



REVERBERATIONS OF CASTE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA – A Study of Select Auto/Biographies in Socio-Political Lexes

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Abstract: Caste is a social structure with deep roots in Hindu society. Likewise it is the cornerstone of Indian political system since 1947. In studies related to Indian society, the prominent features of caste system and its subtle and more evident transformations, coupled with its perseverance and ubiquity, have been central. In India, caste is a significant pillar of social stratification and defines the existence, organisation, and functioning of political parties, interest groups, and all political institutions and their functions. Both the socio-political features of the caste were dynamic and are being transformed. In this scenario the caste discrimination doesn't changed its facet, rather changed its forms. The ancient Hindu caste system after independence transformed into official stratification and this stratification turned the lower strata into political vote banks. Dirty games were often played in politics, keeping the caste system at the centre. Constitutionally, caste based discrimination is outlawed but not outlawed by the society. With an emphasis on the socio-political dimensions of the country, this study presents a specific view on reverberations of caste in contemporary India with the help of select Auto/Biographies called Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life," Sujatha Gidla's "Ants among Elephants," and Suraj Yengde's "Caste Matters" in socio-political lexes.

Index Terms: Caste, Reverberations, Social Stratification, Political Institution, Auto/Biographies.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the impact of modernization, urbanization and secularization on Indian society, significant changes have occurred in the caste system in the modern times. The caste is not a homogeneous unit where, instead, every individual has the same identity, it has split into several castes and sub-castes. The oppressed sections' identity was sharply asserted in the latter half of the twentieth century and the first two decades of the twenty-first century, as were rigid contradictions among them, exposed by atrocities across India. 'Is Caste Appeal Casteism' (1999) by Javeed Alam and C P Bhambhari's 'Caste and Casteism Dialectics' (1999) by C P Bhambhari help us understand a few more caste dynamics and raise some major issues that directly affect dalits and Indian society in general. According to the former, the oppressed have "become a community in the sense of the term" (p. 759), while the latter claims that "Hinduism of every variety is very much in existence as a reference point of the oppressed sections' world view" (p. 2619). The identity of the caste is largely a basis for regulating the social, economic and political actions of the people of India. There are caste, racial, and community inequalities that are profoundly rooted in daily social interactions, over and above immense income gaps. The essence of caste and group interactions has undoubtedly changed over time, but considerations along ascriptive lines remain significant markers for both the public and private realms. After independence, caste became a dominant factor in Indian Political system. Dirty games were often played in politics, keeping the caste system at the centre. Constitutionally, caste based discrimination is outlawed but not outlawed by the society. With an emphasis on the socio-political dimensions of the country, this study presents a specific view on reverberations of caste in contemporary India with the help of select Auto/Biographies called Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life," Sujatha Gidla's "Ants among Elephants," and Suraj Yengde's "Caste Matters" in socio-political lexes.

II. MATERIAL & METHODOLOGY

This academic paper is qualitative in nature and provides specific view on socio-political reverberations of caste in contemporary India covering the period from 1945 to 2019. In order to gain insight into the Caste issues, a study of the secondary data obtained from different books, National & International Journals, publications from various websites focusing on socio-political dynamics of caste. The main focus of the study is on Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life," Sujatha Gidla's "Ants among Elephants," and Suraj Yengde's "Caste Matters."

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Rig-Veda uses the word 'Varna,' which means "colour, exterior form, peripheral appearance, shape or figure." The definition of 'Varna' according to Mahabharata is "colour, tint, dye, or pigment" (Monier-Williams, 2005). But according to Manusmriti 'Varna' refers to four social classes (Malik, 2005).

In the late Rig-Vedic Purusha Sukta (RV 10.90.11–12), the initial application for the traditional schism into four social categories, that is Brahman (Brahmin), Rajanya (instead of Kshatriya), Vaishya, and Shudra form the mouth, arms, legs, and feet of the primordial Purusha respectively (Basham, 1991).

"There is no evidence in the Rig-Veda for an intricate, many-subdivided, and overarching caste system," according to Jamison and Joel Brereton (2014), and "the varna structure seems to be embryonic in the Rig-Veda and, both then and later, it appears to be a social ideal rather than a societal reality."

"The Rig Vedic society was predominantly organised on the basis of kin, tribe, and lineage... (it) was neither systematized on the basis of social division of toil nor on the basis of disparities in wealth," writes Sharma (1990).

The Varna structure in Dharma-shastras is thoroughly debated and according to these debates the society is divided into four varnas called Kshatriyas, Brahmins, Shudras, Vaishyas and Others, who fall out of this structure are ostracized as outcastes (untouchables) because of their grievous sins and deemed beyond the system of Varna (Bayly, 2001).

Olivelle (1998) notes that ritual contamination, purity-impurity, is not endorsed by ancient and medieval Indian texts as the basis for the Varna system. It was mentioned in Dharma-shastra texts, but only in relation to spiritual, ritual, and biological contamination like eating meat, urination and excretion. In his Dharma-shastras analysis, he wrote, "We see no example of when a term of pure/impure is used with regard to a Varna or a caste." In the Shastra texts from the 1st millennium, the only mention of impurity is regarding individuals that who commit Spartan debaucheries will be kept out of their Varna and are named as "fallen people" and be announced that they are ostracized by the society. Olivelle further supplements that in the Dharma-sastra texts, the overwhelming emphasis on issues concerned to the purity/impurity. "Individuals irrespective of their varna affiliation" could achieve purity or impurity through their acts, ceremonial deeds, and element of character, ethical values, innocence, and provisos.

Epic 'Mahabharata' provides two versions of Varna. The first version defines Varna as a color-coded method, according to which "white - Brahmins, red - Kshatriyas, yellow - Vaishyas, and the black - Shudras" through a sage named Bhrgu. Another prominent sage, Bharadwaja questions this definition and says that colours can be noticed in all Varnas, that anger, anxiety, desire, dread, greed, grief, hunger, and toil are all dominant emotions, and all human bodies consists of blood and bile in a free flow. Thereafter, the Mahabharata recites a behavioural model for Varna, that Kshatriya are those inclined to annoyance, desires, and Valour; Vaishyas are those inclined to gather cattle and live off the plough; and Shudras are those inclined to delinquency, covetousness, and contagion. The class of Brahmins is depicted in the epic as the archetypal default state of man, dedicated to austerity, purity and reality (Hiltebeitel, 2011).

Kshatriyas and Brahmins are referred to jatis rather than varnas in the Buddhist texts. In fact, they were the high-ranking Jatis. Low-ranking jatis were referred to as chandala, as were workers such as bamboo weavers, hunters, chariot-makers, and sweepers (Chakravarti, 1985).

In medieval, early-modern, and modern Indian periods, especially during the period of Mughal Empire's reign and the British Raj's supremacy, the Varna system was transformed by various ruling elites. According to Bayly (2001), "Caste, never had been a fixed fact of Indian life," and the today's caste system was established as a "ritualised pattern of social stratification" in two phases, that is during the post-Mughal era of late 18th and early 19th centuries. In this development, three value sets played an important role: sacerdotal hierarchy, kingship, and armed ascetics. He went on to say that the mysterious post-Mughal elites were synonymous with kings, priests, and ascetics. They used caste and kinship symbols to divide their own people and consolidate the power. In addition, in this stateless environment, some of society's traditionally casteless segments formed into caste groups.

British Colonial ethnographers used caste (jati) headings in the census of 1881 to count and classify people in the then British India now separated into Bangladesh, Burma, India, and Pakistan (Bayly, 2001). The 1891 census included 60 sub-groups into these classifications, each subdivided again into six occupational and ethnic categories, and the number increased in succeeding censuses of population (Dirks, 2001a). During the British Raj, Indian castes were merged with traditional British class structures, according to Cannadine (2002).

According to Nesbitt (2005), the colonial government made caste-driven divisions in India tougher through not only caste census, but also through a number of legislations passed in the early 20th century. The British formulated the caste into the governing system between 1860 and 1920, awarded administrative positions and senior appointments to upper caste people only. In the 1920s, social unrest culminated a shift in this policy (Dirks, 2001b). With the shift in Census policy, reservation of certain proportion of seats for the lower castes in government employment was occurred. The colonial administration started a policy of positive discrimination. After India attained independence, the policy of caste-based reservations in employment was formalised with the lists of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

The 1909 Moreley - Minto reforms introduced separate voters who gave non-Brahman castes a fillip in their search for self-respect. Now, they started to organize themselves as "Depressed Classes." From 1917 onwards, this gained traction, and numerous Depressed Caste Associations began in various parts of India. With the development of British suzerainty in India, the process of challenging existing hierarchies by means other than war began. Caste and politics were still connected, but at various periods of time the association was manifested differently. One big shift in the way caste and politics interact was initiated by the establishment of democracy in independent India, and that is by making all equal legally (Dipankar Gupta, 2005).

Mulk Raj Anand (1935) through his work "Untouchable", reveals that even in the outcaste's colony, there are higher and lower castes, resulting in unnecessary yet prideful disputes. The flaws discovered through the practise of one religion cause a man to seek refuge in another religion.

The profound understanding of religious and social norms, customs and rituals, psychology of women and men, old and young, poor and rich, upper castes and untouchables of Indian society could be seen through the analysis of Munshi Premchand's tales (1931).

Robert L. Hardgrave (1969,) in his book entitled "The Nadars of Tamil Nadu" provides an analytical account of this caste group. Based on the results of his study, he has also given a sub-title to the book, The Political Culture of a Community in Change. He analyses all the then prevailing shades of opinion about the origin of the caste and also the claim that it had once been a ruling class.

The lives of the Dalits, who have been muzzled for centuries by societal oppression and caste discrimination, are portrayed through various forms of literary art in Arjun Dangle's book "Poisoned Bread: Translation from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature" (1992). In the last sixty years, Maharashtra's Dalits have found a strong voice in the literature of Marathi. Dr. Ambedkar's revolutionary social movement was matched by a wave of poetry, prose, fiction, and autobiography that erupted with depth and richness of content, maturity, raw vigour, and shocking in its exposition of their acrimonious experiences.

Radhika Ramaseshan (1995) analyses the political ramifications on caste lives over a 40-year period beginning in the 1960s in her paper "Dalit Politics in Uttar Pradesh." She traces the struggle of the Dalits to express their pent-up emotions by aligning with a variety of political parties in Uttar Pradesh, including the Congress, the Samajwadi, the Bahujan Samaj Party, and the Republican Party of India. The Dalits' political awakening, which accounted for 23.7 percent of the total population, allowed them to exert pressure on the government. The author cautions that unless the Dalits gain control over vital economic resources, they will not be able to fight social and political discrimination effectively.

Not only did the Constitution of independent India abolish untouchability, however, arrangements were also made to reserve jobs and seats for the employment in government and educational institutions to the people of Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The untouchables are recognized as Scheduled Castes. But still the incidents of caste based discrimination in the 21st century's modern Indian society are reverberating in many forms.

IV. SOCIO-POLITICAL LEXES IN SELECT AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES

The 'Caste' itself is a sociological aspect and the politicization of Caste and making it as a vote bank shows how both are intertwined in Indian society. The Caste based societal stratification and the political discrimination that existed throughout the ages, still exists in India and the disparity that comes with it is being thoroughly criticised. The socio-political aspect of caste and the resulted discrimination is a nexus, which could be seen in contemporary India. The present study of Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life", Sujatha Gidla's "Ants among Elephants", and Suraj Yengde's "Caste Matters" depicts the socio-political transformations of Caste during 1940s to 2019 in both rural and urban spheres.

4.1 Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life"

The author belongs to the Mahad- Rajapur belt which forms the central region of the Konkan of Maharashtra, compared to the north-south belt, this region is quite backward (Pawar, 94).

The village Parthavane does not have a proper school. Just one teacher (pantoji) on the verandah of a Brahmin house, used to teach only Brahmin kids. Later Urmila's grandfather, Chimaji, had donated his house to Christian missionaries to set up a school. Since then only the children of converted Mahar-Christians went to that school, it was called the "school of the polluted converts." (Pawar, 15) Urmila's father went to this school, completed his sixth standard and became a teacher in a school for untouchable children, opened on a hill called Sinal where many Mahar families used to live, with surnames like Tondekar, Kashelkar, Naneejkar, and so on (Pawar, 16). By the time Urmila's father became a teacher, the Brahmin school was moved from the verandah to the Courtyard of the house (it was held under the canopy of a creeper there). A few others, children from other castes like the Bhandaris and Kunbis, started attending school with the Brahmin boys. Some Mahar children went to school as well, but they had to sit in the courtyard outside. From afar, the teachers instructed them and checked their slates. If the children made any mistakes, they would be hit with stones (Pawar, 17). The school in Urmila's village was upto fourth standard only and girls were not allowed to enrol in this school (Pawar, 18). When Urmila's sister Shanthi was enrolled in fifth standard in Parthavane, all the women complained that "Bah! What do women have to do with education? Ultimately she would be blowing on the stove, wouldn't she? or Is she going to be a teacher, a Brahmin lady, that she goes to school?" (Pawar, 18). This shows how women are stereotyped and lack of education structured their thinking pattern.

In the Patit Pavan Temple located in the village, Savarkar used to organize sahabhojan programs, in which untouchables and high castes ate together. The Mahars from Partavane attended these programs. In the sahabhojan programs, sweet dishes, such as huge bundi ladus, jalebis etc (Pawar, 18). The food items like 'ladu', 'modak', 'karanjya', 'puranpolya' were not uttered in the houses of Dalits and were not known of such items. But around 1950-55, the Dalit homes in the cities were well acquainted with these names and food items (Pawar, 93 & 99). The food was always scarce in the author's house. They use to bring Coarse rice grains from the ration shop and was cooked for lunch. This was taken along with the pithale made up of kulith floor. Sometimes with leafy vegetables grown up in their backyard. Sometimes they were served with bhakri made up of milo (red jowar) or of its husk. This bhakri was served along with the dried fish or small inexpensive fish (chadu), fried with onions, red chilli powder and salt (Pawar, 94). In the rainy season Urmila's mother used to cook a plate full of takla leaves with little salt and sometimes aloo leaves with pavte beans, salt, red chilli powder and amsul or dried ratamba fruit. Their meal was like a spoon full of rice and a plate full of curry (Pawar, 95).

The Dalits of Konkan region were supposed to collect drinking water from a particular part of the river. The Mahars couldn't resist even the Caste Marathas deliberately wash their buffaloes and bullocks in the designated part of the river of Mahars (Pawar, 85). The houses of the Marathas and the Brahmins were at some distance from Urmila's house. Bhandari and Kulwadi women could drink water from their wells, but untouchable women were absolutely forbidden to do so (Pawar, 23).

At that time Brahmin priests performed the rituals of marriage and ceremonial worship for the lower castes, like the Mahars and Chambhars. But the priest would never enter the Maharwada to perform these tasks. He would climb a tree on the outskirts of the neighbourhood, muttering some chants. The holy moment for solemnizing the marriage would be either in the morning or evening, when the trees cast long shadows. So the priest would climb the tree because he did not want to be polluted with the shadows cast by the people of our Mahar neighborhood. When a marriage took place, the bride and groom would be standing in the pandal in the Maharwada with a piece of cloth that is held between the bride and groom at the time of marriage, barring them from looking at each other—and the Brahmin priest would climb a tree at a distance muttering mantras under his breath. Then he would shout the word sawadhan (a ritual chanting that literally means "attention") from the tree. At that instant the drummers started beating their drums and the marriage would take place. The priest would then descend, use a pali, a small ritual spoon, to sprinkle holy water from his panchapatra—a vessel with five compartments—on the coins kept as his dakshina to wash away the pollution and clean them, and tuck it into his waistband. As part of his dakshina, he would also make it a point to take all of the offerings: rice, coconuts, and so on. If one wanted to consult the priest about choosing a proper name according to the almanac or collect some holy ash for a sick person, he had to wait endlessly outside the priest's house, that too beyond the courtyard (Pawar, 12 & 13).

Mahar youth were forced to perform the difficult task of cutting down tree branches and trunks and transporting them to a field where a fire would be lit at dusk during the Holi festival, also known as the Shimga festival. But, they are not allowed to partake in the festivities: the goddess's palanquin is carried by upper-caste men, and the Mahars are not permitted to touch it (Pawar, 25). Another ritual was for an upper caste man to inflict a large wound on the back of a Mahar Man, and the Mahar Man's wife to cover the wound with a cloth and continue walking around howling! This rite is reminiscent of some ancient sacrificial rites! The Mahar represents the beast that will be sacrificed (Pawar, 86). During Gauri and Ganapati festivals women work very hard to prepare for the festival and earn a little extra money by selling more grass and firewood bundles to buy new clothes, bangles, necklaces etc., for their children. All the women including their daughters would get tattoos on their foreheads, arms and hands.

There are several examples of Gender based incidents throughout the memoir since the birth of a child to marriage, an important aspect of everyone's life. Saptapadi, Sathphera or seven steps around the sacred fire by both the bride and groom, is an example of a marriage ceremony (Pawar, 61). Pawar says that "All of these events were really intended to rheostat and keep a check on the bride." When they were being played, however, everyone laughed and enjoyed themselves. These were joyful times in their lives" (Pawar, 62). Patriarchal oppression of women within the Dalit community and along caste lines, the upper-caste men having free reign to sexually exploit Dalit women was a nexus. The priest of the temple sexually abuses a young girl from the nomadic community called Komti; Urmila is perplexed when she sees her crying as she leaves the inner sanctum. Another horrifying storey involves a widow, who becomes pregnant. She was kicked in the stomach by all the village women until the foetus is aborted and she dies.

Among Dalits, there were various groups of organisers and political activists. Urmila was moved by circumstances involving caste and gender bias, and she began to write short stories to express her feelings. She encountered other authors and became aware of issues of style and structure after some of these were published. She also recorded the experiences of elder Dalit women that participated in the Ambedkar movement. Samvadini, is a coined name that adds a feminine ending to the word for conversation, a literary group of Dalit women in Mumbai. Pawar's first political action at the time was this. Urmila Pawar's personal transition from verbal to a written form of self-expression echoes in the Dalit stories of emancipation.

The ancestors to present members of author's family had an influence of Satyashodhak movement led by Mahatma Jotiba Phule in 1873 and Buddhist movement led by Dr. Ambedkar. After Ambedkar's death, the movement for the liberation of the out-castes continued for a while, but the ruling Congress Party's co-optation of many of its leaders diminished its radical edge. For his part, Ambedkar, like Jotiba Phule, a nineteenth-century social reformer, was always clear that a large-scale struggle for Dalit emancipation was required. Even today, leaders of anti-caste, cultural and political actions invoke the names of Phule and Ambedkar. Today's Dalit leaders, however, are not especially receptive to women raising gender issues, as Urmila Pawar points out several times throughout her book. Some argue that patriarchal attitudes have hardened in India since 1990s, when fundamentalist religious groups began to gain power. The Shiv Sena, a party that mobilised disaffected non-Brahmin youth in Mumbai using a fascist rhetoric aimed first against "southerners" in Mumbai and then against Muslims, began to erode the radical face of the Dalit movement even earlier.

4.2 Sujatha Gidla's "The Ants among Elephants"

The Author belongs to a lower-middle class untouchable family of town Khazipet in undivided Andhra Pradesh, presently located in the new state of Telangana (Gidla, 1). Her parents were educated and worked as lecturers. She says "your life is your caste, your caste is your life." As a child author grew up in Elwinpeta of Kakinada, a well-known city in re-organized state of Andhra Pradesh in an abject poverty conditions (Gidla, 293).

The Caste oppression in Indian society made change in religion obligatory for the untouchable families. Though the untouchables, who were converted into Christianity also treated as 'Untouchables' but the people converted from higher castes are not treated as untouchables like Kerala Namudris (Gidla, 6). The quest of the author to know the reason for family's conversion into Christianity reveals us multiple dimensions of early seventies to 21st century. The Missionaries found first converted Telugu people in Guntur. The Christian community there is the oldest in the region and is therefore considered among Christians in the area to be purer in its belief and practices. These people are called 'Sampradaya Kristavulu' (old or traditional) and are prosperous and highly cultured community, also the product of the mission schools and hospitals that they afforded them employment (Gidla, 26).

Canadian Missionaries were active and started schools for untouchable children. The villagers started sending their children to those schools with gratitude. Though these schools were the only institutions offering modern education, Caste Hindus refused to send their children to these schools, despite the fact that they would have to sit alongside untouchable students. The missionaries tried to accommodate the local customs and also opened "caste schools" where the untouchable students are not admitted. In these schools boys and girls were kept separated very strictly (Gidla, 15). The missionaries also taught untouchables how to make themselves look respectable (Gidla, 17).

It was the year 1942, on one side the world was at war. The Japanese have dropped their first bombing on the harbour located in Vizag. Entire beach was occupied by the British soldiers and the war ships were in position in the harbour (Gidla, 19). Also Subhash Chandra Bose's Indian National Army to liberate the sub-continent. On the other side, independence movement led by Gandhi and Congress party. He has been the principal leader of the nationalist agitation for more than two decades. In August 1942, Gandhi called on the British to "quit India" and for "open rebellion" to back up his demand. But the Indian people made the struggle violent by attacking police stations, cut telegraphs, burnt post offices and derailed trains etc., due to which Gandhi called off Quit India Movement (Gidla, 22).

In 1945, the war was concluded and the Labour Party came to power in Britain. They recognized that the direct colonial rule over the sub-continent was not possible for longer time. They showed interest in transferring the power to Congress party. Except Communists, all the political prisoners arrested during quit India movement were released from jails. Elections were announced to form the native governments in the provinces though the British Viceroy stays in power for time being (Gidla, 25).

During 1947, the Vetti system was a very real situation in Telangana, the heartland of the Nizam's Deccan kingdom. Every untouchable family in every village was required to give up their first male child as soon as he learned to speak and walk under this system. They would take him to the 'Dora's Gadi (Landlord's fortress)' and force him to work as a slave in his household until he died. The Telangana peasants were terrified of the dora's gadi. It was a place of torture, rape, and murder, a symbol of tyranny, slavery, and cruelty. Under the system of vetti, every caste people including women was forced to provide goods and services to the dora on demand and without compensation. The whole village was the dora's, along with everything in it. If anyone picked up even a twig from the ground for his hearth, they could be fined and beaten. Young untouchable girls were chosen to serve as concubines for him and his relatives and guests. At the head of the doras stood the Nizam (Gidla, 41). Even the wealthy middle classes in Telangana were oppressed under the Nizam's regime. The rich peasants were squeezed by competition with the doras for land and labour. Under the Nizam's rule, Urdu was the only medium of instruction allowed in schools and universities. Urdu and English were the official languages of the court and public administration. Under these conditions, some adventurous boys from Brahmins, reddy, the sons of merchants and rich peasants, who had some means but no future in the kingdom of the Nizam turned to an organization called 'Andhra Maha Sabha' (AMS). The AMS stood for the promotion of Telugu culture (Gidla, 42). The British supported the Nizam in his suppression of Telugu libraries and any other measure he found necessary to maintain his autocratic rule (Gidla, 43).

The militant educate youth, who joined the AMS had a different outlook from that of the older, city-dwelling members. The younger members realized that without the support of the masses they couldn't achieve the reforms. So they called AMS to work on social questions like child marriage, compulsory primary education, lower tax rate on the peasantry etc. In this process they contacted Andhra Communists, for whom they gave a political cover to operate in Hyderabad. With the help of the Communists, the AMS was transformed into a different kind of organization. Membership fee was reduced from one rupee to one anna which recruited 100,000 new members from masses in the country side. Thousands of them were flocked to the AMS conference held in 1944, but they had no objective on which they can fight or work. As the Communist party had no plan, the peasants themselves embarked on the path of mass struggle with primitive methods on dora's goondas and succeeded. But they were useless in fighting off the Nizam's police and army. The Nizam had let loose an even dirtier force called genocidal Razakars, who were a Muslim-chauvinist, pro-Nizam militia. The purpose of the Razakars was to slaughter and terrorize as many Hindus as possible before a vote was taken. Under the three pronged attack of the police, the army and the Razakars, Telangana became a death camp. With all these circumstances, everyone wanted freedom from bondage and dignity irrespective of their class and caste. By August 1948, their revolt had spread to more than three thousand villages (Gidla, 48). Finally on September 13, 1948 the Indian army finally undertook a direct invasion of Hyderabad. Shockingly the Asaf Jahi army was defeated, the Razakars surrendered, the Nizam had been deposed (Gidla, 58). In independent India general elections were held at the end of 1951. By the time of 1955 elections, the Communist Party lost its face in Andhra. The Communist Student wing – the SFI too became weak (Gidla, 158).

The early seventies were the days in which Radical Students Unions (RSUs) were rigorously trying to join the people into these groups by singing songs across the streets of Kakinada. The song sung by the group of teenagers was "Come on, peasant brothers," "come on, all you exploited and impoverished, join the party of the peasants and the poor and let us all stand up to the landlords." The RSU was the pupil annex of the People's War Group (PWG) where author's maternal uncle and poet called KG Satya Murthy alias Siva Sagar was an active member (Gidla, 295).

With the influence of this song, Sujatha joined the union informally. Whenever party needed her services, she used to involve in the activities like distributing leaflets. She was always ready to help the PWG party. She also joined the street theatre group and she went around singing the songs on unemployment, rise in prices of basic commodities, corruption in government hospitals, the evils of the education system etc., (Gidla, 295).

The party stood for people's war: an armed struggle against the landlords to seize their estates and distribute the land to the poor peasants who actually worked on it. Radicals have looked forward to this future phase of struggle, which will help the party to win the support of masses. The radicals were treated violently by the landlords and police. Hundreds of PWG members and sympathizers were arrested during this period. Torture was routine in the custody. Many of the comrades and students were shot dead (Gidla, 296).

When Sujatha was nineteen, she enrolled for master's programme in Regional Engineering College (REC) in Warangal. In the same college her uncle did political work. At that time student life was dominated by the Radicals, and many faculty were Naxalite sympathizers (Gidla, 296). In that college an upper caste professor in the electronics engineering department, started passing all the students of his own caste with high marks and failing the low caste students in the same branch. This incident led to strike in the college. Many of the students were arrested and the arrested group was not provided with food, water and sanitary facilities for long periods and tortured. Though Sujatha not participated in the strike, she was arrested at her home and transported to Warangal. She was the only girl among the arrested group and was moved continuously from one precinct to another. She was not released from the jail until her mother filed a petition of habeas corpus with the help of famous civil rights lawyer Kannabhiran (Gidla, 297).

The arrest of Sujatha had an indelible effect on her family. They were social ostracized, especially Christians avoided them. The chances of marrying Sujatha and her sister were very little, the sympathizers of the family were also kept away due to the fear of police harassment (Gidla, 298). During that time, Satya Murthy was expelled from the Communist Party, the person who drew all the intellectuals and students to PWG politics, with his slogans, poems, songs and the people's theatre troupe he inspired. Because of Satya Murthy, the PWG had become the most successful guerrilla party in the sub-continent, except for the Tamil Tigers. The allegations raised on Satya Murthy were that he had turned as a traitor and tried to divide the party (Gidla, 299).

In 1984, Satya Murthy had been arrested while waiting for a train and thrown in prison. He was second-in-command at the time, and he became the PWG's general secretary during that period. A group of young untouchable members approached him at the time and complained about casteist practises in the party's underground operations. They emphasised that the members of the party were assigned responsibilities based on their caste. Barber Caste members were told to shave the chins of comrades, Washer Community members were asked to wash the comrades clothes, The Untouchables were assigned to sweep and mop the bathrooms, as well as clean the restrooms. Inside the party, discussing caste feelings had always been frowned upon (Gidla, 300). Satya Murthy was not exception to the share of casteist insults from uppercaste members who were close to him. They knowingly left some amount of money in bathroom to check whether he would pocket it or not. Satya Murthy convened a meeting of the Central Committee to address the grievances of the young members. The leaders, on the other hand, reacted quickly and ruthlessly. For "conspiring to split the party," he was promptly expelled from the party (Gidla, 301).

During that time the political climate in the state had a change in the wake of a shocking massacre occurred in the village of Karamchedu, where an entire madiga settlement was brutally attacked and 11 people were killed by a mob of two thousand kamma men. The reason for this massacre was the denial of clean water to the untouchables by the caste people, which was complained by a madiga women that the kmmas were washing their buffaloes in the madiga drinking water tank. This was the period where, awareness of casteism as a political question was spreading among untouchables (Gidla, 300).

After Karamchedu massacre, in 1991 eight malas were massacred by reddy landlords in the village of Tsundur. The bodies were chopped up and tossed into an irrigation canal. Satya Murthy went to that village and conducted an investigation of the incident with the help of civil rights lawyers, including a young Brahmin Chandra Sekhar. Satya Murthy organized untouchables in self-defence. Fifty-six members were charged with murder (Gidla, 302).

4.3 Suraj Yengde's "Caste Matters"

The Author belongs to a Dalit family below poverty line (BPL) of urban area of Nanded in Maharashtra, which had 18 to 24% of the population below the poverty line. He grew up in the relative poverty conditions. According to the author... "Caste is viewed through a variety of lenses, making it the most misunderstood topic of discussion in/about India. Reservations, Dalits, Adivasis, manual scavenging, poverty, Dalit capitalism, daily-wage labourers, heinous crime, criminality, and incarceration are all associated with caste, as are Rajputs, Brahmins, Baniyas, Kayasthas, and OBCs" (Yengde, 3).

Caste was a dishonest social construct, known for its elemental ability to deviate from its main motive of existence, which governs the world's oldest system of human oppression, subjugation, and degradation. It has penetrated all religions on the Indian subcontinent, having its origins in the Hindu social order. In India, caste is an absolute sanction of the ruling class over the ruled. The conversation about caste is steered by the individual's investment in the system (Yengde, 7).

The following incidents elucidate that the 'Untouchability' remains as a lifeline of India's present. The Khairlanji's brutal incident in the year 2006 - forty year old Surekha Bhootmange was mercilessly raped along with her seventeen year old daughter Priyanka, a twelfth grade topper, by the Kunbi – Marathas of Khairlanji village near Nagpur, in the broad daylight at the village square. Chilli powder, rods and sticks were forced into their vaginas. They were stripped, battered and then paraded naked and eventually murdered. In this brutal episode, Surekha's sons Roshan (21), and Sudheer (19) were also stripped, mercilessly beaten and killed in cold blood. In the year 2015, more than 50% of households in the country were admitted the practice of untouchability in urban capitals such as Delhi. Country wide 30% of Indians have no hesitation in imposing the worst form of human oppression upon fellow humans. A study over four years (2014-18) in Tamilnadu revealed that over 640 villages in 20 districts practice untouchability. Untouchability and casteism are not the things of past, they are real and belong to present too (Yengde, 11).

The author's father has established eight social and cultural organizations, began a school for the underprivileged and was an active member in the Dalit Panther movement and a committed BAMCEF – BSP (The Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation – Bahujan Samaj Party) activist. He also edited a daily newspaper called 'Daily Sarvjan' and a weekly 'Vastunishtha Vichar' (Objective Thoughts) in Marathi (Yengde, 12). The comrades' sathis of the BAMCEF movement were committed to the dream of ruling India that will be established on the principles of equality, liberty and justice (Yengde, 173).

Caste killings go unmentioned instead 'honour' killings take precedence. Casteist killers are acquitted from the constitutional morality that prohibits untouchability, while society condemns only so called honour killings that are caste neutral. The beautiful and precious lives of Pranay Kumar, Shankar, Rekha Kumari, Mridul Kumar, Somi Kumari, Manoj Sharma, Kumar, Amit and Jyoti, Ankit, Rama and many others have been cut short due to the violent refusal to embrace the nurturing qualities of Dalit love. Among the slaughtered bodies, Dalits do not monopolize the numbers – all castes take the hit (Yengde, 51).

The agriculture census of 2015-16 states that 92% of landholdings operated by Dalits comprised of small and marginal holdings, not exceeding 2 hectares. The poorest of the farmers belong to the Dalit community whose operational holding is depressingly 78.06%. In a casteist economic order, Dalits are the most viable, accessible, loyal and determined labour. The logic behind putting Dalits closer to the chain of production is to extract undeniable labour. There are no national level political calls for reclaiming Dalit land in rural and urban areas for the uprooted Dalit community (Yengde, 84).

Dalits are forced by caste colonizers to be patriotic in their own homeland. The question of caste and Ambedkar's role during the independence movement is narrated from Brahmin diaries. The idea of patriotism built around the casteist nation is a treacherous concept. It is a crooked plot of traditional oppressors to question one's patriotism and resort to punishment if one has the temerity to even declare one's Dalitness. In 2015, a Dalit youth was hacked to death in broad day light in Ahmednagar of Maharashtra. The reason behind the incident was his mobile ringtone was set to Dalit music in praise of Ambedkar. Not only this, weekly thirteen Dalits are murdered, five Dalit homes are burnt, six Dalit people are kidnapped, twenty-one Dalit women are raped (Yengde, 92).

The existence of various organized movements and struggle related to Dalit rights since the 19th century is a testimony. Various regional groups in the north, south, the Deccan, east and all over India could be seen working towards the cause of anti-untouchability (Yengde, 156). Caste and Dalit are not separate issues, neither are they issues of the other – external, unrelated to someone in the caste ecology. They are not peripheral, they have to do with the quality of personhood – the humanness of a common collective existence. They affect the oppressed substantially but also the one who is doing the oppressing. They are oxymoronic positions to theoretically discuss the formation of the caste as a system while at the same time being adjusted to the dialectics of Brahmanism – benefitting out of it and reproducing it. Many mainstream Dalit movements are called upon by the dominant castes to lessen their severity of language and limit their outwardly style (Yengde, 157).

Dalit middle class is a generational change brought by welfare measures like the reservation policy wherein the generation that benefitted from the policy fits into the new middle-class category. According to Pew Research data 2015 (upto March 2019), we have the largest Dalit middle class in the history. The Dalit middle class is a powerful mediator between poor Dalits and regular society with caste-class privilege. Presently, most Dalit movements in India are run by Dalit middle-class people. The political and social organizations are an outcome of Dalit middle-class visions. Work-based SC/ST employees' welfare unions are an outcome of the Dalit middle-class desire to fight oppression at their workplace. In most avenues of society, the Dalit middle class is playing consequential role in filling the gaps and offering a Dalit perspective and Dalit leadership. They wrestle with the non-Dalit sphere to gain recognition and add their voice on equal terms. Due to the presence of many organizations and the implicit inner and intra-class wars, the Dalit middle class faces hostility for embracing its ideology as well as class status from amongst its own (Yengde, 167).

Kanshiram reiterated Ambedkar's vision of the governing class sharing political power in terms of equality or 'shaasan karti zamaat' (ruling class community), or as he put it 'hukmaran samaj' to refer to the Bahujan class rule. The Bahujan identity was deployed as a model for political and social unity. Many of the BAMCEF members filed behind Kanshiram's leadership as they are salaried employees (Yengde, 173).

The graphs of education, poverty, housing, incarceration rate, health, lifespan, access to housing and land, among other socio-economic issues, presented by NSSO data and the Socio-Economic Caste Census (SECC), agriculture census, crime records and prison statistics demonstrated that Dalits and Advasis are being pushed further to the bottom of the ladder towards near annihilation. But in many spheres of Indian public and private life, the SCs/ STs were overwhelmingly excluded (Yengde, 177).

The instances of gross under representation are seen in budget allocations too. The 2017 budget of the government of India scrapped SCSP - Scheduled Caste Sub Plan and STSP - Scheduled Tribe Sub Plan which was a constitutional guarantee in the 1970s. The Twelfth Planning Commission admitted the government's failure in addressing the serious deficit in budget allocation to SCSP/STSP, but the remodelled NITI Aayog continued to mete out similar disgraceful treatment for SCs and STs in budget allocations. Many states and union territories spent less than half of the funds allocated. Crude strategies of not implementing the budget and thereby letting the amount lapse have become the norm for budgetary allotments meant for SCs/ STs. In the recent budget of the central government too, the mockery continued (Yengde, 183).

Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DICCI) started off as a quasi-formal space for budding Dalit entrepreneurs who had emerged in the shadow of the Indian neo-liberalism (the post 1990s liberalization – privatization – globalization era). DICCI is an entity catering to marginalized business persons. Dalit capitalism was as relevant as nineteenth-century's African-American capitalism (Yengde, 205). In its ten-year history, DICCI has gained access to important monetary portfolios in India where it shares the dais with the National Board of the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, National Skill Development Council (NSDC), Confederation of Indian Industries, BFSI Sector Skill Council of India, Affirmative Action Council, Monetary Policy Consultative Committee, Reserve Bank of India (RBI), among others under the policy of affirmative action. Dalits continue to face multi-layered exclusion, according to Aseem Prakash's study of Dalit capitalism (Yengde, 216).

V. CONCLUSION

In India, The Caste system was intertwined with religion, occupation, culture, politics and it became a way of life by existing social hierarchy. As expressed by Dirks, (2004) in Indian society caste it-self is shaped by political struggles and processes and it has been inscribed in ritual, familial, communal, socio-economic, political and public theatre of quotidian life. The modern Indian society is not an exemption to it. The discussion from Urmila Pawar's "The Weave of My Life," Sujatha Gidla's "Ants among Elephants," and Suraj Yengde's "Caste Matters" also reveals the same. In order to evict the caste differences so many revolutions and reformative actions were led out and to bring the equality reservations were also provided. But the caste remained the most powerful single dimension for oppression, exclusion, domination and the privilege for social life. Though the caste was an ancient expression, remained as a modern phenomenon in all the spheres of the society. Still undergoing many transformations and changing its facet but remaining as a single dominant factor affecting everyone's life in the rural and urban societies.

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