefore for him in civilized society, the universal morality holds the justice for individuals against their subordination by the community.¹¹⁵

realize that if there must be standards to measure the acts of men there must also be a readiness to revive those standards". p.304..

¹¹³ Meera Nanda, *Prophet Facing Forward*, op. cit., p.80.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in A.V. Satish Chandra, "The Annihilation of Caste: The unfinished Task of Dr. Ambedkar", in *Dr. Ambedkar Buddhism and Social Change*, ed. A.K Narain and D.C Ahir, B.R Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1994, p.165.

¹¹⁵ For Ambedkar "modern society consists of men only....and of men who are worshippers of different Gods". B. R. Ambedkar, "Philosophy of Hinduism", in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*, Vol.3, Government of Maharashtra, Education Department, Mumbai, 1987, p. 17. For Ambedkar it is because of the religious revolution in the modern age "God has ceased to be member of a community. Thereby he has become impartial. God has ceased to be the father of man in the physical sense of the word.....by this revolution, man has ceased to be blind worshipper of God doing nothing but obeying his commandments. Thereby man has become a responsible person required to justify his belief in God's commandments by his conviction". Ibid, p.23.

Ambedkar essentialized the values of modernity in both the political and religious domain. This suggests that the rationality of modern sciences is the commensurable vocabulary for Ambedkar which unites both the public and private sphere. Here one can refer to a passage from Ambedkar where he talked about the contradictory and at the same time a schizophrenic consciousness that developed amongst the caste-Hindus in the instances of their railway journeys.¹¹⁶ It is because of their constant interaction with the divine and the modern in their life. It is this schizophrenic consciousness which Hindus had maintained in the modern age, which for Ambedkar stands antithetical to the modern values of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. However, in the contemporary times, the same schizophrenic consciousness can be discerned in the model of 'alternative modernity' suggested by postcolonialist scholars.

It is quite clear with the above passage that Ambedkar's route of emancipation is not mired with the postmodernist and postcolonialist language of heterogeneity and hybridity, where the divine in terms of past has a continuous interaction with the modern present. It is the maintenance and celebration of this schizophrenic consciousness for Partha Chatterjee and Ashis Nandy that are well substantiated by their notions of policing of spiritual or 'inner' domain from the 'outer' one 'and 'critical insider'. As for Partha Chatterjee, "it was deemed necessary to cultivate and imitate the material accomplishments of western civilization, it was compulsory to simultaneously preserve and police the spiritual properties of national culture".¹¹⁷ Similarly, for Nandy, as put forward by Sarah Joseph while interpreting him, that "Indian Civilization has absorbed

¹¹⁶ Ambedkar said that "it must a source of silent amusement to many non-Hindu to find hundreds and thousands of Hindus breaking caste on certain occasions, such as railway journeys and foreign travel and yet endeavoring to maintain caste for the rest of their lives! The explanation of this phenomenon discloses another fetter on the reasoning faculties of the Hindus. Man's life is generally habitual and unreflective. Reflective thought, in the sense of active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form or knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which presents a dilemma-a crisis. Railway journeys and foreign travels are really occasion of crisis in the life of a Hindu and it is natural to expect a Hindu to ask himself why he should maintain caste at all, if he cannot maintain it at all times. But he does not. He breaks caste at one step and proceeds to observe it at the next without raising any question. The reason for this astonishing conduct is to be found in the rule of the *Shastras*, which directs him to maintain caste as far as possible and to undergo *prayaschitta* when he cannot. By this theory of prayaschitta, the *Shastras* by following a spirit of compromise have given caste a perpetual lease of life and have smothered reflective thought which would have otherwise led to the destruction of the notion of caste". Valerian Rodrigues, op. cit., p.296

¹¹⁷ Leela Gandhi, op. cit., p. 96

alien influences over time but still retained its distinctive character”.¹¹⁸ It is suggestively the absorption of above mentioned schizophrenic consciousness for Nandy speaks the language of authentic India in the modern age. Such assertions of postcolonial intellectuals reflect a strategic compromise with the benefits of modernity where they uphold modernity’s gift of technological innovations, but at the same time rejects its philosophical ethics of rationalization of interpersonal relations. Such a ‘creative adaptation’ of postcolonial intellectuals in India is not different from what Charles Taylor pointed in the context of Chinese government after the opium war: “we’ll take their technology and keep our culture”¹¹⁹. It is such moments for Charles Taylor that shows how “the modernizers begin to look indistinguishable from the conservative enemies of change”.¹²⁰

My argument is that the postcolonialists pragmatics or strategic adoption of colonial modernity is based on their firm rejection of its essential feature which Habermas identified in communicative ethics. If modernity is an ‘unfinished project’ for Habermas then it is better to say that Ambedkar’s ideas also followed the same trajectory, because Ambedkar had taken the values of modernity in the spirit of their essence, whereas the postcolonialist stance towards the modernity is anti-essentialist and contingent. It is on the same lines that we will discuss the concluding part of this chapter, where we will focus on the essentialist route of Dalit emancipation against the anti-essentialist route of postcolonial scholars.

IV

Ambedkar’s ideas are much in conformity with the notion of essence given by Aristotle. For Aristotle, the search for essence is the central feature of human being; without knowing the essence of being human one can’t be called human. Those essences may be described in many forms; some perceive it in terms of colour, race, culture, religion, etc.

¹¹⁸ Sarah Joseph, op. cit., p.425

¹¹⁹ See Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity”, *Public Culture 11 (1)*: 153-174, Duke University press, 1999, p. 163.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Is it possible to call these qualities essential? Are they so central that without these qualities the very notion of human being can't exist? These are the central questions posed by Aristotle when he was talking about the distinction between essence and accident.

For Aristotle, the formation of ourselves is based on essential forms and not on accidental qualities. It is not the difference in color, race, religion and culture that reveals the essential feature of an individual or society. This was explained by Aristotle, as put forward by Christopher Shields: “your current hair colour is accidental, as is, let us say, the fact that you at present have an even number of hairs upon your head. If you pluck out one hair, or dye you hair grey, you have changed but not died. Contrast that with the property of *being human*. Arguably, the moment you lose that property is the instant of your death: when you are no longer human, you are no more. Put in Aristotle terms, a human being is a *substance* and exists *unqualifiedly*, whereas a grey haired human being does not exist unqualifiedly, but is rather a substance sporting an accidental feature”¹²¹. In this way the very demand of recognition of difference for accidental features does not invariably ask for the essential feature of human being in an Aristotelian sense. Therefore, recognition for essential qualities is not based on contingencies but on necessities. This raises a fundamental question: should our demand based on necessities or on contingencies? One can argue that the very demand of racial, religious and cultural difference does not depend on the demand for necessities but on contingencies. It is because, the very formation of race, culture and religion are not stable but are contingent in nature, they have a fallible nature. A particular race may lose its essence when it intermingles with other races. Similarly, cultures adopt different features when they come in interaction with other cultures and also people change their religions according to their needs and requirements. More importantly, religion changes its content and meaning as it is in a process of constant interpretation. Therefore they can only give us opinion about truth but not knowledge i.e. why there are differences in religions primarily because of

¹²¹ See Christopher Shields, *Aristotle*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p.100.

opinions¹²². I will further concretize the distinction between essence and accident of Aristotle in the following chapter, in order to show the possibility of reading 'Dalit' as a category of substance in Aristotle's framework of categories.

Ambedkar's rejection of Hinduism was essentially based on this ground, because of its claiming of *Sanatan*. The possibility of difference only arises because of multiple opinions but not truths. The moment one says that there are multiple truths one is signaling towards multiple opinions. If something is true than it means it is certain, stable, essential and infallible. This suggests that the moment when opinions commensurate with each other they invariably reject their differences in order to acquire a status of truth. Now, it is possible to ascertain that the search for the objectivity is the search for truth and invariably for the essential feature of the human being which remains stable in spite of the presence of accident features. It is within this spirit that Ambedkar located the infallibility of reason and therefore, rationality for him is the essential feature of human society. In Ambedkar's ideas reason stands as an indomitable value, in both the public and the private domain.

Scholars on Ambedkar's thoughts had seen his conversion into Buddhism on two different trajectories. Some see it as a political event whereas others locate it as a pure spiritual event. As Gauri Viswanathan pointed out that "recent critical approaches to Ambedkar's conversion are as disparate as his contemporaries' interpretations of his motive. By and large, the split is straight down the line, dividing the private from the public, the spiritual from the political"¹²³. For some, like Gail Omvedt, Ambedkar's conversion should be seen as tool of politicizing the masses for their retrieval against the

¹²² John Locke talked about the interpretation of strictures when he was making a demarcation between civil and religious power and further made a distinction between faith and knowledge Locke has signaled that revelation that comes from scripture can only gives us opinion about the truth but not knowledge, which suggest one should not become dogmatic about the opinions. As Locke suggested that divine inspirations does not relive us of the duty to verify by means of our rational faculties whether it really is a divine inspiration, as Locke emphatically expressed in the *Two Treatises*, reason is man's only 'star and compass'. See Wolfson, Adam, *Toleration and Relativism: The Locke-Proast Exchange, The review of politics, Vol. 59, No.2 (Spring, 1997), pp. 213-231, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1408088>, accessed on 06/10/2008 02:46. p.219.*

¹²³ See, Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside The Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998, p.225.

oppression of the caste-Hindus and also from the political groups like communist party who disregarded the oppression on the basis of caste and religion from the class factors.¹²⁴ Also for Gopal Guru, the spiritualization and Hinduisation of Ambedkar by the right wing parties and the Buddhist organization of Trailokya Bauddha Mahasangha Sahayaka Gana (TBMSG) in Maharashtra stands fundamentally against the philosophy of Ambedkar. For Guru, “if one looks at Ambedkar’s ideology of Buddhism and his idea of conversion, one finds that he created a counter ideology in the form of neo-Buddhism thereby rejecting not only old Buddhism but also offered a dialectical undermining of Hinduism at the ideological level.....this forms the core of Ambedkar’s ideological pursuit as well as his strategy and hence and any attempt to assimilate Ambedkar into Hinduism would be a distortion of his emancipatory categories”.¹²⁵ Similarly, in his another piece Guru criticized the attempts made by Lokmitra in regard to the spiritualizing of Ambedkar. Guru argued that Lokmitra understanding of Ambedkar’s Buddhism is devoid of any political tunings. Guru argued that “Ambedkar who was both a political thinker as well as practitioner wrote and worked out strategies of emancipation with the political dimension upper most in his mind.....in fact, a careful study of Ambedkar shows that his Buddhism and conversion movement involve underlying political currents with the potential of leading to the long-term emancipatory politics of the ‘Dalit’ masses”¹²⁶. In Guru’s views, Ambedkar’s considering of *Gita* as political text

¹²⁴ Ibid. For Omvedt “Conversion was not an individual act; hundreds of thousands of Dalits joined him in massive open grounds at Nagpur, and as the conversion swept the Mahar Community throughout the Maharashtra it included the practical consequences of social rebellion, refusing to ‘do the work of a Hindu’, that is, to carry away dead cattle or perform any of the other of their ordained caste duties”. See Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar an the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p.248.

¹²⁵ For Gopal guru “ it is in the same spirit that Ambedkar has progressively negate his 1920’s protests which the present day neo-Hinduists are so tempted to exploit but often out of context. In fact, Ambedkar’s religious protest of the 1930’s was not a protest for Hindu reforms; he used this protest as a strategy only to take up Dalit struggle on a clearer political terrain. Similarly, his conversion movement in 1956 was apolitical strategy which involved political mobilization of Dalit masses directed at creating a counter-culture with political underpinnings for the negation of Hindu dominant culture”. See, Gopal Guru, “Hinduisation of Ambedkar in Maharashtra”, *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol.26, No.7 (Feb. 16, 1991), pp.339-341, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4397328>, p.340.

¹²⁶ See See Gopal, Guru, ‘Appropriating Ambedkar’, *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol. 26, No.27/28 (July6-13, 1991), pp. 1697-1699, , <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4398126>, p.1699.

of Hindus should be considered as logical culmination of *Buddha and his Dhamma* for the Dalits¹²⁷.

The significant claim of postcolonialist scholars about locating Ambedkar within the paradigm of heterogeneity and hybridity came up in the writings of Debjani Ganguly: *Caste and Dalit Life worlds: Postcolonial Perspectives*, 2005). The larger argument of the book is to trace out the use of non-sociological vocabulary by Ambedkar while preaching the Rationalism of Buddhism. For her Ambedkar is located in both the mythical past and the modern present and this continuation of claiming glorious past for Dalits in present through modernist vocabulary of science for her justifies Ambedkar's location in heterogeneity. The fundamental difficulty with such arguments is that it failed to locate the mythical assertions of Ambedkar within the spirit of historical facts. Ambedkar was quite cautious in his approach while writing *Who Were Shudras* and *Castes in India*. It is in these works that Ambedkar asserted the true spirit of a historian and he pleaded that his works should be read in the same spirit.

This can be gathered from a long passage written in *Who Were The Shudras?:* "While it is true that a non-Brahmin scholar is free from the inhibitions of the Brahmin scholar he is likely to go to the other extreme and treat the whole literature as a collection of fables and fictions fit to be thrown on the dung heap not worthy of serious study. This is not the spirit of an historian. As has been well said, an historian ought to be exact, sincere, and impartial; free from passions, unbiased by interest, fear, resentment or affections; faithful to the truth, which is the mother of history, the preserver of great actions, the enemy of oblivion, the witness of the past, the director of the future. In short he must have an open mind, though it may not be an empty mind, and readiness to examine all evidences even though it be spurious. The non-Brahmin scholar may find it difficult to remain true to this spirit of the historian. He is likely to import the spirit of non-Brahmin politics in the examination of the truth and falsity of the ancient literature which is not justifiable. I feel

¹²⁷ It is concluded by Guru that "I am adding a political dimension to Buddhism, but is Ambedkar who tried to enthuse it in Buddhist teaching and practice to help the 'Dalit' masses understand that the solution to their problems lies in their radical politicization and not in spiritualization. Therefore, Lokmitra and his TBMSG are free to sell their packages of spiritual Buddhism and synthesize it with anything but not with Ambedkar's Buddhism. Because it does not allow such synthesis". Ibid

certain that in my research I have kept myself free from such prejudice. In writing about the *Shudras* I have to present in my mind no other consideration except that of pure history. It is well known that there is a non-Brahmin movement in this country which is political movement of the *Shudras*. It is also well known that I have been connected with it. But I am sure that the reader will find that I have not made this book a preface to non-Brahmin politics".¹²⁸

This long passage of Ambedkar gives a clear account that in spite of being attached with the non-Brahmin movement he did not compromise with the values of rationality and objectivity of modern science. His claims about the origin of untouchability and the original status of Shudras are based purely on history and not on mythical planes. The above passage of Ambedkar shows that his writings should be interpreted in a spirit of a pure historian, as his task was to build communicative relations with the facts. Where others can come and debate about their scientific nature. In this way, for Ambedkar nothing is infallible and every knowledge system should come under the supervision of scientific rationality. However, authors like Debjani Ganguly completely missed the Historian spirit of Ambedkar, instead of providing the counter arguments and facts against the writings of Ambedkar, she blatantly declared Ambedkar as a 'founder of Dalit discursivity'.¹²⁹ Her writing fails to underline the essentialism of rationality of modern science in both the political and religious writings of Ambedkar.

For, Ambedkar "Sentiment must be outlawed from the domain of science and things should be judged from an objective standpoint. For myself I shall find as much pleasure in a positive destruction of my own ideology, as in a rational disagreement on a topic, which, notwithstanding many learned disquisitions is likely to remain controversial forever. To conclude while I am ambitious to advance a Theory of Caste, if it can be

¹²⁸ See *The Essential writings of B.R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2004, pg.394.

¹²⁹ For Ganguly "it would be no exaggeration to say that Ambedkar is the founder of 'Dalit discursivity'. I use the phrase 'founder of discursivity' here in the Foucauldian sense of a figure who provides a 'paradigmatic set of terms, images and concepts that organize thinking and experience of the past, present and future of society, doing so in a way which enigmatically surpasses the specific claims...(he/she) puts forth'. It was Ambedkar's re-imagining and re-invention of lower-caste and untouchable identity, through both his conversion to Buddhism and his mythographic attempts to critique dominant ways writing about India's past, that gave the term 'Dalit' the power and resonance it has today". Debjani, Ganguly, op. cit., pp. 131-132.

shown to be untenable I shall be equally willing to give it up”¹³⁰. Such an assertion of Ambedkar not only repudiates the postcolonialists branding him as a man of heterogeneity, but also makes him a political activist with strategies based on reason and not on rhetoric.

It can be concluded on these lines that search for authenticity in the postcolonial discourse is largely based on their claiming of cultural difference against the colonial one. The accident of being born with a particular caste, religion, race, and colour on which difference can be claimed is not a claim of essential difference but more or less they are based on accidental difference. However, it is quite understandable that colonial modernity was an imposition on the natives but it cannot also be denied that on the Dalits the native is also being imposed in terms of caste and untouchability. The problem is the same with both i.e. imposition from the above.

However, their route of rejecting this imposition is not the same. Therefore, the Postcolonialists route of emancipation lies in the rejection of colonial modernity through constructing an ‘alternative modernity’, which is nothing else but a constant interaction of mythical past with the modern present, a sort of hybridity and heterogeneity against the modern practice of historicism. For Dalits on the other hand the route of emancipation is to claim the universal, they are demanding truths not accidents, their claim is for objectivity which lies in essential features of being human, like self respect dignity and recognition. These claims are not cultural or accidental but universal because of their commensurability with the different cultures.

Therefore, Dalit emancipation lies in search for truth and objectivity and seeks rationality and ultimately search for humanity. They are against the mythical and scriptural opinions of the Vedas and Shastras which are imposed on them. It is because this constant ruling of opinions on them, forced Dalits to uphold the banner of an ‘unfinished project of modernity’ and this gets stronger and radical especially against the postmodernist and postcolonialist celebration of hybridity and their contingency of truth.

¹³⁰ This was said by Ambedkar in his text *Castes in India*. Valerian Rodrigues, op. cit., p.262

The language of truth is so essentially tied in with the Dalit, emancipation, that apart from the political even the spiritual has not remained unaffected by it. However, nothing can be appositely summarized as the answer to Dalit emancipation than this statement by Ambedkar that: “*Buddhism is nothing, if not rationalism*”¹³¹

¹³¹ See, B.R. Ambedkar, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Siddharth College Publication, Bombay, 1957, p.250.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL IDENTIFICATION OF DALIT AS A CATEGORY OF SUBSTANCE

The previous chapter focused on an analysis of postcolonial thought and its aversion towards colonial modernity. As argued in the last chapter, postcolonial discourse seems to share much of the celebrated theme of hybridity and heterogeneity popularized by the postmodern thought. Moreover, it has been argued that Dalit theory of emancipation stands in disagreement with postcolonialists' fascination with hybridity and heterogeneity. Dalit emancipation as outlined in the previous chapter rests on deriving essential ideas of modernity, which not only signals the limitation of the pragmatism of 'alternative modernity' but also echoes the *denial of schizophrenic consciousness* as developed by the postcolonialists. It was also argued that there is an arbitrary imposition of postmodern concepts and categories on the Ambedkar's understanding of Dalit emancipation by the postcolonial theorists. There is a selective and at the same time an anti-essentialist reading of Ambedkar produced by the postcolonial intellectuals, which not only created a contingent view of Dalit emancipation but also deciphered it as 'discursive'.

At this point, it is significant to highlight that the idea of Dalit emancipation should not be read as co-terminus with other notions of emancipation which are tied-in with competing categories of the same group. It is the projection of a non-essentialist reading of the Dalit category which fashioned multiple and at the same time produces contested versions of Dalit emancipation. The previous chapter has highlighted such a misrepresentation of the Dalit category by postcolonial intellectuals. These scholars have produced heterogeneity of Dalit emancipation. In this background it would be interesting to know how far the multiplicities of Dalit emancipation resonate with the essence of the category 'Dalit' itself. Moreover, it will be equally important to know how these multiple versions of Dalit emancipation have produced a counter stance towards the essential dimension of Dalit emancipation.

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part briefly discusses the anti-essentialist instances in Dalit discourse which in many ways are responsible for the formation of Dalit discursivity. Scholars on Dalit discourses understood this discursive turn towards Dalit emancipation as the moment of '*atrophy in Dalit politics*'. The second part will theorize about Dalit as a category of substance within Aristotle's framework of categories. Here, an attempt is made to provide a universal foundation to Dalit category by making use of the distinction between essence and accident from the writings of Aristotle.

I

In the postmodern understanding, the idea of discursivity calls for the repudiation of stability and coherency of the concepts and categories. Seen from this angle, therefore, calling Dalit discourse and its dimensions of emancipation as discursive always pleads for a contingency of their foundations. It is quite understandable that concepts and categories have their own contexts and it is the sensibility towards their context that determines the historical trajectories of the concept itself. In other words, the stability and the permanency of the concepts always get refashioned in multiple ways which in turn renders rather profoundly the nature of the concepts as discursive. Therefore, one can argue that the discursive turn stands in opposition to the essential. Particular concepts acquire an essentialist character due to their rootedness in 'specific contexts and in the peoples consciousness'¹ and they are available for their appropriation in multiple forms by different agents like politicians, revolutionaries and intellectuals. In other words, rendering the concept discursive suggests an overlapping of it with other concepts of the same group, without however, recognizing the difference and contradictions among the

¹ See Gopal Guru, "The language of Dalit-Bahujan Political Discourse", in *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge, Vol.2*, ed. By Ghanshyam Shah, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2001, p. 97. For Guru "the categories and their labels change their meanings, connotation and significance from time to time and place to place, depending upon the specific socio-economic and ideological contexts and the politics of the users who formulate them. It is this rootedness of categories in their specific contexts and therefore in the people's consciousness that decides their nature. Since the consciousness involves progress and regression, the categories cannot be thought to be concrete and given, permanent and infinitely exclusive or inclusive".

latter. In fact, it is the contradiction, incoherency and instability that primarily define the meaning of discursivity. Therefore, one can suggest that in the arena of pragmatic politics, the politics of naming itself makes the concept both fragmentary and discursive. Therefore, the pragmatic route of understanding the concepts rejects an essentialist reading of the latter. Thus one can logically decipher that discursivity in many ways commodifies the concept itself. Subsequently the acquired route of pragmatism fosters the utility for multiple usages according to the need and fulfillment of the particular subject and group. This reduction of the concept into a commodity is similar to strip down its essence and substance. There is no denial that the meaning of Dalit in the contemporary times is reduced to the same.

In case of Dalits, categories like *Bahujan*, *Harijan*, *Asprushta*, Depressed classes, subaltern, Untouchables, *Bahishkrut*, backwards, underprivileged etc., are all used complementarily for a common group of people which in meta-language may be described as marginalized². One can refer that, categories like *Harijan* (children of god), *Asprushta*, underprivileged, backwards and state constituted categories like SC's, ST's and OBC's, are read simultaneously with the category Dalit. Which renders contradictory results, because these categories stand starkly opposite to the essence of the category Dalit as they are counterpoint to the categories used by the originators of Dalit category.³

This is the fundamental reason why in contemporary times Dalit emancipation is seen as fragmentary and discursive. It is precisely because of an inherent contradiction within these categories because of the relativities of vision, of emancipation within them. The presence of relativities signifies that there is some kind of incommensurability that seems to be existing in the sphere of ideas, practices and methods in these categories. It is rightly argued by Guru that “in the domain of politics, these categories do not acquire an arbitrary character; they are not aimless or passive representation of the world out there but are conscious constructions with either a positive or negative agenda chalked out by

² For a detail account of this, see, Gopal Guru, op. cit., p. 97-107.

³ For the differences among these categories, see Gopal Guru, “The language of Dalit-Bahujan Political Discourse”, in *Dalit Identity and Politics: Cultural Subordination and the Dalit Challenge*, Vol.2, ed. By Ghanshyam Shah, Sage Publication, New Delhi, 2001, pp.101-102.

their users”⁴. It is the presence of these two judgments i.e. negative and positive that often produces the contested results for the similar category. This has been the case with the category Dalit.

The concerns in contemporary Dalit discourse acknowledge this ‘atrophy in Dalit politics’⁵. The atrophy in Dalit politics shows the misuse of the category Dalit and its synonyms by those who are in a process of stripping down the universalistic dimension of it by indulging in a self-created pragmatism against the universal emancipatory dimension of the category Dalit. This rather new and alternative theorizing of Dalit emancipation does provide some cheering in the sense that it provides constant churning by making Dalit category more informative and loaded. However, the difficulty with such is that it has also taken the same discursive route. Rather than exploring mutually affable and familiar sets of concepts it has taken the anti-essentialist or non-substance route.

One can say this anti-essentialist or at the same time relativist talk of ‘different voice’ has significantly come up in Dalit discourse from some corners, like in the arguments of ‘one step outside modernity’⁶ through the essentialisation of the Dalit identity and articulation of caste as a legitimate category of democratic politics and more importantly in fashionable statements like ‘Dalits in search of Bourgeoisie’⁷. Aditya Nigam argued this by interpreting Ambedkar as a resistant of universalizing urge. Nigam through his interpretation of Ambedkar argues that ‘the ‘Dalit Being’ is not a part of any whole and cannot be represented by any essence of the whole. The irreducibility of the part is also

⁴ Ibid, p.97.

⁵ It is argued that “Dalit politics today has become rudderless and lost its real purpose in a hail of claims and counter-claims that are launched at it from both within and outside the Dalit platform. Those who masquerade as the champion of Dalit cause have been propagating with impunity their hideous perspective that serves nobody else but themselves. It is not the cunning that they are deploying to use Dalit cause for the personal end. In fact there is complete lack of social vigilance among the common Dalit masses whose practical reason is used by these self-appointed Dalits as well as non-Dalit ‘messiahs’”. For detailed intervention see, *Atrophy in Dalit Politics*, ed. by Gopal Guru, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 2005. p. 5.

⁶ See M.S.S Pandian, , *One Step outside Modernity: Caste, Identity Politics and Public Sphere*, Economic & Political Weekly, May 4, 2002, pg. 1735-41

⁷ See

its declaration of autonomy⁸. The language which Nigam employs, seeks to resist the inter-subjectivity that constitutes modernity. It is in this sense that Nigam confirms his stand as postmodern as it rests on the vocabulary that involves irreducibility and incommensurability. Both, Nigam and Menon, in their collective work have mapped out Dalit emancipation in the celebration of consumption. Thus, this work suggests that the desire to become capitalist is the new turn which the Dalit movement is witnessing in contemporary times. The leading member of this club, Chandrabhan Prasad alongwith others like K.P Singh, chalked out Dalit emancipation by indulging it in the new agenda called Dalit capitalism.⁹ The self-styled radicalism of Prasad towards Dalit emancipation is described by himself in the following words that: “a few Dalits as billionaires, a few hundred as multimillionaires and a few thousand as millionaires would democratize and de-indianize capitalism. A few dozen Dalits as market speculators, a few Dalit-owned corporations traded on stock-exchanges, a few Dalits with private Jets, and a few of them with Golf caps, would make democratic capitalism loveable”¹⁰. Such instances in Dalit emancipation not only renders an anti-essentialist understanding of the Dalit category but also reduces it to a commodity which can be utilized for personal self-recreation.

This suggests that the understanding of the Dalit category among these writers is merely of political maneuvering and pragmatic value, where Dalit can with the selective utilization of their past experiences fulfill their personal agendas. This take on the Dalit situation may lead to an atrophy of the emancipatory thrust of Dalit politics.

Therefore, it would be important to critically account for the efforts that suggest a dissolution into postmodernist insignificance. For the retrieval of the Dalit category as an emancipatory impulse it is necessary to find out the efforts to locate the very existence of

⁸ See Aditya Nigam, *Secularism, Modernity, Nation: Epistemology of the Dalit Critique*, Economic & Political Weekly, vol.35, No. 48, Nov.25 -Dec.1, 2000, pp.4256-4268.

⁹ The genesis of Dalit capitalism can be traced in the *Bhopal Document*, where the efforts were made to make Dalit move out of the earlier phase of Dalit movement. This post-Ambedkar vision of Dalit emancipation wants to “liberate Dalit imagination from the grip of the “job-reservation” framework that had dominated the movement so far. It explicitly stated that the movement now seeks land redistribution and the democratization of capital. This meant, in practical terms, not simply a demand for “reservation in private sector” but more importantly, a need to give push to Dalit business” See Nivedita Menon & Aditya Nigam, *Power and Contestation: India Since 1989*, Zed Books, London , New York, p. 100.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 96.

the categories including Dalit on their universal/essential dimensions. This can be gathered by tracing the historical emergence of the categories in their very own context. This not only provides a clear theoretical baggage of the categories but also helps in defining its interactions, additions and modifications within the time periods. It is by keeping the essential of the category as a reference point that one can discern those qualities of the other categories which question the primary substance of the category Dalit itself. In other words, in order to move out of the discursivity of being Dalit one has to locate those other categories which are used for the same group that renders the possibility of being discursive, for example, reading Dalit vis-à-vis *harijan*.

The substance of the Dalit category seems to have been defined by Ambedkar in the year 1928 in his fortnightly publication called 'Bahishkrut Bharat'. For him "Dalithood is a kind of life condition that characterizes the exploitation, suppression and marginalization of the Dalit people by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes Brahminical ideology"¹¹. Here, the meaning of Dalithood marked as an outsider who was not consulted in the formation of his/her present and future and ruled by the divine impositions of the mythical pasts. Being outcaste from both the public and private domain or the material and spiritual has rendered them untouchable since they were emptied of the essence and substance of being called human. Therefore, the word Dalit in Marathi and Hindi referred as 'ground down', or 'broken to pieces'¹². Dalit, therefore is a search for gaining recognition of being called human through the subversion of the Brahminical caste-order. However, the approach and intention of subversion within the Dalit is of universal nature as against the particular.

One can read subversion within the Dalit which is suggestive of a political dimension of it; portrayed by revolutionary spirit against casteism and so forth against Brahmanism. This defines practical nature of the word Dalit. Whereas the ethical and moral dimensions of it described in its theoretical name called universal. Universality signifies the sharing

¹¹ See, Gopal Guru, "Understanding the Category Dalit" in, *Atrophy in Dalit Politics* ed. by Gopal Guru, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 2005. p. 67.

¹² See, Anupama Rao, "Who is the Dalit? The Emergence of a New Political Subject, in *Claiming Power from Below: Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India*, ed. by Manu Bhagavan and Anne Feldhaus, Oxford University press, New Delhi, p. 11.

of those values which can be categorized as imperatives. Dalits' sharing of the universal suggests, their retaining of values like Liberty, Equality and Fraternity both in the public and private spheres of communities. Therefore, the Dalit dimension of politics has a universal bearing which makes the concept dialogical and inter-subjective, because it is constructed throughout in history by constant interactions with the values of the similar logical class both from within and the outside. This substance of the word shows its openness to all those who share the similar utopia of disposing the imposition of particular i.e. Brahminical caste order in order take recourse into universal based on reason. Therefore, its language of dialogue holds the attitude of commensurability among those who share a similar theoretical approach. It does not confer the exclusion of those categories which further enriches the particular category and mutually commensurate with it. This is similar to what Kant referred as 'analytic' judgment¹³ where the different predicates¹⁴ are mutually inclusive to each and to the subject-concept and forms a true proposition through the laws of logic. Therefore, for Kant analytic judgments are "judgments of clarifications" as they clarify what is already implicit in our concepts¹⁵. The proposition that all Dalits oppose the caste system and untouchability is true through laws of logic. However, this proposition can be contradicted by arguing that not all Dalits oppose the caste system and untouchability. Well, this argument is not sustainable if one is not taking an anti-essentialist understanding of the concept Dalit, because in the essentialist understanding this argument is not logically possible and so forth not analytical. This suggests that once we know the meaning and ingredients of the concept itself then we can broaden its horizon by founding the similar vocabularies that can commensurate with it. Also in the Dalit discourse there are vocabularies which share similar meanings with the category Dalit. For Guru "these different categories in politics can be reciprocal, and hence, cannot be permanently in opposition to each other. In fact,

¹³ "An analytic judgment is true because its predicate is contained in its subject-concept". Paul Guyer, op. cit., p. 373. For eg. "All bachelors are unmarried" stands true because the meaning of bachelor itself means unmarried. Here the predicate unmarried is contained in the subject-concept bachelor. Therefore the proposition that all bachelors are unmarried stands true through their identity with each other. Ibid, p. 46.

¹⁴ Predicate is an expression that is capable of connecting with one or more singular terms to make a sentence. A predicate expresses a condition that the entities referred to may satisfy, in which case the resulting sentence will be true. For this reason a predicate may be thought of as a function from things to sentences or even to truth-values. See, Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 298.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 46-47.

these categories belong to the same logical class in as much as they share the same positive utopia of creating a society free from coercion, exploitation and dehumanization”¹⁶.

The following part is going to exhibit the same. Here I will try to show that within Aristotle’s framework of categories, the Dalit category stands as a category of substance. This I will show by using the distinction of essence and accident in the writings of Aristotle. This theoretical framework not only helps us in identifying the foundations of the Dalit category but also makes us realize its universal spirit against the particularities of identities like caste, class, race and gender.

II

In the Kantian framework objects are expressed by the language of judgments. It is judgments that decide the nature of objects. Therefore, for Kant knowledge cannot be constituted merely on the basis of intuitions. The observation of a particular object needs thinking and assertion and therefore requires an application of a concept to it. For Kant the “judgments about objects necessarily have certain characteristic forms, determined by what he calls the ‘functions’ of judgment. Finally, he concludes that all our concepts of objects must correspondingly have certain forms, which allow us to apply the forms of judgments to them. These forms are what Kant calls the ‘pure concepts of the understanding ‘or ‘categories’”¹⁷. Therefore categories in Kantian framework hold the promise of being objective and provide the “conditions of the possibility of experience”¹⁸ and hold an upper hand in comparison to experiences.

¹⁶ It I argued by Guru that the “Dalit category has not yet assumed an explicit character, and hence, has not closed its linkages with the other categories which also describe reality at different levels and therefore real.....In fact, these categories belong to the same logical class in as much as they share the same positive utopia of creating a society free from coercion, exploitation and dehumanization”. Ibid, p.107.

¹⁷ See, Paul Guyer, *Kant*, Routledge, London and New York, 2008, p. 71

¹⁸ Ibid.

In the Kantian Framework there are two different kinds of knowledge, one which is based on cognitions called *a priori* and another which is based on experience called empirical or *a posteriori*. *A priori* cognitions provide the possibility of making judgments independently of any insistence on particular experience. This means that such cognitions are based on the principles of “‘necessity’ and ‘strict universality’”¹⁹. One can argue that positive feature of *a priori* cognitions is that they are independent from the governing powers of intuitions. Kant defines the intuition as a “singular representation”, that is, one that represents a particular object, while a concept is always a “*universal*” (*representation per notas communes*)”, which represents properties common to many objects”²⁰. For Kant categories are called pure concepts of understanding and they are the providers of the possibilities of experience. They bear the status of universality and necessity and so possess the nature of objective validity. Therefore it is significant to locate those categories which can summarize the substance of the concept Dalit and at the same time decipher its being different from other concepts.

This raises a fundamental question, whether we should perceive the word ‘Dalit’ as a particular object or as a concept. For being a concept or a category in strictly Kantian sense it must possess the properties of universality and necessity. Understanding Dalit as a purely empirical or experiential cognition inevitably reduce it to particularity thus making it as ‘personal property under somebody’s possession.

To understand Dalit as a theoretical subject one has to figure out what makes it theoretical. The underlying idea here is to locate Dalit as a being which can be known by understanding the category that makes the being of Dalit. This directly led us to the theoretical structure in which one can grasp the character of word Dalit. Perhaps Aristotle’s thoughts on categories can explain it better.

Knowing the essence and substance of something was the central concern of Aristotle in his work on categories. For Aristotle it is through categories that one can decipher the

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 46

²⁰ For Kant “an intuition is ‘immediately related to the object and is singular’, while a concept ‘is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things’” Ibid, p. 54.

being of something. Aristotle's work on categories are divided into three parts: the *Pre-Categories* (traditionally called *Antepredicamenta*); the *Theory of Categories* (the *Praedicamenta*); and the *Post-Categories* (the *Postpraedicamenta*). Out of these three the first two are more significant than the third²¹.

Aristotle in his *Pre-Categories* has discussed the structure in which he described the nature of the relation among the properties and their relation with the subject which are hierarchical and differential. Precisely because of this reason he is critical of Plato's theory of Forms, where the participation relation of the subject with different properties is similar in each case²². Therefore, Aristotle's first complaint against Plato's theory of Forms is that "he treats the participation relation in which particulars stand to universals as univocal. Second, Aristotle implies that even if there were Platonic Forms, they could not all be on par with one another".²³ Aristotle's concern is to decipher the nature of relations among the different kind of things, which for him are not similar and have different consequences on the things. Like if paleness of Socrates in Plato's theory of Forms does not possess the same consequences as Socrates relation with humanity in Aristotelian framework. Paleness here is only an accident predicate in comparison to human, because Socrates can still exist when he no more remain pale, but the moment he

²¹ Scholars on Aristotle writings identified that this divisions signifies three main motives "the *Pre-Categories*, which seems to do the spade work for the theory of categories, though how has been disputed; the *Theory of Categories*, which delivers the theory of categories and treats the individual delineated categories in detail; and finally, the *Post-Categories*, which purports to provide guidance for ways to think about the categories and the relations between them". For the scholars the main thrust of Aristotle's theory largely emerges from the first two parts. See, Christopher Shields, *Aristotle*, Routledge, London and New York, 2007, p. 151

²² This is well explained by Christopher shields through an e.g. where the nature of two sentences with alike surface grammar and related to an individual. 1) Socrates is pale. 2) Socrates is human. For Shields "on one way of understanding Plato's theory of Forms, the deep structure of these sentences is mirrored perfectly in their surface structure. Suppose that each of these sentences is true. We may ask: what makes them true? What, that is, is the truth-maker for each? On the Platonic approach the answer comes up the same for both sentences: in each case we have an individual, a Form, and a participation relation. Thus: 1) Socrates- the participation relation- paleness. 2) Socrates- the participation relation- Humanity.....Let us suppose, for simplicity's sake, that this representation is fair to Plato, and further that the participation relation is in one way or another akin to a predication relation, and finally the Forms are abstract universals . then the picture is this: the truth-maker for 'Socrates is pale' is the complex of Socrates participating in the Form Paleness- that, the Socrates having the universal Paleness predicated of him, while the truth-maker for 'Socrates is human' is, analogously, the complex of Socrates participating in the Form of Humanity, that is, Socrates having the universal Humanity predicated of him. Crucially, on this Platonic approach, the participation relation is the same in each case. Further, as stated, there is no differentiation between the kinds of universal Forms there may be." Christopher Shields, op. cit., pp.152-153.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 153

ceases to be human, Socrates concurrently cease to exist. Therefore paleness is not same as humanity. This is the prime reason for Aristotle to locate the true understanding of things and their relation with something, which is not same for him.

Aristotle has explained this by using two types of predications *said-of* (*legetai*) and *in* (*en*)²⁴. This distinction of *said-of* and *in* produce four set of relations, explained through four categories. These categories are, Non-substance universal (e.g. Black), Secondary substance (e.g. human), Non-substance particulars (e.g. doctor) and Primary substances (e.g. x)²⁵. This makes a statement read as; x is a black human doctor. What is significant from the Aristotle's point of view is the nature of these properties and the relations among them. One can argue that black is an accidental property attached to x and human, it might be white or any other colour, but that necessarily and essentially do not change the nature of human. One can say that black is not an essential property of human, i.e. without black human will still exist. Similarly, without being a doctor, human can still exist. In other words one can say that a particular human called x is no more a doctor because he/she forget the knowledge that makes him/her doctor. That knowledge is not universal in nature it has a particular status, because x knowledge of doctor is not shareable and therefore not universal. In other words, the foundation of doctor is not substance and so they are non-substance particulars. It is their particularity that makes them non-substance²⁶.

²⁴ In Aristotle's own words "Among the things that exist, some are *said-of* a subject but not *in* any subject. For example, man is *said-of* a subject, the individual man, but is not *in* any subject. Some are *in* a subject but are not *said-of* any object. (By 'in a subject' I mean what is in something, which not belonging to it as apart does, cannot exist separately from what it is in). For example, an individual bit of grammatical knowledge is in a subject, the soul, but is not *said-of* any subject; and the individual white is in a subject, the body- for all colour is in a body- but is not *said-of* any subject. Some are both *said-of* and *in*. For example, knowledge is in a subject, the soul, and is also *said-of* a subject, namely a bit of grammatical knowledge. Some are neither *in* nor *said-of* a subject, for example, the individual man or individual horse; nothing of this sort is either in a subject nor *said-of* a subject". See, Aristotle, *Categories* 1a20-21b6. Quoted from, Christopher Shields, op. cit., p. 154.

²⁵ Pattern of this explanation through example is taken from, Christopher Shields, op. cit., 154-156.

²⁶ In another way this well explained by Christopher shields through an example of 'knowledge of grammar' as non-substance particular. For shields "both Jack and Jill have studied French. Both have reasonably good grasp of French grammar, but jill is a bit more secure and confident in her knowledge than Jack is. Still each has knowledge. We might speak of Jill's *knowledge of French grammar*, by saying that *Jill's knowledge of French grammar is superior's to Jack's*. In this sense, *Jill's knowledge of French grammar* is a particular sort of thing, something which Jill carries around with her; in the way that her pale complexion goes where she goes. It is in her, says Aristotle, not as a part of her, but as something that cannot be separated from her (Cat. 1a24-25). This suggests that Jill's knowledge is in her, as accidentally

At surface level one can see that human is also dependent on something which makes human as similar to doctor's knowledge of biology? However, we can still make a distinction between the two that a property doctor is not same as human. What make these two separate entities is the distinction of universal and particular or substance and non-substance. One can still be a doctor which varies according to the knowledge of medicine. Therefore, there are bad doctors and good doctors, because of the particularities of their understanding of knowledge of that particular field which can be quantified and qualified. Now is it possible to say same to human, i.e. good human or bad human? The answer is probably no because human is not a non-substance particular but in Aristotelian framework it is a secondary substance. Being calling a particular human good or bad depends upon the qualities that particular human possess, which is not similar to call someone a human. In other words x is accidentally a black and doctor but essentially a human. This will get clearer when we follow his text called *Theory of Categories* (the *Praedicamenta*).

The task of *Theory of Categories* is not much different from his work on *Pre-Categories*. In *Theory of Categories* Aristotle provides the division within the categories itself. These categories are substance, quantity, quality, relative, place, time, position, having, acting upon, and being affected. Their possible examples respectively are man, two-feet long, white, double, in the market, yesterday, sitting, has shoes on, cutting, and being cut²⁷. Out of these ten categories Aristotle gave the primacy to the category substance, which includes living beings like dog, man etc. because of being essential and not accidental as other categories are.

predicated of her, and depends upon her for its identity conditions. Such knowledge is not essential predicated of Jill, since she may easily lose her knowledge of French grammar through lack of practice; and it is certainly not predicated of Jack or anyone else in any way at all. So, an individual knowledge of French is not shareable, and hence is not universal, yet is not a completely autonomous sort of thing, since dependent on its bearer for its existence. An Individual knowledge of grammar is a non-substance particular". See, Christopher Shields, op. cit., p.155-156.

²⁷ This list of examples is provided by Shields. Christopher Shields op. cit., p. 157.

In Aristotle's categories *ousia* in Greek is referred to as substance, which he used both for essence and being²⁸. In Aristotle's framework substances are divided in two parts, they are primary substances and secondary substances. Primary substance "is a subject of properties but is not itself predicated on anything"²⁹. Therefore, for Aristotle primary substances are not objects and abstract universal forms but living beings like flesh-and-blood individuals³⁰. In the above example x is a primary substance. The reason is without x every other categories ceases to exist. This is the reason why Aristotle considered living substances as primary substances. Also, for Shields the Aristotle's primary substance is primary because "other things depend upon them, where as they do not depend upon other things. So, primary substances are primary and other categories secondary"³¹.

However, the combined reading of both *pre-categories* and *Theory of Categories* creates some kind of confusion regarding the difference between primary substance and secondary substances. The reason behind this is, that Aristotle does not produce any distinction between primary and secondary substance in *Theory of Categories*, here he only mentioned the category substance. However, one can still argue that the example which Aristotle gives for substance is man and horse in his *Pre-categories* he put *this man, this horse* in the primary substance and *human* in the secondary substance. What is significant here is that the essence of substance man is being called human; similarly essence of substance horse is animal. This makes a clear understanding that horse and man which Aristotle referred as substances in *Theory of categories* are primary substances and not secondary, as secondary substance for the same are animal and human. Therefore secondary substance in many ways refers as essence of substance itself. According to J.L. Ackrill, Aristotle described secondary substance as the "species and genera of primary substance and only later makes the point that they are said of

²⁸ According to Shields *ousia* for Aristotle "is an abstract noun, formed from the feminine participle (*ousa*) for the verb *to be (einai)*. Its root meaning is, simply, 'being'. In connection with the essences....For example, that this horse is an *ousia*, where the horse is not an essence, but the sort of thing which *has* an essence". Ibid. p.172-173

²⁹ Ibid. p.172.

³⁰ Ibid. p.156.

³¹ Christopher Shields, op. cit., p. 176. For Shields what makes a primary substance primary for Aristotle is "1. Everything which is not a primary substance is either *said-of* or *in* a primary substance. 2. If (1), then without primary substances, it would be impossible for anything else to exist. 3. So, without the primary substances, it would be impossible for anything else to exist". Ibid. p. 176

primary substance but not in any subject”³². If primary substance is man or dog then its genera is human and animal respectively. This suggests that for Aristotle the primary substance is a particular living being whereas secondary substance is the genera of that particular living being. The argument follows in this way that man and women are living beings but their genera is not animal or plant but human, similarly fish and dog are animal because their genera is not human but animal.

The difficulties with Aristotle’s categories is that though he made the distinction between primary and secondary substance but he does not made any distinction between primary qualities and secondary qualities³³. Therefore, often difficulty arises regarding the placement of certain concepts within the categories which sometimes lies in between both substance and quality. This will raise a question about the status of terms like Dalit, that whether Dalit is a category of substance or quality or whether in the first place it is a category or not. For Aristotle, according to Ackrill that, “what is relative is farthest removed from substance”³⁴. This is a strict test which Aristotle put on the categories to be covered in the substance. This suggests that for Aristotle the category of substance is not relative in nature and if Aristotle puts living individuals in the category of substance then he ruled out the differences among them because they belong to the same genera. Therefore, one can argue that the category of substance in Aristotle signifies the ontological equality among the human beings itself by virtue of being called human. This is significant aspect of Aristotle’s writings on categories which has clear bearings on his work on ethics. This will get clearer when we take his distinction between essence and accident³⁵.

³² See, J.L. Ackrill, *Aristotle Categories and De Interpretatione*, Oxford University Press, New York, pp. 81-82.

³³ Ibid, p. 76.

³⁴ Ibid, p. 81.

³⁵ One can refer that authors like Martha Nussbaum used Aristotle’s essentialism for the claims of ontological equality by distinguishing between essential and accidental components of human beings. For Nussbaum “One might, that is, believe that the deepest examination of human history and human cognition from within still reveals a more or less determinate account of the human being, one that divides its essential from its accidental proper- ties. Such an account would say: take away properties X, Y, and Z (a suntan let us say, or knowledge of Chinese, or an income of \$40,000 a year) and we will still have what we count as a human being on our hands. On the other hand, take away properties A, B, and C (the ability to think about the future, say, or the ability to respond to the claims of others, or the ability to choose and act) and we no longer have a human life at all. Separating these two groups of properties requires an evaluative

Aristotle's approach towards the explanations is dominantly essentialist in nature, which suggests that he prefers deeper definitions against the shallow ones. For Aristotle as put forward by Shields "a deep definition must be essence-specifying precisely because when we seek to understand what something is, we want to know what it is in its *nature*, and not merely how it may seem on its surface"³⁶

For Aristotle "we must inquire whether a thing and its essence are the same or different. This is of some use for the inquiry into substances; for a thing is thought to be not different from its substance, and the essence is said to be the substance of each thing"³⁷. If man is a substance then its essence is lying with being called human. If x is a substance term in the above example then the task of picking up the essence is also lies with the x. It implies that "if substance is linked to essence, then substance terms not only designate the metaphysically basic entities – they also pick out the entities which are primary with regard to knowledge. What is first in being is also first in knowledge"³⁸. This suggests that if primary substance is x then this primary substance x also picks up its essence which makes x as a substance. For Barnes priority "in definition" for Aristotle "is the sort of primacy which focal meaning introduces. Priority of knowledge amount to this: any knowledge which we may have about anything must depend on knowledge of its substance (that is to say, on knowledge of its essence)"³⁹. This is a significant move in the writings of Aristotle which has implications on understanding the social and political nature of human beings and more specifically on their ethical life.

Aristotle referred to essence in a similar fashion as substance (*ousia*). But for Shields, Aristotle is constantly looking for those features of kinds which he treats as essential.

inquiry: for we must ask, which things are so important that we will not count a life as a human life without them." See, Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism", *Political Theory*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 202-246, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/192002>, p. 207-208

³⁶ Christopher Shields, *op. cit.*, p. 99.

³⁷ Quoted from Jonathan Barnes, "Metaphysics", in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p. 100.

³⁸ Therefore for Aristotle "there are several senses in which things are said to be primary, and substances are primary in every sense- in definition, in knowledge, and in time" *Ibid*, p. 100

³⁹ *Ibid*.

Therefore, for Shields “ his approach to essentialism is non-modal: the essential features of a kind are not merely those features without which something would not be an instance of that kind, but must also be explanatorily prior to other necessary features of that kind. Thus, if rationality is the essence of human beings, necessarily human beings are capable of grammar, capable of laughter, and so on; these latter features are jointly explained by rationality, but do not explain it. Each of the latter is an instance of *proprium* ”.⁴⁰

For Aristotle as worded by Hutchinson that, “it is natural and right for us to develop into rational animals, and if we do not , then we might be living men, but we are not living *as men*; we might enjoy ourselves living, without *enjoying living*. The only way for us to realize our human nature is to realize our divine nature, and the mind is the divine element in us, by virtue of possessing reason, we can approach the happy state of gods.”⁴¹ This was aptly put by Aristotle when he said that “man deprived of perception and mind is reduced to the condition of a plant; deprived of mind alone he is turned into brute; deprived of irrationality but retaining mind, he becomes like God”.⁴² Aristotle considered man as a rational animal. One can refer that rationality here treated by Aristotle as an essence of human being; therefore, he talked about the correct and incorrect use of reason in his ethics in order to pursue a good life. It means for him reason is already embedded in human beings⁴³.

One can argue that why Aristotle treated human beings in the category of substance, primarily because without the existence of this substance the existence of other categories like quality has no relevance. The qualities define the characteristics and features of

⁴⁰ Christopher Shields, op. cit., p. 410. “In Aristotle, any property belonging to all and only things of a certain kind, but not part of their essence. Being the only creature that bears clothes is a *proprium* of human beings”. See, Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 307.

⁴¹ See, D.S. Hutchinson, “Ethics”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2006, p.196.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ For Aristotle “man is a rational animal, and he is at his best when he uses his reason in the best way. The correct and best use of reason is to know the truth. The dispositions of the mind which enable us to know the truth are called “intellectual virtues” to distinguish them from moral virtues, the dispositions of our emotions which help us respond correctly to practical situations”. Ibid, pp. 205-206. This suggests that the availability of the virtue in human beings is possible only through the availability of reason. The virtue here is relative in nature, for example the virtues of intellect are practical wisdom. Therefore the virtues here are qualities and they are not the same as the reason, because reason here referred as an essence out of which virtues takes place in human beings.

particular individuals, which Aristotle located in his work on ethics. Therefore ethics only suggests those things which are incidental for living a good life. However the existence of ethical life is essentially tied with the primary recognition of considering individuals as human beings or substance. If this recognition of ontological equality among human beings is absent then the task of ethics has no relevance at all. One cannot talk about human ethics by keeping animal or plant as primary substances. This is the reason why human ethics are essentially tied to the substance human only and not to the animal.

The ideas of Aristotle still have some relevance in modern times not only because of his ethics but the foundation of his ethics is essentially tied with the substance which he labeled as humans. This has relevance in those societies where the potentialities of being calling human are not actualized. The caste system and untouchability in India are the prime examples where the notion of substance like human are divided on the basis of accidental qualities. The most pernicious character of untouchability and caste system is that its foundations are built on bodies and not on minds; therefore there are touchable and untouchable bodies. Here the bodies are the prime movers against the mind and reason. One can say the universality of reason has no essential bearing in untouchability and caste system, the Brahmins are firstly pure bodies and secondly the reason possessors. It is by virtue of pure beings they are the holders of rationality. One can refer that even Aristotle who justified slavery on natural grounds did not count physical bodies as the markers of slave identity. For him, “under its material aspect, as body, nature cannot tell us who deserves to be a slave”.⁴⁴ Therefore, the reason in caste system do not holds universality but particularly attached to those who are pure.

For Sarukkai untouchability in Indian society is regulated by the notion of touch and un-touch of the skin. For him “the skin as the defining quality of a person means that a person whose skin is untouchable is himself an Untouchable (note the change from an adjective to a noun state in this process, the creation of a kind of people from an adjectival property of a skin); the skin as a “map of character and moral disposition”

⁴⁴ See, Jill Frank, “Citizens, Slaves and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature”, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 98 No.1 (Feb. 2004), pp. 91-104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4145299>, p. 95.

again illustrates how an untouchable's skin embodies certain moral properties; once untouchability is inscribed on an individual, then the impossibility of crossing the wall of untouchability. All these explain why it is touch that should be the primary sense in any such act of exclusion and proscription"⁴⁵. This is one of the essential dimensions of Hindu society, where the essentiality of human being is mapped out on the basis of pure and impure bodies. Therefore, for Sarukkai as put by Guru that "Brahminhood, as a part of this requirement, seeks not just the need to outsource untouchability to others, but most importantly, it involves a philosophical move to supplement untouchability into others"⁴⁶. The purity here is not only defined by the divine rituals but also regulated in common organic lives. In other words, the untouchability here is so deeply soaked that even the natural element like water, air and earth also do not remain unaffected by it. One can decipher that such despicable nature of untouchability and caste system reduced the ontological equality of substance called human beings through scaling down the accidental qualities like body and skin. The untouchability here occupied such a nature where animals can be touched but not human beings. One can see that the category of substance in Aristotelian framework the human beings in Brahminical society are not sub-humans but worst than animals.

I am aware that there are instances in Aristotle's writings regarding his justification for slavery, which in many ways stands in opposition to his category of substance. An obvious conclusion for his justification of slavery inevitably asks for the inclusion or exclusion of slaves in the category of substance. However, Aristotle did not excluded slaves from the category of substance, he treated slaves as similar to human beings, as they are similarly constituted by matter and form as other human beings are and so forth possess the capacity to reason. In his *Politics*, he made the distinction between human beings and the other natural beings as put by Jill Frank "on the ground that human beings alone possess *logos*, the capacity for articulate speech or reason. All human beings by virtue of being human, possess the first level capacity, including the slaves. It is in the

⁴⁵ See, Sundar Sarukkai, "Phenomenology of Untouchability", *Economic and Political weekly*, Vol. XLIV No. 37, September 12, 2009, p. 41

⁴⁶ See Gopal, Guru, "Archaeology of Untouchability", *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol. XLIV, No. 37, September 12, 2009, p. 49.

virtue of *logos* that human beings make choices about the useful and harmful, the just and unjust, the good and bad”⁴⁷. Aristotle justifies slavery only on the natural grounds, where human beings who essentially the holder of *logos* do not engage themselves in making choices for their lives. Therefore, for Aristotle “the one who possess the capacity for *logos* but consistently does not use it, engaging, instead, in activity that falls short of *prohairesis* activity, is a natural slave. Such person can have no share in ‘a life based on choice.....The deficiency of a natural slave is, then, his failure to actualize the first-level capacity for *logos* he possess”⁴⁸. For Aristotle “those who are deliberatively deficient owing to their consistent failure to use their *logos* are, for that reason, worthy of slavery and are, therefore, Aristotle’s terms, natural slaves”⁴⁹. This suggests that the distinction between slave and citizen depends on the *prohairesis* activity⁵⁰, which again is not permanent and stable.⁵¹

However, what is more appreciable about Aristotle is, his condemnation of man-made slavery, which for him is accidental and based on coercive conventions and laws. For Aristotle as put forward by Frank that, “those who are prevented from using their *logos*

⁴⁷ Jill Frank, op. cit., p. 96.

⁴⁸ Ibid. This is the prime reason for Aristotle that marks the difference between slave and citizen. As the identity of a citizen is a “product of making and doing, where doing is a kind of self-making (by sharing in the constitution, I make myself a citizen) and making, as the guided shaping by laws, education, and other institutions, entails citizenly doing”. Ibid, p. 94. This citizenly doing for Aristotle is entirely rests on making the use of reason which slaves have the potential to exercise but they do not actualize it.

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 96.

⁵⁰ “Choice, *prohairesis*, charts the course of a human life. It is the act of choosing one action instead of (or before, *pro*) another, namely, making a judgment about what to choose. It is Aristotle says the starting point or rule, *arche*, of action. As signaled by the prefix “pro”, *prohairesis*, in the Greek understanding, has an embedded character: The choices that initiate the actions people undertake are determined by their habits, which reflect who they have been and therefore who they are. *Prohairesis* activity, combining desire and intelligence, is characteristically human activity insofar as it discloses the character, the soul, and thereby, the nature of the one who acts, specifically by revealing the degree to which, in the actions he undertakes, the actor is using the capacity for *logos* he possess”. Ibid.

⁵¹ For Jill Frank the nature in Aristotle’s writings is not immutable. For Frank “Nature, Aristotle implies, cannot stand as a guarantee. Unable to sustain itself, it must, rather, be sustained by something else, namely, as the context of Aristotle’s discussion suggests, by politics. This is not to make politics prior to, or more fundamental than, nature or to say that nature is wholly political. It is rather to call attention to the complex relation Aristotle sets up between politics and nature. Human nature may be a measure of politics but the fact that that we are, in Aristotle’s terminology, naturally political beings suggests that human nature is also, at least in part, constituted politically. Nature is thus not immutable but changeable, and this means that the hierarchy it underwrites, though necessary to politics, will be changeable too”. For a detail account of this argument, See, Jill Frank, “Citizens, Slaves and Foreigners: Aristotle on Human Nature”, *American Political Science Review*, vol. 98 No.1 (Feb. 2004), pp. 91-104, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4145299>,

owing to conquest or coercive institutions, or those whose capacity for *logos* is damaged from birth or incapacitated later in their lives (through no willing nonuse of their own), are made slaves by force or accident and are, therefore, to Aristotle, not natural slaves at all. Understood by way of *Prohairesis* activity, nature thus distinguishes slaves from non-slaves but secures no absolute boundaries and offers no permanent foundations”.⁵² This is starkly opposite to the nature of caste and untouchability in Indian society, where the accidental slavery had acquired the status of being natural.

One can argue that the practices of caste and untouchability in Hindu society is one step ahead to the Aristotle’s thought on slavery, because here the *Prohairesis* activity is strictly tied with the *dharma* where the element of self-reflexivity about making choices for oneself is replaced by the duties. In other words, the existence of lower castes and untouchables are meaningful only in terms of duties and obligations towards the upper castes. In other words, the recognition of being human in Hindu society is based on one’s ascriptive or accidental identity which is permanent and immutable. The point is that it is intrinsic in the Hindu society that those who are born as untouchables and Shudras are by virtue of their birth are not the agents of their lives. But, for Aristotle, as put forward by Frank, “the actual determinant of slavery is “worthiness or character, itself a function of activity. Character, Aristotle continues will not justify slavery in perpetuity: whereas nature intends that from good men a good man will spring (and from a slave will spring a slave), this desire is often thwarted. A persons characters can therefore justify only his own enslavement, not that of his children”.⁵³ Therefore, Aristotle’s idea of human nature is not permanent and immutable but changeable as we all are the possessors of self-reflexivity and therefore we are agents, but when we are not engaging ourselves with this activity we are turned into slaves. But, one can refer that in Hindu society there are some who are naturally agents and others are forever their slaves.

For Charles Taylor a person is defined as an agent who has an element of reflexivity that makes them certainly an agent “who has an understanding of self as an agent, and can

⁵² Ibid, p. 96

⁵³ Ibid, p. 102

make plans for his/her own life”.⁵⁴ Therefore, for Taylor this reflexivity cannot be attached to animals like dog. For Taylor “what seems important about a person’s conception of self is that it incorporates a range of significances which have no analogue with non-person agents. For it is not just that we are aware of ourselves as agents that distinguishes us from dogs, say, it is more that we have a sense of certain standards which apply to us as self-aware agents”.⁵⁵ One can discern that this is the minimum requirement which is essentially tied with the human beings to call as humans in comparison to animals.

One can say that being a human in the Hindu society is not human but something which is determined by their caste particularity. Here you cannot say that x is human which is substance in Aristotle’s categories, but you say x is either Brahmin, Khastriya, vaishaya or Shudra and their another being which lies outside the categories of being called *atishudra* or untouchable. One can say that in the caste system these markers which at the surface level seems to be substances but at the deeper level they are merely accidental identities of non-substantial nature.

In this context one can argue that the status of word Dalit is not merely a political concept which can be easily tied with attaining power to reverse the position of ruler and ruled or in other words the reversing the hierarchies of dominance. Such understanding of Dalit merely reduces it as a concept of identity rather than as a category of substance. Fastening Dalit with identity questions its substantiality. Asking about the nature of being Dalit is asking about universal. It is not similar to being a proletariat, Brahmin, untouchable, white, black etc., as these are the accidental qualities which human being posses by being not a human but by an accident of being born in particular family, group, nation, culture, race, class, caste etc. When we use the term Brahmin and untouchable both of them feed on each other through a relationship of master and slave and both have recognition for each other. However this recognition is not based on being called human

⁵⁴ See, Charles Taylor, “The person”, in Michael Carrithers, Stevan Collins and Stevan Lukes (eds.) *The Category of Person Anthropology Philosophy History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, p. 263

⁵⁵ Ibid.

but some sub-type of human which essentially question the category of human as substance. What is significant about the category Dalit that, it question such categorization among the humans itself which is based on accidental identities. What is more significant for Dalit is to oppose this categorical mistake committed in the Indian society where essential got substituted by the accidental. Therefore Dalit signifies a search for being called human; it stands as a synonym of secondary substance in Aristotle's framework rather than some quality, class, group, race etc. It is because of its implicit nature of rebuking the imposition of accidental identity on the substance human makes it a category different from the other ones. Therefore, "this category is not a given one which can be pigeon-holed into a specific social group"⁵⁶.

It is the search for ontological equality primarily defines Dalit as a category of substance. There are instances in Dalit discourse where this search apart from the domain of politics was also made known at the metaphysical level. For Guru "all the organic bodies contain within them negative properties like, sweat, excreta, urine, mucus and gases. In the material sense, they are a source of foul smell and unpleasant feeling. Thus, at the metaphysical level, the organic body as the source of impurities suggests a kind of ontological equality- that everybody is dirty, both in amoral sense as well as material sense. Ontological equality suggesting equal distribution of these impurities or organic refuse sitting underneath the skin of everybody is supposed to bring out in very person a moral insight that in turn will compel him/her to acknowledge this ontological equality".⁵⁷ What is significant about such claims of ontological equality in Dalits is the marker of their universality which not only cut across the ascribed identities of caste,

⁵⁶Gopal Guru, "The language of Dalit-Bahujan Political Discourse" op. cit., p. 105.

⁵⁷ Gopal Guru, "Archaeology of Untouchability" op. cit., p. 50. This claim of ontological equality by dalit is further substantiated by Guru through another substantial category called *Panchamahabhute*. Guru argued that "everybody is respect worthy, simply because it is constitutive of five principles that are present in every organic body with equal quantity. These are earth, water, fire, air and *akasa* (space).....These five principles, which are naturally endowed with internal purity, form the necessary physical conditions for the every organic existence of any body. It is in this sense Panchamahabhute establish an ontological unity among bodies across time and space.....Thus, any cultural constructions dividing egalitarian bodies into pernicious gradation could be decisively refuted by invoking the metaphysics of body. Metaphysics of body, in turn, can create moral capacity among those who lack this capacity that is so necessary for assigning moral worth to everybody". Ibid, p. 51.

colour or race but also installs its substantiality across the territories and so forth rendering it a mutually desirable category.

What I had tried to suggest in this chapter is that by understanding Dalit as a category of substance one is not only transcending from the politics of victimhood to subject-hood but also in many ways ushering the most profound and at the same time rational and deliberative ethos to the whole humanity. Dalits attaining power and reversing the domination in many ways is incidental and practical to their material gaining, but at the same time one should not forget that this reversal of power relations essentially tied to their emancipation. What essentially describes the substance of Dalit is the recognition of ontological equality of being called human and similar to the others, which is necessarily devoid of any particular accidental identities like caste, class, race and gender. This not only demonstrates its nature of being universal but also confirms that it has foundations of humanity against the anti-foundationalism and anti-humanism of postmodernism.

CONCLUSION

In this work we have reflected upon the conventional and non-conventional ways of understanding Dalit emancipation. We have seen that the conventional one is coupled with the ideas of enlightenment and modernity that forms the philosophical legacies of both Jotirao Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar, the two thinkers of modern India. From the ideas of these thinkers it can be noted that an element of critical consciousness is the tool which advertently seeks the emancipation of dalits against the mythical and the in-human dictates of the caste Hindus established on the foundations of divine order. According to the perspectives of Phule and Ambedkar the universality and indomitability of reason stands as the substance for the emancipation of dalits. This thinking ultimately defines their sharing of universal against the urge towards essentialization of particular identity, which tied to a particular time and space. Therefore the ethical and moral claims in dalit discourse are not relative in nature and so forth perfectly substantiate their opposition to the postmodernist's approach towards emancipation.

In postmodernism, the debates about emancipation are relative in nature and their focal point of conversing with emancipation is 'a theory of relativity of the social'. Therefore in the framework of postmodernists vocabularies like difference, heterogeneity, discursivity, hybridity, anti-essentialism and post-foundationalism decides the course of emancipation. The result of such an approach invariably does not locate any determinate or fixed criteria of mapping out desirable or non-desirable emancipation. In fact, the language of Laclau and Mouffe i.e. 'universalism of indeterminacy' offers their route of emancipation. The postmodernists critique of universalism essentially portrays the enlightenment ideals as totalitarian and hegemonic, which they found inimical for the multiple and plural emancipations.

The postmodernists deploy a tool of deconstruction in their struggle against totality. As against totality, they suggest desirability of particularity. The formation and celebration of little and local narratives against the commensurable and objective nature of modern science acquire importance in such 'perspective'.

One can find support to such position in the writings of Foucault and Rorty, who also offer their critique of universalism of modern science. Their turn to the attainment of pure subjectivity is well regulated by the ideas of one's complete indulgence in the activities of 'cultivation of self' and 'redescription'. Therefore for the formation of pure subjectivity, their route of attaining emancipation subscribes 'politics of autonomy'. It is the Rortian fascination for seeking a 'poeticized' rather than 'rationalized' or 'scientized' cultures that recapitulates the aesthetic and cultural turn of postmodernism in the domain of social sciences.

The abandonment of 'communicative reason' as a source of human unification of Habermas in the later phase of modernity and its replacement by the subject-centered reason of Postmodernists like Rorty signals the siren songs of contingent view of emancipation in the contemporary times. In the Rorty's poeticized culture rationalists are substituted by the ironists. The present work, finds the post modernist work deficient in understanding the question of caste and untouchability.

It is argued in this work that both Rorty's and Foucault's ethics of vacillation do not offers much concrete in averting the structures of untouchability and caste system in India. On the contrary, such perspectives in many ways tend to open a new upsurge of conservatism identified in their cheerful celebration of ethnicism and localism.

One can dispute the postcolonial scholarship in India on the similar grounds, like the postmodernists it also relies on the ideas of inventing or re-searching those ways of lives which are incommensurable with the universal and dominant ways of living as ushered by modernity. Therefore postcolonial scholarship in India actively participates in the postmodernists relativist turn towards culture and aesthetics. Their animosity towards the European ideas is well described in their refashioning of the same through the local impulses; the example of 'alternative modernity' is one of them. Their

creation of such kind of hybridity of modernity against its essentiality regulated by some of those phrases which are both fashionable in contemporary times, such as, 'critical insider', 'non-derivative' 'outside the imperium', etc. commonality in these expressions suggests their inimical attitude towards the ideas derived from the west'. Therefore the postcolonial scholarship in India locates Gandhi's *sanatanism* of Hinduism as an alternative against the modernist-revolutionary spirit of Ambedkar located in scientific Buddhism. Moreover their anti-essentialist approaches towards the ideas of Ambedkar neatly but, wrongly portrays him as a man of heterogeneity and of 'dalit discursivity'.

The postmodernist focuses on the aesthetic and the cultural domain as the spheres of emancipation. There are large numbers of art practitioners and cultural activists belonging to Dalit communities. These artists do assert their voice through the artistic ventures, although they have meager resources. Therefore it becomes crucial for us to recognize their artistic vocabulary and their critical approach towards postmodernist cultural turn. It is argued in this work that the modernist approach is much feasible to purchase the best advantage of emancipation.

However, avowal of postmodernist language in artistic ventures is fashionable in contemporary art across the globe. Therefore it is the significant task of the art practitioners' belonging to the Dalit communities to set a shared definition of aesthetic which could be the guiding spirit for the upcoming generation. In order to achieve the true emancipation, the Dalit aesthetics must assert their distinctions from the hybridized oeuvres produced on the lines of revivalism or alternative modernity. In the contemporary times most of Dalit artists borrow their artistic vocabularies from the modern avant-garde movements such as Expressionism or Fauvism over the mythological or indigenous subject-matter. This language is not similar to some of the romantic and pre-modern poetic and figurative language deployed in the indigenous *yogis* and *sadhus* as popularized by D. R Nagraj¹. Therefore Dalit search of

¹ For Nagraj "the task of fighting the caste system had been one of the spiritual requirement of their tradition" D.R. Nagraj, *The Flaming Feet: A Study of the Dalit Movement*, South Forum Press, Bangalore, 1993, p. 4. Cited in Bali, Sahota, "The Paradox of Dalit Cultural Politics", in Manu Bhagavan and Anne

emancipation will not meet on the path of spiritualism but rather in rationalism. Dalit emancipation as explored in this work does not participate in the language of liberation of D.R Nagraj, who argued that “the liberation of the self from the phenomenal world was the spiritual goal, and both the arrogance and humiliation of the caste system were major obstacle in the path of moksha or nirvana”².

Such discursive turn in dalit discourse produced a fragmentary reading of the word dalit. Such understanding facilitated both transcendental and contingent view of dalit emancipation. This atrophy in dalit politics is the result of commodification of the category dalit itself. Rather exploring the essentiality of the category some of the self-appointed messiahs of dalit emancipation reduced the category to a pragmatic politics. However it is argued in this work that dalit search for emancipation dwells upon its claims of ontological equality. Therefore the essential way of understanding dalit category is not to fasten it with particular identity but to explore its dimensions in succeeding the universality of humanity through the approach of rationalizing the life-worlds. Perhaps, this universal dimension of dalit emancipation describes it as a mutually desirable category and so forth neatly fits with the category of substance formed by Aristotle.

In order to conclude the theme, it has been observed that wake of postmodern theories and its onslaught on the debates about emancipation and rationalism renders instability and tends to contest the theme of emancipation itself due to nature of its anti-foundationalism. Therefore the possibilities of conclusion in postmodernism are inevitably provisional rather than stable and determinant in nature and so forth merely a rhetorical practice.

The debates around dalit emancipation in the present context seem to be moving towards the state of banality. This is the primary reason why we are witnessing newer and alternative readings in dalit discourse, which in many ways represent an urge to transcend from the modernist legacies of earlier dalit discourse exhibited in

Feldhaus (eds.) *Claiming Power from Below: Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India*, Oxford University press, New Delhi, 2009, p. 190

² Ibid p. 191.

Ambedkar's ideas. However this work exemplifies its critical attitude towards such newer forms of understanding. Nonetheless at last the theme such as dalit emancipation in this work howsoever may sound banal, but it essentially represents the intelligibility and essentiality of dalit emancipation. Therefore the search of dalit emancipation is best identified in its utopia of universalism of not only in the model of a 'civilized society' but also in a 'decent society'.³

³ This phrase is taken from, Avishai Margalit, *Decent Society*, Translated by Naomi Goldblum, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1996.

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