



Drama and
Short Fiction

4

Block

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DRAMA AND SHORT FICTION

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

In this **Block, Unit 1** will introduce you to the social and historical context of the Dalit movement in India while outlining to the contribution of Jotirao Phule and Dr.B.R. Ambedkar. This will be followed by a discussion of Datta Bhagat’s play *Whirlpool*.

Unit 2 will familiarize you with Dalit theatre and give a detailed analysis of the play *Routes and Escape Routes*.

In **Unit 3** two Marathi short stories “The Poisoned Bread” and “The Storeyed House” are discussed in detail. Both the stories are representations of a new Dalit Consciousness.

Unit 4 introduces you to two Gujarati short stories “The Flame” and “Fear”. The themes and other major aspects of these two dalit short stories are discussed in this unit as well.



UNIT 1 CONTEXTUALISING DALIT WRITING

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction: The Socio-Historical Context of the Dalits in India
- 1.2 A Brief History of the Dalit Movement in India
- 1.3 Reminiscences: Ambedkar and Untouchability
- 1.4 Ambedkar and the Call for Conversion
- 1.5 Dalit Theatre
- 1.6 Tamasha and the Ambedkari jalsa
- 1.7 Datta Bhagat: *Whirlpool*
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Glossary
- 1.10 Questions
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will familiarize you with the social and historical context of the Dalit movement in India. It will examine the origins of untouchability in the context of the *chaturvarna* system and the socially functional role assigned to people according to the varna or category to which they belong. We will discuss the social implications of this system on the lower rungs of society. This will be followed by an analysis of the nineteenth century Dalit movements with special reference to Jotirao Phule. In the context of the twentieth century there will be a presentation of B.R. Ambedkar's sharply etched memories of the experience of untouchability. We will also study Ambedkar's call for conversion to Buddhism. Finally this will lead to a discussion of Dalit writing, especially Dalit drama in the context of the Marathi Dalit playwright Datta Bhagat.

1.1 INTRODUCTION: THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE DALITS IN INDIA

Any discussion of the term Dalit involves first and foremost an explanation of the varna system in feudal India. The structure of the Hindu society divided people in terms of their position in the four varnas also known as the *chaturvarnya*—Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras. Where as the position of the Shudras was pathetic, being the last in the social ladder, there was a whole mass of people at rock bottom outside the neatly divided society. Technically they were not part of the varna system and were situated outside it. These were people who performed menial tasks for the upper caste people. The caste system had an interlocking pattern with the feudal system and the appropriate term to understand this phenomenon is caste hierarchy. On the one hand was the *chaturvarna* and on the other hand was the feudal perspective. This meant that the roles of the people were divided on the basis of

caste and their association with the land. In this there were the feudal lords or the owners of the land, and the peasants. According to Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt:

...two hierarchies developed in the traditional feudal system. One was a hierarchy of groups defined in terms of their position in relation to the land—ranging from landlords to nominally independent peasants to tenant cultivators in varying stages of semi-serfdom to field servants in varying positions of semi-slavery. The other was a hierarchy of artisans and service workers—ranging from certain priests etc. at the top down the scale through goldsmiths, barbers, etc, down to weavers, washermen, leatherworkers, and others at the bottom, and related to the controllers of the land through the jajmani or the balutedari system which defined their duties. (Patankar, Bharat and Gail Omvedt. *The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*. Critical Quest. Gautam P: New Delhi, 2004. P.4)

Patankar and Omvedt explain how this structure was coupled with that of caste ideology. The people who were “at the bottom” performed the unskilled tasks and were, therefore, not really bound to land in any active manner. They were bound to the owners of the land the tasks assigned by whom they performed. These people were defined in terms of their exclusion both from the caste system and from the economics of the land. Theirs was an identity constituted by a lack of relationship with any system. The duties of these people were determined by the *balutedari* system. This mass of people was paid a *balut* for their duties and this was determined by the feudal lords. Since most of their chores were related to cleaning, they were considered as impure or “untouchable”. The notions of purity and pollution chiefly arose from the nature of the work performed. The lower castes were considered to have a polluting effect on the one above them in hierarchy. However, “the untouchable castes in performing the essential tasks of removing the most polluting elements of the entire society, represented a kind of absolute impurity or pollution that was the polar opposite of the Brahman’s absolute purity” (4). Baburao Bagul makes an insightful statement about the politics of the varna system:

Varna and caste came to be determined on the basis of birth. This is because the ruling class wanted to ensure for itself the exclusive possession of wealth, power, and higher social status. (Bagul, Baburao. “Dalit Literature is but Human Literature.” Dangle, Arjun. *Poisoned Bread*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009. P. 276)

The varna system became a strategic way of securing family land and assets from one generation to the other by successfully ostracizing the people who did not have any land. This helps us understand the origin of the term “untouchable” in the context of India. Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* gives us a crucial insight into the life of the untouchables:

In Poona, the capital of the Peshwas, the untouchable was required to carry, strung from his waist, a broom to sweep away from behind the dust he treaded on, lest a Hindu walking on the same should be polluted. In Poona, the untouchable was required to carry an earthen pot, hung in his neck wherever he went, for holding his spit, lest his spit falling on earth should pollute a Hindu who might unknowingly tread on it. (Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste*. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2004. P. 6)

Patankar and Omvedt explain how one of the untouchable service castes who either did shoe-work or carried dead cattle performed the menial tasks for the feudal

lords. Further, they also belonged to a fairly large group in a region. Some of these were the “Mahars in Maharashtra, Malas and Madigas in Andhra, Holeyas in Karnataka, Pallars and Paraiyans in Tamil Nadu, Chamars in Western Northern India.” Certain social practices were pre-determined in the context of caste feudalism. Birth into a specific group determined the course of a person’s life and this could not be changed and marriage could take place only within a social group of caste and service.

Harijan or Scheduled Caste:

In her analysis of the life and contribution of B.R.Ambedkar, Eleanor Zelliott states that 1935 onwards there were two choices available for the community relegated as the “untouchables”— the Harijan or the Scheduled Caste. They chose the latter. Harijan was a term used by Mahatma Gandhi based on a Gujrati saint and it meant the people of God. But this continued to place the group in the context of the *chaturvarna* system. People discussed the rehabilitation measures of the untouchables but were reluctant to look at them as a politically active group in their own right. As Zelliott points out:

Repentance and duty were the key words in this concept. Improvement in education and sanitation for the Untouchable and propaganda for the removal of untouchability directed at the caste Hindus were the methods used. The “rights” of the Untouchables, the development of Untouchable leadership and participation in politics were not part of the “Harijan” concept. (Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013. P.140)

Being a Harijan meant that you would continue to perform the duties prescribed but keep in mind an improvement of your conditions. There was no recognition of the Harijans as an active group that could seek political representation. On the other hand Scheduled Castes referred to the 1935 schedule that listed the castes that were considered as untouchable. In a sense this became a constitutionally appropriate term that had social relevance as well. It brought the people within the purview of the constitution making them a legally valid group that needed equality. It was therefore apt that the people chose the term Scheduled caste over Harijan.

Dalit

The term Dalit arose as a rejection of the caste status of the untouchable as also the rejection of the term Harijan. Zelliott in *Ambedkar’s World* defines the word Dalit as meaning “oppressed” or “broken”. According to Zelliott, “It’s use began in the 1970s from among Ambedkar’s followers.” Dalit meant a unique identity that allowed the members of the Scheduled Caste to live as a group that demands its own respect and dignity by rejecting the established nomenclature. Raj Kumar gives a detailed history of the term Dalit:

As a Marathi word it is found in Molesworth’s Marathi-English dictionary of 1975, a reprint of the 1813 edition. It gives the meaning as ‘ground, broken or reduced to pieces generally.’ It derives from a Sanskrit word meaning ‘crushed’ and is understood in all the Indian languages that are derived from Sanskrit... Over the ages, the connotation and interpretation of the term ‘Dalit’ have been changing. For example, Namdeo Dhasal, the noted Marathi poet and one of the leaders of the Dalit Panther movement, infused the term with a leftist vision to include not just the Scheduled

Castes but also the economically oppressed classes comprising the Scheduled Tribes, Neo-Buddhists, landless labourers and others...For Gangadhar Pantawane... (it is a) symbol of change and revolution. (Kumar, Raj. "Dalit Literature: A Perspective from below." *Dalit Assertion in Society, Literature and History*. Ed. Imtiaz Ahmad and Shashi Bhushan Upadhyay. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2010. P.131)

Zelliot explains how this term arose in the 1970s in Bombay. The Dalit Panthers took on from the American Black Panther movement. Like the term 'black', the term Dalit also refers to the "marginalized". She further states:

In general writing, it basically replaces 'Harijan', children of god – Mahatma Gandhi's patronizing term for Untouchables. The use of the word Dalit means that outside factors determine the status of Untouchables, not any inherent pollution. It includes the technical terms, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which indicate the groups eligible for benefits, but is not limited to them. (Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013. P.11)

Gail Omvedt in the Preface to *Poisoned Bread* relates the term 'Dalit' to Dalit writing and the emergence of the Dalit Panthers. She states:

Dalit was originally given, both by the Panthers and by others of the time, a broad meaning—all the oppressed—at least all those socially and religiously oppressed by the caste system and class. In actuality it was used primarily for those classified as scheduled castes, the very lowest in the traditional caste hierarchy. (Arjun Dangle ed. *Poisoned Bread*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009. P.xvii)

Therefore 'Dalit' became the preferred term in theory to refer to a group hitherto marginalized. It expressed their dignity and also the history of marginalization. At the same time the use of this term indicated protest and the need and demand for change. As mentioned, it rejected the polarity of purity and pollution propagated by caste. Particularly in literary writing, it became a marker of the realization of their identity as a collective. Today, there are many debates about the usage of the term. But one must keep in mind that Dalit is a historical indicator of a people's realization and definition of their existence. Omvedt's definition of Dalit as a progressive protest movement and its relation with the Dalit Panther movement gives it a sense of historicity. But at the same time, Omvedt draws attention to the limitations of the expression and its perception. In a sense, she pre-empted the problematic lineage of the name in the period after the 1970s and 1980s.

It is probably true that the majority of people classified as scheduled caste reject it for self-identification. It is rejected for varying reasons. In some cases, as among the new Buddhists of Maharashtra, Dalit is felt to be negative and confining, while being Buddhists gives a broader, positive and humane identity.

The debate about contemporary terminologies and usage continues just as the subversive aspects of the term Dalit abound and make us look at the Dalit ideology as a politically active one. Sharatchandra Mulkibodh in "What is Dalit Literature?" discusses the political nuances of Dalit literature. With objective insight he elaborates:

It could be said in conclusion that a Dalit point of view accompanied by Dalit consciousness would not necessarily result in great Dalit literature. But an original and important Dalit work of literature would emerge when a Dalit point of view would visualize itself through concrete experience only. It will also prove to be a deep and powerful picture of human life thirsty for freedom in the real sense. (Muktibodh, Sharatchandra. "What is Dalit Literature?" Arjun Dangle ed. *Poisoned Bread*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009.P.273)

This restores the need for terminologies to cohere with humanity and an objective understanding of society in totality. The Dalit point of view emerges from concrete experience and resists the onslaught of the ones in power.

1.2 A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DALIT MOVEMENT IN INDIA

The beginning of the Dalit movement can be traced to two important trajectories in the Indian context—the British rule and the reform movements in India. The British rulers established equality in India based on certain democratizing principles. They introduced the idea of equality at all levels. This meant that the group labeled as untouchable has access to all the institutions, temples and other social amenities like the social groups that are above in station. However, this was only in theory. In practice the discriminatory practices continued. The space of the untouchables was away from the civilized inhabited quarters in the main city. They could not enter temples nor did they have access to water. This is where the reform movements became significant. They chiefly altered the way of thinking in Maharashtra.

Dalit movements in the nineteenth century

Two names that come to mind in the context of the nineteenth century are Jotirao Phule and Gopal Baba Walangkar. Phule belonged to the mali or the gardener caste and Gopal Baba was a retired Mahar army officer. Phule referred to himself as "Jotimali, the gardener." Phule evolved a counter theory to the superiority of the Aryan caste. According to him the original settlers were the non-Aryans or the shudras and the ati-shudras. In his *The Book of the True Faith (Sarvajanic Satya Dharma Pustak)* Phule raises important questions about the equality of all human beings and the existing brahmanical code. He states with ease that everyone is born with the same faculties and for this reason there must be equality at all levels. Take a look at the following extract from the section titled "Caste Differentiation":

Yashwant Jotirao Phule: Is caste differentiation natural to human beings?

Jotirao Govindrao Phule: Originally human beings were not divided into castes.

Yashwant: how does one know that originally there was no caste differentiation among human beings?

Jotirao: There is no such differentiation among birds and animals. Why would it be there among human animals?

Yashwant: Please elaborate on this.

Jotirao: Animals, birds, etc. all differ from each other anatomically. Like-wise two-legged human beings are different from four-legged animals. It is said that the Arya Brahma has created the four castes. He would have done so for the animals as well. Can you tell me then who are the Brahmans among the donkeys, crows, etc.? (233)

Phule raises the important question that if the creator has made the world, then the caste differentiation imposed on humans should be seen in animals as well. This indicates an objective understanding of society that rejects any whimsical belief as false. In his journal *Satsar* (The Essence of Truth) brought out in 1885, Phule presents a counter discourse to the brahmanical theory and the *chaturvarnya* system. He states in *Satsar-1*

Brahman: If you do not wish to help us then you yourself should tell the mangs and mahars their human rights and lead them on the right path.

Shudra: your ancestors came from Iran and invaded all the original inhabitants of this country. They deprived them of everything and became their rulers. They enslaved the shudras and deprived them of their right to learning. Many of them were reduced to untouchability and in this way they were tortured in every manner. We find utterly cruel writings about this in the scriptures written by your ancestors like Manu. Don't we see for ourselves that that you Aryans ruined the shudras completely? Therefore, in order to erase the trace of your ancestor's low deeds you now want to educate the mahars and mangs and incorporate them in the associations you have planned. Why should we shudras render help to you in this matter? (208)

Phule elaborates this idea in *The Book of the True Faith* as well. He posits the Dalit identity as the original one that was exploited, devastated and violated by the Irani Aryabhats and given the name untouchable. He discusses how the creator created both humans and animals. Therefore, if there were any differentiation between the humans, there would be one in animals too. In a nutshell, the idea is that the creator never created any differences. These are man-made and more particularly created by the Brahmins. Phule's ideal world was that of Bali. As Gail Omvedt mentions in *Seeking Begumpura* that "it was Bali Raja who provided the main symbol for Phule. Bali remembered by the masses as an ideal king "who could make "troubles and sorrows go", was for brahmanic theory a 'demon'. Phule looked at the perfect world as one that was likened to Bali's rule. He vehemently denounces the Manusmriti and also defends Pandita Ramabai and her decision of conversion in *Satsar-1*. G.P.Deshpande in his introduction to the *Selected Works of Phule* states:

His is a shudraatishudra rewriting of history. It is not scientific as much as it is subversive. That is its purpose: subversion and destruction...Phule was not writing history. He was rejecting history from a brahmanical history from a shudraatishudra perspective. If we keep this in mind, we can make sense of his polemic, and see its historical necessity and inevitability. (Deshpande, G.P. Ed. *Selected Works of Jotirao Phule*. Trans. Maya Pandit, New Delhi: Leftword, 2002. P. 7)

Advocating the shudraatishudra as people present before the coming in of the Aryans, Deshpande draws attention to the difference between "writing history" and "rejecting it." It is clear that Phule understood man as an "animal" and he discarded the theory of brahmanical supremacy. In proposing a theory of the shudras as the earliest present community, he is making a bold attempt at rewriting history. Phule's writings are an effective counter discourse as a combination of subversion and representation. The veracity of his argument is not of significance. It is this attempt at presenting an emerging point of view that fortifies Dalit identity. It is interesting to note that Phule's idea of the original inhabitants became common to all Dalit movements in the early twentieth century. As Patankar and Omvedt state:

Ideologically, in spite of their very diverse origins, it is remarkable how many themes the dalit movement shared in common. Central to their thinking was the adi theme, a definition of themselves as the original inhabitants of the country, a claim that their own inherent traditions were those of equality and unity, and a total rejection of caste (*chaturvarnya*, *varnashrama dharma*) as the imposition of the conquering Aryans who used this to subjugate and divide the natives. (Patankar, Bharat and Gail Omvedt. *The Dalit Liberation Movement in Colonial Period*. Critical Quest. Gautam P: New Delhi, 2004. P.16)

Phule brought the concerns of the shudras and the atishudras to the centre of all reform movements. In 1848 Phule opened the first ever school for the shudra and atishudra girls. He also opened an evening school for the workers in 1855. Phule set up a home for widows in 1863. He established the Satyashodak Samaj in 1871. Phule wrote the first “political and discussion” play in Marathi, *Tritiya Ratna*. He felt that the idea of caste needs to be looked at in terms of a bipolar structure with the Brahmans on the one side and the shudratishudras on the other. As Deshpande points out he looks at it in terms of a *dvaivarnik* system.

Phule looks at the impact of the English as liberatory. But in the nineteenth century Phule is able to capture the moments of transition. Firstly, he depicts the paradoxical relationship of the English with the untouchables. The wave of modernity that the English brought with them gave the people a chance to educate themselves. This was a step in the right direction. But “this was countered by Brahmans grabbing positions of power and the British preferring to make an alliance with them” (Omvedt 174). Phule also articulates his own theory of civilization. It is interesting to note that the west had changed with the theories of Charles Darwin regarding the evolution of man from apes, Phule, too, looks at man as a social animal. He thereby refutes the veracity of the brahmanical argument and proves it to be false and advocates his own idea of man as equal.

Walangkar, too, pointed out the treatment meted out to the “untouchables”—”difficulty in getting education, exclusion from dharamshalas, discrimination while travelling, bans on participation in trade, social stigma even when army service pay might allow them to better their condition, revulsion toward them because of their handling of dead cattle.” (Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013.P.14). Walangkar especially opposed the reluctance of the British to appoint the young people from amongst the untouchables. The efforts of Phule, Walangkar, and Iyothee Thaas in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century matured into specific forms of resistance in Ambedkar’s world of the 1920s. Some of these movements headed by Ambedkar were as follows:

- Mahad tank satyagraha of 1927 in Maharashtra. It led to the burning of the *Manusmriti*. This day is still celebrated as *Manavmukti din*. The Mahad satyagraha formed the beginning of the “untouchable liberation movement.”
- Parvati temple satyagraha of 1930-35 in Nasik.
- Satyagraha at Parvati in Poona in 1929.
- Vaikom temple satyagraha of 1930-32 in Kerala.

The movements took place all over India and bloomed in the light of the freedom struggle. To the Dalits the struggle to achieve independence meant not only to be

rid of the British colonizers but also of the decrepit caste system in the country. Ambedkar held numerous conferences and started newspapers to reach out to the people. Some of the newspapers were:

- *Mooknayak* (The Leader of the Voiceless) 1920
- *Bahishkrit Bharat* (Excluded India) 1927
- *Janata* (The People) 1929
- *Prabuddha Bharat* (Enlightened India) 1955

A conference of the Dalit writers was to be held in December 1956 but this could not happen due to the death of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in that year. The first conference of the Dalit writers took place in 1958. The inaugural speech was delivered by Anna Bhau Sathe. It had to be only a free mind that could allow for the development of a nation. The reform movements and the spread of education created a modern sensibility that made the Indian mind amenable to question caste oppression and speak for change. Munshi Premchand's short stories such as "Kafan" and "Sadgati" pointed to the widespread layers of exploitation in feudal India where the privileged continued to act in an inhuman manner by latching on to the caste divisions that were prevalent at the time.

Dalit Panthers

According to Omvedt the Dalit Panthers were born out of a "war of uniting words and protest actions." It is a term that belongs to the modern period and came into usage around 1972. She points out how they were opposed to the state forces that failed to end atrocities on Dalits. They drew inspiration from the Black Panther movement that sought to end the Afro-American slavery. The major voice of protest was that of Baburao Bagul who inspired the writers like Namdeo Dhasal. Bagul's magazine *Ahmi*, Gangadhar Pantavane's *Asmitadarsha*, Dhasal's *Golpitha* voiced the outlook of the Dalit Panther movement. M.N.Wankhade in "Friends, the Day of Irresponsible Writers is Over" explains how *Asmitadarsh* came as a result of the fact that Dalit writers were not being published. In 1967 as a step to encourage Dalit writing and introduce this new form of writing, they started the journal *Asmita* whose name was later changed to *Asmitadarsha*. It was representative of the mood of Ambedkar's ideals. The idea was to publish Dalit writing and to challenge the "literary monopoly" about the forms of literature.

1.3 REMINSICENCES: AMBEDKAR AND UNTOUCHABILITY

Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar is a familiar name that we associate him as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for the Constitution of India. But he was also the chief proponent of equality for the Dalits in India. He recounts with great pain and anxiety his first realization of being categorized as an "untouchable." He belonged to a family that primarily served the army of the East India Company. His father retired as a Subehdar and then went on to work as a cashier in a bank in Satara. Ambedkar narrates the beginning of pain as he along with his brother and cousins had to visit his father in Satara. As they got down at the station at Masur and stated that they were Mahars, a crisis ensued. No one was willing to take them to Goregaon. He narrates his meeting with the station master:

As is usual among Hindus, the station master asked us who we were. Without a moment's thought, I blurted out that we were Mahars. He was stunned. His face underwent a sudden change. We could see that he was overpowered by a strange feeling of repulsion... suddenly a thought seemed to have entered his head and he asked us, "Can you drive the cart?" feeling that he was finding out a solution of our difficulty we shouted, "Yes, we can". With the answer he went and proposed on our behalf that we were to pay the cart-man double the fare and drive the cart and that he should walk on foot along with the cart on our journey. One cart-man agreed as it gave him an opportunity to earn his fare and also saved him from being polluted. (Ambedkar, B.R. "Reminiscences of Untouchability." New Delhi: Critical Quest P, 2004.P.6-7)

With great difficulty the young men finally reached their father the next day. This incident left an "indelible impression" on his mind. Ambedkar states: "I knew that I was an untouchable and that untouchables were subjected to certain indignities and discriminations." This incident is significant in Ambedkar's life and finds mention in most description of his personal life.

Ambedkar was probably the second Mahar to complete his matriculation. Eleanor Zelliot notes that "the community, in which the family lived, Dabak Chawl, held a celebration early in 1908 to mark the achievement." (Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar's World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Narayana, 2013. P. 68). After having completed his B.A. at Elphinstone College, Baroda he went to Columbia to complete his education. He came back to Baroda to a much greater realization of the experience of being discriminated against as an untouchable. In Baroda, he did not find place in any inn to stay and work. Circumstances compelled him to take a Parsi name, Adalji Sorabji" to stay at a Parsi inn. But his identity was soon discovered by all and he had to earn the wrath of a number of Parsis who came armed with sticks. They asked him who he was and he replied that he was a Hindu. They, of course, knew that he was a Mahar and threatened him with the lathis. He had to leave the inn and Baroda. In this manner, Ambedkar recounts numerous instances with the members of other communities to show how deep-rooted the stigma of untouchability was in India. It is his experiences that convinced him that the only way out of this problem was by annihilating caste and adopting another religion. In 1935 at the conference at Yeola, Nasik he declared "I will not die a Hindu". Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in the year 1956. Ambedkar's experiences find resonance as Arjun Dangle, too, writes about the pathetic treatment meted out to the "untouchables."

1.4 AMBEDKAR AND THE CALL FOR CONVERSION

The painful experiences of his life had shown him that there was no space that could be created within the existing fabric of Hinduism. This also meant that it was not possible to effect a change in the prevailing mind-set of the people. The answer lay in a complete rejection of caste. At the Yeola conference, he began by asking: "Some people often raise the question, 'Why should we change our religion?' then I feel an impulse to ask a counter-question, 'Why should we not change our religion?'" In this speech he recounted some of the instances from his life that we have already mentioned in 1.4. He then asked a very poignant question – "I would like to ask you all, what is the sense in living in a society which is devoid of humanity, which does

not respect you, protect you or treat you as a human being?...To change this degraded and disgraceful existence into a golden life, conversion is absolutely necessary.”(Ambedkar, B.R. “Conversion as Emancipation.” New Delhi: Critical Quest P, 2004. P. 6-7).

Ambedkar was able to carry the legacy of Jotirao Phule by looking for solutions in modern India. For him, the path ahead lay only in the rejection of the structure of caste as that allowed inequality to seep into the human fabric. Within this structure, people looked at themselves as Hindus who belonged to a specific group that gave them a false sense of superiority. The declaration of conversion also meant an end of the struggle for accommodation within Hinduism. Ambedkar declared the end of the satyagraha as there was no point in engaging with the Hindus to seek entry into their temples. He stated that they should “close the satyagraha campaign” and “make our society independent of the so-called touchable classes.” For almost 20 years after the call for conversion, Ambedkar kept thinking about various possibilities till he finally embraced Buddhism in 1956. According to Gail Omvedt in *Dalit Visions*:

The logic of dalit politics, it may be argued, involved three major emerging themes:

- a challenge to the very definition of Hinduism as the majority religion and the core of Indian tradition; an insistence that it was a rather brahmanic Hinduism that represented the hegemony of an elite over that tradition, and that this hegemony had to be overthrown.
- a spreading of this theme beyond dalits themselves to involve all the sections of the oppressed, exploited and marginalized by the processes of caste exploitation, including adivasis and other backward castes (the former shudras), peasants, women and oppressed nationalities; and a synthesis of a new economic and political direction with the cultural challenge. (Omvedt, Gail.

Dalit Visions: The anti-caste movement and the construction of an Indian identity. Tracts for the Times. Ed. Romila Thapar and Neeladri Bhattacharya. New Delhi: Orient Longman, 2006.P.86-87)

1.5 DALIT THEATRE

An early example of Dalit theatre is Jotirao Phule’s *Tritiya Ratna*. Dalit Theatre as a specific movement began around the 1950s. According to Ananda Lal it dates to M.B.Chitnis’s *Yugyatra* (The Procession of an Age). The play documented historically the discrimination against the Dalits. It was staged in Aurangabad in 1955 and for the Dalit converts in 1956 at Nagpur. This performance took place in front of 600000 people who converted to Buddhism. Two notable Dalit playwrights are Datta Bhagat and Premanand Gajvi.

1.6 TAMASHA AND THE AMBEDKARI JALSA

Tamasha literally means entertainment. The engagement of Dalits with theatre is closely related to their relationship with the tamasha. Theatre was originally considered as a genre fit for the *nats* and the *bhanda*s. The association of theatre with the mobile nomadic groups or traveler, troupes and its flexibility allowed great freedom of expression to the Dalit writers. As Dangle mentions, that the Dalit artists participated in Ambedkar’s movement “by composing songs and writing ballads, and through traditional folk arts such as *tamasha* and *jalsa*.” Omvedt refers to these

artists as “popular communicators.” This was a form that could easily be taken up and experimented with. *Tamasha* was definitely more nebulous in form and it allowed the freedom to speak and act without any fixed stage directions and any pre-conceived notions. *Tamasha* is performative in that sense. It is more akin to what we understand to be street theatre or like the nukkad natak of the present day.

The free movement of the groups from one village or space to another was mapped on the *tamasha* form with its rejection of any determining impact. Since theatre was considered impure, most of the actors came from the lower rungs of society. It is interesting to note that Marathi theatre history begins in the nineteenth century with the plays of Vishnudas Amrit Bhave. He was a “puppeteer, poet and storyteller”. He worked with the “members of the lowest Brahman sub-caste in the court’s employ, generally illiterate and relegated to the kitchen as cooks and water servers” (Lal 81). In fact, as Lal reveals, *Tamasha* has been associated with the lower castes such as the Mahars, Mangs and Kolhatis. This meant that the people who performed had the freedom to express themselves in ways that they created, experimented and devised in relation to its success with the audience. This is how *Tamasha* form became popular in Maharashtra and in other parts of India. As a dramatic form, *Tamasha* helped question the existing structures of power through the use of the comic. As Lal states:

Tamasha subverts the established ideologies of social power by presenting them in an inverted and outrageously funny manner through typical characters and situations, affording people a release for their suppressed anger against hegemonic hierarchies. (Lal 407)

Dalit theatre provided a platform to the oppressed classes to present their problems and issues to the modern audience. The exclusion of the Brahmans from this kind of drama allowed for greater freedom and very soon it developed into a viable form of counter discourse. It ripened against this backdrop of *tamasha* as it gave the people a chance to use the amorphous nature of the *tamasha* to express the anxieties of Dalit identity.

In the context of Dalit theatre this grew into the *Ambedkari Jalsa* form. This became a way of celebrating Dalit identity. As Erin B. Mee points out in the introduction:

In the theatre the politically active Dalits stopped participating in *tamasha* after the Buddhist conversion. They reconstructed *tamasha* so that it focused on the life of Ambedkar and on the Buddhist conversions, and they called it *Ambedkari Jalasa*. They performed *Jalasa* to spread the teachings of Ambedkar and to create greater political awareness among both Untouchables (those who had not yet converted to Buddhism or become politically active) and Dalits. (Mee 16)

Phule’s *Tritya Ratna* to Datta Bhagat’s world of theatre there is a degree of sophistication that develops in the process. Bhagat looks at the world of the 1950s and the way in which it can be expressed on stage.

1.7 DATTA BHAGAT’S WHIRLPOOL

Avart or *Whirlpool* was written in the year 1978. The play is structured as one continuous scene and there are no act or scene divisions. It uses the *tamasha* form as it opens with the buffoonery of the Jester and the Stage-Manager. The Jester and

the Stage-Manager are accompanied by two groups—one who enforces caste inequalities such as Josi, Mahadu, Kisan and Piraji and the other that believes in equality i.e. Tukaram and his son Manohar.

The play uses the form of the *tamasha*. There is a direct reference to the “Yesibai-*Tamasa*” and its entry into the village. This form is seen as the “loknatya” or “people’s theatre”. The play distinguishes *tamasha* from drama—where *tamasha* is the more flexible form with great powers of communication, a play refers to the more refined and structured form that appealed to the new intelligentsia of modern India. The play makes use of the European tradition of the Absurd drama as the stage manager and the Jester can move neither forward nor backward. This indicates that the only movement possible is circular. This reminds us of Vladmir and Estragon in Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* who don’t go anywhere. They continue to wait for Godot whose identity is not clear and who does not arrive even at the end of the play. There is stasis and a movement of circularity. However, in *Whirlpool* this stasis is used to raise some crucial questions in the course of the play. The stasis is that of the Dalit community whose position remains unchanged even in the large dreams of an independent and modern India.

In *whirlpool* the setting is contemporary. The witty exchange between the Jester and the Stage Manager makes a reference to *Johar*, an ancient form of greeting amongst the Dalits. The stage-manager associates *Johar* with a new meaning and that is “Dalit Literature.” In this way, the ancient and modern practices are brought to question in the play. Manohar, a Dalit has been to Bombay and Pune, and is under the influence of the Ambdekarite way of thinking. He has been advocating the entry into the temple of Vithoba by the Dalits. The Josi are known for their accurate reading of astrology and have played truant. To prevent the entry of the Dalits into the temple, Josi tells them that the “lunar mansion” would be two days later than the prescribed time. The procession going to Pandharpur come two days early or rather at the appropriate time so that such bold attempts could be thwarted.

Manohar represents the third generation of the oppressed and the rebel. His grandfather Tukaram had touched the feet of the Maharaj and this was associated with the outbreak of cholera in the village. It was rumoured that Tukaram had a vision and he decided to sacrifice his life by jumping into the well. The vision was of the Goddess who “demanded Tukaram’s father as a sacrifice.” The villagers believed that the “Potraj” had said so but Mahadu explains how this was the plan of the local lord, Candar Patel. Tukaram’s son, too, was part of the oppressed. It is Tukaram’s grandson Manohar who resists the onslaught of tradition as manifested in caste. He represents the Dalit faith in modern independent India. He nurtures dreams of Gandhi and Nehru and believes that the Dalits can no longer be treated badly. He thinks he has a right to express his voice. He questions and argues in the following manner:

People say that you don’t live cleanly and that you, therefore, contaminate them. That you eat fish and meat and that you will desecrate the deity. I instructed the children of all the nearby villages. They live cleanly. They don’t eat fish and meat—therefore, we are fit to go to the Hanuman temple.
(Bhagat, Datta. *Whirlpool*. G.P.Deshpande. Ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. P.660)

Tukaram, too, supports his son as he asks—”Janaoba, Cokhaba, Savata, didn’t they all sit in one row?” (660). This is a reference to the bhakti saints who propagated

equality. Manohar uses the liberal ideas of independent India to decry caste difference. His arguments are logical but then rationality has never been employed by the guardians of caste and religion. Manohar stresses on the purity of the soul as a reason to enter into the temples. He upholds his struggle as he states,

It's better to live one day the life of a lion than to live a thousand days as a meek sheep, that's the message that was given to us...Not even the goddess who is pretending to enter the body of the potraj, not even she has the power to decide on justice and injustice. It's the people who rule, that's what Gandhi and Nehru say. (Bhagat, Datta. *Whirlpool*. G.P.Deshpande. Ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. P.667).

The play exposes the exploitative relation between the influential Patels and the evolving Manohars in this new world. Manohar's point of view belongs to the vision of a prospering and independent India where there is going to be equality at all levels. But the likes of Patel develop newer methods of containing the liberal forces. How does this translate into the social position of the community relegated as the untouchables? Manohar's beliefs are modern but it is clear that the powerful people are not willing to accept this argument as it endangers their comfortable position in society. They continue to assert the traditional notions of caste difference and hierarchy.

Manohar is to be tried by the authorities of the village. He is charged for conducting "ascetic penance" because of which the brahman's son died. The panchayat comprises people who belong to the upper caste and therefore exercise a determining influence in village matters. In the fluid form of the *tamasha* where there are no scene divisions, no definitive indicators, there is also greater flexibility of roles. The Jester who by his very name is not to be taken seriously emerges as a subversive character. As he is jesting, he becomes the judge presenting before us the insidious and covert nuances of the authority of the panchayat. But the Jester makes a dig at Manohar's way of thinking as he says, "How can he apologize? He thinks the government is his. Hey, but what is his? The government is in Delhi, and Delhi is very distant." (672) The Jester once again brings in the contradiction between the theoretical ideas of freedom for all and its practice in areas that are "distant" from Delhi. In his defense Manohar uses mythology to indicate his oppressed yet subversive state. He is the "world ruler of poverty," "Sambuk," "Ravana," the "Mahar child carried lovingly by Eknath," "Chokhamela," "Savai," "Saranvare". Through all these figures, he defines the history of the Dalits and seeks change. He wants to break the circle of absurdity that does not allow change to come into the world. He says:

I want that turning like a spinning top to come to an end. The moving in circles on one spot should be ended. Your honour, if I've incurred guilt, well, then that's it. I'm a spinning top, a spinning top turning in circles on one spot" (Bhagat, Datta. *Whirlpool*. G.P.Deshpande. Ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. P. 676).

The punishment that is to be meted out to Manohar and his father is to be decided. The jester as judge continues to speak tongue-in-cheek as he keeps on emphasizing the new democratic world. Thus, one of the options is to hand them over to the police but this would not satisfy the village henchmen. So the jester suggests:

When our brothers make a mistake they are beaten, expelled from the village, punished. But these are old worn-out punishments. Gandhibaba says that there should be Ramrajya now. We won't judge them. We won't punish them. ..we will forgive them. Wait—a man that is forgiven carries his head high. Again he will commit a fault. Therefore there ought to be punishment. An entirely customary punishment. In accordance with the orders of our most benign government we will dig a public well in our village...the little work which remains these two will do. (Bhagat, Datta. *Whirlpool*. G.P.Deshpande. Ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. P.677)

This verdict is accepted by all. Amidst shouts of “May Mahatma Gandhi be victorious,” “Remove poverty,” the work for the well continues. The jester asks as to whom the well belongs and all resound that it belongs to the villagers. But then he asks:

Jester: To whom does the water belong? To whom does the water belong?

Stage-Manager: it's the villager's water, not the Mahar's.

Jester: The poor were deceived. The Mahars were deceived. (Bhagat, Datta. *Whirlpool*. G.P.Deshpande. Ed. *Modern Indian Drama: An Anthology*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2000. P.678)

When Manohar and Tukaram try to come out of the well, nobody helps them. After an explosion created by Kisanrav they are wounded and joined the dindi of the Vitthal cheers. The stage manager and the jester continue to move in circles. The Dalits are once again cheated by the Brahmins and are deprived of their basic rights of access to water. The play is a painful reminder of such practices prevalent in modern India.

On the 122nd birth anniversary of Dr. B.R.Ambedkar *The Hindu* carried an interesting article on the open page on this idea. In the article by Anurodh Lalit Jain titled, “Let's help realize the vision of Ambedkar for Dalits,” the subtitle demands a reassessment—“Action, not just offering flowers, will be the real tribute.” He discusses the case of the manual scavengers and states:

A real tribute to the great leader would be to continue with his efforts of empowering the Scheduled Castes and helping them overcome the vicious cycle of caste and cultural barrier, rather than merely offering flowers to his statue on his birth and death anniversaries. (Jain, Anurodh Lalit. “Let's help realize the vision of Ambedkar for Dalits.” *The Hindu*. 14th April, 2013. <http://www.thehindu.com/...-dalits/article4614717.ece> 21 april 2013)

The article written in the contemporary world urges us to re-look at the situation of the Dalits in this globalized world of the twenty first century. The play evaluates the position of the Dalits in the post-independence period. It raises an important question—has the position of the Dalits changed? The answer that the play suggests is that it is only the modes of oppression that have changed and have become more sinister. Inequality and prejudice on the basis of caste continues. What one needs is to learn from the bhakti saints a denunciation of the Brahman as intermediary between man and god. One must form a relationship of equality amongst humans and reject all forms of discrimination.

1.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt the socio-political and historical nuances of the terms untouchable, Harijan, Scheduled Caste and Dalit. This unit has outlined the contributions of Jotirao Phule and B.R. Ambedkar. It has also acquainted you with some of the personal experiences of Dr. Ambedkar to understand the importance of the Dalit movement in India. Ambedkar's call for conversion to Buddhism was a historically significant moment that had consequences for the Dalits. Their conversion to Buddhism and the beginnings of Dalit ideology are therefore significant. The following section developed the idea of tamasha and its association with Dalit writing, especially drama. This was finally followed by a discussion of Datta Bhagat's *Whirlpool* and its implication as counter-discourse.

1.9 GLOSSARY

Balutedari	: Baluta is the relationship between the Mahar and the village. Certain pre-requisites such as a small piece of land or a measure of grain was given for the performance of duties for the upper class.
Nat	: Performer
Bhand	: Performer, but the term is often used as a pejorative.
Tamasha	: A form of entertainment
Jalsa	: A kind of festival in which excerpts from Ambedkar's life were enacted.
Dhindi	: it is part of a palkhi, a procession on its way to Pandharpur. Each caste has its own dhindi.
Potraj	: The potraj is the servant of the goddess Mariai and functions as a trance-oracle.

1.10 QUESTIONS

- 1) Differentiate between the terms untouchable, Harijan, Scheduled Caste, and Dalit.
- 2) Do you think that the term 'Dalit' is an appropriate one that aptly describes the anxieties of the oppressed?
- 3) Analyse the rise of the Dalit movement in the nineteenth century.
- 4) Discuss B.R. Ambedkar's contribution to the struggle for equal rights for the "untouchables."
- 5) Analyze Jotirao Phule's contribution to Dalit literature.
- 5) What do you understand by "Tamasha"? How is it related to the "Ambedkari jalsa"?
- 6) Discuss Dalit identity as a means of counter discourse through the play *Whirlpool*.

1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

Ambedkar, B.R. "Reminiscences of Untouchability." New Delhi: Critical Quest P, 2004.

—————”Conversion as Emancipation.” New Delhi: Critical Quest P, 2004.

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—————*Seeking Begumpura*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2012.

Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013.

UNIT 2 DATTA BHAGAT: *ROUTES AND ESCAPE ROUTES*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction: Dalit theatre
- 2.2 The Socio-historical Context of the Mahars
- 2.3 *Routes and Escape Routes*: A Summary
- 2.4 Kaka's Route
- 2.5 Arjun Jadhav's Approach: Mobocracy
- 2.6 Satish and Hema: Marking the Road Ahead
- 2.7 Hema and the Struggle with Social Stereotypes
- 2.8 End: Is There any Road Ahead?
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 Glossary
- 2.11 Questions
- 2.12 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The previous chapter presented an outline of Dalit identity and the different terminologies related to it. The lesson also acquainted you with the history of the Dalit movement in India from the nineteenth century to the present. This was followed by a discussion of the *tamasha* form and its evolution into the *Ambedkari Jalsa*. Finally we presented an outline of the play *Whirlpool* by Datta Bhagat. This unit will familiarize you with another one of the plays by Datta Bhagat titled *Routes and Escape Routes*. The play belongs to the period of the 1980s. It reassesses the issues related to Dalit identity and politics. It also examines the possibilities that lie ahead for the Dalits in India.

2.1 INTRODUCTION: DALIT THEATRE

Ramnath Cavan in "What is Dalit Theatre?," his Presidential Address of the Seventh All India Dalit Drama Convention in Nashik in December 1992, makes a crucial distinction between theatre for entertainment and "explosive writing." Emphasizing the political nature of Dalit theatre, Cavan states:

Friends, this theatre belongs to all those whom the Hindu religion, caste and creed system have kept away from social, economic and educational benefits. It is the theatre which concerns itself with the pain, sorrows and sufferings of these neglected people. It is the theatre of protest which aspires to get back basic human dignity for those from whom it was snatched away. (Cavan, Ramnath. "What is Dalit Theatre?" (Excerpts from Ramnath Cavan's Presidential Address of the Seventh All India Dalit Drama Convention, held in Nashik, Maharashtra, in December 1992. Published in Marathi at A. Jnaneshvara & M. Bhosale, Pune. Translation: J.N. Paranjape) <http://www.georgs-home.com/dalitr//cahvan.htm>)

It is clearly asserted that Dalit theatre provides the oppressed a space to enact, present and discuss their problems and that it is a site of protest against any kind of division in the society. It provides the oppressed and marginalized communities with a chance to express their anxieties and voice concerns about their situation. This theatre marks the beginning of a new debate in society that questions the existing power divisions and challenges them. Dalit theatre does not conform to any existing paradigm and states that “the high caste people, who were daily fed on the ‘diet of entertainment’, could not appreciate this kind of explosive writing.” (Cavan). The reason that Cavan cites for this is that Dalit plays raised an effective counter to the caste assumptions of the privileged groups that made such plays unacceptable. According to Cavan, these plays are “realistic” and “committed to the problems of life.” He is also critical of Marathi theatre that caters to the whims and fancies of a feudal world. The earlier Marathi plays presented kings, myths and grand stories to entertain the powerful people. This is a view that is offered also by M.N.Wankhade. He believes that the great social upheavals in India find no reflection in Marathi literature, they are according to him “artificial and false, like a paper flower.” Dalit theatre becomes a significant intervention in this context and Wankhade sees it as a medium that can be used to “educate people.” In his discussion of K.A.Gunasekran’s *Bali Adugal* (Scapegoats), Armstrong explains Dalit theatre thus:

Dalit theatre links the day-to-day affairs of Dalits, encourages the participation spirit of the people with emancipatory impulse, re-evaluates Dalit arts and restructures/reconstitutes the misrepresentation made by the dominant castes. Additionally, it provides an alternative forum against the demeaning endeavors of the dominant castes over the Dalits, and retells the history, culture and life-style of the Dalits. (Armstrong, S. The Politics of Translating Indian Dalit Drama with special reference to Bali Adugal (Scapegoats).” *Modern Indian Theatre*. Ed. Nandi Bhatia. New Delhi: Oxford, 2009 P.189)

Here Dalit theatre is a means of questioning the power structures in society. Armstrong aptly points out that it is a way of re-telling, re-presenting; and that Dalit lives need to be looked at from their own perspective rather than the mainstream voices that look for ways of pushing them out of their marginal spaces. Dalit theatre has a tradition that goes back to almost 150 years. It has at the fore-front the human values that are ignored by an already prevalent form of theatre whose sole agenda is to provide some form of crass bourgeois entertainment.

Dalit drama has faced widespread criticism and is relegated as a pejorative term. Some castigated it as “verbose” and the others dismissed it as “not drama” at all. Raj Kumar in “Dalit Literature: A Perspective from below” also draws attention to this dismissal of Dalit literature as not literature and something that is “reactive” and “propagandistic.” He argues for a complete change through Dalit Literature by laying stress on the “social responsibility” of a writer. This is what leads Dalit writers to create a “counter-culture.” According to Baburao Bagul a significant marker of Dalit literature is “democratic socialism.” This idea specifically applies to Dalit theatre:

Democratic socialism which is based on liberty, equality and fraternity is the philosophy of the modern age...Democratic socialism, the new science and technology, and the revolutionary present, form the essence of Dalit literature...Literature that makes the common man its hero and advocates

socialism is the model for literature. (Bagul, Baburao. “Dalit Literature is but Human Literature.” Dangle, Arjun. *Poisoned Bread*. New Delhi: Orient Black Swan, 2009 P.293)

Dalit theatre is the form that will speak for a modern age. It makes use of rationality and questions the assumptions of the audience that create caste and other divisions in society. In the previous chapter you studied the evolution of Dalit drama from the *tamasha* form to the *jalsa*. Dalit theatre makes use of these formations also on the proscenium stage. Let us now discuss Bhagat’s *Routes and Escape Routes* as an example of Dalit theatre that raises relevant questions about the issues related to the Dalits in India while keeping in mind the elements of democratic socialism and rationality in Dalit theatre.

2.2 THE SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE MAHARS

Let us consider briefly the position of the Mahars in India with respect to Routes and Escape Routes. The play is set in Maharashtra and the Mahars constitute the major Dalit group in the state. They are the largest in number amongst the untouchable groups. Mahars were among the twelve *balutedars*, these were the village servants who had to serve the village and not any specific family. The *baluta* or the recompense was given by the village. What is striking about the Mahar was that they were entitled to a *watan*. This was a “fixed amount of land that remained in the possession of the Mahar who inherited the *balutedar* position. The Mahars could also raise a crop on the *watan* or land that they received. They were also entitled to certain pre-requisites:

The hides of the dead cows of the village, the clothes of the corpse at the burning ghat, the privilege of begging for leftover food from door-to-door, and such ritual related gifts as “money thrown into her platter when a Mahar woman comes to wave a lamp around the head of the bride or bride-groom’s mother.” Those Mahars whose inheritance did not include the *balutedar* title laboured on other’s land. (Zelliott, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013 P.26)

The Mahar was also referred to as an “inferior village servant” by the Britishers. They performed various duties such as that of watchman, arbitrator, messenger, repairing the village wall removing dead cattle, and performing duties in religious matters. The Mahars were distinguished from the other people by their clothes such as a kambal and a lathi. They had no access to the village school, temple, and well (Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013 P.27). Omvedt also points out that along with the Malas in Andhra Pradesh and Holeyas in Karnataka the Mahars formed the major category of bonded labourers (Omvedt, Gail. *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution*. New Delhi: Sage P, 1994 P.69). The Mahars were also a part of Shivaji’s army. They watched the jungles, were escorts and supplied the fort with the basic necessities such as fodder and wood. They were later recruited by the British army against the Peshwas.

A nineteenth century poem highlights how caste difference is naturalized in the minds of the children from the beginning. Ambedkar mentions how “the untouchable

was not allowed to use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along, lest he should pollute the Hindu by his shadow.” The untouchable was also supposed to wear a black thread as a marker to prevent the member of the high caste from getting polluted. Take a look at this poem that questions and challenges this ostracism:

The First Question of the Untouchable Boy

The children of untouchables,
 poor, gay, playing on the roadside—
 a Brahmin came from far,
 to the simple kid what should he say?—
 Oh you brats of *Mahars*, move away,
 Be gone! What are you playing at, you louts?
 Run and give way to the Brahmin!
 The boys fled—who would dare stay!
 One amongst them did;
 the wicked Brahmin brandished his club and shouted,
 Ass! thy shadow must not fall on me,
 get thee gone, or else this ‘sweet present!’
 The kid too slunk homewards,
 musing—
 ‘What if my shadow fell on him,
 what’s so wrong about it?’
 At home he asked the question of his mother.
 The poor mother said:
 ‘We are low and they are high,
 when you see them you had better step aside.’
 She said so—simply
 How should she know
 that highness in this world is built
 on sin and glory
 on the degradation of others!
 3rd September, 1988

(Zelliot, Eleanor. *Ambedkar’s World: The Making of Babasaheb and the Dalit Movement*. New Delhi: Narayana, 2013 P. 28-29)

2.3 ROUTES AND ESCAPE ROUTES: A SUMMARY

Datta Bhagat’s play *Routes and Escape Routes (Wata Palwata)* was first staged in 1987. It was written as part of a workshop in 1972 and was first performed in 1987 at the Tilak Smarak Mandir and was directed by Sudhir Mungi. The play is regarded as a “significant milestone in both Marathi theatre and Dalit theatre because of its thought-provoking and mature treatment of the Dalit/upper-caste conflict and because this conflict was presented on the established Marathi stage for the first time” (Columbia 1155). The play belongs to the phase of modern independent India when the Dalits converted to Buddhism at the call made by B.R. Ambedkar. *Routes and Escape Routes* explores in a lucid manner the different points of entry as well

as convenient exits from a specific way of thinking about Dalit ideologies. The play is striking for its holistic and constructive approach as it steers the reader/audience into asking relevant questions about Dalits in India.

The play has a two-act structure. The first act is divided into two scenes and the second act has three scenes. Datta Bhagat uses the naturalistic stage space for the action of this play. This is in contrast to the more flexible space in *Whirlpool*. Within the naturalistic space the play takes place within the drawing room or sitting room of the Godghate family where we see the different intellectual currents. There is progress both at the level of thought and action in the house of Satish Godghate, a teacher in a college. He is a Dalit married to a Brahmin, Hema. With them lives Satish's uncle Kaka, who had participated in the freedom struggle and is now an active member of the Dalit movement. There are two frequent visitors to their place; Arun Jhadav, a student and leader of the movement, and Dasrao who is referred to as Guruji. One is a Dalit and the other a Brahmin who is ostensibly a spokesperson for equality. In the drawing room of the Godghates there is a portrait of Babasaheb Ambedkar, a Sewadal calendar and a study table. These establish the different factors influencing Dalit thought and the way in which they impact the relationship amongst the different characters.

The play opens with Kaka dictating to Hema how she should behave with the elders by always responding with a "ji". Hema and Kaka's relation is a strange one. He never accepted this marriage and only reconciled to it with time. Kaka did not spare any occasion to remind Hema that she belonged to the upper caste. Kaka's contemporary, Dasrao, a Brahmin, carried the façade of believing in equality. However, it turned out that he, too, did not support Satish and Hema when they were in need. Her marriage to Satish is the point of intersection for the various collateral thoughts and routes that develop in the course of the play.

The respective entries of Dasrao and Arjun fix three different co-ordinates in the play. At one end of the spectrum are Kaka and Dasrao, freedom fighters and now participants and supporters of the ideology of the Dalits. At the centre of the play are Satish and Hema who strongly believe in and practice equality at all levels. They are able to see through the machinations of the state and its forces and look at the movement from within the sphere of law and order. At the other end of this spectrum is Arjun Jhadav, a student activist, who leads the movement. He believes in taking up action in his own hands, and his attempts at forming Bodh Vihar turn out to be anarchic. These are the different routes in the play as also the escape routes for some of the characters. Erin Mee in her introduction to the play states:

Routes and Escape Routes dramatizes the conflict between three characters typifying different positions within the Dalit movement. Kaka, Satish, and Arjun each represent a different generation of the movement: Kaka is an unquestioning follower of Ambedkar, Satish is an educated activist who teaches in college; and Arjun is a radical student activist. *Routes and Escape Routes* asks: what is the future of the Dalit movement: what kind of movement is it becoming? (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001 P.283-343) (17)

As each of these is different from the other it is important to discuss Bhagat's *Routes and Escape Routes* from the point of view of these different in-roads in the play. These differences are blurred in the course of the play as each way clashes with the other making the reader/audience question the viability of each of these routes.

The drawing room of the Godghate family becomes the space to discuss the problems related to the Dalits and their possible solutions. Act I raises the question of honesty and the nature of help to be rendered to the Dalits. Shewanta, a rickshawpuller's wife wanted to educate herself to get a job. She wanted to do a "D.Ed or B.Ed". For this she required a teaching certificate which ratified that she had taught for three months. Satish refused to provide this as it would be dishonest but Kaka managed to convince Dasrao who agreed to 'arrange' the certificate. While all this was happening, Arjun Jadhav got involved in securing the houses made for the flood victims and handed them over to the Dalits. His aggression is off-set by his feelings for Sonal which he keeps to himself. Her father, Dasrao humiliated him on account of his caste even though he had made no advance towards Sonal. Instead it was she who had written a letter to her father confessing her love for Arjun. His anger manifested in violence injected into the movement.

Along with this tangle of emotional relations is the mesh of the political events that takes centre stage in Act II. There is a colony called Milind Nagar being constructed by Pawar Sahib. The colony was meant for flood victims but had still not been handed over to them. Arjun Jadhav, a Dalit leader decided to take the matter in his own hands and took a morcha to Milind Nagar and forcibly occupied the colony. However, the occupants were Dalits and not the flood victims of the other castes. Satish opposed this step vehemently but Kaka saw in Arjun a new turn to the Dalit movement where violent activism was the need of the hour. However, Kaka's hopes were dashed when he found out that Arjun had collected money from the people who inhabited Milind Nagar. He also evicted Shewanta forcibly for not being able to pay the money. Shewanta was eventually killed in a police firing during a clash between the activists and the police. But the play ends on a positive note as Arjun saves Sonal from the mob and leaves her home safe, contrary to the speculations of Dasrao. It is this gesture that indicates the way ahead to Satish and Hema for the Dalit movement.

2.4 KAKA'S ROUTE

The character of Kaka is interesting for the various shades of the Dalit ideology that it presents to the reader/audience. An active participant in the freedom movement, he believed strongly in the teaching of Babasaheb Ambedkar but had somewhere down the line adapted them to suit the new environment. He did not mind a bit of arm-twisting when it concerned the issuing of a false teaching certificate for Shewanta, a widow, and a Dalit woman. He opposed Satish who felt that it was not correct to issue a false certificate. He rationalized this as follows:

The poor girl wants to learn. She's a widow. Shouldn't we help? She's even got admission to the course. B.Ed or D.Ed, whatever they call it... Who the hell does he (Satish) think he is? The God of Truth? Why did he get educated if he did not want to help his own people? Ha! I would have procured ten such certificates had I been in my own village! (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001 P.288)

This presents before us the question of the nature of help that can be rendered to someone who is completely marginalized. Where as Kaka feels strongly that a false certificate can change her life, Satish suggests the ethically correct 'route'. According to him she should teach the weak students for a year and then seek admission. But for Kaka, this is unrealistic as she has no support system and would then stand to lose a year.

In contrast to his concern for Shewanta is his genial bickering with Hema. Kaka finds it difficult to rid himself of his role as father-in-law, which allows him the right to make a jibe at Hema's position as Brahmin. He is fond of her but spares no occasion to remind her of her upper caste status. He is opposed to the marriage as:

She's a gem of a girl really. So what if she's a Brahmin! But suppose he hadn't married her... wouldn't a girl from one of our own families have lived like a queen in this house?...Of course I don't blame her. Our own boy was a bad coin so it couldn't be helped. (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001 P.293)

Kaka appreciates Hema's concern for him but feels sad that this privilege of a good home could not be enjoyed by a Dalit woman. But there is tremendous growth in the ageing man. He undergoes a process of rethinking and asks significant questions even though he is unable to locate the answers in the immediate context. He is cynical at the beginning of the play but evolves a positive attitude as he connects with Arjun's way of leading the movement. Arjun's anarchic activism inspires him bringing back the fervour of the freedom movement. He looks at himself as one of the "comrades of Babasaheb Ambedkar." He defies Satish's "armchair intellectual" position and joins Arjun in forcibly taking over Milind Nagar. He is totally fascinated by the young man's ways as it fetched them immediate results. He reprimands Satish for his mild position and states:

Oh Sattyawan, Our Lord of Truth! Why are you telling me all this? Don't give me that bullshit! What will happen? Jail, at the most. All right. I have been jailed before! Dadasaheb Gaikwad had organized that satyagraha. And on what a grand scale! Even Gandhi had never been able to organize such a mammoth rally. You know what it was for? For the grazing lands to be given to the rural poor. Thousands of poor people went to jail. Endured lathi charges. Their children suffered utter starvation. And did the poor get that land finally? No. None of them got any. But today this Arjunya has indeed achieved a miracle! People have got houses in just one day. Now let them jail us. Who cares? Come on! He may be your student, but he's working far more effectively than you. Pat him on the back, instead of boxing his ears! What's the use of your education otherwise? (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001P. 314)

These lines by Kaka present to us two different "routes" to the Dalit ideology. On the one hand is Kaka's generation that had been part of the freedom movement and the Ambedkarite struggle. On the other hand is the new generation signified by Satish and Arjun. In fact these are three different ways of looking at the Dalit way of life in the modern times. Where Satish believes in a non-violent activism, Arjun lives in the here and now. He does not hesitate to use any kind of violent and anarchic means to attain the Dalit objective. For Kaka this is something new and he embraces Arjun's ways whole-heartedly.

Consider another situation. When Kaka finds out about Shewanta's burning, he retires into his cynical cocoon. The burning of Milind Nagar and Shewanta bring an end to his active participation in the movement but these do not dilute his faith. Kaka is shocked at the perversions in Arjun. He could not fathom how Shewanta for whom he had obtained a false certificate was thrown out of her house in Milind

Nagar by Arjun “for just fifty rupees”. However, Kaka is not disheartened. He continues to believe in the ideals of Ambedkar and brings Buddha’s statue at home. This idol was meant for Milind Nagar but he refuses to give it to them. He also rejects the charity of “utensils, clothes and five hundred rupees” to be given by the “guardian minister.” Kaka dismisses Arjun’s offer. He cites the history of the Dalit movement from eating the “meat of dead cattle” to a state where the town boycotted them and they had “no wages.” They built a new life surviving on “*tarotha*” leaves. He explains to Sonal the relevance of the *parayana* – a re-interpretation of the reading of the scriptures from the Dalit point of view. He accuses Arjun for having embezzled money and expresses his deep seated anguish:

These boys showed me a new courage, and I felt alive again! But even they are going the same way now. Go, go, all of you. Go the same way. But this Kaka is the genuine heir of Babsaheb. Go accept those garlands! Bow down before them if you want to. But I won’t...this old man will break but not bend...Get out, get out of here, get lost! (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001 P.334)

With these words Kaka dies but his life ends on a note of strong dissent with the anarchic and violent methods of people like Arjun. He looked forward to the houses that Satish was planning for a Bodh Vihar in the form of a registered housing society.

2.5 ARJUN JADHAV’S APPROACH: MOBOCRACY

Another route to the Dalit movement in the play is that of Arjun Jhadav. He is a student activist and a strong believer of the anarchic methodology for the progress of the group. He decides to break the locks of a colony, Milind Nagar, constructed for flood victims to accommodate both flood affected people and the Dalits in it. Even though this is illegal, Arjun believes that if the state and people like Pawar can do their own thing, then surely he too can do the same. For him this is a struggle similar to the freedom movement. In him we see the rebellious streak that is present in Manohar in *Whirlpool*. However, Manohar uses rhetoric and argues cogently but does not resort to violence. When Josi Maharaj and Mahadu compel Manohar to rub his nose on the ground and beg forgiveness, he says,

What maharaja? Devotion to whom? Do what you think is right for you. Shall we look on silently, whatever happens? A deity that is desecrated by our touch is not our deity. That religion that keeps us away is not our religion. It’s better to live one day the life of a lion than to live a thousand days as a meek sheep, that’s the message that was given to us. (*Whirlpool*, 667)

This streak is visible in an aggressive form in Arjun Jhadav in *Routes and Escape Routes*; he rejects the caste basis that oppresses the Dalits. But he takes matters in his own hands and this translates into the use of violent methods to protect the Dalits. The play questions the position of anarchy, violence and one-upmanship in a group in the context of the Dalit movement. This is another manifestation of dissent in an India that acquired freedom through the use of non-violence.

With respect to this, Satish tries hard to explain to Arjun the difference between struggle and “goondaism”. According to Satish, “goondaism” is illegal and not “social service”. But Arjun does not listen and argues that the state is corrupt as one

of the names in the list of the flood victims is that of Dasrao. He defends himself thus:

Arjun : And these are the people who brand me a casteist! People in Bhim Nagar have been living in hutments that leak. The rains are just round the corner. I made arrangements for them. I don't have monopoly rights to think on behalf of everybody! I won't think for the others. I'll think only of my caste. That's all.

Satish : Arjun, has anybody insulted you?

Arjun : Yes.

Satish : Who?

Arjun : My caste. The caste I wasn't born into by choice. I don't want an education. Is there any dearth of those who are educated and unemployed in this country? Anyway, what will I get from this kind of education?...I want to trample on those who pretend to be reformers. I want to expose those who capitalize on our caste...I have chosen my path, sir, consciously. With my reason intact...I know what the ultimate consequence will be. Handcuffs, prison. What else! I'm prepared for that! (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001 P.302-303)

For Arjun, if the powers that be are self-seeking then he too can adopt similar measures for the benefit of the oppressed groups. Cynical, he questions the role of education for the Dalits and sees it as unproductive to the movement. Satish teaches in a college and he is a student in the same institution. But even in an academic set-up he encounters difference in the form of people like Dasrao. He pretends to help the marginalized groups. But Dasrao believes as much in caste difference as anyone else. When he discovers his daughter Sonal's letter confessing her love for Arjun, he attacks Arjun with a volley of verbal allegations. This disillusiones Arjun even more. He is sharply critical of reformers like Dasrao who are hypocritical. In the context of Sonal, he tells Hema:

Have I ever said four sentences in a row to her? Just because I live in a slum, am I shameless? Because I am an orphan, am I a ruffian? Because I am poor, am I a hooligan? I don't give a damn for such respectable people. I kick them in their teeth. I spit on their wealth...do you know what else her father said? I used to respect him so much because he had taught me. But how was I to know that a man who was such a fine teacher had a perverted heart? He said, can all Mahars be Ambedkars just because they receive an education? Receive as much education as you want, he said, but you'll never lose your habits! You'll never be civilized! (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001 P.311)

Dasrao symbolises of the double standards of the upper caste that make claims to improve the conditions of the oppressed groups. Arjun's anger is a result of the rejection by someone who had been his teacher and had propagated equality. Dasrao is unable to accept Sonal's love for Arjun. Instead of confronting her, his own caste anxieties make it more convenient for him to humiliate Arjun. Datta Bhagat is once again posing a crucial question: Are the theoretical ideas of the equality of people in India put into practice? He exposes the shortcomings in the sensibility of the upper caste that preaches one thing and practices an entirely different one. But all

these factors lead to the development of a hatred that transforms into anarchy and violence in Arjun. He continues to battle these issues with his own proactive way of thinking that leads to lawlessness.

Thus, in due course, Arjun is arrested for the illegal possession of Milind Nagar and Kaka and Satish bail him out. However, in the name of the movement, Arjun starts collecting a monthly allowance from the residents of Milind Nagar. As a result, he throws out Shewanta from Milind Nagar for not paying up the money. She had also demanded that Arjun reveals the accounts but he refused. His justification to Satish for doing this was that he needed money to bribe the officers and to fund his own travel expenses. Bhagat raises an important question here—How does one accommodate Arjun’s act of taking money for bribes, his visits to Bombay, or his denying Shewanta a place, within an ideology that is subversive, in the context of a state that is itself ridden with corruption? Legally, the state considers taking bribes as illegal but in the name of smooth functioning of the state, this is not an oddity. Therefore, the borders between what is legal and what is not are anyways blurred to the common man. This is why Arjun Jadhav fails to make the required distinction and believes that his act is correct as it is for the right cause. The issue here is of the relation between anarchic forces within the movement and the state powers that be. Thus, in the play when Arjun adopts the crooked methods of the state that are perpetuated by its own forces they turn back onto him diluting the energy of the movement, changing its focus, and in turn reinforcing the state. At the end of the play, Arjun is seen making a compromise by accepting the charity given by the “guardian minister” against whom he had earlier taken out a morcha. Shewanta’s death disillusioned Kaka. In a state of excitement, he rejects Arjun’s anarchic methods and hopes for a future with the likes of Satish.

In the play, Bhagat appears to suggest that an ideology that is in the interests of the exploited groups – Dalits, women, or poor people – there seems to be a tight-rope walk that needs to be done. One must avoid the trap of individual belief that has been spread by the state. Milind Vihar is finally burnt and the government puts its best foot forward by renovating the colony and rehabilitating people in that colony. The minister makes a display of charity and distributes money, utensils, and clothes to the people. By resorting to anarchic methods the resisting ideology stops to function and in turn strengthens the dominant state ideology. In using the methods of the state the people involved in a mass movement become victims themselves, as the state is the seat of power. Momentarily, Arjun’s voice has been muted as he goes to receive the money much as he believes that it is their money and not of the government. But the fact remains that the state has once again ratified its position in the eyes of the commoners by putting on the guise of generosity. As Kaka says disapprovingly,

Then why do you offer them garlands? So that they can set your houses on fire and be the ones to put the fire out? Ah, what magnificent justice! Don’t you boast in front of me. (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.332)

But even at the end of the play Arjun continues his policy of attack. The people who had burnt Milind Nagar were released by the court. This made the law and the state even more suspect to Arjun. He reiterates his idea of the road ahead:

The accused were released. Proved innocent. As if that had given them a license to insult us. The moment they entered the town, they started a volley of abuse. Where

were the police then? We were unprepared. They caught one of my friends in the city square. He was alone. Unaccompanied. They thrashed the life out of him. When we heard this, we rushed to the place. We found two policemen at the pan stall, rubbing tobacco in their palms. The so-called guardians of law!...what sort of justice is that? Some people burned Shewanta. And the same people charged me with murder. They were the ones who trapped me. Okay, I know what has to be done now, sir. There's a technique for escaping safely. I know it now. I've found my own way, sir. Attack is the best defense. The movement has no other alternative but struggle. (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.341)

Shewanta's case complicates matters further. Arjun was cornered and there seemed to be no escape. But this in turn convinced him that his way of thinking was the correct one. This raises the issue of the treatment of the Dalits by the state forces such as the police. Arjun was first rejected by Dasrao, and then subject to further torture in the Shewanta case by the police. The only escape route that he could fathom was that of a complete rejection of the law and the state.

2.6 SATISH AND HEMA: MARKING THE ROAD AHEAD

In *Routes and Escape Routes*, Satish and Hema represent the voice of wisdom and intellect. Satish is a Dalit and Hema belongs to the upper caste and is a Brahmin. They met at a Vikranada camp and their marriage faced stiff opposition from all. Hema belongs to an educated family of "reformers"; her father is a judge. Her mother felt disturbed about this marriage but the family gradually reconciled. We don't know much about their views on this marriage but Kaka's response is certain. He was opposed to this match as it took away the chance of prosperity from a Dalit woman. In the play their relationship is projected as one of equality. Both Satish and Hema are confident that the road ahead has to be ascertained through education and things must proceed according to principles of legitimacy. The idealism that Satish and Hema share is precious and they are sincerely attached to the movement whose beliefs they practice.

Satish is a professor in a college and Arjun is his student. Satish opposes Arjun's acts but bails him out and defends him. Satish tries hard to persuade Arjun not to enter Milind Nagar forcibly. Satish carries the argument further as he positions the law as an important force in civilized society. He asks:

Satish : Arjun, your action is illegal.

Arjun : I know that.

Satish : Arjun, this is called *goondaism*.

Arjun : Sir!

Satish : And *goondaism* isn't social service.

Arjun : Only needy people have occupied those houses. You call that *goondaism*? You call me a *goonda*? (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.302)

Arjun's anarchic ways and Satish's philosophical tone raises the question about the relationship of the state to the deprived sections of society? Is the state in any way responsible for a vast group, the masses, or does it suffice that the state considers the face and interests of the small but powerful social group? This difference in the way of thinking, behaving and strategizing continues through the play. It allows us to assess and evaluate the different manners/routes in which one can approach the Dalit ideology and look at the road ahead. Satish believes in the law and for him the alternative is to register a housing society and take a loan for it. However, the impatience of people like Arjun pushes them to take immediate action based on their singular whims. For Satish, the road ahead lies in the Ambedkarite way of thinking. But the interpretation of Babasaheb's ways differs from that of Kaka or Satish. A highly educated person, Satish appreciates Babasaheb's method of integrating the Brahmins into the movement. During a Mahad satyagraha, Ambedkar had rejected the help of the "non-Brahmins" as they had asked him to eliminate the Brahmins from the movement. Satish is inspired by this holistic view of B.R. Ambedkar and for him the route ahead is the path suggested by the great leader. He states with confidence:

Kaka you've always thought of me as an armchair intellectual. It's true. I'm no activist like you. But I want you to answer a few questions. There were ten thousands activists in the Mahad *satyagraha*, right? Each one had a *lathi* in his hand, a fire in his soul, and the strength of an elephant! And how big was the group of the stone throwing Brahmins? Only a handful. Had they really wanted to, the activists could have burnt the whole of Mahad... Babasaheb had just to say the word, and they would have done it in a second. But it never happened... it was a historical moment. A moment when the Dalits realized their collective power. He refused help offered to him by the non-Brahmins... because their condition was—"Exclude the Brahmins." Taking the support of the law and appealing to the conscience of the people when law was found to be weak—that's how Babasaheb lived! (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.314-315)

He sees Arjun's view as nothing but "mobocracy". Even though all the castes are united on the issue of the housing society for the flood victims, Arjun refuses to make them a part of the movement. Satish reprimands him but to no avail:

Arjun you aren't prepared to respect the law. You don't bother about earning people's sympathy. You aren't prepared to consider other castes even as a strategy. Where are you leading them all? Where? Arjun, the fight for justice can't be fought with crowds alone. That is sheer mobocracy. It always claims the poor man as the victim. Forget about the others. At least we have to fight more carefully. (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.314)

Satish distinguishes between *morchha* as a constructive force and mobocracy as violent and destructive and suggests that there is no point in meddling with the law. Satish can see through the invisible trap of the state in which the anarchic forces are constantly victimized and there is no constructive end that is achieved. This is further complicated because in a capitalist economy the caste divisions are at the root entwined with class hierarchies. In the context of the accused that had set fire

to Milind Nagar, Satish explains how these were poor people who were misled. This consciousness is there in the play as Satish explains to Kaka and Arjun:

Oh that they did. But they were misled. They are savarnas all right, but they, too, are poor. It's the poor who are fighting the poor. Moreover, they are taking the law into their own hands. (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.331)

People are forever caught in the devious maze of routes and escape routes set up by the state that prevent people from reaching a meaningful goal. Satish is caught in this situation as the college decides to suspend Arjun from the college. Since there is no concrete charge against him, Satish takes a firm stand and defends him. He further states that in case the college decides to go ahead with its decision he will resign from the committee. Satish has to bear the brunt of this as students come and canvas outside his house. But he tries to engage in a constructive dialogue with them but to no avail. He is disappointed and looks for hope in dismal conditions.

Dasrao who pretends to be a spokesperson of equality in society still has tea made by a Brahmin and cannot think of marrying his daughter to a Dalit. He chooses to believe that Arjun, a Dalit, must have kidnapped his daughter but is put to shame when he is informed that he has in fact saved Sonal. This gesture reveals the humane side Arjun who would not even in this caste-war think of harming Sonal. This is what gives Satish and Hema a glimmer of hope as they rush to save him. Bhagat portrays his characters in a sensitive way. For him, they are human beings with certain beliefs and are constantly capable of change.

2.7 HEMA AND THE STRUGGLE WITH SOCIAL STEREOTYPES

The action of the play opens with a conversation between Kaka and Hema. Kaka tries to inculcate 'values' in Hema by conditioning her speech and making her respond by saying 'ji'. Hema gives in to some of Kaka's whims as she finds him friendly and sympathetic and knows that he does not nurture any bad intentions unlike Dasrao who pretends to be a reformer. However, the conflict in the play is not about patriarchal control within a family. Kaka is uncomfortable with Hema's status as a Brahmin as it deprives Dalit woman of possible upliftment. Throughout the play there are constant references to her superior caste status, which in turn makes "Brahmin" a pejorative term. As Kaka says,

But tell me, does caste disappear if I stop talking about it? Babasaheb used to say, what you can't cast off is caste...I have worked with Babasaheb for more than forty years against the caste system. But has it disappeared? No. How many years has it been since your marriage? Five. Why, it's more than three years since Satish came here, to this town, to take up this job. But what do people say even now? Tell me: Satish Godghate, professor, a Buddhist, and his wife, a Brahmin! (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India*. Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.287)

This question is redundant in the context of Hema who is a strong believer of caste equality. A member of the Vikranda movement she wants to do away with any kind

of categorization whether based on varna or religion. Bhagat has portrayed Hema as a sensitive, intelligent woman who speaks her mind with conviction. Hema's agony is visible a little later in the play when she lashes out against this caste tirade by expressing her own views on this issue. She says,

If you call someone a Mahar, that's an insult! And what if you call someone a Brahmin? Is that supposed to be an honour? I rejected my caste when I married you. It's a deliberate insult to me to be called a Brahmin! A downright affront! Everybody claws at me with their savage caste nails.
(Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India.* Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.321)

Hema is disturbed by the stereotypes around her that project her in a particular manner due to her caste status even though she rejected such perceptions. A firm believer in caste equality she resists the slotting of people on the basis of their caste. She is averse to any social stereotyping. For instance, she is disturbed as Sonal seeks their help regarding her love for Arjun. Her marriage to Satish indicates that she is to provide support for all such relations. When confronted by Dasrao she asks him—"Who did you take us for? Managers of an Intercaste Marriage Bureau?" (320) She shares her agony with Satish, "Sonal thinks I must support her. Why? Simple! I've married out of caste! Then there's Arjun!" (321). Hema's distress at a certain stereotyping of her position viz-a-viz the protest movement is a relevant question. Hema's voice is that of the casteless woman within the Dalit construct. However no one recognizes this and continues to look at her as the Brahmin within the Dalits. This creates a situation that disturbs Hema. However she is shown to be a strong woman who decides to overcome all with her inner strength.

At the end of the play she is seen worshipping the Buddha idol that Kaka had brought home. It is in his memory that she worships the idol even though he had mocked her—"This is our God, you know. Not yours." (325) But it appears that Hema remembers Kaka fondly for his honesty and sincerity to the movement. Satish too is surprised to see her make the offering. At the end of the play Hema is pregnant and the baby signals hope and optimism. Hema provides support and hope to Satish showing the possibility ahead. She and Satish decide that they must salvage the last trace of humanity that is there in Arjun.

2.8 END: IS THERE ANY ROUTE AHEAD?

The end of the play raises some thought-provoking questions. Having burnt the police jeep is, Arjun is on the run. He believes strongly in the methods he employs in the movement, even as Satish calls them a "devastating explosion" and tries to stop him, Arjun, refers to Satish's methodology as impotent and good enough only to "discuss" Arjun says,

I'll come to you when I don't have anything important to do. To "discuss" things. It will be a nice entertainment for me, and you will get the satisfaction of having done a lot, too. You always told us, didn't you, that you have to pay the price! If you want to be in the movement you have to pay the price! What does it mean—paying the price? To protect your job, reputation and face a little mudslinging? (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India.* Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.342-343)

According to Arjun, Satish enjoys a degree of respectability as a teacher and the price, if any, that he has to pay is resignation from the discipline committee. Arjun turns onto Satish to pose the question of the viability of theoretical modes of thought that do not translate into action. Satish recognizes this when he says:

There's something wrong somewhere. What's wrong? Where? Kaka educated me so that I could think. And me? I do nothing else but think. Nothing but impotent thinking! I have become irrelevant in this system. (Bhagat, Datta. *Routes and Escape Routes. Drama Contemporary: India.* Ed. Erin B. Mee. Baltimore, Md: John Hopkins UP, 2001. P.343)

Satish understands that there is a lacuna in his relationship with his social setting but he is unable to define it. He understands the working of the state but cannot find effective answers that would give a concrete form to the movement against a system divisive at its roots. He redeems himself by Hema's reassurance of their faith in humanity. According to her Arjun's act of saving Sonal is exemplary. But the question posed at the end of the play is, what can be the possible route towards a constructive approach in society to assert the rights of the social groups that are outside the circle of power? Through the debate between Satish and Arjun, Bhagat seems to suggest that the anarchic sensibility must be reassessed and at the same time the impotence and cultural elitism of the intelligentsia needs to be properly addressed. The intellectual think tank of our society has to ally itself with mass movements to effectively resist the dominant forces of the state and to make this resistance a success. There is hope in Satish's efforts at creating space for the oppressed by taking a loan for the housing society. Further Satish and Hema rush to save Arjun who showed a humanitarian streak in saving Sonal. The baby that Satish and Hema are going to have is a symbol of hope signalling a meaningful road ahead.

2.9 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have read an analysis of Datta Bhagat's play *Routes and Escape Routes*. This unit discussed the different routes or attitudes towards the Dalit ideology. It raised the issue of the road ahead for the movement. The lesson raised questions regarding the difference between an organized movement and mobocracy. These issues have been looked at from the different perspectives of Kaka, Arjun, Satish and Hema. We finally dealt with the note of optimism the play presents at the end.

2.10 GLOSSARY

Ideology	: integrated ideas in an approach.
Mahar	: a caste considered to be the untouchable in Maharashtra
Milind Nagar	: The choice of name is interesting as B.R.Ambedkar had started a college in Aurangabad by the name of Milind College for the education of the Dalit students.
Mob	: a riotous crowd
Morcha	: agitation
Naturalistic	: Naturalism in Europe on stage began towards the end of the nineteenth century. In India in the 1950s playwrights frequently used this style on stage. In it the entire action takes place within the drawing room of a household.

- Parayana** : A Hindu ritual of reading the epics during the rainy season. In some villages, Buddhists follow the same ritual, but they read Ambedkar's book *Buddha and His Dhamma* instead of the *Ramayana*. (Mee 352)
- Savarna** : upper caste Hindus.
- Vikranda** : Datta Bhagat says there is no organization by the name of Vikranda, that it is an imaginary organization. The sound of the word, however, is reminiscent of Yukrand, the name of an organization that does exist. From 1970-1990 young people in Maharashtra were heavily influenced by the Yukrand. (Mee 356)

2.11 QUESTIONS

- 1) Why does Kaka find it difficult to accept Satish and Hema's marriage?
- 2) What kind of person is Dasrao?
- 3) Which character do you appreciate the most?
- 4) What are the problems that Hema has after marrying Satish?
- 5) What is the difference between social service and mobocracy?
- 6) How does Arjun plan to counter the problems of the Dalits?
- 7) Comment on the ending of the play.
- 8) Analyze *Routes and escape Routes* as an example of Dalit theatre.

2.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 SHORT STORIES: “THE POISONED BREAD” AND “THE STOREYED HOUSE”

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Bandhumadhav (1928-1997)
 - 3.1.1 Themes and Concerns
 - 3.1.2 Introducing the story: “The Poisoned Bread”
 - 3.1.3 Detailed Analysis of the Story: From Pathos to Protest
 - 3.1.4 Metaphors, Symbols, Irony, Sarcasm
 - 3.1.5 Autobiographical Element
- 3.2 Waman Hoval (1938-)
 - 3.2.1 Themes and Concerns
 - 3.2.2 Introducing the Story: “The Storeyed House”
 - 3.2.3 Detailed Analysis of the Story: From Erasure to Assertion
 - 3.2.4 Autobiographical Element
 - 3.2.5 Comparison and Contrast
- 3.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.4 Glossary
- 3.5 Questions
- 3.6 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit we will get introduced to two Marathi short story writers Bandhumadhav and Waman Hoval. We will familiarize you with their life and works and give a detailed analysis of their short stories “The Poisoned Bread” and “The Storeyed House”. After going through the unit you will become aware of the themes and concerns of the writings of the two authors.

3.1 BANDHUMADHAV (1928-1997)

Bandhumadhav Modak was born in Sangliwadi, district Sangli, Maharashtra on November 3, 1928. Short stories, or *katha*, constitute a significant portion of Marathi Literature. As enriched as Marathi literature is with other genres of literature, Dalit literature also owes greatly to Marathi writers for its present shape and form and Bandhu Madhav’s contribution to Dalit story writing is significant. Being born in the Mahar(untouchable)caste, Bandhu Madhav lived a life of extreme poverty and distress, struggling for day-to-day survival. He was interested in poetry from his childhood days and started writing in 1942. An employee with the office of the government of Maharashtra, he quit his job because he wanted to contribute to the cause of the Dalits. He is best known for his collection of stories titled *Amhini Manas Aahot* (We are Humans Too) published in 1981. Some of his other notable works are *Petle le Aakash* (The Burnt Sky) published in 1983 and *Varg Samrat*, (1985)

a biographical novel based on the life of Shahir Bhau Phakkad, a popular writer of the Marathi Vagas, an integral part of ‘Tamasha’ (highly popular form of folk-drama which has been in vogue since the seventeenth century in Maharashtra). Apart from this, he was among the leading writers together with V.S. Kardak and Raja Dhale whose short stories and revolutionary ideas used to be published in *Prabuddha Bharat* and *Dharmayana*, Ambedkarite Marathi periodicals. Considered to be the “harbinger of Marathi Dalit story”, Bandhumadhav is referred to as the “first Dalit writer” who requires to be mentioned by Maharashtra Nav Nirman Sena in a detailed article on Marathi short story. (www.manase.org) Hailed as a pioneer short story writer among Dalits, he is called “Dalit Sahityatil Adhya Kathakar” by Arun Kamble, the famous Marathi writer and Dalit activist, and “Adhya Praneta of Dalit Sahitya” by J.G. Mane (*Man and Development* Vol.10 by The Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development , 1988)

3.1.1 Themes and Concerns

A very active participant in the Ambedkarite movement, Bandhumadhav’s writing echoes Ambedkar’s campaign of rejection of caste hierarchy. Being a Mahar himself, he was truly striving to describe the life he had experienced as a Dalit. He, along with the other followers of Ambedkar like Shankarrao Kharat, Baburao Bagul, Annabhau Sathe felt that there was no place for the joys, sorrow, life and experiences of dalits in the contemporary Marathi literature. So, they started writing about dalit experiences with unparalleled vehemence and trenchancy against what Baburao Bagul, a significant precursor of dalit literature, called as “Sadashiv Pethi Literature” (a sarcastic term referring to a bourgeois, Brahmin dominated locality in Pune, meaning literature catering to the needs of only the upper class) . Rejection of the superstitions of the Varna system, inhumanity and unjust exploitation, a strong protest against all the forces in the way of human welfare and a strong revolt against the class and caste based structure of society gave his writing an Ambedkarite colour and constituted the major theme of his works. Bandhumadhav was also inspired from the African American Black Literature and Black Panthers like all Marathi Dalit writers associated with Dalit Panthers and Little Magazine Movement, and projected concrete reality in his works by being a true mouthpiece of the oppressed. In his first collection of stories, *Amhini Manas Aahot*, he urges the downtrodden to fight for the social ascension and emancipation and to revolt against their centuries old bondage. By its representation of the lives of the most marginalised, he stunned the reader with his poignant images, liberated spirit and strong and powerful style of writing. The disapproval and rebellious style of his writing show his extreme hatred for Hindu caste system and like most of the Dalit writers, Buddhism shaped and influenced his writing, fascinated by Dr. Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism.

3.1.2 Introducing the Story: “The Poisoned Bread”

Belonging to the epoch of the Dalit Panthers, the story is a true representation of their ideology i.e. to raise a voice against the increasing atrocities towards Dalits by the caste Hindus by reacting sharply to the age old oppression and tyranny and arousing and uniting the Dalit youth to protest against their inhuman treatment. ‘Dalit Panthers’ were a group of educated Dalit youth wishing to give an expression to their anger against caste prejudice and injustice. The tumult in the mind of the writer as a Dalit Panther himself is automatically communicated to the reader through the narrator of the story, Mhadeva, a Mahar by caste. Unlike the other untouchable castes of Maharashtra like Mangs whose occupation was to make ropes, Mahars

had to depend on the other people for work. Arjun Dangle writes, “The Mahars had no place in the rural economy. They had no traditional profession, no land to till, no means of production. They had to do any available work in the village and lived on left-over food doled out by the upper castes.” That is why during harvesting time, the narrator, just returned from the city where he is receiving some education, accompanies his grandfather to the field of a landlord Bapu Patil in the hope of getting some share of corn, in exchange of their work on the field. Bapu Patil, however, truly representative of his class, spews venom for the low caste Mahars as being ‘evil’, accuses them of “profaning religion”, and “defiling lords” and calls them “*chappa*” which should keep to its “own position”. The rebel in the narrator cannot stand this insult of his grandfather and retorts sharply, attacking the landlord with a volley of words trying to prove the worthlessness of his arguments against his caste. This further annoys the landlord, Bapu Patil and he refuses to give them any work in his field, asking them to “get lost”. Yetalya, however begs to be forgiven and pleads for some work, literally falling at his feet. As if with an intent to take revenge from the narrator for his audacity, Bapu Patil asks them to finish the work in an impossibly short period of time and leaves for breakfast. As anticipated, they fail to finish the task on time, inviting for Bapu Patil’s wrath and even after the day’s toil, he flatly refuses to give them any corn. Yetalya manages to get some “stale, rancid pieces of bread in the oxen’s pen. The bread was so stale that even the “oxen seemed to have refused to eat them.” But Yetalya happily collects the pieces and returns home. His wife cooks those stale bread pieces with *dulli* and they all eat that concoction for dinner. The bread, however, turns out to be “poisonous” making grandpa severely sick the next morning, vomiting and purging badly. All treatments and medicines fail, and grandpa Yetalya dies due to the “poison” but not before giving a strong message to his grandson, “take away this accursed bread from the mouths of the Mahars” and leaving a loudly wailing family behind. The words of his dying Grandfather keep echoing in the mind of the narrator instigating him to fight back, and he takes his grandpa’s death as a reason to be filled with this urge to retaliate.

3.1.3 Detailed Analysis of the Story: From Pathos to Protest

If seen from the standpoint of theory of aesthetics and art, the story is cast into the framework of socialist art which is manifest in the manner in which it ends with a message to overthrow the bourgeois primitivism and accept facts of reality as they are. The socialist writer is conscious of the transforming power of art, the socialist art calls upon to raise the curtain upon the world of tomorrow and to this end, life is to be depicted in its revolutionary development. The socialist realism grows out of the fertile soil of revolutionary romanticism and critical realism which is connected with the growth of social consciousness in the working class. In other words, the class factor plays a decisive role in the creation of the new system as envisaged by Yetalya, the poor protagonist of the story.

What transforms people into mutually hostile atoms in a bourgeois society is self interest and profit motive which, to quote Engels gives “rise to universal disintegration”. The social harmony is destroyed in a property owning society, the individual is dominated by selfish thoughts and feelings rather than being alive to the common good. This inherent contradiction between labour and capital is very crucial in capitalism which the story beautifully dramatises.

The story digs at the Manuite division of the society into four varnas according to merit/virtue of birth, family and caste, which has been much maligned and abused

by the self proclaimed Mahants of the society. It begins with the visit of the narrator Mhadeva with his Grandpa, Yetalya , to the farmhouse of one member of the upper caste farming community at Kupad village. The village is a locality riven with class and caste consciousness, the 'big' and the 'small' people. The people of Mhadeva's class are looked upon as untouchables, their identity is reduced to just being equal to a footwear, a chappal, symbolizing the lowest rung at the social totem pole, the underdogs and the downtrodden. The master is Babu Patil, the bread giver who seems to be an inveterate believer in the supremacy of the class hierarchy and looks a superstitious man which is manifest in taking his encounter with the Mahar in the morning as something sinister, inauspicious.

"Hey, what brings you here at such an early hour? Hope you haven't come here with your mind set on evil. For don't they say, an encounter with a Mahar in the morning, and you're doomed for good." ("Poisoned Bread" p.166)

His portraiture is true to history, a product of the bourgeois world outlook that has been standing over since ages together on their self-proclaimed supremacy of the position in the social order which has ironically divested them of their humanity.

The author by degrees introduces the theme of untouchability which is a larger social evil and which is reflected in Babu Patil's accusation of the Mahars polluting the gods. The temple of a local deity, Lord Vithobha of Pandharpur is defiled by the very entry of the low caste people which was forbidden and as such, the river Chandrabhaga is dried up as a result of God's anger at the profanation of religion¹. The division of Gods in terms of caste and the concept of "pollution" by the very shadow of a Dalit is highly comical and incompatible with the change of winds from the corner, the master perhaps does not understand. Mhadeva is introduced as a "city bred lad", Yetalya's eldest daughter's son and education has taught him the meaning of human dignity, nevertheless, his protest against a senseless accusation is rebellious and therefore fatal. Patil has no answer, nor does anyone from his own caste, to what the boy asks for. Because the address is not to one, but to the entire community which boasts of being 'big' without knowing what 'bigness' is

"Patil, will you kindly tell me what you meant when you accused us of forgetting religion , abandoning our caste and of polluting the god? And if a religion can't tolerate one human being treating another simply as a human being, what's the use of such an inhumane religion? And if our mere touch pollutes the gods, why were the Mahars and Mangs created at all? And who, may I know, who indeed, created them? And would you please tell me the name of the god whom the Mahars and Mangs can claim as their own?"

There is no reason why Patil should feel so enraged. He consciously stirs a debate, as to what makes a Brahmin Brahmin, education or birth. "A Mahar is a Mahar even if he passes LLB and becomes a barrister... one should always keep to one's position."(169) What position Patil refers to is no secret. Mhadeva's retaliation at the discrimination of one from the other in terms of caste, birth, religion "aren't we also made of the same flesh and blood as the rest of you?"(169) has human implication which is not properly appreciated by one whose cultural constructedness is vitiated by a rotten spurious system that encourages caste hierarchy.

The title finds full implication in the second part of the story. Both the grandson and the old man are seen plying at the work, the master leaves for breakfast with the

warning to finish the job by the time he returns. The “hard work at the threshing floor” and “the red sun” leave the boy famished, he feels scared of Patil’s arrival whose usual merriment is tormenting a labourer like a beast of prey. And with Patil’s arrival, the story takes a turn, towards violence, both physical and moral. It is past noon, Patil finds nothing substantial done. Not rewarding for whatever little was done, he threatens them to leave the floor. Yetalya’s supplications with tearful eyes are too weak to stir Patil’s conscience. Yetalaya fears the pangs of starvation not as much as those of slavery. Carlyle’s celebration of the dignity of labour—”weather of head or hand” is just a simple feat for the sake of sermonising for people like Patil with a bourgeois mindset.

The two toil throughout the day with high hopes to get a handful of grain to eat but Patil does not give them even a “few measure of jowar”. The old man turns feverish imagining the bite of hunger and the plight of one going to bed unfed. However, his eyes fall on the four-day stale, rancid crumbs of bread thrown on the ground for the oxen to eat. He collects them and carries them for his family to eat. The grandma mixes the bread with dulli and cooks for supper. The morning turns into a gloomy start of the day because the four day stale bread, smeared with cow dung and urine grows poisoned. The old man begins vomiting and the doctor finds the cause of vomiting and diarrhoea in the poison that the staleness of the bread created in the form of toxin. The old man is on the verge of death with the boy sitting by his side shedding tears, ruminating on the predicament of his caste, “when shall the meek and humble people of my community be uplifted? And when shall they be treated like human beings...When?” (174)

The tragic spectacle of life as lived by the Mahars and Mangs does not end on a note of defeatism and despair, rather it strikes a note of hope and optimism as is generated by the words of the dying old man. A message which is not merely phoney for a fairy stuff, but it is highly pragmatic, the real anodyne to escape the poisoning impact of the viciousness of the system governed by the consideration of caste, religion, birth and division of labour.

“Mhadeva, don’t weep, my boy. I’m an old thing now. And being so old, I may stop breathing any moment. What can I say to you now? I can only say: never depend on the age-old bread associated with our caste. Get as much education as you can. Take away this accursed bread from the mouths of the Mahars. This poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man. ...” (174)

The words “the poisonous bread” keep ringing in the boy’s ears. Overcoming the tragic loss of his grandpa, he feels illumined. He is filled with a sense of fury and disgust which “prompts” him to “retaliate”. This mode of retaliation is not violent, but it surely is revolutionary, and it is to be effected by being self reliant in matters of living and not “depending on the age old bread” associated with their caste.

The influence and reflection of Dr. Bhimarao Ambedkar on the writer is clearly visible and is communicated through the story. Dr. Ambedkar, being a Mahar himself, led the struggle to free the untouchables from the clutches of caste or varna system. Mahars derived lot of inspiration and enthusiasm from the revolutionary standpoint propounded by Ambedkar. He believed that the “mental slavery” which perpetuates this slavery as being a matter of “right” also “holds back dalits and other subordinate classes and they don’t feel like fighting to be free because they are bound by their “minds” as well. Gail Omvedt, in his prefatory note “Literature of Revolt” to the book *Poisoned Bread* (ed. Arjun Dangle) cites example of an African American

movie, *The Great Debaters* as having the same message. “The hero, Denzil Washington, tells his students, after describing graphic atrocities against the slaves, ‘they found a better way to keep slaves: feed the slave, keep his body, but take his mind. You’ve lost your minds, I’m here to give you back your minds!’” Omvedt further says that “if dalits throughout India today revere Ambedkar, it is because he had played that role in their lives—giving them ‘minds’ to understand and move ahead with.” The narrator of the story, Mhadava, is certainly shown having clear thoughts about rooting out this “mental slavery” or the slavery of the mind which in the words of Gail Omvedt, “lay behind seeing caste-feudal bondage as a ‘right’.” The narrator, being the mouthpiece of the writer, challenges this idea. It is clear in his rebellious war of words with Patil, quoted above, and in his reasoning out with his grandfather, Yetalaya against his ‘mental’ block on the age-old slavery as being the only destiny of Mahars:

“But why should it go on? Even a lion locked in a cage all his life forgets how to hunt. This hereditary land right has trapped us Mahars for good. How can we dream of doing business independently since we’ve been fed all our lives on the charity of others? What achievement can we ever boast of? All that comes from begging is more begging.” On being asked by his grandpa the way to escape from hereditary holding of land, he boils further, “by abandoning it. There’s no alternative...Instead of enslaving ourselves to life-long labour, we must free ourselves from the land-bondage and learn to live independently, with a sense of pride.”(172)

His enlightened spirit is expressed in his strong urge to overthrow the system and taking a stand against the oppression that has been continuing for centuries by asserting the right to live and be treated as a human.

The story, if interpreted in the light of the materialist theory of history as offered by Marx and Engels, with emphasis on class struggle as the driving force of history is revolutionary in its conception, the essence is on reforming—favouring the dismantling of the status quo, making an appeal to both the ruling and the ruled: the former should be considerate towards the well being of the labourers, the latter be awakened to reality for the smooth running of the system. There is a journey from apathy to anger, from the depiction of pathos to an advocacy for protest. The story communicates, to thousands of others like the narrator and his grandpa, the message of Ambedkar, to stand up and take every step in the direction of “taking away the accursed bread from the mouth of the Mahars”.

3.1.4 Metaphors, Symbols, Irony, Sarcasm

Although the employing of stylistic devices is not considered very important in Dalit writing and the emphasis is on the illustration of the real problem, the predicament of the weak and poor. Still, the images, symbols, metaphors and sarcasm brought into play by the writers has a specific purpose: To heighten the impact of the heart-rending situations and horrible experiences of the untouchables on the reader. Bandhumadhav has also made use of a few of these devices to achieve this sensitive influence on the mind of the reader and to depict the reality of things.

First of all, The metaphor of the “poisoned bread” in the very title is highly suggestive. The bread in the story that kills the protagonist is virtually poison. But the real spirit of the story lies elsewhere which gets articulated in the dying words of the old man. The bread is a variant of caste, in a sense. The bread is poisonous, if earned

under a system controlled by slavery but the call is to be free from slavery and the bonded labour.

Chappal is a metaphor for the lowest status in the social order and caste hierarchy. Patil says to the grandson, “a *chappal* is never worshipped in place of God, is it?” The Mahars are treated as a ‘*chappal*’ by the ‘Patils’ of the society, signifying the lowest of the low, something to be loathed and treated contemptuously.

The writer uses sarcasm also as a device to underline the theme of the story, the plight of the Mahars. Yetalya’s repeated requests and begging for some share of corn meets with scorn by Patil, who says in a derisive tone, “Don’t give me that line, you’re no longer the Mahar-Mangs of the good old days, to beg your share of corn. You are now Harijans! You’ve even started claiming equality, so I was told, eating and drinking with us at the city hotels. So, there remains absolutely no difference between us, does there? Now that you’re our peers, tell me, why do you still beg for a share of the corn?” This bitterness of Patil exposes the insignificance of the changing times and reforms in the lives of people like Yetalya who are accused of forgetting the reality by their Lords and Masters and are shown their true “position”. Their journey from ‘slavery’ to ‘equality’ still remains a far-fetched dream and considered to be an eye-wash for the upper class Patils. The reference to the nomenclature “Harijan” can also be a dig of the writer at the strong differences of opinion between Ambedkar and Gandhi on the subject of the strengthening the Dalit society. Dr. Ambedkar and his followers did not find any difference between being called an untouchable or a ‘harijan’ (the name given by Gandhi) as the new ‘name’ did not do anything substantial to change their status in the existing social order. The writer being a staunch Ambedkarite ridicules Gandhi’s feats regarding the politicisation of the whole issue. Because, as Arjun Dangle says, “It was not in the interest of Mahatma Gandhi or the Indian National Congress to allow the influence of Dr. Ambedkar to extend to all untouchables, as Dr. Ambedkar actively participated in politics and opposed the Congress. The congress began to build up leadership at the national level from amongst other groups of Dalit to stop the advance of Dr. Ambedkar.” The writer, through his villain, Patil, points the finger at Gandhi’s shallow efforts to eradicate the evil of caste system and whatever he did, was more in his own interest than the dalits because Dr. Ambedkar opined, in the words of Arjun Dangle, “that the congress was a handmaiden of the capitalists and the upper castes.”

3.1.5 Autobiographical Element

Saranakumar Limbale in his book, *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature* says that while non-dalit literature is based on ‘imagination’, Dalit literature draws from ‘experience’. All dalit writers have documented what is ‘real’ and what they have ‘experienced’ themselves as outcastes. There would be no dalit literature if this reality was not felt so deeply by the creators of this genre of literature. “The Poisoned Bread” is no exception. The story narrates the plight of the Mahars in Maharashtra and Badhumadhav being a Mahar himself, has been able to juxtapose their trials and tribulations well, without any hesitation. Moreover, the references to Sangli, a Maharashtra town, bring the story even more close to the reality of the writer because of his having spent many years in the same place. The “city bred” boy of the story is akin to the writer who received his education at Sangli. The very name “Mhadeva” is also very close to “(Bandhu) Madhav. The rebel in the protagonist is the mouthpiece of the author himself when he asks his grandpa to abandon “the fix

of this hereditary holding”, “We Mahars have been misled by the false notion of land right, taking it as a rightful favour to beg for bread as long as we live. We forget all the while that the crumbs they give us make us slaves.”

Bandhumadhav, in one of his articles in the *Prabuddha Bharat* of 15 February 1958 explains the aim of the Dalit writing, “Just as the Russian writers helped the revolution by spreading Lenin’s revolutionary ideas through their works, our writers should spread Dr. Ambedkar’s philosophy to the villages. Politics is just one way of attacking the opposition. Unless we attack from all sides we cannot defeat those who have inflicted injustice on us for the last thousands of years.” “The Poisoned Bread” is an attempt towards achieving this aim. The story gives a new definition of Dalit writing by leaving no scope for acceptance or withdrawal, it being a story of his own, as well as of all his comrades who strove to “take away the accursed bread from the mouth of the Mahars”, so that it does not “kill the very humanness of man”.

3.2 WAMAN HOVAL (1938-)

Waman Govind Hoval was born in village Tadsar of district Sangli, Maharashtra on April 1, 1938. Having received his primary and secondary education in his native village, Hoval passed his matriculation in the year 1956. His father worked at some dockyard in Mumbai and that gave him a chance to come to Mumbai to pursue higher education. He enrolled himself for B.A. at Siddharth College, established in 1946 by Dr. Ambedkar for Dalit students. He completed B.A. in 1974, and after that he worked for Indian Railways and retired as an Office Superintendent. Known as a famous *kathakar* in Maharashtra, Hoval was interested in writing stories since childhood days and was more inclined towards writing folktales. His childhood experience as a dalit became the subject of most of his writing. His first story to gain popularity was *Manush* (Human Being) published in 1963. Some other collections of stories are *Denwad* (1973), *Yelkot* (1985), *Warsdar* (1986) and *Wata Aadwata* (1987). *Paus Pani* (The Rainwater) is considered to be his most famous collection of stories and it has been translated in English and French. He was also a writer of folk plays and has contributed greatly to the rise of the Marathi folk theatre. He also made his observations in the slum areas of Mumbai and wrote about the life of people living in these areas because he does not limit his understanding of the plight of the weak and crestfallen to only dalits. His central concern has been the ‘human’ and ‘humanity’, be it anyone who is a victim of social discrimination and apathy of the upper class. Hoval’s rendering of these issues of the weak and downtrodden is true to the spirit of Dalit literature, the spirit of social awareness through projection of reality. Hoval’s style of writing is rustic and uses simple, bucolic language to cater to the taste of his readers.

3.2.1 Themes and Concerns

The entire corpus of Dalit literature, says Felix Wilfred in the book *Dalit Empowerment*, revolves around a common theme and concern—the “portrayal of Dalit suffering and humiliation” and also some “hope in the midst of struggles”. In most cases, “narrated by the victims themselves, this literature pours out the sentiments, emotions and anger of the sufferer”. There are differences in the themes and concerns of the literature of the dalits/marginalised group of various times and climes, yet there is a flow of cohesion that runs through them. The insults, wounds and scars these peoples share give their voices the same intensity of pain and

poignancy. Waman Hoval's writing was also woven around this theme. Being a victim of the age old tyrannical social system which had no place for the *panchamvarna*, the untouchables, he voices the discrimination and oppression and it finds strong opposition in his writing. Becoming the mouthpiece of those who have been silenced for centuries, his writing is driven by the dominant current of reaction against the exploitative system and part of it is assertive in nature, against the exploiters whose interest lied in maintaining the status quo through upholding of their supremacy. Like Bandhumadhav, his writing also exposes the capitalist exploitation of the working class in the uneven social order. Dalits in his novels, like that of many of his fellow-writers, are endowed with a radical, Ambedkarite consciousness advocating the need for an organized and educated Dalit youth that stands united by ideological commitment and sincerity of action towards empowerment of Dalits. A staunch follower of Ambedkar, Hoval's writing echoes his revolutionary ideals to stir Dalits into action. Inspired by Babasaheb's initiative to put into effect the socio-cultural upsurge for the total emancipation of the Dalits, Hoval made the effort to bring about a change in the social order and revolution in the minds of millions of Dalits the chief aim of his writing. He has also eulogised Buddhism in his works and conversion of Mahars to Buddhism is a recurrent theme of his works, which clearly shows his affiliation to this religion fascinated by Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism.

3.2.2 Introducing the Story: "The Storeyed House"

"The Storeyed House", originally titled "Majlyach Ghar" in Marathi, is a saga of painful suffering giving birth to a new, awakened Dalit consciousness. The story echoes the appeal of Ambedkar made to his fellow brethren at the Mahad Satyagraha on 25 December 1927 saying that "our work has begun to bring about a real social revolution." Gauri Vishwanathan says in his book *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* that "The Storeyed House" is one of the most powerful literary expressions of the political impetus initiated by Ambedkar. This highly compressed story uses the metaphor of the storeyed house to suggest different levels of expansion of Dalit empowerment within a self-constituting framework. Hoval offers in parable what Ambedkar delineated in numerous political tracts and speeches".

It tells us the poignant story of Bayaji, a Mahar by caste who returns to his native village after his retirement from a dockyard in Bombay where he worked for thirty five years. Rather than spending his life's earnings on less valuable things like clothes, jewellery etc., Bayaji proposes to build a "storeyed house" for his large family, so that they don't have to "eat by turns or sit crowded, knocking the knees together" and can live comfortably. The family is happy with the plan and it is finalised. The foundation is laid and the work progresses. But the news spreads fast and it provokes the ire of Kondiba Patil, a caste Hindu who has the one and only "storeyed house" in the village and he considers building of another one, that too by a Mahar, as an affront and a challenge to his self-proclaimed, shallow "supremacy". Strongly resenting Bayaji's "effort to equal him in position", He threatens Bayaji and asks him to decide against it, by choosing to build a regular "three portioned" house. Frightened to the core, Bayaji gives up the plan and goes for a regular three portioned house with the middle floor a bit elevated and the small storey is built with "wooden flooring", but this small storey is not visible from the front view of the house. Patil visits the house on the day of the house warming ceremony and is furious at the sight of the elevated storey which Bayaji has 'audaciously' built despite his disapproval. Enraged at this defiance of Bayaji, he secretly plans to teach him

a lesson and Bayaji’s newly built house suddenly catches fire from all sides. In a bid to save his house, Bayaji is badly burnt and succumbs to his injuries. On being asked by his teary-eyed sons his “last wish”, Bayaji says that he wants his sons to build a “storeyed house”. In the end, the children of Bayaji, instead of mourning, are seen digging the foundation of a new regular “storeyed house” and not a hidden one, sending across an optimistic message to the younger generation to reassert themselves and not to be hindered and threatened by the violent social forces which have been subjugating them since ages. The writer hits at the very root of the stinking caste system by suggesting to defy it and that is the only way to bring about change in the age-old order which is rotten and is devoid of humanity, empathy and compassion.

3.2.3 Detailed Analysis of the Story: From Erasure to Assertion

The story is a fine illustration of how amid the harrowing incidents of torture, exploitation and unending suffering of the Dalits, an undercurrent of revulsion, protest and resistance is also taking place. The story is truly representative of the origin of a new Dalit consciousness, which aims to hit back at the system which has been responsible for their suppression and subjugation for thousands of years. The writer seeks to pave the way for the Dalit youth, the younger generation, to reject the vicious system which has devoured the very humanness of the man. Dealing with the violence perpetrated by the upper class elites, the story also shows the upper class’ resistance and intolerance towards the change that is sought by the irrepressible resolve of the Dalits.

Bayaji, originally a Mahar by caste, returns to his native village at the age of sixty, after serving at a dockyard in Mumbai for thirty-five years. Though being born as a Dalit, Bayaji has now converted to Buddhism which is an expression by the writer of the influential momentum initiated by the conversion of Ambedkar to Buddhism. Bayaji’s conversion to Buddhism, like Ambedkar’s, has given him a new way of life, overcoming the disillusionment gained from their being born as a ‘hindu’ and yet, an ‘untouchable’. After serving in a place like Bombay and his conversion has made Bayaji acquire a different outlook of life unlike the others belonging to his community. He has developed a more liberal and unconventional notion of leading his life, which is symbolic of the positivity that Ambedkar enthused in his brethren by choosing to accept a new way to live. This is clear from Bayaji’s avant-garde way of greeting Bhujaba, a “known rascal of the village”, who belongs to the upper class, “Greetings to you, sir, how are things with you?”. However, this way of being greeted is not well-received by Bhujaba, who, like a stereotypical member of the high class Hindus believes in the “age-old custom” which requires Bayaji to greet him with a customary “My humble salutations to you, sir, who are my father and mother.” But when Bayaji, driven by his enlightened spirit bespeaking of the different form of life Ambedkar introduced to the Mahars, does not greet him thus, Bhujaba gets furious and says, “do you think you can become a Brahmin merely by saying “greetings”? Can you forget your position simply because you’ve turned Buddhist”? Bhujaba’s retort signifies the intolerance and deep displeasure of the upper class towards the ‘change’ that was taking place among the Dalits, treating it to be a destabilisation of the established sacrosanct world-order which should remain the way it has been. But at the very next moment, the writer records the reaction of Bayaji who “was tempted to knock him down with his box” but wanted to avoid that clash at the very outset of his retired life the entire span of which is to be spent in the village. Though “nonplussed” by Bhujaba’s angry reply, Bayaji is, for the

most part, unaffected by it and is shown spiritually balanced and more reasonable and thought it best to remain peaceful as “it was not good policy to incur the hostility of anyone in the village, least so of Patil, the village headman.” Further, the hypocrisy of the upper class “elites” is revealed in Bhujaba’s inquiring about the gratuity fund amount that Bayaji has got on his superannuation.

“Then you’ve collected your fund amount? Bhujaba was taking his measure. ‘yes sir’, Bayaji replied with pride. ‘How much’? Bhujaba asked greedily.

“Some two and a half thousand rupees” Bayaji gave the correct figure.”

“Bayaji, you have a heavy load on your head. Go to your house first. We’ll talk at leisure later.”... (“The Storeyed House” P.178) At the moment, Bayaji was the proud owner of two and a half thousand rupees in cash and, so it made no difference whether he was an untouchable or a Buddhist. If only one could swindle out of the untouchable Bayaji—or rather Buddhist Bayaji—four or five hundred rupees, that was enough. With the thought in his mind, Bhujaba entered his *wada*, the big house.” The writer digs at the shallowness and pseudo-morality of the upper caste Hindu, when it is question of usurping money, looting their houses, raping their women, suddenly the ‘untouchability’ or the “lower position” of the Dalits does not matter. Now even Bayaji’s changed religion, met with contempt earlier in the story, will not be an obstruction in the way of the vile Bhajubas of the society.

The building Bayaji lives in is named “Buddha Vihar” by those who had adopted Buddhism. Though even after their conversion, the untouchables are still made to live on the periphery of the village in a settlement meant especially for them, but the writer shows the community as already asserting their new identity as Buddhists, and not Hindu untouchables, by naming the colony as “Buddha Vihar”. This again shows the reluctance and repulsion on the part of the upper class to accept the transformation that the Dalit society was seeking to bring about and the somewhat tenacious spirit of the untouchables, irrespective of the abhorrence of their ‘lords’ and ‘masters’, seeking to establish a new way of life for themselves.

Bayaji’s family is “doing well” and the writer once again delineates interesting details of his family living a life that the Ambedkarite movement had infused in them. His two sons are in government service, one a school teacher and one was still studying which shows writer’s endorsement of Ambedkar’s message, “Unite, Educate, and Agitate”. Ambedkar founded the People’s Education Society in Bombay in 1945 and started Siddharth College in Bombay. He believed that “education opens out new avenues and that Dalits should have access to them”, this was pursued by many Dalits who were walking on the Path shown by him. The writer has given a glimpse of that huge following through the educated sons of Bayaji.

Bayaji proposes to build a “storeyed house” out of his entire life’s earnings so that the large family does not have to “eat by turns or sit crowded, knocking their knees together” and as he says, “the usual three portioned house shall not be adequate for us”. The family is “happy” at the plan and “the foundation of the storeyed house is laid on the auspicious new year day” However, this news is not received well by Kondiba Patil, the upper class headman of the village who was the owner of the only other “storeyed house” in the village. He thought of it as an attempt to destabilise and threaten the established social hierarchy on the part of a dalit by trying to “equal” him in status. The writer says, “That Bayaji, an untouchable creature, should think of a rival storeyed house was too much for Kondiba to bear. Other also

murmured that the untouchables were forgetting their position." Bayaji, who just wishes to "build a comfortable shelter for his family" assumes the status of a 'rival' even without his knowledge, in the mind of Kondiba who lashes out at him thus, "Do you aspire to an equal status with us by building this house? The poor should remain content with their cottage, understand?...one should keep to one's position. You shouldn't let a little money turn your head". Taking it as a figurative attack on the economic, social and cultural privilege that the old social structure had bestowed him with, Kondiba threatens Bayaji saying, "you may go in for a storeyed house only if you don't wish to stay in this village. I hope you know what I mean." Realising that his sound economic status and a display of the same actually had social implications in the orthodox caste system, Bayaji gives up the idea of building the storeyed house. This is a sad recognition of the fact that the desire of living a life of honour harboured by an "untouchable" in the rigid caste system is deciphered as an act of defiance towards the established social norms and is met with a feeling of vengeance.

"The conventional three-portioned house was taken up. Work was resumed and the walls rose rapidly. The middle portion was a little elevated and a small first storey fixed up there with a wooden flooring. This part could be reached by stairs rising from the kitchen. No one could guess from the outside that there was a first storey to the house. Bayaji had to make the best of things." (180)

This was Bayaji's way of averting the punishment that he could attract by the assertion of equality in a caste-governed village.

The house is complete and at the traditional housewarming, "Bayaji put up a fine pandal in front of the house. His sons worked hard for two days on the decorations. Well known devotional singers came with their troupes...in the evening four petromax lights were hung in the four corners of the pandal. It lent a unique golden light to the surroundings."(181) The devotional songs sung in praise of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, and Lord Buddha, "take to heart the sweet advice of Bhimaraya and bow down to Buddha for the emancipation of the whole world. I fly to the refuge of Lord Buddha, I fly to the refuge of faith; I fly to the refuge of the faithful"(182) create an environment for the assertion a different identity of converted Mahars like Bayaji. Gauri Vishwanathan says in his book *Outside The Fold: Conversion, Modernity and Belief* that this atmosphere "creates a community distinct from but not separate from the general community of the village, as evident in the mixed assemblage of guest, including high class Hindus, whom Bayaji invites to witness what is now freely displayed as his open flaunting of the caste norms." But this new found self-constituted identity is met with great opposition and resentment by the caste communities. Kondiba Patil arrives with his ruffian companions and as if the spectacular sight of the house, an extravagant house-warming ceremony, troupes of famous singers was too much for them to gulp down their throats, "these people felt uneasy at the sight of the brand new house, the impressive *pandal* and the crowd of smiling faces... Patil sat quietly...His companions rather uncomfortably took their positions around him"(181) Bayaji leads them up the stairs in the kitchen to the "loft-like first floor filled with a pious and holy ambience" enhanced with "framed pictures of great men like Lord Buddha, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and others", (181) only to infuriate them further, seeing such a grand and impressive house built by a mere untouchable. Burning with envy and spite and upholding his high 'class', Patil refuses to accept the customary betel leaves offered by Bayaji, planning for something "undreamt of"—" they eyed one another as if to

say, “this untouchable worm has got a swollen head. He needs proper handling.” And as the programme is about to wind up, the house catches fire from all sides. The fire creates a ruckus and people run helter-skelter in confusion. Bayaji, knowing in his heart the hand behind the evil act, turns frantic, saying “my house, my storeyed house! It’s on fire. My enemy has taken revenge on me.” In an effort to save his house, Bayaji gets serious burns with all “his hopes reduced to ashes”. Bayaji’s dying words “Sons, I want you to build a storeyed house. I’ve no other wish”, seem to be reverberating in the rest of the story. This becomes clear at the end when his sons are seen carrying digging tools. On being asked what were they doing they say, “we’re starting on a house, not one with the concealed first floor but a regular two-storeyed house.” And they resume “with determination the work of digging the foundation of a two-”storeyed house”, the digging being symbolic of hitting at the very foundation of the predicament, the evil of caste system which is the cause of affliction for many. It may also be seen as the sons digging at the foundation of Kondiba Patil’s house, being the representative of the perpetrator of the injustice meted out to millions like Bayaji, symbolically weakening the roots of the old social order which should give way to a new one. The story suggests the new order with an awakened and enlightened consciousness of dalits to evolve as a community which aspires to achieve and assert their rights by attacking the system. After their father’s funeral, the sons continue the struggle of the dead man—to restructure and re-imagine the distinct dalit identity by transforming the ashes of his dream into a more defiant and concrete symbol of dalit equality. Unlike Bayaji, who belonged to the older generation and feels subdued by the upper caste hierarchy, his sons represent the new generation, the youth which is undeterred, undaunted and willing to turn the dream of their father into a reality by all means. Sharatchandra Muktibodh says in his article “What is Dalit Literature?” that The Dalit point of view constitutes a clear diagnosis of a particular social reality and a sanguine hope for its desirable transformation.” The present story underlines this point of view which is taken up by the new generation of Bayaji’s family.

Thus, the end of the story incorporates element of a positive expression, of a resistive surge for combating oppression entailing militancy. It is a display of a new-found courage and confidence to reject the old and stinking system and embrace a new, self-constituted and self-orchestrated social structure. The story is truly representative of what Sharatchandra Muktibodh calls “Dalit Literature” as having a “Dalit sensibility” which “seeks to bring about compatible changes in the social consciousness, it is rebellious as well as fundamentally optimistic and revolutionary.”

3.2.4 Autobiographical Element

Arjun Dangle, in the Introduction to the book *Poisoned Bread*, says, “The first to set their feet on the land of Dalit experiences were Dalit themselves...This literature of the Dalits is intimately related to social reality and is not imaginary or entertainment-oriented”. He has further said in the same article that Dalit literature is “The delineation of the social system, communalism, injustice, exploitation and of the lives of people who had been subjected to these evils” and is written “without glossing over any facts.” In this sense, the entire corpus of Dalit literature is autobiographical as it represents the hopes and desires of the subjugated people amidst their struggle for survival, the problems faced by them in their day-to-day life, and horrifying experiences. “The Storeyed House” is no exception. The author, a Mahar, has noticeably woven the story around his own life and experiences. Bayaji worked on a dockyard in Bombay and so did Hoval’s father, with whom he went to

stay in Bombay getting a chance to pursue his higher education. The story refers to Bayaji's sons as educated and "doing well" with government jobs, this may have parallels to the life of the writer himself, who, after studying at Siddharth College, Bombay, worked with the Railways. The story profusely refers to the momentous effect Babasaheb's religious conversion had on Mahars in general and the writer in particular. The writer, as has been said above, creates a Mahar-converted-Buddhists a distinct community adopting the new cultural tradition that was adopted by the writer himself. Bayaji's seeking a life of honour after his retirement is an exemplification of the "way to a new cultural life" that the conversion to Buddhism entailed in the life of the writer himself along with his community people. The story and characters are surely the mouthpieces of the writer in their disseminating of the message of Babasaheb for the awakening of the Dalit society. Ambedkarite ideology is the true inspiration for the writer, igniting his mind with ideas and agitations and he has spread these very ideas, for the awakening of the masses through the medium of the story.

3.2.5 Comparison and Contrast

Strikingly close contemporaries, Both Bandhumadhav and Waman Hoval belong to the period of the uprising of Dalit Literature as the "literature of revolt". It was the time when finding their hero in Ambedkar, the Dalit writers were spreading his message and appeal to the masses through their writing. Originating from the "anguish of many thousands of people, experienced over thousands of years", both Bandhumadhav and Hoval have written about "the inhuman system that was imposed on them." The "untouchable" Mahars by caste, both the writers created literature that dealt directly with Ambedkarite movement voicing the life of poverty, injustice, exploitation and atrocities giving birth to rejection and revolt for the awakening of the millions of Dalits. This was triggered by Ambedkar with his untiring efforts towards the emancipation of Dalits and rejection of Hindu social order culminating in his conversion to Buddhism in 1956, joined by five millions of his followers in a huge Buddhist Conversion Ceremony. This conversion created a spark in the dismal hearts of those downcast millions and, as Sharankumar Limbale says, "brought about a revolutionary change in the consciousness of Dalit society". Limbale further says, "The historical event marked the beginning of a new liberation struggle. Dalits found a new cultural dimension in Buddhism, and it had an energising impact on the development of Dalit literature." Both the writers under study represent this phase of the movement and there is a close affinity in terms of themes, characters, situations and settings in their works delineating the radical, ground-breaking stance of Ambedkar.

Bayaji and Yetalya, both representing the Mahar community, are the victims of the erroneous varna system and subjugation born out of their socially 'inferior' status as untouchables. However, Bayaji, appears to be an extension of Yetalaya in this regard because of his progressive thinking and the new way of life that his conversion to Buddhism has given him. More advanced in his ideas, and much less threatened at the sight of wicked Bhajuba, the 'high class' villan, Bayaji holds his self esteem high and is daring enough to wish Bhajuba in an unconventional manner, saying "Greetings to you, sir, how are things with you?", and not "my humble salutations to you, sir, who are my father and mother." This address is quite unlike that of the manner in which Yetalya wishes Patil in "The Poisoned Bread", addressing himself by demeaning terms like "slave", and "begging Mahar" and certainly not as one "claiming equality." Both the protagonists achieve a different purpose in the

respective stories, whereas Yetalya is an epitome of poverty, suffering, slavery and tribulations that the Dalits endured for thousands of years and which pervades the Dalit Literature as a theme, Bayaji's portrayal is suggestive of the awakened consciousness, instilled in the Dalit community at the call of Dr. Ambedkar. While Yetalya finds his place only in the feet of Bapu Patil, the upper caste drone, even ready to be "kicked", Bayaji even feels "tempted to knock him (Bhujaba) down with his box" at his insolent behaviour but avoids the clash not wanting to be violent, as violence was not a way with the Dalit movement which sought to fulfil its aims by "peaceful means", so Ambedkar said in his speech at Mahad Satyagraha. So Bayaji considers it a good policy by not "incurring the hostility of anyone in the village" as he was there for the rest of his life and did believe in peaceful co-existence with everyone, an understanding that owes greatly to his affiliation to an illumined Buddhist spirit. That is the reason why Bayaji decides against the plan to make a storeyed house at the threat of Kondiba Patil, not willing to offend him unnecessarily and builds a "concealed" storey serving his own purpose too. Both the characters, in a way, try their best not to incur the fury of their upper class lords: Yetalya finding "no escape from the hereditary holding" and Bayaji "making the best of things" in the interest of both the parties. But the way both these characters meet their end in the respective stories is an eye-opener and converging of the basic idea of the writers behind their portrayal. Both the characters fall prey to the viciousness of the system and die a tragic death. But the irony is, that it is only at the time of their death that both of them realize the worthlessness of the life of submission and slavery that they led, and not willing to let the same submissive tendency percolate down to their younger generation, they leave a strong message for them. This appears to be the cross point where both the stories intersect. Not inclined to leave behind a tearful legacy of innumerable suffering and untold miseries, both the characters ignite a spark in the mind of their young generation, which is handed over the torch of revolution, to stand against the atrocities and create a stir. And so, Yetalya's dying words to his grandson, "never depend on the age-old bread associated with our caste. Get as much education as you can. Take away this accursed bread from the mouths of Mahars. This poisonous bread will finally kill the very humanness of man", find a clear correspondence to the last words of Bayaji, expressed as his "last wish" to his sons, "I want you to build a storeyed house. I have no other wish." These are not mere words uttered by the two characters; they are the reflection of the collective minds of the people representing the life of millions of Dalits who have borne the burden of their 'inferior birth' for thousands of years. Their suffering had been established as a tradition spread over centuries. These words resonate a strong urge to break away from this suffering and imposed tradition, the seeds of which were sown by Dr. Ambedkar on 25 December 1927, beginning an agitation by drawing water from the Chavadar Lake at Mahad. The water of this lake was only reserved for caste Hindus until then. The drawing of the water from that lake was to mark the protest against the inhuman untouchability, and a beginning of a "real social revolution" sustained by "a strong feeling, the power that drives the movement" as Dr. Ambedkar said in his speech on that historic day. The last words said by the two characters of the stories, evidently the mouthpieces of the writers and of millions of others who are partners in suffering, are the steps on the path of revolution shown by Ambedkar.

The depiction of the younger generation too, in both the stories is quite similar. While the grandson of Yetalaya is a "city-bred" boy who has received education, Bayaji's sons are also educated and are "doing well" –one of them being a school teacher, two in the government service and one still studying. Education was an

important pre-requisite for the Dalit movement to succeed and as Arjun Dangle says, “Dr. Ambedkar’s slogan ‘Unite, Educate and Agitate’, was being followed by more and more people.” Founding the People’s Education Society in 1945, Dr. Ambedkar started Siddharth College and Milind College in Bombay and Aurangabad. The educated young generation of the stories is a symbol and representation of his belief that “education opens out new avenues and Dalits should have access to them”. The rebel in the educated Mhadeva, enabling him to question, rips apart the soul of the rotten system in his arguments and counter arguments with Patil as well as his reasoning with Yetalya. The ability to know and understand things and his belief in the possibility of a ‘change’ in the situation make him protest against the conventional and obsolete modes of thinking and living. Bent upon ending the suffering of many like him, Mhadeva tries to convince his grandpa that it is surely possible to break away from the chain of land-bondage which is taken as hereditary by Mahars and is accepted as an established norm without questioning. Overcoming the sorrow of the death of his grandfather, Mhadeva was “inflamed with a sense of fury and disgust, prompted to retaliate”. This implied retaliation of Mhadeva finds a striking parallel in the retaliation of the sons of Bayaji, who, exactly like Mhadeva, rise above their grief and sorrow at the death of their father, and joined by each other, start digging the ground to start “on a house, not one with a concealed first floor but a regular two-storeyed house.” Like Mhadeva, it is their “retaliation” that they start digging the foundation of a new two storeyed house. The young generation in both the stories, which ‘rejects’ and ‘revolts’, it represents a collective consciousness of millions of Dalits. Sharankumar Limbale says, “Just as the anguish expressed in Dalit literature is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are social and collective...Revolt is the stage that follows anguish and rejection. ‘I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being—such is the consciousness that gives birth to this revolt. Born from unrestrained anguish, this explosive rejection and piercing revolt is like a flood, with its aggressive character and an insolent, rebellious attitude.” This ‘insolent’, ‘rebellious’ attitude is the hallmark of Dalit literature, well presented and illustrated by the two stories under study and there is a common thread, which runs through the themes, characters and situations of the stories from the beginning till the end.

3.3 LET US SUM UP

What needs to be reiterated in this unit is that despite a long history of the victimisation of the weak and downtrodden, and being subjected to deep hatred and callousness by the ‘lords’ and ‘masters’ of the society, this community’s resolve to cling to life by persistent efforts to come out of their margins is creditable. Pamela Philipose’s observation in her article “Life Beyond the Pale”, a review of *Poisoned Bread* sums up the stories included in the book saying “The overall tone of *Poisoned Bread* is somber and angry, in a manner reminiscent of Maxim Gorky’s *The Lower Depths* or parts of Emile Zola’s *Germinal*. It reveals the underbelly of human existence, which defies the neat politeness of the middle class” and it “records the evolution of modern dalit consciousness.”

3.4 GLOSSARY

Vithoba is the incarnation of the lord Vishnu, the chief Hindu deity. The temple of Vithoba at Pandharpur (Maharashtra) is a major centre of worship for Hindus. Untouchables were not allowed inside the temple until after Independence when

the efforts made by Gandhian reformists finally made it open for all. The temple is situated on the banks of river Chandrabhaga.

3.5 QUESTIONS

- 1) Discuss the stories “The Poisoned Bread” and “The Storeyed House” as representations of the literature of ‘revolt’ and ‘protest’.
- 2) What does the end of the story “The Storeyed House” suggest?
- 3) How is the approach of the narrator towards the caste conflict different from that of his grandfather in the story “The Poisoned Bread”? What does it propose?
- 4) Write a note on the metaphors in the two titles “Poisoned Bread” and “Storeyed House”.
- 5) Compare and contrast the two stories in the context of their theme and significance.

3.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

- a) Dangle(ed). *Poisoned Bread*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009.
- b) Arjun Sharankumar Limbale. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2012.



UNIT 4 SHORT STORIES: “THE FLAME” AND “FEAR”

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction: About the author
 - 4.1.1 Themes and Concerns of Mangalam’s writing
 - 4.1.2 Introducing the Story: “The Flame”
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- 4.2 Dalpat Chauhan
 - 4.2.1 Dalpat Chauhan’s Works
 - 4.2.2 Themes and Concerns of Chauhan’s Writing
 - 4.2.3 Introducing the Story: “Fear”
 - 4.2.4 Detailed Analysis of the Story: “Fear”
 - 4.2.5 Symbolism
 - 4.2.6 Comparison and Contrast
- 4.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.4 Questions
- 4.5 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we will have a look at Harish Mangalam’s short story “The Flame” and examine it’s content from the viewpoint of the marginalized. The unit will also familiarize us with Dalpat Chauhan’s short story “Fear”. Both the stories were originally written in Gujarati and were translated into English.

4.1 INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harish Mangalam, a prominent Gujrati dalit writer, was born in 1952 in Falu, a small village of Mehasana district in North Gujarat. The Son of a low caste poor weaver, and one among thirteen members of the family, Mangalam had a difficult childhood assisting his father in making skein and doing supplementary work such as preparing yarn, going to the fields to do agrarian work, weeding in fields, mango-plucking, production of cement-pipe et al, thus managing to meet the expenditure on notebooks and uniform to continue his studies. Having started writing at an early age of thirteen, Mangalam rose to prominence in the eighties when, during the anti-reservation stir in Gujarat, he began writing solely about the downtrodden. He was aware of terrible past involving discrimination based on caste system, exploitation of labourers by the farmers, social injustice, and inequality. All these made him write literature for upliftment of the downtrodden.

At present, this retired Additional Collector in the Government of Gujarat is Secretary of the Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academy and editor of *Hayati*, the only magazine of Gujarati Dalit Literature. His first poem is significantly titled “Kisan” (Cultivator),

his first short story is called “Vapas” (Come-Back), his first novel is titled *Tirad* (Crack), his first collection of short stories is *Talap* (The Craving). His publications include Prakamp (poetry, 1991), *Talap* (short story collection, 2001 translated into Hindi as ‘*Talab*’ by Fulchand Gupta and into English as *Light of Darkness* by Rupalee Burke.) and *Tirad* (Novel, 1992; 2nd edition 1995). This novel has been translated into Hindi as *Darar* by Hasmukh Barot. Another novel *Chowki* (Novel, 1992; 2nd edition 1995) has been translated into Hindi as *Chowki* by Surendra Doshi and Harshad Rana. The third novel is *Aganzal* (2008). Mangalam’s poems and short stories have been translated into English and other regional languages such as Hindi, Odiya, Bengali, Malayalam, and Urdu. A documentary film has been produced on his story “Dayan” (The Midwife)

Harish Mangalam has received several awards and recognitions such as “Gujarati Dalit Varta.” “Gujarati Sahitya Parishad” (2001-02), the “Sant Shree Kabir Dalit Sahitya Award” (2002–2003), the “Dhavant Oza Award”, and “Mahatma Jotiba Phule Dalit Patrakaratva Award”, “Shreshtha Dalit Sahitya Award” was another point of recognition for him.

4.1.1 Themes and Concerns of Mangalam’s Writing

Mangalam’s writing addresses the concerns of dalits. In his own words, “I consider Dalit writing as the corpus of pain and suffering but not only of pain and suffering because it is the main weapon to awake the people against injustice. Dalit literature is fully based on the ideology of the great social revolutionary reformist, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar. Dalit literature depicts and speaks about the values of humanity, liberty and brotherhood, which are basic virtues for unity of the people and the (ground) on which the nation-state can stand. A nation can neither be built on a shaky foundation nor be built without the above-mentioned three basic and inevitable virtues of the people. Dalit literature promotes all the three ideals. Thus, dalit literature is positive and constructive about the entire process of nation building. . . main themes of my writing are to strive to eliminate superstitions found abundantly in canonical literature, to rise up against bigots, pundits and inequality, inhuman treatment, to aim at the welfare of common man and a society which is casteless and classless and to voice the sufferings of the oppressed people.”

Mangalam particularly seems to be disturbed by the Varnashrama (the four fold caste system in Hinduism) and is critical of its propaganda unleashed by the Manuvadis (people who believe in principles of Manu in Manusmriti). He is committed to writing against the validation of the four castes. In his own words “The stench of ghettoization is all over the place. The fragrance of humanity is missing – it seems to be a hollow world, burdened with feelings of emptiness and absences. Incidents triggered by burning issues of existence and survival rend my heart and cause my tears to evaporate. I find it difficult to breathe, difficult to bear” and “my writing has a message of humanity, liberty, equality, rationality and to eradicate untouchability.”

4.1.2 Introducing the Story: “The Flame”

“The Flame” was first published in *Nayamarg*, a Gujarati monthly magazine under the title “Zol” in the year 1992. It is a powerful rendering of an age-old saga of torment, suffering and pain resulting from poverty, social discrimination and distinction, inequality, and hatred of the dalits by the privileged and the upper class. The protagonist of this story, referred to as “that man” not only suffers physically,

but also psychologically. He suffers on account of something that happened to him many years ago. He refers to a "mosquito bite" that caused to him eczema, and the "itch" this disease gave, refused to subside or diminish. He consulted many "doctors", swallowed a cocktail of medicines and applied ointment after ointment but no relief came. The story works at two levels. For instance, the protagonist's "mind was sore" along with the body which "does not exist". The man remained "restless", discussed it with his friends and even thought of getting his leg above the knee amputated lest the eczema should spread. His friends suggested against it. He found that the friends discussed Marx and his ideas which did not lead him anywhere. In the story, the protagonist's wife is amused at his talk of eczema because she cannot see it anywhere and the man on the other side feels sorry that she cannot notice the foul spreading of the disease. At the same time, all his friends suffer from eczema. However, they fail to find a doctor who can help them. Later, they look at the statue when a sudden explosion occurs and the sky is filled with flames rising high. The story ends with this explosion, leaving the friends looking at the sky that turns into a red hot ball of fire, full of flames.

4.1.3 Analysis of the Story: Untouchability as a Metaphor

In the beginning, a man suffering from a chronic disease, eczema, is introduced. He has had this disease for almost half a century. The man is of no ordinary sensibility and is conversant with the undercurrents of devilry in the system that governs his life and has left a scar on his mind, adding to the scars on his body. He is one who has reached a level of perception that others may find hard to attain. The disease is symbolic of a deeper malady eating into human vitality. It could be broadly named untouchability and caste system. The 'flame' in the title is symbolic of the flame of communal hatred and violence which keeps on spreading as the bacteria keep multiplying and corrupting the human flesh. The narrator's memory keeps swinging back to the past and then returns to the present. He remembers how in village Toda, a mosquito bit him that caused an itch. For him, it has remained ever since, "till today, it's itch, itch, itch."

Who is the mosquito, why has in the medically-advanced age of today the scratching remained uncured, why does the victim suffer from a sense of loss of existence, ("whole existence has drowned in the eczema") why is any ointment or prescription proving of no use? Questions such as these are of vital import to get at the crux of the story and the anger of the man, stung by a mosquito. The narrator is critical of the system that he has found "devoid of any attitude too! We are two million and yet we live as it is, in the same old ways." Is it the indictment of passivity, moral inertia or the lack of zest for living Eliot's Waste Landers suffer from? "Is there no cure"? He asks and then proceeds to resolve, "there must be a cure, there should be". He seems to be a man with a mission to redeem humanity that suffers from the disease. It is all pervading. "It crossed all borders—north-west, east-south. The environment got polluted."

There are hints in the story of the eczema being only in the mind of the narrator and nowhere on his body. He has been affected by the evils of the class society, untouchability and social discrimination. His wife's laughter at his brooding over the disease has a deep meaning. She suggests the cure for the disease but her asking "but where is the eczema?" shows her indifference towards his pain.

At the end, of the story, the dimensions of anger get widened, and the personal scar of the narrator becomes the scar of a group of his friends that represent a larger

section of untouchables. One friend tells him about the nightmare he suffered in Bihar for marrying a 'Savarna' (Savarna means 'within the varna' i.e. someone who belongs to one of the four varnas of the Hindu social order. The untouchables were kept out of the four varnas. They were the 'outcastes', not considered a part of the society) girl and in retaliation, bore the brunt of the wrath of 'ghosts of castes', ending with "stabbing his private parts with spear." Another friend shows the eczema in the armpit and ventilates his anger saying, "the burning flame of Jetalpur charred me here." Still another shows his neck and the fifth shows buttocks with the dark patches of eczema. In consequence, silence pervades. The question why, all of them suffer, symbolic of primitive savagery, in silence, leaves them stunned. Following this, the statue of a "world famous doctor" is introduced, signifying hope for salvation. It definitely is the statute of Baba Saheb Ambedkar. It is said of him that the man found the cure of eczema. But he died working hard and haunted by anxiety. Anger seizes them the angry gaze is fixed at the statue which seems to be shaking. Soon, there is a sudden explosion, flames rise high and the sky turns into a red hot ball. It is not that the explosion symbolizes the destruction of values associated with the statue of the 'world famous doctor'. Instead, it signifies a formula for communal harmony. What needs to be fostered is love of humankind as a whole and respect to all alike, high or low.

In the end, the emphasis seems to shift to the creative role of superstructure in a class society. How the ruling class imposes their value orientation upon the ruled with their consent is convincingly brought out by Gramsci's concept of 'bourgeois cultural hegemony'. It is in this context that the proletarian class needs to have their own superstructure to hit back at the bourgeois base and expose the sophistry of its value pattern.

There seems inherent in the story a questioning of Marxism. Still, it is not a rejection of Marxism but a version that incorporates changes in view of happenings in the twentieth century. The "man" in the story says, "Marx? The so called intellectuals have made him only a subject of discussion. Empty discussion!.. and he had the itch again." The writer finds no remedy of his "itch" in Marxism: "They found substance in his talk: continuous discussions, pamphlets, reports, exchange of ideas, and yet it had led them nowhere". It shows the writer's advocacy for radical action rather than any sterile ideology. Sharankumar Limbale's comments are pertinent in this regard. He says in his book *Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature* that "...Marxists in India waged struggles on workers' issues, but they paid no attention to the caste system and untouchability. If they had done so, there would have been a creative development of Marxism consistent with Indian conditions." Limbale further says that "inequality in Indian society is not the consequence of capitalism alone, it is a much more complex disparity, and there can be no movement forward unless the place of caste, morality and truth in Hinduism is evaluated. A common battle will have to be fought on both social and economic fronts." Dr. Ambedkar too, opined that Indian Marxism was "incomplete" in the context of the Indian social system because it did not think about ending caste discrimination. The writer, a devotee of Ambedkar, also supports this view and "the man" in the story, a victim of the hideous caste system himself, becomes the mouthpiece of the writer.

4.1.4 Symbolism

Symbolism expresses the invisible by means of visible and is a powerful technique in the hands of the artist to reinforce a meaning "The Flame" is replete with symbols that make it a strong statement against atrocities committed on the downtrodden.

From the beginning to the end of the story, the writer employs highly suggestive symbols. There has been a free play of some other stylistic devices also like irony, sarcasm and satire to dig at the forces of social disharmony.

Firstly, the "eczema" that the man suffers from, is symbolic of the malady which is eating into dignity and moral health. It is the epidemic of untouchability, class consciousness and caste stratification. The eczema spreads in the body, and leaves patches of scars by continuous scratching. The protagonist is not able to get rid of the "restlessness" and "itch" caused by the disease following the mosquito bite. The mosquito also is a powerful symbol of those that bite, the bourgeois, the upper caste groups that render a whole section helpless. On the other hand, the affected protagonist is representative of the entire community of untouchables. Like the protagonist of the story, the society finds "no cure" of this disease. The disease, is "chronic" and has been continuing for centuries with no possible solution in sight.

The wife of the protagonist "laughs loudly" at his pain which is symbolic of the section of the privileged. The writer points to those who capitalize on these problems of society for their own selfish motives. He is critical of those who enjoy the power of money. To quote: "if the eczema gets cured then doctor's practice gets ruined, his air conditioner stops working, spring of his revolving chair breaks, wheels of his car get stuck in the mud." Expanding on the insensitivity of society towards the dalits, he says, "...do our heartbeats reach to his heart through his stethoscope? No, no."

The writer is critical of the "reformist" attitude of Gandhi and his policy of non-violence and 'peaceful' protest. What needs to be done is restructuring the system by kindling the "flame" of revolution. The man in the story is greatly dismayed: "Did the eczema get any better? Look how it has rotten down? Did Ayurvedic doctors too get it cured? Dr. Gandhi, Dr. Andhi and Dr. Pandhi, how did they treat?" The revolutionary stance of the writer is clear when he says, "I will embrace death with a smiling face but I don't wish to get treated by them." According to the writer, the predicament of the dalits has continued to exist despite the efforts made by reformists' like Raja Rammohan Roy and Mahatma Gandhi. That is why the statue of the "world famous doctor" evokes respect and all look at it in deep reverence. The vision of change is captured thus: "All directions rang. That man and his friends stared at the statue for without blinking their eyes for long. Like the clouds in the sky, time passed swiftly. The statue shook."

The friends of the protagonist symbolize a collective consciousness, a community instead of an individual having suffered at the hands of social discrimination. There is hint of the need to make collective effort for the upliftment of the weak. Limbale has commented: "This anguish of Dalits is the progenitor of Dalit literature. It is in the nature of a collective social voice, similarly, the rejection and revolt are also social and collective." The flames at the end of the story become the "flames" kindling hope for the entire community of Dalits.

4.1.5 Autobiographical Element

The story is autobiographical in the sense that the protagonist of the story, "that man" is a representative of the community of the dalits and the downtrodden to whom the writer belongs. The writer relates with the protagonist suffering from the "eczema," since he had experienced the pain and misery of the millions like him. The protagonist of the story has not been given any name, and has been called "that

man” purposely by the writer. This is to establish an affinity between him and all the others suffering from the “chronic eczema”. The writer universalizes the problem by not limiting it to one name, or one person. It is this idea that brings the writer close to the protagonist. There is mention in the story of Gujarat cyclone, hitting one of the writer’s friends badly. The Dalit’s right of reservation had never been approved by non-dalits. The first organized and violent anti-reservation movement occurred in Gujarat in 1981. Anti-dalit riots broke out in Ahmedabad, Nadiad and Vadodra. Several Dalit hamlets were torched and looted. Rioters killed twelve dalits and injured hundreds. As Mangalam was a witness to all this in Ahmedabad, he has made a reference to this in his story.

Being born in dalit community, the writer had gone through a series of experiences full of violence, and maltreatment of labourers by the farmers. All these factors determined the shape of his writing and the present story is representative of dalit literature as a whole.

4.2 DALPAT CHAUHAN

Dalpat Bhai Chauhan was born in a small village Mandali of tehsil Kheralu in Mahesana district, Gujarat on 10 April 1940. His father was a weaver, who also worked as a labourer in spinning mills and taught voluntarily at ‘Antyaja’ (Dalit) schools for some time. Chauhan spent his childhood in absolute poverty because of his father shifting from one job to another, and having no regular source of income. The taste of the coarse life of the untouchables and dalits in his village had a deep impact on him as a child and as an adult. Despite the opening of special schools for dalits to promote the education and upliftment of the downtrodden by Maharaja Sayaji Rao Gaekwad, dalits were not able to benefit from the schemes because of the repulsion and protest of upper class gentry against educating the dalits. When Dalpat Chauhan’s mother was sent to such a school in 1914, their house was torched and stones were pelted on it that the family had taken such an audacious step of educating a dalit girl. It was considered foolhardy on the part of the poor untouchables to dream of education and living a life of self respect. After many years spent in his native village, amidst inhuman conditions for living, Chauhan’s family moved to Ahmedabad. There he studied further and completed his B.A. in Economics from Gujarat University, Ahmedabad in 1964. Chauhan worked with the Pay and Accounts Office of the government of Gujarat. Now retired from the job, he continues to write on dalit issues and problems with passion and fervour in order to spread awareness.

4.2.1 Dalpat Chauhan’s Works

Gujarati Dalit literature is believed to have come into existence with the publication of *Aakrosh*, (Anger), a poetry journal initiated by Dalpat Chauhan on 14 April, 1978 along with Nirav Patel and Praveen Gadhavi. A year later, he also started publishing *Kalo Suraj* (The Black Sun), an annual journal of Dalit literature. These two publications were important milestones in generating awareness about dalit rights and led to an upsurge of creative output in gujarati dalit writing. This made Chauhan one of the founding fathers of Gujarati Dalit literature. In addition to these, Chauhan has a considerable amount of writing in all genres to his credit. His novels are *Giddh* (“The Vulture”) 2000, *Bhalbhankhalun* (“Morning”) 2004, *Malak* (Motherland) 1991 and *Rasha va Suraj* (“The Sun Lies Ahead”) 2012. His collection of poetry is named *To Pachhi* (“What Next”) Which came out in 1983 and *Keya*

Chhe Suraj (“Where is the Sun”) published in 2000. His collections of short stories are *Munjharo* (“(Suffocation)”) 2002, *Darr* (“Fear”) 2009 and *Belaam* (2013). He has also scripted plays with titles *Patanne Gondre* (1987-88), *Anaryavarta* (2000), *Antim Dhyey* (2000) and *Harifai* (2003), *Padchinha* (2004) and *Samarthan* (2009) are his analytical works. He also edited Gujarati Dalit Stories for Sahitya Academi in 2009. Apart from this collection, his edited works include *Gujrati Dalit Sahitya ka Itihaas* (2009), *Dundubhi* (2000) and *Vanboti Vartao* (“Unheard Stories”) 2000. At present, he is the editor of *Tal Ni Boli* (2009), a dictionary of old dalit words. To his credit goes another edited work, an exceptional compilation of one hundred and twenty one poems titled *Shabde Bandhyo Suraj* in the year 2011.

Many prestigious literary and social awards have been conferred on Chauhan, some of them being ISCUS Award in 1983 by Indo Soviet Cultural Forum, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad Award in 2004, Gujarati Sahitya Academi Award for *Keya Chhe Suraj* in 2000, and similar ones for his books *Deewalo* in 1989, and *Harifai* in 2003 *Bhalbhankhalun* in 2005-06. The government of Gujarat conferred on him Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Sewa Lifetime Achievement award in 2001-02. He was also given the Shreshtha Dalit Sahityakar Puraskaar by Gujarati Dalit Sahitya Academi in 2009. Most of his works have been translated into English, Hindi and Urdu and have reached a wide audience of non-Gujarati readers.

4.2.2 Themes and Concerns of Chauhan’s Writing

Like Harish Mangalam, Chauhan’s major concern is to chronicle the inhuman and unjust social order which denies dalits and untouchables a life of dignity and self-respect. His literature also engages with the issue of self-awakening and reflects a sharply critical approach towards atrocities committed on untouchables. There is a strong and clear message in his writing—to awaken and enlighten his brethren, against discrimination and callousness of the upper class towards them. He has asserted the dalit identity and given a voice to Dalits in India’s standing against hierarchy and cultural subjugation. The characters of his stories have been picked up from real life, silenced for centuries by caste prejudice and social oppression. On his side, he wants to break that silence and inspires them to register their protest through his short stories, novels, poetry and plays. Chauhan’s writing calls for revolution and not mere reform. He calls “Dalit samaj” his greatest inspiration where he has seen the reality, the ‘*yatharth*’, which stimulated him to write. He has adhered to the path shown by the great social revolutionary Dr. Ambedkar and has propagated his revolutionary stance through his work, believing that Dalit writers should keep in mind the ideology of Mahatma Jotiba Phule and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar for seeking direction. The theme of “darkness” and “light” prevails throughout his writing. The titles of most of his works like *Kalo Suraj (The Black Sun)*, *Keya Chhe Suraj(Where is the Sun)*, *Rasha va Suraj(The Sun Lies Ahead)*, *Shabde Bandhyo Suraj,(The Sun Tied with Words)* *Bhalbhankhalun* (Morning) are symbolic of the black shadow of the affront and shame on humanity resulting from caste-system. His writing is a weapon for struggle and change.

4.2.3 Introducing The Story: “Fear”

“Fear”, originally called “Darr” in Gujarati, was first published in *Shabda Srishti*, a Mukhpatra (Monthly) of Gujarat Sahitya Academi, in November 2003 and was later translated into English. The story was inspired from the infamous Golana Massacre, a real-life tragedy that occurred in the village Golana in Gujarat. There, on January 25, 1986, four dalits were murdered by Durbars, a Kshatriya caste linked

to the courts (Durbars) of the former Rajput rulers of Saurashtra. The Darbar community had practised caste discrimination upon Dalits for centuries, exploiting them and keeping their socio-economic status low. Pochabhai Chauhan was a member of Dalit family of Golana who managed to receive some education and started working against exploitation of his community by Darbars. He led a movement for the allocation of government land used by Darbars in the village to the Dalits. The Gram Panchayat, however, was dominated by Darbars and it refused to do so. On the other hand, Darbars decided to teach him a lesson, and killed Pochabhai and three others brutally. This accompanied burning of a few houses. Among those killed were two brothers, Khoda and Mohan Mitha who were a significant catch for the Darbars because sometime earlier, Khoda Mitha had accidentally brushed against a Darbar's Hookah (smoking pipe). The plot and the protagonist of the story "Fear" is inspired by this violent happening.

Khodo the lunatic, the protagonist of the story belongs to dalit community of the village living in the locality of untouchables. Both his parents have been the victims of the savagery of the upper caste Baraiya community. His father was burnt alive and his mother committed suicide fearing that she would be raped. This turn of events has made Khodo apprehend that he might fall prey to the violence of the *baraiyos*. He also fears that Punjo, his closest neighbour and protector, will be murdered by the Baraiyas. Khodo is also suspicious that he may lose Punjo, a dalit neighbor for whom he has developed regard and affection. The words of Narsinh, a *baraiyo*, keep reverberating in his head and he locks himself up inside his house out of fear. There are other incidents, too, of dalit women facing sexual abuse by upper caste Rajputs. He thinks this might happen to Punjo also. Later as the caste Hindus approach his house to kill him, they see his body hanging from the beam of the small hut.

4.2.4 Detailed Analysis of the Story: "Fear"

"The Fear" is a powerful dramatization of a nightmare generated by the viciousness of the system, working through caste hierarchy. It highlights lustfulness and beastly violence. It shows a society where a man destroys himself as a tired exasperated animal and where women are chased as objects of desire. The 'fear' of the suppressed community has been used as a motif in the story through the character of Khodo, the lunatic. Khodo represents to the *vahavaya* community of dalits. His mother was compelled to commit for escaping rape and murder. Khodo lives with this 'fear' of meeting a similar fate. In the beginning of the story, he is shown lying on the cot in his hut restlessly looking at the *moliyo* hanging from the beam of the ceiling. This reminds him of his mother's suicide. This is how his state of mind is captured:

"He blinked his eyes and all of a sudden he espied the shape of a woman hanging down from the beam. Her flaccid hands are hanging loosely down...he was scared stiff. Squeezed his eyes shut. Everything vanished. He remembered, "your mother had...hanging herself from the beam". He couldn't dare to recall all of it. He sweated profusely all over his body."
("Fear")

Khodo feels choked out of fear as he imagines people shouting his name out loud, "Khodo, the lunatic....Khodo...". The fear is so deeply rooted in his mind that he loses his mental balance. This fear is representative of the constant fear in the minds of millions of people belonging to Dalit community.

Khodo's fear grows as he imagines the loss of Punjo, his loved neighbour who has looked after him following his parents' death. He keeps imagining Punjo chased by the *Baraiyos* –

‘To tell you the truth, Punjo, it was you who had fastened the door with chain’... He got frightened. Beginning to writhe in pain as if someone flogged him with sticks, he envisaged the face of his father. Bloodied...tossing and twitching in excruciating pain. He also began to toss about like him.’

Khodo constantly advises Punjo to run away from the village as he keeps visualizing a *baraiyo* approaching Punjo with a sword in his hand. “Run away Punjo, I am telling you. That *tentu* would chop you to pieces. Run....That bloody *tentun* was approaching holding a sword in his hand.” The writer has effectively connected the unconscious fear of the protagonist with the conscious reality around him. The fear is imaginary, yet it is real because though Khodo is wrought to madness because of the concern. Khodo's hallucinations are real, and that is why he never recovers his self-possession. He becomes a part of the gloomy reverie, having been familiar with its chances of coming true. Enhancing the ominous and eerie atmosphere of the story are the incidents that keep occurring in quick succession, not allowing the underlying theme of ‘fear’ to settle. Once the upper caste Narsinh catches him in the field and shouts:

“bloody seducer of your sister...if I saw you here once more , I would hang you upside down from the branch of a mango tree and would burn fire below...” (“Fear”)

There may be a sense of resistance in dalits following such an incident but it is defused anticipating the aftermath. Although Khodo's entire *vas* has such bitter experiences, yet they are forced to compromise with insult and ignominy. This becomes manifest in Rami's thoughts to herself,

“In reality, this village is spineless. The life of *vahavayas* is all waste. Now that lad of the sarpanch made randy advances into Jivi's house, Punjo couldn't stomach that, the shoes lying in the verandah , the closed door and all that, and so he fastened the chain from outside. After half an hour, the door rapped sharply and the entire *vas* was filled with abuses.

“Bloody whelps of my mother-in-law, who fastened the door with chain. Come out and face me. I would set him right. Bloody seducers of your mothers, I am a *darbar*. I may visit anybody's house. Who the hell are you to stop me?”

“Nobody from the *vas* uttered even a word. The next day his father, the sarpanch, came and went away after flinging expletives at the mothers and sisters of the entire *vas*. Nobody objected. Only Khodo would beat his head against the walls restively. Sometimes her husband Punjo would vent his spleen on the subject. But when the entire *vas* is...” (“Fear”)

The hypocrisy of the so called ‘big’ is clear in such a case. Under the mask of respectability, the upper castes take pride in distancing themselves from the ‘small’ people. At the same time, women of the lower class are chased by men of the dominant section as objects of desire. It is tragic that the dalit women are doubly oppressed being treated first as dalit and then as an object of lust. A dalit woman is

exploited everywhere – at the construction sites, at home and in the fields. The villain invariably is the head of the village, the feudal lord and his muscle men.

Khodo, “who never in his lifetime had gone out in the afternoon” for fear of being spotted by a *tentu*, is shown running “all the way from the road to the farm” to warn Punjo of the impending danger to his life. The fear of losing another one dear to him makes Khodo apprehensive of one more tragedy in his life. He says: “Punjo, I am telling you. You dastard, run away..that *dharado* would reach here in no time, resting his scythe on his shoulder ...would cut you into pieces in no time...in couple of whizzing swipes...” (“Fear”)

And further

“...There he came...I am telling you Punjo,run away” Then he began to weep loudly for him. “First of all my father...then mother. I was watching everything with wide open eyes. What shall I do..run away Punjo, now it’s your turn to go..I am telling you the truth...believe me.” and with his mad prattling, went into hysterics out of fear. However, the retorts of Jivi, a dalit woman accused of unquenched sexual desire and adulterous relations with Darbars, make him come out of his sickness at once and getting restless, he returns to his house and closes the door from inside. The words keep echoing in his mind again and again, “...this bloody sissy implores Punjo to run away. Why! slaughter some baraiyo *instead!* If you do something like that you will be the true son of your father. Slay somebody. What can we expect from him now when he didn’t budge a little when his father was killed.” (“Fear”)

The door does not open. The reader is left to wait with bated breath for the tumult in Khodo’s mind to unfold. Soon, the tension reaches its climax by the end of the story when it is learnt that Khodo has broken Harisinh’s leg the previous night, determined to prove that he is “the true son of his father.” Nevertheless, he is unable to overcome his ‘fear’ till the end, and hangs himself besides the *moliyo* of his mother where her body had been found hanging earlier. The end of the story is apparently distressing and suggests hopelessness, but if we look at it from a different angle, we may spot a positive message. The writer contends that if this ‘fear’ from the enemy continued in the minds of dalits and they were not able to conquer it in the same way as the protagonist, they would also meet the same fate as he did. There is a message for the dalit community that running away from fear, will not take them anywhere. In sending across this message, the writer reminds us of the words of Baburao Bagul, a Marathi dalit writer, said at a The Dalit Literature Conference held in Nagpur in 1976: “ Only anguish, waiting, pronouncements of sorrow alone do not define Dalit literature. We want literature ‘heroically’ full of life for the creation of a new society.”

4.2.5 Symbolism

The writer makes use of symbols to communicate a deeper idea. The reader’s mind is given a jolt to interpret the hidden, profound meaning. Symbols also convey the theme of a literary work, without the writer telling it directly. Consider, for instance, the very title of the story. The ‘fear’ in the story is real. The episodes of the story are not limited to a particular person like Khodo or a particular place like his *vas* or village, it gets broadened in the process of telling and encompasses the whole social

scene. The *moliyo* thread tied with the crossbeam associated with his mother's marriage and the tassels of the colourful threads tied to it which had "gone sooty and rotten" are symbols of better buoyant days now turned into the dark, dingy reality of Khodo's life. The mother is now dead and what remains is her saddening memory which is intensified when Khodo looks at it: "the *moliyo* was shriveling gradually, it was getting smaller and smaller increasingly. He felt as if he were choking."

The "flies" buzzing around and landing on the tassels every now and then are symbolic of the cruel *baraiyos*, who make Khodo "livid" at their sight. He tries to "flush them away" violently gesturing, but in vain. He feels as helpless dealing with the flies as his entire community feels with the Darbars who seem to be oblivious of their plight. The result is a feeling of frustration: "He withdrew his hands helplessly as the flies remained indifferent to his exertion." These symbols are recurrent and are repeated for reinforcement of the meaning. This happens when Narsinh, a *baraiyo* flings abuses on him for trying to relieve himself near the hedge of his farm, "He began to quack. His eyes reached the crossbeam. The *moliyo* was hanging. The flies were buzzing. He took up the stick lying in the corner and began to whiz it at the flies as if they were Narsinh. The stick was dashing against the wall and the door." This is the same stick the sight of which makes Khodo uneasy in the beginning of the story as he imagines himself being beaten by it. "His eyes fell on the stick. He got frightened. Began to writhe in pain as if someone flogged him with sticks." But by the end of the story, he has learnt to use the same stick as his weapon to be used against the evil *baraiyos*. On being challenged by Jivi to prove his mettle and do something big such as slaying a *baraiyo*, Khodo "began to cast thoughtful glances at the stick, the *moliyo* and the door etc." giving a thought to some serious action which is taken later in breaking Narsinh's leg. It is symbolic of Khodo's effort to come out of his fear and give it the shape of aggression to be used against the *baraiyos*.

'Moonlight' and the patterns of 'moon' are also recurrent symbols in the story and remain from the beginning till the end. In the beginning, when Khodo looks at the wall, "the moonlike patterns were formed on it, spectacular circles of light...full of light.", the pattern symbolizing a pattern in the life of a dalit. The writer wants to convey that at the end of darkness, there is hope. We note that as soon as these patterns cease to exist, or the moon "slips away," the darkness permeates again:

"He threw a glance on the cot. Two or three moons were cast on the quilt. He began to flinch away from those moons. After a while he charily extended his hand towards the moons. The moons slinked into his hand.

"damn it, this is nothing but moonlight..." he drew his hand back and the moons slipped away. He was reminded of Punjo as soon as the moons slipped away." ("Fear")

In the last part also, the 'light' and 'moon' are purposely used as powerful symbols intending hopefulness and a promising future for the dalits, if only they overcame their 'fear'. To quote: "the filtered light was flowing in the house. And a small image of moon fell onto the palm of Khodo's hand hanging loosely down." Here, the moon is a symbol of subtlety, clarity and softness. Where the sun boldly bears down its blaze upon a given philosophical subject, the moon softly draws our attention—illuminating our psyche with a glow. That is why the writer chooses to end the story with the symbol of the moon to lighten up the minds of millions like Khodo to achieve their missed target, the villainy of the upper castes.

The 'closed' door of Khodo symbolizes a sense of powerlessness and feebleness of the dalits which the writer wishes to convert into strength and power. By showing the closed doors, he wants to convey the opposite, that the doors should open, and Khodos should come out in the open, speak their mind, and fight their opponents. The writer sends across a strong message for the dalits - to overcome their sense of inferiority.

4.2.6 Comparison and Contrast

Dalit literature of today has come a long way from the literature of Chokhamela, (considered to be one of the 'first' dalit writers) and other untouchable saints of the thirteenth century Bhakti movement. The literature of Chokhamela, though considered to be a torch-bearer among writers of humble origins in the past, is not the literature of protest. The plight and agonies of the dalits articulated by Chokhamela do not protest the barriers of the oppressive social order. In some of his poems, Chokhamela held his 'low' social status as linked to his past deeds and finds solace in the feet of lord Vithal who could put an end to his misery. Instead the present-day Dalit literature rejects such simplistic beliefs and is highly critical of the degraded social system surrounding it. Now, the Dalit writers relentlessly expose the inhumanities and prejudices of caste society. The two writers under study, through their respective stories, "The Flame" and "Fear", have tried to take a step in this direction. Both the stories end with a strong message against the long history of suppression and struggle for identity and craving for equal status in society. There are clear parallels— The "mosquito" biting the "man" in "The Flame" can be very well related to the *baraiyos* or the Darbars of "Fear". "Biting" is symbolical of their barbarism and brutality towards the entire vas of Khodo. Both the "man" of "The Flame" and Khodo are poor victims of inequality in society. It is also interesting that both the writers have projected the impact of the "bite" on the psyche of the two protagonists. Whereas the "man" of "The Flame" continues to have "growing" patches of "eczema." Khodo turns a "lunatic" and has a perpetual sense of uneasiness and 'fear'. Also, both the protagonists suffer on account of something that happens in the past.

The hero in "The Flame" appears to be an extension of the protagonist of "Fear". Khodo belongs to a much older time, a more remote region of the dalit society continuing its struggle in the midst of suffering. The "man" in "The Flame", however, is educated, city-bred and belongs to a relatively advanced society. However, Khodo's committing suicide, is also intended to be understood as the beginning of a kind of revolution, signifying the writer's purpose of striking at the very roots of the "fear."

4.3 LET US SUM UP

Dr. C.B. Bharati in his article, "The Aesthetics of Dalit Literature" says that, "The aim of Dalit literature is to protest against the established system which is based on injustice and to expose the evil and hypocrisy of the higher castes." Apart from this, says Sharankumar Limbale, "Our war is the war of ideas. Dalit literature seeks to transform savarna society, to bring about change in the heart and mind of the savarna individual. Dalit literature has two dimensions. One will be to familiarize dalits with their past, to explain to them that they are enslaved, to show them that it is their right to fight for their rights as human beings. The other dimension will involve working on the hearts and minds of savarna society in order to persuade them about the rights and entitlements of dalits, to make them see and convince

them that they must change.” To sum up, one can say that both the stories are a conscious effort towards achieving these well-defined aims.

Short Stories: “The Flame”
and “Fear”

4.4 QUESTIONS

- 1) What are the primary concerns of Mangalam’s “The Flame”? Explain.
- 2) Write a critical note on the use of symbols in Mangalam’s “The Flame.”
- 3) Trace the autobiographical elements in “The Flame.”
 - a) Write a note on the use of symbols in the stories “Fear” and “The Flame”. Explain how do these symbols contribute to enhance the meaning.
 - b) “Our war is the war of ideas” says Sharankumar Limbale with regard to Dalit literature. Illustrate and elaborate the statement with reference to the two stories.
 - c) Compare and contrast the stories “Fear” and “The Flame” in the context of their representation of the theme of untouchability.
 - e) What does the ending of the story “Fear” signify? Does Khodo emerge as a hero?
 - f) Who do you think does “the man” represent in the story “The Flame”? Do you think his comments on Marx are justified?

4.5 SUGGESTED READINGS

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