DALIT MEDIA FIELD:

DISCOURSES IN PRINT AND ONLINE FORUMS

Thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PRIYANKA SRIVASTAVA

CENTRE FOR MEDIA STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
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मीडिया अध्ययन केन्द्र
CENTRE FOR MEDIA STUDIES
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली–110067, भारत New Delhi - 110 067, India

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DECLARATION

I, Priyanka Srivastava, hereby declare that this PhD thesis entitled "**Dalit Media Field: Discourses in Print and Online Forums**" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** is my own original work carried out as a doctoral student at the Centre for Media Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, under the supervision of Dr. Chitralekha.

All the sources used for the dissertation have been fully and properly cited. This thesis contains no material which has been submitted for the award of any other degree at any institute.

Priyanka Srivastava

PRIYANKA SRIVASTAVA

CERTIFICATE

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

Supervisor

Dr. Chitralekha

Dr. CHITRALEKHA
Assistant Professor
Centre for Media Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067

Co-supervisor

Prof. Heeraman Tiwari

Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067

Chairperson

Prof. Manukonda Rabindranath

अध्यक्ष/Chairperson
मीडिया अध्ययन केन्द्र/Centre for Media Studies
सामाजिक विज्ञान संस्थान/School of Social Sciences
जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय/Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली/New Delhi - 110067

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Priyanka Srivastava

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1. Purpose of Study

The domain of the Dalit media is a relatively new one, and most of the significant moments of this media field can be traced from the second quarter of the twentieth century onwards. Encompassing the multi-tiered domain of print, broadcast and the 'new media', it may be broadly defined in terms of the engagement exhibited by its various participants (producers, distributors and readers) to forms of resistance to and a critique of the dominant discourse on caste and social relations. While much of the mainstream media is characterized by a high degree of apathy to the concerns of the Dalit community, the Dalit media field is defined by its calculated tropes of defiance and resistance to the established episteme on and the practices of caste relations. It is, thus, marked by a high degree of self-consciousness in political interventions in the caste-mediated socio-cultural and epistemic processes. As a medium of articulation for a liminal community, the Dalit media field is acutely sentient of its unique responsibility in reimagining and reorganising ideas, spaces and social structures that have traditionally been hostile to the aspirations of the community, if not to its very existence.

Deriving from the above, my proposition in this thesis is that the Dalit media field is a highly political domain, fabricated in the context of a continual spate of physical, social and psychological violence that is endemic even today in our caste-mediated society. The systemic violence that is time and again directed at the Dalit communities has not only not declined in any significant way but has even increased manifold in certain spaces. A part of this perceptible growth in violence can, of course, be attributed to a heightened alertness on the part of the mainstream media organisations and social media platforms to acts of evident brutality. However, it is also undeniable that the social churnings of the last several decades in the country have punched holes in the traditional social fabric of the country, thus increasingly encouraging violent attempts at its restoration. Additionally, acts and forms of economic, bodily and psycho-social intimidations have also transformed themselves over time and space, accommodating themselves to the expediency and subterfuge required in the face of social and structural rearrangements necessitated by our Constitutional values. However, despite the Constitutionally guaranteed rights to equality and dignity to the community, there are countless

documented examples of abject humiliation and brutalities carried out against Dalits who are perceived as non-conformist in their behaviour or resistant to the conventionally accepted practices of exercise of caste power.

This study locates the inception of the Dalit media field in its earliest print culture characterised primarily by a pamphlet or chap-book style literature that was relatively easy to write, print and circulate due to its limited economic investment. These incipient devices of mass communication were the breakthrough mediums that allowed an exceedingly small number of *avarnas* (those outside the fold of the varna system) to respond to their cultural milieu from an anti-caste perspective. This nascent print culture was also a crucial agent in launching the community into a tryst with (colonial) modernity in India, which is yet another vital category of engagement in this study. My specific field of investigation—the city of Delhi—is an important protagonist in the story of modernity in the country; more particularly for its position as the political capital of the nation. Although Delhi may not be the epicentre of many of the important political and social movements in India, yet every popular protest and discontent has claimed a space in the city. Thus, movements, social actors, and institutions (both public and private) are the next critical building blocks in this inquiry into the expansion of the print culture(s) of the Dalit community in Delhi. The protocols of the print culture of this time also embedded some critical socio-political themes in this media field that reinforce its distinct intellectual and cultural arc and infrastructure.

Print protocols are very pertinent entry points for this study to turn its gaze from the physical to the virtual, and to enter the realm of the Dalit cyberspace. In many ways, the Dalit web is the most protean and complex of the entire Dalit media field. Not only does it carry forward elements of its preceding technological and ideological infrastructure, it also invests them with newer dynamics due to its unprecedented (in degrees and not in kind) relationship with time and space. Time is an important co-ordinate in the very architecture of the online media, especially of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Temporality and spatiality have traditionally been crucial factors in our perception of historicity, and the conjunction of the technological hardware (material infrastructure) of the internet with the web as a new (again, in degrees and not in kind) rhythm of space and time reconfigures the historicity of this media field on many singular planes—the implications of which continue to unfold in their many vicissitudes. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to

investigate the (Delhi-based) print as well as the online Dalit media to identify their significant historical agents over time—human as well as non-human—and to understand their shifting relationship with the larger social and epistemic arenas of our caste-afflicted existence. It also investigates the way these media forms have been deployed by the community to re-cast(e) the cultural and intellectual frames of selfhood and re-calibrate the graph of social and discursive power.

However, before initiating a detailed discussion on the provenance and forms of the Dalit media field, it is useful at this point to clarify some of the terms of the discussion as used in this study. A media field in this study refers to the entire environment of a media system which includes its various modes of production, dissemination and consumption. It is important to bear in mind that while a society may have a dominant media field, yet it is not the only one. There are several collaborative as well as contesting media turfs that overlap each other at several points, and define their identities in terms of the larger socio-political and cultural role that they assume in the society. My use of the word 'field' to delineate the profile of the Dalit media is different from the works of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who defines 'field' as different spheres of action existing in a society, with their own internal structures of power relations determined by the 'habitus' of its various participants (Bourdieu 1977). I have used the word 'field' to mark out the reasonably distinct area of media practices and social methods that are particular to that domain. Additionally, as a working hypothesis, I have guardedly characterized the Dalit media field as a cogent unit that is shaped by the imperatives of an urgent socio-political and literary response to social processes chronically mediated by severely exploitative caste relations. However, in order to maintain a structural consistency for the proposed research work, I have chosen to exclude the genres of autobiography and fiction from my data-set, and have focussed exclusively on non-fictional works.

It is also important to outline the framework of the term 'new media'. 'New media' is a generic term applied to the multiple forms of digital communication that rely on computer technology and are interactive. Another term commonly used here is 'social media'. However, the two are not interchangeable as 'social media' refers to the techniques of interactions where people are both users and producers at the same time. They create, share, and trade information, ideas and user-generated content in virtual communities and networks. Social media makes use of mobile and web-based tools to produce extremely collaborative platforms through which

individuals and communities exchange, create and alter user-generated subject matter. Thus, social media is a subgroup of the 'new media'. With this small but necessary detour on the very first premises of this project, it is apposite now to turn to the provenance and proclivities of the Dalit media.

With a distinctive topography of its own, the Dalit media is marked by certain identifiable practices of cultural performances, symbolism, socio-economic arrangements, means of production, distribution and consumption, and technological methods. The Dalit media field is clearly characterized by a system of media forms that are meant for advocacy and challenge, and thus the range of tone and attitudes employed by the editors and creators towards their subject and social processes bespeaks this preoccupation. The models of social and political identity adopted by these media forms are re-interpretative of historical and cultural practices. The significance of this development should not be overlooked—my interviews with several protagonists of the Dalit print media field reiterated the sentiment that the Dalit political consciousness was the strongest in those areas where the Dalit print culture has flourished the most. Conversely, it was also pointed out in the same exercise that the Dalit assertion for equality has remained the weakest in those states where the community had failed to establish a credible and independent print culture of its own, such as Himanchal Pradesh and Jharkhand.

There are many reasons for the inconsistent advancements that have been witnessed in the Dalit media field across space and time, not the least of which has been extreme financial constraints. It is crucial to recollect that many of these print media outlets were—and continue to be—financially precarious as they are either family owned or have a very tiny institutional setup. They fold up easily due to a limited economic base. Their readers are small in numbers, and many of them are confronted by an absence of equipment, skilled workers, and a dependable distribution network. In case of newspapers, the sourcing of news is also very distinct from that of the mainstream media. Keeping the above in mind, therefore, this study has attempted to investigate and gain possible insights into the efficacy of this media field as a forum for articulation of Dalit identities over the period of its existence, as well as its current public influence among the Dalit community of Delhi—the designated field of this research project.

While reformers and socially oriented people in India had been writing on caste oppression and the extremely backward position of the so-called 'untouchables' from nineteenth century onwards, the participation of the Dalits themselves in this enterprise was minimal (with a few exceptions, and even therein, not much in north India) to begin with. However, we notice that from the first decades of the 20th century some people from the various Dalit communities in the north Indian provinces began printing newsletters, small booklets and periodicals, thus addressing their circumstances in a milieu that was relentlessly casteist. The Dalit media in north India saw its inception in this moment when the members of the community—however modest in numerical strength or in the tenor of their articulation—insisted on inserting themselves in the operations of social and textual 'wisdom' on caste and its praxis. These initial attempts to de-centre the existing episteme on caste marked the genesis of not just a counter-literary culture but also a political consciousness that has never diminished in its vigour through decades of transformations that India has witnessed in the political economy of its mediascape—from print to the digital.

Historically, the first Hindi Dalit newspaper published in north India was *Achhut* by Swami Achhutananda in 1917 from Delhi. Similarly, the first periodical to be published in the region was *Adimanav*, again by Swami Acchutanand, in 1927. The 1930s saw the founding of a few Dalit magazines like *Samata* and *Utthan*. However, the decades immediately before and after India's independence in 1947 remained rather tepid as far as the productivity of Dalit periodicals in Hindi was concerned, and then found a burst of strength from the early 1960s onwards where one notices a proliferation of titles like *Vidrohi* (1959), *Himayati* (1960), *Zamin Ke Taare* (1962), *Shoshit Pukar* (1966), *Swadheen Bharat* (1968), *Buddhaghosha* (1968) and *Bhim Sandesh* (1969), among several others. By today there are several hundred small and big titles in Hindi by Dalits published from several centers in north India.

As mentioned earlier, the domain of Dalit media today is constituted by the genres of print, broadcast[1] and the new media. While the print media is perhaps the most accessible of the three, in the recent years the discursive space appears to have become even more animated

[1] Although television and other broadcast mediums like the radio are very significant for a methodical understanding of a media field in its entirely, I have chosen to exclude these two forms from the Dalit media ecology of this study as my preliminary fieldwork has demonstrated the very marginal presence and claim that the community has here in terms of control, agenda-setting or even representation.

due to the growth of the digital media. The world wide web has played a particularly significant role in this process. The recombinant properties of the online platforms allow for an easy carriage of utterances from one medium to another, thus re-configuring the formal and aesthetic co-ordinates of the text, as well as amplifying its circulation to those quarters of society and channels of dissemination that have traditionally been indifferent and insouciant to these developments. Today, even as I attempt to put together words to frame an introduction to this thesis, yet another example in a string of seemingly interminable episodes of heinous violence directed at the bodies of the Dalit women plays itself out in the mediascape of the country. A nineteen-year-old girl of a Dalit community in the town of Hathras in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh was brutally attacked and gangraped by a group of four men belonging to the dominant caste of the area and then left for dead. What is depressingly routine about this case is not just the regularity with which Dalit women are targeted as objects of sexual violence but also the way the media of the state and the nation handled it.

In the fortnight leading up to the woman's death while she was struggling for her life in a hospital, almost no leading newspaper deemed the incident worthy of reporting. However, the story was shared by some Twitter accounts of Dalit-Bahujan people (both activists as well as politically conscious Dalit men and women) and their outrage on the platform helped draw attention to the crime. After her death a couple of weeks later, twitter trends such as #DalitLivesMatter, #Hathras, #HathrasCase, #HathrasHorrorShocksIndia trended strongly, thus directing acute attention to the unfolding events where the state agencies tried very hard to surreptitiously dispose of the evidence of having handled the case with immense insensitivity and callousness, stemming from a system deeply rooted in a dehumanizing power play of caste and gender. A substantial section of this project is, thus, also concerned with investigating the nature and range of digital literacy of the online Dalit community in order to assess its potency in reconfiguring discursive and social relations by their interventions through important digital platforms on the internet today. The chapter on digitality does that by examining the various actors—human as well as non-human—of this domain, and tracing the manner in which the evolution of the internet technology has affected not just the number and nature of participants in the field, but also the very world-view to technology and computer mediated communication. The web is now no longer merely a tool for the advocacy of the rights of the Dalit community—although it is indeed that too. The cyberspace today is a much more complex entity that allows for a variety of intersectional solidarities that are enacted in myriad forms through the many

tools of the social web. This section closely engages with two such social media events to map the increasingly complex ideas of history, memory, identity and community as people, networks and processes cross political, cultural and geographical borders, thus creating newer knowledge(s), practices and systems of power.

2. Conceptual Framework: Intersecting Predicates

This research project started out with the three-fold objective of delineating the nature of the Dalit media field in Delhi, exploring its socio-political imaginary through its discursive dimensions, and tracing the community's shifting longings for newer identities in the milieu of its media spaces in an urban conglomerate such as Delhi. A media field is especially pertinent for this kind of endeavour as its continuity through a longer span of time invests it with the character of an enduring enterprise where the epistemic field is marked by the emergence of new structures of knowledge, their circulations and exclusions. In addition, all media fields are also self-consciously dialogic due to their participative nature (to varying degree), thus developing into very rewarding terrains for teasing out the multi-layered and historically determined strategies of critical assumptions and socio-cultural motivations of the various participants of the field[2]. However, as my engagement with the project advanced, the latter acquired many more dimensions that added complex layers to the tri-partite objectives I had started out with.

2.1 Media as an Archive

One of the more persistent and recurring matrixes in this thesis is that of the media (print and digital) as an archive. Media plays a crucial role in generating, recording, and structuring knowledge about communities and people. At the same time, it is a well-established social fact that the mainstream media and/or archival systems do not extend equal space—physical or ideological—in chronicling and documenting narratives and histories of marginalities. Thus, these sites of public story-telling and record-keeping repeatedly fall short

[2] All media fields are historical categories, responding to and being shaped by the imperatives of the social forces of the time. Thus, every moment in the history of a media field is a chronicle of the times, expressing its multifaceted and kaleidoscopic engagement with its various protagonists and their subjective/ intimate and sociological urges and the stimuli for their participation.

of their mandate as they too mirror the conscious and unconscious erasures that the normative knowledge systems impose on the outliers. While the legacy media has been guilty of this compromised political stance due to its long-standing nexus with institutions and structures of social and cultural privilege, this diminished credibility is also perpetuated in the media systems that found their origin in what is defined as the 'Information Age'. Chapter 2 and 3 frame the Dalit engagement with the print as well as the digital media as a state of strife with its mainstream representatives to wrest control over not just the processes of chronicling caste-centred personal and community narratives but also to re-define the political economy of the medium, and ally it closer to the imperatives of grassroot or participatory-knowledge creating media forms.

The internet allows for the accretion of yet another form of identity among some of those Dalits who battle caste prejudices in the cyberspace and on the internet. Many of the active online participants among the Dalit communities include members of the Dalit diaspora or the trans-national population groups such as young professionals or students who move across geographical boundaries for educational, professional, or advocacy-related reasons. While trans-national advocacy for seeking stringent governmental interventions against continuing caste-based atrocities and exploitation isn't a new thing for the Dalit community, the presence of the internet has acted as a potent device for a renewed churning and re-working of the issues of home, belonging, community, alliances and displacement. The trans-national moorings of these social actors—also made possible by their location in a relatively distinct technological moment—provides for newer possibilities of self-identification(s), solidarities, negotiations, interventions and resistance in relatively easier encounters between 'national' narratives and trans-national experiences.

2.2 Spatiality

The ability of the trans-national Dalit population to move across geographical areas with relative ease introduces us to another significant conceptual terrain utilised in this study—space, including cyberspace. The academic study of space has theorised the idea over time through its myriad dimensions, ranging from representational cartography of physical geographies to mapping territories in terms of social relations, political movements and cultural identities. This study is located in at least two spaces, one 'physical' and the other virtual.

While the city of Delhi constitutes the geographical field of this project, the world wide web is the other important dimension that 'situates' the protagonists of the Dalit media field. Both these 'spaces' are framed by physical infrastructures, tangible utilities and public spaces. The world wide web has the internet as its physical infrastructure and tangible utility, and there is not much on it that can be excluded from being considered as 'public' (to varying degrees). Delhi, on the other hand, is determined by its physical and administrative boundaries, as well as by a plethora of facts and data that help shape its governmentality and administrative practices. I have chosen Delhi as my field due to several reasons. Being the capital city of the country, and perhaps the most important centre of political, economic and socio-cultural influence in north India, Delhi has a comparably healthy Dalit print culture in at least two languages—Hindi and English. Moreover, as the biggest metropolis in the north, it also has a fairly high literacy rate by the national standards. This translates into a higher percentage of media consumers, including the Dalits. In addition, due to its relatively high per capita income, it also allows for greater disposable income for a segment of its residents—including a section of Dalits too. All of these factors make Delhi a comparably viable landscape for a study of the Dalit media field, and even more particularly for its subset of participation in the online media. The latter in India is a relatively younger domain, and its most sturdy infrastructure as well as its regular patrons are most widespread in the larger cities of the nation—Delhi being one of them.

Studies that derive from cartographic and other data-based knowledge systems of the various localities, districts and areas of the city throw up some very interesting information about the growth of the place through at least the last two centuries of its history. The time I spent in the archives of the Delhi state, along with a perusal of a few significant historical accounts of the place by historians and scholars (not only of the city but also of the Dalit communities of the city) like Narayani Gupta, Percival Spear, Robert E. Frykenberg, Vijay Prashad and Tatvaleen Swaroop Chand Bauddh demonstrated the extremely porous boundaries that this city has had. This porosity is descriptive of not only the communities that have called Delhi its home over time, but also of its physical boundaries that have—and continue to—remained in flux. This fluidity has left a deep imprint on the socio-cultural and political face of the national capital, thus shaping its positionalities in a relatively distinct manner. While the details on this follow in the following chapter of this work, it is necessary to mention at this point that the demography of the various communities settled in the diverse areas of the city in

substantial number determines the strength or the weakness of the Ambedkarite-Dalit movement and its media culture. For instance, the trans-Yamuna area of Delhi is strongly peopled by the members of the *Jatav* community who migrated from western Uttar Pradesh in the 1960s and 70s in large numbers and populated many of its neighbourhoods. Today, much of the Ambedkarite-Dalit discourse and print culture in Delhi finds its sustenance from the activities and efforts of the Dalits who live in these localities of the city, in addition to certain other neighbourhoods in Rohini, Dwarka, Narela, Mangolpuri and Sultanpuri. The residential geography of the city studied together with the caste-character of its inhabitants is a valuable cartographic device in mapping the centrality of caste in not just the history of the national capital, but also in the continuing influence of caste in India's tryst with modernity.

Spaces are often constituted by the cartographical knowledge of a place, but that is only a part of the story. Equally valuable are mapping practices that chart social relations, political trajectories and even print practices. Such a mapping of a physical site is oriented towards the unravelling of narratives of literary, political and cultural liminalities—narratives that have been overshadowed or silenced by the din and blaze of the established (and therefore socially respectable) machineries of legacy institutions and textual traditions. This project deploys different set of metrics to uncover micro tales of social actors writing, publishing, printing, illustrating, selling books, archiving, blogging, commenting, tweeting and creating digital content of varying nature to collide with and challenge macro accounts of caste, culture and media functionality in the city and country. These metrics used print and digital practices of the Dalit communities to outline the memorializing, de-territorializing and then subsequent re-territorializing (to a degree) of public places, linguistic practices, book trade, cultural institutions and online engagements.

For instance, Connaught Place (henceforth CP) in central Delhi is not just the literal centre of the city, it is also the metaphorical Elysium of the upwardly mobile, aspirational, apolitical, urban, English-speaking residents of metropolis. One way of evaluating CP's proximity to the lifestyle and intellectual choices of this demography is by tracing the linguistic affiliations of the bookstores that dot the area. Out of at least nine bookstores that are to be found in the various circles and radials of this busy financial and entertainment hub, there are only two bookstores that devote a section to books in Hindi. The overwhelming majority of the other books are in English and cater to the market-determined appetite of the average

metropolitan reader who (admittedly, as a broad generalization) refuses to engage with the written word requiring greater application of time and mind beyond superficial engagements. In a space primarily aligned with commercial and entertainment interests such as CP, it is promising to discover that the works of Dalit authors, particularly those related to the literary output of the community, is discovering a larger and more enthusiastic audience in the last few years. The Peoples' Publishing House at G-block in the outer circle of CP has been stocking larger volumes of writings (fictional as well as non-fictional) by Dalit writers, in addition to the essential writings of Dr. Ambedkar. It is important to bear in mind that much of this textual tradition is in the medium of Hindi, and the writings of the Dalit authors seems to be helping the language firm up its very modest footsteps in the English dominated trade of books and magazines in CP.

Additionally, it is pertinent to mention that places such as The Peoples' Publishing House in Connaught Place or the Hindi Book Centre at Asaf Ali Road are conduits for providing physical as well as metaphorical space to this commercially emergent textual tradition in the important/ upscale book markets, which otherwise would be extremely challenging for most of the Hindi Dalit writers/ publishers to achieve, given their limited resource base as of now. To elucidate, important Dalit booksellers and publishers such as Gautam Book Centre and Samyak Prakashan are well-established among the community of Dalit readers, and their bookstores in Shahdara and Paschim Puri respectively are identified landmarks among their audiences. However, it is well-nigh impossible for them to establish independent branches of their bookstores in places such as CP or Asaf Ali road, and thus trade alliances and collaborations become useful ways of finding footholds in diverse literary spaces. Thus, mapping the diverse literary corners and nerve centres of the city through the medium of the various actors in this system discloses vital details of the multiple intersections of socio-spatial hierarchies, commercial interests, trade practices, linguistic contestations, literary cultures, and hidden histories in the societal meta-narratives that exist on caste and identity in Delhi.

2.3 Modernity and Dalit Media

The Dalit media field in India is decidedly a modern form of social imaginary, and the multiple layers of its crafting in terms of its physical production, form and content are a

chronicle of the Dalits' encounter with Indian 'modernity'. Consequently, 'modernity' is yet another important leitmotif that recurs intermittently through much of this project. I have chosen to engage with the construct of 'modernity' in this project primarily through the infrastructural and technological mechanisms that act as the bedrock of the intellectual and imaginative resources of the Dalit media in its print and digital forms. The study of contemporary infrastructure and technology in the disciplines of sociology, urban studies, cultural studies, and political sciences firmly locate these two categories as important mainstays of modern life (Graham and McFarlane 2015; Furlong 2019; Kitchin and Dodge 2011; Edwards et al 2009). They form a part of the routine social lives of individuals and communities, and shape systems of participation and exclusions, political engagements and choices, and ways of belonging in the city (Graham and McFarlane 2015). The contemporary print culture was made possible by the necessary infrastructural system of schools and universities, public libraries and other institutions of civic and intellectual exchange, ecology of book trade, information assemblage by curators and archivists, and other public platforms or social formations that recognized a stake for themselves in encouraging their own economy of print. The infrastructures of the Dalit print culture in Delhi (and north India) has played a crucial role in re-imagining the community as equal citizens of a modern democratic state, and has actively participated in the attempts to create and manage a modern social and political identity for them.

However, this process has been extremely challenging as the social lives of infrastructures are deeply embedded in the socio-material experiences of a body politic (ibid). The formations as well as the practices of the print infrastructures of the country have inhabited the fault lines of class, caste and power, thus reflecting the privileges of those who have designed, constructed, conserved and controlled these systems. This is equally true of the digital infrastructures of the country. The first part of the third chapter examines in detail the establishment of the infrastructures of modern sciences (including its institutions, such as the colleges and universities) in India, and their heavy investment in the colonial enterprise. The subsequent contestation between the ruling British and the relatively privileged 'upper' caste men of India to claim civilizational proximity to the values of modern sciences shaped the discipline's post-Independence future in the country, where the *savaranas* (and more particularly, Brahmins) saw themselves as the natural heirs of the techno-scientific project of nation building. The substantial imprint of this 'upper' caste-determined norms of inhabiting

and participating in the infrastructures of science and technology in independent India did not recognize caste as a debilitating identity of engagement, and therefore established 'merit' as the only qualifier for inclusion in the venerated corridors of science and technology.

The above development had significant consequences for the digital life of the Dalit community, and goes a long way in explaining their significantly late entry as well as reduced participation in the cyberspace. It also manifests itself in the myriad different ways in which the members of the community must adapt to, negotiate with, contest, circumvent and attempt to re-shape the underlying infrastructures of the world wide web. In this context, it is crucial to recognize that the Dalit engagement with the print as well as the digital media infrastructures occasionally situate it outside of the logic of 'presentism' and ally it with pre-literate or oral infrastructures of knowledge. I have found it helpful to adopt the metaphor of the 'vernacular' as used by several members of the subaltern school such as Partha Chatterjee, Raziuddin Aquil, Sudipta Kaviraj and Gyanendra Pandey to delineate the quintessence of modernity in India in order to locate the position of the Dalit subject in it. It was primarily with the indigenization and localization of the terms of the debate on Indian modernity that it ceased to be an undifferentiated monolith of universal progress and was recast as a kaleidoscopic arena for competing identities jostling for power and redefining categories of experience, and the Dalit media is a reflection of it. Yet, 'vernacular' is an ambivalent site for the Dalits as each detail of its fabric is laced with memories of systematic caste oppression and exclusion. Dalit media too is marked by this disharmony between the manifest ideological conviction of a work stemming from normative modernity and its expressive resources with their roots in the structures of shared vernacular cultural memories. Consequently, the formations of the Dalit media are therefore a very potent chronicles of the protean, dynamic, and frequently chequered relationship of the Dalits with modernity—in all its plurality—in India and the world.

3. **Literature on Dalit Print and Digital Media**

There are relatively fewer studies that employ caste as a crucial category to scrutinize the Indian media in English as well as in the *bhashas* (vernacular languages), although the attention to this lacuna has grown considerably in the last few years. Dalit media is an emerging field of study for the researchers of the Dalit sub/ counterculture; while it has been subjected to comparatively more critical appraisal from the scholars working in the *bhashas*, scholarship

on Dalit media deriving from the tradition of print culture/ book history remains fairly scarce. Some scholars have studied the Hindi print media, particularly the mainstream Hindi newspapers, in relation to their engagement with the Dalits and their concerns. Sheoraj Singh 'Bechain', the well-known Hindi Dalit writer and scholar has investigated the role of the Hindi print media in relation to the Dalit concerns in his books *Samkaleen Hindi Patrakarita Main Dalit Uvaacch* (Dalit Voices in Contemporary Hindi Journalism), published in 2009, *Hindi Dalit Patrakarita Par Patrakar Ambedkar Ka Prabhav* (The Influence of Journalist Ambedkar on Hindi Dalit Journalism) published in 1999 and *Ambedkar, Gandhi Aur Dalit Patrakarita* (Ambedkar, Gandhi and Dalit Journalism) published in 2010. Although the latter work is an exhaustive survey of the various Dalit magazines and newsprints in Hindi published since the beginning of its history, Bechain does not use his dataset to attempt a close analysis of the discursive formation of Dalit identity and its emergent power and influence. Other scholars of the media like Sevanti Ninan and Robin Jeffrey also do not examine the history and the nature of the Dalit print media in detail. Jeffrey, in his influential work *India's Newspaper Revolution: Capitalism, Politics and the Indian-Language Press* (2000), self-admittedly leaves out the magazine industry from investigation, thus significantly limiting any comprehension of the role of an independent Dalit print media in tracing the political and cultural economy of the Dalit—or even the 'mainstream'—discursive domain. Ninan's book *Headlines from the Heartland: Reinventing the Hindi Public Sphere* (2007), explores the role of the Hindi language media in redefining the public domain of the Hindi belt through the emergence of new structures of knowledge, as well as their circulation and exclusions. Nevertheless, Ninan's study of the Hindi media too focuses on the major newspapers with significant readership and influence, and no independent Dalit periodical publication qualifies.

Similarly, scholars of the print cultures of India, particularly of the Hindi language, like Francesca Orsini and Ulrike Stark who have engaged extensively with the print history of the colonial north India have also not extended their investigations to the Dalit print culture. Orsini's two books *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism (2001)* and *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (2009), as well as Stark's *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial North India 1858-1895* (2007) do not use caste as a significantly operative category of their study. Another important work on the print culture of north India—like others restricted to the period prior to India's independence—

is *Periodical Literature in Colonial North India: Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere* (2012) by Shobna Nijhawan. Nijhawan systematically examines the genre of the periodical literature as a vital platform for the creation and sustenance of a public sphere, though as the title states, its angularities are primarily shaped on the anvil of gender. Other scholars and practitioners of the media who have engaged with the presence—or to be more accurate, the absence—of the Dalits in the mainstream media field have focused primarily on the systemic exclusion faced by them in finding employment or exercising control in a position of influence (Anand 2005; Balasubramaniam 2011; Varadarajan 2006; Harad 2020; Mondal 2017). So far, there is still an epistemic lacuna in terms of a systematic and methodical study of the history of the Dalit print culture in the northern parts of the country.

Equally, there are limited studies on the Dalits' access to and their participation in the new media spaces in the country. P. Thirumal and Gary M. Tartakov in *International Exploration of Technology Equity and the Digital Divide: Critical, Historical and Social Perspectives* (2011), have investigated the opening of newer strategies of intervention in the national debates for the Dalits through the platform of the internet, and particularly the social media. Elizabeth Langran, in the same volume, examines the very restricted access that the Dalits have to technologies of the internet, and argues that the Dalits are truly on the wrong side of the digital divide. While it is correct to argue that the Dalits still lag behind members of other communities in terms of their entrée into the digital culture, yet the statistics of their digital technological use today in India far outstrip the estimates cited by Langran in 2006. The trend is clear in a study conducted by the Centre for Study of Developing Societies in 2019 where an increasing percentage of the Dalit community owns a smart phone with internet connectivity and spends several minutes every day on social media by 2019 (CSDS 2019). Today the country has the second largest number of internet users in the world, and the level of internet penetration stands at 40% of the total population (Kantar 2020). Even more importantly, it is rural India that has spearheaded the penetration of the internet in the last couple of years, riding on the back of cheap data costs and a proliferation in vernacular content (ibid). It is very unrealistic to claim that a part of the current internet users is not derived from the Dalit community, given that even today there is a small but significant number of internet users from that part of the society. Crucially, Dalit twitter handles have recently managed to trend several critical issues (#DalitLivesMatter, #HathrasShame, #cancelallblueticksinIndia, #CasteistTwitter, #JaiBhimTwitter) related to caste atrocities and discriminatory practices in

the country, thus demonstrating the growing influence of the community on the microblogging platform. According to the survey by Lokniti and the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (Delhi), the percentage of Dalits using Twitter daily or weekly increased from less than 1% in 2014 to 5% in 2019 (CSDS 2019). Thus, the liberating potential of the internet is more likely than not to grow in strength even for those who have traditionally occupied liminal spaces in the country's power zones.

Several scholars, practitioners and observers of the field have pointed out to the marked absence of Dalit journalists, editors and publishers in the country, even decades after its independence (Harad 2020; Mondal 2017; Jeffrey 2001; Balasubramaniam 2011). It is even rarer to find an autonomous Dalit publishing establishment that is commercially viable—more so in English, but also in Indian languages too. This is primarily so because—compared to other marginal communities—the Dalit print culture is a relative recent development given that literacy is a recent acquisition for the Dalits. Historically, Dalits were forbidden from acquiring education and, thus, one of the sweetest fruits of 'freedom' for them has been the ability to read and write.

In his important work on the convergence of technology, nationalism and identity claims in India, Rohit Chopra in *Technology and Nationalism in India: Cultural Negotiations from Colonialism to Cyberspace* (2008) methodically exhibits the discursive and the material terrain on which the 'upper' caste, middle class India plays out its trajectory of cyber success. Although this work does not talk of the Dalit cyberspace or of an equivalent Dalit interest in the pursuit of scientific and technological knowledge, yet the silences on these issues raise pertinent questions on the possibility of a comparable Dalit experience. Yet another essay by Chopra (2006) investigates the underlying similarity in the mobilization of primordial identities for self-representation by both the Hindu right-wing and the Dalits on online forums, but he does not extend his insights to a comprehensive study of the myriad utterances of the Dalits on several diverse kinds of online platforms.

Education plays a very important role for the Dalit community in staking a claim for itself as significant political subjects of the nation. Education is more than self-fashioning for the Dalits—it is a political tool of resistance that is best expressed by Ambedkar's famous slogan of 'Educate, Agitate and Organise'. The Dalit media space is one of the protagonists of

this pressing aspiration and is thus characterized by its myriad desires. Its primary impulse was counter-cultural, reflected not only in its content but also in the locus of the work with respect to the relations of production. Compared to the mainstream media, the means of production employed by these media formations were much more basic and makeshift, requiring little capital and professional skills to run them. Thus, the Dalit media field comes close to the definition of democratic communications developed by Raymond William, in his book *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (re. 1997).

Williams, while discussing the press of the working classes, points out that the former—unlike mass media forms—promotes a 'new kind of relationship', thus a 'new social order' by encouraging 'decapitalization, de-professionalization and deinstitutionalization'. These three modes in production enable ordinary people without professional training in media skills or publishing and little economic resources to share in the process of creation, thereby breaking down the hierarchy of participation, access, and control. It also has the additional function of fostering the emancipation of the participants by encouraging reflexivity through thinking of alternative frames of political outlook, social values and egalitarian perspectives.

Badri Narayan, in several of his works relating to the Dalit public sphere in the Hindi heartland of Uttar Pradesh, brings out the role of the grass-root Dalit print culture in the creation of a Dalit 'public' (2006; 2011). The politicization of this public is made possible to a large extent by the unstinting and tireless work of the many small Dalit pamphleteers and newsletter writers who would invest a part of their limited economic resources in setting up a makeshift printing press at their homes, and then would distribute the imprints free of cost to the people, often cycling for kilometers to reach their target audiences (Narayan 2006). Thus, the role of the Dalit print culture has been inalienable in the creation and the sustenance of the Dalit public in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

4. Philosophy Of Method

The philosophy of method of this study derives from insights developed by an intersection of multidisciplinary knowledge domains and approaches, including Foucauldian thought, performance studies, book history/ print culture studies and hermeneutics. A common concern that runs through all these approaches is the commitment to the themes of history,

materiality and knowledge. Deriving from a hermeneutical tradition of interpretation of texts, social sciences have apprehended physical phenomena through their socio-cultural imperatives. Interpretation of a text has involved a 'recovery' of its meaning as intended by the author by situating the former in its proper historical and cultural context. The philosophical hermeneutics of Gadamer goes a step further by insisting upon the application of the historical method to the interpreter of the phenomenon as well. Gadamer argues that the 'knowledge' of social meanings is not objective and is strongly mediated by the prejudices and the worldview of the interpreter/ knowledge generator. Thus, he becomes instrumental in casting the researcher too as a protagonist of history and its material contingencies, and not outside it as a neutral knowledge creator.

Arguably, the most lasting impact on the concept of history, materiality and knowledge has been made by Foucault through his theorization of discursive practices. He contends that the set of rules, methods and systems that constitute a discursive terrain are powerfully historical in nature, though they disguise themselves as a-priori and transcendental categories of thought, thus claiming an authority beyond history and materiality. Discursive formations are a formidable means of exercise of social power as they subtly perpetuate the hierarchies in society, and thus the power play involved is contingent on not just the devices of exclusion but also on those of inclusion. In fact, argues Foucault, the two are necessarily contingent on each other for any kind of discursive practice(s). Caste is a very rich discursive category in India and the history of the conversation on it reflects the nature of social power as it has renewed itself over time. The Dalit print and digital culture and their protocols examined in this study are attempts at creating a system of discursive practices that that not only challenge the existing epistemic field on caste but also institute structures and patterns of noesis truer to the embodied experiences of the community.

The theory and praxis of book history/ print culture developed by scholars such as Elizabeth Eisenstein, David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, and David Hall share insights from the above discussed systems of thoughts, as well as the distinctly anti-disciplinary impulse of several areas of scholarship that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s such as cultural studies, feminist studies, and media studies (among others). While much of this was due to the cognitive shift that happened with post-modernism, it was also a consequence of several changes in the world system itself that made it evident that cultural forms are an outcome of interventions

across and within diverse sites of activities. Book history, therefore, addresses issues relate to the structural dynamics of print cultures, the political, cultural, economic and social motivations of the several actors who define its many variables, including the role of the social institutions as well as non-governmental factors, and their surrounding infrastructural matrix.

The materiality of belonging to a particular moment in space and time is also shared by Performance studies, which has had a powerful influence in humanities and social sciences from the 1980s onwards. However, the history of apprehending 'performance' as a social behaviour, anthropological fact or speech act goes back to the scholarship of Kenneth Burke (1945), J.L Austin (1955), Turner (1957), Goffman (1959) and John R Searle (1969). In the 1970s, as a reaction to the imaginative and discursive stranglehold of realism in representational fields and social reasoning, a 'turn' was witnessed in the social sciences towards "performance". Performance theory encouraged cognitive processes derived from the experiences of the body and moored in its materiality, expressing themselves through actions and gestures that could be highly stylized, exaggerated, ritualistic and non-realist (Schechner 2002). Kirsten Hastrup (1995) argues that the bulk of cultural knowledge resides in actions rather than words, and that a "thinking body" (Hokowhitu 2014) is the embodied creator of cognition. Thus, the conventional western philosophical separation between abstract thought and the material body is contested for a position where neither the mind, nor the material universe nor the body is independently (or in itself) the point of origin of, or even the vehicle of instrumental action and knowledge creation. As a system of thought, Performance theory too is resolutely determined in challenging given 'structures' of cognition as well as of social life.

This undoing of the traditional structures of thoughts and values invested in hierarchically arranged socio-cultural variables is continued with the method of 'deep' mapping in geography where geological data is studied alongside several other methods of analysis and systems of information that combine data, aesthetics, and philosophical approaches from a multi-disciplinary position. Deep mapping involves a philosophical and methodological acceptance of the inherently equal cognitive and interpretative worth of different orders of knowledge, be it scientific, intuitive, literary, historical, testimonial, reportage or even folkloric. It privileges a performance-oriented understanding of a site—geographical, in this case—where a multivocal, non-linear, cross-referential and equitable

interaction between its many layers of existence is encouraged. The site becomes a palimpsest where every fresh layer of its crafting only covers but never erases its earlier existence. 'Deep' mapping as a philosophy and as a methodological tool is an extremely insightful device for research in humanities and social sciences as it combines both quantitative as well as qualitative designs of research in their diverse disciplinary configurations without diminishing the contributions of any. Thus, the study of intersectionality is best served by methodologies that allow an interplay of analysis.

In conclusion, the philosophy of method for this proposed study derives from this grid of history, materiality and knowledge creation that mirrors the movement towards an epistemological levelling of disciplines, and creation of egalitarian structures of societal narratives. It advances with the recognition that it does not trade in absolutes or objective truths but with contingent, open histories that could both be anecdotal and empirical, 'situated' and transient at the same time. It is not undermined by disciplinary energies from other knowledge systems or intimidated by cross-referentiality of the 'real' with the intuitive and imaginative. This is especially suited for this research project that seeks to investigate the multiple co-ordinates of a media field of a socio-cultural group that is marked by a heterogeneity of affiliations, political aspirations, creative utterances and cultural identities.

5. **Methodological Approaches**

While the methodology involved in this research project drew upon a diverse range of investigative tools, one of the preliminary and sustained methods included an exploration of the archives, both formal as well as informal. My interest in the history of the Dalit community in Delhi led me to the Delhi Archives, located on Satsang Vihar Marg, opposite the eastern gate of the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Although this was my first extended experience of examining the archives, the challenge got easier within days. The Delhi Archives offered a fascinating glimpse into the expanding life of the city, ranging from its territorial augmentation from two *parganas* in 1819 to several districts by often taking over lands and villages from neighbouring states such as Punjab (now parts of Haryana) and Uttar Pradesh—and occasionally conceding some regions. The archives hold early records from the departments of Education and Public Works indicating increased governmental engagement with the social and civic life of the "depressed classes" over time from the early twentieth century onwards.

Documents relating to the administrative history of the city in 1926 and 1932 indicate the allotment of village sites in Multani Dhanda (in Patparganj) to the "depressed classes", lands being granted in Daryagang for an industrial school for the community, and the government sanctioning scholarships for the education of the boys from the Dalit castes. Education appears to be a primary concern of the administration in its interventions for "the amelioration of the moral, material and educational conditions of the Depressed Classes" (1916). Similarly, the records of the Municipal Act 1891 onwards indicate a growing involvement with the sewage project and drainage network in Delhi, and as pointed out by Vijay Prashad (2002) in his important study of the Valmiki community in Delhi, almost all of this work was assigned to the men from this Dalit subgroup. These snippets of information were useful bits and pieces as they helped create a larger chronicle of the past of the Dalit community in Delhi as there is still no established book-length, empirically rigorous account (with the exception of *Dilli ka Dalit Itihaas* by Swaroop Chandra Bauddh) on the subject.

The difficulty involved in gathering information on the antecedents of the community and its roots in the civic life of the city points to the data discrimination that mark our archives—state supported or otherwise. Our legacy institutions of memorialization and record-keeping have slighted the contributions of the liminal groups and have ensured a radical dismemberment of their history and systems of knowledge. Thus, the Delhi Archives was only the first small step in my attempts to glean information on the community, and necessitated a shift towards more informal sources of datasets for better insights. My archival research was more fruitful once I turned my attention to individuals, groups and collectives, and away from the state records and institutions. The information infrastructure built by members of the Dalit community painstakingly over time in the form of personal libraries, study collectives, collaborative practices of record keeping, and small literary and media establishments proved to be a richer source—both materially as well as in perspective.

The above-mentioned trajectory proved to be a crucial lesson for my research as it led me to the subject of investigating the role of large institutions as against smaller collaborative mechanisms in creating depositories of the experiences of people, particularly for those on the wrong side of history. In this context, my visits to the Ambedkar Foundation in 2016 was somewhat disappointing due to its limited collection of records and books. My experience with the archives found theoretical support in the form of insights advanced by the scholarship on

oral history, archiving practices and museology, and performance studies on the centrality of people rather than institutions in creating and preserving knowledge. Scholars such as Dwight Conquergood, Kirsten Hastrup and Norman K. Denzin argue for privileging knowledge contained in the embodied selves of social actors rather than the tomes of published knowledge languishing in inaccessible libraries and other archival spaces of our elite cultural and academic institutions. The information preserved in the form of memories, stories, anecdotes, autobiographies, reportage, interviews, testimonials, data, statistics and essays in Dalit homes and their collaborative spaces are attempts at setting right the "epistemic injustice" (Fricker 2007: 1) by narrowing the distance between the creator and the curator. When the community of creators also act as indexers, taxonomists, curators and interpreters, they rescue the products' abstraction from the experience structures and labouring bodies that have produced them by preserving—to varying degrees—the contexts, the polyvalence and the original design of the product.

The attempts of the community in archiving its experiences about individuals, families, important events or everyday life has witnessed greater (and more visible) success on the world wide web. Thus, the online media has been another useful archival space for this project in mining data on Dalit history and print culture. The internet is a system that has undermined the necessity of institutional set-up for data collection on a large scale by embedding participation/ collaboration in the infrastructure of the internet itself (Shirkey 2005), thereby opening up the doors to possibly infinite data. Another significant change brought about by the world wide web is the elimination of a moderator/ gatekeeper to determine participation. Consequently, the web today is the preferred mode of articulation by communities that have traditionally struggled to access and shape the discursive priorities of the legacy media. Most Dalit organisations, groups, media formations, literary forums, artists of multiple hues, and many politically evolved individuals have a presence in the cyberspace, either in the form of their own web site or through platforms offered by the giants of social media like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These forums are constructed to invest greater value in stories, plurality, cross-referencing and micro-records than in abstract structures and official knowledge management systems. Therefore, several online Dalit projects, blogs, websites and YouTube channels such as the Dalit History Month, Dalit Camera, Dalit Dastak, Bayan TV, Velivada and Round Table India act as repositories of personal histories, interviews and first-hand accounts and impressions of the people who have participated in or observed/ commented

upon past events, or engage in documenting diverse views from Dalit communities activists, students and intellectuals. In addition, the internet has given a new mobility and visuality to the printed word—not only in terms of their dissemination and consumption, but also in terms of their production and philosophy. Thus, a considered combination of institutional and personal archives, web-based resources, and existing scholarship on the Dalit community and the city constituted the initial research design of this project.

The time spent in the archives acted as a preparatory measure for my subsequent exploration of the field of the Dalit media in Delhi. Armed with a preliminary understanding of the urban life and the participation of the Dalit communities in Delhi's various historical moments, I decided to conduct my field research to test the initial impressions gathered from the archival and textual groundwork. However, in order to structure my field and to evolve strategies for best possible methods to identify the variables for investigation, I turned to the methodological tools and practices of book history and ethnography. This choice appeared the most obvious also for the reason that the first two chapters of this thesis derive their functional and discursive logic from the disciplinary energies of the History of the Book (Histoire du Livre) and Print culture studies. The phrase 'print culture' was introduced to tide over certain definitional limitations of its practice as those scholars who engaged with manuscripts, scribal material or serialised publications found the initial nomenclature too restrictive. The non-codex forms of print like pamphlets and newspapers also fell through the definitional sieve of the field, and thus a need was felt to frame the contours of the discipline in much broader terms. Print culture studies was, therefore, formalised through a generic understanding of the word 'print' which now stood for the entire spectrum of the written communication. It should, nevertheless, be borne in mind that the phrase 'Book History' is even now generally used interchangeably with 'print culture', and the use of the two concepts do not signify much difference of intent or perspective. This position is made clear in the introductory issue of the annual journal of the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading and Publishing (SHARP), titled *Book History.* In it, the two editors define the discipline of Book History as:

> [T]he entire history of written communication: the creation, dissemination, and uses of script and print in any medium, including books, newspapers, periodicals, manuscripts, and ephemera…The social, cultural and economic history of authorship, publishing, printing, the book arts, copyright, censorship,

> book selling and distribution, libraries, literacy, literary criticism, reading habits, and reader responses (Greenspan and Rose 1998: ix).

The above definition also makes it plain that it isn't just the individual sites or locations (of social actors, products or institutions) that are in themselves sufficient for a comprehensive understanding of the print culture of a community. The multiple patterns of inter-relations between the various variables are equally essential in investing significance to the field. Book history or print culture studies, therefore is a multi-sited enterprise with ongoing inter-connectedness or transactions between its various protagonists, objects and establishments. Print culture studies of the Dalit community in Delhi moves across various locations of production, distribution and consumption across time as well as space. Its analyses necessitate the use of methodological devices derived from various disciplinary sources, including some from multi-sited ethnography. For this reason, I found it useful to adapt the research method outlined by Marcus in his essay cited below, albeit with a few modifications to suit my enterprise. Marcus states:

> [c]ultural logics…are always multiply produced, and any ethnographic account of these logics finds that they are at least partly constituted within sites of the so-called system (i.e modern interlocking institutions of media, markets, states, industries, universities—the worlds of elites, experts and middle classes). Strategies of quite literally following connections, associations, and putative relationships are thus at the very heart of designing multi-sited ethnographic research (Marcus 1995: 4).

Marcus argues that multi-sited ethnographies determine their object of investigation through multiple modes and techniques which arise out of movement and the attempt to chart a complex but adaptable cultural phenomenon within different sites. He suggests six categories that could be followed by a researcher in her attempt to develop a multi-sited field of investigation. The first category comprises of the people or groups of people who are the initial subject of study, and Marcus encourages the researcher to follow their movements as they go through their activities. The second category is of "thing(s)" or material objects of study whose circulation ought to be charted as it moves through various hands and contexts as gifts, commodities, art etc. The next category is the "metaphor" or what is defined as the "social

correlates and groundings of associations [of material objects] that are most clearly alive in language use and print or visual media" (Marcus 1995). In this case, semiotics drives ethnography as the material object under study is tracked within the domain of its discourse and modes of thought. The fourth category is that of the plot, story or allegory. Marcus believes that the stories and narratives related to the researcher in the process of the fieldwork can act as a device for lateral explorations through connections, associations and indicative relationships for forging multi-sited research. The next category is that of biography or life history which too can be used for shaping multi-sited ethnographic studies. It involves the process of systematic and careful generalisation from the events in the life of an individual to illuminate cultural formations and social contexts that may otherwise remain concealed. Finally, the last category mentioned by Marcus is that of conflict. Today, conflict constitutes an important theoretical concept in the study of societies and communities as it is understood as near ubiquitous among humans and in their social configurations. Following the various dimensions of conflict in the object of study is yet another useful tool for designing a multi-sited research field.

For the purpose of investigating the print culture of the Dalit community in Delhi, I found it useful to adapt the above method outlined by Marcus with the insights derived from the study of social movements, particularly with its communicative dimensions. Ann Mische, while studying the role of communication in social networks forged in political and social movements, insists that "communication is a dynamic, fluid, interactive, and yet socially structured phenomenon that composes relationships both within and across the multiple network formations that give form and life to social movements." (Mische 2003: 259). This conversational matrix in print—in the form of pamphlets, periodical writings such as magazines and newspapers, booklets and even ephemera—is inalienable to recording and expanding the outreach, coordination and alliance formation in movements. Charles Tilly believes that social movements are constituted by an on-going conversation between its multiple protagonists including the activists and their public, the movement and its challengers, as well as between the movement actors themselves (Tilly 2004). Thus, movements, whether social or political, are sustained by and give rise to a network of print culture and communication.

Adopting the insights from the above-discussed body of thought, I undertook the examination of the composite material conditions as well as the abstract institutional and organizational configurations of the Dalit media space that collectively act as the inalienable environ for shaping its discursive tradition. Consequently, I attempted not just the retrieval of the texts themselves but also the various components of the diverse print and cyber environments that shaped them, such as their production, transmission and reception. Moreover, in charting the multi-faceted terrain of the Dalit media field, it became vital to map not only the discursive practices it derives from and responds to, but also the matrix of inclusion and exclusion created by it. In this context. it is important to bear in mind that the Dalit media field is also an exercise in the production of power, and not just a challenge to it. Thus, I identified my field in terms of the various social actors—writers, editors, publishers, book sellers and readers—who had laboured to create the physical and socio-cultural infrastructure of this media domain. I tried to maintain a diversity of categories like as age and gender. However, this proved to be a challenge for several reasons, given the limited participation of women in independent positions of authority, and the demise of some of the earliest protagonists of this media field. In case of the latter, I attempted to fill this lacuna by reading (whenever available) the works penned by these men (they have all been men), their memoirs, obituaries written by others on them and by talking to people who were their associates and friends.

I also endeavoured to understand the role of institutions in helping build the infrastructure of a print culture, and to that end I visited the offices of or events hosted by bodies such as CADAM, Dalit Lekhak Sangh, Ambedkar Foundation and Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy. Observing their material infrastructure first-hand gave me a sense of their scale and scope, and other dimensions to their role were investigated further by conducting interviews with the office bearers, whenever possible. I could not meet the founder and National President of Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy due to his engagement in organising the annual conference of Dalit writers. However, I attended the conference itself and was able to interview a few participants who ranged from writers, media practitioners and activists. Apart from the Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy, World Book Fair and the fair organised on Ambedkar Jayanti every year at Parliament Street were also useful sites for not just meeting the multiple participants of this media domain, but for also viewing first-hand the plurality of its media and forms of utterances. Ambedkar Jayanti in particular is a melee of people, media

forms, stalls of various nature, and a riot of activities. While it was not possible to talk to people at the fair due to the high decibels at the place, it is an unmissable occasion for soaking in a sense of the community and its celebration of an icon.

The interviews that were conducted with multiple people were partly based on a prepared questionnaire, keeping in mind the specific role of the person in the field, and were partly free flowing in nature—only occasionally being interrupted due to a prior commitment on the part of the interviewee or due to some professional claim. They were conducted over a period of six months, and sometimes involved unexpected audiences/ additional participant. Although most questions were answered without reserve, there was one occasion where my questions related to the economic determinants of the field went unanswered as they were perceived as irrelevant to the subject I was studying. Most accounts were partly life narratives interwoven with observations on the larger dynamics of the Dalit media domain, and they were analysed for drawing conclusions on larger social and print cultural patterns. However, it is also important to recall these narratives for their individual characters as well as they chronicle every (those who were interviewed) participant's individual engagement, memory and experience of the media field. This field isn't only shaped by its observable data, but also by the toil, commitment and inspiration of its social actors. The knowledge they built resulted from inspired minds, and, even more significantly, from tireless bodies.

Finally, for the fourth chapter on the Dalit presence in the cyberspace, I followed a historical materialist design combined with the discursive practices mentioned above. It is important to recognize that the historical moment and the material context for the two related yet different technologies of print and cyberspace are contiguous yet also dissimilar, and have thus created their own affective, cultural and epistemic systems. Although these systems are not entirely disparate and also overlap, the medium as well as the terms of the discursive ecosystem of the two are identifiably distinct to a degree. The much more pronounced influence of global capital, trans-national ideas and the world system analysis has implications for the nature of the social commitment of the online Dalit media space in the times of 'disruptive' technology such as the internet. Also, since the 'field' in this case was the world wide web, visuality and aurality too became important aspects of research. It was my attempt to recover a representative sample/ understanding of the pursuits, practices and social arrangements that are allied with the cyberspace and Dalit identities, and it required the adoption of archival

method where the cyberspace functions as an archive in itself. I also attempted to see the continuities as well as differences between the domain of the print and the new media. In addition, it was equally pertinent to trace the nature of ownership of the two forms of the media in the hands of the Dalits independently, and compare the implications of the difference between the two fields. All these above-mentioned categories of empirical study opened themselves up to an extremely rich qualitative enquiry. In fact, the qualitative approach adopted for this chapter brings us back to the purview of the methodological philosophy of this work—a discussion that this section started with.

6. Outline Of Chapters:

Apart from the introduction (chapter 1) and the conclusion (chapter 5), the thesis works with three fairly voluminous core chapters that are divided into several subsections that engage with many crucial tropes associated with a media and its field of influence. The second chapter is a broad historical survey of the Dalit print culture of north India in Hindi, and locates its inception in the social structures of knowledge production that had characterised the literary canon on caste in the country from nineteenth century onwards. This existing scholarship on caste in India in this period (and beyond) was supported by the twin columns of Brahminical and colonial epistemes that emerged as the hegemonic hermeneutical frameworks to understand social identities and differences in the country. The Dalit print culture in the Hindi heartland emerges in response to these meta-narratives and creates its own economies of knowledge that swiftly predicate themselves at a tangent from the established ones. Thus, the chapter attempts to investigate the narrative of the origin and the consequent growth of the Dalit print culture in the Hindi language. What were/ are the socio-cultural, political and institutional influences that laid the ground for the emergence of this distinct media culture based on alternative values, priorities and perspectives? What were/ are its class, caste and ideological matrix, and what kind of political voice(s) and public intervention(s) does it seek to achieve? The chapter avers that the discursive dimensions of the Dalit press are defined by the imperatives of framing and articulating an independent Dalit response to a unique historical conjuncture of ‘modernity’ with the experience of caste oppression in India. This section, therefore, evaluates the Dalits’ stake in the unfolding of modernity’s ‘project’ in India through certain tropes of print and its infrastructures that identify themselves through their persistent recurrence over the years. The second chapter concludes by introducing Delhi into this narrative,

first in terms of the broader geo-political history of the community under study and then the social world of its media formations.

Chapter three narrows the spatial and social circle of its inquiry to focus closely on Delhi as the site of study in relation to the Dalit print culture through the length of the twentieth century. The Dalit print sphere in Delhi is a consequence of the various social, political and religious movements that have shaped the consciousness of the Dalit community in the city. These movements have found expression in the print form through memoirs, essays, pamphlets, magazines and other periodicals, biographies, life narratives, historical accounts, political tracts, social commentary, records maintained in the offices of the various movements, religious literature, poems and other works of fiction. This chapter explores the particular social, political, cultural and religious movements that have contributed towards a creation of a Dalit print culture and a counter public to the 'mainstream'. This is done principally by examining the role of movements in Delhi in producing and shaping the current nature of the Dalit print culture of the city, and by ethnographic study of the actors and institutions that define this domain. Although this chapter finds its justification in the print protocols of the Dalit community, careful engagement with the underlying practices of this textual tradition betrays its continuing ties with the oral and the pre-literate forms of articulations that create their own economies of cultural infrastructures. The chapter concludes with an attempt to weave together the many implications of this narrative for a politically inflected reading of the rugged and often fractured terrain of this print culture that defines itself—above all—by very self-conscious tropes of its alterity from the "mainstream".

Chapter four takes off from the previous one on the print culture and is intended as a partial conversation with it through the device of the Dalit online media. The familiarity with and the use of the online media space symbolizes a higher degree of comfort with the world of literacy and technology. This section engages with the issues of the Dalit cyberspace and the dynamics of its environment, its possibilities for political and other kinds of interventions and its modalities and forms of expressions. It also seeks to investigate the continuities as well as refractions of this form of the Dalit media field with its print culture for a comparative understanding of the two forms.

The Dalit presence on the online mediascape of the country is a relatively recent phenomenon, and a lot of social scientists have engaged with the many ways in which the world wide web has been an ally in harnessing the power of computer mediated communication in its attempts to invest the community with the dignity and rights due to it as subjects of a modern human society. However, the web, like every other human fabrication, is marked with the normative convictions of its architects. In case of India, the social matrix of the web replicates the dynamics of western scientific/ technological values dovetailing with motifs from the hegemonic cultural practices and value systems of the country. In the light of this, it isn't inaccurate to claim that the web is a complicated ally for the Dalits as much of the Dalit episteme and experience structures don't necessarily find an intuitive expression on the web. Increasingly, however, epistemes based on objective absolutisms and the duality of the mind and the body are under greater challenge on web platforms now from several minority cultures (including Dalits) that assert the 'situated' noesis of our embodied selves. Drawing upon the works of Norman K. Denzin and Dwight Conquergood on performance and culture, particularly the assertion of the former that "the world is a performance, not a text" (Denzin 2003: 191), this chapter claims that the internet too is a performance, and not a text. Increasingly, the features of web 2.0 with its social software is allowing its users to not just create text-based content for reading and sharing, but also permits them to plan and launch social media 'events' that invest 'activity' or 'doing' into the system. For instance, the chapter closely examines the social media activity that unfolded itself on Facebook and Twitter when Raya Sarkar, a law student at UC Davis School of Law in the United States of America, released an anonymously crowdsourced list of male professors in the academia who were accused of sexual harassment by several women. Sarkar's list of sexual harassers in the academia used the informal, unofficial modes of information to construct a body of 'practical' or 'useful' knowledge that by privileging the embodied experiences of a large number of women in academic spaces closes the traditional distance between information and action. This Focusing upon the interconnections between the Dalit body and its experiential knowledge is found on several online platforms, and the chapter contends that the transnational Dalit networks of the second-generation users of the internet are re-shaping and re-defining the system's core principles and premises in order to challenge and re-assess the existing forms of institutional engagements and their participatory hierarchies in various establishments—both online as well as offline.

While the three core chapters engage materially with these very important questions, the conclusion (chapter 5) of the thesis broadens the arena to reflect on the role of the non-Dalits in the social structures of knowledge production on caste in modern India. For instance, some print establishments that are committed to a radical questioning of caste are not necessarily owned or controlled by the Dalits themselves. Many of these spaces (magazine houses like *Hans* and *Kathadesh*) were extremely vital for the visibility and acceptability of the Dalit discourse in the mainstream. Thus, what is the role of radical/ alternative media spaces that may not institutionally qualify as 'Dalit' for the growth and acceptability of the Dalit media? How do they affect the principles and praxis of 'Dalit power'? In engaging with these questions, the conclusion also re-iterates a commitment to investigative self-reflexivity that must never be disregarded in caste negotiations—discursive or otherwise.

Chapter 2
Hindi Dalit Print Culture in North India and Delhi: Text and Context

1. Introduction

Literacy has crucial civilizational consequences for humanity, evident in the way a pre-literate community structures its social consciousness and its sense of civilizational identity on markedly different principles configured by the non-writerly material resources and forms available to it. The written word permanently and irrevocably transforms a community's sensibility by fabricating it through the technological, social and historical forces that are mediated by the idea and experience of literacy[3]. Literacy fostered relationship with the alphabet, enabling an individual or a community to codify and archive its knowledge, and turn it into textual practices. In addition, due to its potential for facilitating a relative dissociation of cognitive activity of a person from her larger social milieu, it encourages the privatizing of meaning and interior development of thought (Ong, 1982; McLuhan 1964).

The familiarity with the written word has almost always been the preserve of the privileged few in most societies. Thus, one distinct feature of literacy across world cultures has been the creation of a small class of lettered individuals who have deployed the written word as a tool of social and psychological dominance over the rest of the community. The domination of the literate over the non-literate population was facilitated not just by the interred and recondite nature of the knowledge produced by the authoritative textual tradition but also due to the power it conferred to them over the right to represent. The perceptual techniques and the value system of the producers of texts are powerfully inscribed in social practices as well because of the superior status of the written word over orality. Textuality is therefore a powerful

[3] It is important to bear in mind, however, that there is no water-tight and neat division between pre-literate and literate societies. Most contemporary communities continue to have intersecting elements of orality as well as literacy. In fact, according to Walter Ong in his seminal work *Orality and Literacy,* the contemporary age of electronic devices is the times of "secondary orality", or the orality of the electronic devices that are necessarily dependent on the medium of writing and print for their being.

tradition that also helps create what it says, thus reinforcing the dominance of a certain nature—of communities, dialects or values.

Although literacy has been a pivotal attainment, its acquisition and dissemination across societies and communities have been both quantitatively and qualitatively differential for various socio-cultural and political reasons. Therefore, different groups of people have found themselves variously arranged on the multivalent spectrum of prestige and power, of social authority and public speech, and vocabularies of self-articulation. Much of the history of the humanity thus is a narrative of the contestations by multiple social groups for a more favourable re-arrangement of these hierarchies for themselves.

This chapter surveys the history of one such contestation in the Hindi speaking regions of north India between the Dalits and the 'upper castes' through the medium of the Dalit print culture in Hindi. Print culture is a higher stage of writing culture, and in many ways replicates and even intensifies several of the contradictions and struggles inherent in the power matrix of literacy. But before we move on to an examination of the Dalit print culture in Hindi in north India, it will be useful to trace the brief outlines of the Hindi print and public sphere in north India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in order to contextualize the former more comprehensibly.

2. The Hindi Public Sphere

The Hindi public sphere during colonial India has been a subject of rigorous research by scholars like Francesca Orsini and Ulrike Stark. Orsini's two books—*The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940. Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* (2002) and *Print and Pleasure: Popular Literature and Entertaining Fictions in Colonial North India* (2009)—and Stark's *An Empire of Books: The Naval Kishore Press and the Diffusion of the Printed Word in Colonial North India 1858-1895* (2007) have engaged extensively with the print history of the colonial north India.

Orsini, in her book *The Hindi Public Sphere* (2002) argues that the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century was the period when Hindi was cast in the role of the foremost national language, and thus attempts were made to establish a prestigious canonical tradition

for it. A significant part of this effort stemmed from a strong conviction on the part of the Hindi-promoters that the language ought to be purged of any 'foreign' influences and restored to its 'pure' roots. Thus, writers and scholars of Hindi took it upon themselves to standardise the language and define its norms of 'correct' linguistic and grammatical usage. Employing of Urdu words, or words with Arabic-Persian roots was strongly discouraged (as they were seen as the 'corrupting' influence of a foreign culture) and the learners/ practitioners of Hindi were instructed to adopt Sanskritic vocabulary.

Moreover, as she points out in the same work, it must be borne in mind that Hindi itself was spoken in various dialects through many parts of north India in this period. However, the process of standardisation of Hindi ensured that the *Khadi boli*—which was spoken in a small region of Uttar Pradesh, particularly its north-western region—ousted its other varieties like *Braj Bhasa* and *Awadhi* from the formal and 'respectable' discourses. It is evident that the canonisation of Hindi as the language of the public sphere in this age was concerned overwhelmingly with the respectability and prestige-creation of the language rather than its communicability or general outreach. Another useful tool in this direction was the deployment of the institutional structures of the society like associations and educational spaces such as schools and colleges to train people into the normative linguistic practices of this culturally influential minority. The *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* of Banaras (established in 1893) was founded with the stated purpose of formalising and sanitising Hindi from its 'impure' and 'alien' influences, and turning it into a language worthy of carrying the nationalistic aspirations of the country. To this end, the *Nagari Pracharini Sabha* also managed to cultivate official patronage and financial support from the government, thus reinforcing the desirability and urgency of such an endeavour.

Similarly, the Hindi textbooks in the educational institutions were also strongly marked by a preference for the polite, highbrow variant of the language that clearly exhibited its ideological solidarity with the attempts at re-defining its identity on more exclusive and narrower principles. It was extremely challenging for students from non-upper caste and non-upper class backgrounds to identify with the new institutionalised linguistic practices of Hindi. Several Hindi periodicals and other important publications also participated zealously in this project. Orsini identifies Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi as its best exemplar, the formidable Hindi scholar whose periodical *Sarasvati* (published in the first two decades of the twentieth century)

was at the forefront of defining the 'right' linguistic register for the language. Thus, Hindi as a language of the public sphere in this period is heavily characterised by markers of religious, caste, class and gender entitlements as its best practitioners were upper caste, upper class Hindu men.

There is a remarkably interesting contradiction in the idea of the public sphere advanced in the Hindi belt (as elsewhere too) in this period. While the notion of the public sphere promised an open and equal platform to all citizens of the nation for the articulation of their opinion on a public issue, yet its praxis generated conditions and situations of unequal and discriminatory participation. The Hindi public sphere of the age, due to its insistence on 'correct' and 'pure' Hindi-linguistic practices, devalued and excluded a large majority who lacked the necessary training or the required cultural credentials for membership. The lack of this training or the obligatory cultural environment on the part of an individual or a community effectively led to exclusion from participation in the public sphere.

Moreover, the new Hindi public not only defined its linguistic practices but also its discursive concerns within an extremely limited range. It created a normative, singular set of values where only subjects of 'national' concern could be discussed. The 'national', in this context, was defined primarily by the imperatives of anti-colonial struggle, and a uniform set of values for 'Indian-ness' and patriotism was created to fit everyone. Thus, the public was essentially emptied of any internal fault lines on the rubric of caste, class, religion, gender or any other marker of identity by subsuming it under the category of the 'educated patriot'. Interestingly, the 'educated patriot' betrayed clear indicators of the upper caste Hindu male. Everything else was dismissed as a devalued political, social or linguistic form and therefore unworthy of utterance in the public sphere. In addition, any dissent with or challenges to the definition of the 'national' as established by this small socio-literary group was branded as divisive and disruptive of the freedom movement, and thus anti-national or un-Indian. As a result, the demands or the agonised utterances of specific caste, class, religion or gender based liminality was seen as parochial, sectarian and thus undeserving of recognition in the public sphere. (Orsini 2002)

Orsini goes on to argue that while the above-mentioned hegemonic tendencies were true of the Hindi public sphere of this period, it is also undeniable that the 1920s and the 30s

were also the age of a marked rise in the populist tendencies in the Hindi scene. The press and other print mediums were teaming with publications that were clearly constantly slipping out of the control of the disciplining and disapproving gaze of the *haute* Hindi hegemons. This was the period when a small but visible section of educated women became avid readers of periodicals and other kinds of literature produced for their exclusive consumption. Shobna Nijhawan, in her important work *Periodical Literature in Colonial North India: Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere* (2012), delineates the entry of women in north India in the male-dominated public sphere through the medium of these periodicals. The medium was instrumental in these women's efforts to designate a space for themselves and their shifting domestic and public aspirations in society. Over time, these women's journals gradually but progressively shifted their attention to more topical and political subjects, thus recognising women's new role as nascent political subjects in a nation struggling for freedom and a more modern self-definition.

Similarly, the peasants were yet another important category of the social and economic underclass that voiced its particular dissatisfaction and demands vociferously in the press—thus challenging the limits of the acceptable 'public' in the mainstream. The peasant community also understood the significance of extra-discursive measures in order to make itself more visible politically, and therefore there were many demonstrations and public meetings of the peasants during this period (Rawat 2011). It was evident to the peasantry that print in itself was not sufficient to bring about the necessary social change as the newer ideas in the print culture did not necessarily encourage social action or even a decisive intellectual conversion on the part of the conservative and traditionally privileged sections of the society. The problem was compounded by the fact that although the voices of the liminal had started finding some space in the public sphere, yet the overarching, dominant identity of the nationalist self still did not accept the underclass as its equal. It continued to define its relationship with them in terms of alterity, and insisted on characterising itself as the normative, desirable model of participation in the public debates. Thus, much to the eventual disappointment of the marginal, it became unmistakable that their utterances would either have to dovetail in expression and sentiment—for the most part—with the space granted to them by the new Hindi hegemons, or be excluded altogether from the platforms appropriated by them. It is in the above milieu that the Hindi Dalit print culture takes root and begins to grow—tentative to start with, but eventually finding its own particular character and voice.

3. The Hindi Dalit Public Sphere

A significant amount of research exists by scholars like Badri Narayan, Sarah Beth Hunt, and Ramnarayan S Rawat, among others, who have examined the role of the Hindi Dalit print culture and public sphere in north India. However, it is important to bear in mind that most of the insights arrived at by these scholars are derived from their work principally in Uttar Pradesh, and for Badri Narayan, a section of Bihar as well. Large parts of other Hindi speaking areas of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and even Bihar have not been extensively investigated and studied. Although it is possible to generalise and claim with relative accuracy that the Dalit print culture in Hindi was strongly a consequence of the socio-cultural and political developments in Uttar Pradesh, yet the insights derived herein remain partial and open to amendments for greater accuracy with more work in other areas too.

Historically, the Dalits have come to literacy extremely late as a community. The reasons for this have been rooted in the Brahmanical social order that made it culturally unacceptable for the Dalits to be educated. However, the presence of the British colonial government in India provided the first opportunity for the Dalits of the country to seek formal and systematic education. The government and the missionary schools not only did not discriminate against the Dalit students but also actively encouraged them to enrol in schools and pursue education. In addition, the presence of the British in India opened up certain other avenues of economic sustenance for the Dalits, which allowed them to provide for the formal schooling of their children. The Dalits found employment in the British army as sepoys, in the municipal corporations as sanitation workers and in the leather factories as labourers—and very occasionally, as owners too (Rawat 2011).

All this helped create a small but politically conscious section of the first community of Dalit activists who understood the urgency to transform the Dalits into a political community that was conscious of its rights and militant enough in its sensibilities to demand its lawful place as equal citizens of the nation. This section of the Dalits understood the potential of the printing press in creating autonomous communication networks, which could then feed into the efforts for social and political change. It is therefore very essential to remember that the

Dalit media, since its inception, is defined by self-conscious tropes of defiance and resistance to the established episteme on and the practices of caste relations. Its birth, structure and epistemic practices are inseparable from the socio-political energies of its times.

The above is one of the important ways in which the Dalit episteme has distinguished itself from the mainstream by contending that its literature (fictional as well as non-fictional productions) is inexorably shaped on the anvil of the political rather than the aesthetic or the transcendental. Taking issue with the canonical Hindi or other *bhasha* opus, the Dalit writers such as Sharankumar Limbale, Om Prakash Valmiki and Kanval Bharti have argued that the material conditions of the Dalit life does not allow its individual or collective noesis the privilege of discarding its social milieu to explore the more private dimensions of a relatively hermetical subjectivity, or the disinterestedness to traverse the realm of the transcendental, or even the depoliticised romanticism of an aesthete. The Dalit literary consciousness is forged in the flames of political contestations, sharpened by the demystification of power arrangements in social relations and polished through its commitment to agitation and activism for change.

The domain of the Dalit knowledge production in Hindi, as pointed out by Sarah Beth Hunt in her work *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation* (2014), and Ramnarayan Rawat in *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India* (2011) started off with small, inexpensive caste-history pamphlets published by small or privately owned Dalit presses in the first two decades of the twentieth century in Uttar Pradesh. These chapbooks like literature were primarily written by early 'Chamar'[4] activists and thinkers who took it upon themselves to respond to the existing episteme about their community in both the Hindu/ Brahmanical texts as well as in colonial ethnography. Much of the ancient Hindu textual tradition either upheld the ritualistic impurity of the so called 'untouchable' castes and accordingly prescribed various forms of indignities and debilities of existence for them or, alternatively, elided their lifeworld altogether. Similarly, the nationalistic

[4] 'Chamars'—a sub-caste among the Dalit in north India—are the most prominent of all the Dalit sub castes in the region, particularly in Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. They constitute around two-thirds of the total number of Dalits in Uttar Pradesh and are also the numerical majority in Delhi. The dominance of this sub-caste is evident not only in their numbers but also in terms of the educational and economic lead they have over other Dalit communities. Most of the Dalit thinkers and activists in north India, in addition to the Dalit middle class, derive from this community.

writings in the nineteenth and twentieth century[5] concerned itself overwhelmingly with the representation of ancient India as a golden age that was lost due to the Muslim invasion, and thus it either offered a justification for the varna-based hierarchy of the ancient Indian society or erased the Dalits as figures of relevance from the social stage of the period.

Taking a cue from the existing Brahmanical canon, the colonial system of knowledge production on India also replicated many of the existing prejudices and prevalent preconceptions about the 'untouchables' amongst the natives. The colonial historiography of caste in India took the shape of decennial censuses, compilation of folk narratives, surveys of castes and tribes of the country and other kinds of ethnographic studies and data. The purpose of this massive project of studying and subsequently producing an authoritative body of knowledge on India and its people was the founding of a colonial governmentality that methodically used rational and scientific principles to generate various modes of direct and indirect forms of power and domination of its imperial subjects.

Ironically enough, the 'rational' and the 'scientific' rigour of the colonial episteme duplicated the empirically questionable association of every 'untouchable' caste with an occupational stereotype due to its dependence on Brahmanical texts and 'upper'-caste Hindu knowledge systems[6]. Rawat writes "[T]he persistence of the stereotype that Chamars are leatherworkers, which spans both colonial and post-colonial contexts, demonstrates the constitutive relationship between imagined occupation and the representation of Dalit identities." (Rawat 2011: 6) He convincingly goes on to demonstrate later in his thesis that contrary to the popular stereotype, most of the 'Chamars' in Uttar Pradesh were actually peasants or landless agricultural labourers. Similarly, Vijay Prashad in his work *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (2000) argues that the 'Mehtar'/ 'Chuhra' or the 'Valmiki' community of the Dalits in Punjab were popularly typecast as sweepers. However, like the 'chamars' in Uttar Pradesh, most of the Valmikis were landless agricultural labourers who worked on the lands of those more prosperous than them (Prashad 2000).

[5] Some influential writers in this tradition included Bharatendu Harishchandra, Raja Siva Prasad Simh and Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.

[6] Colonial ethnographers like George W Briggs and William Crooke associate the traditional occupation of the 'chamars' with leatherwork, and they cite the Sanskrit root of the word to endorse their derivation. Briggs asserted that the word "Camar" is derived from the Sanskrit *charmakara*, which means leather worker.

In the context of the above, it is therefore essential to recognise that this overriding documental association between an assumed occupation and disadvantaged caste groups is representative of not just epistemic violence inflicted by a textual tradition but also had significant debilitating relationship with their life chances. For instance, the Valmikis—due to the established assumptions about their traditional work as sweepers—overwhelmingly constitute the workforce of municipalities all over north India as sweepers and scavengers. This was not an accidental development but an outcome of a deliberate practice on the part of the municipalities to encourage and give preference to the hiring of Valmikis/ Mehtars as sweepers in the organisation (Prashad 2000). The Valmikis too, on their part, found this arrangement convenient as it gave them the security of a government job as most of them had newly migrated from the villages to find better economic and social opportunities in the cities. Over time, the Valmikis assumed a 'natural' right over the municipal jobs in the cities and much of their productive energies concentrated itself on securing the sweepers' position in the organisation. Thus, for long there occurred a delimiting of imaginative, existential and productive possibilities for the community because of an exclusivist policy based on flawed and hegemonic representative practices. Comparably, for the Chamars of Uttar Pradesh, their stereotype as leatherworkers exposed them to serious and sustained violence in village communities for their alleged role in poisoning cattle for their flesh and hide. It is therefore accurate to claim that much of the vast body of Brahmanical, colonial and even post-colonial scholarship on the Dalits belie the authentic material and experiential social milieu of these communities and help perpetuate casteist and hegemonic knowledge paradigms.

3.1 The Hindi Dalit Public Sphere—Earliest Manifestations

The earliest Dalit activists and thinkers were faced with the formidable task of locating their community more sympathetically and honourably in the textual tradition of the country in order to wrest for themselves a socially respectable identity as a caste group. Ramnarayan Rawat points out that almost all the writings by the Dalits in the first two decades of the twentieth century show a significant lack of concern with the existent economic destitution among the 'lower' castes, absence of land distribution or anti-colonial struggle (Rawat 2011). Most writers direct their intellectual and creative resources towards re-visiting the caste identity of their community by posing a challenge to the traditional, Brahmanical wisdom on it. One

explanation for this would lie in the class and cultural affiliations of the writers of these works. Most of these writers were a part of the small urban educated elite amongst the Dalits who had acquired relative prosperity through professions like law, teaching and petty government services. Their experiences as Dalits were mediated by their urban environment where issues of land distribution, rural poverty and *begari*[7] were not as relevant. For these educated urban Dalits who had been exposed to the modern institutions of the public sphere and the arena of public debates, their disqualification from an equal participation on grounds of the stigma associated with their caste was perhaps a heavier burden.

Moreover, these Dalit caste histories were not written in isolation from the larger literary environment of the period but were a consequence of it. A number of caste histories or *vamsavalis* were written around this time by the caste Hindu literati, including a few by Bhartendu Harishchandra. These *vamsavalis* were based on the *itihas-purana*[8] tradition of

[7] *Begari* was a system whereby Dalits of all *jatis* were expected to provide free service to not just traditional masters like the *zamindars* or landlords but to the new colonial masters and its administrative bureaucracy as well. Any resistance to the practice invited brutal violence and other forms of reprisal for the rural Dalit communities.

[8] The colonial scholars firmly held that India did not have a tradition of historiography or history writing, and thus the Indians lacked a sense of history. However, as many Indian historians have subsequently pointed out, although India did lack history as a discipline as defined in nineteenth century Europe, it is incorrect to claim that India lacked a tradition of history-writing altogether. There were several modes of chronicling and recording of significant events and personages in India, and one of the most ancient and significant ones was that of the *itihas-purana.* The *Puranas* literally means ancient or very old. They are an extensive body of literature ranging on a number of subjects such as cosmology, genealogies of gods, goddesses, kings, heroes, sages, and demigods, folk tales, pilgrimages, temples, medicine, astronomy, grammar, mineralogy as well as theology and philosophy. As several scholars of ancient India have argues, the Puranic tradition—due to its narratives of past events of social significance combined with a genealogical approach—was closely allied with political power, royal courts and court poets. It was often used to extend historic authority and weight to new kings or new kingdoms for political legitimacy. Since caste has been a very important factor for political authority through much of Indian history, *Puranas* have often been deployed to establish the *Kshatriya* status of questionable (on grounds of caste) political figures through *Kshatriya* ancestry. Romila Thapar, in her work *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations*, talks of the difficulties in correlating "the major lineages of the early tradition" with archaeological data. Thus, she states that *Puranic* genealogies "are not apparently factual information on history and chronology but they can be examined as records of a general pattern of settlements and migrations." (226) She cautions the reader in viewing the *Puranic* sources as history as we understand the discipline in contemporary times. It is for this reason that the word '*itihas'* is more apt for the kind of historical information contained in the *Puranas* than the word 'history' as *itihas* combines belief-systems, folklore and myths with facts.

history writing, and were used primarily to invest caste groups with increased social and cultural prestige and clout through the fabrication of an appropriate lineage in antiquity to facilitate conditions for upward mobility in the contemporary caste hierarchy. Thus, the first set of Dalit writers were responding to their immediate socio-cultural and literary environment more from the matrix of the hegemonic public, political and discursive value systems than the later generation of writers and thinkers to come (Rawat 2011; Hunt 2014).

Some of the earliest Dalit texts that derive from this tradition of writing include U.B.S Raghuvanshi's *Shree Chanvar Purana* (published between 1910-1916), the Jaiswar Mahasabha's *Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha* (1926), Pandit Sundarlal Sagar's *Yadav Jivan* (1929) and Ramnarayan Yadvendru's *Yaduvansh ka Aitihas* (1942). These booklets were published from various centres in north India such as Kanpur, Lahore, Agra, Meerut, among others. While this literature derived its political and cultural legitimacy from its supposed ties to the *Puranas*, yet the outcome it sought to generate was entirely contemporary. Thus, all these *jati* genealogies attempted to claim a *Kshatriya* status for their caste in antiquity by locating the prestige of the particular community in a king or ruler renowned for his wisdom, generosity and goodness. The kings—either through misfortune or the conniving of rivals, both human and divine—fall from grace and are condemned to lead the life of an outcaste, thus marking the steady debasement of their caste since then to now. However, these caste histories are also very careful in holding out the promise for a future benediction of the caste group either through the birth of a messianic figure[9] or the self-improvement strategies on the part of the community through the knowledge of their 'true' ancestry, revealed to them through these *vamsavalis*. This is a vital reason for the financial, ethical, promotional and other kinds of support extended to these works by the institutional matrix of the caste associations or *jati sabhas* that had sprung up in these regions by then[10]. The Chamar *sabhas* in particular were very ardent in their

[9] The *Chanvar Purana* mentions that the birth of Saint Raidas in the Chamar community in the *kaliyug* will be the beginning of the restoration of the caste group to its former respectability and glory.

[10] The Jatav Veer Mahasabha in Agra was established in 1917 by Manik Chand, Khemchand Bohare and Ramnarayan Yadavendu. The association acted as the institutional support for the local Chamar community's claim to *Kshatriya* status as Jatavs, insisting that the word was a corruption from the title Yadav, thus attempting to establish links to the *Yaduvanshi* lineage of Krishna. Pandit Sunderlal Sagar's *Yadav Jivan* (originally titled *Jatav Jivan*) and Ramnarayan Yadavendu's *Yaduvansh Ka Itihas* were published from Agra with the assistance of the Jatav Veer Mahasabha.

advocacy of reforms for the community, and insisted on aligning the lifestyle of the Chamars to the 'pure' and 'clean' practices of the 'upper' caste Hindus by encouraging the abjuring of alcohol, non-vegetarianism and leatherwork. Crucially, these associations also made their children's access to education a very important part of their reform agenda, thus laying the grounds for the future burgeoning of a well-defined Dalit media field with its distinctive practices of cultural performances, symbolism, socio-economic arrangements, means of production, distribution and consumption and technological methods (Bauddh 2016).

Scholars like Sarah Beth Hunt have insisted on drawing a fine line between these *vamsavalis* and the later literary productions of the Dalit press, claiming that the socio-cultural imaginary of the former are distinctively more collaborative with the hegemonic caste practices and thus much less resistive than the literature that followed (Beth 2014). Therefore, it is more accurate to designate these works as the pre-cursors of the Dalit print culture than a part of it. However, it is also useful to bear in mind that these *vamsavalis,* at the same time, are decisive indicators of the community's entry into modernity, including print modernity as they gesture towards an incipient Dalit 'public sphere'. The 'public sphere' in India—as elsewhere—is a decidedly modern form of the social imaginary as it allowed the 'public' the right to a discursive space for rational interactions and debates. It is conceptually distinct from the state and its machineries and is co-terminus with the idea of participatory democracy where the 'public opinion' is held to be an important determinant of governmental policies and actions (Habermas 1989; Chatterjee 1993; Narayan 2011). The possibility that these Dalit writers could insert themselves into the 'public sphere' in order to speak for their community from a position of authority, and challenge the conventional wisdom about their identity in the ritual hierarchy of caste is more than a mere nod at their tryst with political and cultural modernity of the period.

3.2 The Hindi Dalit Public Sphere—Socio-Political Roots

The next important stage in the growth of the print culture of the Dalits in north India occurred with the proliferation of the Adi-Hindu literature, which was a consequence of the emergence of the Adi (precursor) movements in the country in the 1920s. The Adi movements arose all over India under different names, and in Uttar Pradesh it was known as the Adi-Hindu movement. It was initiated by Swami Acchutananda, one of the most important ideologues of the Adi movements and anti-caste rebellions. In Punjab, the Adi movement was started by

Mangoo Ram under the name of Ad-Dharm. Deriving from the recently excavated Indus valley civilization that indicated the existence of a sophisticated, urban culture in India even prior to the much-venerated Vedic age, the early Dalit thinkers located their community—along with the other caste-based marginal identities—at the centre of the narrative of the Indus civilization. They claimed, and not without theoretical support from the existing historical convictions of the period, that the Brahmans and the other 'upper' caste Hindus were non-indigenous invaders who overran the prosperous, peaceful and non-combative Indus valley populace, and decimated an advanced polity by brute force. The caste system was thereafter instituted to enslave and ghettoise the dark-complexioned pre-Aryan population of India, in order to maintain the racial purity of the Aryan race and its political dominance (Juergensmeyer 1982; Singh 2009-10; Bharti 2011; Ram 2004; Gooptu 2006).

This historical narrative proved to be a very useful device in the hands of the early Dalit thinkers as it helped them deploy the anti-colonial moment in India and its analytical categories against the structures of caste oppression. In this framework, the British were not the only colonisers—they were simply the latest in a sequence that had started with the Aryans (equated rather reductively with the entire 'upper' caste). Thus, the logic of aboriginality demanded the shift of political power not just from the English to the Indians, but more specifically, to the 'indigenous' Indians (the Dalits and the Shudras) who not just constituted the numerical majority in the country, but were also the rightful suitors of the nation's political destiny.

Consequently, we find that several pamphlets and tracts were written and published in this period around this subject. The first periodical to be published in the region was *Adimanav* by Acchutanand in 1927, and was conceptualised on the principle of defining the original inhabitants of the nation. Swami Acchtananda's press in Kanpur was the source of many of his literary works and newspapers, including another periodical by the tile *Achhut*. Yet another very important press associated with the publishing and propagation of the Adi-Hindu ideology and writing was the Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan set up by Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu in Lucknow. Some of the representative titles published by this press include *Mul Bharatvansi Aur Arya* (1930), *Bharat ke Adi-Nivasiyon*, *Shrishti aur Manav-Samaj ka Vikas* (1938)*, Bharat ke Adi-Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata*. Swami Acchutananda also composed some poems like *Itihas Gyan* and "Adi Vansh Ashtak" in the early 1920s to relay to a largely illiterate audience his re-telling of the history of ancient India through the lens of the Adi-Hindu philosophy.

Many scholars like Sudha Pai in *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* (2002) and Christophe Jaffrelot's *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics* (2003) have argued that the decline of the institutional base of the Adi-Hindu movement was also its demise in entirety. However, it has been pointed out by certain other scholars like Nandini Gooptu (2006) that the decline of the Adi-Hindu movement did not end its long-term ideological contribution, which continues to perpetuate itself in the Dalit episteme with the ongoing belief in the racial otherness of the Dalits and the Shudras from the Aryans, and the conviction that the contemporary non-upper caste population of the country has derived its lineage from the pre-Vedic civilizations, the hallmark of which was the Indus Valley culture. Many works continue to be published around this theme till late 1970s and even after, and some of the existent ones include titles like *Arya Satya* by Prof. Tara Ram, *Moolnivasiyon, Ye Aapke Daman ke Mool Karan* and *Moolnivasiyon! Kya Aapke Paas in Sawalon ke Jawab Hain?* by Ranjeet 'Kabeerpanthi' Sadhu, *Pracheen Bharat ke Shashak Naag, Unki Utpatti aur Itihas* and *Sindhu Ghati Sabhyata ke Srijankarta Shudra-Vanik* by Dr. Naval Viyogi, among others.

The Adi movements across the country were primarily social in nature, with the aim to unite the Dalits and the Shudras for political collaboration. The Dalits had not managed to enter institutional politics with a political organisation of their own. This, however, was to change in the 1940s with the rising political influence of Ambedkar in north India as well. Ambedkar and many of the radical Dalits had a history of disagreement with the Congress and Gandhi on a range of subjects and political practices. Consequently, Ambedkar decided to found a political organisation to enable the Dalits an uncompromised and candid entry into the institutional political spaces of the nation. The political front instituted by Ambedkar for this purpose was the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF), which was established in Maharashtra in 1942, and its Uttar Pradesh wing became operational in 1944. While a majority of the Dalits in north India continued to ally itself with the Congress, the SCF—and its later avatar, the Republican Party of India (RPI), established in 1957—rapidly became an important alternative ideological locus for a sizeable section of the Dalits in many north Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and even Delhi (Singh 2009-10; Yadav 2011). The SCF and (later on) the RPI unflinchingly focussed on the caste identity and marginality of the population, and attempted to underscore the caste dimensions of poverty and exclusion in the society. Congress and its Nehruvian

socialism, on the other hand, laboured to erase all indicators of what it defined as 'parochialism' in public life in order to drive the country towards its vision of modernity, and thus characterised caste as a remnant of the old feudal social order on its way out. SCF and RPI directed its energies towards rural land distribution and agricultural reforms as its constituency of 'untouchables' were deeply affected by its discriminatory practices. Congress, meanwhile, concentrated more on industrialisation and urbanisation, thus failing to meet the needs of a considerable section of the rural poor—many of whom were Dalits. It is important to point out here that most of the voters and adherents of the SCF and the RPI came from the Jatav/ Chamar communities of the Dalits as it was this sub-caste that had benefitted the most from education and exposure to progressive and radical ideas. Many other sections of the Dalit community, particularly the Valmiki/ Bhangi sub-caste, continued to stay loyal to the Congress politically and to Hinduism culturally (Jaffrelot 2003; Prashad 2000)

The Dalit print sphere was keenly affected by these political developments, and the presence of the SCF/ RPI in the electoral arena. While the preceding decades had remained rather tepid as far as the productivity of Dalit newspapers and periodicals in Hindi was concerned, it suddenly found a burst of strength from the mid-1950s onwards where one notices a proliferation of newspapers. Owen Lynch, in his study of Jatavs in Agra, states that "a series of newspapers have been published since 1956, but all [were] short lived." (Lynch 1969, as cited in Hunt 2014). The publication and distribution of pamphlet and chapbook literature also continued, now incorporating many contemporary political themes and concerns. This proliferating print culture played a vital role in the emergence of a Dalit 'public'. Badri Narayan, in several of his works relating to the Dalit public sphere in the Hindi heartland of Uttar Pradesh, brings out the role of the grass-root Dalit print culture in the creation of this 'public' (Narayan 2006, 2011). The politicization of the Dalits is made possible to a large extent by the unstinting and tireless work of the many small Dalit pamphleteers and newsletter writers who would invest a part of their limited economic resources in setting up a makeshift printing press at their homes, and then would distribute the imprints free of cost to the people, often cycling for kilometres to reach their target audiences (Narayan 2006).

Another important development that played a crucial role in shaping the print culture of the Dalits was the conversion of Ambedkar along with thousands of his followers from Hinduism to Buddhism in 1956. Ambedkar's conversion was not just a spiritual but also a

political dissent against Hinduism and its exclusionary social structures. This conversion triggered off a series of pamphlets and other works on Buddhism and Dalit religious identity (Hunt 2014). There was an already existing tradition of writing on the religious practices of the 'untouchables', which was associated with the Bhakti saints like Kabir, and more particularly, Ravidas. Buddhism and Bhakti became the two parallel and harmonious belief systems of the 'untouchable' identity for the more heterodox section of the Dalits.

The SCF/ RPI had played an important role in giving a political sharpness to the Dalit print culture; but by the 1970s, RPI had splintered into several factions and had lost its relevance as a political platform for the Dalits. Many of its important leaders were co-opted in the Congress' political culture of tokenism and compromises, and the political energy of the Dalit movement in north India petered out to a considerable extent. This energy was to be revived with the institution of BAMCEF (All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) by Kanshi Ram in 1971 and 1984 respectively. The BAMCEF was oriented towards social usefulness, and to encourage the Dalit bureaucrats to work for the Dalit masses. This, he believed, would ensure a steady resource of intellect, money, and talent for the welfare of the *bahujan* society. The BAMCEF eventually led to the founding of the BSP, a political party for the *bahujans*, rather than just for the Dalits (Omvedt 2006; Kumar and Sinha 2001).

The BAMCEF and the BSP also instituted their own press and journals to propagate their philosophy of the *bahujan samaj*. Apart from these organisation-linked media, the Dalit print space expanded to include the new dimensions of the new political choices, and the cultural affiliates that came alongside. Thus, the complex questions of Dalit identity in the changing dynamics of caste-power equations in the modern Indian society raised by the (temporary) political alliances of the BSP (first with Samajwadi Party and then with the Bhartiya Janata Party) form yet another very rich discursive domain of the Dalit print culture. A significant determinant of Dalit identity and episteme has been its trenchant anti-Brahmanism. While acknowledging the validity of the argument that Brahmanism and its practices have been at the core of the caste system, it is pertinent to remember that caste is a system of multiple gradations rather than of binary opposition; and this is borne out very plainly in everyday interactions where the rules of the pecking order are replicated even intra-'lower' castes and the other backward castes. With the changing political demography of the country,

it has been noticed in some parts of north India (particularly in states like Uttar Pradesh and Haryana) that politically and economically influential 'backward' castes like the Yadavs and the Jats represent the dominant antagonists of the Dalits. Moreover, the lessons of ritual purity and pollution have discovered both new allies as well as new adversaries in the forces of global capital, trans-national ideas and the world system analysis. These developments draw attention to not just the futility of 'casting' Brahmans as the 'other' of the Dalits but also make it necessary to re-examine the continually adaptive forms and flexible alliances of the Indian caste system. Some of these difficult questions are under scrutiny in the contemporary Hindi Dalit media space of north India.

This section has so far engaged broadly with the origin and the shape of the print culture as well as the historical imperatives of the Dalit media in north India in general. The next section of this chapter has a narrower focus as it attempts to investigate a specific area (Delhi) in the wider matrix of the north Indian Dalit media terrain, and to tease out a historical and theoretical paradigm of its institution, evolution and present dynamics. I will begin by detailing a relevant history of the Dalits in the city, and then move on to a delineation of the print world of the community, finally concluding the chapter by a tentative investigation of the particular forces that separate the city from its neighbouring states.

4. Dalits in Delhi—A Socio-Cultural Sketch

This section will examine the relevant political and socio-cultural history of Delhi since the nineteenth century to piece together a tentative narrative of the Dalit community in the region. While there are several studies on the history of Delhi itself, there is no scholarship available on the history of the broader Dalit community in the city. Vijay Prashad and Rama Sharma are two scholars who have studied the *Valmiki/ Bhangi* caste in Delhi. Vijay Prashad's (2000) work is a social history of the community since mid-nineteenth century till the middle of the twentieth. Sharma's work (1995) is an anthropological scholarship on the dimensions of the *Bhangi* life in Delhi in the mid twentieth century. However, no historian has undertaken a comprehensive study of Dalits as a larger caste community in Delhi—the features of their social origin, cultural formations, economic impact and patterns of interactions with other communities over time. While this kind of historical investigation is beyond the scope of this study, yet the knowledge of the history of a community is inalienable for investigating and

appreciating its print culture and media history. Thus, this section tries to piece together a chronicle of the Dalit community of the city from various archival and other sources.

Delhi has been the seat of numerous ruling dynasties for many centuries, marked by several periods of decline into relative insignificance as well. However, by the seventeenth century, the city had emerged as an important cultural centre. The walled city of Shahjahanabad was a sophisticated and refined society of elites who followed the dictums of decorum and mutual politeness. The town's Urdu culture brought together the Muslim elites, the Hindu literati, the merchants from both the communities and even the European intellectuals in a common sphere of elegant urbanity. The next important ingredient in the mainstream socio-political and cultural cauldron of the region was added by the British, who conquered the territory in 1803. The English introduced some new dimensions to the governance of the place and divided the region into districts in 1819. The two districts of Delhi were made up of the northern pargana and the southern pargana. In 1832, the Delhi territory was made a part of the Northwest Provinces and was administered by a Commissioner in correspondence with the Government of the North West Provinces of the East India Company.

The rule of the East India Company came to an end with the revolt of 1857. The Revolt was a very significant event for Delhi's political history (Spear 1945; Gupta 1997; Frykenberg 1994). Delhi suffered immensely as a consequence of it, and took considerable time to recover from the shadow of death and destruction arising from the British thirst for reprisal for the rebellion. As an aftershock of the Revolt, the Delhi Territory was annexed to the Lieutenant Governorship of Punjab, and the Delhi district was placed under the command of a Deputy Commissioner. The walled city of the Mughals—Shahjahanabad—was severely depopulated in 1858, and it was only after a year or so that the population of the walled city started rising again. However, by the turn of the century, Delhi had become the seventh largest town of British India and the wealthiest city of the Punjab province by 1896. This was the result of the increase in mercantile and business activities post the establishment of the railways (Gupta 1997).

In order to rebuild the city after the ravages of the revolt of 1857, the colonial government decided to establish a Municipality in 1863. The primary function of the municipality was the upkeep of law and order in the city through the device of policing, which

was financed by imposing taxes on the local population. However, the municipality was also invested with the task of looking after public health and convenience. In its particular role as the guardian of public health and convenience, the Municipality of Delhi entered into a sustained and enduring liaison with the *Mehtars* amongst the Dalits, and the institution has become one of the pivots through which one can trace the history of the community's presence in the city (Prashad 2000). I will address this narrative in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

The next significant phase in the evolution of the city happened in 1911 when the British decided to shift the capital of the country to New Delhi—an administrative entity that was founded south of Shahjahanabad by acquiring the territory that constituted of the *tehsil* of Delhi and the Police Station of Mehrauli. The shifting of the national capital from Calcutta to New Delhi re-defined the social and cultural contours of the city by encouraging a flood of immigration by the professional and clerical sections of the Bengali community, which formed the bulwark of the officialdom of the British administrative machinery. Post World War I, the Sikhs migrated to Delhi as contractors, merchants and workers. Yet another phase of heavy migration and population increase in Delhi was witnessed in the aftermath of the partition of the country into the twin nations of India and Pakistan in 1947. This stage of population influx to the city brought in the Punjabi community, many of whom had to leave their well-established businesses and households in those regions of Punjab that were given over to Pakistan.

It is essential to recall that though the record of the various urban settlements in the Delhi area is fairly well rehearsed in the annals of Indian history, we do not possess more than a piecemeal narrative of the areas lying outside these urban settlements in the region through much of the city's existence. What is unquestionable is that until a few decades back, there was a distinct demographic divide between the population that lived within the walled city and the one that lived in the suburbs. The sex ratio of the population living in the suburbs in the mid nineteenth century—particularly in the age group of 15 to 45—was more markedly in favour of men, indicating that most of the men in these areas had migrated as labourers or petty shopkeepers. In contrast, the sex ratio was much more balanced in the walled city. Similarly, the literacy rate of the men in the suburbs was only 5%, while it was 25% for males in the city. Half the men in the suburbs worked as manual labourers whereas an equal proportion of men

worked as traders or manufacturers in the city. Nearly 7% of the city population worked as professionals or clerks, while the figure for the same in the suburbs was a meagre 1.2%.

Moreover, any study of the category of Delhi and its outskirts is complicated by the fact that territorially, the city has undergone several changes. As is pointed out by Narayani Gupta in her work, *Delhi Between Two Empires* (1997)

> [I]n the last two centuries, the political status of Delhi has changed more frequently than that of any other Indian town or city. The Delhi *Subah* of the Mughals included the tract of Haryana west of the Yamuna, and the upper *duab* and Rohilkhand to the east. After the British conquest in 1803 it was made part of the North Western Provinces, in which Delhi District included the *tehsil* of Delhi, part of Ballabhgarh and part of Rohtak (138).

Thus, the fluidity of the territorial boundaries of the region makes it even more difficult to delimit the boundaries of any kind of 'Delhi' experience. In this context, the account of the Dalits in the outskirts (and even within) of the boundaries of the city walls is even more elusive and fractured due to the community's extreme liminality in the social hierarchy. However, a few attempts have been made to study the social matrix of the 'hinterland' that lay outside the walls of civilization that was Shahjahanabad, and these attempts throw into some relief any efforts at a more comprehensive understanding of the region.

The neighbouring *qasbas* and suburbs of the walled city were Paharganj, Sonepat, Narela, Najafgarh, Mehrauli, Rakabgeanj, Kishenganj, Teliwara, Faridabad and Ballabhgarh, and the traders of these regions had established strong trade links with the central market of the walled city. Although these suburbs had economic links with Shahjahanabad, socially and culturally there was a vast gulf between the people of the city and those who lived on its 'hinterlands'. Paharganj was primarily inhabited by the Gujar community that extended dairy and cattle related services to the inhabitants of Shahjahanabad. Importantly for the history of the Dalits in Delhi, it was also inhabited by the *Chamars* and the *rehgars* who were engaged with the business of tanning, dyeing and ice-making. During the epidemic of 1871, attempts were made to relocate many of the Dalit castes like the *chamars* and the *rehgars* to Karol Bagh. However, despite the move, Paharganj continued to be identified with poverty due to the

continued presence of low-income groups like tanners, dyers and some Dalit communities like the *chamars.*

Closer, yet anterior to the walled city were certain areas that were particularly marked out for the poor and the destitute. These areas included Mori Gate, Ajmeri Gate, Turkman Gate, Delhi Gate and Farashkhana. These were those parts of the town where many dalit castes like the *chamars* found miserable accommodations for living. These sites became a hub of missionary activities in the nineteenth century as some of the poor were ready to accept Christianity for better economic and social prospects. However, the peak of missionary success amongst the *chamar* community for conversion was achieved during the years of famine in the mid-1860s and 70s. A well recorded missionary enterprise for the conversion of the *Chamars* to Christianity was by the Cambridge Mission to Delhi, an Anglican Christian missionary initiative to India in the mid nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led by graduates of Cambridge University. *The Leather-Workers of Daryaganj*, a book by Reverend George Alfred Lefroy, published by the Cambridge Mission to Delhi in 1884, discusses the attempts by the mission (and others) to encourage the *Chamars* of Daryaganj to abandon their old faith and join the new one. The Reverend admits that it was during the famine of 1877-78 that things changed substantially, and a large number of the community—around 800 people—came forward to receive Baptism. However, as he goes on to state, the converts were Christians in nothing but in name, and continued to abide by the norms of their caste in their feasts, ceremonies of birth, death and marriage, and in forms of popular worship. Thus, although there was a Christian *basti* of the *Chamars* in Daryaganj, yet the history of Christianity among the *Chamars* of old Delhi was a very chequered one.

The Dalits have had a numerically significant presence in the city for at least the last two centuries. While there are no existent early records that would throw light on the ancestry of the Dalit community in the region, the oral folk narratives of certain communities try to establish their antiquity by claiming long-enduring histories. For instance, the *Bhangis* of Old Delhi believe that their people migrated to Delhi in the times of the Mughal emperor Akbar in the sixteenth century. The migration could have been necessitated by famine, poverty or even by a surplus in their numbers that would have made it difficult for many to find sustenance in their villages. Rama Sharma states that given the difficulties of the travelling conditions in the sixteenth century, the ancestors of the *Bhangis* of Old Delhi would have emigrated from places

within a radius of 30 miles from Delhi, and would have come in several small waves rather than in one big inflow. They settled on the outskirts of the walled city, and in its 'hinterland' like Karol Bagh, Pahari Dheeraj, Teliwara, Sadar Bazar, Paharganj and Kashmiri Gate, and even in a small area of Shahdara across the river Yamuna (Sharma 1995).

The process of migration of the Dalits to the city continued unabated over the next centuries, as the city continued to grow and offer more and more economic possibilities. Through much of the nineteenth century, Dalits from Punjab and the United Province immigrated to the city in search of a better life. Then, in the twentieth century, many more Dalits (particularly from Uttar Pradesh) settled in New Delhi and other suburbs of the expanding city.

However, what has been distinctive about the settlement of the Dalits in Delhi is that most of them settled in urban ghettos occupied principally by members of the Dalit groups themselves. The physical separation and social isolation from 'upper' castes and prosperous neighbourhoods due to caste specific *mohallas* replicated in many ways the residence pattern in traditional Indian villages where the Dalits lived in segregated settlements on the outskirts of the villages. Most Dalits abandoned the villages in favour of the cities in order to break away from the stigma of caste and caste-based occupations deeply enmeshed in the rural areas. For most Dalits, urbanization extended the promise of liberation from the orthodoxies of caste, yet the experience of urbanization in India for the Dalits has managed to dovetail relatively comfortably with several imperatives of caste traditionalism and hierarchies.

A crucial study that points out to betrayal of the Dalit dream of liberation in the cities is Vijay Prashad's *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community* (2000). Prashad examines the history of the *Valmikis* of Delhi since the middle of the nineteenth century till the late 1980s, demonstrating the manner in which this Dalit community was confined to its 'traditional', caste-based occupation even as the members of the caste group discarded their ancestral villages for better occupational and social prospects in Delhi. Prashad's work is a compelling investigation of the manner in which the city—in this case Delhi—is only a partial release from life choices forged on the anvil of caste for the *Valmikis*, who are the focus of his study.

The *Bhangis/ Chuhras/ Valmikis* were conventionally believed to be sweepers as a caste group during the colonial period. However, as Prashad points out early in his work, the *Mehtars* of Mughal Delhi or Shahjahanabad were a permanent sanitation crew made up of the poorest and the lowliest of various Dalit groups like *Khatiks, Chamars, Chuhras, Reghars, Sansis* etc. The job of the sweeper in Mughal Delhi was not reserved for any exclusive caste group, unlike the practice of the Delhi Municipal Corporation (DMC) that actively encouraged the hiring of the *Bhangis/ Chuhras/ Valmikis* due to its exclusive association of the former with sanitation work. Interestingly, while most Dalit groups banded together on the lines of their sub-caste in the outskirts of the walled city, the sweepers did not live together as an ethnic group in any particular neighbourhood. Moreover, in 1916, while the colonial administration decided to re-settle most Dalit groups into the West Extension Area of Karol Bagh in order to oversee and regulate them more efficiently, they did not do so with the *Mehtars.* The administration asserted that while the trades practiced by the other Dalit communities needed to be transferred out of the crowded walled city for their own good, the *Mehtars* were required around the neighbourhood of their work for greater efficacy and promptness in the interest of cleanliness. Thus, the sweepers lived in various neighbourhoods (on its outskirts) across the city, sometimes being the only family unit of that community in the *mohalla.* This was a very vital development that had a key role to play in inhibiting the advancement of the *Mehtars* as a political community with a consciousness of their collective identity as workers and exploited caste. While the controlling hand and supervising eye of the DMC administrative machinery made it difficult for the sweepers to forge a sense of shared interest as dalits *and* workers in the work place, the absence of a common residential neighbourhood made it even more challenging to band together as a political pressure group or to found any institutional mechanism of resistance. Thus, although the sweepers had struck work a few times in the decades of 1870s and 1880s to protest against the high-handedness of the DMC, it was not until the 1930s that they formed a sweepers' union for collective bargaining. By the 1930s, various trade union movements and the principle of collective action had established themselves very strongly across the length and breadth of the country. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to claim that the notion of a joint struggle for amelioration of one's working condition was fairly delayed among the Delhi sweepers. It is essential to bear in mind that one's identity as a socio-cultural community is different from one's political identity. While the sweepers were responsive to their cultural identity much before the 1930s, the assertion of their political rights as workers of a certain cast[e] comes much later. Ironically, as Prashad points out, the politicization of the

sweepers of Delhi[11] was also arrested by the emigration of the *Chuhra* community from the rural areas of Punjab[12]. This group of Dalits had faced extreme poverty and land alienation in

[11] In the 1870s, the *Mehtars* went on strike several times in order to protest against the DMC's move to bring them under the control of overseers. Prior to the governance of Delhi by the British administration, the sweepers were the employees of the neighbourhood where they worked, rather than the employees of the state. This gave them a relative degree of freedom to choose their hours and pace of work, and the selling of the night-soil and other garbage they collected from the households. The disposal of night-soil and other items collected from the garbage allowed the sweepers some extra income above what they earned from their employers. Also, an unstated understanding between various sweepers determined everyone's 'rightful' territory, where the others wouldn't encroach even in case of a conflict between the sweeper and the residents of that neighbourhood. All of this allowed a comparative negotiating power to the sweepers, which came under threat with the DMC's attempts to turn them into its employees (and delegitimise private sweepers) exclusively dependent on the salary (and the working hours) it determined. Although the sweepers resisted initially—and were helped in it by the residents they worked for—gradually the tide of opinion turned against them, principally due to the DMC's successful propaganda of blaming the sweepers and their militancy for the filth in the city. The DMC also managed to break the back of sweepers' militancy through statutes bringing all the *mohalla* sweepers under its purview, confiscating night-soil, garbage, and through the imposition of very stiff fines on those sweepers who rebelled in any way against the policy decisions taken by it. Thus, much of the tenacity of the *Mehtars* was successfully contained and diminished by the DMC in the next few decades.

[12] It is today widely recognised in Punjab's agricultural history that the *Chuhras* had a very important role to play as farm labourers. Many of them worked as skilled winnowers, reapers and harvesters of the land, in addition to manuring it—something that most 'upper' caste Hindus refused to do. Even in the nineteenth century, the colonial officials recognised the inadequacy of the census records that enumerated most *Chuhras* as sweepers, and its refusal to credit in record the social reality of their wider occupational role as agricultural labourers. By the 1890s, the question of legitimising the place of the *Chuhras* as agricultural labourers in official records became a crucial one for several reasons. Nineteenth century Punjab witnessed at least three severe droughts, which inflated the price of food grains by two-fold. In addition, the mid to late nineteenth century was also a time that saw commercialisation of agriculture in Punjab, which transferred the lands of many smaller farmers to bigger landlords or rich peasantry. However, the rise in the price of land and additional expense on agriculture also put the landlords and rich peasants under added financial pressure as they had to borrow funds from usurers and moneylenders. As a consequence of it, the landlords and the rich peasants began to deny the agricultural labourers such as the *Chuhras* of their traditional rights like access to fuelwood,

their native state, and thus were gratified to find employment with the DMC in sanitation services. After 1912, Delhi had become a reasonably open labour market, and the expansion of the city begot amplified sanitation needs of the place. Thus, the new entrants found easy appointment as part-time DMC workers—where they were required to work two or more jobs in a day—a position that was very unpopular with the Delhi *Mehtars*. The Delhi *Mehtars* preferred permanent jobs with the DMC, which were hard to come by and needed bribing the *Jamadars* (the supervisors of the sweepers). Thus, there was neither any immediate contestation nor sympathy between the two groups. The presence of the rural C*huhras* was also a convenience for the DMC, which found the former more amenable and compliant with the policy of the organisation.

The DMC pursued the Punjab *Chuhras* tenaciously for employment as sanitation workers due to the conventional wisdom about the community as sweepers. The supervisors would regularly visit the *Chuhra* neighbourhoods in Delhi and flaunt openings in the DMC, which would be taken up with alacrity by the people looking for jobs for survival in the city. Prashad writes

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manure, common lands for grazing cattle, food on workdays, carcass of animals and a share in the crop produced. They also reduced the daily wages of the labourers to cut down on costs. In addition, the colonial government—acting under a desire to ensure maximum productivity from agriculture—decided to identify and strengthen those castes that it believed to be traditional agriculturalists, much like the yeomanry in England. It believed that the sturdy agricultural castes like the *jats, Gujars* and the *Arians* needed protection from the avarice of the community of merchants and moneylenders who advanced loans to the peasants only to take over their land in the eventuality of non-repayment of the loan. Thus, the government enacted the Punjab Alienation of Land Act of 1901 (PALA) that would determine the traditional agriculturalists of Punjab, and would exclude the rest from owning lands. By this time, some *Chuhras* who had managed to save some funds for that purpose had started buying small pieces of agricultural lands for self-cultivation. However, section 25 of PALA decided that "the artisan and menial classes, such as blacksmiths, carriers, weavers, Chamars, Mochis, Chuhras, Musallis, Mazhabis etc., should certainly be excluded [from acquiring agricultural lands]". Thus, the law made it effectively impossible for the *Chuhras* to buy land and become independent cultivators. It is under these circumstances that many *Chuhras* decided to migrate to the cities—Delhi included—in order to escape destitution forced upon them by adverse legal conditions and changing customary practices.

> The state inserted itself into the Chuhras' lives to adversely refashion their destiny; when the nationalists spoke on their behalf, the state claimed to be a detached arbiter…The Chief Commissioner of Delhi rebuked the nationalist demand for education for the dalits, since he claimed there was plenty of work for their 'hereditary calling of sweeper' (Prashad 2000: 44).

The popular stereotype of the *Chuhras* as sweepers closed most doors of opportunity for them in the long term in other spheres of life, and confined them in public imagination and state policy to refuse-removal. With time, and with increased rivalry for government positions in the country, the community re-defined itself as the 'rightful' claimant of the jobs in the sanitation department in the city (as all-over north India), and fiercely resisted the entry of other castes in the profession. In 1921, nearly 82% of the sweepers of DMC were drawn from this community, and the figure went up to 89.4% in 1931. By the 1950s, the traditional link between caste and occupation had crumbled for almost every community, but for the *Valmikis.* Till as late as 2011, Scheduled Caste employees formed around 41.2% of the total workforce of MCD, NDMC and DCB. In order to understand the implications of these figures better, it is useful to compare these statistics with certain others which are equally telling. The number of Scheduled Caste employees working in autonomous bodies in Delhi stood at 17.5% in 2011, and the total number of SC employees of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi for the same year was 21%. Thus, we notice that the percentage of Dalits working for the MCD, NDMC and the DCB is disproportionately high in comparison to their presence in other professions[13]. While the statistics that we have for the three local bodies of Delhi in 2011 includes the entire Dalit community (and not just the *Valmikis*), it is not incorrect to claim that even today the *Chuhras* or the *Valmikis* form the bulk of the SC population in these local bodies.

The above assumption is reinforced by a recent PIL filed by the Human Rights Law Network in 2007 against four separate New Delhi municipal agencies seeking to improve the safety conditions of sewer workers in Delhi. The PIL argued that the workers are required to clean the sewers manually till date, and are not provided with any safety equipment to protect

[13] Data taken from STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF DELHI 2012, published by the Directorate of Economics and Statistics. p 130.

them against the serious hazards to health and life. The PIL asserted that a vast majority of these workers are from the *Valmiki* sub-caste, primarily because members of other castes refuse to do this exceedingly perilous and dirty work traditionally associated with the *Valmikis*[14]. It established that the systemic discrimination faced by the *Valmikis* made it immensely challenging for them to find employment in other spheres of work, and the indifference exhibited by the municipal authorities of Delhi only reinforced their lowly status as a caste and people even in contemporary times.

Apart from the *Valmikis,* other Dalit communities like the *Chamars*, *Khatiks* and *Kolis* have been an enduring part of the history of the city for several centuries now. The census of the Delhi district in 1901 places the population of the various Dalit communities at a fairly high number. The *Bhangis/ Chuhras/ Valmikis* were tallied at 26,910, *Chamars* at 65,738 and other significant Dalit communities at just a little over 16,000. The total population of the city was counted at 689,030 ("1901-Census of Delhi District", 2016)[15]. Thus, the Dalits formed around 15.8 percent of the total population. Interestingly, the census enumerates the Dalits not just as Hindus but also some of them as Muslims. For example, around 231 *Chuhra/ Bhangis/ Valmikis* cited their religion as Islam ("1901-Census of Delhi District", 2016)[16]. Other caste community such as *Julaha* and *Dhobi* also found mention among Muslims. The population of the Dalits in the city has remained by and large stable at around the same population percentage over the period of a century. The census of India 2001 counted the Dalit population in Delhi at 16.90% of the total population. Of them, the highest population remains of the *Chamars* at 38.1% of the total Dalit residents. The next are the *Valmikis/ Chuhras/ Bhangis* at 21.34%, followed by *Koli*, *Khatik* and the *Dhobis*. The Dalits are predominantly an urban community in the city today as nearly 92% of them live in the urban pockets of Delhi. They have the highest concentration in the Central district (23.3%), New Delhi (22.2%) and Northwest district (19.3%).

[14] https://caravanmagazine.in/caste/how-kejriwal-is-failing-delhis-sewage-workers

[15] 1901-Census of Delhi District. (2016, March 25). In *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1901_Census_of_Delhi_District

[16] Ibid.

5. Dalits in Delhi—Textual Traces

Despite the Dalits forming a significant numerical force in the city over long, very limited and extremely fragmented narratives of their lived experiences are available in the existing discourse on Delhi—more often than not as footnotes in studies related to the more established and regnant aspects of the city and its people, or as an off-shoot of studies conducted on Dalit communities in the neighbouring states. Pauline Kolenda undertook an ethnographic study of the *Chuhra basti* (colony) in Khalapur village in the Saharanpur district of Uttar Pradesh in the mid-1950s (Kolenda 2003), and uses this experience and the insights gained therein to critically review Vijay Prashad's *Untouchable Freedom: A Social History of a Dalit Community*. She contends that while Prashad's book is a product of rigorous scholarship, she is not persuaded by his arguments that the DMC sweepers were all permanent residents of Delhi, and that they could not procure any work other than that of sanitation (Kolenda 2002: 744). Her criticism is based on her study of the *Chuhras* of Khalapur, most of who had worked in cities—including Delhi—over a period of time in various positions as sanitation crews of municipalities, railways and the military, or as cleaners elsewhere. A few had also worked in coal mines, and for many of them there would be seasonal or periodic migration to and fro from their village to the cities. She also questions the empirical validity of Prashad's argument that during the Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984, the Congress led rioters were mostly composed of the *Chuhras*/ *Valmikis* (Kolenda 2002: 746).

Similarly, in a small section of her authoritative study of Delhi, Narayani Gupta in *Delhi Between Two Empires 1803-1931: Society, Government and Urban Growth* (1997) points out that the *chamars* of Delhi were not exclusively Hindus. A limited number followed Islam, and some had converted to Christianity during times of extreme poverty. A slice of *chamar* rebellion and their consciousness as a class/ caste community is evident during an incident in 1901 when the Muslim and Christian *chamars* joined forces against the rich Muslim shoe-merchants. In response to the lockouts of the merchants, the *chamars* responded by declaring a strike, which effectively brought to a halt the shoe trade across the whole of north India. However, the Hindu moneylenders came to the support of the Muslim traders, thus forcing the *chamars* to arrive at a settlement with the latter.

In yet another example of the same, MSA Rao undertook the study of Yadavpur, a village on the outskirt of Delhi which was made a part of the Delhi Corporation in 1958. The study[17] was oriented towards an examination of a rural community situated on the Delhi metropolitan fringe, and the processes of social change it undergoes due to urban influences. This village was dominated by the *Ahir* community, numerically as well as socially. The leatherworkers—who are traditionally *Chamars*—of Yadavpur found better economic opportunity in market or contract gardening, and steadily became liberated from their economic dependence on the *Ahirs* due to the opening up of the doors of material prosperity outside the traditional agricultural system. The increase in the wealth of the leatherworkers led them to self-assertion (with the help of the Harijan Welfare Board of the Delhi administration) and consequent hostilities between them and the traditionally dominant *Ahir* community. In fact, much of the twentieth century Indian social scape has been marked by the ensuing tension of Dalits' affirmation of a confident identity resulting from better education or economic prosperity and the outpouring of violence on the part of the dominant communities intended to contain the newly buoyant Dalit identity.

Another instance of the same is found in a handbill distributed by the *Manav Utkarsh Samiti* during Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations on 14 April 2016 at Parliament Street in New Delhi. The handbill mentions that Dalits have been residing for "hundreds of years" at the "historic" village of Tughlaqabad in Delhi, as is the case with many other communities too. However, particular dimensions of their existence as a marginal community and the trajectory of their power relationship with other castes/ classes have never formed a part of the mainstream discourse. The need for the handbill was necessitated by the recent conflict between the *Jatavs* (a Dalit caste) and the *Gurjars* over 8 *bighas* of land that the *Jatavs* have traditionally held as their own, and now accuse the former of usurping illegally due to their political influence in the area. It describes the various devices of coercion used by the *Gurjar* land mafias to subdue the legal claims of the *Jatavs* over this land, and conclude their appeal for help by stating that "despite seventy years of independence, there is even today an ongoing example of brutal caste oppression in the capital of the nation" (my translation).

[17] Published as "A Rural Community on the Delhi Metropolitan Fringe" in *A Reader in Urban Sociology*, ed. MSA Rao et al, Orient Longman (1991) New Delhi.

While one knows proportionately more about the *Chamars* and the *Valmikis* in Delhi, we know considerably less about certain other significantly large sections of Dalits in the city like the *Reghars* and the *Khatiks*. The *Khatiks* in Delhi have traditionally been assumed to have migrated from Rajasthan. The population of the *Khatiks* in 1901 in the city was merely 2494 but steadily climbed up to 158121 by 2001, indicating that this community has migrated to Delhi in significant numbers in the twentieth century itself. Conventionally, the Delhi *Khatiks* were engaged in rearing goats, pigs and poultry for sale for its consumption, as well as in tanning hides. More recently, however, most of the members of the community are engaged in small, independent businesses of their own—a consequence of the weakening of the ties between caste and occupation. The *Reghars*, too, are a barely known community amongst the Dalits in Delhi, although there is an entire area (Rehgarpura) named after then in West Extension Area of Karol Bagh. The *Rehrags* were also traditionally engaged in tanning and ice-making, and were moved out of Paharganj by the British in the early decades of the twentieth century.

In the light of the above, it is essential to bear in mind that the various Dalit communities have played vital and productive roles in the socio-economic history of the city, the narrative of which is embedded across the cityscape of Delhi. There are several localities in the city that are named after the Dalit communities that populate them. It is the liminality of their caste status that has allowed their presence to be elided over by the prestige of the written word in the palimpsest of historical record-books. Much of what we know about the Dalits in Delhi today—with a few exceptions—is an outcome of scholarship on 'more regnant' aspects of the city and its history that has also had to tangentially engage with its marginal subjects for the sake of greater authority and comprehensiveness.

6. Collective Memories, Embodied Knowledge and Social Action

The absence of the recorded narratives of the presence of the Dalits in the city over centuries brings us to very important questions related to social action and their collective memory in any form. The absence of a record of personal or social contribution of an individual or a community doesn't necessarily translate into the absence of one. Memory, including collective memory, crystallizes around culturally determined mandates of individual/ social worth and consequence. Thus, as individuals and as communities, we are engaged in constant

and conscious/ unconscious choices about retention or forgetfulness of the lifeworld(s) inhabited. Several theorists have variously described this phenomenon as an outcome of 'ideology'[18], 'hegemony'[19], 'epistemological field'[20] and 'ruling relations.'[21] All of the above analytical categories of thought underscore the abstract institutional processes that authorise certain utterances or ideas as fact or knowledge, and disallow others. For my purpose, however,

[18] Marx and the classical Marxists tradition use the concept of ideology to delineate the process through which the dominant ideas in any society reflect the values of the ruling economic class of that time and place. Ideology generates a sense of 'false consciousness' among the masses whereby they identify the interests of the ruling class as their own, and choose not to revolt against an exploitative system.

[19] The term 'hegemony' is most closely identified with the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci. Gramsci found the concept of ideology too totalising, unitary and abstracted from the everyday relations of social actors. He distinguished between coercion and consent as tools of social power, and hegemony was identified with the domain of voluntary participation on the part of the masses in the enactment of power relationships in society. Hegemony is the "common sense" view of the world which perpetuates class privilege and encourages political and social inertia and status quo.

[20] Foucault defines 'epistemological field' in his book *The Order of Things* as the domain of episteme that forms the conditions of possibility for knowledge in a particular time and place. 'Episteme' refers to the 'unconscious' but orderly structures that lie beneath the production of knowledge in a given time and space. Thus, as Sara Mills writes in her introduction to Foucault, episteme is "not a sum of everything which can be known within a period but it is the complex set of relationships between the knowledges which are produced within a particular period and the rules by which new knowledge is generated…a set of conflicting discursive frameworks and pressures which operate across a social body and which interact with each other, and these condition how people think, know and write." (62-63).

[21] Similarly, Dorothy E. Smith draws upon Foucault's idea of 'discourse' as social relations or social organisation rather than as institution in order to delineate her theory of 'ruling relations'. In an edited volume by Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Millenial Milestone. The Heritage and Future of Sociology in the North American Region.Proceedings of the ISA Regional Conference for North America.* Toronto, Canada, August 7-8, 1997, Smith claims that "ruling relations…"extract" the coordinative and concerting of people's everyday/ every night activities from relations between persons and subject them to specialized and often technical development as "organisation", "communication", "information", "management", and the like. They are mediated by and based in texts and textual technologies, such as print, radio, television, and more recently, electronics…Progressively, the individuated functions of knowing, judging, planning and deciding are transferred to organisation, ceasing to be immediate capacities of the individual…[They have the] capacity to reproduce standardised forms of control, management, communication, etc. across multiple local sites and at different times…"(42-45)

I have found it more useful to adopt the ideas of the 'epistemological field' by Foucault and the 'ruling relations' by Dorothy E. Smith (1997) to understand the particular nature of the Dalit community as historical actor. Both Foucault and Smith address the ways in which power/ social power operates through (more generally for Foucault) discourse[22] and (rather more narrowly for Smith) the written text.

Cultural memories are 'recorded' and perpetuated through a variety of artefacts like images, rites, fairs, festivals, costumes, customs, buildings, monuments, cities, posters, poems, epics and texts. However, as Foucault argues in *The Archeology of Knowledge,* the material conditions of thought and knowledge have accorded varying degrees of prestige and acceptability to different kinds of cultural formations. As a consequence, certain kinds of objectivised cultural markers such as texts and the written word have a higher measure of worth in cultivating, stabilizing and communicating a community's self-image and identity (Foucault 1982). Dalits, as has been mentioned earlier, are late comers to literacy, and therefore lacked a textual tradition of their own or even a significant readership until very recently[23]. The

[22] In the *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault defines discourse as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as individualizable groups and other times as a regulated practice—the unwritten rules and structures which produce particular utterances and statements—that accounts for a number of statements. The word can be used to denote all utterances and statements made that have a meaning and some effect.

[23] The overall literacy rate of the Dalits in Delhi in 2001 census was 70.8%, which was higher than the national average of the literacy rate among Dalits, which stood at 54.7%. In the same year literacy, among the Dalit males in the city was at 80.8% while female literacy stood at 59.1%. Of the entire Dalit community in Delhi, it is the *Chamars* who have registered the highest rate of literacy in the city. Among the major castes, *Chamars* have also registered the highest number of matriculates, followed by the *Dhobis* and the *Khatiks*, whereas the *Valmikis* come at the bottom of the list. As the census data points out, it is vital to bear in mind that among the Dalit literates, 23.3% are either without any educational level or have received only below primary level of education. Those who have received education at primary level form 30.8% of the total literates. Middle school pass-outs are 20.9%, while those having received higher secondary degree stand at 19.5%. Graduates and above are only 5.2% of the total Dalit population in the city. While the literacy rate amongst the Dalits in 2001 is comparably respectable, it is also important for us to examine the rise in literacy for the community over the last few decades. In

imbalances in the power relationship—including the power of literacy and a textual culture—between the Dalits, the 'upper' castes and colonial ethnography has inevitably led to a hegemonic production of typological knowledge systems in relation to the liminal group. Not only has this episteme perpetuated a normative universality about the Dalit community, but it has also generated conditions for 'relations of ruling', as defined for Dorothy Smith. Thus, the production of 'objective' sociological knowledge on the Dalits has abstracted the lived individuals and their material reality engaged in "everyday/ every night" social interaction from the textual discourses, turning them into mere statistics or facts, or—as Foucault puts it—"objects of power/ knowledge" (Foucault 1982).

However, for both Foucault and Smith, "power/ knowledge", "discourse" or "ruling relations" are not closed systems of unilateral domination or preformed categories of unvarying social existence but microsocial relationships that produce as well as challenge hegemonic ties. Textual practices too, like discourse, are a result of social exchanges, *performed* rather than *preformed* at the level of microsocial interactions, and must not act as abstract entities that override social actors. This can be achieved by positioning oneself— reader/ writer/ knower—as embedded or embodied presences rather than disembodied codes or reified absences produced by stylistic conventions, nominalizations and generalised social/ textual processes or structures.

The idea of embodied knowledge is extremely useful for an assessment of the Dalit print cultures. Dalit textual tradition, much like the Dalit episteme, is deeply inflected by 'embodied' forms of knowledge, especially in its early phase. It is for this reason that any evaluation of the early print culture of the Dalits in Delhi has to depend very heavily on oral transcripts, chirographic documents, cheap pamphlets, stacks of personal papers as well as personal histories and narratives. Much of the archive exists not in the abstract institutional

1961, the overall literacy for the Dalits in Delhi was at 20.86% (male 32.15% and female 6.8%), in 1971 it stood at 28.15% (male 39.22% and female 14.32%). In 1981 the figures rose to 39.30% (male 50.21% and female 25.89%), and then again to 57.60% (male 68.77% and female 43.82%) in 1991. All through these decades, the literacy among the Dalits stayed at least 10% below the literacy rates for the non-Dalit population of the city. These figures have a significant implication for the print and media culture of the Dalits of Delhi—a subject that this paper will address a little later.

spaces and authoritative tomes of wisdom, but in the humble homes and the persons of the people whose daily living was/ is embedded in local sites and experiences of contemporary institutional processes of caste conflict. It is precisely their insistence on inserting themselves as subjects of their narratives and as a community of readers/ knowers that pre-empts their reduction to disembodied and reified apparatuses of a textual tradition.

If we look back at the earliest production of the Dalit print culture, i.e. the caste genealogies as well as the alternative history of the country written in the early decades of the twentieth century, we discover that the writing of these texts were extremely personal acts on the part of their authors. Unlike the 'high' caste Hindu or the colonial ethnographer who aimed to produce canonical or 'objective' systems of textual wisdom on caste and its craft, the writers of these *vamsavalis* could not position themselves outside the social world of these texts. The cause for it was embedded in the power structures of the Indian nation, and the extremely liminal position of the Dalits in it[24]. In order to establish their hegemony, the Brahmans (to begin with)—and then the English—had to turn the rest of the Indian society into 'objects of investigation/ interpretation'. The Brahmanical episteme as well as the colonial ethnography that followed it aimed at developing knowledge systems that would help them govern with greater control and sway. Both these systems of knowledge were abstract theoretical paradigms based on partial fragments of reality; entities forged discursively rather than grounded in the material realities of the people they aimed to investigate. Thus, as principles of the 'relations of ruling', these abstracted and totalising epistemes worked towards disembodying the Dalit as a historical actor by denuding her of her lived experiences in the discursive and textual practices.

The early Dalit writers did not attempt to produce a body of impersonal or academically disinterested writing as their imperatives for that very act was counter-hegemonic in nature. While the established discursive practices tried to disembody, reify and thus conceal the lived experiences of the liminal sections of the society, the veritable objective of pen'men'ship for the Dalits was to unmask the elite praxis of obfuscation and erasure, and to insert themselves as the embodied subjects of the nation's history and culture. Therefore, the genealogies and the historical narratives of the community strongly position the Dalit as the historical actor, and

[24] Refer to the earlier discussion on the Hindi Public Sphere in the initial parts of this chapter.

heavily invest their writing praxis with a distinctly identifiable consciousness of reclaiming the Dalit dignity. There is very little attempt to locate the writer or the reader outside the social world of the text, to privilege the standard scholastic stylistic conventions or to even rigorously follow the established historical methodologies or hermeneutical schemes.

The genealogies permit a greater degree of interpretative freedom as they are based on the *itihas-purana* tradition of writing. While it is true that the Oriental scholars too used the *Puranas* to develop their sociological insights into the Indian society, they ignore almost all of the folkloric element and the human palaver endemic to it, and only isolated the 'factual' information they could unearth from it. The Dalits, too, could comprehend the authority of the *Puranas* as discursive powerhouses for colonial ethnologists as well as the 'upper' caste Hindus. However, the Dalits employed the Puranic tradition in a very different manner from the scholastic practices of the Oriental scholars. While the latter sequestered the human drama from the *Puranas* to develop their knowledge systems, the Dalits mined the literary tradition to embed themselves as the protagonists wherever they could, and occasionally manufactured a *Puranic* text to endorse their claims of ancient glory and contemporary mobility and dignity.

For instance, as argued cogently by Ramnarayan Rawat in *Reconsidering Untouchability*, *Shree Chanvar Purana* is written by U.B.S. Raghuvanshi (and not by some sage in ancient India) and is visibly concerned with investing the Chamar community with a glorious lineage of royalty, deriving from the great king Chamunda Rai. The *Chanvar Purana* ascertains the fact that the original name of the Chamars was 'Chanvar', which was the dynastic title of powerful line of rulers belonging to the *surya vanshi* Kshatriyas. The unfortunate disgrace of King Chamunda Rai becomes the cause of the degradation of the entire Chamar community, which also loses its community identity of Kshatriya 'Chanvar' and becomes the untouchable 'Chamars'. In order to institute the *Chanvar Purana* with authority as a *Purana*, Raghuvanshi claims it was discovered by an ascetic in the fairly inaccessible regions of the Himalayas, and was translated by the former from Sanskrit to Hindi with great endeavour. In order to further establish the veracity of the text, Raghuvanshi claims that the narrator of *Shree Chanvar Purana,* like *Garuda Purana,* was Lord Narada himself. Moreover, he goes on to add, the *anushasan parva* (section) of the *Mahabharata* also mentions the fall from grace of the Kshatriya *Chanvar* rulers due to the failure of one of its kings' in upholding Brahmanical knowledge (Rawat 2011: 123-124). Thus, the Dalit writers were clearly engaged in marking

the ‘canon’—wherever possible—or instituting discursive practices with their embodied visibility and presence.

Similarly, while based on the findings of the archaeological evidence of the period, a considerable part of the Dalit narrative of Indian history under the influence of the Adi movements is a hermeneutic leap in order to embed the marginal caste groups in India’s saga. The insistence on viewing the origin and the purpose of the caste system as a device to ensure racial segregation and the subjugation of the ‘indigenous’ population of the country denies equally—if not more—strong theories that have been advanced by scholars of the Indian caste system to explain its purpose as an occupational division, a form of guild, a religion-based hierarchy or an evolutionary principle of social stratification that sees caste as a gradual outcome of several interacting forces. Moreover, the Dalit thinkers display a fairly simplistic—and for that reason, rhetorically more successful—understanding of indigeneity, cultural encounter and political entitlement. Most significantly, much about the Indus Valley civilization remains shrouded in mystery due to very few archaeological evidence and the inability of the historians and linguists in deciphering the script of the community. Thus, very little can be stated about the dead civilization with convincing authority. While the historians still do not have a consensus about what caused the decline of this pre-Aryan civilization, there is a general agreement that the environmental factors were more to be blamed than the Aryans, many of whom arrived in small waves over a considerable period of time. What cannot be denied is that the two groups would have seen instances of mutual conflict, but the skirmishes were not of the nature of a major wave of invasion by the war-like Aryans who overran the Harappan people overnight. In addition, the historians today have almost given up on the racial theory of the caste system, and believe that there was sufficient miscegenation in the Indian society (at least among the non-Brahmans) by the time caste firmly instituted itself to promote the one-dimensional association between the ‘lower’ castes with the Indus Valley people and the ‘upper’ castes with the Aryans (Thapar 1996; Cairae 2014; Trautmann 2015).

These interpretative strategies clearly indicate that the writing of India’s history from the vantage point of the Dalits was clearly a non-objective, non-academic enterprise. The significant element here is not in the inaccuracies or the inexact analyses, but in the radical project of writing such histories. These histories break many of the conventions through which texts and textual traditions replicated social power and dominance in colonial India. We can

broadly identify two distinct yet engaged systems of knowledge production in India of the early twentieth century. The more hegemonic and influential of the two was the new 'European' pedagogical method that was based on the scientific principles of disciplinary knowledge, deriving its stability and worth from the structures of colonial power in the country. This system of discursive production found its expression in such practices as enumeration, observation, surveillance, codification and classification; thus, valourising specialities like law, museology, cartography, linguistics, census, archaeology, revenue, demography and other data-based knowledge formations. These forms of knowledge were closely allied with institutional settings and their imperatives of professional or bureaucratic organisation of information, management, administration and governmentality—in this case, colonial governmentality. Consequently, there was a spurt in the founding and growth of learned societies, surveys, museums, libraries, academic/ research organisations (for instance, the Archaeological Survey of India) and institutional press and media.

The above-mentioned system of knowledge creation illustrates extremely lucidly Smith's "relations of ruling". What we witness is a gradual but steady reproduction of "process"—social as well as textual. The bureaucratic and administrative procedures of knowledge production attempted to reify the social actors and represent them as series of 'facts' that could be scientifically analysed and classified. Vast amounts of human and social complexities were reduced to textual forms or encyclopaedic archives of fixed meaning, or "discursively constituted entities" (Smith 1997: 39). Even when people are present in these texts, they are present as objects of investigation, codified through systems of signage determined through the colonial episteme and pedagogy.

A very useful example of a textual tradition replicating and perpetrating social inequality in the colonial context was the erasure of the *Bala Shahis* and the *Lal Begis*[25] from the censuses of the Government of India. Vijay Prashad states that several Chuhras/ Balmikis

[25] Bala Shah Noori and Lal Begh were recognised as prophets of the Chuhras/ Balmikis in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi. The two prophets combined elements from Islam as well as Hinduism to develop powerful local religious traditions that acted as a source of spiritual comfort to this marginal community. They encouraged their followers to trust neither spiritual nor secular intermediaries, but to vest their faith in God himself. These sects offered the Chuhras a relative degree of cultural autonomy from the debilitating spiritual and ritualistic definitions imposed on them by the established religions.

in Punjab and Delhi defined their religious identity in terms of faith based on the worship of 'local' deities and preceptors rather than institutionalised religions. However, the needs of a manageable taxonomy required classification into recognised categories of social identities, and thus it was found necessary to classify the dissenting Chuhras/ Balmikis as Hindus. It is important to recognise that the census officials were distinctly aware of the complexities of the Chuhra/ Balmiki religious identity in terms of their lived experience (Prashad 2000: 67-68). Yet, the epistemic compulsion of the colonial governmentality dictated the eliding of the personal experience of a community over procedural sociological knowledge.

It is crucial to bear in mind that the Dalit works of the period were not unmediated by the new mode of knowledge of the imperial rulers. In fact, the 'scientism' of European episteme acted as an important device for the logical and argumentative weight for much of the Dalit historiographical practices, and most of the Dalit writings of the period tried to be rational in enquiry and empirical in citing evidence. However, what is distinctive—and thus radical—is the location of the writer and the reader in relation to the subject under discussion. Adapting Smith's theory on women's standpoint for sociological studies, it can be claimed that the Dalit episteme views discourse as social relations or social organisation, and thus

> locates [the] positioning of reader/ writer/ knower in particular ways in relation to objects of inquiry, both in terms of how they incorporate what people say and do into discursive texts and in the relations constructed with the texts themselves. There is therefore an issue of how these relations are organised and of the practices to which we become committed when we are positioned as knowers or inquirers within sociological discourses (Smith 1997: 38).

Thus, the early Dalit print culture was defined by self-conscious tropes of defiance and challenge to the established episteme on and the practices of social and discursive relations. It was marked by a high degree of self-consciousness in political interventions in caste-mediated socio-cultural and epistemic processes, produced in the context of a continual spate of physical, social and psychological violence that is endemic even today in our caste-mediated society. The Dalit press was clearly characterized by a system of pedagogical forms that were meant for advocacy and resistance, and thus the range of tone of attitudes employed by the writers and their approach to their readers was identifiably distinct.

The other discursive tradition that the Dalit print space defined itself against was that of the Hindi nationalist public sphere, a subject that has been briefly touched upon in the first section of this chapter. The Hindi nationalist public sphere and its press was pre-dominantly male, 'upper' caste and canonical in its ideas and practices. It attempted to contain certain traditional institutional arrangements of the Indian society like caste and gender-roles outside of the ambit of the public sphere, and thus sheltered from any serious and consequential change. However, realising that it was progressively difficult to do so, it tried to frame the caste and gender debate through its interlocutors and intermediaries, and with its own limited reformist agenda. It is for this reason that we find that post 1920s, and particularly in the 1930s when Mahatma Gandhi takes it upon himself to address the question of 'untouchability', the subject of caste begins to find space in the mainstream media.

Given the above, it is not difficult to trace the debate over the 'untouchables' or the 'depressed classes' in the nationalist print and public domain from the early twentieth century onwards. There were a number of social and religious organisations, as well as some leaders from the Indian National Congress, that chose to engage with the 'depressed classes' and to write about their unhappy conditions of life. The literary as well as the journalistic, non-fictional and political writings of the period are indicative of the growing interest in the problem of 'untouchability'. The following section will examine a representative sample of some of the debates in the 'mainstream' through the medium of print as it existed in Delhi in the early decades of the twentieth century. At the same time, it must be borne in mind that Delhi, being the projected capital of the country from 1911 onwards, was deeply affected by developments all over the other country, particularly by its neighbouring states such as Punjab and Uttar Pradesh (then known as the United Provinces). Thus, it is extremely difficult as well as reductive to distil an exclusively Delhi's print or discursive milieu independent of the influences of the extra-regional influences.

7. Dalits in the Early 'Mainstream' Print Culture of Delhi

The Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha were two important social organisations to engage with the challenge of untouchability in the Indian society at the outset. As the question

of political representation and legitimate authority became increasingly tied with the idea of numbers and census records of population groups, it was recognised by many Hindus that in order to bolster the claims of the former as the numerical majority in the country, the Dalits had to be accommodated within the framework of Hinduism. Thus, reformist organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha took it upon themselves to work with the Dalits in order to bring them into the fold of Hinduism through their *shuddhi* or purification. Swami Shraddhananda established the Shraddhananda Dalitudhar Sabha (SDS) in Delhi in 1921 to 'uplift' the 'untouchables' of Delhi (Gooptu 2006; Jones 2006). The Arya Samaj gained a lot of acceptance and popularity in Delhi towards the close of the nineteenth century (Prashad 2000). Swami Dayananda had visited Delhi for the Dilli Durbar of the King Emperor George V, and returned to the city again after touring Punjab. He founded a branch of the Arya Samaj in Delhi on 1 November 1878. The founding and the amplified presence and activities of the Arya Samaj in the city made the latter a significant protagonist in the nation-wide Hindu reform movement, and added additional layers to the religious and caste ferment in the region. Delhi was chosen as the site of the first meeting of the Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi on 31 August 1909, and it has remained the headquarters of the organisation since then (Prashad 2000).

More importantly, however, a study of the history and the print culture of the period[26] indicate an attempt on the part of the orthodox Hindu thinkers and intellectuals to cast the Muslims invaders as the cause behind the institution of untouchability in the country[27]. They argued that the 'untouchables' were Brahmans and Kshatriyas who refused to abandon their religion and work for the Muslim rulers, and were therefore punished by assigning the most menial tasks of handling night-soil and dead animals.

[26] Swami Shraddhananda, in his work *Hindu Sangathan: Saviour of the Dying Race* (Delhi, 1927) blames the Muslim emperors and their bigotry for the founding of the practice of untouchability (cited in Prashad 78). Similarly, a Hindu preacher announced to the Delhi Dalits in 1924 (recorded in *Tej*, an Urdu daily, cited Prashad 78) that sweepers came into origin because of the Muslims who needed them to sweep the chambers of the Mislim women who observed seclusion.

[27] This tradition of historiography derived from a section of Oriental scholarship of the western researchers who projected ancient India as a 'golden age' of peace and prosperity, which was disrupted by the invasion of the Mongols and the Muslims rulers—thus, enforcing an ongoing era of slavery and regression on the Hindus.

A crucial book that has become an important part of the Balmiki cultural repertoire is Ami Chand Sharma's *Shri Valmiki Prakash*. Although Ami Chand (a Brahman) started his work of disengaging the Balmiki community from the Ad-Dharmis in Lahore (where he was soon joined by Swami Yodhnath who composed a number of hymns and songs devoted to Maharishi Valmiki, the composer of *Ramayana*), his work gained popularity all over north India. The earliest edition of *Shri Valmiki Prakash* that is traceable in Delhi is a 1936 edition by Dehati Pustak Bhandar (Prashad 2000). The book played a very crucial role in delinking the Balmikis culturally and imaginatively from the traditions of Bala Shah Nuri, Lal Beg, and everything that even remotely associated the former with Islamic practices. In its place, the work exhorts the Balmikis to recognise Maharishi Valmiki as their true teacher, and to worship him instead. Significantly though, although sage Valmiki is co-opted in the Hindu pantheon, the Dalits themselves are not accorded the status of the progenies of the sage. Ami Chand categorically denies that the rishi Valmiki is an ancestor of the Balmikis, he only allows for the relationship of a *guru* and his disciples between them. Vijay Prashad writes "[t]he tract was distributed extensively, having been given the stamp of approval from major Arya Samaj and Gandhian leaders" (Prashad 2000: 98). The influence of this tract on the Balmikis of Delhi is recorded by Prashad through his interviews with Sant Chandrabhan, 21 February 1993, Ratan Lal Balmiki, April 1992 and 20 March 1993, Balmiki Colony, New Delhi and the Annual Report of the Bharatiya Shraddhananda Dalitudhar Sabha, 1927, pp. 18-20 (Prashad 2000: 98). Valmiki temples were established in the city, and the Balmiki Hindu Mahasabha as well as the New Delhi Balmiki Hindu Sabha were founded to strengthen the ties of the community with the Hindu faith.

The most effective figure amongst the 'upper' caste Hindus who took to reform the conditions of the Dalits was Mahatma Gandhi, and the history of Gandhi's engagement with *dalitudhar* is also the most controversial. Gandhi, whose engagement with the problem of 'untouchability' began from 1917 onwards, began to refer to the Dalits as 'Harijans' (children of god) from 1930 on. However, many Dalit intellectuals found the term patronizing and humiliatingly pacifist, and discarded it quickly. It is important, nevertheless, to bear in mind that though Gandhi's intervention on the matters of 'untouchability' was cautious, it was not communal like that of the militant Hindus. Gandhi censured the anti-Muslim narrative in holding the Mughals responsible for untouchability and made his disapproval very clear. He, nonetheless, believed in the *varnashram dharma* with its four occupational tiers, and

considered the proliferation of castes or the *jatis* as an evil aberration from it. Thus, fundamentally Gandhi agreed with the structural arrangement of traditional Indian society and strongly rejected the possibility of Dalits parting from Hinduism (Nanda 1994). Significantly, Gandhi also did not deem the Dalits capable of leading their community or possessing the necessary political acumen of deciding their destiny as citizens of the nation. He maintained that the Dalits needed the guiding hand of the enlightened leaders who were necessarily 'upper' caste in the given period. Gandhi's insistence on projecting himself as the leader of the 'untouchable' community in India resulted in a bitter rivalry between him and Ambedkar, and much of this rivalry is reflected in the print culture of the period (Prashad 2000). Both Gandhi and Ambedkar established their own periodicals and engaged in other genres of writing as well to deal with untouchability and caste oppression, and to generate opinions against it. Again, it is also undeniable that Gandhi—for all the limitations of his assessment of the caste problem in India—was instrumental in imprinting the plight of the 'untouchables' on the national conscience much more successfully than any other leader, including Ambedkar.

Gandhi founded the All India Anti-Untouchability League, which was renamed as the Harijan Sevak Sangh, in Kingsway Camp at Delhi in 1932. In order to give a discursive edge to the organisation, he started a weekly journal *Harijan* (1933-48). This journal was also published in Hindi under the title *Harijan Sevak*. However, the organisation as well as the journal came under severe criticism for its very moderate stand against untouchability. They promoted a language of duty and submissive petitioning for the Dalits rather than the politically potent language of rights. Even on an issue as uncontentious as manual scavenging which generated unanimous condemnation, Gandhi worked more towards investing the occupation with dignity rather than attempt its eradication altogether. Similarly, Harijan Sevak Sangh established a vocational school for the training of 'Harijan' boys in weaving, spinning, leatherwork, carpentry and wickerwork. The 1934 edition of *Harijan* makes it clear that the Sangh had no intentions of providing formal schooling in higher education to the Dalit boys as it was considered unnecessary, and the main objective was to train them as employable, and thus useful, members of the Hindu society (Prashad 2000: 127). This, too, goes sharply against the grain of much of Dalit aspirations of the time as education—and not merely vocational training—was seen as a steppingstone to emancipation from caste oppression. The widespread approval and urgency for education amongst Dalits was best exemplified in the very popular slogan of "educate, agitate, organise" advanced by Ambedkar.

Harijan was an important part of the public sphere and the general print culture of the times, particularly on the caste question. Gandhi was a regular contributor to the periodical, and the magazine is a very expedient device for appreciating the mainstream, 'upper' caste, educated approach to the challenge posed by the practice of untouchability. It should also be borne in mind that no contemporary organisation, establishment or agency had as much political clout or resources as did the Indian National Congress, Gandhi and the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Delhi, as the capital of the nation and the seat of colonial political power, received substantial attention from all groups and organisations. While the 'public' in the provinces had the relative autonomy to shape their political fortune in comparative detachment from the immediacy of the national affairs, Delhi, as a capital city, did not have this choice. This is perhaps an important reason why the Congress—with its commitment to Gandhian ideals of Dalit uplift—has been able to sustain the political loyalty of the Dalits in Delhi for long, as well as blunt their militancy longer than it could in many other states that had the relative freedom to allow the 'local'/ 'regional' issues to supersede the national ones.

While the Congress and Gandhi did have a fair amount of influence on the discursive nature of the knowledge around caste and its role in the Indian society, there are some textual evidences to indicate the existence of a radical section of Dalits in Delhi who challenged the authoritative voice of the 'upper' caste hegemons. Not many evidences remain of it today as cultural materials produced by the liminal sections of society do not merit the same kind of preservation efforts that the culturally dominant receive. Thus, this incomplete data-set is reinforced with oral transcripts of personal histories, interviews and first-hand accounts and impressions of the people involved in the conceptualization, establishment, production and the distribution of this print domain, as well as its avid readers.

There are certain documented evidences of the presence of some Dalit radical organisations that provided an institutional ground for the promotion of dissenting ideas, and to disrupt the collaboration between the caste hegemons and their Dalit supporters. Clearly, the Adi-Hindu movement with its organisational network of *prachraks* (propagators) was one such platform. The *pracharaks,* through their speech and writings, sought to challenge the traditional wisdom on caste and nationality, and tried to organise the Dalits and other 'lower' caste people as distinct counter-public. Swami Acchutananda, as the main ideologue of the Adi-Hindu

movement in north India, organised several public meetings in Delhi, which were attended by a large number of Dalits. *Swami Acchutananda: Sachitra Jeevani* by Sheelpriya Bauddh, mentions a huge Dalit gathering in 1917 in Delhi where Swami Acchutananda discarded his Arya Samajist name of Pd. Hariharananda and accepted the new name by which he is renowned today (Bauddh 2003: 26). He cites another huge rally of the Dalits at the grounds of Lal Quila in Delhi in 1922 where multitudes had gathered to listen to Swami Acchutananda, the size of which was unprecedented and a clear challenge to the Arya Samaj. The work also mentions that Acchutanada started his periodical *Acchut* from Delhi in 1922 under the editorial supervision of Pd. Jagatram Jatia. His other periodical, *Adi-Hindu* (published from Kanpur in 1930), inspired others to start similar print enterprises in other parts of north India, including Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. Sheelpriya Bauddh mentions that two other magazines on the Adi-Hindu philosophy were established in Delhi by the name of *Pracheen Bharat* and *Satveer*. He, however, does not give their dates of publication of the two magazines or the names of their editors or publishers (Bauddh 2003: 38).

Similarly, scholars like Vijay Prashad and Brij Kishore Sharma (2008) have pointed out to the presence of caste associations like the All India Jati Sudhar Mahasabha, which was founded in Delhi in March 1922 in a Dalit neighbourhood. The All India Jati Sudhar Mahasabha declared that

> Before the advent of the Aryans, we were a flourishing nation. But when the foreign Aryans conquered us they wanted to reduce us to slavery and so they branded us as "untouchables" so much so that it received sanction in their religious books, e.g. the Rigveda (Prashad 2000: 84).

The All India Jati Sudhar Mahasabha insisted in 1931 that it had no faith in the Hindu organisations like the SDS (Delhi), the Acchutadhar Committee (Allahabad) and their likes as they were run by caste Hindus with an aim to arrest the political and discursive autonomy of the Dalits.

Finally, Prashad mentions the existence of a major reworking of the *Ramayana* by Gyaneshwar, a Dalit activist in Delhi in which the sage Valmiki is presented as a radical Chandal and not the Vedic rishi who—by the likes of Ami Chand—is associated with and yet

not identified with the Valmikis in a casteist manoeuvre that seeks to conciliate but not admit the Valmikis as equal members of the Hindu community. Prashad cites Santram, who in his work *Hamara Samaj*, published in 1949, had argued that the Chuhras/ Valmikis had a twin religious tradition of Lal Beg (shaped by Muslim traditions) and Maharishi Valmiki (derived from the Hindu influences). However, due to the impact of the orthodox Hinduism, the Valmikis had to actively forget their allegiance to Lal Beg and ally themselves entirely to the rishi Valmiki. Prashad reads the re-writing of *Ramayana* by Gyaneshwar as probably the final source of textual and discursive dissent deriving its power from the nonconformist and bold imaginative energies of the tradition of Bala Shah Noori and Lal Beg; and, the loss of even the last copy of this version of *Ramayana* in the 1960s as a telling comment on the definitive erasure of this autonomous, subaltern folk religious tradition from the lived experiences of the Valmikis.

8. Early Dalit Print Culture in Delhi—Some Observations

The early print culture of the Dalits in Delhi was by and large fashioned by pamphlets and chapbook-like literature which were cheap to publish and easy to distribute. In terms of their subject matter, most of them were primarily historical and cultural in their orientation, although deployed for forging a political community of the Dalits. As much of this literature has not survived in contemporary times, it becomes vital to depend on secondhand sources like oral transcripts or mentions in books written later on for references to this initial textual tradition. Not many journals or newspapers were published in this period as news journalism or political articles were to be a feature of the future. It is principally with the entry of the Dalits in the political processes, and their participation in the institutional political mechanisms of the country that political news and the journalistic impulse takes root.

Roopchand Gautam, in his book *Dilli ki Dalit Patrakarita* (2009) states that Dalit journalism in Delhi started in the year 1952 with the establishment of a newspaper by the name of *Manav Kalyan* by Dharmprakash. The newspaper was published regularly till 1962, after which it went out of print. Then, in 1959 R.K Shashi launched a four-page weekly newsletter *Vidrohi*, based on "news and views" (Gautam 2009, 29). Another important journal that was started that same year was *Utthan*, edited by Rai Singh, and based upon the idea of propagation of the philosophies of Ambedkar and Tathagata Buddha. Several other magazines, newsletters

and journals came into existence in the following years, some of which include *Himayati* (1962), *Buddha Ghosh* (1968), *Bhim Sandesh* (1969), *Laukik Dharm* (1973), *Samyak Samaj* (1973), *Samay ki Aawaz* (1973), *Dhamma Darpan* (1976), *Kala Bharat* (1978), *Bahujan Sangathak* (1980), *Bahujan Adhikar* (1981), *Voice of the Weak* (1984), *Bahujan Sangharsh* (1987), *Dalit Patwar* (1989), *Hum Dalit* (1990), *Creative News* (1991), *Nyaya Chakra* (1991), *Yug Udbodhan* (1992), *Abhimooknayak* (1992), *Samajik Utthan* (1993), *Dalit Prakriya* (1994), *Arthpurna* (1995), *Koli Times* (1995), *Sajag Prahari* (1995), *Prabudh Jagat* (1997), *Rajdhani Ghoshna* (1997), *Voice of Buddha* (1998), *Dalit Hitaishi* (1998), *Samajik Parivartak* (1998), *Samta Prahari* (1999), *Vanchit Vani* (2001), *Mahila Ghoshna* (2001), *Aihwan-e-Mission* (2001), *Bahujan Kesari* (2002), *Aaj ka Dalit* (2002), *Mookvakta* (2002), *Apeksha* (2002), *Samajik Nyaya Sandesh* (2002), *Dalit Times* (2003), *Mission Ambedkar* (2003), *Bahujanon ka Bahujan Bharat* (2003), *Moolniwasi Times* (2003), *Samyak Bharat* (2003), *Haashiye ki Aawaz* (2006), *Bayan* (2006), *Sangharsh* (2006), *Maitri Times* (2007), *Bahuri Nahi Aawana* (2008) and *Forward Press* (2009).

Gautam points out that even in the 1960s running magazines and newspapers used to a risky business in Delhi since a significant section of the Dalit population was illiterate and thus there were very few readers. Stories, cultural events and other forms that would orally engage the audience were more successful as forms of dissemination of knowledge, values and political messages. The first (and only) Dalit journalist in Delhi then was Dr. Sohanpal Sumanakshar, who was employed by the Hindi daily, *Dainik Hindustan.* He founded the very influential Dalit magazine *Himayati* in 1962. The magazine was very successful in its run as it lasted for over four decades and received support from an important political figure like Babu Jagjivan Ram, and institutions like the Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy (founded 1984).

The successful run of *Himayati* brings us to the very vexed question of the relationship between print culture and the establishment. While several of the magazines, pamphlets and newsletters published in the Dalit media space (then and today) are run by small, independent presses, a few also enjoy institutional patronage and support. The assistance and the aid offered by institutions go a long way in providing financial stability and viability to these enterprises, yet they come with their own associated limitations. Dorothy Smith, in her theory of the 'relations of ruling', mentions the manner in which organisations and institutions steadily divest people of their ability to set agendas and autonomous decision-making, and transfer

these actions to the imperatives of the establishment and its processes. Thus, the institutions become "forms of organizing knowledge, judgement and will as external to particular individuals" (Smith 1997: 42). Consequently, institutional bodies promote the schema and the objectives of the organisation, which may discourage particular kinds of epistemic confrontations and knowledge production. *Himayati*, for long, was seen as close to the Congress' politics of adjustment and collaboration, rather than to principles of militant radicalism due to the closeness between Sumanakshar and Babu Jagjivan Ram. It opted for a balanced journalistic voice over polemics, solicited advertisements for its financial health from government sources and depended upon the Bharatiya Dalit Sahitya Academy for its subscribers to a large extent.

On the other hand, many other Dalit publications are financially very precarious as they are family owned or have a very tiny institutional setup. They fold up fairly easily due to their very limited economic base. Their readers are small in numbers, and many of them are confronted by an absence of equipment, skilled workers and a dependable distribution network. Thus, an important question here relates to the various kinds of negotiations that occur owing to the varying financial base and size of these print establishments due to institutional support or its absence, and their implications for a study on the plurality of Dalit identities. While the small, independently owned establishments have the freedom to shape their own political agenda and literary content, the fact that they are financially very vulnerable severely undermines their reach amongst readers and longevity. The ones that are funded through organisations or associations have a longer life-cycle and healthier readership, yet they might be marred by a compromised or preformed political stance precisely due to its institutional loyalty. Therefore, the political and cultural economy of the Dalit discursive domain and their potential to reconfigure the social relations of power is inalienably determined through the very complex web of their organizational structure, operational freedom and sources of revenue.

Another vital factor that decides the richness of a media domain is the profile of the publishers and sellers/ distributors in the field. Unlike Uttar Pradesh where an especially important Dalit-Bahujan publication house by the name of Bahujan Kalyan Press was established by Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu in the 1930s, Delhi did not get its own major Dalit-Bahujan publication centre until much later. This is significant, given that in Delhi the first press for the Indian *bhasas* was established in the first half of the nineteenth century, and this

was also the period when the first few newspapers in the country in the vernacular languages were printed from Delhi in Urdu and Persian. By 1852 there were several presses all over the city, leading to a sharp decline in the price of books. Avnindra Kumar Vidyalankar, in his book *Dilli ki Hindi Patrakarita. Ateet aur Vartaman*, claims that Hindi journalism in Delhi started only with the anointment of George V in 1911, but even as late as that, it was fairly removed from the lives of the ordinary people and was confined to a very small section of the literates in the city. By then, several towns in Uttar Pradesh, particularly Banaras, had become very important centres of the Hindi print culture. It is therefore not too much of a surprise that Jigyasu established a Hindi press in Lucknow in the 1930s with the aim of propagating the philosophy of Adi-Hinduism, Buddha, Ambedkar and other Dalit-Bahujan ideologues like Phule and Periyar. Hindi, as a language, did not gain prominence in Delhi until much later than Uttar Pradesh. The primary language of the educated classes of the city even in the early twentieth century remained Urdu, and Hindi took hold only gradually.

While there are many small Dalit presses in Delhi today, there are principally two important centres of independent Dalit publication/ distribution of books in the city, and both were established in the 1990s. Gautam Book Centre operates from the house of S.S Gautam in Shahdara in East Delhi, and was started by the former to act as a co-ordinated centre from where all sorts of books by Dalit authors could be located. S.S Gautam collected hundreds of catalogues from publishers and booksellers across the country and ordered all books on caste and Ambedkar. Today, the Centre boasts of several hundred books—some of them pretty rare—on caste, Ambedkat and Buddha. They have organised stalls in several book fairs, political rallies, conferences, exhibitions and Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations on Parliament Street in Delhi every year. Gautam Book Centre launched its website in 2009 for greater outreach to its readers, yet the physical infrastructure at their disposal remains small and not very visible in the public eye. Recently, the Book Centre has also entered into publication, and has started printing books written by S.S Gautam himself as well as that by several other Dalit writers.

The other important publication house for the Dalit-Bahujan discourse is the Samyak Prakashan, founded by Bauddhacharya Shanti Swaroop Bauddha for the purpose of the dissemination of literature on Buddha, Ambedkar, Emperor Ashoka, Phule, Chhatrapati Shahuji and other revolutionary activists of Indian society who took it upon themselves to

transform the country through their writings and deeds. Samyak Prakashan very self-consciously defines itself as a part of the alternative media, and claims to be successfully engaged in the project of defining an alternative and distinctive language of the Dalit-Bahujan aspirations and literary utterances that is rooted in the unique cultural inheritance of the two communities. Bauddha claims in an interview to Sarah Beth Hunt that "[h]aving our own publishers in important, because if we don't have them, we would have to borrow our ideology of our enemies through their literature. We should have our own literature to teach the ideology of Ambedkar" (Hunt, 166). Samyak Prakashan helps out many Dalit writers with managing publication expenses, thus extending the early twentieth century idea of performing 'seva' or service to the community by helping in establishing a rich discursive tradition. Samyak Prakashan today has a list of over a thousand books, posters and calendar art that are printed in its press at Pashchimpuri, New Delhi, yet it too depends to a large degree on the handicraft business of its founder for its financial survival. The publishing house has gone online as well, trying to cast its net wider for readership.

For the purpose of this chapter, it is important to investigate the causes that distinguish the Delhi Dalit media field from that of the rest of north India. While, undeniably, there are many overlaps in the manner in which the Dalit print culture and the media domain shapes up in the two spaces, there are certain identifiable differences. It could not be any other way—while macrosocial structures of power exist across these two contiguous geographical and cultural zones, practices of power/ knowledge operate at essentially local sites through microstructures of social relationships. Thus, it is important to recall certain unique configurations of the city that sets it apart from other places.

States like Punjab, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have produced important Dalit leaders such as Swami Acchutananda, Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, Mangu Ram, Raisaheb Ramcharan, Shivdayal Singh Chaurasia, Mahadev Prasad, Badluram Rasik and Gauri Bhankar Pal. Delhi did not produce any Dalit leader of this stature. Similarly, there was a reasonably widespread existence of 'lower' caste associations such as that of the Jatav/ Chamar community in Uttar Pradesh in the early twentieth century. This is indicative of the fact that some Dalit communities in these places had already introduced themselves to modern institutions of group solidarity and cohesion for the purpose of self-improvement. In addition, historians have noted the presence of several Dalits—particularly Chamars—in various demonstrations and struggles

organised by the peasants and agricultural labourers to demand better conditions for agriculture related works, and claim on land. Delhi does not see such potentially revolutionary moments by the Dalit community in this period. Finally, there was also a reasonable number of writings by the Dalits in the form of caste genealogies, and re-interpretative historical narratives of the country in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. Delhi, being the capital of the country, was a recipient of these works undertaken by the ideologues of the other states, but did not produce a tradition of its own in any significant way.

Many historians have argued that Delhi was a political hinterland during much of the colonial history of the country. The public opinion in the city was centred more around issues of local import than national. This started changing—albeit tardily—only in 1911 when it was decided by the imperial powers to shift the capital of the country to New Delhi. Gradually, the population of the city started evincing more than a liminal interest in national affairs and the political struggle for independence. The 'old' city or what was once called Shahjahanabad continued to remain the nerve centre of political activism, though in comparison to other urban centres, Delhi continued to exhibit a relatively placid face. At the same time, it is important to bear in mind that Delhi's "splendid isolation" (Gupta 1997, 221) was on the decline owing to the influx of not just political figures of national stature but also due to migration by various ethnic groups like the Bengalis, the Punjabis and people from the United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh).

Moreover, it is important to recall that Delhi has not enjoyed the status of a separate/ independent state until very recently. For much of its colonial and post-colonial history, Delhi has been governed principally by the national governments, with some local bodies in charge too. This absence of relative political independence from the national/ central government at the level of institutional politics has been crucial in stamping Delhi with its distinct political face. While the electorates of states like Uttar Pradesh and Punjab had the freedom to choose a regional government independent of the national one, regional political groups that arose on the lines of local identity concerns in these states also had a larger room to manoeuvre between 'national' and 'regional' concerns. Delhi, however, did not have this privilege at the level of electoral politics. While all the political fronts would establish their offices in Delhi due to it being the national capital, political support for them came primarily from the states themselves.

Additionally, Delhi had established itself as a preferred urban destination for migration for much of north India, and thus many Dalits from the neighbouring states came over to escape the stronghold of caste prejudices in their villages. The oppressive structures of caste were much stronger, blatant and tangible in the rural spaces of Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and those Dalits who escaped to Delhi for a better life found a relative degree of freedom from the stigma of ritual pollution in the anonymity of the city. This is also perhaps a reason why caste-based political organisations such as the RPI and the BSP have not found as much electoral support in the city as many of their models of caste-determined harassment and trouble derive from the life-worlds of rural communities, with their problems of agricultural poverty, redistribution of cultivable land, and till a few decades ago, *begari*.

The above does not claim that Delhi was a caste-free experience for the Dalits who migrated to the city. However, the caste discrimination in the urban centres manifest themselves a little differently in the form of biases in the office spaces, residential colonies and at inter-personal levels of interactions. This range of experiences, nevertheless, was to enter the Dalit discourses in the decades that followed India's independence. One very important aside remains in this narrative—the untold stories of caste relations in many of those 'out-lying' areas that have today become the part of the urban expanse that this city is.

Chapter 3
Delhi And the Dalit Print Culture:
Movements and the Protocols of Print

1. Introduction:

The printed word in the form of the books, serialised works, historiography, political pamphlets and advocacy materials deriving out of the Dalit literary and cultural history in Delhi lends itself to a fairly rich study from the interpretative repertoire and tools offered by the conjoined fields of book history and print culture. So far, however, much of the Dalit writing has been written, read and evaluated principally for its content. Dalit writing, until recently, has largely been tested on the touchstone of 'authenticity' of the representation of the 'Dalit experience', or for its success in documenting Dalit lives and their noetic. Of late, the scholarship on Dalit literature has been gradually but steadily moving towards defining hermeneutics of its aesthetics, theoretical paradigms and an increasing self-reflexivity arising out of its self-representations.

The attempt to construct a book history or an account of the Dalit print culture in Delhi is a much neglected but crucially important frame of reference to appreciate the politico-cultural history of the community. Consequently, this chapter derives its functional and discursive logic from the disciplinary energies of the History of the Book (Histoire du Livre) and print culture studies. Book history is broadly understood as the study of the history of books, texts, and documents, including hypertext and digital media. It encompasses all possible aspects of production, social and noetic dimensions in the life of a written word, and advances far beyond the interpretations made possible by the traditions of literary criticism, discourse analysis, social history, bibliography and cultural studies in themselves. Thus, the history of the Book engages with the material processes of production, dissemination, regulation and reception of a text, as well as with the ideological formations of its entire range of textual culture.

Structurally, this chapter will first examine the role of movements in Delhi in producing and shaping the current nature of the Dalit print culture of the city, and will then move on to discuss the findings of an ethnographic study of the several actors and objects/ artefacts that define this domain. Finally, I will attempt to weave together the many implications of my narrative for a politically inflected reading of the rugged and often fractured terrain of this 'print culture'. At the outset, however, it is important to clarify the manner of the use of the

word ‘political’ in this context. Based on the insights of the Marxist social theorists and political philosophers such as Karl Marx, Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Michael Foucault, Judith Butler and Slavoj Zizek, if politics may be defined as the struggle for substantive as well as discursive control over the organizational processes of the human society, then it is also about the function of agents, agencies and institutions that act to maintain or transform the human environment, both social, psychological and physical. Accordingly, politics is a phenomenon found in and between all kinds of institutions—social, political, cultural, and economic—existing in a society. It is expressed in all the relations, institutions and structures that are involved in the production and reproduction of the life of societies. Defined as such, ‘politics’ is the universal facet of social life.

The advent of Cultural Studies in the 1970s added yet another dimension to the word. As aesthetics took a turn in the direction of Cultural Studies, representational art forms came to be identified as the archives of human experiences resulting from an intricate nexus of the social, political, cultural and economic institutions that constitute any society at a given historical time. Hence, Cultural Studies theorists such as Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson, Stuart Hall and Judith Butler assert that as components of the ideological universe of a society, no social text—visual, auditory or written—can repudiate its political origins and functions. It is my contestation therefore that the entire range of the Dalit print culture in Delhi is a testimony to the myriad forms of power and control that operates between communities, institutions and the social agents of the field, and the last section of this chapter attempts to capture the many nuances of this proposition.

2. **Movements as Avenues of Print**

The contemporary Dalit space in print in Delhi is a consequence of the various social, political and religious movements that have shaped the consciousness of the Dalit community in the city. These movements have found expression in the print form through memoirs, essays, pamphlets, magazines and other periodicals, biographies, life narratives, historical accounts, political tracts, social commentary, records maintained in the offices of the various movements, religious literature, poems and other works of fiction. While the previous chapter engaged with the history of the Dalits in Delhi, in this chapter, I begin with an exploration of the particular

social, political, cultural and religious movements that have contributed towards a creation of a Dalit print culture and a counter public to the 'mainstream'.

The concept of social movements has a long and contested history due to the complexities involved in not just its disciplinary allegiances as a field of study but also due to the immense diversities in its praxis. Following scholars such as Ravi Kumar, Ghanshyam Shah and M.S.A Rao, movement is understood as a deliberate, organized and enduring form of resistance to demand reforms or even radical changes in the structures of a society. Sociologists and Political scientists such as Rao, Paul Wilkinson and Rudolf Heberle argue that any sharp theoretical distinction between political and social movements are difficult to sustain. Several social movements have sought to bring about changes in the political processes of the nation, for instance, the Backward Class movements in several southern states of India (Rao 1978). In addition, even if a movement does not consciously strive for gaining political power, its actions have political ramifications as it seeks to intervene in and transform the power alliances between and among institutions, interests and social actors.

The advent of a new form of social protest, commonly accepted as new social movements or NSMs, has added a further nuance to this debate. Broadly, it has been noticed that in a world changed by the forces of increased globalization and more integrated networks of communication, the organized forms of resistance have undergone a transformation. Several scholars of the new social movements like Jean L Cohen, L. A. Kauffman, Klaus Eder and Ekkart Zimmerman have argued that the issues concerning the former are no longer conceptualized on the axis of class, economy or state power. Many of these movements have been characterised as assertions of identities and not as struggles to control the mechanisms of economic production or political power. This position, however, is not entirely tenable as much of the Dalit movement or women's movement today is also oriented towards instituting systemic changes in the economic and political structures of the society for increased control and power in the hands these liminal social identities (Shah 2004: 22). It frequently pits them against the state and its paradigms of authority and interest, thus indicating that identity-based forms of contemporary mobilisation is not divested of economic or political substance.

Another significant development in contemporary times is the unprecedented yet evident indifference of the middle classes internationally to any sustained form of political

activism or political engagement as a measure of collective action (Cohen 1985; Offe 1985). The last quarter of the previous century witnessed the turning away of the youth from organised political forums and political organs to join non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and civic platforms of people's initiatives against administrative problems or issues of locality and the homestead. Most of these were non-institutionalized, autonomous, grass-root centered units of action and activism that "create[d] horizontal, directly democratic associations that [were] loosely federated on national levels...target[ed] the social domain of "civil society" and raise[d] issues concerned with the democratization of structures of everyday life" (Cohen 1985: 667). The goal of the new social movements is therefore more towards social justice and social change rather than direct interventions in the political society. However, as Ghanshyam Shah points out, such a neat distinction between the political and the social is reductive both theoretically and in praxis as the 'political' is not simply a feature of the state and its mechanisms of power, but permeates all aspects of the societal realm (Shah 2004). Crucially, such a position that seeks to restrict the 'political' to the state and its apparatuses also runs the risk of emptying the social space of its political agency (Shah 2004: 23).

3. **Dalit Movements in Delhi**

Within the above-outlined context, the trajectory of the Dalit movement in Delhi can be seen as having witnessed several stages of engagement. In its earliest phase, Delhi did not see any appreciable measure of organised assertion of the Dalit identity unlike other places like Maharashtra, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In this context, it is useful to recall that Delhi has not been the location for the beginnings of any significant mass movement in the country such as the Indian national movement, working class movement, peasants' movement, backward class movement or any other. The only possible exception is the students' movement that found massive expression in the city during the 1970s (Emergency), 1990s (Mandal Commission) and then in the early 2000s during the proposed expansion of reservations in institutes of higher education to include Other Backward Classes in its ambit. The reasons for this are several, some of which I will quickly enumerate for the sake of brevity. Unlike Calcutta, Bombay or Madras, Delhi was not an important colonial city till the early decades of the twentieth century when the British decided to shift the capital of the nation to Delhi (Gupta 1997). One significant reason for the transfer of the national capital to the city was precisely its comparative political torpidity post 1857. In addition, the politically conservative character

of Delhi was also shaped by the activities of the Hindu right of various shades—the Arya Samaj, Hindu Mahasabha, Jan Sangh and the Bhartiya Janta Party—that found considerable support for its values and activities amongst the native merchant community and the Punjabi refugees who relocated from Pakistan after 1947 (Jaffrelot 2000; Singh 2007). In addition, and not unlike several capital cities in the world, Delhi was never an industrial or a manufacturing hub, and thus did not generate conditions for the presence of a large-scale, organised working class force. Finally, as the administrative and bureaucratic capital of the nation, Delhi became a magnet for those who aspired to a place—however lowly—in the power dispensation. Thus, this combination of the middle-class officialdom and petty mercantile interests in the city played an important role in containing socially radical impulses to a good measure. Finally, Delhi has been a host to several migrant communities for a long time, and the political participation of a migrant population has vastly different dynamics from that of native residents[28]. The imperatives of this relationship will be discussed in greater detail later on in the chapter, but for the moment it is important to bear in mind that the quantum of the floating/ unsettled/ mobile population played a significant role in determining the political atmosphere of Delhi.

Delhi has been the capital and the political node of the country for over a century now, yet—as mentioned before—the city has not been the locus of any important movement in early to mid-20th century. Most movements—for national independence, social and religious reforms, caste dignity, labour rights, women's equality, environmental concerns—have sprung up in various other parts of India and have resonated in the streets of Delhi thereon. However, given that the city is the seat of political power, every important campaign has inscribed a part of its substance and its lore in its palimpsest.

3.1 Socio-Religious Movements in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century

[28] The political positionalities shaped by the imperatives of migration came up many times in the interactions that I had with several members of the Dalit community, and it is discussed in greater detail in the later sections of the chapter.

The first important movement for the purpose of this chapter are the various *adi* movements that found extensive support amongst the Dalits in many parts of India. In north, it found its best expression in the *Adi*-Hindu movement of Swami Acchutananda in Uttar Pradesh and the *Ad-Dharmis* of Punjab. The *Adi*-Hindu movement gathered endorsement from a section of the Dalits of Delhi too, although the support for it in the city wasn't as wide-spread as it was in the states mentioned above (Rawat 2011: Singh 2009-10). The Jatav *panchayats* (formerly known as the *Jati panchayat* of the 3 *bawanis*) of old Delhi and the neighbouring areas were instrumental in mobilising the Jatav/ chamar community of their *mohallas* (settlements) away from the influence of the Arya Samaj or other Hindu organisations and towards the Adi-Hindu movement (Bauddh 2016: 174). According to Bauddh, the Jatav *panchayats* of the early twentieth century had an important public role to play in this period as they represented the only community-based social platform for this Dalit sub-group in Delhi that could be marshalled for any kind of concerted political articulation by its people. The Jatav *panchayats* were therefore crucial to the Dalit political and social movements of the first half of the twentieth century in the city. Swami Acchutanand stayed in contact with the leaders of these *panchayats* and it was only with their assistance that two sizeable conferences of the Delhi Jatavs were organised in the city in 1911 and 1922 (Bauddh 2016: 168-170). These panchayats not only provided the necessary infrastructural support for the activities of the Adi-Hindu movement in Delhi but also formed its ideological groundswell.

A few years later, the Jatav *panchayats* initiated the Jatav community in Delhi to Ambedkar's movement for the political empowerment and social dignity of the Dalits. Ambedkar was born in Maharashtra and much of his influence found a strong foothold in that region, yet his ideas gradually spread beyond the borders of his home state to affect the then 'untouchables' in many parts of the country. Delhi's tryst with the man and his ideas has, in many ways, replicated the trajectory of movements in the city. Ambedkar as an anti-caste activist had overlooked Delhi until 1942, when he was appointed the Labour Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and had to relocate to the capital. The Jatav *panchayats* had heard of the man, and had admired his radical gesture of burning the *Manusmriti* in December 1927 at Mahad (Bauddh 2016: 183). Under Ambedkar's encouragement, the leaders of the *panchayats* and a few other politically inclined people helped establish a branch of the Scheduled Caste Federation in Delhi as a prelude to Ambedkar's campaign for the Dalits of the city to "educate, agitate and organise". However, with time, and with the growing influence of

the Scheduled Caste Federation, Ambedkar Bhawan Association, *Bhartiya Bauddh Mahasabha*, *Ravidass Janmotsava* Committee and other organisations, the Jatav *panchayats* lost their relevance as a force of social cohesion and political mobilisation. The socio-political roles of these *panchayats* were taken over by the above organisations, thus marking an important transformation in the character of the Dalit public and the nature of its civic engagement in the period.

These changes in the Dalit public sphere were also a consequence of the loosening of caste-based habitational collectives in the city due to the rapid expansion of Delhi outside the influence of the walled city. Many families moved out of the ambit of community-determined residences to live independently or in largely detached environments of the new colonies that were constructed by the government agencies, thus breaking the hold of *jati panchayats* over families and people (Bauddh 2016: 397). In addition, Dalits from the neighbouring state of Uttar Pradesh started migrating in large numbers, and they formed their own collectives for participation in anti-caste agitations in the city. These new migrants formed new platforms and groups for a collective assertion of their identity, and the Dalit society of Delhi moved progressively and steadily away from the traditional forms of participation in the public sphere to more modern ones (Bauddh 2016: 398). This is reflected in the character of the print culture of the period which was strongly oriented towards mass consumption rather than private reading by atomistic individuals, but more on it later.

The community-based character of participation by the Dalits in public affairs in early to the middle of the twentieth century was also sustained by religious groups such as the *Ravidasis.* Sant Ravidas was a *bhakti* poet-saint in north India in 15th-16th century, and was venerated by the masses due to his teachings against class, gender and caste divisions in society. *Ravidasis* were very popular in Punjab and western Uttar Pradesh, and because of the migration of Punjabis to Delhi, the sect had become popular among the Delhi Jatavs too (Bauddh 2016). Similarly, Buddhism in the middle of the previous century had started finding followers among the Dalits due to Ambedkar's conversion to the religion and it too became an important religion patronised by a section of the community. Both *Ravidasias* and Buddhism offered communistic spaces of association to their followers due to their synergetic forms of worship (Buddhism) or celebration of *jayantis* (*Ravidasis*) (Bauddh 2016; Ram 2017).

3.2 Print and Socio-Religious Movements in the Early Decades of the Twentieth Century

The print domain of this period (1920s to 1960s) is heavily influenced by the social imperatives of the age. An especially important thing to bear in mind in this period is that the majority in the Dalit community in the city was either illiterate or semi-literate, and thus there were more listeners than readers. Gatherings and assemblies were perhaps more crucial for generating political consciousness than books by themselves. Thus, as argued by Swaroop Chand Bauddh (2016), the culture of orality had a vital place in society and the print domain was deeply inflected by this recognition. All the important leaders in Delhi, including Swami Acchutananda and Ambedkar, realised the importance of public assemblies and mass meetings—both big and small—for the ideological conversion of the people. Therefore, a number of public meetings and conferences were held in various places across the city where Dalits were to be found in large settlements, such as Paharganj, Karol Bagh, Kalan Mahal *basti* and the areas near the Red Fort. Poetry oration from the stage had a very significant place in these gatherings, and no meeting ever wound up without a session on poetry recitation. This period was rich in the tradition of the *jan kavi* (popular balladeers) who would passionately exhort the audience from the dais to work for the dignity of their community (Bauddh, 2016; Gautam 2009). Swami Acchtananda himself was a popular mass poet and many of his poems were delivered by him in the many gatherings he held all over north India, including Delhi. The other very famous mass poets or *jan kavi* of this period were Pandit Jagatram Kaviratna of Paharganj, Biharilal Harit from Shahdara and Kavi Patram Singh of Teliwada (Bauddh 2016).

It should be borne in mind that this period in Indian history is very rich in terms of production in print, and thus the context of this discussion is not an exclusively oral or pre-literate culture. Some of the poems by these popular balladeers have been preserved in print, and most others were first written and then recited in public; but it must be recalled that all of them were initially conceived for a primarily unlettered audience. Biharilal Harit recounts in a volume of his collected poems in 1999 that he wrote an anthology of poems titled “Acchuton ke Betaaj Badshah” (The Uncrowned Emperor of the Untouchables) in 1945 to spread Ambedkar’s message among the masses. In a public meeting at Company Bagh in Delhi in 1946, a thousand copies of this volume were sold for an *anna* each within hours. When Ambedkar was presented with a copy of the anthology, he insisted on an immediate performance of one of the poems on stage with the entire crew of singers and joined in himself.

The poem, with a couplet that urged the youth to serve the community, included a line "Jai Bhim ka naara lage, Bharat ki basti-basti mein" (every colony in the country should resound with the slogan of 'Hail Bhim'). Harit claims that since that performance, the slogan of 'hail Bhim' or 'jai Bhim' became very popular among the masses, and even today the Ambedkarites use the phrase as a commonly accepted form of greeting each other (Harit 1999).

If one were to examine some of these poems that were in popular circulation in the Dalit public domain of the period, a few identifiable features immediately present themselves. Almost all of these verses derive their aesthetic sensibility from the exigencies of a principally oral community that was not yet initiated into the relatively solitary act and experience of reading. Thus, these poems have an immediacy of address, and confidently presume an audience. They are not private or tentative exercises of self-expression but bold utterances directed to a set of audience that they identify with closely. Many of them are directly exhortatory, and strongly propose the task of community welfare to their audience. The words employed in these poems are simple and non-scholastic, and are derived from the everyday language of conversation of the average 'man' of the community. Many of these works use words from the popular parlance of everyday living as well as the political discourses circulating in the by-lanes of the city. Pandit Jagatram Kaviratn, in his very famous poem "Quami Mercia"[29] (Elegy for the Community) uses words and phrases from English like "nation" and "policy" with very prosaic Hindi and Urdu phrases such as "mardumshumari", "ghinate" (repulsed), and "chun karoge" (to squeak). This is a very important detail in the poems of this period as (testified to by my own experience of engaging with the print culture of the community as a part of this project) this simplicity of language and expression in the print domain of those times is not to be easily found in the contemporary print culture of the Dalit community, particularly in monographs and the literary periodicals. With the decline in mass movements over time, the poets and writers lost their position in the public sphere as bards of the masses. In addition, the increase in literacy and education of the Dalit community in the city also diminished the immediacy of contact between the writers and the readers. One of the significant transformations that literacy—and more so, print—brings about is a relative physical and emotional distance between the writer and her readers, and the style of writing

[29] The poem is included in Swaroopchand Bauddh's book, *Dilli ka Dalit Itihaas. Kuch Anchuye Prasang*, which was published by Samyak Prakashan (Delhi) in 2016.

too is marked by the changes in this relationship (Ong 1986; Havelock 1963; Innis 1964). An important criticism of the Dalit print culture today is an escalation in its expressive elitism which makes language an impediment in the ease of reading for people with non-scholastic backgrounds. This transformation in the selection of the linguistic repertoire indicates the writer's changed self-perception as well as the shift in her conception of her readership, which is no longer the 'man' on the streets.

These poems also exhibit other stylistic features of oral literature in terms of simple rhyme-scheme, repetition of lines or couplets and alliteration. These stylistic features made the poems easy for public recitation and retention by the people. They recalled the tradition of devotional hymns or folk ditties that the people were used to listening and memorising, and found considerable acceptance and popularity. Roopchand Gautam writes "in those days the medium of broadcast for Dalits used to be folk literature. Groups after groups would gather on the streets of Shahdara. Biharilal Harit would alternate with reciting poems and singing songs…after a hard day of labour people would sing songs and beat the drums" (my translation) (Gautam 2009: 33).

The folk element was very prominent in the poems composed in this period, and thus another crucial feature of these works is the element of performativity deeply inherent in them. Most of these poems were meant to be sung or recited, and not to be privately or silently read. Consequently, there is a clear presence of beat, meter and rhythm to them. Their performance requires a variation in tone, pitch and the pace of recitation. Moreover, their recitation or singing is meant to be accompanied by an appropriate body language in terms of gestures and facial expressions. They find their true fulfilment only in their enactment and are incomplete without an immediate audience that can react to them. Thus, although conceived in writing and perpetuated through the medium of print, these poems are only half alive on the pages that have become their memorials.

Additionally, as mentioned by Shanti Swaroop Bauddh in one of my interactions with him in 2016, Buddhism too had a role in the development of the print culture of the Dalits in the mid decades of the previous century. Ambedkar had converted to Buddhism a few months before his death, and this act prompted a lot of Dalits to abandon Hinduism and enter the folds of the new religion in Delhi too. A number of Buddha viharas came up in the city, as well as

the Buddhist Society of India (Bhartiya Bauddh Mahasabha), an institution founded by Ambedkar himself in Delhi. These Buddha viharas published thin booklets and pamphlets on the teachings of Buddha, and on Ambedkar's writings on Buddhism. Similarly, the Bhartiya Bauddh Mahasabha founded a quarterly magazine by the name of *Dhamma Darpan*, a carrier of Ambedkarite-Buddhist philosophy and value systems. Although the reach of the print productions of the Buddhist centres of worship and association remained confined primarily to the members of these organisations, yet they sowed the seeds of a particular genre of writing—the Ambedkarite-Buddhist literature—in the city, the culmination of which in contemporary times is the Samyak Prakashan. Additionally, these sites also acted as the locations for the interaction and exchange of ideas and efforts for some protagonists of the Dalit print culture in Delhi.

Although this period may not have been as prolific for a book history account of the Dalit community, it is vital to recognise that this is the moment in time that lays the foundation for the future growth of an autonomous print culture of the community in the city. Ambedkar's central tenet in his struggle against the caste system was education, and the slogan of "educate, agitate, organise" became the gospel of life for many in the community. The Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in its public meetings distributed books, notebooks and slates to young boys and girls to encourage them to studies (Bauddh 2016). Most parents from the Jatav community tried to ensure the education of their children even if it meant working even harder to procure the money for it. Reservation in the government jobs for the SC community enabled the creation of a Dalit middle class/ lower middle class that could then imagine a relationship with books and other print forms. And, most significantly, many tentative steps were taken by several individuals in the direction of establishing an independent and autonomous media culture in the city that has borne some significant outcomes by now (Gautam 2009). Many magazines—*Vidrohi* (1959), *Utthan* (1959), *Himayati* (1962), *Bhim Sandesh* (1969), *Samyak Samaj* (1973) and *Dhamma Darpan* (1976)—were started by some enterprising individuals. Several people wrote monographs on the sundry aspects of their experiences as Dalits in a 'modern' nation. These were published and distributed through whatever non-professional channels that could be managed. The long span of nearly half a century had schooled the community into a need for an autonomous print domain where control over the questions of what, why and how of content, its production and distribution would be determined by the members of the community and not by those outside it.

By the concluding years of the 1960s, there was a considerable down-surge in people's association with platforms of large-scale movements. Some of the reasons for this have been discussed earlier in this chapter. The process of dissociation from these social and political platforms was also fermented by disenchantment with the political processes where the struggle for power and pelf played itself out unabashedly among the leaders of the community. Many leaders (including those from the SCF and the Republican Party of India) were seen as abandoning the cause of a sovereign Dalit identity to ally with the Congress and other political parties that offered them positions of influence, and helped co-opt the Dalit community in their majoritarian agenda. Babu Jagjeevan Ram of the Indian National Congress epitomised this compromised character of the Dalit politics for many Ambedkarites. It was a similar narrative with the prominent socio-religious platforms of the Dalits, such as the *Guru Ravidas Janmotsav Committee* that too witnesses underhand manipulations by several factions to win over the *Ravidasis* to the political ambit of the 'mainstream' political organisations like the Congress and the Bhartiya Janta Party. This marked a distinct schism between the Ambedkar-Buddhist political impulse and the 'Hindu-ised' *Ravidasis* who allowed themselves to be misappropriated for personal gains, leading to the detriment of a collective radical Dalit identity (Bauddh 2016).

4. New Social Movements and the Dalit Print Culture

Although mass movements suffered a setback in the decades that followed, movements for social dignity and political assertion by the Dalits did not dissipate. It transformed itself into several kinds of small organisations and confederations—mostly non-governmental in nature—in order to initiate changes in the social realm rather than the political. The nature of these organisations varied from social to cultural, and the numbers went on increasing. Today there are several such platforms that claim to work for the uplift of the Dalits in society, but the following section will engage only with the more significant ones.

For clarification, it must also be stated that this chapter does not claim any mutually exclusive categories of conventionally understood mass movements and the new social movements. There are several overlaps in their conceptual frameworks, and the former continues to find space for its articulation even in the age of the NSMs. The two categories are

merely indicative of the dominant trends at separate moments in history, and must only be read as such. While the older forms of social movements were more integrated with mass-scale protests and agitations for structural changes in the macro institutions of the society, the new social movements—as mentioned earlier—are oriented towards social justice and social change rather than direct interventions in the political society. BAMCEF and the still ongoing Safai Karamchari Aandolan (SKA) led by Bejwada Wilson are examples of the traditional mass movements in contemporary times that have enjoyed huge following for a sustained period of time. However, they are minority occurrences in an age taken over by a loose confederation of organisations that work independently in their different domains, and collaborate occasionally for a limited period of time over pre-determined common goals.

Perhaps the most important autonomous Dalit organisations that work from Delhi for the uplift of the Dalit community today are the National Commission for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), Centre for Alternative Dalit Media (CADAM) and the National Confederation of Dalit Adivasi Organisations (NACDAOR). Of the three, NCDHR is a platform organisationally spearheaded primarily by the English speaking Dalit communities from the southern states of the country such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. Much of their activists are concerned with forging international alliances for its struggle against caste oppression. NCDHR is also dominated by Dalit Christians, which is a minuscule demography among the Dalits in Delhi and north India. Thus, NCDHR is not an organisation that has had an organic link with the Dalits of the city, or even other locations in north India. Although NCDHR is the biggest and the most prosperous non-governmental organisation operating from Delhi, I have found CADAM and NACDAOR more seminal to the vision of this paper.

There is a clear trajectory from CADAM to NACDAOR, a trajectory that is symbolic of the symbiotic relationship between society and media. However, there is another trajectory that led to CADAM, and that curve is evocative of individual enterprise, the search for social platforms for change and the documentation of that change. CADAM had its roots in ‘Mukti’ (Liberation), a youth organisation that was founded in 1982 in Delhi for social, economic and political equality. Although it was primarily dominated by Dalit youths, it also had the participation of some ‘upper’ caste students with similar agenda for social change. But ‘Mukti’ too was an outcome of the group’s earlier attempts to engage with students from the

marginal sections of the city's population. The founder members of 'Mukti' and its earlier avatar, a youth study circle, those such as Ashok Bharti, Rajni Tilak, Anita Bharti and a few other politically conscious Dalit men and women. All the founder-members of the study circle were Dalit young men and women who had worked for the community in various capacities. Rajni Tilak, who I met and spoke with at length in her office at CADAM on several occasions in December 2016 for the purpose of this project, had earlier tried to found a Dalit theatre group in Delhi, prior to working with the study circle. 'Aahwan' was the first Dalit theatre group in the city, and was co-established by Rajni Tilak and a friend of hers with training in the theory and praxis of film making. The group conducted a few plays and managed to survive for a couple of years but broke up eventually due to the relocation of Tilak's friend to Bombay. With no other person with similar skill sets in sight, the group had to abandon its plans for further performances and dissolved permanently.

The next important socio-cultural undertaking assumed by Tilak was her participation in her younger brother Ashok Bharti's plans for a youth study circle. This study circle was constituted for young students from schools and colleges. The students were asked to write essays on issues of current significance, and then their writings were corrected, edited and improved on the lines suggested by the senior members of the group. Finally, these essays were typed and their cyclostyled copies were made and given to the students. The attempt was to encourage the students for honing their writing skills and to turn them into observers and commentators of their social environment. The youth study circle persisted in its efforts for nearly two years, after which it too broke up.

However, the youth study circle had prepared the group for a bigger project of social transformation through yet another platform formed by the name of 'Mukti'. Mukti was a students' organisation as Rajni Tilak, Ashok Bharti and others collaborating with them were all students, then studying in various colleges of Delhi. Mukti took it upon itself to assist the Dalit students with admissions in colleges, and helped them identify the right institutions and courses for higher studies. Most students, particularly women students, found it extremely challenging to travel long distances to attend classes in colleges where they were admitted on the basis of the cut-off marks for candidates from the reserved categories. Mukti guided them through the entire process to ensure that they got admission in colleges close to their homes.

They also organised protests, demonstrations and sit-ins to make sure that the Dalit students were not denied opportunities for higher studies.

Mukti invested a lot of time and productive energy in helping students with their education related problems yet none of their efforts were ever mentioned in any of the newspapers. In addition, neither did the issues addressed by the organisation find space in the 'mainstream' media of the city. Thus, Ashok Bharti, Rohit Jain and Rajeev Singh of 'Mukti' decided to found CADAM, the Centre for Alternative Dalit Media. CADAM realised the need to initiate a multi-pronged strategy of building a powerful and independent media and print culture of the Dalits in the city. As a step in the direction, it took upon itself the task of actively encouraging students from the very marginal Dalit communities like the *Valmikis* and *Kanjars* to enrol themselves in schools for education. Towards this end, the activists of CADAM visited the *Valmiki* colony at Shankarpura and started a small educational centre. Initially, the room that they were given to teach housed small animals like goats as well, but after six to eight months of persistent efforts, they managed to prepare young boys and girls for school education. In 1996 there was just one literate child in a community of hundred families but by 2016 (as pointed out with a sense of quiet satisfaction by Ms. Tilak) a large number of kids regularly go to school.

Another very important task that CADAM attempted to initiate was workshops for training Dalit men and women in journalistic writing skills. CADAM understood that Dalit media can be a powerful and effective tool of advocacy for the community only if it were to derive its strength from the people operative at the grassroots, and decided to offer training to build a force of Dalit journalists reporting even from the most overlooked spaces of the community's lived experiences. CADAM invited activists and social workers functioning at the grassroots—many of them were daily wagers, labourers, rickshaw pullers and students—and taught them the five principles of journalistic writing, i.e. what, how, why, when and where. CADAM believed that with these five principles in mind, even a moderately educated person can report incidences and cover news, and the fine tuning of language can be managed by the editors. After the training, these people were sent to the field and asked to write on whatever that caught their attention. The articles written by these grass-root 'journalists' with the vantage point derived from the experiences of subalternity were included in CADAM's monthly newsletter "Abhimooknayak".

CADAM has also contributed significantly to the discursive traditions of the Dalit community through its activities. It was the first organisation to hold an all India Dalit women writers conference in January 1996. The first day of the conference was given to the appreciation of the literary efforts of the Dalit women writers, and the next day was devoted to a comprehensive debate on patriarchy, caste and gender oppression of women from the experiential matrix of Dalit womanhood. CADAM is one of the first organisations in north India to discursively link the question of gender with the existent debate on caste, and organised another conference on Dalit Women's Movement in March 2002. The organisation has also established a Dalit Women Resource Centre that has a number of books and studies on and by Dalit women. It has a very useful collection of books and other materials for a research on the history and the present of Dalit and Adivasi women of the country.

As an alternative centre for the Dalit media, CADAM has plans to start a Dalit feature service and found a daily newspaper to give utterance to the aspirations of the Dalits, the *Adivasis* and the marginalised. It also hopes to establish an autonomous Dalit publication unit and a distribution centre, which would act as a means of enabling them to build libraries in various small towns of the country for the benefit of the Dalit readership. They also hope to translate and publish a compilation of Dalit literature from various Indian languages so that they can be instituted in the 'mainstream'. Finally, although CADAM has successfully undertaken research on various issues of concern to the Dalit community, they wish to formally establish a research centre that can also act as a place for an alternative system of knowledge.

As an organisation, CADAM has played a significant role in developing ideas, infrastructure, human and material resources as well as a culture of reading and writing among the Dalits of Delhi. Currently, Rajni Tilak from CADAM is managing a quarterly newsletter "Aandolit" which is specifically—but not exclusively—targeted at women activists and workers of NACDAOR and RDMA or the Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Aandolan. The newsletter is funded partly through donations and partly through project funds for the purpose, and is distributed free of cost to the intended audience. In recent times, much of CADAM's social activism has been taken over by NACDAOR, and the former organisation is playing the role of the secretariat, with the added role of documentation and record-keeping.

Although social organisations have a significant role in fostering the print culture of a community, there are certain institutions that are more directly invested in the task of literacy events and its practices. The next section will examine the role of these institutions in creating and nurturing the print culture of the Dalit community in Delhi.

5. **Institutions and the Dalit Print Culture**

Literacy is inalienable to any print environment, but it isn't enough in itself to create a rich print culture of a community. Literacy requires the assistance of physical circumstances, social relationships, material tools and knowledge systems to create a culture of book production and its consumption. The best tools of creating and perpetuating cultural formations in a human society are institutions. According to Mary Douglas, institutions are "legitimized social groupings…[that are] organizers of information" (Douglas 1986). This section will investigate a few institutions that are usually considered as the flagbearers of the public spirit in the arenas of print and culture.

The earliest autonomous Dalit institution that perhaps played this role was Ambedkar Bhawan at the Rani Jhansi Marg. The foundation stone of this Dalit cultural centre was laid by Dr. Ambedkar himself, and after the death of the former, it went into the hands of a committee tasked with the responsibility of carrying out the functions for which the place was founded (Bauddh 2016). Unfortunately, the Ambedkar Bhawan management committee did not live up to the expectations and could not even manage to maintain a well-kept library for the use of the community. A small bookshop was privately opened in the complex of the Bhawan with the hopes of it housing the seminal texts of Ambedkarite and Buddhist philosophy, but the place barely managed to keep itself afloat for a few years before it closed shop. With time, the government of India established the Ambedkar Foundation on Ashoka Road. This new organisation was government funded and did not lack financial support for any of its activities. However, the Foundation too stayed placid and uninterested in promoting any literary activity in the community or in creating its needed infrastructural support system. As pointed out by Roop Chand Gautam in a conversation I had with him on the state of Dalit journalism in Delhi in late 2016, the Foundation has not even managed to set up a library to archive important books and other materials of the Dalit communities despite repeated requests and suggestions. The organisation was invested with the task of translating and publishing the entire oeuvre of

Ambedkar, and till a few years back, the progress was very tardy. In contrast—as is clear in a comparison of the two institutions—the organisation responsible for bringing out Gandhi's writerly output had managed to publish over hundred volumes, in addition to releasing digitised material for the public on the Mahatama.

The Foundation has a monthly magazine by the name of *Samajik Nyaya Sandesh* which has been in existence for several decades now, including a few years when its publication was suspended. Mohandas Naimisharay, one of the oldest and renowned Dalit journalists, was associated with Ambedkar Foundation as the editor of *Samajik Nyaya Sandesh* for a few months. He maintains that most of the officials at the Ambedkar Foundation were not interested in promoting Ambedkar's writings or his vision of society; and those that were, would not be allowed to function properly. Although claiming to be the followers of Ambedkar, most of these officials were self-serving status-seekers who deceived themselves as well as their community.

The community's disappointment with the establishment at the Ambedkar Foundation is palpable and pronounced, as was evident by the assertions of multiple people who opined on the role it has played so far (interactions with Roopchand Gautam 2016; Mohandas Naimisharay 2016; S. S Gautam 2016). The organisation, with the financial support of the Central government to enable its activities, had held out the promise of generating a cultural and literary effervescence in the community. It could have funded autonomous Dalit magazines and periodicals, offered support to the creative endeavours of the community that was floundering due to the absence of resources and could enable the establishment of the first public library of the Dalit community in the city. The Foundation could have been the archival centre for all kinds of codex and other print material ever produced by the Dalits, and could have gone on to be a research centre of formidable weight. It was also expected to contribute to the creation of an interest in print culture among the members of the community, but the institution failed to meet all expectations due to the lack of vision and honesty among the officialdom.

The absence of an independent Dalit platform for credible cultural interactions encouraged some members of the community to establish forums of their own, or in collaboration with others. One such important literary institution is the Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya

Academy (BDSA), founded in 1984 on the lines of the governmental Sahitya Academy near Mandi House. Dr. Sohanpal Sumanakshar was the founder President of the organisation, and although instituted in Delhi, it soon developed an all India character. BDSA is much more than a literary platform today. The organisation holds a national conference of Dalit writers every year where several prizes and fellowships are given out to achievers in various fields. Awards are an important way of investing an individual with social visibility and dignity, and Sumanakshar decided to institute these autonomous awards for the Dalit community as 'mainstream' society would never deign to treat them as their equals deserving recognition for their efforts. The BDSA recognises excellence not just in literature but in social work and political activism too. It focusses principally on religion, history, media and literature, and has organised literary conferences, public meeting, symposiums, seminars, rallies, writing competitions, exhibitions and street plays. ((Bhartiya Dalit Sahitya Academy 2017).

The other important literary platform of the Dalits in Delhi is the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* or the Dalit Writers' Collective. The information included in this section on the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* is primarily based on a discussion I had with Hiralal Rajasthani in late 2016 at his home when I had gone hunting for the back numbers of the Collective's monthly magazine, *Apeksha,* and with Rajni Tilak. These discussions were then scrutinised alongside a few other reports that exist on the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* on various media platforms, including Facebook and YouTube. Additionally, Sarah Beth Hunt has also devoted a small section of her book *Hindi Dalit* Literature (2014) to a study of the Collective, and it too proved useful in setting off any bias that may have crept in due to my conversation with an office bearer of the literary group. *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* was established in 1997. To begin with, most of its founder members were associated with the *Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh* but broke away from it to found an autonomous Dalit writers organisation as they felt that the oppressive caste dynamics were not given as much attention as they merited. However, the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* still collaborates with other progressive organisations such as the *Pragatisheel Lekhak Sangh, Janwadi Lekhak Sangh, Jansanskriti Manch* and *Sahitya Samman* for social activism. The *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* is of the opinion[30] that the 'mainstream' media today gives space to news of atrocities on Dalits, but it is not a media of advocacy for the community. The 'mainstream' media has learnt to accurately

[30] Based on a conversation with Hiralal Rajasthani, a then office bearer at the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* on 6 September 2016.

report incidences of violence directed at the minority communities, but its objectivity is its limitation. Thus, the community needs its own press and literature that would not just record but also advocate and agitate for change.

Another problem identified by the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* is a lack of critics in the Dalit communities for a proper evaluation of a work of art and literature. The group believes that the absence of a good critic weakens the literary or writerly capabilities of a community. The absence of critics and reviewers amongst the Dalits cannot be substituted by those from the *savarna* community as the latter lack both confidence as well as the intimacy of contextual knowledge. Thus, the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* has undertaken it upon itself to train the young members of the organisation into its technical requirements.

Training young members into the mores, traditions or skills of the group is an important feature of institutions. In fact, according to Rajni Tilak—another founder member of the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh*—the group was instituted with the purpose of training people in the Dalit *bastis* and colonies in the art of writing correctly, creative and otherwise. It was also planned to educate the Dalit masses in the social philosophy of Ambedkar through setting up of small libraries in these settlements, and sharing with them the creative works of the members of the group. However, the elitism of the educated, middle class Dalits ensured that the group never interacted with the masses in *bastis* and squatter colonies, and meets in the sanitised and comfortable social spaces like the coffee houses.

The *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* had started with the laudable purpose of taking the art of writing and the gift of the letter to the Dalits on the extremes of social marginalities. However, the lure of class solidarity and the contestations for control over the group distracted it from its original agenda. For long, it stayed confined to the comforts of the drawing rooms of the middle-class poets and writers, and conducted discussions within the in-group that it had constructed. Eventually, the struggle for control over the group led to its split in two factions, and consequently, the *Dalit Lekhak Sangh* lost much of its socio-cultural relevance. By the end of 2016, the two groups were by and large inactive and uninspired.

The Dalit institutions have had mixed success in their efforts to create and sustain a socially useful and relevant print culture for the community. Some institutions—such as the

Ambedkar Foundation—have spectacularly failed in creating conditions for the soaring of the print tradition of the community. Others, like CADAM, have had a relative degree of success in laying the substructure of the print culture by helping in the development of the human and extra-human resources. However, it must be recalled that a large part of any tradition of writing are its social actors such as the writers, publishers, distributors and the readers. We will now turn our attention to these human actors of the Dalit print culture.

6. The Social Actors of the Dalit Print Culture

This section will examine some important protagonists of the Dalit print culture in Delhi through their biographies, and then go on to draw certain theoretical generalizations on the print domain based on the experiences of their life. The first two people are writers (among other things) and both belong to the senior generation of Dalit writers in the city. The first writer in this section, Bhagwan Das, passed away in 2010. The account of his life mentioned below is assembled through his writings, his online biography as penned by S. R. Darapuri in 2014, his autobiography (Das 2010) and references to his life and writings by other Dalit writers and scholars (Bauddh 2016).

6.1 Bhagwan Das

Bhagwan Das was born in an 'untouchable' family at Jutogh cantonment in Shimla on 23 April 1927. His father, a man of some education, was a contractor in the British army. This allowed the father to fund the formal education of his intellectually bright son in a school in Shimla. However, the untimely death of Bhagwan Das' father forced the then sixteen years old matriculate to drop his dreams of higher education and provide for his family economically. While still at Shimla as a teenager, Bhagwan Das met Dr. Ambedkar when the latter visited the city in 1943, and never lost his deep veneration for the "great man" thereafter. He served in the Royal Indian Air Force during World War II, and picked up the English language (along with a pronounced American accent) from the American troops stationed alongside on the Burma front in the mid-1940s. After demobilization, Das worked at various positions with the Government of India in Uttar Pradesh, Himanchal Pradesh and finally settled in Delhi as an advocate in the High Court, and eventually in the Supreme Court of India. Meanwhile, he also continued his education through this period, and acquired his post graduate degree in Political

Science and another one in law from Punjab and Delhi. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that as a Dalit in pre-independence India, Das—like Ambedkar—was not permitted to study Hindi as a subject in school, and had to substitute it with Persian. He identified Urdu as his mother tongue, and eventually learned to read and write in Hindi as well as Punjabi, apart from Persian and English. Bhagwan Das' high level of formal education made him an exceptional figure amongst the Dalit community then, particularly given that he was born in the *Bhangi* community, one of the lowest in the social hierarchy even among the Dalits.

A significant event in Das' life occurred when, in the 1950s, he worked with Ambedkar as a research assistant on a project on the pervasiveness and the impact of corruption in India, while the latter (as a member of the cabinet in the Congress government) was based at his residence in Alipur Road in Delhi. This gave Das a much sought-after opportunity of a close intellectual association with Ambedkar, thus marking him with a remarkable weight of authority for future political, intellectual and cultural interventions in shaping the Ambedkarite movement in north India. He was one among the several thousand initial converts who left Hinduism for Buddhism with Ambedkar in 1956. By then, Das had started working as an advocate in the Delhi High Court and had become very active in publishing articles and pamphlets on issues that were of relevance for the Dalit community. His other mission for life was the propagation of Buddhism, for which he founded the Society for the Promotion of Buddhist knowledge. He was also the office bearer of several Buddhist organisations like the Bouddh Upasak Sangh, Delhi; Indian Buddhist Society located at Ambedkar Bhawan, Delhi and the Buddhist Laypersons Society. The last-mentioned organisation held weekly meetings at the homes of the members, and undertook expeditions to neighbouring areas to propound the ideas of Buddhism and Ambedkar among other Dalits.

Bhagwan Das, under the influence of Ambedkar, became a member of the Schedule Caste Federation (SCF) at the early age of sixteen. After the dissolution of the SCF, Das persisted in his political activism through his association with the Republican Party of India (RPI), another political organisation founded by Ambedkar, although the latter did not live long after its inception to give it political direction. As a consequence, RPI soon broke into several contending factions, each one claiming to continue Ambedkar's legacy ahead. Das, as an Ambedkarite who had been an intellectual associate of the influential leader, even sought election to the Lok Sabha in the 1970s under the aegis of RPI in Delhi but was unsuccessful

due to various internal factions of the party on the lines of *jati* and regionalism. However, Das was much more fortunate as a member of Samata Sainik Dal, a social organisation founded by Ambedkar in 1926. One of the major contributions of this organisation—and Das'—was a successful movement to retrieve and publish many of Ambedkar's previously unpublished speeches and writings that had been under the custody of the Bombay High Court for almost two decades after the leader's death due to the custodial battles amongst his children.

Das was a prolific writer who wrote several books and pamphlets on Ambedkar, Buddhism, subjects affecting Dalits, some short volumes on the *Bhangi* community, reservation, an autobiography and some works of fiction. He has contributed several hundred articles to journals and magazines. Some of his important works include *Thus Spoke Ambedkar* volumes I to IV (edited), *Ambedkar: Ek Parichay Ek Sandesh*, *Main Bhangi Hun*, *Dr. Ambedkar aur Bhangi Jatiyan*, *Valmiki aur Bhangi Jatiyan*, *Valmiki*, *Dhobi*, *Bharat Main Bauddh Dharm ka Punrjagran Tatha Samasyayen*, *Untouchables in the Indian Army*, *Mandal Commision and the Future of Backward Classes*, *Buddhism and Marxism*, *Ambedkar as a Religious Leader*. Many of these works have been published by Dalit presses in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, the significance of which will be addressed a little later in this section.

Bhagwan Das was instrumental in raising the issue of 'untouchability' in various international forums such as the United Nations, and he was one of the very first Dalits to attempt a network of global alliance against 'untouchability'. In 1998, he played a pivotal role in the creation of the International Dalit Convention at Kuala Lumpur, and then again in pitching caste discrimination as an important human right violation at the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001. He was a tireless warrior against caste oppression through his actions, writings and activism till his death in Delhi in 2010.

6.2 Rajni Tilak

This section is composed by piecing together the narrative shared by Tilak herself about her life and her work in an extensive conversation I had with her in 2016. Rajni Tilak was born in old Delhi on 27 May 1958 in a poor Dalit family. Her ancestors had migrated to Delhi from

Uttar Pradesh several years before her birth in search of a better livelihood. Her father was a tailor by profession and had seven children to provide for. Despite all the economic hardship, he tried to ensure the best possible education for all his offspring. However, due to limited resources, their education got continually disrupted—and more particularly hers, as she was the oldest girl among seven children. As a girl child, her higher education had to be shelved so that she could assist in the house by taking care of the younger siblings. She had once hoped to become a nurse but had to abandon that aspiration due to financial constraint.

After her graduation from a higher secondary school, she joined a tailoring and stenography course at ITI. However, while at the ITI, her enterprising nature and quest for dignity as a woman led her to form a union for girls as she realised that women, notably those from the deprived sections of the society, were disfavoured on several grounds. Their tentativeness with their surroundings and social background placed them at a disadvantage while negotiating with others for scholarships, or even basic sanitation needs like separate toilets. In order to add more force to her agenda, she decided to merge her union with the then-dynamic left-wing student organisation, the Progressive Students' Union. However, she was soon disillusioned by the PSU due to its neglect of caste as a crucial site of exclusion and marginality, and the two organisations went their separate ways from thereon.

Her disappointment with the PSU and the Left political forces led her to explore the writings of Ambedkar, Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, Mary Taylor, Mahatama Gandhi, Rahul Sankrityayan and several other writers. This was also the time when she became a part of the Dalit movement but realised that the latter—like the Left—failed to recognise more than one identity for exclusion. The liminal space of women in Indian society was almost entirely overlooked by the embedded patriarchy within the Dalit movement and the community. This encouraged her to set up her own organisation by allying with the Bharathiya Dalit Panthers in Delhi in 1982. She also continued to work and collaborate with other women's organisations such as *Saheli* that worked in areas like sanitation, health, counselling for family planning, providing shelter for the marginal groups, campaigns against dowry, rape etc. *Saheli* proved to be an important experience for her as an activist and social worker, but she also realised that women's movement then—whatever its presence and strength—was almost exclusively shaped by and oriented towards the sensibilities and the requirements of the 'upper' caste, middle class, urban women. These women, according to Tilak, already claimed a fair degree

of social liberation, and were emotionally and experientially distant from the oppressive patriarchal disregard of the women in the villages, slums and other backward regions of the country.

Tilak eventually joined CADAM and worked extensively on the ground for the Dalits on extreme margins of the society. From CADAM to NACDAOR and to the Rashtriya Dalit Mahila Aandolan (RDMA), Tilak never lost her urge to work for the women of poor and non-urban background. Her empathy for this section can be seen in the fictions she has penned as well as in her social work. She continues to work with the RDMA and to write regularly. In addition, she is also the editor of a quarterly newsletter "Aandolit", which presumes its primary readership in the women who work on the ground to change social realities for the better.

6.3 Shantiswaroop Bauddh

I had the opportunity to meet and talk to Late Shantiswaroop Bauddh, the founder of Samyak Prakashan, in the course of my fieldwork in 2016, when I visited the publication house to study the nature of work undertaken by them. On my request, he agreed to talk to me about his life and his work, and the following is a reproduction from the conversation we had. Bauddh was a sketch artist and painter of considerable talent, albeit untrained. In 1965, he entered the business of printing cards, particularly marriage invitation cards as a part of the Ambedkar-Buddhist revolutionary movement. By 1975, he had started designing and printing calendars and frame pictures, and it was only in 1980 that his small undertaking came out with a booklet in Hindi on the social philosophy of Saint Ravidas written by Swaroopchand Bauddh, titled *Sant Ravidas ka Samajik Chintan* (*The Social Philosophy of Saint Ravidas*). However, soon after, Bauddh engaged himself extensively in the religious activities of The Buddhist Society of India (Bhartiya Bauddh Mahasabha), an institution founded by Ambedkar in Delhi. He was also elected the President of the organisation for a considerable period of time, and served as an editor on the editorial board of *Dhamma Darpan*, a magazine founded and managed by the Mahasabha.

This was the period when Bauddh had the opportunity to visit some international Buddhist conferences in many parts of the world. In one of these conferences in Hong Kong in 1997, participants were urged to promote Buddhist literature, particularly in terms easily

accessible to children and lay readers through the devices of pictures, uncomplicated language and simplified thought systems. Encouraged, Bauddh decided to design and print a pictorial biography of Gautam Buddha on returning home, and on receiving encouragement and appreciation for it from various quarters, expanded his work to publish similar biographies of other figures from the Buddhist canon. He published nearly forty such biographies, all of them on the now-forgotten but important thinkers and contemporaries of Buddha. This was the formal founding of Samyak Prakashan in the guise it is recognised today, and the work that he started then has continued unabated since then despite various challenges.

Shantiswaroop Bauddh described Samyak Prakashan as an outcome and the carrier of Ambedkarite-Buddhist revolution[31], and claimed it as the largest publication house for this political impulse the world over. Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism and his deep engagement with the socio-religious philosophy of the Buddha marks an important moment in the print culture of the Dalit community. Ambedkar's unfinished book *The Buddha and his Dhamma* is not only an exegesis on Buddhism as a socio-religious ideology for the political assertion of the Dalit community but is also a first in this new genre of Ambedkarite-Buddhist literature. Samyak Prakashan, as a production, publication and distribution centre of the Ambedkarite-Buddhist literature, is a very essential site for the burgeoning of this category of writing, which includes literature on (and by) Ambedkar, Buddhism and Ambedkar's evaluation of and subsequent conversion to Buddhism. Samyak Prakashan has a few hundred books and tracts published on the subject, and a number of writers to carry the tradition forward. However, Shantiswaroop Bauddh himself is no more, and he passed away in 2020 at the age of seventy-one.

7. **Dalit Print Culture: Driving Impulses and Compulsions**

The role of government jobs in the creation of the Dalit print culture in Delhi has been immense. It provided the enterprising individual with the necessary financial means for not just economic survival for the self and family, but also with a small capital to invest in writing, publishing or in any other aspect of the book trade. Most of the people who have participated

[31] Ambedkarite-Buddhist revolution refers to Ambedkar's socio-political revolution that is grafted with the Buddhist religious tradition.

in the print culture of the community as writers have drawn upon their monetary retirement benefits, PPF and salary to fund the publication of their manuscripts. For them, the financial stability of their government service was enough of 'royalty' as an overwhelming majority was kindled with the passion to extend the service of knowledge to others of the community.

7.1 'Service' and the Dalit Print Culture

The preponderance of the idea of social work or 'service to the community' inherent among the social actors of the domain indicates crucially to the fact that most of them were *not* professionally engaged in the arena of print (Hunt 2014; Narayan 2006). Writing, or even the publication or distribution of books, was seen as a way of enacting one's communal role in society rather than as an attempt to profit. Most writers who invested their life's savings to see their books in print did not manage to recover even a fraction of their expenses, yet it did not deter most from penning down their experiences as members of the lowest *jatis* in the caste hierarchy of the society. Similarly, as shared by S.S Gautam and Shantiswaroop Bauddh of Gautam Book Centre and Samyak Prakashan respectively in their conversations with me during my fieldwork, their labour in the collection and dissemination of books and tracts was sparked by a commitment to ideologies, principles and personalities. Neither Gautam nor Bauddh were trained in the skills of book trade or had any familial background in the profession. It was their personal circumstance of birth and exposure/ association to ideas or notable figures that eventually led them on to their future course. Gautam invested the money gained from retirement, sat with his books in makeshift stalls on roadsides, *melas*, outside conference halls and seminar rooms, and travelled in dust and grime across the length and breadth of the country to sell these books. It is a similar story with several of the uncelebrated and un-feted enthusiasts who turn up with their collection of books, pamphlets, tracts and other printed material on Ambedkar *jayati* and other occasions out of a sense of commitment to the cause of a Dalit literary and cultural revolution, travelling long distances and displaying their stock on a small booth or even on ground in exchange for very little or no monetary benefit.

A slightly different but an equally interesting example is that of A.K. Rawal, the proprietor of Blumoon publications who I had the opportunity to interact with while I was attempting to identify Dalit publishers and book sellers in Delhi. Rawal does not belong to the Dalit community, but was drawn to its literature through his interactions with an aspiring Dalit

writer who came to him for help with the necessary linguistic and editorial changes in his manuscript. Rawal found the manuscript on the history of the Dalit community very moving, and resolved to get it published through his own efforts. By then, he was also associated with the *Voice of the Weak*, a bilingual monthly published from Delhi, where he worked in an honorary capacity as a writer, editor and translator. It was also at the Delhi office of this monthly where he was presented with some of Ambedkar's writings by the chairman of the establishment, and Rawal was captivated by what he read. He decided to devote his intellectual and other resources to popularizing Ambedkar's writings among people which, he realised soon enough, could not be done without a publication unit. This was so because most of Ambedkar's writings were available in lengthy volumes which proved a deterrent for the average reader. Rawal made up his mind to excerpt Ambedkar's writings in thinner volumes by focussing on one idea at a time, and thus managed to publish twenty-two booklets. He also approached many educated people from the Dalit community and encouraged them to write, promising their publication with the Blumoon Books. So far, Rawal has published around one hundred and fifty-five books, most of them on Ambedkar and other issues of concern to the Dalit community. He claims he could do this work because of the money he received from his retirement fund, and because he owned a place of his own to run a publication unit. Despite all his efforts, however, he had to stop publishing in 2014, and now Blumoon Books is barely functional even as a bookstore from its location in Karol Bagh.

Like several others of the field, Rawal too believes that he persisted for so long due to his sense of mission to this work. His source of livelihood was his job at the Delhi University, which also made it possible for him to keep publishing these socially very relevant books despite the fact that they don't sell in numbers large enough to generate profit. He would mail lists of his publications to people all over the country with similar interests in reading, and hoped they would place orders for purchase. He also sent his lists to universities and bookshops, but found a limited base of buyers therein too. These books were occasionally bought in bulk by people who were interested in establishing a private library for themselves or for the use of the local community in the neighbourhood. Thus, according to Rawal, the readership for these books remains niche, limited and expands usually through the word-of-mouth.

Rawal, like Gautam Book Centre and Samyak Prakashan, never advertised aggressively for Blu Moon Publications due to the lack of resources as well as because he did not ever

envisage himself in the role of a businessman. Blu Moon Books was promoted only in the fortnightly journal *Dalit Voice* that was published from Bangalore, and it remained his sole means of reaching out to a larger audience through advertisement. Rawal emphasised in the interview with me that his work with Ambedkar and Dalit literature is an expression of his fascination with the thoughts of Ambedkar, and his personal convictions. His earnestness and missionary ardour also led him for a while to the busy by-lanes of Chandni Chowk where he competed with unwelcoming hawkers to distribute copies of *Dalit Voice* to largely unenthusiastic passers-by.

What sets Rawal apart from many others in this narrative is his non-Dalit background, which places his social identity in a limbo on several occasions. While a number of people from the non-Dalit communities have called him a "traitor" for promoting Ambedkar-ite though and value system, some Dalits have also accused him of diluting the vigour and the critical edge of the Dalit writings he has published. In his defence, however, Rawal claims that his work has exposed him to legal notices and even to threats of physical violence from the disgruntled sections of the society but he has persisted in his efforts[32]. It cannot be denied that Blu Moon Publications was an important avenue for Ambedkar-ite and Dalit literature in the city in the 1990s when there were next-to-no establishments that dared to make the genre its forte.

It is imperative at this point to return to our earlier discussion on the marked absence of professionalism in a vast section of the various mainstays of the Dalit print culture in Delhi. As most of the people saw their role in terms of 'social work', they invested only a part of their time and vigour to writing, publishing or distributing books and periodicals. Some of these people were social or political activists, and their writing was an extension of their activism. Several others were professionals in various capacity but also socially conscious members of the community who saw writing and the creation of a literary tradition as a part of the larger Dalit cultural revolution. Very few of them made the print domain their primary enterprise as

[32] While in conversation with me in the office of Blu Moon publication, Rawal recounted the occasion when he was asked to publish three extremely "revolutionary" speeches of the former President of the country Shri K.R Narayanan as it was suspected that the publication division of the Government of India would decline to do so due its unconventional content. Rawal took up the challenge and published the three speeches, thus making sure that they found their due in print for posterity.

the material and intellectual context and circumstances of the attempt to do so were extremely forbidding. Very few people from the Dalit community dared to plan their career as writers, publishers or booksellers as economic stability was a crucial drive for this largely impoverish caste group. The security of a government job was—and still remains—a cherished goal for a majority of the educated members of the society, and severely inhibited their audacity in imagining a life soaked solely in ideas and ink.

7.2 Imperatives of the 'Market' and the Dalit Print Culture

Another significant challenge in this direction was the absence of a robust and well-defined market for Dalit writings through much of the twentieth century. In his study of the newspaper revolution in India, Robin Jeffrey offers a tentative outline of the way a market is created for newspapers. He argues that a newspaper revolution requires a conjunction of the political, technical and economic circumstances. To begin with, a small group of the literate elite deal in the printed word to communicate, debate and even entertain themselves. When literacy spreads amongst a larger section of the populace, a demand is created for newspapers for the masses due to a rise in their political consciousness. Technological upgradation and refinement follow in order to cater to a growing market of readers, which in turn helps expand the readership (Jeffrey 2000).

Applying this theoretical model to the print culture—which includes but is not restricted to the newspapers—of Dalits in Delhi, we find that literacy as a large scale phenomenon among the members of the community is a relatively recent development. Limited literacy among the Dalit masses restricted their demand for books and periodicals, thus eliminating them as an interest group in the market dynamics of the city's print culture. Additionally, the Dalits have also historically been one of the weakest economic groups in the nation, and this too has traditionally diminished their role in the market of cultural products. Most crucially, a community's political consciousness plays a significant role in determining the health of its print culture, and Delhi has not been particularly favoured in this regard. In fact, a recurrent complaint from several quarters throughout my fieldwork was over the absence of a strong reader base in the city across caste and class lines, although—paradoxically—Delhi is the foremost centre of book trade in the country. The compromised health of the political character of the Dalits in Delhi is reflected in the barometer of its cultural market, and the readings are

conflicted at best. While the general consensus is that the readers (particularly Dalit readers) have increasingly become interested in Ambedkar's writings and other books related to caste in India, yet the numbers are still not enough to sustain a rich and robust trade in print based on the economics of profit.

The outlook is even bleaker for Dalit periodical literature such as newspapers, magazines and journals in the city. Although there has been a proliferation of Dalit magazines in the recent past, an overwhelming majority of them are running on uncertain financially grounds. Most of these magazines run on donations from institutions or governments, or even private individuals. For instance (as shared by both Naimisharay and S.S Gautam) *Bayan*, one of the longest lasting and extremely influential Dalit literary magazines, used to be financed by donations from the Delhi and the Madhya Pradesh governments, and eventually ran out of steam when the government of Delhi stopped financing literary magazines in 2014. Most magazines, including *Kadam*, *Samyak Bharat*, *Samajik Utthan*, *Bahuri na Aawana*, *Maitri Times*, *Koli Times* and many others, are financed primarily by donations from governments and people, and do not have a sustainable independent financial model. Consequently, the issues are frequently late or even sporadic and are seen in the market only as long as finances can be gathered through collections and institutional or private patronage.

Lack of resources is an important hurdle for independent Dalit journalistic ventures even in a city like Delhi that has a sizable number of financially well-off members of Dalit communities. Most proprietors and editors cite the absence of a regular and steady supply of money as the primary cause of the failure of Dalit magazines or newspapers from making a mark of their own in the field of media. For instance, *Shilpkar Times* is the only daily Dalit newspaper published from Delhi today. This newspaper used to be a fortnightly, then a weekly before it turned into a daily on 20 March 2016 (Naimisharay 2016). The publication of the newspaper is managed from a small office space on the fourth floor of a commercial building in Dwarka in south-west Delhi, and the entire staff comprises of merely three to four people. The owner of the newspaper, Vallabh Tamta (who belongs to the Dalit *jati* of Shilpkars or craftsmen in Uttaranchal) admitted in a conversation with me that the newspaper sources its news from the Press Trust of India and other news agencies as it is not in a position to hire reporters or stringers of its own. Thus, the only daily Dalit newspaper of the city is financially distressed enough to not be able to afford a reporter on the site of action, or to discover/ track

stories of concern to the Dalits of Delhi. In addition, proof reading is a hurried process as a couple of staff members have to look after the entire process of putting the newspaper together before it is printed and carted off for distribution in Delhi and other out-stationed centres in Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and some other states.

It is essential to recognise that revenue gained from advertisements form the backbone of a financially viable periodical venture in contemporary times. All successful magazines and newspapers are heavily dependent on advertisements to subsidise the cost of production in order to make the final product cheaply available in the mass market. In order to print a thousand copies of a magazine of around fifty pages—with three to four pages in colour—one has to invest an amount of forty thousand rupees as production cost, which is exclusive of the money paid to the editorial or support staff (ibid). It is difficult to collect this amount every week/ fortnight/ month merely on donations, and advertisements are the only available means of rescue for a venture. Mohandas Naimisharay, one of the earliest and extremely prolific journalist from the Dalit community, narrated his experience of managing *Bayan* for several years through his sustained efforts of soliciting advertisements. He travelled extensively to many parts of the country including Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh, Goa and received advertisements from NTPC, ONGC, Delhi government, government of Madhya Pradesh, among others. Naimisharay was successful in generating generous amounts of advertisement income in the early years of the magazine which enabled him to hire paid help for running the enterprise successfully. He also used to offer payment to the writers for the articles accepted for publication. *Bayan* had up to sixteen pages in colour print, which was very unusual for a Dalit magazine then, and even now. But gradually the advertisements dried up, a process also hastened by the digitisation of the procedure of applying for financial aid to institutions and organisations. The final death knell for *Bayan* was delivered by the Delhi government in 2014 when it stopped all financial assistance for literary magazines, thus forcing this long-running Dalit magazine to bite the dust eventually due to governmental disinterest.

However, there is another perspective on the paucity of resources at the disposal of the Dalit periodicals in the city. Mohandas Naimisharay stated in one of his interviews published in a Hindi magazine in 2016 that there are around one lakh Dalit families in Delhi that earn between Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 60,000 a month, in addition to several others that belong to the high income group due to businesses, top governmental jobs or because of their association with

politics and the political culture. He reiterated this same point a few years later in an event organised by *Dalit Dastak* in Delhi to commemorate a hundred years of *Mooknayak*, the magazine started by Ambedkar in 1920 (Dalit Dastak 2020). Every major city in the country houses several prosperous Dalit families who can easily act as patrons of a Dalit daily and make it a financially viable instrument of advocacy for the community. Naimisharay identifies the problem partly within the community where a lack of cultural capital inhibits most people from the community from spending on newspapers and magazines. He recounts his own brief association with *Shilpkar Times* as its executive editor. Despite all possible efforts, claims Naimisharay, not even half a percent of the educated and financially stable members of the Dalit community from the city subscribed to the daily.

Both Naimisharay and Roopchand Gautam (a scholar of the Dalit media of Delhi) also point out to a widespread lack of proper training in journalistic skills amongst the people engaged in the business of magazines and newspapers. Most editors do not even manage to design a presentable file of the magazine/ newsletter to win advertisements or revenue from governmental sources. Many others lack a good working knowledge of modern technology or the necessary information on the available infrastructural support (such as the Press Information Bureau of the Government of India and the Information and Broadcasting Directorate of the Delhi government) that forms the bedrock of a successful media enterprise.

Lack of professional commitment to journalism is also detrimental for the quality of content in the Dalit magazines and newspapers. In our conversations held in September 2016, Naimisharay lamented the absence of investigative journalists and reporters in the field of the Dalit periodical literature, while citing a few examples of his own extensive research for writing original and investigative articles for the 'mainstream' magazines and newspapers that solicited his penmanship. He mentioned the case of Palvankar Balu, a Dalit from Bombay and one of the most talented early cricketing genius in India. Naimisharay spent around twenty days in Mumbai researching the life and history of this forgotten cricketing hero who was the bane of the English cricket team due to his formidable sports skills. Naimisharay's original research article on one of the earliest yet forgotten sports icon from the Dalit community was published in *Jansatta* on 13 November 2013. This kind of investigative enquiry, he rued, is missing from the journalistic horizon of almost every Dalit journalist, with the possible exception of Chandrabhan Prasad and a very few others. Naimisharay held firmly that the absence of

intensive research in the articles in the Dalit magazines and newspapers prohibited them from achieving a superior standard of worth and appreciation.

Perhaps the only Dalit magazine in Delhi that is owned and managed by a full time, trained journalist is *Dalit Dastak*. This monthly magazine was instituted by Ashok Das in May 2012, and the first issue came out on 27 May the same year. In its fifth year in 2016, *Dalit Dastak* claimed to be read in 25 states of India with a significant readership to its name. These numbers are unprecedented for any Dalit magazine or newspaper anywhere ever in the country. The magazine's distribution network does not only involve subscription by a loyal or niche customer base but is also marketed like many 'mainstream' magazines in newsstands and magazine shops. In fact, *Dalit Dastak* is the first Hindi Dalit magazine to be sold at the stalls of A.H Wheeler at many railway stations India.

In a meeting with him in his editorial office at Pandav Nagar in September 2016, Das asserted that unlike others in the field, he was the only professionally trained journalist running a magazine venture. Das has stated on various platforms that he was never interested in the pursuit of a financially stable, 9 to 5 office job in any governmental organisation (Das 2017). This statement of intention was a marked departure from the aspirational spectrum of most Dalit youths who, in the words of Naimisharay, have a tendency of risk-aversion and hope principally for the security of a government job and are reluctant to invest themselves in journalism. Das was always prepared for the vicissitudes of fortune in a profession that offered the scope for him to exercise his talents in the fullest possible manner, although for long he wasn't sure what that was. However, as he was fond of reading and writing, he decided to take admission to the mass communication programme at IIMC, Delhi. Instances of 'micro discrimination' at IIMC and at the media houses like Lokmat and Amar Ujala propelled him to eventually establish *Dalit Dastak* with the stated aim of gathering and relaying the activities of the *bahujan*[33] community all over the nation. Significantly, operating *Dalit Dastak* is a full-time commitment for Das as it is a mission as well as profession for him. He belongs to the new breed of professionals who are well versed in their trade as well as in its tools.

[33] *Bahujan* literally means the largest population group, but in the case of identity politics in India *Bahujan* is a category used to define the political solidarity of the Dalits, the Other Backward Classes, the Scheduled Tribes and every social identity that is not 'upper' caste.

Dalit Dastak had started with an initial investment of merely Rupees 50,000 in 2012 and with 2,000 initial copies of the magazine. Das was then dependent on a job for his livelihood, yet he decided to take the plunge in this direction. He based the founding vision and the outlook of the magazine on the value systems of Jyotirao Phule, Savitribai Phule, Dr. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram for an inclusive readership and discursive alliance. Although Das is the sole editor of the magazine, he attempted to bestow a larger and inclusive core to it through the involvement of Prof. Vivek Kumar (Jawaharlal Nehru university), Anand Srikrishna (litterateur and Buddhist thinker), Shantiswaroop Bauddh (Buddhist thinker), Dilip Mandal (senior journalist), Pooja Rai (consultant on women's issues) and J.C Adarsh (retired PCS officer) in the editorial board. The road ahead, however, remained tough. In the first few months of starting the venture, he personally spent hours in queues in post offices in attempts to mail copies of the magazine to the readers. He too faced trouble over generating revenue through advertisements as, according to him, "many companies, even those owned by Dalits, are not comfortable with advertising in a Dalit magazine" (Sharma 2013), yet today the magazine is growing in its reach by every passing year even though its primary financial model remains that of institutional and private donations. Given its success in establishing itself as a recognisable face of the affirmation of Dalit identity in print in the Hindi belt with reasonable rapidity, Das now plans to issue *Dali Dastak* in at least half a dozen Indian languages other than Hindi. Moreover, the print version of the magazine also has a web portal that is well maintained and is frequently updated. The online platform also acts as a promotional device for the printed form of the magazine and frequently excerpts some pages for easy sampling by the visitors to the page. It was Das' dream to establish a daily newspaper for the Dalits by 2020 that would act as the kernel of an independent Dalit media and an advocacy press for the community.

A comparison of *Dalit Dastak* with the earlier periodical literature of the community exhibits some very identifiable changes in the self-imaginary of its print culture. In the initial phase, the purpose of founding magazines and newsletters and writing books was to grant oneself a platform for self-expression in print, and to provide a common forum to like-minded people to do the same. It was an important way of realising one's selfhood and humanity by breaking the silence of language and the invisibility of one's embodied experiences due to centuries of social debasement. The community found empowerment in its new-found freedom to write, to debate and to challenge. Books and other symbols of erudition and knowledge were

not items of passive consumption for the Dalits, but the Promethean flame to forge new identities with and to fight the stigma of caste. It was the cultural capital of books that had been missing from their lifeworld, and they threw themselves in the task of its acquisition. Their efforts in the direction span from documenting atrocities against the members of their community to investing a harmony of poetic rhythm to their lives as representatives of a resounding human liminality. For the activists, the medium of print is recognised as a very important ally in social transformation. It is a channel of dissemination of information on future programmes. It is a device that records current successes and failures of movements and action programs for perusal and assessment by the future generations. It will speak to them of the struggles and aspirations of their forebears, of those who fought to make their present a dignified reality.

8. A Literature of Their Own: Establishing Literary Roots

Recovery of or the desire to give shape to a Dalit literary/ writerly tradition is yet another clearly identifiable trope of the Dalit book history enterprise. This is visible in the lives of all the social actors mentioned in an earlier section of the chapter, as well as among those who could not be discussed in detail. S.S Gautam of the Gautam Book Centre mentioned that he collected nearly three thousand catalogues from all the publishers at various book fairs to make a list of books available on Ambedkar and other Dalit icons such as Ravidas, Kabir and Phule. After this he moved on to buying all the books that he could discover, and started building a personal library for himself. He travelled extensively even outside Delhi to places as far as Nagpur, Bombay, Udaipur and Patna to buy books that were rare and unavailable in Delhi. He made similar attempts to locate rare or lost books written by Dalits in Delhi too. Gautam managed to locate one such book published from Delhi in 1945 by a man named Bhupati Upnaam Chhedilal Pandaya who was a resident of Dev Nagar, Karol Bagh. The book is titled *Hind Ke Aadi Niwasi* (The Original Inhabitants of the Hind). Gautam even paid a visit to the address mentioned on the last copy of the book that he had discovered, but the house was unoccupied. He reprinted the book with his publication house, but has retained the original details and even the original font type in these reprints.

Apart from trying to recover the ‘lost’ books by the early Dalit writers, there is also a fair amount of focus on attempts to create a literary tradition for the Dalit community. For instance, both Gautam and Bauddh have focussed on translating writers from Marathi and other

Indian languages into Hindi in order to create a lineage of Dalit writings in Hindi as well. Shantiswaroop Bauddh claimed to have undertaken and successfully completed maximum translations of the existent literature in Ambedkar-Buddhist tradition, especially from Marathi. Maharashtra had several very important biographers of Ambedkar who had a close and intimate knowledge of his life and its struggles, and had documented them in the Marathi language. Thus, Marathi had a rich tradition of Ambedkarite literature that Hindi lacked due to its relative lag in the trajectory of the Ambedkarite revolution. Samyak Prakashan took it upon itself to retrieve and translate from Marathi into Hindi many of these writings on the life and activities of Ambedkar. It also commissioned translations of important works from English to Hindi, including several books by Ambedkar himself.

Similarly, Rajni Tilak and CADAM have made extensive attempts to introduce important Dalit women writers to the Hindi readers in north India. Tilak mentioned in her conversation with me that her efforts in this direction were triggered by her visit to Bombay University where she was informed by a teacher that the latter could not find any book at all in Hindi by a Dalit woman. That statement triggered the desire in her to translate Marathi Dalit women writers in Hindi and make them available for the Hindi readers. Tilak and CADAM have translated and published several of the women Dalit writers from Maharashtra. CADAM claims to be the first organisation that made the writings of Savitribai Phule available to and known in the Hindi belt. They also translated the writings of Tarabai Shinde and Shantabai Dane, the latter a former political worker in the RPI in Maharashtra. Tilak also recovered for her Hindi readers the writings of Mukta, the first student of Savitribai Phule. In addition, Tilak has written a book titled *Buddha Ne Ghar Kyun Chhoda?* (Why Did the Buddha Leave his Home?) from the perspective of Buddha's wife Yashodhara too, which is fairly rare as this question has so far been examined only from the vantage point of Buddha, and his wife cast as a passive recipient of his decision.

The attempt to forge an autonomous tradition of writing is also visible in the attempts by the writers to clearly distinguish themselves from the Hindu cultural repertoire. In our conversation, Bauddh indicated to the significance of language and the progressive drive behind the selection of words in the books published by Samyak Prakashan. As an extremely self-conscious agent of the Ambedkarite-Buddhist revolutionary impulse, the publication house is very alert to the potency of languages and words in moulding a radical consciousness

as well as to their ease in co-option in revisionist sentiments. Thus, the writers and the editors of the organisation try and eschew words and forms of expression that carry any hint of deviation from their commitment to the twin philosophies of Ambedkar and Buddha. For instance, Bauddh mentioned that in order to express the idea of initiation into a new thought or work, Samyak Prakashan never uses the more established but also the more Sanskritic phrase like "*Shree Ganesh*". Instead, they prefer to use the secular sounding Hindi word '*prarambh'* or its Urdu substitute '*aaghaaz'*. The contest here is not merely between the Brahmanic/ elitist Sanskrit and the Buddhist/ popular Prakrit as languages of their respective bodies of literature but also with the entire pantheon of Hindu gods in their complete range of doctrine and belief systems. Thus, the rejection of a phrase or a word is a metonym for the rejection of the total edifice of a socio-political and cultural system structured on the imperatives of Hinduism and its philosophy. Similarly, the publication house uses words like '*parinirvit'* (final beatitude) or '*tatvaleen*' (to become one with the elements) for those who have expired and not '*swargvasi'*. While the former words are clearly derived from the Buddhist metaphysics, the latter is distinctly expressive of the Hindu episteme on life and death.

9. From Words to Visuality

Samyak Prakashan is also the leading publication by far in the pictorial literature of the Ambedkar-Buddhist movement. The publication house had a native advantage in this as Bauddh himself was a talented illustrator, and had designed the visual content of many of the books and their cover pages. Samyak Prakashan has over a couple of hundred books that are illustrated, and a majority of them have been developed by Bauddh himself. Most of these books are on the historical figures from the Buddhist tradition or characters and narratives from the Buddhist literature. A few others are based on important protagonists of the various anti-caste upsurges in many parts of the country, such as Jyoyirao Phule, Savitri Bai Phule, Periyar, B.R Ambedkar and the latter's first wife Ramabai Ambedkar. These pictorial books are fairly popular with the readers as they do not demand high erudition and are pitched at readers with an intermediate level of literacy skills. From the cover pages to the accompanying images, visuals exercise an influence quite unlike the written word. Like a flare of light, they contain a concentrated power that not just lures but also illumines its context; and the eloquence of their rhetoric on socio-cultural and discursive practices can be overwhelming. For instance, an image

of violence is much more visceral than its narration in words because of the immediacy of its accessibility to our sensibilities due to the absence of a mediatory medium such as languages.

Images also have the effect of opening up imaginative possibilities for a discursive practice by releasing it from the relative fixity of representation through print to the fluidity of delineation through images. That images allow for greater freedom of interpretative interpolations is evident from an illustration (figure 3.1) in Bauddh's illustrated biography of Periyar where a young Periyar is shown as physically restraining a teacher from assaulting the former while some other students look on in amusement (Bauddh 2006). If a reader were to first look at the illustration without reading the accompanying text on the left side of the page (as most readers do as an impulse), she would in all probability identify the scene as depicting a conflict between a Brahman and a set of 'lower' caste youths of varying age groups. The foreground is taken up by the two combative figures of the Brahman and a 'lower' caste young man, where the former is represented with one of his hands raised in a gesture of assault and face contorted in anger. The other figure rests his palm on the Brahman's chest in an attempt to hold him back, and the contours of his body as well as the expression on his face demonstrate his self-assured poise and balanced restrain simultaneously. This is in many ways a typical illustration of caste antagonism between a haughty and entitled Brahman and a socially marginal but fair-minded and dignified 'lower' caste man. The kids hovering in the background of the image with mischievous grins hint that they could be the immediate cause of provocation, and the 'older' youth may have had to intervene to defend them from a sound beating. The text, however, frames the illustration with a slightly different set of meanings. The Brahman is also a schoolteacher who is agitated because of the trick played on him by Periyar. The younger looking kids are Periyar's classmates who aren't blessed with his physical build and vigour. They are spectators and not the cause of the conflict. Moreover, the text doesn't mention a physical confrontation between Periyar and his teacher. It merely states that Periyar's strong physique deterred other students from intervening on the behalf of the teacher, and when the latter himself tried to catch hold of Periyar, the errant boy evaded capture and ran away. Thus, the representation in images by itself works on a broader narrative of caste antagonism,

construction of heroes and villains, and offers a larger field for interpolation than the text. While one could aver that the image is not exactly representative of the accompanying text, it may be argued that it works better as a device of political and cultural polemics precisely because of its deployment of broader strokes of associations and social practices. The image is evocative of the long-standing social hostility between empowered and disempowered classes of people, and is therefore discursively very identifiable and, for this precise reason, powerful. Working through a set of socially identifiable tropes through the medium of visuals is an important strategy to insert the politically uninitiated mass in the arena of political struggle for self-respect and social dignity. In addition, given that a sizable section of the Dalit population in Delhi—particularly female—is still illiterate, the visual is an important strategy through which the domain of the print—with all its radical impulses—can be made relevant to the lives of these most liminal among those already on the social periphery.

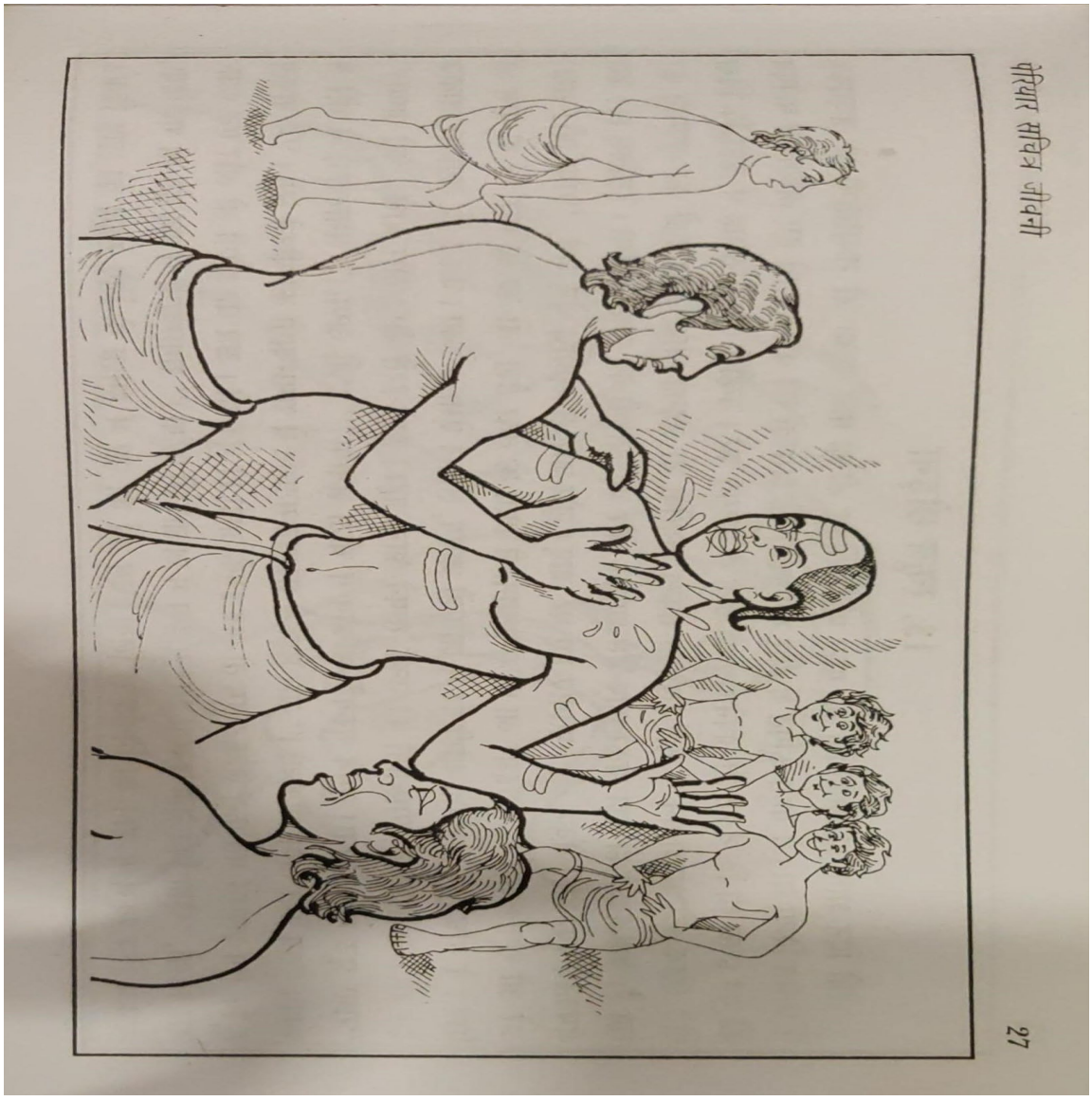

Figure 3.1

In this context, it is important to recognise the value of posters and calendars that proliferate in many Dalit homes and establishment. There are very few print centres in Delhi that are in the business of printing posters and calendars on Dalit icons but Samyak Prakashan is one of them. Gautam Book Centre has also printed 'Bhim' calendars and diaries in the last few years. Most of the posters and the calendars are on Dalit icons like Buddha, Ashoka, Ravidas, Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram, Jyotirao and Savitribai Phule or on historical heroes such as Matadin and Jhalkari Bai who were crucial to the revolt of 1857 against the English. It would be inaccurate and reductive to describe these posters and calendars as merely decorative and free of discursive content. These works of art are heavy with symbolism and political impulsion, and are important everyday ideological reminders of the Dalit struggle for equality and socio-cultural visibility. In the words of Sukhdeo Thorat, these images represent:

> "a switch over from Hindu religious and cultural symbols to those associated with Ambedkar and Buddhism and similar traditions. The other is an ideological change…signifying the changes in principles that govern the ways in which Dalits now define their identities and the ways in which they relate to others. The first is a rejection of symbols that represent social hierarchy and a shift to the alternative symbols…that represent social equality and the struggle for equal rights and dignity" (Thorat 2012, xxiii).

Even a cursory look at most of these posters would bring out several of the defining features of the principles around which the vision of a new social order is centred. Almost all the posters have Ambedkar dressed in western clothes—suit, tie and formal shoes—with usually a pen and a book in his hands. The book in his hands is frequently the Constitution of the country, a document that is designated as the centre-piece of modern India that aims to lead the nation out of its Brahmanical parochialism and feudalistic oppression of the weak. The book and the pen are also important symbols of Ambedkar's lifelong exhortation to the Dalits to educate themselves in the western knowledge systems as means of intellectual freedom from the medieval obscurantism of the traditional Hindu episteme. In the two posters included here (figure 3.2 and 3.3), Ambedkar is framed within the symbols of learning and knowledge, a scroll and a book in the first one and a library of books in the other. The second poster (figure 3.3) has several strategic cues that locate Ambedkar very explicitly as an inheritor of a western system of erudition and lifestyle. Although he seems to be wearing a *sherwani* and a pair of

pyjamas, the room is very evocative of a prosperous Victorian household with a study full of books. The fireplace and the bust of a European male are again very English resonances, as is the wooden décor. The only non-western tropes in the scene are the various figurines and paintings of Buddha that can be seen prominently in both the posters.

The Dalit media field in India is decidedly a modern form of the social imaginary, and the multiple layers of its crafting in terms of its physical production, form and content are a chronicle of the Dalits' encounter with modernity—or at least with its Indian form. However, it is important to recognize that pre-modern/ non-modern imaginative and intellectual resources powerfully mediate its fashioning. One of the instances of this is the leitmotif of Buddhism that can be seen consistently through much of Ambedkarite-Buddhist movement. Although Ambedkar and others who followed him in this tradition tried to uphold Buddhism as a 'modern' (in terms of its value system) religion, yet modernity and religion are uncomfortable bed fellows ideologically even though not so much in practice. The third poster (figure 3.4) shows Ambedkar as a Buddhist monk, and other than a pair of spectacles, the former has shed all symbols of modernity. He is cast as an ascetic in traditional wooden slippers, cane and a thin monochrome robe. Significantly, Ambedkar is represented with a shaven head which is a very powerful reminder of ancient Indian (which includes Buddhism) religious systems where the discarding of the hair is a gesture of renouncing the world. Thus, the model of western modernity offered as the alternative to the medieval Indian orthodoxy in the figure of Ambedkar is mediated time and again by pre-modern/ non-modern imaginative and discursive apparatuses that indicate the difficulty of directly transposing a non-endemic phenomenon to a dissimilar context.

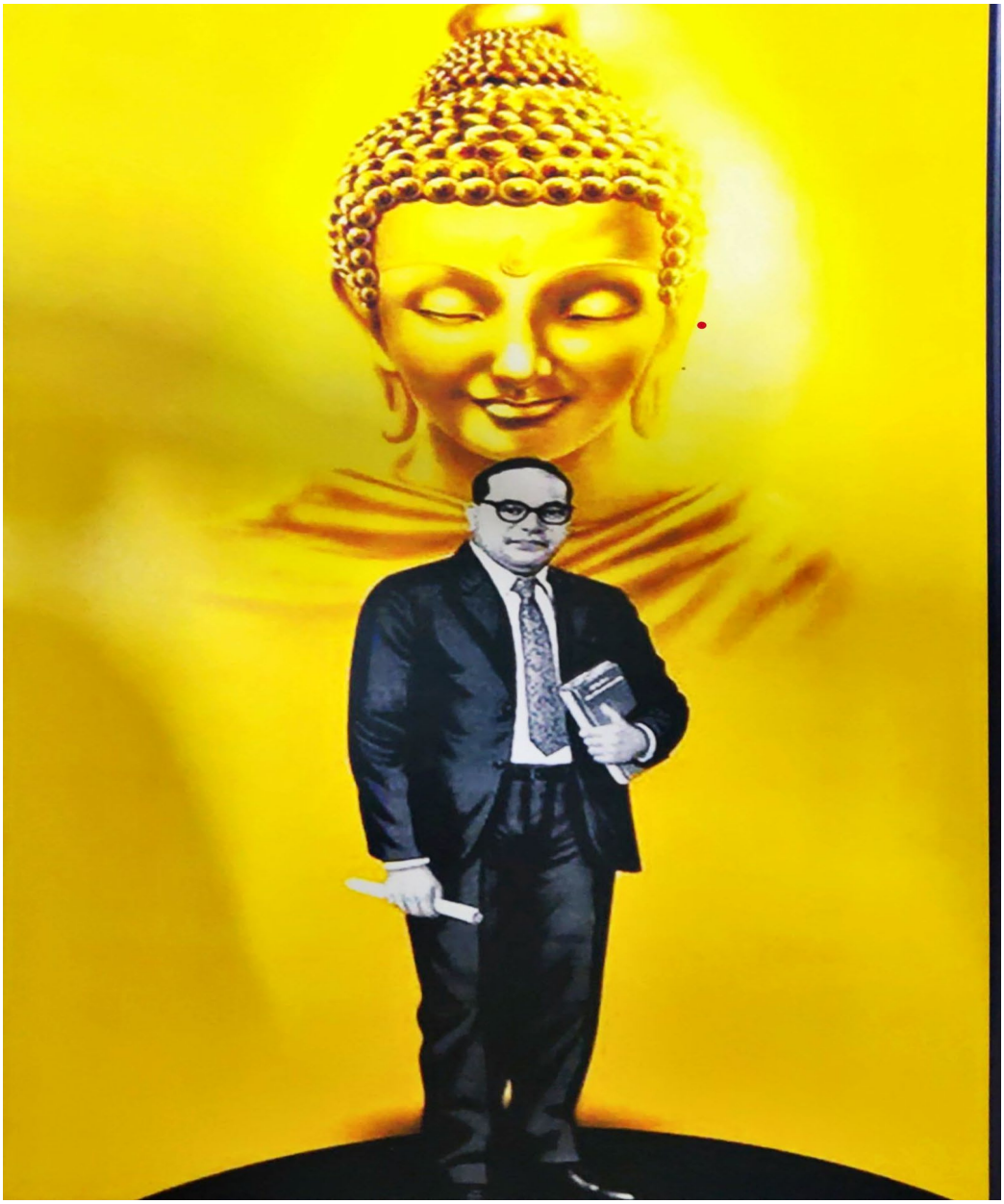

Figure 3.2

Figure 3.3

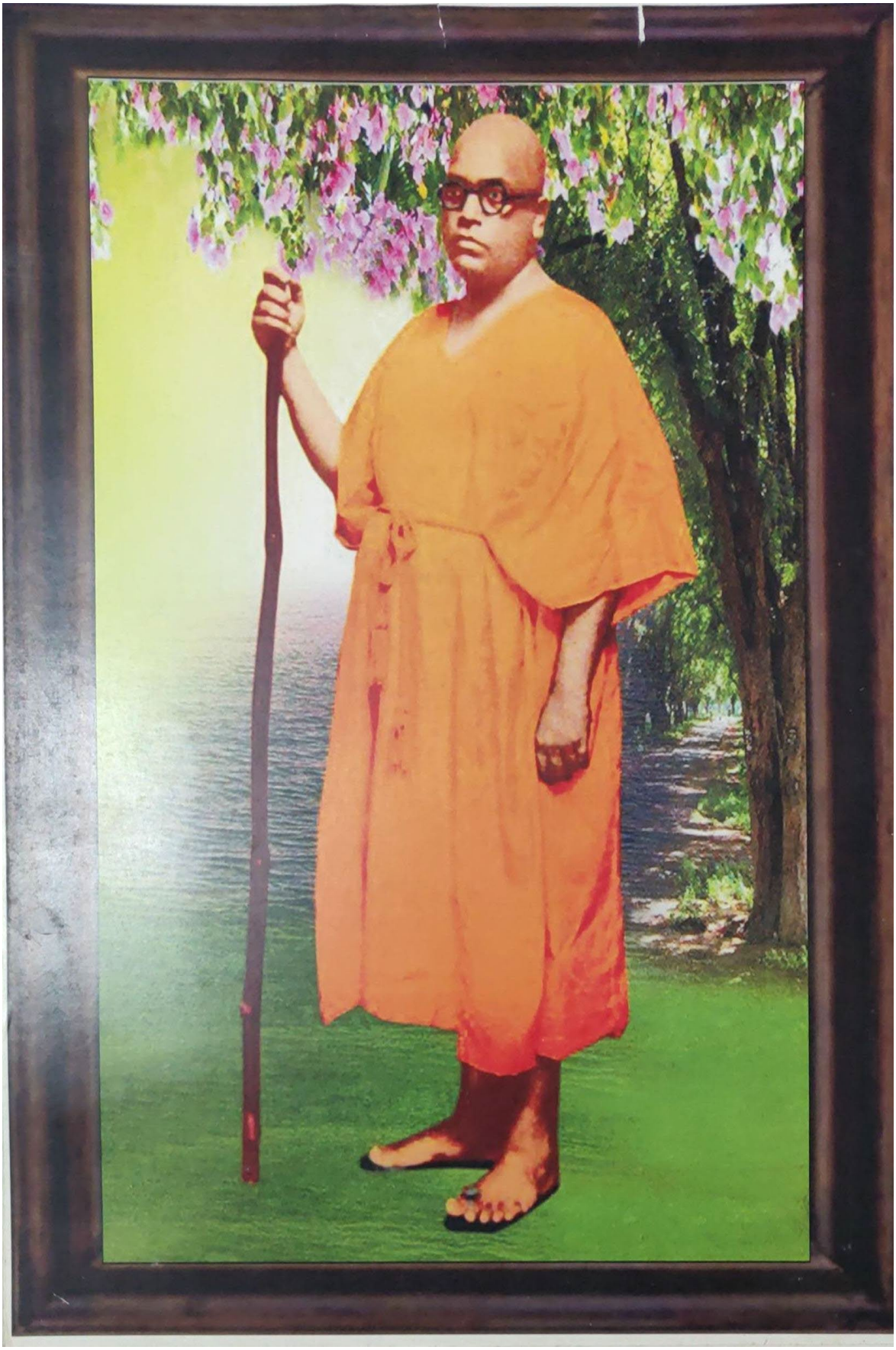

Figure 3.4

I have found it helpful to adopt the metaphor of the 'vernacular' as used by several members of the subaltern school such as Partha Chatterjee, Raziuddin Aquil, Sudipta Kaviraj and Gyanendra Pandey to delineate the quintessence of modernity in India in order to locate the position of the Dalit subject in it. It was primarily with the indigenization and localization of the terms of the debate on Indian modernity that it ceased to be an undifferentiated monolith of universal progress and was recast as a kaleidoscopic arena for competing identities jostling for power and redefining categories of experience (Guha 1997; Chakrabarty 2003; Vanaik 1997; Kaviraj 2010). Yet, 'vernacular' is an ambivalent site for the Dalits as each detail of its fabric is laced with memories of systematic caste oppression and exclusion. Dalit media too is marked by this disharmony between the manifest ideological conviction of a work stemming from normative modernity and its expressive resources with their roots in the structures of shared vernacular cultural memories. A very eloquent instance of this is the manner in which these posters are used and displayed in many Dalit households. Owen Lynch—in his study of the Jatavs of Agra and the colourful floats they make on Ambedkar Jayanti festival—offers an "analysis of the images…that uses a theory of the "*darshan* effect" where a particularly "Indic" use of visualization is employed to establish a very potent and emotive relationship between the viewer and the viewed (Lynch 2012, 180). *Darshan* in Hinduism is the visual perception of the sacred as the image or the idol of the deity is believed to embody the divine. The act of *darshan* therefore comprises of seeing the divine and be seen by the deity in turn in order to gain blessings. The idea of *darshan* extends to saints and holy personages as well. In modern times, Gandhi had become an especially important representative of this occurrence due to his stature as *mahatama*. Many Dalit households place images of Ambedkar with the idols and images of Hindu gods—if they are practising Hindus—or only of Ambedkar and Buddha if they are Buddhists. The fabrication of the figure of Ambedkar on these lines is indicative of a very strong emotive relationship between the viewer and the viewed, with its roots in the larger cultural practices of the Hindu community Tartakov 2012). More importantly, this particular nature of the relationship between a devotee and the object of devotion is especially crucial for the enfranchisement of those Dalit subjects in the cause who are not yet fully integrated into western 'modernity', and are thus not entirely capable of abstract and disembodied valourisation of ideas and personages. It is for this reason that Chandrabhan Prasad, an established Dalit journalist, had to erect a statue of a goddess for the English language in Banka village in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh in early 2011 to encourage the Dalit children of the village to learn the language (Prasad 2006). 'Embodiment' of ideas or systems

of thoughts is a vital strategy to develop consciousness, and many of these attempts find their resources in the traditional practices of communities and their life worlds. The Dalit media in its myriad forms is a very potent chronicler of the protean, dynamic, and frequently chequered relationship of the Dalits with modernity and tradition—in all its plurality—in India and the world.

Another important genre of the visual material found in many Dalit households is calendars that are designed and printed by autonomous Dalit publication centres or print establishments. There is a distinctive aesthetics and discursive dimension to these calendars that sets them apart from those found in the 'mainstream' society. Not only do these calendars contain the pictures of the Dalit icons and sites of significance to the community, they also have very interesting textual content. The "Jai Bhim" calendars printed by Samyak Prakashan (figure 3.5) mentions the year in bold on the first page, but the year is not merely the one based on the Christian timeline. The calendar states "Bharatiya Calendar Buddhabd 2561 Ambedkar Sun 125 (Sun: 2016-2017/ Vikram Samvat: 2073-2074 Shak: 1938-1939/ Hizri: 1437-1438)" (Indian Calendar Buddhist Century 2561 Ambedkar Year 125 (Year: 2016-2017/ Vikram Year: 2073-2074 Shak: 1938-1939/ Hizri: 1437-1438). Apart from mentioning the usual Christian, Hindu and Muslim years, this calendar also seeks to equally validate the Buddhist timespan in peoples' imaginary. Even more interestingly, the year of Ambedkar's birth is marked as another crucial juncture in time from which the chronology of years ought to be measured. By including Ambedkar in this series, the calendar makes a very deliberate manoeuvre to locate the Dalit icon in the ranks of history's most illustrious and compelling leaders who influenced the world indelibly. In addition, the days of the year are stamped by the significant developments in the Dalit socio-cultural domain, such as the date of birth and death of the *bahujan* icons, important events in *bahujan* history and incidences from the Buddhist annals. Thus these calendars act as abbreviated review lists of the *bahujan* history that is available for quick and daily consultation and reverence, and to infuse visibility to those figures and incidences that have been deliberately erased or distorted in the larger cultural repertoire of the Indian society. Importantly, these calendars do not demand high erudition for interpretation, and carry much of their discursive force through their visual content. They, along with the posters, are cheaply available and serve decorative purposes in the houses, thus making them better investments for those with either limited means or limited literacy.

Figure 3.5 Bhartiya Calender, Samyak Prakashan 2016

In fact, the visually rich print material of the Dalit print media exhibits a greater spectrum of sale price than monographs or booklets. On an average, the highest price for a hard bound book at autonomous Dalit publication centres do not exceed six hundred rupees, and these books are considered expensive even then. Samyak Prakashan however, has recently

come out with a coffee table edition of their Hindi book, *Bhagwan Buddha Aur Unka Dhamma* (The Buddha and His Dhamma) at the price of thirty-eight hundred rupees. This book extensively includes coloured handmade paintings—which is very different from the calendar art techniques—from the *Dhammapad*, and the entire book is printed on large sized, glossy art paper. The small blocks of text are derived from the *Dhammapad* and Ambedkar's last work *The Buddha and his Dhamma*. This coffee table book is of "international quality" (S S Bauddh 2016), and targeted at the highest economic strata of the Ambedkarite- Buddhist Dalits who reside in India and even abroad. A coffee table book with its high visual content can justify this investment of labour and capital—despite less depth in content and orientation—as its readership would purchase it for exhibition in drawing rooms or other entertainment spaces. These coffee-table books thus serve as the high-end equivalents of posters and calendars found in more modest Dalit households. It is vital here to notice that a tiny slice of the autonomous Dalit print establishment in Delhi has taken a tentative step in the direction of printing 'luxury' or 'deluxe' edition of books, gesturing to the presence of a section of Dalits in the country who can stake a claim to exclusivity and modishness in their taste in print. It should also be borne in mind that such an enterprise can only be possible for the Dalit community in urban print cultures such as Delhi that are also islands of prosperity for a segment of the targeted community. And most significantly, this development also points to the growing engagement of a few autonomous Dalit publishers with the larger market-oriented practices of book trade, and their increasing confidence in their abilities to do so successfully.

10. Linguistic Mediums and Dalit Print Culture

Another noticeable feature of the Dalit print culture of the city is its overwhelming location in the linguistic medium of Hindi. Location is an important indicator of one's positioning vis-à-vis language, and 'location' in this case applies not just to geography but also to writerly and reader-ly traditions, economic stratification and affiliation to institutions. Both Hindi and English (in the case of Delhi) are supported by social and political apparatuses, and an individual artist's achievements are also shaped by the support system available to the particular linguistic medium. The matrix of writers, publishers, critics, academics, booksellers and readers available around a cultural product helps shape its worth and merit, and thus it is important to realise that the latter is not necessarily only an 'innate' quality of the work.

English is closely associated with the middle class in India, and the language has become an important way of evaluating one's social and cultural position and influence in society (Rukmini S 2019). A very small percentage of the Indian population speaks English, and the statistic shrinks even further when it is extended to the Dalit community in the country. Delhi, as the national capital, is a city planned around the imperatives of middle and upper middle-class lifestyles and this is manifest in the planned parts of its cityscape, socio-cultural institutions and civic infrastructure. Thus, there is a strong convergence of the social spaces of the upper middle class with the values associated with the English language. English, as a language of the privileged, exists in sharp contrast to Hindi that only finds a less distinguished place among the various social actors in the domain of culture.

For instance, Connaught Place in Delhi is one of the centrally located, upmarket shopping and entertainment hubs in the city. It carries significant markers of a middle/ upper middle class socio-economic space. Connaught Place has a few bookshops that sell English books, including the Oxford Book Store on Barakhamba Road. There is just one bookshop on Hindi books in Connaught Place's dominant grid of Anglicised socio-cultural exchange. This is the left oriented People's Publishing House that has recently been stocking books in Hindi, in addition to its regular from the Marxist tradition of writing. PPH is the only bookstore in Connaught Place and the neighbouring areas that sells Hindi books. As an experiment, Rishabh Kumar, the seller-in-charge of the shop moved the Hindi books to the first floor, but realised that no buyer was willing to make the effort of climbing the stairs to reach out to the Hindi collection. Consequently, he moved these books back to the ground floor where they would be picked up by some interested readers. Dalit writings in Hindi occupy an even smaller space among the Hindi collection. Hindi books chiefly attract either committed readers or those from the academia, and this is broadly true of the Dalit writings too. There is, however, a finer point involved here. Dalit autobiographies, novels and Ambedkar's writings are higher on the scale of popularity and get attention from the new readers too. However, non-fictional works by Dalit authors do not find the same attention from the buyers. Thus, the spatial arrangement of the books in the bookstore is an important indicator of its market-viability. Anil Verma of the Hindi Book Centre on Asaf Ali Road—a very important centre of book trade in Delhi—mentioned (in an interaction with me in November 2016) that many of the autobiographies and life histories of the Dalit writers had been popular with the readers for long, and the bookstore had not clubbed these writers in the Dalit section of the store. These works were shelved within the

larger (and more 'mainstream') categories of autobiographies and novels. When I visited the store in the last week of November 2016, the section on Dalit writings did not contain any work of fiction by the Dalit writers, and these books were stacked in the front part of the bookstore with other works of fiction. Thus, generic preference of the readers is another crucial factor in deciding the visibility of the various categories of the Dalit writings.

In this framework, it is not difficult to comprehend the twin burden of language and caste borne by the print culture of the Dalit community. The burden falls on all the variables of the domain, including the product, writers, publishers, booksellers and the readers. It is therefore not surprising that most autonomous centres of Dalit print establishments in Hindi are located even further away from the centre of influence and geographical accessibility when compared to the 'mainstream' Hindi ones. No Dalit publication house can afford an office at Daryaganj or Asaf Ali Road, the main hubs of publication in Delhi. Both Gautam Book Centre and Samyak Prakashan operate from their proprietor's home office in Shahdara and Pashchim Puri respectively. Interestingly, the only autonomous Dalit establishment that has an office in one of the most expensive and upper middle-class neighbourhood of Andrews Ganj is the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS), the English dominated, research-based private academic institution with a large number of international collaborations.

Although a lot of fictional works and autobiographies by Dalit authors have started finding a respectable space in Hindi bookstores across the city, it is important to note that the principle of selection in making these books available to the readers stays in the hands of the non-Dalit proprietor of the bookstore. For instance, Anil Verma of the Hindi Book Centre stated (2016) that most Dalit writings are in the form of slim booklets and pamphlets which his bookshop doesn't stock as they deal exclusively in monographs. By delimiting the range of books that would qualify as acceptable for sale in the bookshop, the shop owner proscribes the accessibility of a significant spectrum of Dalit writings to the buyers of the Hindi Book Centre. Moreover, Verma mentioned that some publishers have "standing orders" for a certain number of books from them and some others have "standing instructions" to send a few samples before they place their order. The hierarchy of publication houses inherent here is yet another mediatory decision by the bookshop owner that decides the availability of books for the readers.

These decisions by bookshops and distributors are indicative of their proximity to the market infrastructure for these books as well as to their consent to its logic. While the Hindi Book Centre—as a purely commercial establishment—refuses to sell pamphlets and periodicals as the profit margins on them are very slim, People's Publishing House stocks and sells pamphlets, booklets and journals along with books and monographs. As a part of the left-liberal political and discursive apparatus of the country, the PPH is more comfortable with selling progressive literature in pamphlet forms at a no-profit-no-loss basis. The PPH itself has published several such works that are sold as slim volumes at very marginal price for the propagation of liberal values in the society. The PPH too has a policy of short listing books for sale in its outlets. The employees scour markets and places like the Delhi International Book Fair for like-minded publications, and found one in the Gautam Book Centre. The PPH has a much larger stock of books from small but autonomous Dalit publishers than the Hindi Book Centre which is due to larger convergences of ideologies and market principles.

This distinction between a big, mainstream bookshop like the Hindi Book Centre and smaller and less commercial bookshops such as the Gautam Book Centre or Samyak Prakashan (which doubles as bookshop too) is evident in their sales pattern with regards to educational institutions in India and abroad. While the Hindi Book Centre sells books to educational institutions in India and abroad to departments that have instituted centres of Dalit Studies, Gautam Book Centre and Samyak Prakashan maintain that their books are never bought by libraries in India or even overseas. However, individual scholars and researchers are frequent visitors to their outlets, and buy books from them frequently. I believe that the cause for this very divergent experience for the two sets of booksellers lies in their location in the publication business in the country. Given that the Hindi Book Centre orders hardbound books and other forms of monographs principally from the well-established publication houses in the country that choose to print commercially popular books or canonical writings of a literary tradition, they are approached by libraries and institutions for these volumes. On the other hand, Samyak Prakashan and Gautam Book Centre have published a lot of non-mainstream writings by Dalit authors that are not sought by most libraries and other academic establishments. Moreover, their reprints of the writings of 'mainstream' Dalit authors are cheaper and slightly inferior in production quality due to their target readership. Thus, this too becomes a reason why these books do not find patrons in institutional spaces.

In conclusion, it is important to state that while there is a significant difference between the cultural prestige and social weight of Hindi and English, the difference between the two languages must not be overstated. With the rapid expansion of the Hindi media all over north India, Hindi has found a huge readership at its disposal. In addition, the growing prosperity in the non-urban centres has added to the economic clout of the Hindi speakers. The middle class in India today includes a sizable section of the people who identify Hindi as their primary language of communication and expression, and this section is increasingly confident in claiming the Anglicised social spaces for itself. There is a continuous process of contestation as well as collaboration between the speakers of the two languages (these two categories are not mutually exclusive either) with every change in experiences. The Dalit protagonists of the domain of the print media in the city partake of these experiences that define the life of the *Hindi-wallahs* of Delhi. The Indian bourgeoisie, stripped of its caste markers, is the dominant social model found just beneath-the-surface in the collective imagination of the Dalit print media. In the revision of its role models and the consequent distancing from the struggles of an average Dalit in the city, the contemporary Dalit media has travelled a long distance away from the sensitivity and acumen of Phule, Acchutananda and Ambedkar.

Chapter 4
The Dalit Web: From Print to Performance

1. Introduction

This chapter is located at the broad intersection of caste, science and technology, and the new media in contemporary India. They together constitute the three major columns that frame the discursive structure of this section. Caste, as an example of some of the extremely resilient cultural institutions in the country, has had important consequences for the other two categories of our social experiences. Thus, any historically nuanced account of science and technology and its trajectory in the life of the nation since independence (and even before) must acknowledge the constant yet officially elided umbra of caste around it. While caste and science/ technology have been old companions in the above-mentioned triad, new media is a relatively recent entrant. The history of the new media—like the history of any other form of media preceding it—is closely tied to advancements in scientific discoveries, their technological applications and a host of economic, political and social elements that define their operative environment. Thus, in order to assess the role of caste and the specific imperatives of the Dalit identity in shaping the presence of the community on online forums, it is crucial for us to first survey the account of modern science in India since the time it was brought to the country's shores by the imperial hands of the British in the seventeenth century.

At the outset, I would like to delineate a quick map of the chapter for a more integrated reading experience. The chapter starts with a survey of the introduction and progression of modern science in India, and the way it became an integral part of the cultural, political and discursive fabric of the colonised nation. Crucial issues related to racial competencies, nationalism, religious and caste assertions, and linguistic hierarchies knotted together with the philosophical and epistemic questions of western science in India. The chapter moves on to demonstrate that the social and epistemic tropes that manifested themselves in this period live on robustly—in historically modified contexts, yet remarkable in their broad ideological continuity—in the post-colonial life of the country. They continue to shape the systems of intellectual and cultural beliefs and conduct that have forged policies on science and technology, public perceptions on scientific excellence, as well as the infrastructures of contemporary digital culture(s) and its literacy. This is the overarching milieu in which the rest

of the chapter situates the increasing participation of the Dalit community in online platforms. Although the chapter begins with the story of the physical sciences in India, it finds its culmination in the dissolving disciplinary boundaries that truly enact the idea of the internet today.

2. **Modern Science in Colonial India**

Modern science is a historically contingent entity that found its genesis and initial growth in the specific social and intellectual milieu of early modern Europe (c. 1550 - c. 1800). Scholars of the discipline (Kuhn 1962; Popper 1963; Okasha 2002; Godfrey-Smith 2003) argue that the growth of modern science brought about several far-reaching changes in the intellectual, social, political and economic patterns of interactions in the western societies. These included a mechanistic re-imagination of the natural environment, an increasingly disinterested and impersonal approach towards the subject of investigation, methodological reformulations that prioritized the neutrality of the human agent and the attempts to apply the resulting insights to social relations (Shapin 1996, 13). Much of the above was enabled by a rationalist and empiricist system of thought that, in turn, prepared the way for a decline in popular religiosity and aided in establishing the authority of secular ethics in these nations.

Western science was introduced in India through the initial efforts of a few surveyors, naturalists, geologists, astronomers and men of medicine from Europe, many of whom worked for the East India Company as engineers, army surgeons or in other capacities. In addition, there were also some from the band of early adventurers and Jesuit missionaries who too made India as the site of their scientific investigations of both natural and human subjects (Kumar 1995; Chakrabarti 2004). However, these individual attempts by a few ‘men of science’ did not immediately turn into a broad-based support for modern science or science education in India, either on the part of the ruling British or for a vast majority of the Indians. As both Kumar and Chakrabarti point out, modern science in India during the colonial period remained largely subjugated to the imperial needs of the British, and there was very little government support (financial or intellectual) for a science-based education of the Indians in India. The wide-ranging array of the scientific information collected about the nation and its human and natural topography was harnessed to the end of a colonial governmentality that was unprecedentedly information-intensive for a better control and maximum dominance of the colonised population

(Chakrabarti 2004, 11). The establishment of modern science as the hegemonic episteme in Europe provided a legitimizing authority to the British for claiming racial, political and epistemic superiority over the indigenous population of India.

However, things began to change somewhat in the nineteenth century. Although the colonial government was still wary of encouraging science-based education in India as they feared a resulting resistance to their rule enabled by the methods, logic and the language of the modern science, they did require a class of mechanics, assistants and technical service providers for the rapidly expanding medical and technical fields in the country. Logistically and economically, it was more viable to train the local population than to hire professionals from overseas, and thus the government instituted a few centres of medical and technical/ engineering education in some of the major cities of India such as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Although the government did found a few institutions for educating Indians in the discipline of the western science, the dispute over the value of modern science as an educational discipline as well as a system of intellectual conduct for the former continued well into the century. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a number of educated Indians too had joined this debate. They had witnessed the innovative, industrial and the concomitant discursive edge that modern science had provided to their colonial masters, and thus considered scientific knowledge and its epistemic philosophy as fundamental to steering India on the path of resurgence. However, there remained a number of issues that needed to be settled, many of which sharply pitted the British interest in India against the Indian.

One of the most crucial differences that arose between the English and the Indians regarding a science-based education in India related to its economics. The imperial government was extremely reluctant in investing money in establishing and maintaining institutions of scientific training in its colony. As Deepak Kumar points out, it was easier for Indians to afford the much more reasonable fee at the University of Oxford than at the Presidency College in Calcutta. (Kumar 1995, 145-46) Moreover, whatever little support the government extended stayed limited to a few of the institutions in the metropolitan centres of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. The official reticence in funding science institutions also stemmed from the colonial government's insistence on conceiving higher education in India as a moral project of

cultivating rectitude and integrity of character among the 'natives'. This idea is best exemplified in the figure of Thomas Babington Macaulay who—in the early decades of the nineteenth century—ensured that the nature of higher education in India stayed pre-eminently literary and Anglican in character. As a member of the Supreme Council of India in the East India Company, Macaulay played an important role in shaping the educational agenda of the country. As an Anglicist, he successfully argued in his *Minute on Indian Education* in February 1835 that the official support for education of Indians in Sanskrit and Arabic should be withdrawn, and the available money be used for educating a class (and not the masses) of Indians in the English language and its literature. His veneration of the arts and the humanities deferred the introduction of a modern, science-based curriculum in higher education in India, and the prestige of arts continued over the sciences for a time. This was evident by the fact that matriculates with better marks continued to choose arts over the sciences or engineering in this period (Kumar 1995, 139).

Macaulay's intervention in the trajectory of higher education in India had significant implications for science education in the country as well as for its caste imperatives. We will direct our attention to its details a little later in this chapter. Prior to that, it is important for us to investigate yet another binary that divided the multiple stakeholders of higher education in India into two camps. This particular debate centred on the value of pure sciences as against the applied ones, such as those in agriculture and engineering. While the colonial government wanted a team of technological assistants and mechanics to ensure that the civic services were carried out smoothly and the imperial project of the economic domination of India continued efficiently, there was a section of the Indian intelligentsia that too believed that the study of pure sciences was an indulgence that a poor and enslaved nation could ill afford in its struggle for political and economic autonomy. They argued that India should look towards technological and industrial education for deliverance from the various social and economic backwardness it suffered from. However, there were some Indians who firmly asserted the indispensability of the fundamental sciences for a comprehensive regeneration of the Indian society. Not only would a pure science-based education allow for essential research for the technological and economic growth of the country but would also encourage a rational outlook towards the social and cultural processes of the nation, thus laying the economic, cultural as well as moral foundation for the eventual political sovereignty of India. The latter's vision of the role of

sciences in India was radically emancipatory of both the Indian mind and its socio-economic structures.

It is worth noting that after a protracted period of debate and dissent, it was the supporters of the technological and applied sciences who managed to establish their dominance over the higher education sector in the country. By the 1860s, the patronage—both governmental and private—for industrial and agricultural sciences and engineering had increased significantly, and a number of science institutes had begun to take firmer roots in some of the important cities of the country. It is important, at this point, to reiterate that the transmission of the western/ modern science in India happened as a facilitator of the British imperial drive, and thus the history of the genesis and growth of modern science in India cannot be abstracted from their colonial heritage. While this imperial encounter, on the one hand, compelled the Indian opinion-makers to accept the epistemic and philosophical supremacy of the western sciences over the indigenously produced systems of knowledge, it also—and not unexpectedly—conjugated the subsequent history of the modern sciences in India with nationalism and the independence movement.

2.1 Western Science and the Indian National Movement

By the first two decades of the twentieth century, modern science had become an important component in the discourse on nationalism in India (Chakrabarti 2004). This was enabled by the rise of a few Indians in the international arena of modern science, such as J.C. Bose, P.C. Ray, S.N. Bose, C.V. Raman and M.N. Saha. Almost all of them were closely associated with (at least intellectually, even if not through direct participation) the ongoing struggle for national independence, and helped weld the ontology of modern science in India with a nationalist imaginary and promote it as an invaluable resource for nation-building. While scientists like J.C. Bose, P.C Ray and C.V Raman invested their scientific endeavours with an 'Indian'—more particularly 'Hindu' cadence—others, such as M.N Saha, saw a socio-moral urge in mobilizing modern science for a civilizational transformation of the country. As will become evident a little later, this relative difference in the position of the various scientists in their apprehension of modern science in relation to India was a consequence of their varying locations on the multiple indices of the social matrix of the country.

Modern science, like any other episteme that travels from a particular knowledge zone to another, also brought with it a substratum of values and ideologies in India that—in turn—took hold in the noesis of the country and engendered a range of responsive stances. The European meta-narrative surrounding the transmission of the western sciences in the colonies relied on an essentialist duality of Occidental rationalism as against the spirituality of the mystic Orient (Chakrabarti 2004). The largely undifferentiated agglomeration of the vastly different cultures and civilizations lumped together as the 'East' was defined as "unscientific", "non-rational" and "spiritual"—different in its essence from the equally undifferentiated grouping of disparate nations identified as the 'West'. Thus, India—the Orient par excellence—was reified by the Orientalist European scholars as a site of mystical and spiritual pursuits that characterised the natives of the land with a marked disregard for terrestrial accomplishments located on the axis of historical time and material sphere. While many Indian scientists and others associated with scientific enterprises such as Mahendra Lal Sircar, J.C Bose and P.C Ray (among others) accepted the broad framework of the master-narrative of the Western and the Eastern mind, they tried nevertheless to harmonise systems of 'rational' enquiry such as modern science with 'Indian' (Hindu) traditions. (ibid)

For instance, Sircar, who was one of the earliest advocates of scientific education in India, believed that both the scientific and the spiritual pursuits were twin instances of the rational faculty of the human mind, and thus Indians were immensely capable of conducting scientific studies. While the West had chosen to excel in the material domain of existence, the East had turned its investigative gaze inwards and had transcended matter to explore the province of the mind and the spirit. (ibid) This, Sircar argued, had endowed the Eastern mind with a high imaginative capability that could steer the western sciences to greater heights, provided the Indians could cast off the slough of irrationality and superstition that modern Hinduism had acquired. He squarely blamed the priestly castes for encouraging irrational habits of the mind for their personal gains and argued for reclaiming the old vigour of the now dormant 'Aryan' intellect. (ibid) It is crucial to note that Sircar, like many other public-minded men of the period, found a paradigm for the future renaissance of the nation in its ancient past. The attempt to locate India's future in a version of its past history was a compelling anti-colonial ideology that sought to project the country as a self-contained unit of legitimate social, cultural and political ideas for its future destiny. It must be borne in mind that the history of the unfolding of this idea in the following decades has had significant implications for the liminal participation of

the Dalit community in the domain of modern science in the country. However, that debate would be addressed a little later in the chapter.

After Sircar, Jagdish Chandra Bose was the next important Indian who figured prominently in the meta-narrative of the Eastern mind in relation to the modern sciences. Bose's experiments were very well received in Europe, but instead of encouraging an interrogation of the existing presumptions about the 'essentially' non-materialist bent of the Indian intellect, they only reinforced Bose's 'Indianness' for his western audience through their scientific success. Most of the western media attributed his brilliance as a scientist to his 'Eastern' cognitive powers that were particularly developed to 'mystically' comprehend the principles of order and harmony from the seemingly disorderly and chaotic jumble of material phenomena. (Chakrabarti 2004) The *sanyasi* in Bose trumped the modern scientist in him for the west, and eventually he too came to delimit his work in terms of Vedic monism (Chakrabarti 2004, 200), exemplifying in his greatness the impeccable union of 'western' rationalism with 'eastern' mysticism. Thus, Bose travelled a longer distance than Sircar in endorsing the value of Indian spirituality in invigorating the western sciences. Moreover, in drawing a parallel between his work as a biologist and the monism of the Vedas, he attempted to establish a scientific endorsement for the philosophical wisdom of the ancient Hindu religious texts, and to point out to the epistemic kinship between them.

The assertion of Hindu thought and knowledge system within the framework of the modern sciences continued with P.C Ray, also known as the father of Indian Chemistry. Ray wrote an exhaustive volume on the scientific tradition of ancient India, with a particular focus on Chemistry. He sought to establish that the ancient Hindus were materially disposed, and had a strong empiricist tradition of knowledge, particularly in Chemistry, anatomy and surgery. Interestingly, Ray blamed the resulting Brahmin orthodoxy after its conflict with Buddhism for the ossification of the *jati* hierarchies, and the subsequent codification of *Manusmriti*, the text that authoritatively proscribed for the Brahmins any kind of contact with a cadaver at the risk of ritual contamination. These developments, Ray argued, were critical in eroding the scientific and materialist acumen of the subsequent generations of Indians who, by the time science found a foothold in Europe, had sunk into a stupor of superstition and intellectual stagnation. However, it is still important to bear in mind that for Ray, as for many other Indian scientists and social thinkers of the period, the Vedic past of ancient India contained the necessary values

of the mind, spirit and cognition to establish the modern Hindus as the rightful—although ad interim adrift—descendants of their 'scientific', 'rational' and 'vigorous' Aryan ancestors[34].

2.2 Science, Technology and Caste in Colonial India

The insistence on casting Vedic India as the source of all 'virtue' of thought, conduct and social formation is a leitmotif that runs through much of the 'upper' caste Hindu nationalist thought of the period (and even after it), including among many of the 'upper' caste Indian scientists. However, the thinkers and intellectuals from the 'lower' *jatis* of the society manifested a deep distrust of the Vedic and the 'Aryan' antecedents of the Indian history and often challenged the 'upper' caste narrative of the period as a lost golden age of the country[35]. In this context, it is useful to briefly examine the discursive matrix of the intellectual

[34] It is important to bear in mind that the assertion of Vedic Hinduism by most of the social and scientific thinkers of the period as a site of ancient wisdom that was also a kind of a philosophical hold-all for the new western epistemes and their inventions was an anti-colonial response to the intellectual and psycho-social onslaughts experienced by the colonized population that urgently required indigenous paradigms as exemplars for self-validation. Most of these thinkers also advocated a reform of the contemporary Hindu society in order to rid it of its current regressive practices. However, it is vital to distinguish the reformist impulse from its revivalist offshoot, where the latter developed into an unapologetically exclusionary and a communally invested nationalist project. Most of the Indian scientists of the period—who were also colonial subjects—could not have escaped the demoralizing consequences of political and cultural enslavement by a foreign power. However, their endorsement of Vedic monism and the ancient Hindu culture doesn't—through the gesture itself—necessarily camp them with the Hindu Revivalists. Each of them require an independent, rigorous and contextually nuanced study of their ideological affiliation to determine their stake (or its degree) in either of the two camps.

[35] The animus of the 'lower' *jatis* for the Vedic past of the nation rested on it being the source of Hinduism and its unrelenting *varna* and the caste system, as well as for the then commonly accepted anthropological and historical account of the conflict between the Aryans and the indigenous population of the country. The Aryans were seen as violent invaders who brutally subjugated the peaceful natives of the land, and turned them into Shudras and the outcastes (the Dalits). Thus, the Vedic period in Indian history was a span of war, bloodshed and oppression for the autochthonous population that was thereafter condemned to a life of religious bigotry, social ostracism, economic exploitation and dehumanised personal existence.

contributions of the only well-established and internationally renowned Indian 'lower' caste scientist of the first half of the twentieth century—M.N. Saha. M.N Saha was born into a Shudra family in Bengal and suffered from both economic deprivation and caste discrimination. Some of his 'upper' caste classmates refused to share a common dining space with him, and he experienced social 'difficulties' in the extremely orthodox cultural milieu of Allahabad where he worked as a professor in the University. (Sur 2002) Saha was extremely critical of the Vedic culture and framed the debate on the modern sciences in some very different contexts. Like most 'upper' caste men, he too believed that modern science as a discipline was objective, disinterested and unaffected by the cleavages existing in society. Yet, his vision of the role of modern science in independent India as well as his subsequent marginalisation from the formulations of national policies on science and technology exhibited the inevitable substructure of contending social locations (including that of caste) that significantly influence an individual's place in sites of power[36]. As Abha Sur argues, Saha's eventual exclusion from all positions of decision making in the field of science and technology was a consequence of "not only...[that] he belonged to what he called "democratic classes," but because he had remained true to them" (Sur 2002, 105).

[36] Saha, as a member of what he called the "democratic classes", did not entirely share the primarily upper class and caste advocacy of the top-down approach to the dispersal of the spirit of science and scientific institutions of research and teaching in the country. He whole-heartedly accepted the role of the government in promoting scientism as a social value and in establishing a large-scale industrial economy that would eventually demolish the regressive beliefs and practices by promoting modern values of egalitarianism and democratic equality. However, he had strong reservations against the elitist bias of the post-colonial Indian state that depended upon private industries, foreign manpower and some exclusive government research institutes—rather than the more accessible and comparatively more inclusive universities—for the advancement of its scientific agenda. He frequently sounded the then Prime Minister of India, Pd. Nehru, on (what he perceived as) the government's retreat from its avowed program of maximising the social base of industries, scientific and technological education and the spirit of rational secularism in the country before investing in scientific projects that would only empower a minority interest and influence. Thus, his disagreement with the government and its choice of scientific adviser in the form of Homi Bhabha over the national nuclear energy program was a matter of significant disillusionment for him as it seemed to privilege technocrats whose vision of science in India was extremely exclusivist with a very narrow participatory window (Sur 2002).

Saha's life narrative subtly foregrounds the collusion between caste and modern science in India, even though the former was not from the bottom-most *jati* hierarchy of the country. Due to the anti-colonial struggle, most scientists—an overwhelming majority of whom belonged to the traditionally privileged varnas or *jatis,* such as the Brahmins—turned to their own traditional culture and religion for validation. As we have seen before, most Indian 'upper' caste scientists such as Bose, Ray, Raman and the others saw the antecedents of western science in the philosophy of Vedantic Monism. This discursive intervention had several consequences for the historical trajectory of science in India. To begin with, a de-sacralised view of the world—as in the case of several European countries—never found a firm footing in India as Hinduism itself was re-scripted as an essentially 'scientific', 'rational' and 'modern' belief system (Nanda 2004). This was particularly detrimental to the interests of those on the margins of the Indian society, such as the 'lower' castes and women as their oppression had scriptural justification. The appropriation of science for the vindication of Vedic Hinduism also granted the latter's principles of faith, social organisation and personal conduct the bearing of universal truth grounded in principles of scientific rationality[37]. As a corollary, it also affectively arrested any concerted attempt through the use of scientific rationality to radically secularise the Indian

[37] The nineteenth century reform movements in Hinduism in some parts of the country such as Bengal, Maharashtra and Kerala did give a call to purge Hinduism of the ills (untouchability, purdah, sati, prohibition against widow remarriage etc.) that had crept in it over the last few centuries and to go back to the pristine principles of worship and social conduct as contained in the Vedas. Reformers and social crusaders such as Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda considered the Vedas as the source of all true knowledge and science. They, as well as the other leaders who followed in their broad tradition of social thought, such as Gandhi in the twentieth century, insisted that the caste system must be condemned. Yet, all of them upheld the fundamental principles of the varna system, arguing that the varna was a non-hereditary organisational structure that divided people into four groups, based on their spiritual constitution and vocation. Thus, most of the 'upper' caste Hindu men retain their allegiance to their consecrated ontology and sacred epistemes, which sets them sharply apart from the more radical Dalit thinkers such as Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar who wished to transform social interactions of all kinds on completely disenchanted, secular principles (Nanda 2004). However, the 'high' caste Hindus seamlessly conjoined western science with Vedantic Hinduism as two sides of the same episteme and created an abiding identification between science and Brahminism in India, thus ensuring that the discourse of modern science in India could not be entirely naturalistic due to its Vedantic associations.

society and undermine its extremely unequal and stratified religious-traditional institutions and customary practices in any meaningful way.

Secondly, the dovetailing of modern science with Vedic Monism also ensured Brahmanical[38] hegemony over the new episteme. Vedic Hinduism found particular favour with the 'twice-born' members of the community. By drawing a strong affinity between modern science and Vedantic philosophy, Brahmanical orthodoxy laid a special claim to the former as its own[39]. This epistemic appropriation, along with the conventional advantage that the 'upper' castes have had with access to education, directly translated into an overwhelming domination of science education and scientific practices in India by the Brahmins and other 'upper' castes, until recently.

Related to the above was yet another strand of the anti-colonial movement that contributed to the very complex history of modern science in India. This particular cast of the scientific-nationalistic imagination was heavily influenced by the European Romantic tradition. For the Romantics, India represented an earlier, pre-capitalist moment in the civilizational history of the world that was now lost to Europe due to heavy industrialisation and mechanisation under capitalism[40]. Those Indians who shared the European Romantics' denunciation of capitalism

[38] It is important to bear in mind here that 'Brahmanism' as a religious-philosophical tradition is different from 'Brahmin' as a caste group. Brahmanism is an ideology that privileges the religious, social and cultural thought that emerged from the Vedic religion, and is characterized by the domination of the priestly caste over other communities, among other things. As an ideology, Brahmanism may be reflected in the belief system of any individual, Brahmin or otherwise. Thus, the principles of Brahmanism may be upheld or socially endorsed in the conduct of the non-Brahmins as well.

[39] A number of Brahmin scientists have claimed that their caste background had especially prepared them for a successful career in the sciences. Sur mentions the example of Raja Ramanna, the former chairperson of India's Atomic Energy Commission and a Brahmin, who claimed that his excellence in science can be attributed to his caste's customary interest in scholarship—often abstract and philosophical in nature—that invests the community with a 'natural' proficiency for it (Sur 2011).

[40] The European Romantics argued for a need for India to revive and preserve its indigenous forms of economy, spiritual and cultural heritage, and traditional forms of knowledge and art in order to escape the ills of capitalism that was steadily hardening its hold over the nation due to the British rule. In the larger arena of the anti-imperial struggle in India, the influence of European Romanticism translated into a suspicion of western science and technology, particularly their use in heavy industrialisation for

advocated an indigenous model of scientific education and industrialisation that would combine the elements of western science with Indian values and tradition in order to create a more compassionate economic and social system than capitalism. For this, they proposed a curriculum that united the study of the modern sciences with traditional literature, history and philosophy of the nation. Over time, this model of education in the sciences did not find much favour with most of the students as well as Indian educationists and scientists as the latter wanted to keep the sciences free of (what they believed) any didactic or cultural accoutrements (Chakrabarti 2004). While this move has been widely read as initial attempts to set up science as a supra-discipline that was independent of any 'taint' of ideology or interest, yet it failed to recognise its own commitment to a normative, elitist model of participation for its protagonists. By declining to locate the ontology and the praxis of the discipline within India's specific social cauldron—churning with the contesting claims of caste, class and gender, among others—modern science in India became a handmaiden of the dominant interests in the country.

3. **Science, Technology and Caste in Post-Independence India**

The collusion between the dominant interests in the country and the way modern science came to be imagined and practiced in India was enabled principally by defining the latter as a priori, and thus, divesting it of its social components. Modern science was envisaged as a meta-episteme that not only needed no referent outside of itself for any self-correction, but also required insulation from the flux of contesting social identities that could undermine its philosophical and methodological disinterestedness. For this reason, its influence on the social processes was seen to be indirect, i.e from a locus external to these social formations, yet capable of readjusting mindsets and material existence in order to eventually eliminate the fault-lines of caste, gender, religion, class etc. However, as pointed out by the scholars of modern science in India such as Nanda and Chopra, the practitioners of science in the country as well as its policy makers remained deeply rooted in the 'high' caste Hindu traditions, belying the famed 'objectivity' of the discipline (Nanda 2004). Their failure to acknowledge the value

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the economic development of the country. The culmination of this strand of thought is best represented in the economic and social philosophy of Gandhi who was extremely critical of industrial capitalism led by modern science and saw machines as abominations of the western civilization. Gandhi envisioned independent India as a collection of self-sufficient village communities that employed traditional, local forms of production rather than big, automated machineries.

systems of their caste identity in shaping the institutional matrix and the practices of modern science continued to perpetuate the older system of differential access to and comfort with science and technology for different groups of people even after independence.

Rohit Chopra delineates this unfolding of the above trajectory in post-independence India where Nehru, the first Prime Minister of the newly liberated nation, strongly held onto the principle of the separation of the domain of modern science from that of the political and social affairs. Participation of any nature in the field of modern science was seen as consequent only on 'merit' or an aptitude for the discipline, and the qualifying individuals were invested with significant social and intellectual capital in the life of the nation. While it is correct to assume that the class of citizens created by this process would be 'chosen' despite their marginal locations on the traditional social indices of power and prestige, yet the reality in practice was significantly inconsistent with the expectations. As Chopra argues persuasively, this 'socially blind' policy of the government—for the most part—almost wholly ended up benefitting the upper class and caste strata of the Indian society as historically they were best placed to prove their 'merit' (Chopra 2008). Thus, the composition of this 'new' class of citizens (with their scientific nationalism) was not vastly different, both demographically and philosophically, from the older one. This observation is also true for the category of the primarily young, techno-savvy, urban population working in the information and technology sector of the economy and known as 'the digerati'. While the domain of the 'digerati' itself doesn't allow for or restrict access on grounds of caste, class, gender or other markers of traditional privilege or disability, yet the latter categories play a significant role in forging an individual's opportunities in life that determine proficiency in relevant parameters such as technical education and skills, entrepreneurial acumen and knowledge base.

To reiterate, there was a fairly smooth carrying forward of the traditional 'upper' caste Hindu cultural milieu in the philosophy and epistemology of modern science in India from its pre-independence phase to post-independence. While the theory and practice of sciences and technology in the country remained imaginatively allied to the project of nation building—even more so, post-independence—the idea of the 'nation' itself stayed rooted substantially to the Hindu, upper caste masculine codes of thought and conduct. However, it is important to recall that a small section of the Dalit community had managed to avail opportunities for education under the British imperial rule, and the community was further enabled in its pursuit

of erudition by the reservation policy of the government of India, formally adopted by the Constitution of the country in 1950. The few decades after India's independence in 1947 saw the emergence of a small but professionally trained Dalit men and (much fewer) women who were poised to utilize the resulting professional and economic opportunities in ways like their more privileged contemporaries from the 'upper' caste backgrounds. Some of these men and women were to make choices that would re-shape the lens through which the world looked at India and its caste system, and the tool that enabled them in doing so was what is now defined as computer mediated communication (CMC). These men and women are the protagonists of the next section that undertakes to examine the crucial role that the technologically savvy Dalits (including its diaspora) has played in harnessing the power of CMC in its attempts to invest the larger community with the dignity and rights due to it as a subject of a modern human society.

4. Western Science, Internet and the Dalit Intervention(s)

One of the more useful ways of assessing the range of digital literacy of the online Dalit community (or a section of it) is by examining its diversity of digital influence—not just in terms of its creation of content, multiplicity of languages, forms of utterance(s) and accessibility but also in examining its interventions in the design and the value systems of important digital platforms on the internet today. The world wide web, like every other human fabrication, is seeded with the normative convictions of its architects. The technology of the internet is a remarkable extension of the epistemic success of the preeminent domain of human knowledge of the twentieth century—modern science. It is evident that the physical structure of the internet and the web is made possible by the advancements in technology. However, it is crucial to note that the imprint of the scientific intellect is manifest equally strongly in the axioms and the codes that guide its architecture as well as its social configurations. In case of India, the social matrix of the web replicates the dynamics of western scientific values (as inherited by a nation deep in throes of its post-colonial moment) dovetailing with motifs from Brahmanical Hinduism (more on it later). In the light of this, it isn't inaccurate to claim that the web is a complicated ally for the Dalits as much of the Dalit episteme and experience structures don't necessarily find an intuitive expression on the web. This statement is truer of the current stage of the web culture where knowledge based on objective absolutisms is under greater challenge from several minority cultures (including Dalits) that assert the 'situated' noesis of our embodied selves. Thus, the web today is experiencing rigorous and

comprehensive critique of its fundamentals from some significant quarters of its users who argue that its exclusionary and limited architecture and value system fail to do justice to much of the world's history and its wisdom.

This chapter is specifically concerned with the critique that the internet and the web has been subjected to in recent times by the Dalit community. In doing so, the chapter does not limit the scope of criticism to those who are physically located in India. I propose that the discursive vitality of the community's engagement with the web is evident in its wider spectrum by examining the forms of knowledge, practices and power developed by people, networks and processes that cross political and geographical borders, such as the diaspora(s) and the internet. My contention is that Dalits with stakes in transnational networks—the Dalit diaspora, students who travel across national boundaries for higher education and professionals in search of better opportunities—by the very plurality of their experiences, have helped adapt and move ideas and processes across networks and platforms to create additional dimensions to the existing epistemic life of a knowledge system. This is well illustrated by the role that the transnational Dalit population has played in the advocacy of the Dalit cause through the online networks in the last several years now. The diasporic first-generation Dalit users of the internet were pioneers in using the medium to advance the case for the human rights of the Dalit community of India on various international bodies and forums. Today, however, the transnational Dalit networks of the second-generation users of the internet have evolved much further and are attempting, with varying degrees of success, to re-shape and re-define the system's core principles and premises to make it more inclusive and egalitarian. In addition—taking a cue from the interactive, collaborative and co-operative infrastructure of the internet—this second generation of the Dalit internet users are also challenging and re-assessing the existing forms of institutional engagements and their hierarchies in various establishments—academic and otherwise.

5. Print Culture and the World Wide Web

To appreciate the growing exactness and depth of the Dalit criticism and reconstitution of the web, it is crucial for us to evaluate the structures and the principles on which the platform was imagined and developed. The internet, ever since its inception, was metaphorically conceived as a giant brain; the web, in turn, represented the variety and range of human

knowledge that would exist in that gigantic 'organ'. The metaphor of the internet as a brain is extremely telling as inherent in that idea is the classic identity of the modern western knowledge system (since the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the subsequent European Enlightenment) as a binary between an abstract intellect that 'knows' and its fundamental 'other'—the body/ matter—that obstructs 'knowing'. This episteme—also known as Cartesian rationality[41]—dissociates the mind from the body and the world as the latter are perceived as material in construct (the mind being non-corporeal) and are therefore objects of knowledge rather than creators of the same. Pursuit of truth or knowledge, in other words, requires a complete disembodiment of the inquiring self, and is therefore procedural and methodology-driven (Taylor 1989).

As a necessary corollary, Cartesian rationalism also invests intentionality and agency in abstract cognitive processes, and valourises positivist objectivity as its best practice (Apffel-Marglin 1996). This duality of the mind and body had significant consequences for the domain of culture and learning as language, and more particularly writing, became entrenched as the medium to externalize, inscribe and eventually archive the truth/ knowledge produced. The rising print culture of the eighteenth-century western Europe amplified and consolidated this newly established alliance between the disembodied pursuit of 'truth' through concepts and abstract reasoning (the modern scientific method) and the written word as its material manifestation. This 'natural' coupling of the two systems persisted very strongly until recently when post-colonial and allied scholarship from several parts of the world started challenging the primacy of the written word, print culture and fossilised institutions of scholastic custodianship in an attempt to de-colonise the knowledge systems of the world. However, the influence of the older epistemic model still manifests itself very strongly in our cultural and literary spheres, including that of the internet and the web.

[41] Named after the famous French mathematician and 'natural philosopher' of the seventeenth century, Rene Descartes. He was perhaps the first modern thinker to propose an ontological dualism of the mind and matter, and much of western philosophy that follows is heavily influenced by the lasting contributions of Descartes in theorizing the self and the world.

5.1 The Early Web and the Philosophy of Print: Epistemic Continuities

It is immensely evident that the world wide web is not only an extension of but is also premised on the template of the print culture and the epistemic standards it rests upon. This is more expansively true of the Web 1.0 in its early phase as the network then was little more than a sophisticated information management system linked together by hyperlinks, primarily for navigation from one web page to another. Additionally, the terminologies for the web technology were adapted from the vocabulary of print, and therefore words and phrases like web pages, Search Engine Results Pages (SERPs), Hypertext Markup Language (HTML), JavaScript and Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) abound. It should also be recalled that among the very first conceptual predecessors for the web were the frameworks of citations and cross-referencing that are followed in the textual tradition of scholarship. The unidirectional system of citations and cross-referencing in print evolved to multi-directional and multimodal network of hyperlinks on the web, inter-connecting the trans-national collection of documents and other data forms. Thus, in the early phase of its existence in the 1990s, the world wide web primarily functioned as a vast resource of myriad information or a giant archive that could be accessed for various purposes, including the advocacy of a cause.

If one were to examine some of the very first websites developed by the Dalits, it is extremely evident that they exhibit not only the dominance of print as a design protocol but also as an epistemic system. To demonstrate the above claim, I have found it useful to closely examine two of the earliest Dalit web sites in existence—dalitstan.org (launched in 1999) and ambedkar.org. Of the two, dalitstan.org can only be recovered today as an archive copy (https://web.archive.org/web/20060510134217/http://www.dalitstan.org/) on the web as it (along with seventeen other web sites) was blocked by the government of India in mid-2006 after the Mumbai train bombings in July the same year. While ambedkar.org (http://ambedkar.org/) is still live, it has not upgraded itself to adapt to the changes of web 2.0. Both these websites were intended for the purpose of advancing the cause of the rights of the Dalit community as a larger human rights issue on the world platform and are therefore information-intensive and primarily operate as memory institutions. These sites were intended to act as pressure points on Indian government and policy makers through their influence on the world community, more particularly through the clout they aspired to exercise on the

various governmental and non-governmental organisations in the international arena due to their vast archives on the Dalit community.

At the outset, one notices that these two websites are static in nature and display the same information to all the visitors, unlike dynamic websites that modify their content type to suit the particular need of a visitor. Visually not dissimilar to the printed pages of a book, these web pages together construct a meta-narrative of the Dalit history of oppression and exclusion in a pre-dominantly Hindu India. However, what is more relevant for our purpose is the proximity they share to the knowledge system underlying the modern print culture. For instance, both these websites are almost completely text dependent for articulation despite the web being a multi-media space. http://ambedkar.org/ uses icons only in the upper tab on the home page, and that is almost entirely all on this visually minimalistic platform. Dalitstan.org, on the other hand, functioned with more images and colours. For instance, in stark contrast to http://ambedkar.org/, dalitstan.org used a coloured layout for all its web pages. Every web page has a different combination of colours which accorded a varying degree of vibrancy to these pages and the content on them. In addition, there are two striking images that formed a part of the two sections entitled 'Ambedkar Library' and 'Sudra Holocaust Museum'. The first one comprises of a series of animations of burning fire that line the contents page on 'Ambedkar Library' (https://web.archive.org/web/20060426152604/http://www.dalitstan.org/books/). The next image is a fairly powerful set of visuals that combine a collection of human skulls, three animated images of burning fire and a man of African[42] descent who seems to be restrained against a wall by a contraption around his neck

[42] It is important to notice that the man under retrain in the image mentioned above is of African descent. This is a reference to the long tradition of racial identification of the Dalit community with the African races, particularly among the more radical sections of the Dalit thinkers and activists. Scholars like Phule and Periyar believed that the Dravidian race of India was closer to their African counterparts than the 'upper' caste Aryan invaders who entered the country at a much later date and overran the flourishing civilization of Harappa established by the now designated *shudras* and Dalits. This association is continued decades later in the Dalit Panther Movement of the 1970s that drew upon the Black Panther Movement of the African Americans for inspiration. In contemporary times, many Dalit activists and intellectuals such as Suraj Yengde not only fashion themselves on lines of African American styles of grooming but also draw upon the latter for intellectual support and community activism.

(https://web.archive.org/web/20060510134159/http://www.dalitstan.org/holocaust/). In terms of the organisation of the web page, the space occupied by the two images is very small, and although evocative, they are dwarfed by the arrangement of the textual content or resources around them.

This compelling reliance on the written word that overwhelms the expressive possibilities of the non-verbal medium betrays a language-dominated view of articulation where images, though potent and emotionally accessible, need to be buttressed by words for elucidation and precise delivery of the authorial message. The superseding authority of the written word was a corollary of the post-Enlightenment western world that endorsed a transparent relationship between objects and the words that 'named' them, thus conjoining the two in a utilitarian signifier-signified relationship that pared down communication to a reductively instrumental use of language. (Heidegger trans Hertz 1959; Foucault 1973) In this context, language is merely a representational tool in an epistemic system that demands its effacement in the advancement of 'truth' or 'knowledge'. Moreover, because there could be only one/ universal 'truth' or 'reality', the signifier-signified dyad increasingly became dissociated from its bearings in the material world and shifted into a self-sufficient system of auto-referentiality and meaning-making (Foucault 1973).

The two websites mentioned above gesture towards a similar role of language where the burden of communication and 'truth-telling' lies primarily on the linguistic tropes and structure of arguments rather than on an event or incident itself. The articles frequently use writing styles that are expository, argumentative, research-based or descriptive in nature for presentation of arguments and a careful crafting of its point of view. Consequently, it can be observed that most of the articles and documents that are written or linked on the two websites deploy satire, sarcasm, logical fallacies or empiricism to critique, satirise and debate social and political culture of the caste system in the most impersonal and rational style, thus clearly favouring the early modern idea of public sociability that was marked by a very deliberate erasure of the subjective or the private self from public spaces (Simmel 1949). There is little that can be considered as a personal, testimonial, auto observational or co-constructed narrative. As these two web sites also chronicle news related to caste atrocities, they function as part archives and part debating rooms—following a clear methodology of logically and systematically building their arguments and assertions with the help of a body of empirical facts, academic scholarship

and comparative analysis. Thus, epistemologically the web protocols of the two sites largely replicate the mind-body estrangement of the modern western knowledge system and its print culture that abstracts the 'reasoning' process from matter and situates it in the mental domain of methods and processes—linguistic and otherwise.

5.2 Print Protocols and Wikipedia

This overriding significance invested in the 'right' method and processes is clearly manifested in one of the longest enduring websites that continues to be extremely influential in introducing people to topics of general reference worldwide, namely, Wikipedia. It is relevant to include Wikipedia in the discussion at this point because not only does it embody some of the strongest protocols derived from the print culture and its institutional matrix, but also represents one of the better examples of an online platform that has seen concerted interventions by historically marginalised groups in recent years in re-calibrating the practices of its information generation and content management. Wikipedia was founded in 2001 and continues to define itself as an online encyclopaedia, thus indicating its provenance in the tradition of books that contained information on a vast array of subjects arranged in a pre-defined order. A careful perusal of its policies on content creation and curation indicates strong affiliations with the practices and principles of print and the relation the latter has to information, particularly in determining the 'reliability' of information. Wikipedia has three core policies on content (Wikipedia 2020, Core content policies), and all three of them directly or indirectly lead us to similar models of selection and rejection that are a part of the larger schema of defining 'proper' knowledge in the domain of print and its supporting institutional framework. The three core principles of policies on content in Wikipedia refer to (a) neutral point of view or NPOV, (b) verifiability and (c) no original research or NOR (Wikipedia 2020, Core content policies).

Wikipedia insists that its articles and encyclopaedic content must be written from a neutral point of view and must give a fair representation of the topic to the reader without any editorial bias. It has mandated that the policy of neutral point of view cannot be over-ridden by other policies, guidelines, or consensus among editors (Wikipedia 2020, Neutral Point of View). Neutrality on Wikipedia is established through a strict segregation of opinions and facts, use of non-judgemental language and by providing appropriate weightage to different positions

that exist on a particular entry (Wikipedia 2020, Neutral Point of View). This pursuit of NPOV as a necessary condition for editorial participation on Wikipedia replicates the affirmation of methods and procedures considered 'right' and scientifically rigorous for the knowledge base of the modern western print culture, both in the academia as well as in the print domain outside of it, thus perpetuating a philosophical consensus between the two technologies over their definition of 'truth'/ 'knowledge'. This becomes clearer on evaluation of Wikipedia entries as against personal blogs and social media content that—by definition—are deeply subjective in their tenor, vantage point and flavour. These forms of internet content are not intended to foreground neutrality of outlook or erasure of one's subjectivity for participation in online forums.

Similarly, the second fundamental tenet of content on Wikipedia asserts verifiability as the next crucial building block for content on the platform (Wikipedia 2020, Verifiability). The demands of verifiability relate to the source(s) of the claims made in an article and are achieved through inline citation or referencing. It is important to note that it is in its definition of 'good' sources that Wikipedia comes remarkably close to mirroring the western print culture as it staunchly re-iterates the latter's characterisation of 'legitimate' citations and references. Resting its faith in abstract procedures, 'objective' information, institutional mechanisms of creating expertise, and disembodied methodologies of knowledge formation in the academia and its allied institutions of scholarship such as the libraries, research and cultural institutions, museums, archives, government bodies and other established players of the print culture (for instance, the legacy media), Wikipedia perpetuates the epistemological inequality between institutional learning produced in the formal spaces of the universities and its cognates, and a wider-ranging but much more informal systems of knowledge produced in the everyday lives of individuals and communities. It is extremely telling that Wikipedia refuses to recognise personal blogs, most social media entries, internet forum posting and much else of cyber content (unless created by organisations with a reputation for fact-checking and accuracy) as 'verifiable', thus posing an irony of some magnitude. As stated by Nishant Shah in a short documentary titled *People are Knowledge*, Wikipedia is an internet form that does not necessarily accept internet objects as sources of verification (Prabhala 2011).

In addition, the design principle of Wikipedia and the types of engagement it encourages among its content creators as well as users is strongly evocative of the relationship print

technology has with its readers, with a few exceptions. Like most other Web 2.0 forms, Wikipedia too allows for participatory content creation that is user-led. However, it is identifiably distinct from social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Instagram that are algorithmically driven to encourage rapid, intellectually undemanding, impulsive, intuitive and largely automated responses to content. Using Daniel Kahneman's research on two distinct models of human thought processes that deploy two different systems of responses, authors Konrad Lischka and Christian Stocker argue that social media is fuelled by "System 1" of Kahneman's model (Lischka and Stocker 2018). "System 1" relies on the emotional, stereotypic and impulsive part of our mind that is extremely vulnerable to cognitive distortions, unlike "System 2" that is logical, vigilant, purposeful and consequently slower in its responses (ibid). They argue that the algorithmic processes of the social media platforms today are deliberately constructed to push the user towards "System 1" type of psychological responses to endlessly further user 'engagement'. This is enabled to a large extent by the design outlay of the social media platforms that use architectural elements of easy sharing, liking, commenting and other forms of micro-engagement or amplification that are simple, rapid and effortless. Thus, it is crucial to bear in mind that the design practices and choices of a platform are significant variables that mediate the relationship between users and information. The architecture of a platform acts as a structuring mechanism that not only provides access to information but also determines its shape, taxonomy and relevance (ibid). Design configurations are not 'transparent' mechanisms that merely 'enhance' user experience of a social website. They are devices intended to act as an additional coordinate fashioning a user's engagement with data to elicit responses that propel the cultural and economic imperatives of the ecology of social media.

5.3 Design Architecture and Meaning: Wikipedia vs Social Media

I have found it useful to analyse the propulsive energies of this media system through the very telling Twitter war that broke over Jack Dorsey (CEO, Twitter) and Vijaya Gadde's (legal, public policy and trust and safety lead at Twitter India) off-the-records meeting with seven women activists, writers and journalists in Delhi in mid-November 2018 to discuss the latter's experience of using Twitter and the challenges therein. The meeting ended with a group photograph, with Dorsey holding a poster that stated "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy". The poster was presented to Dorsey by Sanghapali Aruna, an anti-caste Dalit activist and Executive

Director of Project Mukti. Project Mukti is an incubator and start-up working primarily with women and children from Dalit, Bahujan and Adivasi communities to end caste, class and gender discrimination through education and learning-centred initiatives. This photograph was shared on Twitter India, and in no time there was an uproar on the platform. Jack Dorsey and the other participants in the meeting were accused of (among many other things) "Hinduphobia", "Brahminophobia", "anti-India bias", and of "inciting violence and hate against a minority [Brahmins] community" (https://twitter.com/TwitterIndia/status/1064523207800119296). The Twitter storm by the 'upper' caste Hindus escalated to the extent where the legal head of the company in India, Vijaya Gadde, had to issue an apology on the platform, stating that "[she was] very sorry for this. It's not reflective of our [Twitter India] views. We took a private photo with a gift just given to us — we should have been more thoughtful. Twitter strives to be an impartial platform for all. We failed to do that here & we must do better to serve our customers in India." (https://twitter.com/vijaya/status/1064593507136860161)

A lot of ink has been spent since then by the media (mostly digital but some print as well), on the merits and the demerits of the poster and the apology, and a rehearsal of those arguments here isn't relevant for my purpose. However, what is critical to note is the role that the platform itself (as a digital service with some inherent imperatives of its own) played in shaping this event in the way it developed. The design philosophy of any technological platform is crucial in channelling and shaping human emotional and intellectual energies that engage with it, which, in turn, are formed in the crucible of contesting socio-cultural identities in a geo-political space. Thus, in the present context, caste and gender become extremely relevant macro structures that permeate every 'bit' and 'code' of #SmashBrahminicalPatriarchy and its Twitter backlash. Twitter is a microblogging platform, and as such the "tweets" that its users can post at a time are limited (now) to 280 characters. It is meant to promote brief, quick and real-time messaging that is extremely spontaneous and non-deliberated. As stated by Jack Dorsey in an interview, the team that developed the platform liked the name 'Twitter' because it meant "a short burst of inconsequential information," and "chirps from birds" which they thought described the product accurately (LA Times 2009). Twitter was conceptualized as a short and rapid information-based service that could be used as a forum to update others about moments/ events/ experiences in one's life (the 'public', 'followers' or even selective Twitter handles, depending on one's preferences) and receive updates/ information from others that (mostly)

stays relevant only in the present. In addition, Twitter also captures the "trend" of a social or geographical (again, defined by user preference) 'space'. Twitter "trends" represent a word, a phrase or a topic that is mentioned more frequently than others, and thus indicates a subject or a theme that is witnessing maximum traction on the platform.

From the above description of the platform, it is easy to see that Twitter—like all digital social networks—relies on speed, spontaneity and scaling for its popularity and influence. Although Twitter can make information very easily and rapidly accessible in great volumes, its architecture is not designed to encourage lengthy, reflective and comprehensive assessment of a subject or a topic. This is not to advocate technological determinism of any kind, or to advance a position that overlooks the deliberate and motivated attempts on social networks by human actors to obfuscate and malign a 'trend' by knowingly distorting the intentions of a topic thread or the terms of its debate. The argument is limited to evaluating the conceptual and architectural aspects of these platforms that encourage a particular kind of cognitive and emotional response in the user that is reductive in comprehension and amplified in feelings. This is necessary to promote frequent and extended user engagement on the media platforms that, in turn, translates into commercial profits for these organisations.

Therefore, when the photograph with "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy" poster was posted on Twitter, the architecture and the nature of the platform participated in creating narrative paths to an emotive evaluation of the phrase by divesting it of its complexities of intersectional experiences of systemic oppression of gender and caste. The user-driven nature of social websites occasionally overwhelms a practitioner's/ specialist's use of a message or a phrase and reduces it to its simplest categories of thought and popular wisdom. #SmashBrahminicalPatriarchy as a social media trend and slogan points not only to Brahminism as a dominant value system of multiple gradations of privilege between different *jatis* based on the idea of purity and pollution, and patriarchy as a system of unequal power arrangement between genders, but it also uncovers the interdependence and inherent connectedness between the two as socio-cultural practices in India. As the presiding religious-cultural metanarrative of India, Brahmanism has dominated the social structures of knowledge and conduct of people and communities in the country for several centuries. The #SmashBrahminicalPatriarchy and the poster with that slogan is a battle-cry for dismantling

the structural and institutional bedrock of oppression of (principally) the Dalit women in the country that finds sustenance from the intersection of Brahminism and patriarchy in India.

However, the primarily 'upper' caste reaction to the "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy" poster trended strongly on Twitter due to its emotive evaluation that depends upon outrage for greater traction. The easy triggers for spontaneous, impulsive and immediate reaction to the post available on the platform in the form of microblogging features such as 'tweets', 're-tweets' and 'like' (the latter two require even lesser effort and time than taken in composing outrage in 280 characters) encouraged simplifications, cognitive imbalances and an endorsement of bigotry that a significant number of social media users hold on the multiple axels of caste, gender and political opinions in the country. It is social media events like these that starkly demonstrate the underlying values that determine the local 'face' of an international technology that is founded on the seemingly 'neutral', 'scientific' and 'modern' values of openness and egalitarianism, thus belying the 'universality' and 'constancy' of our conceptual categories such as technology and modernity. In India (as elsewhere), social media channels are co-constructed by the diverse impulses of technological modernity and its systems as fashioned by domestic circumstances, socio-economic structures of caste, gender, class, religion and economic production, and human emotions, desires and aspirations. The mutual influences of these multiple threads weave themselves (largely but not entirely) in historically identifiable patterns in our rich social tapestry, occasionally re-calibrating the fluid dynamics of its diverse elements of techno-social formations in ambiguous and uncertain configurations.

Therefore, for many 'apolitical' people on social networks, Brahminism seemed unfairly singled out for attack as the techno-social domain of India is principally 'upper' caste in nature. They insisted that since patriarchy exists in almost all the religious cultures of the world, it was partisan to name only Brahmanism. Several users took offense at a "foreigner" posing with a poster critical of a Hindu socio-religious tradition and dared him on his Twitter handle to perform similar gestures in other nations with a diversity of population groups with sensitive fault lines of religious and ethnic co-existence. Finally, there were many others who identified the members of the group invited to the meeting with Dorsey and Gadde as belonging to the ideological 'Left' that (for them) includes a motley crew of liberals, 'radical' Dalits and 'westernised' feminists, and trolled them bitterly for harbouring anti-India and anti-Hindu sentiments.

The above incident on Twitter is an excellent elucidation of the close relationship identified between technologies and our sensibilities. According to Laura Mandell, "Technologies provide models and means for subjective life…[I]ntersubjective processes…take place via cultural interface, print protocols, book design, and social networks…(Mandell 2009). New(er) or different technologies forge new(er) and historically different ways of engaging with our personal and collective environment—physical as well as virtual. Social websites have made it possible for everyone with a digital device and internet connection to have a voice in the cyberspace. However, the real time information blizzard on every screen not only makes it possible for, but encourages, the users to respond in real time with instant messages that prioritize verbal virtuosity or emotional outburst for greater reach. Additionally, its 'instant' character requires brevity in sharing data, which usually translates into fragmented or de-contextualized information circulating rapidly without necessary signposts on the social web.[43]

As another example, when the social media trends "Dalit Lives Matter" with examples of daily atrocities against the Dalits in the country, what stays fragmented and splintered across the web is the rich and comprehensive information infrastructure that uncovers the historic and systemic violence and devaluation of Dalit men and women that the Indian society has enabled through centuries. The 'presentism' of the social media platforms usually allows for two broad responses from the predominantly 'upper' caste users of the platform. On the one hand are those who see these atrocities as a "humanitarian" issue and fail to link the unrelenting spate of violence against the Dalit community with the larger institutional structures that systematize caste-based exploitation of the community. The Twitter handle @balwindEr_24 was retweeted several times for its tweet directed at the young *savarna*s who are 'woke' enough to associate themselves with the #DalitLivesMatter but do not identify the larger socio-political causes behind it for what it is (https://twitter.com/balwindEr_24/status/1341620073199386624). The

[43] Again, this is not to deny the existence of deliberate attempts at manipulation by the concerted efforts of interest groups to push up a conversation thread on Twitter by tweeting and re-tweeting the hashtag(s) associated with that particular thread, or to malign its intention by deliberately manufacturing outrage by its premise(s). However, my intention here is to concentrate on those mechanisms on the digital platforms that make certain kinds of behaviour possible without intentional manipulation by interest groups.

other group comprises of those users who do not credit caste or *jati* as an acceptable category of marginalization in any significant way anymore, and respond to the #DalitLivesMatter with advocating "All Lives Matter", thus flattening all socio-cultural identities into one undifferentiated, homogenous category of "life". Much like the #AllLivesMatter in the United States of America in response to #BlackLivesMatter, this group of people subscribe to a diverse range of ideologies, including those on the reactionary end of the political spectrum who refuse to accept the evidence for the structural liminality of the minority groups in contemporary times.

It is important to recognize that both the categories of the 'upper' caste social media users mentioned above (unconsciously or consciously) decontextualize and fragment powerful messages and slogans from their socio-political metanarratives in their engagement. While social networks have enabled the average person to debate and be socially vocal, it has at the same time truncated or made invisible the larger social and discursive co-ordinates of information and knowledge systems (particularly the ones that are related to social facts with formidable provenance and history) due to its design principles and values. Social networks were created to update experiences in real time—much like a live journal—and so there is an overwhelming bias in favour of 'here and now'. Thus, most users (who are mostly non-experts and/ or lack a 'situated' knowledge of a 'trending' topic because of their 'upper' caste background) are tempted strongly to respond to complex issue too without much delay due to the fear of 'missing out' or falling behind the moment. There is considerable irony in this situation as social facts and cultural contestations play out over a broad landscape of space and time. In this backdrop, the multiple short, diverse and fragmented conversations on micro content platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are like the intricate dance of digital fireflies that keep rearranging themselves into endless shifting patterns to illumine varying snippets in our social tapestry of caste and gender.

Going back to the initial example that this section had started with, the outrage against "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy" (in instances where it wasn't manipulated to paint the group that had met Dorsey for a private consultation session as yet another "left/ liberal" assault on the dignity and security of the Indian nation) also partially represented the same social media trajectory of de-contextualizing and splintering a statement from its original roots and intentions. Many *savarna* Twitterati read the statement as a provocation for assaulting

individuals of a particular community than a battle cry against the hegemonic social structure of caste and gender oppression. The popular discourse on social media—for reasons already mentioned above—tends to elide social phenomena from their larger political-cultural causes, and social actors from their collective, institutional roles and bearings. Thus, Brahminism was identified as a religious tradition with cultural implications only for Brahmins, and questions were raised about "Dalit Patriarchy" as a foil for "Brahminical Patriarchy". In addition, given that Brahmins numerically comprise a relatively small section of the Indian society, they were characterized as a "minority" community—and a victimized one at that—and comparisons made with the historical persecution of the Jews. This blithe assumption of "minority" status by an historically extremely privileged community is a complete overlooking of the overwhelming influence of Brahminism as a cultural-religious tradition in shaping the structural and normative regimes in the country till date. This position is made possible by the discursive erasure in the public sphere of the connection between social experiences and their inextricable interdependence on the larger cultural, social, economic and political forces that act as the anvil on which our experiences are forged. While social media is not the only (or even the first) media form that has allowed this abstraction to take place, it is certainly a medium that offers maximum leverage to this process as the conceptual principles and the architecture of the medium find an easy ally in the processes of simplification, brevity and presentism.

The theorists of postmodernism like Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Scott Lash and James Urry provide extremely useful insights for discerning the transformations that these social media platforms have brought about in our discursive spaces. Jameson asserts that postmodernism is the cultural condition of late capitalism, and one of its consequences is the creation of a 'new' type of society—variously labelled as a post-industrial society, consumer society, media society or information society (Jameson 1991). Similarly, Baudrillard (1994), and Lash and Urry (1994) point to the historic shift in human civilization from an age of industrial production to the age of 'signs' that now produce social meanings. Baudrillard calls this development "simulation" as the meaning created by these systems of signs has little or no relation to a reality outside of it (Baudrillard 1994). Lash and Urry (1994) reason that the very rapid circulation of objects in consumer capitalism renders them disposable, thus emptying them of their meaning. A profusion of such 'signifiers' that are drained of their points of

reference blitz the mental faculties of the receiver, further de-sensitizing him/ her to the 'signified' in this web of signifiers.

In the above context, the blitzkrieg of short, rapid, immensely mobile and very 'consumable' data that social networks churn out ceaselessly acts as a cognitive screen, refracting and scattering information and meaning as they circulate through the cyberspace. In addition, 'trends' and hashtags also operate as taxonomies, classifying and organizing data and texts into pre-determined templates of meaning or interpretation—intended or otherwise. Thus, social media 'events' often offer excellent examples of "simulation" as described by Baudrillard. To elucidate, the 'upper' caste backlash on Twitter against the photograph with the "Smash Brahmanical Patriarchy" poster held by Dorsey is an enduring tale of the manner in which that signifier (the poster) was reduced to "simulations" of a 'reality' that had very little material existence. Thus the "hate speech" directed at the "minority community" of Brahmins in India, reflecting "anti-Hindu" (https://twitter.com/TwitterIndia/status/1064523207800119296) sentiments of the human protagonists in the photograph corresponds accurately to a "hyperreality" (Baudrillard 1995) that has little equivalence in the social template that determined the matrix of significations that the photograph captured. Moreover, explanations were extended by at least two of the members in the group in the photograph, Sanghapali Aruna (on multiple online news portals) and Barkha Dutt (https://twitter.com/BDUTT/status/1064937341997858816), where they clarified that the phrase "Smash Brahminical Patriarchy" was a reference to the intersectional social structures of 'upper' caste hegemony and patriarchy, and not incitements for attacking individuals or groups from the Brahmin community. However, most of the tweets in response continued to refute the context provided by Dutt as the Twitter thread on the issue had firmly charted the (very different) ideological and symbolic map for interpreting the signals the picture had generated.

It is perhaps accurate to assess social websites, their products, and forms of engagements with them as outcomes of a postmodern society that has allowed commodification to supersede every aspect of life, including our ability to historicize events (Jameson 1991). Jameson's claim that the postmodern condition is marked by an obsession with the present makes the social websites such as Twitter, Instagram and Facebook products of postmodernity par excellence as their entire ecoculture and design philosophy is based on the celebration of the here and

now. The controversy surrounding the Twitter post with the "Smash Brahmanical Patriarchy" poster was more of a reflection of an online community that chose to reassemble the signifiers of the post into various moments that presented a montage of our present anxieties as a hegemonic 'upper' caste, Hindu patriarchy. As Jameson states, an erosion of our historicity "both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality…" leads to a "schizophrenic…breakdown of the signifying chain", thus leaving us with a string of distilled and discrete instances that exist only in the present (Jameson 1991, 27). This section of the chapter has endeavoured to delineate the platform ecosystem and the conceptual philosophy of the social media and the way in which they—as products of a highly competitive consumer economy of late capitalism—participate in the process of the enervation of the sense of historicity from the domain of the online 'public'. At the risk of repetition, it needs to be pointed out again that the emotive power of the "Smash Brahmanical Patriarchy" post drew sustenance from the elision (deliberate or otherwise) of the historical roots of the intersection of patriarchy in India with the caste system that established Brahmanism as the ruling ideology of the country for centuries, including the present one[44].

As a philosophy of social transformation, postmodernism has deeply affected the forms and the nature of the content on the world wide web, particularly Web 2.0. Much of the online content today, particularly in the form of blogs, videos, memes, posts on Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat or Instagram, and visualised content (including infographics) use narrative strategies that are quite different from the principles of writing employed in print from the Enlightenment onwards. Thus, there is a polyphony of perspectives, narrative voices, genres and content, all co-existing online as a challenge to the protocols of causality, linearity and a totalising universality of worldview. The plurality of structure and style of representation and utterances that decentre the authority of perspectives, voices and events are extremely crucial for the growing presence of the Dalit voices online and the challenge they are increasingly mounting today to the 'mainstream' narratives on issues of social and political contestations. However,

[44] This is not to claim that the caste system in India has remained an unchanging monolith since its inception and has not witnessed any readjustments in its values or the profile of its social beneficiaries over time. However, it is empirically true even today that the 'upper' castes in India continue to derive disproportionate social and cultural capital due to the ideological and material infrastructure of caste relations (among other social formations) that determines the system of power and privilege in the country.

this aspect of postmodernism and the Dalit presence on the web will be addressed a little later in the chapter.

This section had started off by examining Wikipedia and its relatively close links to print culture that is particularly evident in its core content policies which ensure a slower and a more deliberate response to its content by building in mechanisms for effort-intensive engagements within the platform. Like much of the internet in general, Wikipedia too works on the principle of decentring. Not only does it permit (theoretically) everyone to edit any content on Wikipedia, but it also allows for extensive cross referencing that, in principle, eliminates metanarratives that have traditionally centred discourses in absolute terms of references. Thus, in the classic spirit of postmodernism, Wikipedia is equipped to undercut a unified centre of authority or episteme due to its technological advantage. However, even a cursory examination of many of the Wikipedia articles reveal the failure of the platform to successfully implement its principles of collaborative knowledge management, particularly when it comes to information related to communities on the margins of social power and influence, such as the Dalits. The next section of the chapter will evaluate the nature of Dalits' engagement with Wikipedia, and the few interventions made by some Dalit individuals and organisations to make the platform more participatory and inclusive.

6. **Dalits and Technology Campaigns: Participatory Knowledge Creation**

It is an established fact now that Wikipedia is one of the most visited websites in the world, and receives over 1.7 billion unique visitors per month (Wikipedia 2021, Wikipedia). At the same time, it is also true that Wikipedia suffers from significant systemic biases of race, gender and class in terms of content creation and its management (Aruna et al 2018). According to Sanghapalli Aruna, around 20 percent of the world population (predominantly male and white) located primarily in North America and Europe creates, regulates and manages nearly 80 percent of the data available on Wikipedia (ibid, 10). Given that the platform is the most popular free resource for preliminary introduction to a subject, it isn't very surprising that the information on Wikipedia finds uncritical acceptance and wider circulation on other forums as well. This is equally true of the discourse that exists on Wikipedia about the Dalit communities, their history and culture.

6.1 Wikipedia Edit-a-thons: Locating Dalits as Epistemic Agents

Most of the knowledge that existed on Wikipedia on Dalits prior to concerted interventions by members from the community in the form of edit-a-thons starting in 2015, had minimal participation from the members and editors from the community itself. However, things changed somewhat for the better in 2015 when digital campaigns and organisations like Whose Knowledge?, Equality Labs, Project Mukti and the Dalit History Month joined forces to assess and transform the nature of knowledge that existed (or did not exist) on Wikipedia about the community, its place in national history and its icons.

Members of the community who participated actively in organising and executing the edit-a-thons like Sanghapali Aruna, Maari Zwick-Maitreyi and Thenmozhi Soundararajan come from a diverse geographic background, and self-identify as Dalits. While Sanghapali Aruna was born and bred in India, Maari Zwick-Maitreyi and Thenmozhi Soundararajan belong to the Dalit diaspora from the United States of America. Aruna is the Executive Director of Project Mukti and works with the Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi and Muslim communities for expanding digital literacy within these communities. Zwick-Maitreyi and Soundararajan are associated with the Equality Labs as Research Director and Executive Director, respectively. Equality Labs is a "South Asian technology organization dedicated to ending caste apartheid, gender-based violence, Islamophobia, white supremacy and religious intolerance" (Equality Labs 2021). When the three women with a team of volunteers tried to modify and add articles related to the Dalit community and their contributions to national history on Wikipedia, they were met with strong resistance from the 'gatekeepers' (mostly *savarna* men) of articles on South Asia. This experience—in many ways—replicated the patterns of exclusion and marginalisation faced by the Dalit community in the dominant historiographical practices of the country (Aruna et al 2018). They were charged with promoting 'caste' as a category of exaggerated relevance on an international platform and accused of "activism" on Wikipedia. Even the most orthodox of published sources mentioned by the Dalit editors were challenged by the 'upper' caste editors, while most of the references derived from non-traditional systems of knowledge like oral or folk cultures were dismissed instantaneously (ibid). It took immense concerted effort and collaborated pushbacks by the team of Dalit editors and their Wikipedia allies to eventually succeed in editing over 250 articles, adding 30 new write-ups and 45 new images on the online encyclopaedia (ibid 13).

The above episode is yet another instance of different philosophies of knowledge in contestation with each other. The existing knowledge on Wikipedia on the Dalit community rooted itself in the episteme of the Western Enlightenment and the scientific revolution that preceded it, along with a substructure of values animated by caste-based transactions in social and cultural capital between communities. The knowledge produced in the edit-a-thons by the members of the Dalit community derived from the insights of the theory and praxis of decolonising knowledge and their establishments. Thus, the episteme and the information matrix they advocated placed people and their embodied knowledge at the centre of the narrative, as against institutionally determined and disembodied scholarship. For instance, one of the most contentious issues related to referencing of sources and citations. Wikipedia's policy on verifiability mandates the inclusion of only those resources that are validated by the established scholarly tradition of academics or the mainstream publications. However, as stated by Aruna and others, much of the knowledge produced by the marginal communities lie outside the hierarchies of formal knowledge systems (Aruna et al 2018). These are practical/ experiential knowledge that are mostly inscribed in the minds and the bodies of the people, but also occasionally in their private libraries, local newspapers, community sites and personal blogs. It is here that the world wide web has proven to be a crucial 'space' for the Dalit community as it has provided them with resources for accumulating and disseminating community knowledge through various multimedia forms, thus challenging the traditional protocols of generating and managing information and accomplishments. However, the tussle with established Wikipedia editors to provide acceptability to the traditional knowledge of the community, or to the 'archive' constituted by the oral records, audio content, videos, personal blogs, websites and non-peer reviewed articles indicate a deep-seated bias in favour documentation and record keeping that privilege institutional processes and disembodied scholarship over people and their corporeal episteme.

Wikipedia's reluctance to accept this turn towards the corporeal in knowledge practices is perhaps best reflected in its definition of 'notability'. Notability is an important criterion for determining if a person or subject should merit an independent page on the platform. The online encyclopaedia clearly mentions that 'notability' is not evaluated by popularity, fame or importance of the subject under consideration. Instead, 'notability' is gauged on the scale of existing secondary coverage in "reliable resources" that must be independent of the subject

itself (Wikipedia 2021, Notability). This is a fine example of the effacement of the corporeal existence of a person in favour of a trail of publication that must authenticate her/ his experiences and accomplishments. The refraction of knowledge from the material body of its producer to a 'body' of 'texts' that institutionalise and validate it is at the core of this epistemic contestation played out on Wikipedia. Additionally, this terrain is not merely two dimensional in character but is also riven with crossways of multiple social identities that calibrate an individual's or a community's proximity to either of the two epistemes (and its world view) at any given moment in history. Thus, for a community such as the Dalits, the disadvantage of being on the thresholds of the written traditions of the country has translated into a textual invisibility that often slips into an absence of "notability" on forums such as Wikipedia.

For instance, citing the example of Grace Banu, the first Dalit transgender person to get admission into an engineering college in Tamil Nadu, Anasuya Sengupta, Siko Bouterse and Kira Allmann write that it was an immense challenge to not just get her story on Wikipedia but also to ensure that it stayed on (Sengupta et al 2018). The page on Grace Banu was marked for deletion several times as she wasn't considered notable enough to merit an article on Wikipedia. The unfortunate rarity of her achievement as the first Transgender Dalit in entering the hallowed portals of an engineering college truly set a milestone for the community, but for many established Wikipedia editors, her way into the digital pages of Wikipedia had to be routed through formal and official portals of record-keeping and documentation.

The above example also delineates very evocatively the constant delicate balance that technology and human value systems must negotiate between themselves to develop better indices of utility and inclusion. The technological infrastructure of Wikipedia (as well as other internet forms) finds it easier to deploy quantitative measures of determining relevance and notability—such as the number of references and citations, or the identification of a set of 'trustworthy' resources that can be matched against the inputs. Qualitative measures that require a much more nuanced comprehension of 'notability' by establishing multiple contexts, appropriate contextualization, range of perspectives and sensitivity to existing power relationships in society is significantly difficult for machine intelligence to achieve. Although Wikipedia has a significant space for its human participants, it too depends extensively on quantitative or statistical/ databased measures in its fundamental architecture and philosophy. It is here that the role of the human intermediary becomes crucial. Wikipedia has a huge number

of volunteers who not only create content but also manage and monitor the content created by others. However, it is important to recognize that people's relationship with information is always mediated by their subjective location in social processes and thus the widest possible participation and access is required to allow for improved knowledge generation and archival practices. Therefore, the interventions by digital movements and organizations such as Whose Knowledge?, Project Mukti, Dalit History Month and Equality Labs have been noteworthy for their attempts to place the experiences and writings of the members of the Dalit community in a body of knowledge that existed so far without their editorial influence.

This study on Wikipedia and its relationship with the knowledge of the Dalit community (and other marginalized communities as well) would be lacking if it did not address the design architecture of the platform. The principles of knowledge mapping employed by Wikipedia has several problematic objectives that limit the full range of justice to the epistemic practices of the community. A major disability in the platform design can be identified in Wikipedia's mandate of limiting every topic to its one authoritative version. While as an encyclopedia one can understand the platform's insistence on having just one article on every subject, as a philosophy of knowledge this principle fails to honour the plurality of contexts, social actors and epistemic sites that constitute a knowledge field. The formal and rigid structures of the design of the platform impose an absolutist and totalizing template on the narrative, thus inhibiting the multiple resonances of the account. Citing Rohith Vemula and Delta Meghwal, Aruna and Maitreyi mention that according to the rules of Wikipedia, if a person is categorized as 'notable' because of her/ his demise, then the article on that person on Wikipedia would be titled on her/ his death and not on her/ his life (Aruna et al 2018). The two women argue that this insistence of the platform on fixing 'notability' by one moment in the life of a person does disservice to the richness and breadth of her spirit, struggle and calibre (ibid). Moreover, it replicates the legacy media's uncritical representation of the Dalits as merely victims of atrocities rather than as individuals who led lives full of ideas, defiance and determination. It is a diminution of not just their personhood but also a disguising of the social infrastructural regimes that allow these deaths to happen with a depressing regularity. The lives of Delta Meghwal and Rohith Vemula were a testimony to the relentless strife against these oppressive forces, and their deaths a moment in that trajectory. However, the design of the Wikipedia articles—with their insistence on only one authoritative version where the theme of the narrative is pre-determined by the platform's inflexible constants of 'notability' (death, in these

two cases)—belie these rich associations with the lives (as well as the deaths) of the two young people.

Similarly, design also plays a significant part in framing knowledge as coherent systems with their own structures of approaches and methods. Given that the template of Wikipedia is overwhelmingly derived from the protocols of the post-Enlightenment print culture, it is a challenge for the platform to accommodate elements that sit outside that domain. For instance, even a cursory look at the main page of Wikipedia on 'Dalit' reveals some crucial clues about the way the former 'maps' its knowledge of the community (Wikipedia 2021, Dalit). The online encyclopedia categorizes information under certain heads such as "history", "demographics", "social status", "economic status", "discrimination". "religion", "political involvement", "literature", "notable people", and a few others. All these categories of classification represent meta-narratives of our knowledge regimes. The architecture of the information that exists on Wikipedia on Dalits not just 'represents' but in effect 're-presents' and re-imagines the community's episteme on a different footing from their lived experiences. The map of the knowledge system of the Dalit community on Wikipedia does not provide a complete or an exhaustive sample of the range of the narratives that the community has created around its experiences. Wikipedia largely eliminates examples of personal knowledge recorded (as blogs, oral narratives, articles and even micro content) by members of the community. This extremely vibrant, expressive and accessible genre of narrative robustly places itself as a rich and multivalent resource that dives into the intimate experiences of the people to weave an intricate matrix of meaning and values that act as foils to the meta-narratives that institutions and agencies create. By exiling certain forms of experiences or by de-recognizing some stories, the design philosophy of a platform can splinter, de-legitimize and diminish a body of knowledge.

6.2 Participatory Knowledge and Dalit Managed Websites: Dalit Camera

To illustrate the above argument further, it is useful to compare one of the most visited websites curated and managed by the members of the community—Dalit Camera. Dalit Camera has a dedicated YouTube page as well as a website that mostly archives the written word or still images by the members of the Dalit community. For the purpose of comparison, this section would limit itself to the website of Dalit Camera. The home page of the website lists the articles seemingly without any principle of organization in the foreground. The right

corner of the page has a small button that lists categories, if the reader so wishes. The categories mentioned are extremely diverse and evocative, and include heads such as “Appeal”, “Crowd funding”, “Features”, “Lyrics”, “Personal Stories”, “Petitions”, “Photo Essay” and “The Anti Caste Art Project”, among others. Unlike Wikipedia, the categories mentioned here are accommodative of a range of personal experiences as well as emotional and aesthetic impulses and are not just abstract taxonomies of knowledge systems. By doing so, Dalit Camera allows for presenting a more wholistic and consistent picture of the Dalit episteme where personal narratives and passionate art is not elided and expunged in favour of grand historical narratives or master categories of social experiences. The content here is fluid, multi-layered and allows for routine and steady exchanges between personal insights and wisdom with the knowledge systems of the world and the community.

For instance, Dalit Camera has at least three personal narratives that reminiscence about the culinary practices in their childhood homes. The first one titled “Peeling Onions; Or, to be Dalit, and Eat” is by Rahee Punyashloka, who is a writer, artist, researcher, and filmmaker from Bhubaneswar, Odisha (Dalit Camera 2020, Peeling Onions). The second post is “Aloe Vera Halwa and other Back Breaking Recipes to Fix the Broken Women in Your House” by Aatika Singh, who is an editor and lawyer (Dalit Camera 2020, Aloe Vera Halwa). The final blog is by Tarjanee Parmar, an MA student of Comparative Literature at Western University, Canada, and her narrative is titled “Between love, longing and resistance: Dalit food and women’s agency” (Dalit Camera 2020, Between Love). All three writers look back to their childhood to recall the relationship their families had to certain items of food or culinary skills, and the value that practice had for the members of their community. Both Punyashloka and Parmar talk about financial hardships and the nourishment their food practices provided to their families and communities. Singh, too, paints a picture of a difficult early family life where the entire family managed in a one-bedroom house, but interestingly, her memories of aloe vera *halwa* do not elicit satisfaction or longing.

The stories of the three writers are more than a trip down the memory lane—these are personal as well as community histories, with the added complexities of class, profession, memories and gender. For instance, both the women are acutely sensitive to the central role that the Dalit women have played in the welfare of the family (and the community) through their domestic labour—particularly in the kitchen. Parmar mentions certain types of meat

(largely offal) that were once consumed by her grandmother out of penury, and her mother (who was economically better off) due to her appreciation for its taste. She sees her mother's act of buying and preparing offal as an act of defiance against the *Brahminization* of family habits due to increasing prosperity and the patriarchal disapproval of a woman's presence in a butcher's shop. Singh, on the other hand, places her grandfather at the centre of the preparation of the aloe vera *halwa*, and deploys her distaste for the 'delicacy' as well as the entire experience during its preparation to highlight the unrelenting disregard for and disrespect of women and their labour in the family. The very occasional and 'ritualised' preparation of the aloe vera *halwa* by her grandfather is a constant reminder to her of the unacknowledged drudgery of cooking for the women in her life, including her mother. Singh's palpable anger and disgust at Dalit men who are contemptuous of the very existence of the women in their lives is a powerful inditement of the discursive solidarity that is sought to be presented between genders in the 'official' accounts of the anti-caste movements. These non-official archives of personal stories and reminiscences, with their diversity of opinions and ambiguities of feelings, hold as much value—if not more—as the official narratives of the established structures of knowledge.

In the above context, it is extremely interesting to note that although Punyashloka's account also has to do with the culinary history of the Dalit community of the fisherfolks of Orissa—particularly their range and breadth in the preparation of onions and scallions—women are completely absent from his narrative. The three most important pillars of his story are grandfathers, fathers, and sons. The onions (that would be cooked in myriad forms and combinations by women (mostly) in every household) are finally a metaphor for him for a difficult choice between the contesting ontologies of the grandfathers and the fathers vis-à-vis the burden of their community's painful history. Although his narrative is a poignant tale of the vibrant Dalit traditions of food and culture missing from the 'national' archives curated by the dominant and the powerful, it is guilty of a similar injustice in its complete overlooking of the Dalit women whose (invisible) labour would have been the primary vehicle of creating the culinary culture he delights in.

Personal stories, in all their generic diversities, are therefore extremely potent forms of knowledge about communities and cultures. Internet forms like Wikipedia that do not provide adequate space to the local, micro stories of intimate histories of people and their relationships

(either due to their ideological commitment to a hierarchy of knowledge forms or due to the architecture of the platform that curtails polyphony of perspectives, frames of references or contexts) perpetuate status-quoists principles of knowledge, or splinter its body, thus rendering it (and the community) broken and piecemeal. Websites like Dalit Camera and Dalit History Month (among several others) are an attempt to challenge these post-western Enlightenment ideas of 'objectivity' and 'truth' in our mainstream knowledge systems (both online and offline) by asserting equal credibility of heterogenous sources. As a philosophy of knowledge, these attempts at establishing uniform authority for diverse types of information—historical, folkloric, scientific, testimonial, statistical, intuitive, reportage, autobiographical etc—derive from several theoretical traditions mid-twentieth century onwards. However, for the purpose of the following section of the chapter, I will limit its debt to two systems of social analysis that are particularly apt for evaluating the cyberspace as an information system and social terrain—Deep mapping and Performance Studies. Both Deep mapping and Performance Studies are methodologies as well as philosophical approaches to structures of knowledge production. They also collaborate well in the grid of the world wide web as Deep mapping too privileges a performance-oriented understanding of a site where a multivocal, non-linear, cross-referential and equitable interaction between its many layers of existence is encouraged. Both cut across disciplinary, epistemological and methodological boundaries to produce new(er) patterns of cognition, social actions and interventions. It is my contention that this process is enabled better by the various modes of articulations made possible by the internet when we abandon its print-based bias to embrace its extra-textual possibilities. Thus, drawing upon the works of Norman K Denzin and Dwight Conquergood on performance and culture, particularly the assertion of the former that "the world is a performance, not a text" (Denzin 2003), the following section claims that the internet too is a performance, and not a text.

7. Caste, Performativity and the Internet

Unlike the medium of the print that is heavily text-centric, the world wide web in its current form (Web 2.0) facilitates the experiential and embodied Dalit knowledge in forms that the protocols of a print culture could not. Deep mapping and Performance studies expand the ontology of knowledge to foreground the overwhelming quantum of human wisdom that resides outside the textual traditions, and in our bodies, our material existence and deeds (Hastrup 1995; Meyer 2013; Hokowhitu 2014). Corporeality, cross-referentiality, infraction of

knowledge forms, and the undermining of the hegemony of words are crucial for the praxis of both the disciplinary systems. Another defining characteristic of performativity in social behaviour is the context-specific stylized repetition of acts that transform the social actor into a cultural sign sculpted in the atelier of history (Goffman 1959; Schechner 1976; Butler 1988). Since the illocutionary utterances (Austin 1975) and embodied actions of social actors reflect cultural know-how, agency and engagement, any discontinuity or defiance therein is potentially anti-structure in its transgression of established patterns of social conduct (Schechner 1976; Butler 1988). However, the digital platforms add an additional dimension to performative practices, thus significantly affecting social processes in contemporary times. Defining digital cultures as a "performative culture", Martina Leeker, Imanuel Schipper and Timon Beyes (2017) claim that the former "condition and are shaped by techno-social processes and agencies, and they afford new possibilities for performative practices and interventions…the study of performativity in its heterogeneous dimensions cannot afford to ignore the agential forces and effects of digital technologies and their entanglements with human bodies" (Leeker et al 2017; 9).

An extremely pertinent instance of the above relates to the bitter polemics created by the List of Sexual Harassers in Academia (hereon referred to as the list or LoSHA) compiled and eventually published on Facebook by Raya Sarkar, a young Dalit law student at UC Davis School of Law (United States of America) in 2017 (Wikipedia 2019, LoSHA). While this event exposed (yet again) multiple fault lines in the academic and cultural substructure of the country (and its diaspora), the following pages would concentrate particularly on the disabilities of caste and gender as they played themselves out in the discursive terrain of the online media in the wake of LoSHA. It is vital to note that this section is devoted to the exploration of the manner and the terms in which this 'exposè' unraveled on the digital platforms of the internet, and not with the debates and measures beyond that. For this reason, it is also crucial to recognize how and why caste became a significant descriptive category despite the fiercely protected anonymity of the identities of the accusers by Sarkar. For a brief while, caste as a category of oppression superseded other dimensions of the debate, and the polemics around it was sharp and recriminatory[45].

[45] At this juncture, it is critical to clarify that caste as an identity is inherently pivotal to any deliberations on gender politics in the country as the ranking order of the *jatis* participates in calibrating social vulnerability for gender violence as well. For this reason, most participants in the online altercation who

The war of words (and ideologies) was triggered by Sarkar's online publication of a crowdsourced list of sexual harassers in the academic spaces in India as well as abroad. Sarkar's list contained names of some of the most reputed Indian male scholars in the country or in western academic spaces; and mostly from the fields of social sciences and humanities. The list only mentioned the names of these men, and in some cases (fifteen of them) the nature of accusations against them, without providing any concrete instances of the events, occasions or details to substantiate these charges. Sarkar also staunchly kept the names and the identities of the accusers anonymous to safeguard their professional and emotional wellbeing, clarifying however that she had privately collected rigorous evidence from the accusers to be able to compile the list (Menon 2017). Within a few days of the list being widely circulated on social media, a group of twelve women academics and longstanding feminists released a statement on Kafila (a team blog), expressing their distress at the list that sought to anonymously 'name and shame' men on a public platform for allegations made against them without following "due process" (ibid). Very soon social media platforms, particularly Twitter and Facebook, exploded with responses to the Statement; and the group of women responsible for it were accused of—among other things—displaying caste solidarity in defending the misdeeds of "their" men named in the list. They were also charged with using their influence as "*savarna* feminists" to

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insisted on the relevance of caste for LoSHA (even by its absence through any reference) had a more nuanced appreciation of caste dynamics in institutional spaces and the power structures therein. This is not to claim that those who denied the relevance of caste identity for LoSHA do not comprehend the operations of caste marginalities in the academia or related spaces. However, it does seem to me that by arguing for the irrelevance of caste as a factor in the case of LoSHA, these participants failed to credit in this particular case the complex—and many a times the invisible—manner in which our choices (conscious or unconscious) function in the matrix of social forces. Therefore, while caste may not have figured as a conscious category in 'choice' of the victims of alleged harassments, caste does determine the nature and the culture of all our institutional spaces and much of their inter-personal relationships. In fact, even the absence of Dalit victims or Dalit perpetrators of the alleged misconduct from LoSHA is a telling comment on caste and its continuing existence in all our social processes. Finally, it is important to identify the mark of caste in gender violence through not only the physique of the victims but also equally through the bodies of the perpetrators. The overwhelming inclusion of *savarna* men in this list is a powerful statement on the intersection of caste privilege and patriarchy that embodies itself powerfully in the 'upper' caste male body—a figure of enviable social privilege.

discipline and silence the *Dalit-Bahujan-Adivasi* (DBA) feminists by attempting to police them about proper tone and conduct to trauma (ibid).

This long-drawn-out exchange online among several social media users (including those directly involved in the episode) led to several legitimate questions on social marginalities, harassment, procedures, institutional responsibilities, political solidarities and hegemonic discourses, but it is not the endeavour of this chapter to investigate those subjects here. This part of the chapter attempts to analyze digital technology's interventions into social processes through the above example in order to identify newer patterns of instrumentality between the self and institutions, bodies and systems of power, and experience and knowledge. The paradigm of Performance studies is an especially useful interpretative matrix for the above exercise as it brings together the multifunctional regimes of technology and humans, the predictable and the unpredictable, as well as analysis and activity on a common semantic plane. In the above instance, the outcomes of the interplay between the imperatives of technological platforms with social practices were partly responsible for the strident disagreement between the two groups over processes and possibilities. Although members on both sides of the disagreement used social media effectively to argue for their position and contest that of their antagonists, yet the terms of the debate were vastly different. While the pro-list faction foregrounded the inadequacy of the institutional and procedural measures for resolving matters of harassment and exploitation, particularly when it came to DBA women, the anti-list group rested its faith principally in "due process" (and by implication, in the institutional measures)—however tenuous its record may have been at fair play so far. This, I believe, is a crucial clue to the vastly different categories of subjectivity, agency, resistance and episteme that the two groups contested over. It is my contention that while the anti-list group of women and men continued to define these systems independent of digital objects and their operations, the supporters of LoSHA were powerfully shaped by the techno-social structures of cultural, political and epistemic practices.

A close reading of some of the most exhaustive and articulate critique of the list by scholars and activists such as Nivedita Menon, Kavita Krishnan, Debaditya Bhattacharya and Rina Ramdev points to a few recurring tropes that relate to some of the most contested categories of the information infrastructure of a society. For instance, Menon cautions against a romanticization of "'rumour and gossip' networks among women" in the light of Raya Sarkar's

statement that the list was meant as a "cautionary" measure and not for initiating any institutional action against the men named on it (Menon 2019). While acknowledging the utility of 'whisper networks' and informal channels of communication in possibly alerting new members of the group against known sexual predators, Menon advocates for greater faith in a feminist collective that can confront and subdue harassers. However, it isn't quite accurate to extend the idea and experience of a 'whisper network' in physical organisations and institutions to online spaces in unmodified forms. The digital platform of the internet transforms the range and scope of 'whisper networks' in its new environment to suit the material contingencies of the world wide web, thus re-configuring its protocols for a scheme of digital performativity. Offline 'whisper networks' are usually small, contained channels of personal, informal, intimate and experiential wisdom that often enable an individual to practically negotiate her safety and survival in hostile spaces. When this 'whisper network' is brought to bear on the internet, it morphs in range and scope to *re*-enact yet modify the social codes pulsing through its myriad threads. The world wide web amplifies the reach and influence of the 'whisper network' to a degree where it allows for newer possibilities of cognition and social action. Raya Sarkar deployed the power of crowd sourcing on the web to collect information about perpetrators of sexual misconduct in the academia. She states that she posted a status update on Facebook, inviting survivors of sexual harassment to share their stories of abuse with her. Once contacted, she followed up with requests for interviews, oral testimonies, documented evidence in the form of emails, texts and video recordings to verify the allegations. She also talked to witnesses—whenever possible—to ensure accuracy of the claims made, and finally compiled a list of the names of the alleged harassers in the form of a spreadsheet (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhMOgUXJWho).

It is imperative to recall that although Sarkar might have derived her idea of the list from the traditional offline 'whisper networks' of women, its online release transformed its information infrastructure significantly. It ceased being a private, closely guarded system of knowledge about a 'local community' and turned into an expansive ground for potentially endless replication and amplification of data throughout the cyberspace. Thus, LoSHA was a performative palimpsest of a 'whisper network' which assumed the features of a vast techno-social platform of collaborative knowledge management system with a single administrator. In addition, the list and its ecology (including the range of opinions, attitude and narratives that surrounded its online existence) mark an important intervention in defining the philosophical

trajectory of 'truth'/ knowledge on the internet. Sarkar's list of sexual harassers in the academia used the informal, unofficial modes of information such as testimonials, memories, reportage, interviews, auto-observation and personal narratives to build a body of 'practical' or 'useful' knowledge that not only privileged the embodied experiences of a large number of women in academic spaces but also—by the same gesture—closed the distance between analysis and action. The list is not merely an interpretative exercise of a social fact, it is a practical 'tool' to safely traverse the oft-treacherous terrains of our legacy institutions. LoSHA therefore remains an enduring example of digital performativity as it succeeded in finding the required agency through techno-social processes to challenge entrenched structures of mediations in transactions of gender and caste power, be they discursive, cultural or social.

It should be noted that most of the feminist detractors of the list too did not outright challenge the claims of veracity of the allegations. However, the most pertinent and oft-repeated rejoinder that was offered related to the idea of "due process", which is not always necessarily equivalent to the legal mechanisms of the police system or the courts. Many, including Menon, pointed out to smaller, more accessible but institutionally recognized mechanisms such as the (now dissolved) GSCASH (Gender Sensitization Committee against Sexual Harassment) in Jawaharlal Nehru University (Menon 2017, *From Feminazi*). The urge to route the assertions of experiences through the mechanisms of formal associations that (usually) have explicitly stated goals is a leitmotif that sharply pitted the two sides in this debate. Crucially, the supporters of LoSHA unremittingly kept the non-*savarna* and transgender body of the curator of the list at the centre of the debate. Sarkar's corporeal presence (and to a lesser degree, the imagined 'bodies' of the crowdsourced victims) was the looming prism through which the episteme and ontology of the *savarna* feminists' response to the list were examined and denounced. Thus, while the anti-list group seemed to be gesturing towards using institutions as filters for comprehending the embodied narratives of the victims, the supporters of Sarkar were committed to privileging the raw, institutionally unprocessed and (therefore) transgressive embodied 'intelligence' of the women paradoxically 'present' (through their very absence) on the list.

Interestingly, this digital performance is also a rehearsal of the usual lag between the emergent and the dominant in social and cultural processes (Williams 1977). In the still-emerging digital cultures of the world, dominant institutions are being variously tested and

challenged due to the emerging patterns of social and political interactions that are strongly inflected by the powerful ICT technologies. International digital networks such as the internet are offering unorthodox ways of engaging with social institutions and forcing unpredictable outcomes from these encounters, and LoSHA is one such example. In this context, it is pertinent to revisit the anti-list faction's insistence on some form of institutional processes in their desire for "due process". A more conventional understanding of institutions sees it as a necessary factor for resources, skill sets, ideas and co-ordination. However, institutions are pre-arranged structures that are inherently hierarchical and therefore only (at best) moderately inclusive. They are a combination of physical infrastructure and cultural systems, and thus mediate and regulate the fabric of relationships between its various parts. For this reason, it is not surprising that many individuals and communities have had chequered relationships with traditional institutions and their "due process".

The internet, on the other hand, has made collaborations possible through other means, thereby minimizing many of the limitations of offline institutions. It has embedded co-operation in the social infrastructure of the internet through means such as tagging, sharing, social media threads, mailing lists, online spreadsheets etc. to generate resources, ideas and support. However, as mentioned by Clay Shirky, a scholar of internet technologies, an exceedingly small percentage of people contribute to majority of the content created on it (Shirky 2005). As an example of an "unconstrained social system" (ibid), the internet allows for immense flexibility in participation and collaboration. Thus, it is perhaps not an overreach to argue that the different expectations of the two camps vis-à-vis the nature of collaboration in LoSHA broadly reflect the rubrics of social performance enabled by their contextual and material contingencies. Increasingly, the lifeworld of younger, urban or transnational, highly educated, and economically secure Dalit men and women is invested with digital processes for personal as well as public enactments of engagements. Digital campaigns are extremely good instances of these as they function almost exclusively through online participation. Dalit History Month is one such successful endeavour that attempts to educate the Dalit community (and others) in the rich and vibrant history of the people from the Dalit *jatis*. While Dalit History Month is celebrated offline in small groups throughout the month of April in several places in India and abroad, the definite influence of the campaign lies in its online avatar at its dedicated webpage http://www.tiki-toki.com/timeline/entry/423929/Dalit-History-Month/, Facebook page and Twitter timeline. By establishing a collaborative network of people across

the world who can contribute information to an ever-expanding database on the past and the present of the community, the campaign acts as an alternative to dominant cultural institutions and academic spaces that offer extremely limited windows to the trials and triumphs of nearly one-fifth of the Indian population. It is therefore not too much of an overstatement to claim that the collaborative nature of the internet and the possibilities created therein has subtly transformed attitudes to institutional forms of engagements, more so when they are perceived as indifferent or ineffective.

Finally, it is extremely useful to examine the nature of shortcomings identified in 'naming and shaming' by the list and other developments online in its aftermath by at least two of its significant critics, Kavita Krishnan and Nivedita Menon. Krishnan in her tweets (https://twitter.com/kavita_krishnan/status/1049642744392617984) and Menon in more than one article stated that Raya Sarkar had initially claimed to be Dalit but later backtracked (The Wire 2019, Feminist Conversation). Menon writes:

> Raya Sarkar has now deleted posts claiming Dalit identity, and has come out with posts saying they is Buddhist, Ambedkarite and a follower of Savitribhai Phule. All of these are chosen/political positions, not derived from the caste into which one is born, and available to all savarnas if they are available to Raya. Simply put, they was lying about being Dalit (Raiot 2018, Academically Transmitted).

Similarly, she goes on to point out to other 'inconsistencies' in Sarkar's Facebook posts on the issue. She cites a post where Sarkar urges victims of sexual harassment to bypass Internal Complaints Committees (ICC) of their respective organisations and directly lodge FIRs with the police. She also encourages the victims to approach *savarna* feminists for help, and in case of any instance of rape apologia by them, to contact her (Sarkar) for assistance (Menon 2017, *From Feminazi*). Menon reads Raya Sarkar's post on Facebook as an example of not just destroying trust in feminist politics for foreseeable future, but also remarkable for its unexpected and erratic leap from anonymously 'naming and shaming' online to approaching the police and the courts for formal complaints against sexual harassment.

Menon and Krishnan's critique of this social media event from the moment of release of the list in the cyberspace till the #MeToo movement in India in late 2018 was based on

expectations of consistency with and conformity to the largely accepted patterns of gender struggles (in relation with other intersectional identities) in the mainstream Indian society—much of it spearheaded by the sustained intellectual and physical labours of the renowned feminist scholars and activists who had signed the initial Statement on Kafila against LoSHA. The list and the subsequent online battle of ideas eluded conformity to neatly established socio-political templates, despite mimicking some of their broad patterns. The inadequacy of the hermeneutical model deployed by the anti-LoSHA faction is evident by their non-sympathetic 'reading' of the 'unruly' and 'dangerous' message of the list. Moreover, the anti-list group of feminists overlooked the true semiotic implications of the event as it unfolded in cyberspace over time. The often exaggerated, heightened and fairly stylized verbal attacks by the DBA feminists directed at the *savarna* academics and activists in the form of bitter criticism, name-calling and strong denouncements point to the tropes of social and political performativity in challenging entrenched caste and gender equations in radical solidarities. Again, it is vital to remember that these enactments of performativity could be possible only on the social web. The geographical extent of engagement (in composing the list and then in the reactions to the list), the physical time (very rapid and often spontaneous exchange of words and accusations), the diversity of participants and—above all—the illocutionary force (Searle 1975) behind the words that exceeded the mandate of our linguistic systems and laid bare the rugged topography of anger, mockery, impatience, confidence and the unflinching intolerance for authority could not be possible on this scale on any media form before this. The conversational threads on Facebook and Twitter (https://twitter.com/kavita_krishnan/status/1049642744392617984?lang=en, https://twitter.com/hashtag/rayasarkar?src=hashtag_click) on LoSHA are palpable entities that throb with the myriad emotions of living with, challenging, accommodating, scheming against, aspiring for and catalysing interventions against a very unequal social landscape.

When Menon and Krishnan insisted upon an orderly and precisely defined category of caste identity for Sarkar, or when they demanded a consistency of thought or methodology of intervention against sexual assault from her social media posts, they failed to appreciate the absence these as digital enactments of transgressive social utterances and conduct by the latter. The arbitrariness of these acts subverts normative expectations of political solidarities, personal agency and epistemic protocols, thus marking moments of subtle but fundamental transformations in society. The List of Sexual Harassers in Academia was one such moment

for the cultural power structures of the country. It may not have instituted any action against the men accused of sexual misconduct, but it did reflect the presence of the powerful voices of DBA feminists in online as well as offline spaces of the country.

8. #LoSHA and Deep Mapping

Another compelling perspective on the online 'event' around LoSHA is provided by the framework of 'deep mapping' that assesses the social media terrain (here, Facebook and Twitter) in terms of its multifaceted 'map' of space, history, narrative, memory and agents. According to the literary, visual and performance-related practitioners of 'deep mapping' such as Clifford McLucas and Iain Biggs (2010), the former is essentially a creative process and very distinct from traditional cartography. Unlike conventional cartographic practices, 'deep mapping' does not pursue scientific objectivity or a uniform consciousness of a 'space'. It is—in McLucas' words—passionate, political and partisan, and for those reasons necessarily unfinished, composed of multilayered multimedia forms that juxtapose the personal, official, social, historical and the imaginative in constant, unstable negotiations with each other (quoted in Shanks, deep-mapping). Deep mapping is a praxis of decolonizing knowledge by 'enacting' the sense of a place/ space by transforming existing perspectives to it and undercutting the traditional hierarchy of various knowledge forms that shape its discursive turf (Springett 2015).

The 'space' of the social web is populated by a heterogeneity of elements, including—of course—human agents. It is a multifaceted expanse that materializes on several dimensions, including that of time, experience, facts, narratives and technology. In the vast, seemingly limitless realm of the cyberspace, there are many smaller and broadly identifiable 'tracts' that cohere around particular event(s) that may unfold over months and years, thus witnessing multiple experiences and their interpretations. One of the best ways of tracing the trajectory of this online terrain is through the use of social tags or hashtags that act as devices for filtering and structuring digital information. These metadata tags not only plot the multiple authorship of the digital content but also trace its existence on the axis of time and cyber 'space'. Thus, #LoSHA or #thelist were collaborative tagging mechanisms that helped define the immediate outlines of the digital sparring that happened with the release of the list on Facebook. It must be noted here that the paper does not claim that the outlines of an online incident can be sharply demarcated from other information infrastructure on the internet. However, despite the porous

boundaries of hyperlinks and data sharing, tags work as a broad social indexing system in the digital world and can help plot knowledge graph(s) around an occasion. The following few pages will attempt to precisely do that with LoSHA and its aftermath in the light of the insights from the practice of 'deep mapping'.

A deep mapping of the social media space around the list enacts a complex grid of cross-functional solidarities, identities and systems of knowledge. #LoSHA by now has acquired a multilayered intersectional historical lineage both backwards and forward in time. The list was inspired by an article by Christine Fair on HuffPost (later, pulled down by the online publication) where she describes in detail a series of institutionally condoned and systemically endemic instances of sexual harassment suffered by her in the western academia that eventually made her walk away from the system (Fair 2017). In the article, Fair insists upon the necessity of identifying the perpetrators by name (#himtoo) rather than allowing sexual misconduct to continue as a "faceless" crime (ibid). Sarkar's list of alleged sexual predators in the academia responds to this article by Fair by compiling the names of the academics of South Asian descent who were (anonymously) accused of sexual misconduct by several women (Shankar 2017, Why I Published). Similarly, #LoSHA has been credited with being the predecessor of the Indian #MeToo movement in the latter half of 2018 where women (mostly from the field of media but also from the Hindi film industry) named men and provided details of the alleged sexual harassment they faced at the hands of these men. #thelist and #LoSHA find their second major moment of digital performativity when social media—powered by DBA feminists and others—maps a direct trajectory from Tarana Burke's[46] Me too movement, #MeToo (continued by the Hollywood actor Alyssa Milano on Twitter on 15 October 2017), #LoSHA (24 October 2017) to #Metoo India (India, October 2018), with LoSHA being an important link in the chain. The establishment/ identification of a historical lineage for #LoSHA invests it with multiple resonances across time, geographies (physical as

[46] Tarana Burke is an African American feminist based in the United States of America who founded an organisation by the name of 'Just Be Inc.' in 2007 to provide support and empathy to victims of sexual assault. She coined the phrase "Me Too" to build a movement on breaking the silence of the sheer number of women who have faced sexual harassment in some form, and to highlight the numbers to establish solidarity and visibility against the crime. In this context, it must be pointed out that Burke herself shared a Facebook post where she acknowledges and extends support to Raya Sarkar's "fearless work" (The New Indian Express 2017, #MeToo crusader).

well as virtual), social actors, media types and cultural memories, thus deepening and thickening the lines that attempt to etch the map of this cyber event.

#LoSHA (itself a social media object) and the social web around it is rife with intersectional identities of gender, sexual orientation, caste, class, race, nationalities, professions, and education—most of which narrate stories of varying degrees of privilege and marginalities. However, all these stories are not equally visible, and many of them flow as undercurrents beneath the apparent eddies in the digital sea of tales. It is crucial to recall that even respected academics and staunch feminist-activists such as Nivedita Menon and Kavita Krishnan were unsuccessful in identifying the legitimacy of caste as an operative category in patriarchal transactions embodied in LoSHA when the list first emerged on Facebook. The very crypticity of the list turns it into a deep map of the Indian academic spaces that are marked by various negotiations of caste, class, sexual choices, ideological contestations and linguistic proficiency—among others. The various markers of identities on the list, some existing through their presence and others through their absence, made it a hotly contested information infrastructure. The list only contained the names of male South Asian academics located in the highly reputed, liberal centres of higher education in India and abroad, with all of them being *savarna*. Moreover, most of these scholars have academic and personal allegiances to progressive politics and are well-established in the international network of the global intelligentsia. These men together represent the might of the cultural capital and academic influence at the disposal of a collective composed of individuals on the commanding side of caste, class, gender, educational and linguistic hegemony in South Asian societies and their diaspora.

For the antagonists of the list, these particular sites of identities 'mapped' this group of men as 'legitimate' targets for increased attack by the ideological rightwing for their progressive politics that has perpetuated a tradition of critical questioning and undermining of the rightwing historiography, cultural practices, political vision and statecraft. Adding 'licentiousness' to their already existing offense of "anti-nationalism", Menon argues that the list could be a potent weapon in the hands of the rightwing to further undermine the credibility and solidarity of left politics in the country (Menon 2017, *From Feminazi*). In addition, the group of academics who published the Statement on kafila.online pointed to the elision of "due process" by the list and identified that as eroding "the long struggle against sexual harassment,

and make[ing] our task as feminists more difficult" (Menon 2017, Statement). Menon, here and in another article published on The Wire (2019), seems to assume a unitary vision and agenda of the feminist movement in India, and therefore sees the list as a dangerous artefact that can potentially destroy the solidarity and trust between the feminists of the country. For Menon and Krishnan, the list enacts those very anxieties and unease that the left-affiliated (political and ideological) feminists and activists have struggled against as a part of their socio-political commitment. However, for the pro-list faction, the struggle against the right-wing forces doesn't reprieve other fault lines in the Indian social order, and thus for them the list is a palimpsest of memories and experiences created by the relentless misalignment of power relations in a society primarily shaped by the intersections of Brahmanism and patriarchy.

Although I had argued for establishing a diligent screen between the social media event on #LoSHA and its implications for consequences in this brick-and-mortar world of our existence early in this discussion, here I wish to reiterate my complete agreement with the position that such a distinction between the two does not really exist. It was a theoretical indulgence claimed in this study towards the limited aim of examining the interactions of techno-social platforms of social media with processes and agents in the cyberspace. Such cyber events invariably have significant fallouts for individuals and communities in the material world and—in any case—they are usually themselves a response to very tangible contestations of power and influence in the former. I have demonstrated some of these spillages in the discussion above. For instance, the powerful pushback 'performed' by the non-*savarna* feminists on Twitter and Facebook in response to the criticism of #LoSHA moved the needle—even a little—on the praxis of intersectional feminism in India. It must also be acknowledged that this digital performance also raises some very pressing concerns related to accountability, role of institutional mechanisms of grievance redressal, and forms and modes of socio-political participation in an increasingly digitally networked society. However, any nuanced engagement with the above issues would require a full-length study on its own and is thus outside the scope of this chapter.

In conclusion, the heterogeneity of the social actors and agents in #LoSHA and the multi-sectional historical lineages acquired by it chart a fundamentally contested, unstable, open-ended, and yet a deeply voluminous and creative sense of its digital terrain. The techno-social journey of this chapter that started on the firmest footing of 'universal truths' and

‘philosophical disinterestedness’ or ‘neutral point of view’ finds its (temporary) resting place in the rich and vibrant yet deeply volatile and tenuous domain of digital performances and mapping. While the internet promises additional resources and modes of engagement, it also carries the sting of doxing, trolling, threats of physical and psychological harm, and undermining of the right to protection of life, dignity and unconstrained participation in the processes of democratic citizenship. The ground beneath the digital feet is never firm any more, and this makes the cyberspace a complicated ally in pursuit of history, memory, identity, community and places.

Chapter 5
Conclusion

This thesis has been long in making. However, the many years that it took to finish researching and writing the four preceding chapters of this work gave me ample time to not just observe the gradual growth of the subject matter of this project but also of my own self as a student of caste relations in the country, and their micro practices in our everyday lives. As an urban *savarna* of the liberal mould, I grew up strongly believing that not knowing/ shedding one's caste identity was one of the best ways of demolishing caste structures of the country. Thus, our caste identity was never an issue of conversation in my immediate family, with the one exception being the annual *Chitragupta puja*[47] in my household. That was the day when my siblings and I eagerly sat down before the family portrait of Chitragupta and his sons in order to present our annual account of income and expenses to the powers above, taking particular care to ensure that our expenses were way ahead of our income, and urging (in writing) the deity to provide for the deficit.

My familiarity with the issue of caste in the country was only very gradual and began in early adulthood when higher education and employment became a concern. However, my most conscious initiation into the dynamics of caste as a social institution happened in the last semester of my M. Phil course at the English department of Delhi University when I was introduced to the autobiographical writings of Dalit writers like Omprakash Valmiki, Surajpal Chauhan, Vasant Moon, Sharankumar Limbale, Bama and Kausalya Baisantry. Watching me agonise for days over the selection of a subject area for a long research paper, one of my professors in the department nudged me in the direction of Dalit autobiographies, and I was almost instantly captivated by what I read. However, although I had started reading the life writings of the Dalit writers and scholars, my epistemic lens to the discourse on and the practices of caste relations in India was formed primarily through—with the exception of Dr.

[47] *Chitragupta* is the primary deity of the *kayastha jati* of India, and his twelve sons represent the twelve sub-*jatis* among the community. In Hindu mythology, *Chitragupta* is the god invested with the task of maintaining the record of every individual's actions on earth, thus devising a balance-sheet of good and bad deeds of every person ever born. The *kayastha jati* therefore—not surprisingly—has traditionally been associated with professions related to account-keeping and other white-collar jobs due to their historic proximity with the scribal culture.

B R Ambedkar—the writings of the *savarna* and western theorists and academics such as M.N Srinivas, Dipankar Gupta, Badri Narayan, Surinder S. Jodhka, Uma Chakravarti, Louis Dumont, Andre Beteille, Bernard Cohn, Nicholas Dirks, Gail Omvedt, and Eleanor Zelliot, among others. It was only later as I started reading more diversely that I came across thinkers such as Phule, Kancha Ilaiah, Anand Teltumbde, Urmila Pawar, Vivek Kumar and several others. The vantage point to caste offered by them was much more trenchant, critical and combative, and it helped me question more deeply the foundations of my assertions of castelessness as a *savarna,* as well as my roadmap to a caste-free society.

These subtle transformations in the comprehension of my location as a social actor were significantly reinforced during my fieldwork when I met several people from the Dalit community, most of whom were very articulate and forthcoming in their understanding of caste relations in India, particularly urban India. Unlike many educated and politically conscious *savarnas* who questioned not only the need for an exclusive Dalit media but also my attempts to engage with it—which for them exhibited my collusion in endorsing and furthering casteism in society—the *avarnas* staunchly argued for the necessity of a flourishing Dalit media in its multiple forms of print, broadcast and web. The more I engaged with people, the more caste became visible. It was evident that caste continues to live in our languages, bodies, residential spaces, economic opportunities, personal and social narratives, and memories. Two incidences particularly stand out for me in this process.

The first was during my visits to Shahdara on my fieldwork when one of the important protagonists in the domain of Dalit book publications enquired my full name. On getting to know that my surname is Srivastava, he asked me if I was familiar with the history of my *jati*. I confessed my ignorance, and he then briefly recounted to me the 'historical' origins of the community. Since then, I have managed to read a few other versions of the 'genesis' and dispersal of the Srivastava *jati* in north India. However, this encounter made me recognise the scant attention that I had paid so far to the 'history' (or any other kind of narrative) of the Srivastava caste, and the deep-seated interest that several members of the Dalit community took in investigating and chronicling the accounts of the Dalit *jatis*. My indifference was as reflective of my caste location as theirs was of their own. As a savarna, my *jati* has never been the cause of trauma, discrimination, deprivation, disaffection or disdain for me. On the contrary, the legacy of caste in this country has ensured that people higher up in the *jati*

hierarchy enjoy better prospects in life in terms of social, cultural, educational and economic opportunities. At the same time, because these variables exist and interact at the macro-social and structural levels, they stay concealed from the complacent gazes of most of their beneficiaries. Thus, caste-based privileges endure like invisible launchpads that not only (variably) help propel *savarna* individuals and communities into positions of power and precedence but also lift their subjectivity out of the muck and degradation of caste-related humiliations and atrocities. For a *savarna,* middle/ upper-class person inhabiting the urban centres of the country, the invisible patronage of caste privileges is also manifested by a complete lack of recognition of its implications for one's selfhood. It is a curious case of a subjectivity that thrives due to caste entitlements but refuses to see it for what it is. By a clever sleight of hand, the *savarna* body 'cleans' itself of any markers of *jati* by externalizing it and locating it in the body-politics of the *avarna*, thus turning them into the 'other' that need to be studied for their 'difference'.

This exchange between the 'self' and the 'other' was brought home to me much more vividly in another instance during my fieldwork. I had contacted and requested for an interview with the founder-member of a Dalit students' magazine *Insight*, once published from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi, under the aegis of the Ambedkar Study Circle. My request for the interview was politely but firmly denied as the owner of the magazine stated that he did not engage with 'upper' caste researchers and academics as a matter of principle. For the first time ever in my life, this denial not just wrested away my authority to freely access spaces as a *savarna*, it also located caste as social malaise right where it belonged—in the *savarna* body-politics. It was my caste location as an 'upper' caste that barred engagement, and not the much more predictable 'lower' caste identity that is traditionally excluded and kept at a distance. For centuries, the 'upper' caste has identified the stigma of caste inferiority with the 'polluted' body of the *avarna*. Thus, the *avarna* has been denied, expunged and expelled from the Hindu social order—its most visceral reflection being the legally outlawed practice of untouchability. However, the fear of pollution continues to reside—consciously or subconsciously—in the cultural memory of the 'upper' castes, thus finding expressions in the many disingenuous defence of 'social distancing' for 'scientific' and 'hygiene' reasons. A related development in contemporary times is the attempts by some social media users to equate the physical distancing necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic with the 'soundness' of physical segregation and 'touch-ability' protocols established by the wisdom of our ancient culture, which

apparently is now being appreciated by the 'whole world'. However, it does not require a very nimble intelligence to understand that while a SARS CoV-2 virus only temporarily infects a human body, the 'contamination' of caste is permanent since birth and no amount of sanitization can ever get rid of it.

At the heart of caste conflict in India lies the body—the physical body that is also at the same time the site of epistemic contestations. The *savarna* and the *avarna* are the dyad that is tied together—admittedly unequally—to negotiate a new political and discursive regime of caste in India. This study too partakes of similar impulses—as a *savarna* I chose to examine a section of the Dalit print and digital media, thus placing myself as an element in this equation. This necessarily raises questions about the nature of negotiations this study enters into with its 'field' and the multiple actors therein. As an investigator, I wondered if I should place myself outside caste and other social dynamics in the area of my study. Did my *savarna* identity make me a neutral observer of the field, unmarked by any challenges of caste subalternity? Any ideas that I may have harboured to this effect while in the archives were swiftly demolished as soon as I started my fieldwork. My seemingly casteless, unmarked body as a liberal *savarna* quickly found this position unsustainable as the several encounters with the many protagonists of the Dalit media field continued to remind me of my alterity—sometimes deliberately but mostly inadvertently. It is thus undeniable that no one is truly casteless till everyone is casteless, that no one is unmarked by caste till everyone is unmarked by caste. It became very evident to me that my caste location made me as much a subject in this study as the investigator. There is no experience of *jati* in our social structures without the 'upper' caste. Thus, the *savarna* and the *avarna* endlessly switch positions as subject, object, self and the other in an intricate pattern of dialogue, negotiation and exchange in this study.

It must be pointed out that *savarna* scholars have enjoyed almost unfettered control over the epistemic output of this country until very recently. It is only now that the Dalit scholars and thinkers have started assuming significant control over the discourse on caste in the public domain. However, due to their traditional advantage over the spoken and the written word—and its print and digital infrastructure—the 'upper' caste scholars continue to dominate the academia and related spaces in terms of research and academic publications on the Dalit community. This study may find itself in a similar position as it does stem forth from the efforts of a relatively privileged 'upper' caste researcher with a tenured position in the tertiary

education system of the country. However, I have attempted to cast myself as an ally (with a fair recognition of my caste location and the limitation that entails in my engagement with the praxis of caste in India) rather than a spokesperson for any of the events or agents in the study. I have also attempted to centre the knowledge produced by the members of the Dalit community, and develop frames of references and systems of critique that derive from the epistemic tradition(s) anchored in the experience of subalternity. Most importantly, I see this work as tentative reflections of a student of caste and media in India and hope to learn from further conversations on them.

It is crucial to recognize that while the political expediency of strengthening the struggle against hegemonic caste practices necessitates over-emphasizing the cogency of the Dalit media domain and its identifiable common practices, yet its absences, contradictions and complexities are apparent in its architecture. The first problem that confronts a researcher of the Dalit media field is the heterogeneity of the caste identities of its various participants, including the 'upper' castes. An important question then to consider here is whether non-Dalit publishing of Dalit texts leads to affirmative action in the media field? What are the dimensions of this kind of political intervention? On the other hand, does it also necessarily imply that the print establishments founded and run by the Dalits themselves are indicative of their high degree of involvement in setting the agenda for entire breadth of political, socio-economic and cultural interactions vis-à-vis the non-Dalits? Additionally, it must also be noted that the Dalit media has created its own spaces of exclusions too and has very little representation from women and several of the very deprived Dalit castes. All these collectively shape this media field as a rich semantic terrain for the investigation of the nature of Dalit power and agency. The presence and absence of a range of caste identities as participants in this media field raise some interesting questions not only for the nature of the Dalit media field but also for the Dalit discourse and its political potency for lasting social transformations.

The heterogeneity of the constituents of the Dalit media field becomes even more evident through an examination of the role of the technological and institutional dimensions of these media forms in shaping the processes of the Dalit identities over the last several decades. While most of the Dalit media platforms are small with a limited financial base, yet there are some that fall in the middling category. Thus, another vital question here relates to the various kinds of negotiations that occur due to varying financial base and sizes of these establishments,

and their implications for a study on the plurality of Dalit identities. There is an obvious difference between the material resources as well as the readership of these different presses and imprints. What kind of plurality of Dalit identities and patterns of its expression are made evident by attempting a sociological study of the range of technological and material infrastructure at the disposal of the numerous Dalit media establishments? The hybridity of participants, technological and material infrastructure, ownership, control over agenda-setting and even readership combine to permit multiple points of intersections in the larger movement of instituting 'Dalit power'.

In order to illustrate the above assertion better with some existent examples, I will briefly examine the role of the non-Dalit publishers of magazines and books who have attempted to promote Dalit writers and writings—fictional as well as non-fictional—to educate and reinvent society by mounting a strong opposition to casteism. The most popular of these in Delhi (and Hindi-speaking north India) were the two Hindi magazines titled *Hans* and *Kathadesh* in the last two decades of the twentieth century. *Hans* was revived from its near extinction by Rajendra Yadav in 1986, and it (along with *Kathadesh*) became the foremost mainstream Hindi magazine for promoting the literary works of the Hindi Dalit writers, many of whom were struggling to find publishers for their work at this time. The role of these two magazines have been noteworthy in familiarising the larger literary public of the Hindi belt with the themes and aesthetics of Dalit writing, something which the Dalit media of the period could not do.

Similarly, Navayana is a publishing house founded by S Anand, a Tamil Brahmin with an anti-caste social vision. It was established in 2003 to act as a publishing platform in the English language that recognised the centrality of caste as a socio-cultural process in India, and would therefore focus on publishing anti-caste literature. By today, Navayana has published several books on caste, including several slim volumes on works by important Dalit thinkers like B. R Ambedkar, Anand Teltumbde, Kancha Illiah and Meena Kandasamy. However, it also publishes books on caste by non-Dalit writers as well as on other important marginalities such as religion and gender. Although Navayana does not have a vast capital base at its disposal, it is better off than many Dalit-owned publication houses that are forced to survive on shoe-string budgets. Even more crucially, it is evident that Navayana enjoys a better network of cultural capital and academic resources that help it tap financial support from organisations

that offer money for cultural and developmental initiatives. For example, Ambedkar's graphic biography *Bhimayana* is an excellent example of the aesthetic sophistication and discursive range that a publisher can deploy with adequate financial means. *Bhimayana* uses incidences from the life of Ambedkar along with contemporary newspaper reports on the atrocities on Dalits to frame a graphic (intended here as an adjective as well as the genre) narrative of the continuing hegemony of caste in India. As a predominantly visual text, it employs the tribal art form of the Gond tribe of central India. The pages of the graphic biography combine dialogues with extremely vivid and richly painted images of humanity and nature with brightly coloured motifs from the Gond worldview. This capital-intensive book was made possible by a grant from the Prince Claus Fund, Netherlands (Anand 2020) which allowed Navayana to work with the Gond artist couple—Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam—along with their two apprentices.

Bhimayana has sold around twenty thousand copies so far, including its translations in Korean, French and Spanish (ibid). It is also a part of many schools and universities' curriculum, including the University of Delhi. The success of *Bhimayana* is also made possible by the language of the book, which is English for the Indian audience, thus targeting it at a demography that is economically well-off. It is also crucial to point out at this juncture that Navayana's primary readership is the 'upper' caste, English-educated Indians who are interested in reading about caste as a social challenge but are not familiar with or do not have access to the Dalit publication houses that have a much more linguistically diverse collection of books. The physical location of Navayana is also crucial for its targeted audience. The publication house functions from Shahpur Jat, the trendy, bohemian spot in south Delhi next to the very upmarket Hauz Khas, thus making it extremely approachable to the well-off *savarna* population that would find the Gautam Book Store and Samyak Prakashan in Shahdara and Paschim Puri tough to access. It is also useful to recall that the inclusion of *Bhimayana* in the syllabi of schools and universities gives it a range of readership that is not just numerically large but also youthful and diverse in its social background. Thus, Navayana has access to spaces—including formal institutions—that most Dalit publications do not due to the limitations of their linguistic medium, inadequate cultural capital and academic networks, insufficient financial resources and caste-based social hostility. Navayana's many advantages in the trade of books make it possible for it to influence a larger audience, more particularly the 'upper' caste audience that, despite its complicity in the social processes of caste

interactions, refuses to recognise its continuing deleterious effects on the life chances of the Dalit community. This is important as caste privileges are sustained by the caste ecosystem of the *savarnas*, and they can help (but not lead) the struggle against caste by undermining these systems in their families, communities and social circles.

While Navayana's role as an ally in undermining the caste assumptions and their practices in society have been useful, they have not been without controversy. In 2015, Navayana decided to publish Ambedkar's long essay titled *The Annihilation of Caste* with extensive annotations by S Anand and a long introduction by Arundhati Roy. However, the book soon ran into trouble with a large number of Dalit thinkers and scholars who accused Anand and Roy of appropriating the Dalit icon and his work. They also charged the two with undermining the Dalit community's attempts at re-imagining and re-organising the social and discursive template around caste by creating 'Brahminical' frames of references through their editorial interventions in the original text by Ambedkar.

This controversy raises some very crucial questions about the role and the influence of the *savarna* community in the struggle against caste structures. While it cannot be denied that the *savarna* scholars on the whole have more resources, bigger audiences, better infrastructure and a more extensive knowledge capital at their disposal, does the exercise of these privileges to further a struggle necessarily translate into its appropriation? And if appropriation is inevitable, what should be the role of the *savarna* scholars and activists? Should these resources be made available to the best possible degree to strengthen the reach of the Dalit scholars and activists? For instance, shouldn't Navayana have invited equally competent yet lesser well recognised Dalit scholars to annotate and introduce the book to the *savarna* and other non-Dalit readers? Perhaps Navayana would have been a better ally by willingly offering its institutional and intellectual infrastructure to further the creative and social vision of a Dalit scholar by facilitating her supervisory and editorial control over the final product? However, these possible solutions also bear with them the threat of essentialism, whereby easy and uncritical associations can be established between one's social identity and one's competence to engage in complex social or epistemic processes. Conversely, unchecked essentialism can also prevent useful and original interventions by non-members of a social/ ethnic/ caste etc. group due to its exclusionary tendency.

It is then evident that the social and the epistemic terrain of the Dalit media is riven with contradictions and contestations, including the role of the community that has been its historic nemesis. At the same time, it is also evident that the *savarnas* are an inalienable party to this struggle—as antagonists, oppressors, competitors and rivals, but also as allies and collaborators. The Dalit media field demonstrates clearly that the subaltern can and must speak. However, a related question should also be (and now is increasingly being) raised about the 'speech' of the hegemon. Perhaps this moment in history necessitates the surrendering of the amplitude and authority of the *savarna* voice in order to learn the crucial lessons of equality. For the hegemon, genuine equality is learnt only by surrendering one's traditional privileges, be it of speech or action. Just as the *avarna* has needed (and evolved) a new speech-act (Searle 1969) to claim its share of the world, the *savarna* too must find a new speech-act (ibid) to give up that which was never its own. The act of unremitting assessment of one's entitlements and prerogatives in the social arena must be matched by an equally self-reflexive linguistic and discursive orbit. It has been one of the important struggles of this thesis to find that path.

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