

**DALIT INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE
IN MODERN ANDHRA:
A STUDY OF GURRAM JASHUA (1895-1971)**

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that this dissertation entitled "**DALIT INTELLECTUAL DISCOURSE IN MODERN ANDHRA: A STUDY OF GURRAM JASHUA (1895-1971)**", submitted by **Jangam Chinnaiah** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, has not been previously submitted for any degree of this or any other University. This is his original work.

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JANGAM CHINNAIAH

PREFACE

Since early twentieth century, there has been a strong assertion of dalit communities in various parts of the country in various fields such as the social, political, cultural and intellectual. But this has been a neglected area of study till recent times, so far, the studies have focused mainly on Maharashtra region. The other parts of the country including Andhra Pradesh have been mostly neglected. The analysis of Telugu literature reveals that in similar to many other parts of India namely, Maharashtra, Andhra also witnessed dalit confrontation in civil societal structures. In comparison to the political level, at intellectual domain the dalit intellectuals have asserted strongly and have made substantial contribution in the field of literature. It is in this context, Gurram Jashua can be viewed as the pioneer of dalit assertion in Telugu literature.

In this study an attempt has been made to look at the intellectual ideas of Jashua and his contribution to dalit literature. The study is divided into four chapters. The first chapter gives the historical background of dalit movements in India emphasising the movements of Phule and Ambedkar. However, it also seeks to contextualise Jashua in the overall assertion of

dalits in modern India. The second chapter looks at Jashua's confrontation with caste-Hindu society and also with his own Christian community. These experiences of Jashua at various levels of his life made him to rebel against inequality and inhumanity in society. In this background the intellectual formation of Jashua's ideas can be traced back to his own experiences in society.

The third chapter focuses on the untouchable representation in literary texts like *Maalapalli* (Untouchable Hamlet) and *Gabbilam* (Bat). In *Maalapalli*, despite his sincere attempts Unnava Laxminarayana could not get the pulse of an untouchable's life. In other words, he operated within certain limitations due to his social background as a caste-Hindu, and as a non-untouchable. However, in contrast to Laxminarayana Jashua gave fresh insights into the life and sufferings of the untouchables in literary texts as an experienced man. Further, Jashua's 'Gabbilam' can be viewed as a true dalit text due to its intimate identification with the oppressed community.

The fourth chapter deals with the literary and intellectual positions of Jashua. He represented an altogether new social revolutionary ideology in literary texts. In conventional writings Jashua was placed in lyrical poetry,

but the examination of his writings will not fit in that ideological stream. As an organic intellectual, Jashua contested Hindu-Brahmanical ideology and caste-inequalities in the society. Most importantly, he also launched a tirade against the perpetuation of caste differences within the untouchable communities. At the political level, however, Jashua had inconsistent ideas. On the one hand, he adored Gandhi as liberator and, on the other hand, he looked at Ambedkar also as liberator. In spite of these inconsistencies he can be viewed as a Gandhian nationalist for his emphasis on Gandhian liberation ideology. He also looked at Gandhi as an emancipator of dalits. Regarding Ambedkar he wrote only one poem and praised him for his struggle for the liberation of dalits.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the five thousand years of Indian history, the marginal sections of society were not only denied basic needs and human dignity but even their voices were not recorded in the historical writings. The historical writings in India were started by British administrative historians and were subsequently carried out by different schools of historians in different ways such as Nationalist, Marxist, Subaltern and Cambridge schools. All of them share one significant fact i.e., the neglect of the struggles of those really oppressed sections like 'Dalits'.¹ Even though the Marxist and Subaltern schools are aiming at the reconstruction of the history of oppressed and under-privileged sections, they did not give adequate space to the struggles

1 Dalit, Dalitism etc. are terms increasingly used within modern Indian political discourses particularly since the late seventies. These terms refer to the aspirations, struggles and politics of those seriously disadvantaged within the dominant caste system particularly refer to as the Scheduled Castes. The terms of disadvantage within this framework are untouchability in several dimensions and followed by numerous subtle and not-so-subtle forms of civil disabilities. While Dalitism as a separate concern of those suffering from the extreme forms of religio-cultural and socio-economic degradation is a recent origin the same was articulated part and parcel of the larger social movements seeking to abolish the caste system and ideology in total in earlier years.

of Dalits in their writings. Their main concentration continues to remain on working class and tribal movements.

The intrusion of colonialism in India introduced a variety of changes in many aspects of Indian life, from social, economic, political to the cultural fields. Among these changes the introduction of western education brought about major changes in Indian life. Even though the most important beneficiaries in its early stage were upper-caste privileged sections, it, gradually percolated down to the bottom sections of society like women and untouchables. It is this spread of western education among different sections of society which led to the questioning and re-evaluation of traditional Hindu beliefs and thinking from the point of view of equality, liberty, fraternity and democracy. It is from this historical background that Indian intellectuals emerged to counter colonial cultural and ideological hegemony and to rectify the evils in Hindu society.

The above mentioned intellectual response to colonial, cultural and ideological hegemony has created two types of intellectual. One was the Hindu upper-caste intellectual and the second lower-caste intellectuals. Origin of these two intellectual communities can be traced back to the same

historical point of time i.e., the 'Indian renaissance'. However, these two intellectual groups represented two different ideologies. The upper-caste intellectuals represented the idea of the 'national revolution with bourgeois and high caste traditions'² as its base. On the other hand the lower-caste intellectuals like Jotiba Phule represented the idea of 'social revolution with a peasant and anti-caste outlook which saw as its primary enemy the very elite',³ i.e., indigenous elites. In the arena of upper-caste intellectuals, Raja Rammohan Roy, M.G. Ranade, Bankim Chandra, Chandavarkar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Vidyasagar and Veeresalingam were prominent figures. These intellectuals advocated reform with the Hindu society to suit the changing needs of time. They never intended the revolutionary transformation of Hindu social structure but stood only for 'its modernization in other words revitalisation of the old society'.⁴ Contextualising the efforts of upper caste intellectuals Charles H.Heimsath points out as follows:

2 Omvedt Gail, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society - The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India: 1873 to 1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Bombay, 1976, p.100.

3 Ibid. .

4 Ibid. , p.99.

In India social reform did not ordinarily mean a reorganization of the structure of the society at large, as it did in West, for the benefit of under-privileged social and economic classes. Instead it meant the infusion into the existing social structure of new ways of life and thought: the society would be preserved while its members would be transformed.⁵

The issues taken up by these intellectuals like Sati, widow re-marriage, child marriage, education for women, idolatry and others were related to the upper-caste Hindu families and they 'had almost no meaning for lower-caste groups at the time they were undertaken.'⁶ Even the reformers themselves were conscious of this situation. For example, according to Chandavarkar, 'the customs and institutions with which the social reformers proposed to deal are common to the high classes of the Hindu society from whom lower classes take their stand.'⁷ As upper-caste English educated intellectuals their thoughts and actions represented their class outlook and 'functioned within the parameters of bourgeois liberal ideology.'⁸

5 Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Oxford University Press, Bombay, 1964, p.5.

6 Ibid. .

7 Ibid. (quoted from N.G.Chandavarkar's speeches and writings, p.54).

8 K.N.Panikkar, *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, Tulika, New Delhi, 1995, p.94.

As we discussed earlier, the lower caste intellectuals also responded to colonial cultural and ideological hegemony at the same historical point of time like upper-caste intellectuals. But the studies on lower-caste intellectuals has largely remained a neglected area. However in recent years there is a growing interest among different scholars to reconstruct the history of alternative cultural and ideological struggles led by lower caste 'organic intellectuals'⁹ like Jotiba Phule and Ambedkar. Similar to upper-caste intellectuals, these intellectuals were also very much under the influence of Western ideas of equality, fraternity, liberty and democracy. As 'organic intellectuals' of oppressed sections of the society, these intellectuals intended the revolutionary transformation of Hindu social structure in contrast to their upper-caste counterparts. Most of the writings

9 Gramsci classified intellectuals into two groups: the first category of intellectuals are 'traditional' professional intellectuals, literary, scientific and so on, whose position in the interstices of society has certain inter-class aura about it derives ultimately past and present class relations and conceals an attachment to various historical class formations. And secondly there are 'organic' intellectuals the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental class. The organic intellectuals are distinguished by their profession which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas of aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. (Gramsci, A., "Selections from Prison Notebooks, Quintin Hoare and G.N. Smith (eds.), Lawrence and Wishart (London, 1971), p.3. In this context Dalit intellectuals whosoever represented Dalit sensibilities will fall under the category of 'organic intellectuals'.

on the lower-caste ideologies and movements are centred around the above two intellectuals. However there are writings on contemporary movements also. It is in this context that there is a necessity for us to go deep into the understanding of the intellectual ideas of Phule and Ambedkar as they were the first and foremost people to articulate an alternative ideology during the colonial period. And we also have to look at the contemporary movements to connect it with Gurram Joshua's ideas in Andhra Pradesh.¹⁰

For studying the writings on the lower-caste ideologies and movements from colonial to contemporary period we divide do it in three phases: the first one under the leadership of Jotiba Phule, the second one under the leadership of Ambedkar, and the third the last deals with the post-independence period or contemporary era.

Among the different scholarly efforts on Phule's movement Gail Omvedt¹¹ had done quite an appreciable work. According to her the impact of colonialism on Indian society resulted in the emergence of new social classes. They were the traditional and the modern classes. The latter

10 Here I am dealing with contemporary movement, because Gurram Joshua (1895-1971) the intellectual with whom we are dealing was lived up to 1971.

11 Gail Omvedt, op.cit.

were industrial bourgeois, commercial bourgeois and new middle class intelligentsia, while the former were zamindars, Taluqdars, and native princes. She sees a continuous struggle between these two classes due to conflicting economic interests. Most importantly Omvedt argues that colonialism did not destroy the caste and other old forms of social relations, but its dominance itself was based on the perpetuation of these relations. However she looks at caste system in India as a cultural phenomenon on the basis of Louis Dumont's theory of 'purity and pollution' ideology. Like Dumont's, Omvedt sees the economic and political structure of Indian society as based on the caste system. This makes her argue that any economic and political transformation of Indian society should be based on cultural revolt which would destroy the caste system.

In tracing the origin and development of Jotiba Phule's movement and ideology, Omvedt locates the roots of Brahmin and non-Brahmin ideologies in nineteenth century socio-religious reform movements, where all India intellectuals responded to the colonial cultural and ideological hegemony. She identifies the beginning of non-Brahmin movement with the establishment of Satyashodak Samaj in 1873. But she consciously draws a

clear distinction between Jotiba Phule and other Brahmin reformers. According to her, the ideology of early Brahmin reformers represented the ideas of the bourgeois class and high caste traditions without aiming at a fundamental transformation of the Hindu social structure. On the other hand Phule's ideology represented the ideas of revolutionary social transformation with peasants, workers and untouchables as a base. However, Omvedt argues that Phule's anti-Brahmin ideology was not an off-shoot of British policy of divide and rule and instead it emerged from the idea of Indian renaissance combined with the idea of social revolution.

The most important outcome of the non-Brahmin movement in Omvedt's view was the emergence of caste associations and a non-Brahmin political party in 1917, i.e., Deccan Ryots Association. But she sees the failure of these two organisations in giving alternative political platform to Congress. In her view, caste associations failed due to their conservative efforts to sanskritise themselves and improve their caste status within the caste hierarchy. The Deccan Ryots Association failed due to internal feuds.

The other most important scholarly work on this phase is done by M.S.Gore.¹² He gives us an excellent insight in understanding the non-Brahmin movement from the sociological point of view. Gore argues that the realisation of caste inequalities and dissatisfaction with the existing social and religious beliefs was the product of innumerable factors, like, the presence of the British and the role played by Christian missionaries in providing critical assessment of Hindu religious beliefs and traditions. However, he says the varying response of different caste groups to available opportunities under British rule produced the radical thrust required to express a critique of traditional values and institutions. On the other hand Gore argues that Jotiba Phule was not the first to initiate the process of protest and non-conformity with existing beliefs and traditions. Before him there were many people who had expressed radical criticism. Among them Balashastrri Jambekar, Marathi Dyan Prasarak Mandali of Daboda Panduranga and Paramhamsa Mandali were prominent in Maharashtra. According to Gore, Phule was the first person to mobilise shudras and articulate the anti-Brahmin ideology.

12 M.S.Gore, *Non-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra*, Segment Book Distributors, New Delhi, 1989.

According to Gore, protest against Brahmin domination by backward castes was an outcome of specific historical and social conditions. He views that upper-caste non-Brahmin elites, like landed elites, did not protest because of their secure position as in earlier periods. But, on the other hand, from the middle class those who were acquainted with education and other new opportunities under colonialism from among the middle classes were confronting the Brahmins who consolidated their position both as ritual and administrative heads. It was from this specific historical and social background that conflict emerged under the leadership of educated middle classes.

While discussing the specific historical context of protest Gore argues that protest is likely to arise in a group that experiences the inequality of a given social situation rather than a group which perceives the inequality. And that is possible only when the protesting group has the ability to perceive the broader social context and interest relationships that give rise to its problem. However he feels that the social context (structure) is an important factor in deciding the success of the protest ideology, because, he argues, that ultimately scope for the success of the protest ideology would

be decided by the given social situation. Gore notices a great advantage for the leaders who were insiders of the protest compared to outsiders, without undermining the role of outsiders in the articulation and evolution of protest ideology. On the other hand he argues that the methods through which the protest leaders defied the existing beliefs provided the legitimacy for leadership and helped in mobilisation of support. However, spoken languages, folk tamashas and organizational networks of Satyashodhak Samaj played an important role in spreading the message and in mobilisation of support base.

While studying the non-Brahmin movement under the patronage of Shahu Maharaj, Gore finds some ambiguities and uncertainty in ideas of non-Brahmin movement. In his view, above were the reflections of heterogeneous social composition of the non-Brahmin castes. However, the main thrust of the movement was against Brahmin domination but they (non-Brahmins) did not defy the caste distinctions and Hindu ideological hegemony. In contrast they accepted the authority of Hindu religious scriptures and refuted the Shudra identity of the Samaj. In my view, it is

these contradictions which paved the way for the failure of Samaj movement.

Similar to Gail Omvedt, M.S.Gore also views the non-Brahmin political party as an offshoot of the non-Brahmin movement. The second phase under the leadership of Ambedkar, occupies a significant place in social and historical writings due to Ambedkar's social location (untouchable). On this phase also Gail Omvedt¹³ had done quite an appreciable work. The strength of her work lies in her efforts in adding a new perspective to the understanding of Dalit movements in India. According to her, Dalit movements in India emerged as ideological and political movements with the emergence of nationalist and Marxist ideological movements. But as she says, the nature of Dalit movements had suffered both from Marxist and pro-Congress nationalist interpretations. In Omvedt's view both schools have interpreted Dalit and anti-caste movements as divisive and dangerously pro-British. However she refutes these interpretations, by using the framework of neo-Gramscian theorists like

13 Gail Omvedt, *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr.B.R. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*, Sage Publications India Pvt.Ltd., New Delhi, 1994.

Laclau and Mouffe,¹⁴ Omvedt looks at the Dalit and anti-caste movements as crucial expressions of democratic revolution in India. She views anti-caste and Dalit movements as more consistently nationalistic and truly anti-imperialistic movements.

While studying the emergence of Dalit movements in Nagpur, Hyderabad, Andhra and Mysore regions, Omvedt argues that the ground for the emergence of Dalit movement was prepared through spread of education and social activities. However she identifies Nagpur as an important place due to its association with Ambedkar. Omvedt has devoted a major part of this book to the developments in Maharashtra. Dalit movements during colonial period, Omvedt observes had to confront three forces: pervasive Brahmanical order and its hegemony, the nationalist leadership of Congress which was trying to hegemonise every subaltern movement and finally the left-wing politics. She argues that the Brahmanical order and its orthodoxy fought against any attempt to disturb its historical advantage. On the other hand Congress was fighting for democratic revolution without intending the

14 According to them democratic revolution is a major global revolutionary ideology in which values of freedom, equality and autonomy are essential and go against any form of exploitation, subordination and inequality.

fundamental transformation of social structure. However Omvedt argues that by 1930s Ambedkar realised the futility of struggling to reform Hinduism and began to advocate a total repudiation of Hindu religion and turned towards Buddhism in his last stage of life. According to her, 1930s was an important period because the demands of working class, peasants, non-Brahmin and women were gradually being absorbed by the Congress to constitute a historical bloc against colonialism. Omvedt thinks that it was only the Dalit movement under the leadership of Ambedkar which managed to resist the Congress hegemony. Poona Pact of 1932 between Ambedkar and Gandhi about the issue of separate electorates for Dalits opened an irreconcilable breach between them.

Discussing the efforts of Ambedkar, Omvedt opines that he had recognized the natural link between caste and class, which was reflected in the formation of Independent Labour Party in 1936 as Dalits were mostly workers and agricultural labourers. In spite of its failure, the author quotes various instances like movement against Khot landlordism in Konkan and Bombay textile strike of 1936 as a way to unite caste class struggles. Omvedt defines Ambedkar's thought as Ambedkarism, which defined the

nature and scope of the Dalit liberation struggle. However, she finds similarities between Marxism and Ambedkarism. According to her both these philosophies identify the emergence of private property as the reason for exploitation and argued for the state ownership of basic industries. Assertion of an autonomous identity as independent from Hinduism and the dominant cultural framework of nationalism were important aspects of Ambedkarism.

M.S.Gore,¹⁵ looks at Ambedkar's protest ideology in the colonial historical context from a sociological angle. In this context he locates the emergence of protest ideology vis-a-vis the efforts of Hindu elites to consolidate all Hindu castes as a homogeneous community to demand political freedom from the British. Simultaneously the demand for social, economic and civic equality was gaining strength. In this historical context in Gore's view, lower-castes protested against Hindu elites for equality and the emerging consciousness about the equality has percolated down to the bottom of Indian social structure. However, in this historical context

15 M.S.Gore, *Social Context of an Ideology: Dr. B.R.Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*, Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1993.

Ambedkar had emerged as the spokesman of millions of voiceless untouchables.

In his meticulous presentation of Ambedkar's thought, Gore presented Ambedkar's views on Hinduism as a religion as well as a social system and the role of Brahmins in exploitation and oppression of untouchables. According to Gore, Ambedkar thought that the Hindu social order was not a free social order and it was based on the caste hierarchy which in turn was based on inequality and the denial of human dignity. However, Ambedkar viewed Buddhism as the ideal religion which recognised individuality and equality as the prior bases of any social order.

In spite of vivid description of various aspects of Ambedkar's ideology and its contextualisation, the book however suffers from some shortcomings. Gore's analysis of social movements within the functionalist view, by which protest movements are seen as part of continuous social processes does not go well with Ambedkar's ideology which argues for total destruction of the Hindu social order fundamentally based on caste inequalities and denial of freedom, equality and fraternity. Contrary to the functionalist assumption of continuity of social processes, Ambedkar's

ideology argues for replacement of the Hindu social order both at religious and societal levels by a democratic society based on values of equality of individuals, freedom and fraternity. On the basis of Gore's description of Ambedkar's ideology, the functionalist view with which he analysed social movements remains inadequate and contradicts the understanding of Ambedkar's protest ideology as social movement.

Eleanor Zelliott,¹⁶ while giving the historical background of the origin of untouchables protest emphasising on Mahar community argues that legitimacy for the modern protest movement was established in medieval Bhakti movement i.e., for example Chokamela and Eknath expressed their dissatisfaction with caste inequalities in the Hindu society. Regarding the evaluation of protest movement in the nineteenth century, she identifies six important factors. They were firstly the entry of British into Indian sub-continent which led to the numerous changes in the occupational structure, especially that of Mahars whose occupation underwent changes from village servants to the servicemen in military and also led to their migration to the urban areas for other occupations.

16 Eleanor Zelliott, *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement*, Manohar Publications, New Delhi, 1992.

In Zelliott's view it was these people who acquainted with new occupations emerged the champions of protest movement. However, she says leadership for the protest movement emerged outside the village structure which was the case with untouchable and non-Brahmin movements. The leadership was from among the middle class educated sections with an urban base and western oriented outlook. The second factor was that the grievances were understood and felt both by the elite members of the caste and the masses. Thirdly, legitimisation for the Mahar movement was acquired as a result of western values of democracy and the equality of men. The fourth, emergence of brokers who acted as a link between the caste and the institutions of power and modern channels of change, people like Jotiba Phule, V.R. Shinde were prominent figures for untouchables. Fifth was the evolution of modern means of communication like newspapers, both for the insiders (untouchables) and outsiders (non-untouchables). Finally protection given through laws and other channels to the protestors, who defied the traditional culture helped to sustain the movement. In emphasising the regional specificity of Maharashtra, Zelliott argues that Brahmins had enjoyed ritual and political power without giving any space to dominant non-

Brahmin castes to enter the political arena, which was also one factor for the evolution of protest.

While discussing the organized political protest under the leadership of Ambedkar, Zelliott thinks that he had played three important roles in his life time. They were, as a leader of caste, as a spokesmen of the untouchables and finally as the national statesmen. The greatest contribution of Ambedkar Zelliott feels was the politicization of untouchable communities through democratic forms of struggle. As all his efforts to achieve self-respect and equal opportunities at public places through temple entry satyagraha, water tank satyagraha failed to give positive results, he declared to leave Hinduism in 1935 which materialised on 14 October 1956 in Nagpur with his conversion to Buddhism. However, Zelliott sees three fundamental differences between the earlier conversion movements and the 1956 conversion. Firstly it involved one entire caste, i.e., Mahar, secondly they had not joined an established larger body like Islam or Christianity, but were building a new religious organization by retaining much of their social structure, caste loyalty and old leadership, and lastly the conversion had taken place among the people who were already involved in an independent

party in opposition to Congress. However Zelliott says that 1935 decision of Ambedkar to leave Hinduism had a political motive. It was an effort to gain political and social privileges for the untouchables like Muslim community. And it was also to create a separate identity and interests from the caste Hindu majority, and also the politicization of untouchables underlined by the need for self-respect. She sees the Mahar movement under the leadership of Ambedkar as western in its orientation. On the other hand in her discussion on literature, Zelliott says Ambedkar struggle gave inspiration and a mark of self-respect in Dalit Literature, even though it took organized forms through Dalit Panthers movement of 1970s.

Dalit assertion in the contemporary (post-independence) period in various fields like literary, cultural and political marks an interesting phenomenon. Giving an idea about their growing assertiveness through various angles and also the violence against Dalits due to their conscious assertion against inequality and exploitation in contemporary India, Barbara Joshi¹⁷ points out the difficulty in giving accurate date for the beginning of modern Dalit revolt. But Joshi traces the beginning of consciousness

17 Barbara R. Joshi, *Untouchable! Voices of the Dalit Liberation Movement*, Selectbook Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1986.

among Dalits to revolts in three major aspects. One was the attitude and influence of British officials. Second was the effect of missionary activities on local untouchable communities. The last was the growing realisation among all Indians including Dalits. However, she views education as the most important factor in the rise of consciousness.

Most important aspect in this book is an article on the formation of Dalit identity, and culture by Gangadhar Pantawane. He argues that inequality and untouchability have been the source of Dalit culture in India. He also argues that the word Dalit does not represent a caste but it is a symbol of change and revolution. However, he emphatically talks of Dalitness as an essence of achieving cultural identity and source of confrontation. Pantawane defines Dalit literature as a literature of the deprived, depressed, oppressed and suppressed people of India. He disagrees with the notion of identifying evolution of Dalit literature with Chokanela, an untouchable saint of thirteenth century Bhakti movement. In his view Ambedkar was the source of the modern Dalit movement and literature.



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On the other hand Joshi identifies the themes of Dalit poetry as rejection of Hindu Brahmanical hegemony, self assertion of identity and the presentation or humanity of the Dalit culture. However, Joshi argues that self-criticism and protest are other equally important themes which aims at the destruction of slave-mentality of the weaker sections. She also presents a poetry written by Dalit Panthers of Gujarat, which signifies the militant assertion of Dalit identity and the struggle. According to the Dalit Panther writers, their organization represents the disillusioned generation conscious of its plight, sufferings and aspiration of its people.

Ghanshyam Shah¹⁸ argues that Dalit movements in colonial and post-colonial times were centred around the issue of untouchability. And most of the studies on Dalit movements were centred around Ambedkar. He emphasises the need to concentrate on the other untouchable leaders, and points out the lack of national level work on Dalit movements.

Shah has classified Dalit movements into two categories, one reformative and the other, alternative movement. The former tries to reform the caste system to solve the problem of untouchability, while the latter

18 Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movements in India: A Review of Literature*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1990.

attempts to create an alternative socio-cultural structure through conversion to other religions or through educational and political means. On the other hand Shah says that in a number of places untouchable agricultural labourers have participated in peasant movement both in colonial and post-colonial times. But none of the studies on peasant movements highlighted the role of Dalits. Equally baffling is the lack of studies on the organizational set-up and leadership in Dalit mobilisations and the paucity of studies on social and economic stratification among Dalits.

Gopal Guru¹⁹ made an effort to evaluate the existing literature in sociology on Dalit movements. He argues that dominant sociological studies viewed Dalit protest as a necessary outcome of an obscurantist Hindu tradition with its deep rooted prejudice against the Dalits. This view was represented by M.S.A. Rao, Barbara Joshi, Harold Issacs, Owen Lynch, James Silverberg, Sachidananda, Anil Bhat and Cohen. These writers assumed that Dalit movement was limited to achieving the advancement in social, economic, civic and political fields within the existing order without any idea of radical transformation in other aspects. Concepts like social

19 Gopal Guru, "Dalit Movements in Mainstream Sociology", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.28, no.14, 1993, pp.570-3.

✓
mobility and relative deprivation dominated their analysis, which were quite inadequate to capture reality at practical level. Gopal Guru thinks that former view distorted the understanding of Dalit movements in mainstream sociology.

In Guru's view the present scenario is highlighted by three major developments: the total marginalization and annihilation of the rural Dalits, hinduisation of Dalit masses and the growing crisis of Indian welfare state. These seem to question the theoretical validity of the conceptualisation as a form of consciousness. Given the happenings in rural areas, the upper caste/class forces are committing atrocities on Dalits and Dalits are alienated from resources like land, water and other agricultural implements. They do not find access to either natural or human resources and feel totally marginalised from the so-called decentralization of political power in rural India. He concludes by saying that it is the perception of total exclusion from the development process that forces the Dalits to protest in the most militant way as in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Maharashtra.

Our understanding of the writings on lower-caste movements and ideologies, particularly related to Dalits in modern India, have revealed that

most of the writings so far have been centred around Phule and Ambedkar. The studies on other parts of the country are yet to begin. However in this context South India generally and Telugu country (Andhra Pradesh) particularly had represented an enormous intellectual and ideological confrontations regarding the caste inequalities and other oppressive institutions of Hinduism. During medieval period Vemana and Yogi Potuluri Veerabrahman had propagated anti-caste ideology. They also urged institutions in Hindu social and religious spheres. Potuluri Veerabrahman²⁰ had also organized the untouchables (Madigas). In modern Indian history, even though the Telugu country did not witness intense political activity by Dalits both in colonial and post-colonial times like in Maharashtra, except Bhagya Reddy Varma's movement in Hyderabad but certainly the study of writings of different Dalit intellectuals will reflect the confrontation at various levels intellectual and literary fields. These were like Jala Rangaswamy, Gurram Jashua, Bhoi Bheemanna, Kusuma Dharmanha and Bhagya Reddy Varma. These intellectuals as 'organic intellectuals' of their countries represented the anger, agony, humiliations,

20 Stephen Fuchs, *Rebellious Prophets: A Study of Messianic Movements in Indian Religion*, Asia Publishing House, Madras, 1965, pp.260-4.

caste oppression and discrimination and Dalit sensibilities in their writings. However they also negated the Hindu-Brahmanical ideological hegemony and asserted the self-identity and self-respect for Dalits. It was these intellectuals provided the basic ground for the emergence of Dalit literature in Andhra Pradesh. It is in this context to give an idea of self-expression and intellectual dissent Dalit intellectuals, we are focussing on the intellectual discourse of the father of Dalit literature in Andhra Pradesh, i.e., Gurram Joshua.

CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY OF AN 'ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL'

Generally speaking in caste-Hindu society 'untouchables were segregated and treated as virtual slaves in the villages.'¹ They were denied access to public spaces like roads, water tanks, schools, temples and treated worse than animals.² In Ponnur village an untouchable was beaten up seriously and looted by Vaisyas because in thirsty mood he had drunk water from a public place.³ In another instance in Tenali an untouchable marriage procession was attacked by caste-Hindu Telugas because they have passed through the main road of the village.⁴ However in spite of these sort of horrifying references, in reconstructing the social and cultural history

1 V.Ramakrishna, *Social Reforms in Andhra*, Vikas Publishing House Pvt.Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p.7.

2 According to Rao Bahadur M.C.Rajah's 'The Oppressed Hindus' Huxley Press, Madras (not dated). p.6. "When an Indian of any other caste permits a pariah (untouchable) to speak to him, this unfortunate being is obliged to hold his hand before his mouth, lest the (caste) Indian may be contaminated with his breath; and if he has met on the highway, he must turn on one side to let the other pass. If any Indian whatever even a chourie by accident touches a Pariah he is obliged to purify himself in a bath." This account has been quoted from Sonnerat's voyage to the East Indies, which is hundred and fifty years old.

3 Andhra Patrika, June 7, Tuesday 1939, p.3.

4 Ibid.

of untouchable communities in India in general and Andhra in particular one has to face the problem of paucity of sources. Most of the existing writings have revolved around the dominant sections of society and their social, economic, political and cultural life has been constructed as the history of the people as a whole. Untouchables were 'invisible' in dominant historical writings and they were represented (constructed) by sympathetic caste-Hindus (elites) like Gandhi, Unnava Laxminarayana and N.G.Ranga. We hardly come across writings by untouchables themselves about their life and experiences. That is why Teresa Hubel has rightly viewed that 'rarely do we see them from their own points of view and hear their own voices.'⁵ *

However, due to numerous historical factors early twentieth century in Andhra had witnessed an interesting phenomena i.e. the emergence of a Dalit intelligentsia. This included people like Jala Rangaswamy, Bhagya Reddy Varma, Kusuma Dharmanna, Bhoi Bheemanna, Nakka China Venkaiah and Gurram Jashua. These intellectuals have confronted Hindu-brahmanical ideology and caste inequalities and also articulated Dalit * sensibilities at various levels. Among these intellectuals Jashua had written

5 Teresa Hubel, *Whose India*, Leicester University Press, London, 1996, p.148.

very extensively on the sufferings of untouchables in different levels like social, economic, cultural, religious and psychological. Also he articulated a very systematic critique of Hindu-brahmanical ideology, rituals and belief systems. On the other hand he was the only intellectual who kept record of his encounters at various stages in his life. In this context Jashua's autobiography is not just the history of his own experiences but it represents the feelings and sufferings of the community which had been denied basic human needs and dignity for centuries. To link up his personal experiences with his literature, we are dealing with his biography.

Jashua was born on 28 September 1895 in Vinukonda, Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh. His father Veeraiah was a Golla⁶ and mother Lingamamba was an untouchable (Madiga). Both of them were converted Christians, Veeraiah worked in a church as a Father. However he was excommunicated from his caste due to his marriage with an untouchable. That is why he had spent all his life as an untouchable. But untouchables'

6 *Golla* is a backward caste in Andhra Pradesh. In caste hierarchy they are placed under shudra category and they are touchable caste. For more details see, Edgar Thurston and K.Rangachari. 'Caste and Tribes of Southern India', Government Press, Madras, 1909, pp.284-96. According to them the social status of Gollas is fairly high for they are allowed to mix freely with the *Kapu*, *Kamma* and *Baliya* castes and the *Brahmins* will take buttermilk from their hands. The hereditary occupation of *Gollas* is tending sheep, cattle and selling milk (184-5).

conversion to christianity did not bring any fundamental change in their social status, they were continued to be treated as untouchables and their old identities and discriminations against them have been perpetuated in civil societal structures.⁷ In fact 'many christian converts from the depressed classes are in no way better than their friends left in Hinduism.'⁸ Jashua had inherited the same social status and disabilities like his fellow untouchables by birth itself. Because of his parents' association with Christian missionary he was educated and employed in a Christian missionary school. Later he was excommunicated from Christianity and thrown out of job due to his reading of Hindu religious texts and also for questioning illogical practices among his fellow Christians. On the other hand he had bitter experiences with caste-Hindu society also. However, these encounters with both the communities made him a rebel against the inequalities in society. To get a pulse of his life in its social and historical context we are dealing with his experiences.

7 G.A. Oddie, Christian Conversion in Telugu Country 1860-1900: A Cast Study of One Protestant Movement in the Godavary-Krishna Delta, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol.12, no.1, January-March 1975, pp.61-79.

8 *The Census of India (1931)*, vol.14, Madras, Part I Report, p.345.

Childhood Experiences

Jashua had encountered caste discrimination at an early state of his life as a child. And he was able to identify the inhumanity of the practice of untouchability and revolted against it even as a child. This encounter he lamented as

One day I am walking on the street
In a crowd by recognizing me
A Vaisya boy asked me not to touch him
With this I got angry and beat him⁹

After this incident Jashua went and told it to his mother. However she explained to him the real life situation of untouchables in the following way. As Jashua says:

I cried and told it to my mother
She kissed me and said
Oh my son in this frightening world

9 Gurram Jashua, *Naa Katha* (My Story), (Autobiography of Jashua), Jashua Foundation, Vijayawada, 1996, p.37.

Panchamas (untouchables) were denied of food,
humanity and life.¹⁰

According to Jashua after the completion of his fifth standard in missionary school, he went to government school where caste-Hindu students were in majority and teachers were also caste-Hindus. As he explains at that time schools were not thrown open to the untouchables. However untouchable students were discriminated and treated badly both by students and teachers. Jashua described the attitude of teachers and students and also discrimination shown even in providing basic facilities below :

"All the teachers were caste-Hindus; they were very
angry and used to hate us

They never had any sympathy for us

In classrooms, especially for us, equal to the
ground the old benches

A separate space to keep our slates, books and
pieces of chalk.

Whenever our teacher gets angry on us

10 Ibid, same page.

Our untouchable status used to prevent him from
beating us

Indirectly we used to be saved by our status.¹¹

On the other hand Jashua also expressed his mental agony as a child,
when he was banished from playing with his fellow caste-Hindu students as
like this.

All Caste-Hindu boys without any discrimination
Freely used to play like brothers
By seeing them I used to feel pained.¹²

Jashua's Struggle as a Young Poet

As an untouchable Jashua had encountered discrimination in society,
classroom and play ground. Thus discrimination did not end with his
childhood. But even in his later stage, when he was aspiring to become a
poet the actual struggle in life had started for him. Inspired by great Telugu
poets of his time like Tirupati Venkata Kavulu and Koppurapu Kavulu he

11 Ibid, p.46

12 Ibid, p.46

started his Odyssey as a poet. This journey was not any easy task for him, he faced many ups and downs, some human hearts extended helping hands to him.

As Jashua describes, it seems once when he was very young the poet Koppurapu Subbarao had visited Vinukonda. In his honour a public meeting has been organized by caste-Hindus. Thus Jashua, as an admirer of Subbarao, wrote some poems on him and was very eager to present them to him. With the help of one *brahmin* friend Jashua was able to fulfil his desire. Impressed with this Subbarao had appreciated Jashua. But suddenly there was an uproar over Jashua's entry into the meeting. Many of the caste-Hindus boycotted the meeting and scolded the brahmin friend of Jashua. With this unexpected reaction of caste-Hindus Jashua felt humiliated and with lot of guilty feeling he went out off the meeting. Jashua described this humiliating experience as follows:

How did an untouchable enter this meeting

By making uproar

Some people boycotted the meeting

They scolded me and looked at me like angry cobras

With this I went out of meeting with lot of guilty
feeling¹³

While Jashua was trying to write poetry at his young age, one day he had met one Vaishnavite priest and recited his poetry. After listening to his poetry the priest said 'except brahmins, other caste-men should not write poetry and it is a crime to do so.' And he also warned Jashua like this-

According to Hindu Purana Dharma Shastras

In place of brahmins

If an out-caste man writes poetry

There is no sin in killing him.¹⁴

In this way Jashua had invited the wrath of caste-Hindu society by writing poetry. Not only that, many people refused to become Jashua's guru (teacher). It was only Jupudi Hanumachastri who taught him some Sanskrit.¹⁵

Hemalatha Lavanam (Jashua's daughter) says that Jashua had developed his rebel consciousness against inequality and inhuman practice

13 Ibid., p.61

14 Ibid, p.57

15 Ibid, p.51.

of untouchability from childhood itself. According to her Jashua was denied an entry into the play ground by a caste-Hindu boy. Angered with that Jashua had given one tight slap and told that boy 'brother! this slap is not for you but it is for your caste discrimination.'¹⁶ Endluri Sudhakar has interpreted this incident meticulously like this 'Jashua as a child had given a tight slap against caste discrimination and as a poet he had given *Gabbilam* (Bat), which is much more powerful ideological slap to the caste-Hindu society as a whole.'¹⁷

Jashua's Experiences as a Poet

Jashua's encounters with caste discrimination did not end with his childhood. Even after he established himself as a great poet, he encountered the same humiliation and discrimination. Once it seems when he was travelling in a train, one man by looking at books in Jashua's hands recognized him as a poet and asked him to recite some poetry. After hearing Jashua's poetry that man applauded Jashua and appreciated poetic

16 Hemalatha Lavanam, *Maa Nannagaru* (Our Father), Glimpses of Poet Jashua's Life, Insaf printers, Vijayawada, 1995 (Sixth Reprint), pp.18-19.

forms and its narrative styles. Unexpectedly that man asked about Jashua's caste. Jashua replied 'I am a Christian.'¹⁸ Immediately that man said 'Saraswati (Goddess of learning) got polluted and left the place.' This unexpected incident hurt the sentiments of Jashua and he felt humiliated. Jashua described this painful experience to Venkatagiri Raja like this-

'By looking at my poetic abilities and beauty

of its forms

He applauded me and enquired about my caste

While knowing my Caste, he said Saraswati got

polluted

And left the place

I feel pained and humiliated to recount such

incidents'¹⁹

Jashua was not just humiliated by a layman in a train. He faced some discrimination even from the so-called learned scholars (poets). In one

18 In general Christian identity has been associated with untouchables. So anybody who hears a Christians suspects him to be an untouchable. Please see foot note 7.

19 Gurram Jashua, *Kanda Kaavyamu* (First Part), Jashua Foundation, Vijayawada, 1994, p.64.

poetic concert in Kakinada in front of great Telugu poets like Tirupati Venkata Kavulu and Tripuraneni Ramaswamy Choudhary one poet humiliated Jashua by referring to his caste. For that Jashua asserted his self-confidence and dignity and gave a strong reply to that caste-Hindu poet like this-

The crows who were not equal to seashell

With jealousy tries to humiliate me

But the talent which I developed will never leave me

I will sing poems like a bell

And present them to people of Andhra like

flowers.²⁰

In his long journey as a poet Jashua faced many humiliations and a lot of opposition from caste-Hindu society. In spite of such bitter experiences, some caste-Hindu sympathizers were always behind Jashua and helped him in many ways. Jashua acknowledged them very promptly. Those were like

20 Gurrām Jashua, *Naa Katha* (My story), Jashua Foundation, Vijayawada, 1996, p.152.

Veeresalingam Pantulu,²¹ Joopudi Hammachastri,²² Toleti Subbarao,²³
Dipala Pichaiah Shastri²⁴ and Kashinatha Nageshwara Rao.²⁵

Jashua had confronted with caste-Hindu society in many ways. At one level the conservative caste-Hindus were angry at him because of his reading of Hindu religious texts and also due to the violation of caste code of Hindu social and religious life which prevents other-castes from learning. In other words learning is a monopolistic occupation of the brahmin caste. Thus Joshua's (an outcaste's) reading and writing certainly must have invited the wrath of caste-Hindu society. Even after his establishment as a great poet many caste-Hindu writers could not digest the achievements of Jashua. Finding it difficult to challenge Jashua in literature many of them took his caste as an excuse to humiliate and to under-play him. Quite surprisingly great poet like Sri Sri had commented on Jashua very harshly and viewed

21 Jashua met Veeresalingam Pantulu in Rajamundry and sought his blessings, *Naa Katha* (My Story), p.79.

22 He taught Jashua *Kalidasatrayn* (related to Sanskrit).

23 He appreciated Jashua's poetry and recommended a job for him as a teacher. Ibid, p.76.

24 With him Jashua wanted to write a poetry.

25 He published Jashua's poems in 'Bharati' monthly and supported Jashua financially.

him as secondary poet (Upakavi in Telugu).²⁶ Facing all the hurdle Jashua proved himself as a literary genius and conquered the Telugu literary world.

Jashua's Struggle with Christianity and Poverty

Even though Jashua was born a Christian, he had bitter experiences within the Christian community in ways similar to the caste-Hindu society. In childhood itself Jashua had understood the contradictions among Christian followers and started questioning their hypocritical attitudes. He described contradictions among his fellow Christians like this-

I promptly followed the principles of Christianity

But seeing the difference between the preaching

26 Chalasani Prasad (compiled), *Sri Sri Vyulu Rivyulu* (Views and Reviews of Sri Sri), Virasam Publications, Hyderabad, 1992, pp.121-22.

In one of his book reviews in *Bharati* monthly, March 1938, Sri Sri had viewed Jashua as secondary grade poet (*Upakavi*, p.121). Interestingly in the same review he kept Vishwanatha Satyanarayana and Krishna Shastri in very high esteem. Ironically Vishwanatha represented the most conservative Hindu brahmanical ideology, which aims at the preservation of Varnashrama Dharma in society. His famous novel 'Veyee Padagalu (Thousand Hoods) is a classic example of what actually he represents. That is the above ideology. However, Krishna Shastri as a lyrical poet wrote very extensively on love. But in contrast to the above two writers. Jashua's writings have been revolved around the life and sufferings of the oppressed sections, i.e., Dalits. For more details on Vishwanatha and Jashua's ideology see, B.Vijaya Bharati, "Jashua... Gabbilam-Vignana Spoorti" in S.V.Satyanarayana (ed.), *Jashua Sahiti Prasthanam*, Vishalandra Publications House, Hyderabad, 1995, pp.13-22.

and practices of Christian devotees

My mind is disturbed very much.²⁷

Not only that, Jashua had identified contradictions among Christians about their real life attitudes and what they preached in church. Especially he had questioned the church fathers fearlessly like this-

For laymen they will preach as

We are all equals

But they will never practice equality in reality

I argued with them many times about this without

any fear.²⁸

For Jashua's questions church fathers used to look at him angrily and ask him to keep quiet. It was the attitude of even his fellow Christians. But he used to ask them about the real problems of untouchables like this-

Oh lords and liberates

Food and clothes are not in scarcity

Without equality, what is the use of education,

27 Gurrām Jashua, *Naa Katha* (My Story), Jashua Foundation, Vijayawada, 1996, p.20.

28 Ibid, p.21.

thousands of religions and hundreds of rituals.²⁹

Even as a child Jashua had questioned the illogical practices among Christian followers. In this context Jashua's intellectual ideas were the products of his everyday experience in society from early age onwards. After the completion of his education (not mentioned which class), he started working in a missionary school as a teacher. Simultaneously he also started his life as a part. To get a better understanding of literature he also started reading Hindu religious texts. On the other hand he wrote some poems on themes related to Hindu puranic literature like *Dhruva Vijayam* and *Himadhamarka Parinayam*. This resulted in an uproar in his community and ultimately he was ex-communicated from Christianity. They suspected and alleged that Jashua's writings and readings have been indirectly contributing to the propagation of Hindu religion. This aspect of his ex-communication Jashua lamented like this.

Those (Christian fathers) who plants the seeds of

fear

Saying that by birth we are all sinners

29 Ibid.

confidence

ately resulted in my excommunication.³⁰

When Jashua's father did not allow him to enter home due to his job as a Father in church. In this situation Jashua stayed in an old mosque. Simultaneously they (missionaries) were removed from the teacher's job. By this time Jashua also got a heavy burden as an important burden for him. Due to his excommunication he had suffered both at societal and personnel levels. This is the example he described as follow.

teacher job

that, I also lost respect in society

and also my enthusiasm

attached family burden

in villages and towns in search of a

job.³¹

This way Jashua's life was full of struggles. He had bitter experience with both Hindu and Christian conservatives. The other end of his problems were economic. Like all his fellow untouchables of Indian society he was also from a very poor background. Inter-caste marriage of his parents was another drawback which added the burden on him. Jashua's parents were alienated by their respective castes and they did not inherit any properties. Thus they were forced to live on their earnings only. So losing his job was like adding fire to his burning stomach. That is why Jashua had suffered both as a poor man and also as an untouchable. According to Jashua when he lost his job as a school teacher, he went in search of a job in Rajamundry where he was employed in a touring talkie cinema as a script writer for the pay of fifteen rupees a month. But the proprietor never paid his salary but arranged two times meal a day. In that cinema troop Jashua was the only untouchable and he was not allowed into hotel. Thus one of his friends used to get his food out. It seems he had spent his life there just on one pair of clothes. In the meantime with the help of Toleti Subbarao he got a job as a teacher. The salary of which was not enough for Jashua to lead his life. He described his struggle in Rajamundry like this-

By this time I have two sons
To feed them, to pay house rent and also to
washermen

My salary is not enough
I struggled a lot at this time.³²

On the other hand Jashua also struggled even to get his writings published. He went to many people, most of the time he had dedicated his books to the people whoever sponsored to publish them. Sometimes he had survived on the returns from the *Bharati* monthly, which used to publish his poems. In this way Jashua's economic problems haunted him for quite a long time. He worked in many professions like producer in Madras radio station, war propagator during second world war and as a Telugu teacher.

All the above discussions reveal that Jashua came from both socially and economically disadvantaged background. Because of which he had struggled a lot to stand as a human being and also as a poet. Jashua learned a lot from his experiences, which was reflected in his writings. As he himself says 'life had taught me many lessons.' There were two *gurus*

32 Ibid.

(teachers) in my life: first was poverty and the second was caste and religious discrimination. The former taught me patience in life and latter taught me to revolt, but they did not make me a slave. However, by facing both of them I tried to prove myself as a human being. I revolted with my knife; my knife is pen, it did not hate society but its practice.’³³ In this way in analysing Jashua’s literature one has to link it up with his life, because the pleasures and pains of his life have been reflected in his writings. Most of the time his own sufferings became the central aspect of his literature. That is why his social and economic background becomes essential to locate him in social and historical context. By facing all the obstacles in life Jashua achieved his goal, i.e., to become a great poet. And wrote nearly 30 different varieties of writings. Those were like Gabbilam (Bat), Firadousi (Story related to a Persian poet who was deceived by a king), Swapnakatha (Story of dream), Aanatha (Orphan), Netaji, Kothalokam (New World), Bapoojee, Musafarlu, Muntaju Mahaloo, Naa Katha (in three parts), Swayam Varam, Nagarjuna Sagar, Kandhishikudu (refugee), Kristu Charitra (History of Jesus), Kanda Kavyas (in seven parts),

33 Hemalatha Lavanam (Our Father), Glimpses of Poet Jashua’s Life, Insaf Printers, Vijayawada, 1995, sixth reprint, p.10.

Dhruva Vijayam, Himadha Marka Parinayam and many other books. All these works have in common the representation of human sufferings due to social and economic disadvantages. In this context Jashua as a self-experienced (sufferer) person represented the sufferings of his fellow human beings. So it is very essential for us to know about his life to understand, to assess and also to contextualise his literature in socio-historical conditions. Jashua as a forerunner of Dalit literature in Andhra Pradesh represented the feelings and sufferings of his community in history by putting them on paper by relating it to his own life.

CHAPTER III

DALIT REPRESENTATION IN LITERARY TEXTS: A STUDY OF *MAALAPALLI* AND *GABBILAM*

By the 1920s Indian national movement had entered a new phase under the leadership of Gandhi. At this historical juncture Gandhi was trying to unite all the sections of Indian society under the Congress fold against British imperialism. As a part of this holistic movement at various levels intellectuals and political activists were trying to organise various sections of society under Gandhi's leadership. As an alternative to Gandhi's Congress national movement there was a growing assertion of non-brahmin and other lower-caste groups in different regions like Madras and Bombay presidencies. It was in this context in order to assimilate these asserting non-brahmin and lower caste groups into the Congress fold, many initiatives were taken up by different set of individuals and political activists, both at intellectual and societal levels. In Telugu country (Andhra Pradesh) people like Unnava Laxminarayana, Professor N.G.Ranga, Adavi Bapiraju and others highlighted the issue of untouchability in Telugu literary writings. Among these writings Unnava Laxminarayana's 'Maalapalli' (Untouchable

Hamlet)¹ represents an intellectual initiative on the part of Congress leadership to put forward an ideological justification to assimilate untouchables in Telugu country.

It was in the above same historical context under the influence of Gandhian national movement many untouchable writers wrote extensively on the issue of untouchability and also on socio-economic oppression of untouchables. Among these writers Gurram Jashua can be viewed as the forerunner in articulation of problems and sensibilities. However in all his writings 'Gabbilam' (Bat) occupies an important place in Telugu literature.

In the following section we are going to analyse Unnava's 'Maalapalli', and Jashua's 'Gabbilam' to understand the difference between an outsider (Unnava) and insider (Jashua) in representation of problems of untouchables in socio-historical context. Even though the above two texts were published at different times. But they were written under the influence of Gandhi's political movement. In spite of their common political context both texts differ in many ways.

1 'Maala', is a sub-caste among untouchable communities in Andhra Pradesh. So 'Maala Palli', in other words can be referred as 'untouchable hamlet'. Here after it can be used as 'Maala Palli' only.

However, in locating 'Maala Palli' in its historical context, it can be placed within the Gandhian nationalist framework due to its emphasis on the Gandhian mode of struggle and in linking the issue of untouchability to broader anti-imperialist struggle. On the other hand Unnava also emphasized very much on Hindu religious and social life, i.e., the bhajans to Rama and Krishna. In Telugu literary context 'Maalapalli' is the most celebrated and controversial novel. It was banned twice, once in 1922-23, and again in 1935. Due to constraints of time, space and limitations of topic we are not going into the reasons for its ban and other aspects of the novel.

The novel was constructed around two families. One was the untouchable family (Maaladasari), and the other was the landlord (Kamma) family. The members of untouchable family were Ramadasu (father), Malaxmi (Mother), Venkatadasu (eldest son), Sangadasu (youngest son), Jyoti (daughter) and Appadasu (son-in-law). The members of landlord family were Choudaraiah (father), Laxmi (mother), Venkataiah (eldest son) and Ramanaidu (youngest son). Both these families were conceived as immersed in the fabric of Hindu religious and social life with the emphasis on their religious practices and beliefs. Especially in the construction of the

untouchable family we can notice Unnava's conscious attempts to treat the untouchables as part of Hindu social and religious life. However Unnava presents Ramadasu's family (Vaishnavite) as more religious, which could be understood in Unnava's construction of the location of the Rama and the Veerabrahmam temples in Ramadasu's family premises, which cannot be imagined in real life situation of untouchables. In another instance in a family conversation Jyoti (daughter) express doubt about 'whether God will allow them to go near him because of their prohibition to enter into village temples'.² Malaxmi (the mother) replies that 'God will never discriminate and will allow everybody and comes to everybody's temple.'³ The other most important attempt of the author to construct untouchables as part of the Hindu social and religious life at a time when the Christian missionaries tried to convert Ramadasu and others. Ramadasu expresses his opposition saying that

2 Unnava Laxminarayana, '*Maala Palli*', Part I, Jayanti Publications, Vijayawada, 1922, p.42.

3 Ibid, pp.42-43.

this settlement (in which he was kept) belongs to government. We are all Hindus but you people are forcibly preaching Christianity. Is it justifiable?⁴

All these above instances show the way in which Unnava constructed untouchables as a part of broader Hindu social and religious life.

Acceptance of occupational status of the caste both by the untouchable and the caste-Hindus was another important aspect of Unnava's construction. Sangadasu in one of his discussions in Adi-Andhra Mahasabha about caste system views as follows:

The occupational division of caste is not the cause for high and low divisions in society. However occupational division is intended for the welfare of society but not for its destruction. On the other hand, making occupations as hereditary resulted in some injustice for some communities. Destruction of some occupations intensified this injustice.⁵

Here the solutions offered by Sangadasu to bridge the inequalities and to remove injustice in society is very important to understand the way in which Unnava looks at the problems of untouchables and other suffering masses. While emphasising the need for the re-construction of Hindu society to resolve injustices in society, Sangadasu argues that:

4 Ibid, part II, p.111.

5 Ibid, part I, p.169.

By neglecting the larger interest, i.e., Swarajya one should not concentrate only on the welfare of the smaller society, i.e., untouchables welfare, which obstructs the larger interest. So the means which we adopt for the welfare of the smaller society should not hamper the welfare of the larger society. In this nation if everybody concentrates on the welfare of smaller societies the larger issues will be cornered and it will ultimately result in the failure of smaller interest also.

However by putting aside all the issues, if we concentrate only on the development of Maalas weaving occupation, though it looks small, it gets integrated to other several political issues. Unless these political issues were resolved the weaving question will not be resolved. It is because we (untouchables) do not have lands, to work as employees we do not have education, to acquire education we do not have money, and to do business we do not have money. So the re-construction of society is like constructing a house. For which we need different materials, with the help of which we can build a house. While constructing a society if we concentrate only on one aspect of society (without keeping in mind the larger interest of society) there is no use. Our efforts might benefit smaller societies in a short-term period but it effects larger interest of society. Our efforts as a part of larger society should contribute for the development of larger society (anti-imperialist struggle).⁶

Unnava looks at the problem of untouchables as a part of larger national issue, i.e., anti-imperialist struggle. He views that winning independence to India (Swarajya) will solve the problems of nation and also the problems of untouchables. That is why Unnava in his representation

6 Ibid, pp.170-72.

relates Ramadasu's struggle with broader national struggle. And most of Unnava's presentation revolves around the Gandhian mode of struggle, i.e., winning heart of enemy with non-violent. In struggle in other words it represents passive resistance. However, about the problem of untouchables and their sufferings at various levels like socio-economic, Unnava does not try to trace out the roots of exploitation and oppression. On the other hand he does not question the caste system and its dynamics in oppression of lower-caste groups like untouchables, rather he views (caste and occupations) as necessary for the welfare of society. In some places in the novel Unnava lucidly presented instances of oppression like when Sangadasu's aunt was beaten up because of her entry into the landlord's fields and he explains her living conditions as miserable.⁷ However Unnava discusses the appalling conditions of untouchables where Sangadasu explains to Ramanaidu that sometimes for months together Malas and Madigas spend their life without food. To some extent Unnava tries to capture the reality of the untouchable life but as he operated in a political context, i.e., uniting all sections of Indian society against British

7 Ibid, p.110.

imperialism, he did not question the basic structure of Hindu social and religious philosophy, which provided legitimacy for inequality rather he pleaded with caste-Hindus to treat untouchables humanly. As a text in historical context 'Maala Palli' can be viewed as the classic example of the 'outsider's' perception of the problems of untouchables.

One of the most significant aspects of Jashua's writings is the attempt at capturing reality, i.e., the sufferings and real position of untouchables in society. It might be because he had bitter experiences in life. However, no other writer in Telugu literature, especially among the untouchables could represent the social reality like Jashua did. On the other hand Jashua was the only untouchable who was able to develop a systematic critique of Hindu social and religious practices. He did not spare even Christianity about its illogical beliefs. Jashua went deep into literary and social life to identify the roots of oppression and the reason for its perpetuation. The observation and analysis of Jashua's writings reveals that in capturing social reality at various levels he had presented them with humour by giving deep insights into the problems. Every word of lament gives us new insights into the Indian social reality. Even though all of his works are in similar way

connected to the social and economic oppression of untouchables. But 'Gabbilam' (Bat) is considered to be the most celebrated text and viewed as the first Dalit intellectual discourse. It is in this context in order to know about the intellectual discourse of Jashua that there is a need for us to go deep into his path breaking text Gabbilam.

While looking at 'Gabbilam' (Bat) as the Dalit intellectual discourse we have to see it from four angles, namely (i) the ideological context, (ii) the selection of Gabbilam (Bat) as the title of the text and its symbolic representation, (iii) creation of a hero in text, and (iv) content of the text. Analysis of the text in the above four angles gives us an understanding to locate the text in its historical context.

Looking at Gabbilam from an ideological point of view, it is very important for us to re-read the preface written by Jashua in order to see how far 'Gabbilam' (Bat) represents an alternative to the mainstream discourse, and its historical significance as a Dalit text. To quote Jashua,

While writing this poetry I have kept in mind Kalidasa's Meghaduta (Cloud Messenger) and have chosen name of Gabbilam for my book. For some readers it might look very odd. As the hero in Meghaduta sends a message of love, so the hero in Gabbilam sends a boiling poignant message. While the hero of Meghaduta was sentenced for one year, the hero of my

book is sentenced for generations. The hero of Meghaduta was a Hindu Cupid (God of Love), on the other hand my hero is an oppressed hungry man. That is why he says that to listen to his fearful story one needs a kind heart.⁸

The above lines reveal the way in which Jashua was trying to construct an alternative discourse to Hindu classical text (Meghaduta) on the basis of the life and sufferings of an untouchable. Here in his creation of an alternative text like 'Gabbilam' Jashua is negating the Hindu classical text by putting forward an altogether different discourse on the basis of this social reality. This social reality is articulated in the voice and sufferings of the millions of his fellow untouchables. Thus Jashua projects himself as the ideological contender of dominant literary and intellectual writings of a largely Hindu leaning.

The second aspect of the text is the selection of 'Gabbilam' (Bat) as the title. In his selection Jashua had realised the similarity between the life of an untouchable and Gabbilam. Since Gabbilam is considered a symbol of bad omen and treated neither as a bird nor as an animal. Similarly despite his human birth an untouchable is not treated as human being and

8 Gurram Jashua, *Gabbilam* (Bat), Jashua Foundation, Vijayawada, 1996 (reprint), p.3.

consequently denied the basic human needs and dignity. By establishing the similarity between the untouchable and the bat Jashua represents the real life of an untouchable. In Jashua's own words:

Unlike for the noble kings swans and parrots are not available as messenger to the untouchable. For him bat alone represents the everyday reality. Hence I choose Gabbilam (bat) as the messenger for my title.⁹

The third aspect of the text is the creation of a hero as celibate. Which is also a symbolic protest against the inhuman treatment of untouchables. As the hero in Gabbilam say,

When I am myself an outcast why marry and give birth to another? What need for a wife for one so deprived so he chooses to remain unwed (celibate).¹⁰

Here Jashua does not want an untouchable even to be married because he was not interested in throwing his children in the same oppressive society. Indirectly he shows anger at the socio-economic system which deprives him of basic human needs and dignity.

9 Ibid.

10 Gurrām Jashua, *Gabbilam*, tr. by K. Madhava Rao, Jashua Foundation, Hyderabad, 1996, p.3. Sometimes translator did not use appropriate words, here he translated as unwed but in original Jashua used Brahmacharya means celibate.

The fourth and most crucial aspect of the text is its content. In his presentation Jashua laments at the different dimensions of caste oppression and miserable conditions of untouchables. Most importantly he protests against Hindu religious and social practices. Sometimes he also ridiculed Hindu rituals and religious and social beliefs. This can be grasped through various poems written by him in 'Gabbilam'. Even in analysis of the content we can notice various dimensions to it, i.e., like description of an untouchable's life and his miserable socio-economic conditions, and protest against caste inequalities and its dynamics of oppression. On the other hand there is contestation of Hindu religious and social philosophy. However the influence of Gandhi's nationalist struggle and Harijan uplift and temple entry movements are the other important dimensions of the content of the text.

However in his presentation Jashua looks at untouchables' life sufferings from a different perspective like social, economic to the psychological levels. Jashua describes an untouchable as follows:

In simplicity, content with a penny,

In innocence, forgetful of all troubles,

In suffering, suppressing hunger,

Destined to live in penury,
The untouchable,
This unwanted child
Of the great mother,
Bharat, that is India.¹¹

In this poem Jashua had presented a real social, economic position of an untouchable in caste-Hindu society. As he said an untouchable was denied place in society and treated as outcaste. Not only was he denied minimum needs but was also made to satisfy his hunger and forget all his troubles just with a fistful of food. The poem gives us deep insights into the way in which untouchables were leading life at that time.

"He is magnanimous enough to stich shoes
To protect the feet of the very sons of India
Who exploit his labour and social dignity
Indebted indeed is this country to this poor
soul."¹²

11 Gurrām Jashua, *Gabbilam*, Tr. by K. Madhava Rao, op.cit., p.1.

12 Ibid.

Here in this poem Jashua describes the centuries of laborious service (bonded labour) that the untouchables rendered to the caste Hindus in India. In spite of exploitation and the inhuman treatment meted out to them, they never refused to serve the sons of this country. For their centuries of service Jashua says the whole country is indebted.

In another poem Jashua laments the way in which untouchables struggled to feed the stomachs of mankind while keeping their stomachs empty. Here in this poem Jashua relates the life of an untouchable with the grain. That is why Jashua says even mother of grain will hesitate to grow without an untouchables labour. This can be viewed as follow:

"When there is no labour of his wings
Even the mother of grain hesitates to glow
He toils his sweat to feed the world
And yet he starves."¹³

While discussing the stigma of untouchability and its relation to Hindu religious practices Jashua says:

Even the holiest Ganges could not feel pity and did

13 Gurrarn Jashua, op.cit., p.9. Sometimes I had translated on my own.

not clean the mud on his head

If the offerings to God are touched by him

Even the Three Murtis have to starve."¹⁴

Here Jashua identifies the roots of the practice of untouchability in Hindu religious beliefs and practices and views that legitimacy for it comes from Hindu religion itself. That is why he says the holiest water of Ganges which purifies and removes bad omens could not wash off the stain of untouchability and does not feel pity about his deprived conditions. However, on the other hand offerings to the greatest Hindu gods like Threemurtis (Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwara) would also be polluted if they are touched by an untouchable. Here Jashua in effect says that even the so-called Hindu gods will also practice the untouchability.

In another poem Jashua says:

"In this land of Karma

They will feed milk to snake and sugar to ant

Even the Goddess of Dharma (Justice) will shiver

14 Ibid.

In presence of an untouchable."¹⁵

Here Jashua is attacking illogical beliefs of caste Hindus. Caste Hindus, in order to get rewards in the other world, will feed all sorts of animals like pig, snake, ant, and cow. Everything is sacred for them. But ironically they will treat human beings like untouchables worse than animals.

While questioning the legitimacy for practicing untouchability in Hindu religious beliefs and practices Jashua views.

"There is no God to uplift him

How can a human being feel pity for him

What sin he has committed he does not know so

far."¹⁶

However, while he ridicules the Hindu gods for practicing untouchability, he does not blame the caste Hindus for its practice. Because their consciousness has been imbibed from their gods, who were the source of legitimacy for practicing untouchability. That is why Jashua says there is no god among Hindus to feel sympathetic about untouchables. So it is

15 Ibid, p.10.

16 Ibid.

normal for the Hindus to practice it. Indirectly here Jashua is pointing out the religious roots of untouchability by relating it to the Hindu gods. On the other hand he poses a question to them asking whether an untouchable has committed any sin to be banished to such a degraded position.

Highlighting the social and economic deprivation of untouchables Jashua says:

"The demon of poverty thrives
Sucking this poor man's blood
The four hooded Cobra of Hinduism
Frowns at his very sight."¹⁷

In the above lines Jashua explains the way in which an untouchable suffers due to poverty. As he said the demon of poverty squeezes his blood. On the other hand he explains the social oppression, i.e., inhuman treatment practiced against untouchables. However Jashua says the four varnas (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra) will treat and react in the same way at the sight of him as the four hooded cobra. Thus Jashua excellently brings out the social oppression into a literary metaphor.

17 Gurrām Jashua, *Gabbilam*, tr. by K.Madhava Rao, op.cit., p.3.

While explaining the attitude of caste Hindu society towards untouchables Jashua says:

"Beware! you can be banished from temple

If they know you visited this untouchable

Blessed to enjoy the offerings made to God

Why have you foolishly entered this poor man's

abode?

A heartless world this

Life is normal to all but this poor untouchable

He can get comfort none from even the Goddess

Justice

She too acts at the bidding of his exploiters."¹⁸

In the above lines Jashua is attacking the Hindu religious philosophy which justifies inequality and exploitation in society. According to him even the Goddess of Justice colludes with the exploiters. Here Jashua truly represented social reality when he cautions Gabbilam about the consequences of entering into an untouchable house.

18 Ibid, p.6.

In another instance Jashua explains the indifferent attitude of caste Hindus and the mental agony of an untouchable as follows:

"Seeing my plight, even the mountains melt
Their tears forming into streams perennial
But not one drop of tear will roll
Down the eyes of my countrymen."²⁰

On the other hand Jashua in his natural poetic flavour articulates the psychological state of an untouchable mind as like

"This still night has lulled the whole world to
sleep
But it forgot the very me
Afflicted as I am with the incurable
Disease of untouchability."²¹

The above lines reveal the psyche of an untouchable who was rejected by society everywhere. To escape the stigma of untouchability nobody had

20 Ibid, p.7.

21 Ibid, p.8.

shown the way so far. That is why Jashua says there is no medicine to cure the disease of untouchability.

Jashua also questions the legitimacy of Karma philosophy and the role of priests in imposing this philosophy to satisfy their selfish needs which can be viewed in the following lines.

"Selfish religious bigots silence me
Declaring my misery the result of my sins
of the birth previous
Ask your god to explain what this incarnation is
And why it bears a grudge against me?."²²

And Jashua also cautions Gabbilam as

"When your hanging upside down in the temple
Quite close will you be to Siva's ear
Narrate the story of my suffering to God
Making sure that no Priest is around."²³

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid, p.9.

However in the above poems Jashua questions the validity of the Karma philosophy which justifies the exploitation and social oppression of untouchables attaching it to the sin committed in the other world. Jashua asks 'Gabbilam' to prove it with Eshwar, is it really because of their Karma that untouchables are suffering or is it because of the selfish, self-seeking attitude of the caste Hindus. On the other hand Jashua also highlights the role of the priestly class in the perpetuation of exploitation and social oppression. That is why the hero cautions Gabbilam to narrate the story to Shiva in the absence of a priest.

The other most important aspect of 'Gabbilam' is the influence of Gandhian national movement and Gandhi's Harijan uplift and temple entry movements. That is why Jashua in the second part of Gabbilam has appeared more as a nationalist and also as an admirer of Gandhi. However, on the other hand Jashua perceived himself as part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggle and inspired his fellow untouchables to take part in it. As a staunch nationalist Jashua adored national figures like Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda, Gandhi and Jagdish Chandra Bose for their

contributions in various fields, which made India feel proud. This true nationalist vigour can be perceived in the following lines of Jashua.

"Ceaseless applause greeted him at the religious

parliament

Where westward to Chicago, Vivekananda victoriously

went

With the weapon of non-violence Gandhi conquered

every continent

Noble Laureate Tagore shone a lone star in the

firmament

Jagdish Chandra Bose discovered plants pleasure

and pain

Alas, the whole of India ignores my bondage and

chain."²⁴

Even at the height of nationalistic spirit Jashua is able to articulate the sufferings of an untouchable. Here he says that in spite of all these great

24 Ibid, p.41.

achievements none of them above mentioned personalities look into the pathetic conditions of his fellow untouchables.

On the other hand Jashua was much influenced by Gandhi's Harijan and temple entry movements. However Jashua perceived Gandhi as the liberator of untouchables and he viewed positive outcomes of Gandhi's movement in improving the social position of untouchables. Jashua also said that Gandhi was the only leader who understood the plight of untouchables and worked for the liberation of untouchables. This can be noticed in the following lines:

"The scourge of untouchability
Can denigrate the country in the comity of nations
Tears of untouchables will burst like thunderbolt
And doom the nation to destruction
This realisation spurred Gandhi
To toil for emancipation of untouchables.
This great son of India
Proved compassion is an invisible weapon
Only truth can give peace and prosperity

And spinning wheel can turn dream into reality
of freedom."²⁵

Integration of the issue of untouchability with the anti-imperialist struggle is the Gandhian mode of struggle for the emancipation of untouchables. That is why Gandhi tried to change the heart of caste Hindus to treat untouchables humanly. According to Jashua, Gandhi's efforts have culminated in positive change among Hindus to treat untouchables equally. This can be viewed in the following lines.

"British goods are boycotted
Coarse Khadi cloth is respected
Our countrymen started repenting
And accepted untouchables as human beings."²⁶

Jashua also says

"When the great vedas failed
To root out ego and selfishness
Gandhiji's Maunavrata succeeded

25 Ibid, p.43.

26 Ibid.

To unite us all."²⁷

Even though Jashua operated under the hegemony of Gandhian nationalism and perceived his community as part of the overall anti-imperialist struggle, he differed in many ways from Gandhi's followers like Unnava Laxminarayana in looking at the issue of untouchability and in identifying its roots. Jashua as one who had experienced the life of an untouchable, went deep into the socio-religious life and practices of caste Hindus to dig up the roots of untouchability and its inhumanness. However Jashua identified the Hindu religious philosophy as the source of untouchability, which gave legitimacy at various levels of society. That is why Jashua had contested Hindu religious philosophy and Brahmanical rituals and beliefs at various levels. Jashua had contested caste inequalities and questioned the Hindu cultural and ideological hegemony. On the other hand Jashua represented a new level of consciousness in questioning the priestly class and its role in spreading false beliefs and practices in society and in articulating his community's problems and rights at various levels of society, i.e., in independent India.

27 Ibid, p.57.

However Unnava as a caste Hindu (outsider) did not question the basic philosophy of Hinduism and the caste inequalities in society. In this analysis of representation of untouchables we see a lot of difference between an insider (Jashua) and an outsider (Unnava).

CHAPTER IV

CONTEXTUALISATION OF JASHUA

To contextualise Jashua in socio-historical and intellectual arena, it is very important to know about the social and historical conditions from which he emerged. In other words Jashua's intellectual ideas and literary writings have emerged out of his experiences at various stages in his life. The second chapter focussed on the social experiences and humiliations he encountered as a poet. These experiences have culminated in Jashua's revolt against inequality, injustice and inhuman practices in society. On the other hand, he went very deep into identifying reasons for the human suffering at various levels like the social, economic, cultural and psychological. Jashua wrote his poetry during the period between 1920-1970. This was an important period not only in Jashua's life but also in the history of modern India. Several important movements which shaped the political and intellectual ideas of modern India like Gandhian national movement, Ambedkar's movement, atheistic movement in Andhra, communist and separate Andhra movements were launched during this time. All these

movements have certainly influenced Jashua directly or indirectly. So it is very important to take note of these movements while assessing Jashua.

Jashua in Literary Context

When Jashua started writing, the Telugu literature was dominated by lyrical poets-poetry (Bhavakavita Vadham). It was started by Rayaprolu Subbarao and Abburi Ramakrishna Rao and reached its highest stage of popularity in the hands of Devulapalli Krishna Sastri. However, many poets like Kavikondala Venkatarao, Basavaraju Apparao, Nanduri subbarao, Adavi Bapiraju, Duvvuri Ramireddy, Pingali Laxmikantham and Vishwanath Satyanarayana have contributed very much to the growth and development of this literary movement. This has dominated the mainstream Telugu literature up to 1940's. According to C.Narayana Reddy anyone who wrote in pre-1940's could not escape the influence of this literary movement.¹ These poets have 'described nature with keen observation and glorified love as a unifying cosmic force. The new poetry like the lyrics of the English romantics relied more upon natural emotions and feeling than or

1 C. Narayana Reddy, "Aadhunikandra Kavithvam Sampradayamulu" Prayogamulu (Hyderabad, 1993), (Reprint), p.301.

the rational analytical intellect.² According to Velcheru Narayana Rao it was the only modern literary movement which attained immense popularity at one level and at another level it was also ridiculed and condemned by many.³ At the same time Telugu literature witnessed a transitional period between traditionalists (poetic form) and modern poets (prose form). During this time to establish oneself as a poet it was necessary to be a master in the poetic form. People like Tirupati Venkata Kavulu and Koppurapu Kavulu were the famous Pandits in poetic form. Attracted and influenced by these great Telugu poets Jashua wrote his poetry.⁴

However, in Telugu literary analysis by C.Narayana Reddy and Encyclopaedia of Indian literature, Jashua had been placed within the lyrical poetic and ideological tradition due to his poetic form of writing. But a proper analysis and examination of Jashua's writings does not corroborate this view. Lyrical poetry, especially Krishna Sastri's revolved around the

2. *Encyclopaedia of India Literature*, vol.III, Sahitya Akadami, (New Delhi, 1989), p.2502.

3. Velcheru Narayana Rao, *Telugulo Kavita Viplava Swarupam* (Hyderabad, 1987), p.85.

4. Gurram Jashua, *Naa Katha (My Story)*, Jashua Foundation (Vijayawada, 1996), in Preface to Part I.

appreciation of nature's beauty and glorification of love. In contrast to the former literature Jashua's writings have reflected social revolutionary * ideology, which aims at the annihilation of socio-economic inequalities and the establishment of true human society. On the other hand his literature also represented the voice of oppressed and depressed people and their sufferings. Jashua meticulously articulated these things in poetic form in a common man's language. Even though Jashua was attracted by nature and involved with it and also wrote on it, but his perspective of looking at nature was completely different from lyrical poets. According to Hemalatha Lavanam,

when Jashua was excommunicated both from his home and community, he used to spend day time in an old mosque and used to return home in the night like a thief. During this time... nature became close relative, teacher, mother and friend.... And animals, birds, mountains and gardens have become friends and they also became material for his [Jashua] literature. But the beauty of nature did not become themes of his literature rather wherever there is an injustice, inequality and inhumanity that attracted his suffering heart.⁵

So in this way Jashua had highlighted inequality in nature and also in human society.

5 Hemalatha Lavanam, *MA NANNAGARU (Our Father)*, Glimpses of poet Jashua's Life (Vijayawada, 1995), Sixth Reprint, p.11.

Aarudra, a leading literary figure in Telugu also viewed Jashua as lyrical poet. But he tried to focus the social revolutionary aspect of Jashua's literature. For that he compared Jashua and Durjati's poems on spider. According to him, Jashua as a man who had seen a lot of struggle in his life looked at spider very differently from Durjati.

Jashua had written of spider like this-

Even though you do not have machine or charkha

With your natural abilities

You will produce such beautiful silk

Oh spider! why this world branded you as betrayer

Is that struggling weaver your guru

But I cannot see him hiding in your stomach

In this world nobody can equal your skill

But your skill is going waste

No one in this world is ready to recognize your

skill.⁶

6 *Aarudra Samagrandra Sahityam*, vol.XIII (Adhunik Yugam) (Vijayawada 1991), p.71.

In contrast to Jashua's description of the spider's skill and its rejection by society, and it being branded as betrayer, Durjati described the beauty of the skill of spider like this-

At early hour in the morning

Silk lines made by a spider will look like pearls on
the wall

When sun falls on them they will brighten like
diamonds⁷

The above description of the beauty of spider's skill both by Jashua and Durjati reveals the difference between them. Jashua, who had experienced a rejection and humiliation by caste-Hindu society was able to identify his own life with a rejected spider and also able to lament the tearful story behind the beautiful skills. However, in contrast to him Durjati, a caste Hindu and a privileged man was not able to grasp the tearful story of a spider. He was only able to identify the beauty of its skills. That is why Aarudra ridiculously says "even though caste-Hindu society has rejected and looked at Jashua as an insect (intending spider). But the natural

7 Ibid., p.72.

abilities of an insect were not there for so-called human beings (caste-Hindus)".⁸

At another level Jashua as a representative of oppressed sections, sang their misery through his melodious poems, and was able to identify human sufferings and frustrations even in the burial ground (Smashana Vatika). Burial Ground is his most popular kavya. In this Jashua had described the painful stories of the funeral ground in the following way-

Many years have passed through this burial ground

But none of the dead could wake up so far

In this immobile burial ground how many mothers

might have cried

And many drops of tears might have evaporated

It is in the same ground sweet pens of great poets

were burnt

In this same ground many rulers' authorities have

ended

In this same place many mothers were widowed

8 Ibid.

In this same ground great paintings of painters
have perished
If we think of it our hearts will melt!!
Look at that young grave
It might belong to some beautiful baby
In that grave whose kiss might be sleeping
Enormous wisdom useful for this world might have
destroyed.⁹

On the other hand Jashua says-

There is no scope to spread untouchability here
But look at that rich man's marble grave
Next to it shakes the tattered cloth
That might belong to some poor man
Even here nobody gives him a place.¹⁰

Jashua's metaphorical lamentation of burial ground expounds psychological, social and economic aspects of human life. And here he sees

9 Gurrām Jashua, Smashana Vatikā (Burial Ground), *Kandakavyamu*, Part I (Vijayawada, 1993), p.26.

10 *Ibid.*, p.28.

the end of great many things in society at one place. They were power of rulers, creativity of scholars and painters. On the other hand Jashua's description of young graves and their metaphorical representation of human life touches human hearts. As an untouchable, Jashua says that there is no scope to spread untouchability, which reflects the reality in society. This sort of descriptions were possible for him only due to his experiences and also his association with realities of life. That is why Budaraju Radhakrishna says, "society as a school and life as a lesson, Jashua led his life and articulated and created natural life of people in his writings."¹¹ As a poor man Jashua was also able to look at the poor man's position in burial ground as he draws a clear distinction between a rich man having a marble grave and a poor man having no place in the burial ground. In this way, by looking at realities in the society he projected inequalities at various levels.

While looking at the miserable conditions of the poor in society, Jashua wrote poetry describing how an economically deprived will suffer on

11 Budaraju Radhakrishna Aadunikandra Sahityam: Jashua Sthanam, in Dr.S.V.Satyanarayana (ed.), *Joshua Sahiti Prasthanam* (hyderabad, 1995), p,11.

the roads. In his *Kandakavya* named *Anatha* (orphan) Jashua described a destitute woman along with her children in the following manner-

Her porridge might have lost for a rich man's

luxurious food

Her small hut might have shrunk under the palatial

residence of the rich

Her tattered clothes might be lost for rich man's

brightening clothes

Her poor bed might have hid behind the luxurious

cot of the rich

To enjoy the comforts and pleasures of this world

The ruling representatives have stolen her pleasures

And also her honest sons' pleasures.¹²

This lucid description of a destitute woman's miserable conditions and the explanation for her suffering in the exploitation by ruling class represents Jashua's class outlook. He had always identified himself with

12 *Gurram Jashua, Anatha* (Orphan) (Vijsayawada, 1995, p.54.

oppressed and depressed classes of society, and tried to identify the root of oppression and exploitation.

Above discussion reveals that Jashua stands out among his contemporary poets as an original poet, for he never borrowed mythological themes for his poetry, an easy way to eminence, nor did he satisfy himself with translation of epics. He did not borrow western ideas to get the name as a modern progressive poet. All his poetry sprang out of the harrowing experiences in his life since childhood and what he saw for himself around him in the society - its discriminative treatment of the hapless down-trodden masses. He represented sufferings of oppressed and never went into hallucinations, neither about nature nor about human relations. In this way Jashua does not fit into the lyrical poetic stream rather he represented a social revolutionary ideology for the liberation of down-trodden people. That is why he himself was very critical of indifferent attitude of lyrical poets to the day to day sufferings of the people. He criticized lyrical poets like this-

Why will you cry for an unknown woman

Destroying good Telugu Literature

You roam in an illusory world

At least now come to this real world¹³

And Jashua also said-

Busy have these poets been for years

Describing the marriages and ceremonies of the

rulers

Busy have they been narrating

The separation pangs of the queens

These poets ensuring the youth

Lusciously describing the female anatomy

These poets bore us with their monotony

Repeating the songs praising the Lord Rama

These poets have buried their talents

In the depths of the ocean of their selfishness

Totally ignoring the cry for help of the downtrodden

13 Addepalli Ramamohana Rao, *Mahakavi Jashua Kavita Samiksha* (Kakinada, 1996), p.31.

these poets have mortgaged their souls for worldly
gains.¹⁴

Jashua's Contestation of Hindu-Brahmanical Ideology

Jashua as a "Dalit organic intellectual had contested Hindu-brahmanical ideology which justifies the caste inequalities and the practice of untouchability. However, he had contested Chatur Varna (fourfold) philosophy of Hinduism and enquired about the place of untouchable in the caste-Hindu society.

Oh Savitri! We heard that
Old Brahma had four sons
Are you aware of this *fifth son*
Whose life is meaner than an animal.¹⁵

In the above lines, Jashua had contended the very basic philosophy of Hinduism, i.e., the Chatur Varna Dharma, according to which brahmins were supposed to have come from the mouth of Brahma, Kshatriyas from

14 Gurrām Joshua, Gabbilam, Tr. by K. Madhava Rao, *Jashua Foundation* (Hyderabad, 1996), p.70.

15 Gurrām Joshua, *Kandakavyamu*, op.cit., p.27.

his shoulders, Vaisyas from his thighs and shudras from his feet. But untouchable were never mentioned and their position is not defined and they are treated as outcastes. That is why Jashua ask Hindu goddess Savitri (wife of Brahma) from where did this untouchable come, and why his position was worse than an animal?"

At another instance Jashua had ridiculed innumerable sects in Hinduism in the following way-

By tying some Rudraksha seeds on his head, one
appears as Shiva

To detract him another comes in the form of Vishnu

Yet another challenges both of them

One more drug addict will come in an ash ridden form

Another will chase us relentlessly

Proclaiming his to be the greatest religion

Where then is the hope for unity.¹⁶

16 Gurrām Jashua, Gabbilam, tr. by K. Madhava Rao, p.79. Translator had left some lines I added them wherever I felt necessary.

Jashua also criticized inhuman and illogical practices among Hindus
Especially animal sacrifice and other rituals, he had protested against them
like this-

In the name of offerings to god

Many babies were left in the Ganges

Many a young women were burnt

On their husbands' funeral pyre

Many a talent stifled by the evil of illiteracy

Many a progeny were weakened by inbreeding

Many a sculptors wasted their lives carving idols of
stones

A Buddha, a Christ, a Gandhi together cannot do away with this
madness.¹⁷

Jashua had protested against animal sacrifice in the following way-

Dumb animals struggle and scream

As men slit their throats and dance in their blood

Religious bigots sanctify such animal sacrifice

17 Ibid.

All their eulogies of compassion are sham.¹⁸

Joshua had also criticized idol worship in Hinduism like this

They will show us a round stone as a great god

By using it they will come up

At seeing a dying poor

They will feel nothing.¹⁹

This in his opinion is the irony with Hinduism. To satisfy their gods, they will sacrifice innocent animals and spend lakhs of rupees in celebrating the marriages and other ceremonies of stones. But their heart will never feel pity for a suffering poor.

Jashua's Criticism of Untouchable for Practising Caste Differences

Regarding the perpetuation of caste inequalities and the practice of untouchability Joshua had contested Hindu-religious and cultural ideology at one level. At another level Jashua was also very critical about the practice of caste differences among untouchable, i.e., between Malas and

18 Ibid.

19 Gurram Joshua, Netaji, Joshua Foundation, Vijayawada, 1995.

Madigas.²⁰ However Christian Missionaries have converted these two communities massively into Christianity from early nineteenth century onwards. But these conversions did not bring any considerable improvement in the social position of these two communities in caste-Hindu society. On the other hand the conversion could not unite these two communities as a homogeneous Christian community.²¹ Rather Christian missionaries have perpetuated the existing gulf between these two communities for their own selfish ends. The rivalry of these two castes was also witnessed even in worshipping the christian god (Jesus). If Malas go to one church, the Madigas will not visit that church and they will go to another church. The antagonistic feeling among these two communities may be due to the clashing economic interest as agricultural labourers and also for the higher

20 Malas and Madigas were untouchable communities in Telugu country. And they were equally treated as outcastes by caste-Hindu society. But ironically in spite of their common oppression and alienation from human and natural resources these two communities were constantly clashed with each other for higher social status. Malas claim higher social status than Madigas. They traditionally worked as village servants and agricultural labourers. Madigas were leather working community and also village drummers. Inter-caste marriage and inter-dining were prohibited between these two communities. See for more details on feuds between these two castes, Edgar Thurston and K. Rangachari. *Castes and Tribes of Southern India*, Government Press, Madras, 1909.

21 G.A.Oddie, see footnote 7 in Chapter II. And also by same author, "Christianity and Social Mobility in South India 1840-1920: A Continuing Debate", *South Asia*, 19, Special Issue (1996), pp.143-59.

social status. Jashua had himself seen these petty mentalities of the untouchables and ridiculed and condemned them for their illogical practices like this.

One proclaims that Madiga Christ is greater than Mala Christ
Yet another will boycott both of them
Saying that they were pretending to be divine followers
And they are all sham.

On the other hand Jashua says,

For us god is one but two temples
We live in the same place outside village
But there are two jatis among us.
We pretend to be in one religion
But we will fight about our caste status
Mala Christ will not be a Madiga god
Madiga Christ will not be a Mala god
If one touches the other he will take bath
Is there any way to unite them.
If a crow sits on one's hut

It should not touch others hut
Even among crows
There are Mala and Madiga crows
This itself proves our rivalry.²²

This way Jashua had ridiculed and condemned the practice of caste differences among untouchables. And he urged them to discard such differences and unite as one community.

Jashua's Vision

Jashua did not formulate particular ideology and practical methods of struggle to change the structure of caste-Hindu society and its cultural and ideological hegemony. However, he identified the roots of oppression of untouchables and other deprived sections within Hinduism. That is why his discourse revolved around the contestation of inequalities in society at various levels like socio-economic and cultural. Due to his own life experiences he had articulately described the caste oppression and discrimination in society. But people like A. Satyanarayana described Dalit

22 Kathi Padma Rao, *Sanghika Viplava Rachayithalu, Lokayutha Prachuranalu*, Ponnur, 1995, pp.113 and 114. Quoted from Jashua's *Kandakavya*, Part III.

literature including Jashua as protest literature, considering the fact that it revolved around 'caste oppression and discrimination'.²³ Thus the analysis of Jashua's literature reveals that Jashua's is not just protest literature but he also had some vision, i.e., the society in which socio-economic differences, and the inhuman practices like animal sacrifices and other superstitious beliefs and rituals will not be there. And the individual dignity and abilities of the persons will be respected without any caste and religious consideration. This aspect of Jashua's vision can be viewed in his own words.

When will our great poets proclaim the universal truth

When will our nation awake from its slumber

When will we stop believing these superstitious stories?

When will education be released from the rusted shackles of our society?

When will our monks give up the idleness of their hermitage

For that auspicious day I will wait restlessly.²⁴

23 A Satyanarayan, Dalit Protest Literature in Telugu: A Historical Perspective, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol.30, no.3, 21 January 1995, pp.171-5.

24 Gurram Jashua, Gabbilam, op.cit., p.69.

And Jashua says:

Is there a place where a rich man's feast
is not the cause of a poor man's hunger?
Is there a place where knowledge thrives
Without fear of the lion of social taboo?
Is there a place where the delicate flower of art
Is not trampled by the demon of caste
Is there a place where freedom does not surrender
To the cruel sword or the tyrant king
Is there a place where a forlorn orphan
Pricks a fond parent with guilt
As he fondles his own little one?
O Bat, tell me if you have
Seen such a place on earth
There shall I go and live.²⁵

This way Jashua had opposed all illogical and inhuman practices, ritual and superstitious beliefs in society. And Jashua was never subscribed to caste

25 Ibid, p.84.

and religious interest and identities. He wrote for the happiness of the humanity as a whole, intending the liberation of down-trodden masses in society. Jashua as an experienced man viewed caste and religion as a major obstacle to establish true human society. That is why he never subscribed to the petty caste and religious consideration. He explained the purpose of his literature in the following way.

Religious madness and selfish motives

Will not be there in my writings

Language skills and worldly pleasure

Will dance in my writings.²⁶

Jashua as a man suffered did not hate the society, but aimed at reforming the attitude of the people. Throughout his life he struggled to stand as a human being in society. Whenever some one used to address him as great Panchama Poet or Christian poet he used to feel hurt. It seems he used to say why did not they recognize me as Jashua.²⁷ He always struggled to get that human identity as individual rather than as a particular caste poet or

26 Gurram Jashua, Kothalokam, op.cit., p.18.

27 Hemlatha Lavanam, Ma Nannagaru, op.cit., p.66.

religious poet. That is why he refuted those identities and declared himself a universal human being like this.

I will never go by the boundaries decided by the castes and religions

Whatever this society may call me

I will never care for it

But I am a universal human being.²⁸

In this way Jashua had anticipated true human society as the alternative to the rotten caste and religious societies.

Jashua's Political Ideology

In the context of anti-imperialist struggle of the nation, Jashua perceived himself as a part of this holistic movement. And he developed a hatred towards the British rule. But Jashua in realistic terms was never a part of any particular political party. However he looked at Gandhi as the liberator and adored his political struggle of non-violence. At his young age itself Jashua realised the subordination of Indian people to the British and

28 Gurram Jashua, *Khandakavyam*, part IV, op.cit., p.116.

developed a hatred towards it. He explained his hatred towards British like this.

At the young age itself, when I was understanding the world around me

I started realising that

Due to subordination to alien rulers

We were cut into different pieces

Everyday I used to feel angry with them

Even as a child

I could not tolerate the white man's domination.²⁹

This way Jashua hated British rule. He operated under the hegemony of Gandhian nationalism. Not only that he also wrote many kavyas praising the nationalist leaders like Netaji, Sardar Vallabhai Patel and others. He had respect for Indian history and viewed it as the glory of the nation. But sometimes we see a lot of inconsistency in his ideas. At one level he praised the hereditary symbols and places of national glory, at another level he expressed his anger at this land like this -

29 Gurram Jashua, Naa Katha, op.cit., p.40.

Here is this wretched of the earth

Where you can see me spending every source of my energy

Dancing and trimming before the village gods

For the enjoyment of people who prescribed these rites

These cruel and crooked people

Robbed me of my right for ages.³⁰

At another level Jashua adored Ambedkar and his movement for the liberation of untouchables

My comrade, Ambedkar a great scholar with foreign

education

Fought many battles for my community

Eminently qualified for the high post of viceroy

He had welcomed you and commended your mission.³¹

This way Jashua's political ideology was very inconsistent. At one level he identifies with Ambedkar as liberator but at another level he adores Gandhiji. However the Gandhian nationalist framework is more prominent

30 Gurrām Jashua, Gabbilam, op.cit, p.94.

31 Ibid, p.57.

in his writings rather than under the Ambedkarite frame work. This is because only he wrote only one stanza on Ambedkar while in most of his other writings he identified with Gandhi.

Jashua as a Dalit organic intellectual represented the sufferings and human feelings of the oppressed sections in his literature. He went further than this and also asked for their share in society and history. That is why he asked "will you see Madigas in Vedas or in Vyasas writings?"³² This way he spoke for the people who were denied their place in history and literature. So we see Jashua as the first literary figure from the oppressed community who contended dominant ideologies and put his community's voice in the textual literature. In this way he definitely can be viewed as the forerunner of Dalit literature who proved his abilities and achieved highest status in literature as Mahakavi and also as a great human being.

32 Gurram Jashua, *Kandakavyamu*, Part II, op.cit., p.27.

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