

Performativity in Dalit Literature: Identification,  
Disidentification and Re-identification in Contemporary Dalit  
Personal Narratives

Surya Simon

PhD

University of East Anglia

School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing

November 2021

This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that use of any information derived therefrom must be in accordance with current UK Copyright Law. In addition, any quotation or extract must include full attribution.

# Abstract

Dalit identity is one of the core aspects explored and expressed in Dalit literature. Some Dalit writers attempt to understand and define Dalit identity while some “propagate their view on Dalit identity” (Shah 215). Dalit writers endeavour to do away with discriminatory identities and labels imposed on them such as ‘untouchable’ and ‘outcaste’. Dalit activism aims at Dalit emancipation from a historically and socially oppressive system while simultaneously searching for new empowered identities. Dalits chose the term ‘Dalit’, which was adopted to protest against unjust identifications enforced on them. Thus, there is a process of shedding away of identifications and attempts to find new self-determined identity or identities, and Dalit identity is therefore a category in transformation. This study attempts to explore Dalit identity from a new perspective using a performative theory of caste to theorise Dalit identity as a process of identification, disidentification, and re-identification. This study tries to understand the role of caste and Dalit identity from the perspective of performance studies by analysing select Dalit literature. Since Dalit personal narratives (autobiographical narratives) comprise a substantial part of Dalit literature, and in order to demonstrate how they exemplify, explain and themselves perform the processes of Dalit identity formation, I engage in close reading of the following Dalit personal narratives: Bama’s *Karukku* ([1992] 2000), and P. Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* ([1989] 2006) and *Author’s Notes: Gowri* ([1997] 2006). Since the three texts analysed are translations, this thesis argues that the process of identity formation encompasses both, the composition of Dalit texts as well as the translation of the texts; and hence interviews with several translators of Dalit texts are also used to understand the challenges and possibilities of literary advocacy and resistance for Dalits.

## **Access Condition and Agreement**

Each deposit in UEA Digital Repository is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of the Data Collections is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form. You must obtain permission from the copyright holder, usually the author, for any other use. Exceptions only apply where a deposit may be explicitly provided under a stated licence, such as a Creative Commons licence or Open Government licence.

Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone, unless explicitly stated under a Creative Commons or Open Government license. Unauthorised reproduction, editing or reformatting for resale purposes is explicitly prohibited (except where approved by the copyright holder themselves) and UEA reserves the right to take immediate 'take down' action on behalf of the copyright and/or rights holder if this Access condition of the UEA Digital Repository is breached. Any material in this database has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the material may be published without proper acknowledgement.

# Contents

Acknowledgements .....	5
Chapter 1: Introducing the Sociopolitical History of Dalit Identity and Theoretical Introduction to Core Concepts .....	6
<b>1. Social Identity and Social Structure</b> .....	6
<b>2. The Paradox of Untouchability</b> .....	13
<b>3. Dalit Resistance</b> .....	16
<b>4. Understanding Dalit Identity through The Tripartite Process</b> .....	32
<b>5. Caste as A Performative Identity</b> .....	37
<b>6. Literary Activism</b> .....	44
<b>Scope and Structure of The Thesis</b> .....	52
Chapter 2: (Dis)Entanglements and Performativity in Bama's <i>Karukku</i> .....	55
<b>Introduction</b> .....	55
<b>1. Performances and Performative</b> .....	59
<b>1.1. Caste Entangled with Labour</b> .....	68
<b>1.2. Disentangling Caste and Class</b> .....	86
<b>1.3. Caste Performances within Educational and Religious Institutions</b> .....	96
<b>2. Dalits: Legally-accepted but Socially-unaccepted</b> .....	107
<b>2.1. Performativity in Law</b> .....	115
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	128
Chapter 3: Bodies, Intersectionality, and Ideological Offensive in Sivakami's <i>The Grip of Change</i> .....	133
<b>Introduction</b> .....	133
<b>1. Intersectionality</b> .....	136
<b>1.1. Theory in Flesh</b> .....	139
<b>1.1.1. Gendered Bodies</b> .....	141
<b>1.2. Victimised Identity</b> .....	154
<b>2. Caste Performativity</b> .....	168
<b>2.1. Law and Dalit Identity</b> .....	187
<b>3. Ideological Offensive: Sparking Disidentification and Re-identification</b> .....	196
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	205

Chapter 4: Kaleidoscopic Writing in Sivakami's <i>Author's Notes</i> , and Generic Performativity.....	210
<b>Introduction</b> .....	210
<b>1. Personae, Perspectives, and Possibilities</b> .....	211
<b>2. Authorial functions</b> .....	222
2.1. Author as a source .....	224
2.2. Author as a writer .....	232
2.3. Author as a critic .....	247
2.4. Author as a translator .....	253
<b>3. Generic Performativity</b> .....	273
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	280
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	283
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	293
<b>Appendices</b> .....	314

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors, Prof. Anshuman Mondal and Prof. Alison Donnell, whose seemingly inexhaustible reserves of valuable advice, continuous support and faith in my research, especially during the pandemic, have been crucial and indispensable. A note of thanks to Dr. Matthew Sillence, Dr. Matthew Taunton, and Prof. Jon Cook for their help in the early stages of this project as well as their continued support for my wider academic and professional work. You have all been instrumental to my overall development as an academic and a professional over the last four years and it is impossible to fully express how grateful I am.

I wish to also thank the School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing at UEA for providing me with funding for three years, which is the reason why I am able to pursue my doctoral studies in the UK as an international student from India. I wouldn't have been able to achieve many things including my AFHEA qualification, if not for the funding, so I am truly thankful.

I would like to thank my partner, Valentin, and his family in France whose encouragement was vital for my everyday progress during the challenging Covid-19 times. I would like to thank my family in India, especially my father and mother for their love, support and prayers which has helped me finish this thesis. My mother passed away a few years ago but her intelligence, determination, and passion are still with me, and I believe that her undying love has helped me soar in ways I would not have even dreamt of.

## Chapter 1: Introducing the Sociopolitical History of Dalit Identity and Theoretical Introduction to Core Concepts

### 1. Social Identity and Social Structure

The last census conducted in India was in 2011 and this 15<sup>th</sup> Indian Census recorded 201 million people belonging to various Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, making up 16.6% of the total Indian population of approximately 1.2 billion. SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs) were categorised as ‘depressed classes’ during the British rule in India.<sup>1</sup> The term ‘Schedule’ was first used by the British in the Government of India Act (1935), where it is defined as:

such castes, races or tribes, or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes, being castes, races, or tribes, or parts or groups which appear to His Majesty in Council, to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as ‘the depressed classes’, as His Majesty in Council may specify. (Chatterjee 162)

In independent India (postcolonial India), SCs were “identified by the President of India under Article 341” (Shah 18) of the Indian Constitution in 1949 by categorising them as a Schedule.<sup>2</sup> SCs were popularly considered and deemed as ‘untouchables’ or *achhoots* until

---

<sup>1</sup> Scheduled Tribes (STs) are “the tribes or tribal communities or parts of or groups within tribes or tribal communities which shall, for the purposes of this constitution, be deemed to be scheduled tribes in relation to that state or Union Territory, as the case may be” (Article 341 in The Constitution of India 1949). They form the indigenous community in India.

<sup>2</sup> According to Article 341 in The Constitution of India 1949:  
Scheduled Castes:

(1) The President may with respect to any State or Union territory, and where it is a State after consultation with the Governor thereof, by public notification, specify the castes, races or tribes or parts of or groups within castes, races or tribes which shall for the purposes of this Constitution be deemed to be Scheduled Castes in relation to that State or Union territory, as the case may be.

the Untouchability Act of 1949 (India Const. Art.17), which legally abolished the practice of untouchability.

The practice of untouchability is based on the ideas of purity and pollution practised and popularised by a hierarchical socio-religious Hindu order. Ancient Indian Hindu texts such as the *Manusmriti*<sup>3</sup> and the Puranas<sup>4</sup> give importance to the idea of ‘varna’ which refers to a social order in which people were allocated specific occupations that reinforced caste grouping and divisions. The varna system categorised people into four communities (*Chaturvarna*), commonly known as castes or *jatis*, which are “hereditary groups arranged hierarchically with unequal rights, a separation based on taboos of marriage rules, food custom, and a resistance to unification with others” (Thapar 9). The four different and most widespread caste groups in their hierarchical position are: *Brahmins* (priests and teachers), *Kshatriyas* (warriors and leaders), *Vaishyas* (business people and merchants) and *Sudras* (service people and peasants). ‘Untouchables’, also called *Ati-sudras*, were not considered to be within/excluded from the varna hierarchy. Thus, the caste system was viewed as “constructed by religion and divided by occupation” (Anderson 154). Presently, the predominant Indian social structure consists of approximately three thousand sub-castes within the four castes, placed one on top of the other (D’Souza 13); and the continuing influence and unceasing complication of the caste system, which promotes social division and oppression, is explored throughout this thesis.

In Surinder S. Jodhkas’s book, *Caste in Contemporary India* (2015), he explores the notion of caste as a ‘closed system’, in which “succeeding generations did similar kinds of

---

(2) Parliament may by law include in or exclude from the list of Scheduled Castes specified in a notification issued under clause (1) any caste, race or tribe or part of or group within any caste, race or tribe, but save as aforesaid a notification issued under the said clause shall not be varied by any subsequent notification.

<sup>3</sup> *Manusmriti* or ‘laws of Manu’ is a Hindu text that lays down ways and rules of living for a Hindu society. Manu is believed to be the first of Brahma’s (the creator in the Hindu mythology) sons, and hence the text is authoritative and believed to have been composed anywhere between 200 BC and 200 AD.

<sup>4</sup> The term ‘purana’ means ancient and ‘puranas’ refer to sacred texts of Hinduism. They are written in Sanskrit and cover religious topics between 400 and 1500 CE.



work and lived more or less similar kinds of lives” (6). Ambedkar also referred to caste as a “closed class” (Moon 15), perhaps indicating the lack of opportunity for mobility unlike ‘class’. For Ambedkar, such a closed system began with the Brahmins choosing to marry among themselves. The other castes mimicked this mechanism because, as Gabriel Tarde characterises social imitation, the subordinate imitates the superior (not vice-versa) and “the greater the social distance between the two groups”, the more intense the imitation (Jaffrelot 33). Thus, Ambedkar stated that the “caste system was not imposed on society by Brahmins; instead it evolved because Brahmins were *imitated* by other social groups” (33), an example of which is the practice of endogamy. The social organisation and the imitation were based on and conformed to “a belief in the superiority of the Brahmins and of the acquiescence by other castes of their inferiority” (Ambedkar 1917).

Sir Herbert Hope Risley, the Commissioner in charge of the 1901 Census in India was an ethnographer whose “works on the ‘Tribes and Castes’ of various provinces” in India lists out “the various castes with descriptions of their ‘customs’, occupations and putative histories based on information collected by local census officials and administrators” (Sharma 7). Like many other colonial administrators, Risley regarded the caste system “as the result of racial dominance and conquest, subjected groups becoming lower castes” (Sharma 7). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, British rulers believed that caste was “an epitome of traditional Indian society” (Jodhka 6) and it became “the practical means by which the colonial administration knew its subjects” (Sharma 9).

Hence for colonial officials, caste represented the “cultural difference” between the West and India which is an “Orientalist ‘book-view’” (Jodhka 6) of caste. The Orientalists argued that the underlying structures of the Indian society are fundamentally different from Western societies. For example, individualism and equality are core ideas of the West while inequality in India is a sociocultural “fact” (Jodhka 6) where an entire society is

organised by a religious Hindu ideology. The caste system relies on ‘totality’ and ‘holism’ (Jodhka 7) and goes beyond economic and political power. The French ethnographer, Louis Dumont is in agreement with the idea that caste is a hierarchical system functioning on the division between pure and impure. Dumont’s *Homo hierarchius* (1970) counterposed the ‘homo equalis’ of the Christian West to the ‘homo hierarchicus’ of Hindu India and laid out a grand structure of a singular hierarchical nature based on purity-pollution (Heredia 40). However, Dumont dismisses the caste system’s link to material factors. Dumont sees caste as a “hierarchical system, naturalised and legitimized by the Hindu religion and resting on the distinction between pure and impure” (Jodhka 7). This idea of inequality is central to the foundation of caste hierarchies where, as Dipankar Gupta (1981) states, the pure must “find its logical opposite, the impure, for it to be a complete system” (qtd. in Jodhka 7). The idea of power within caste hierarchy is propagated and naturalised by institutionalizing “humiliation as a social and cultural practice” (Jodhka 12).

Dumont also encompasses the whole range of castes and sub castes from the highest Brahmin category to the lowest untouchable group, wherein “the elements of the whole are ranked in relation to the whole” (Dumont 104). But, “purity and pollution are not universally employed to effect the diacritical marks separating different *jatis*” (Gupta 139) because “any notion of hierarchy is arbitrary and is valid from the perspective of certain individual castes” (Gupta 130). In other words, it is possible to have “as many hierarchies as there are *jatis*” (Gupta 138). The subtleties of rank within a caste group are often unrecognised or even unknown to people outside the caste group. Mandelbaum (1970) states that:

those whose *jati* occupation is to wash clothes that are not only soiled, but soiled with the exudation of sweat, are therefore consigned to low *jati* rank. More defiling still than sweat soiled clothes are clothes that have been stained with menstrual blood; washermen who launder the former may not want to touch the latter. (190)

So, the intricacies of the caste system cannot be understood through an ‘Orientalist book-view’ of caste as simply an application of dichotomies such as pure/impure. Chatterjee (1989) states that, “Dumont treats the series of oppositions – life in the world/ life of the renouncer, group religion/disciplines of salvation, caste/ individual – as having been unified within the whole of Hinduism...” (186) but Chatterjee states that such a unification may be “only within the historical contingencies of the social relations of power” and not at the “level of the self-consciousness of “the Hindu”” (186), wherein the perspectives of *all* the individuals impacted directly by the caste system is heard and understood.

Despite the difference in views between Risley and Dumont, they both view caste to be a religious phenomenon. If untouchability is “a religious phenomenon” (Shah 203), then caste is a “product of an established religious order that continues to remain a stratified social system and nurture[s] hierarchical ideas” (Limbale 96). However, there are perspectives on caste which differ from this dominant understanding. For example, caste is argued to be “an invention of the west” (Sharma 6) because caste is, primarily, “not an Indian word but is derived from the Portuguese *casta* meaning pure breed” (Sharma 5) and “the concept of caste belongs purely to an orientalising discourse, moreover one that is specific to a particular colonial or post-colonial context” (Sharma 6). Such an orientalising discourse involved comparison, if not equating, caste with ‘class’ as well as caste with ‘race’; thereby presenting caste, as William Lloyd Warner (1962) states, “as one of a

battery of ‘scientific terms’ independent of cultural context” that “might exist in Africa as well as India and the United States” (qtd. in Sharma 16).

The concept of ‘Race’ is a “European invention that drew from a variety of contemporary studies and situations” (Thapar 12) such as Social Darwinism. The *Rigveda* (one of the texts of the Puranas) is dated back to 1200BC and mentions racial identities of people based *only* on skin colour and hence led to colonial researchers viewing casteism as coalesced with racial discriminations wherein race was viewed as a “scientific explanation” for caste differences and “the four main castes of *varnas* were said to represent the major racial groups” (Thapar 13). However, racism and casteism are about more than just skin colour and this understanding of caste as a racial category is a Western way of comprehending caste through their own racial understandings. Races are “embodied and bodies are racialized” (Fassin 421) by mapping the world, universally (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991) “into a hierarchy of different “races”” (Siebers 372), thereby reducing all complexities “to one single defining characteristic” (Siebers 372). Such racialization is an ascription that “supposes that I identify you as other – racially other” (Fassin 422) by combining physiognomies and social characteristics – the modus operandi of scientific racism that regained massive popularity in the nineteenth century.

Racial ascription imposes an identity and also deprives the possibility of alternative identifications (Fassin 423). The application of race in caste could be seen as an attempt to impose “a concept borrowed from one context onto another context instead of contextualizing the concept itself” (Siebers 383), and such an application prompted an “overstretching” (Siebers 383) of the concept (racism) in an effort to cover a variety of (frequently) ‘disconnected issues’ that are spread across time and space. Instead of “sharpening various concepts to use as heuristic tools for analysing” (Siebers 383) caste, western knowledges propagated racism as a means of essentialising India. Siebers (2017)

understands racism as “an example of essentialism” (372), whereas caste could in fact be a ‘performative’ category which is an anti-essentialist position. The idea of ‘performativity’ is explored in the later sections.

Govind Sadashiv Ghurye was the first Indian anthropologist to study the origins of the caste system, work which was published as *Caste and Race in India* (1932). But Dr B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) started examining the caste system before Ghurye, and he had anticipated many arguments of M.N. Srinivas and Louis Dumont, who are considered as the founding fathers of Indian anthropology (Jaffrelot 31). Ambedkar was a Dalit activist whose efforts towards Dalit liberation are studied in the later section, ‘Dalit Resistance’. Ambedkar challenged the explanation of caste by Western authors because their studies rested on “theories of racial difference” (Jaffrelot 32). One such explanation is that the “Aryan ‘invasion’ had subjugated the Dravidians, thus relegating them to the ranks of the lower castes” (Jaffrelot 32). Western writers approached caste as a racial problem because they were “themselves impregnated by colour prejudices” (Ambedkar 1979: 21), and Ambedkar refused this to argue that “caste is a social phenomenon and not a racial one” (Jaffrelot 32).

Therefore, the alternative view of caste is that it is a sociological phenomenon. The German sociologist and political economist, Max Weber, views the caste system as “a special case of status-based divisions” (Jodkha 9). Weber distinguishes social status from the class factor because class “is a function of the economic order” (Jodhka 9) while social status “is determined by the ‘social estimation of honor’ and ‘style of life’” (Jodhka 9). According to Weber, closed systems such as caste can be found across the globe and he calls it “the phenomenon of ‘pariah’ peoples” (Weber 188-89). Such notions of caste focus on the “power and politics of caste” (Jodhka 10). The Indian sociologist, M.N. Srinivas, in his book, *India’s Villages* (1955), introduced the idea of ‘dominant caste’. In his work,

“The Dominant Caste in Rampura” (1959), he states that “the more forms of dominance which a caste enjoys, the easier it is for it to acquire the rest” (3). Hence, it can be said that the ‘ritual status’ of particular castes becomes authoritarian “only when it was accompanied by the other forms of dominance, most importantly material prosperity” (Jodhka 162).

Thus, the caste system is a religious and social system that exerts dominance and power over a specific group of people through the practice of a rigid hierarchical order. However, while the caste identity remains fixed, the work undertaken by each caste group, that is, the profession imposed on them according to their caste identity is no longer rigid, especially in independent modern India. There are many SCs running successful businesses and working as doctors, engineers, lawyers, teachers and in almost every professional sphere. All the same, this intermingling of professions across caste groups has not diminished the dishonour associated with certain caste identities and discrimination continues rampantly. The following sections look more closely into this matter.

## **2. The Paradox of Untouchability**

One of the striking aspects of the SCs’ situation is that they are subjected by a system to which they do not belong. That is, the varna system positions four castes in the caste hierarchy and SCs are seen outside this varna system. Some communities were also forced to live on the periphery of the villages. So, they were not considered as part of the society. Indeed, the “untouchable Other was written out of existence” (Limbale 4). The untouchables are positioned as having lived “outside “history”” and such communities are even referred to as “*ahistorical*” (Nandy 44) by historians. This is the paradox of the SCs’ situation: they are oppressed by a system that does not acknowledge them in the first place.

They are designated as ahistorical and yet they are oppressed by a historically practiced system.

Discrimination on the basis of caste in India is “three-thousand-five-hundred” (D’Souza 1) years old and remains widespread even after untouchability was legally abolished by the Republic of India. According to the Untouchability Offences Act of 1955 and the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act of 1976, SCs possess full citizenship with the abolishment of untouchability. Yet, SCs still face widespread discrimination and extreme poverty in modern India (“India’s Caste System”). The Scheduled Castes are continuously identified as “former untouchables” (Rawat and Satyanarayana 234), not allowing them to escape the scourge of untouchability. In 2006, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) reported that SCs “face almost 140 forms of work and descent based discrimination driven by the tenet of Untouchability” (D’Souza 27). While untouchability does not exist, legally, in practice, SCs “still bear that stigma and suffer discrimination” (Shah 196). That is, Dalits are ‘legally-accepted but socially-unaccepted’. Hence, the paradox of the SCs situation continues into the present day.

This paradox can be understood better if the Derridean ‘logic of supplementarity’ is applied. Derrida’s logic of the supplement points out that identity works as relational rather than essential. Essential identities create ‘violent hierarchies’ based on binaries leading to the dominance of one over the other. In the case of SCs, the caste system attempts to promote the idea of essential identities in order to naturalise and normalise the caste divisions in the society. Derrida’s logic of the supplement challenges this attempt to essentialise caste identities. The SCs are ‘supplements’ who are excluded yet necessary for not only the functioning of the society but also for its identity formation. The upper castes are *literally* dependent on the SCs to do jobs such as manual scavenging, making leather, weaving baskets, washing clothes and so on. The upper castes are also *vulnerable* to the

Other (SCs) for recognition of their identity. Thus, the authenticity and in the case of upper castes, their purity of “self-identity is always questionable and it is always contaminated by what it tries to exclude” (Newman 3). The unstable nature of identification exposes the vulnerability of the caste identities wherein the supplement “threatens, and at the same time is necessary” (Newman 17) for identity formation. Also, each sub-caste depends on each other, that is, “a *jati* is able to sustain itself only in the presence of other *jatis* in a clearly delimited referential context...” (Gupta 141). Hence, like many systems of power, the caste system is inherently unstable and fluid no matter how rigid it appears.

Furthermore, Derrida states in his *Of Grammatology* (1976) that:

[the supplement] is an outside that obeys a strange logic: it exists only in relation to the inside that it threatens, while the inside exists only in relation to it. Each is necessary for the constitution of the identity of the other, while at the same time threatening the identity of the other. It is therefore an outside that avoids the two temptations of deconstruction: on the one hand, it is an outside that threatens the inside; on the other hand, it is an outside that is formulated from the inside. (135)

Hence, the relational identification necessary to maintain the caste system can also threaten its existence, suggesting the possibility of no “absolute outside” (Derrida 135). Building on this, Julia Kristeva’s notion of the ‘abject’ also refers to the outside which “is radically excluded” (2). Kristeva states however that it is not the “lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection” but rather when the abject “disturbs identity, system, order” and fails to “respect borders, positions, rules” (4). The abject position of the SCs is precisely what disturbs the established order. Thus, there is a fluidity in identification which is significant for the SCs’ identity formation and the twentieth century has seen several efforts made by



SC leaders “to carve out their distinct identity from caste Hindus” (Shah 210). Such efforts were made to facilitate identity formation which “calls for sharing of a common culture, on the one hand, and harping on the separateness from others, on the other” (Shah 210).

Additionally, one of the characteristics of the abject is that it is “opposed to I” (Kristeva 1) and this othering of oneself from the established dominant system became a way of achieving a ‘non-polluted’ identity from an imposed polluted identity.

So, the SCs adopted a new identity through the name ‘Dalit’ in an attempt to shed “despicable and contemptuous names” (D’Souza 22) imposed on them such as ‘untouchables’, ‘outcastes’, ‘Harijans’<sup>5</sup>, and so on. The term ‘Dalit’ is political and was introduced by the “anti-caste leader Jotirao Phule” (Moon 181) in the mid-nineteenth century. The term was derived from the Sanskrit word ‘*dala*’ meaning broken or crushed. This term refers to the oppressed masses and also to the situation of being oppressed by a dominant group. The new identity chosen is an identity of conflict and this “new identity of being Dalit” is also explicitly an identity “in the making” (Shah 213) because it is not the end solution but a means of resistance against the various forms of discriminations faced by those otherwise classified as SCs on a daily basis. For some Dalits, identity is more important and intractable “than the problem of poverty” (Shah 211). Thus, the shedding away of imposed identities and searching for new ones are significant to the Dalit struggle.

### **3. Dalit Resistance**

Over the past four decades, “Dalit identity has assumed critical significance” with “various social and political formations” (Shah 214) emerging across India. Various protest

---

<sup>5</sup>Harijans was used to refer to untouchables and was popularized by Mahatma Gandhi. The term means ‘children of god’; the god, Hari from the Hindu mythology.

movements since the 1960s, namely the Dalit Panthers and the Mass Movement, and the Bahujan Mahasangh since the late 1980s, focus chiefly on Dalit and Bahujan identity assertion (Shah 214). But the roots of these movements stretch much further back in time. The first spark of resistance was seen in the Bhakti movement (from approximately eighth century to the eighteenth century AD). The Bhakti movement gave rise to “radical thinkers” (Kumar 126) who “challenged the varna system and the stratification of human society on the basis of caste” (Kumar 126). Most of the members of the movement were poets, saints and singers belonging to the lower castes. This movement became popular from a literary perspective but did not pick up pace on ground level because it was seen to have only “religious dimensions in it” (Kumar 127).

More recently, there were social reform movements such as the Brahmo Samaj founded by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1792-1833) in 1828 and the Arya Samaj initiated by Dayanand Saraswati (1834-1883). Such reform movements concentrated on reforming Hinduism and although the Brahmo Samaj challenged certain evils of the caste system, it “concentrated more on the issues pertaining to the upper castes” (Kumar 132) such as child marriage and Sati.<sup>6</sup> The anti-caste leader Jotirao Phule started the ‘Non-Brahman movement’ or ‘Enlightenment’ or ‘anti-caste movement’ in the late nineteenth century. The front-runners of the Enlightenment wanted to “create a new society with a new religion” (Kumar 136) grounded on the principles of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’ popularised by the French Revolution in 1789. Also, mystics such as Ramakrishna Paramhansa (1834-1886), poets like Bhima Bhoi, reformers Narayana Guru and E.V. Ramasamy (1879-1973) and freedom struggle leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak openly abhorred and “castigated untouchability” (Kumar 133).

---

<sup>6</sup> Sati (Suttee) was the label given to a recent widow who by will or force commits suicide by burning in the funeral pyre of her deceased husband. This was practiced in many Hindu communities until the Sati Regulation passed by the then Governor-General Lord William Bentinck on December 4, 1829.

In 1972, the “awakened Dalit youths of Maharashtra” (Kumar 145) gave birth to the Dalit Panther movement. The Dalit Panther movement was founded by Namdeo Dhasal and is to-date the most renowned movement against caste discrimination. The Dalit Panther’s *Manifesto* (1973) is one of the most popular documents listing the problems and demands of the Dalits. The manifesto was drafted by the founder of the movement and a former Naxalite<sup>7</sup>, Sunil Dighe. The Dalit Panthers were inspired by the Black Panther movement that emerged in America in 1960s and 1970s against the exploitation of the Black community. The *Dalit Panthers Manifesto* addresses “the fire” (viii) of the Black Panther struggle that had caused sparks in America, from which “Black Power emerged” (viii); and hence, Dalit Panthers “claim a close relationship with this struggle” (viii). Thus, the Dalit Panthers decided to speak for all oppressed communities and the name of ‘Dalit’, expanded to cover workers, landless labourers, proletarians, all working towards a “social reconstruction” (Kumar 145).

The most passionate attempts towards Dalit liberation were arguably made by Dr B.R. Ambedkar when India was under British rule. Hence, it was no surprise that the anti-caste movements in independent India arose mostly in Maharashtra, Ambedkar’s homeland. Ambedkar was independent India’s first Law Minister and he was posthumously awarded the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honour in 1990. Ambedkar was himself a Dalit and he belonged to the Mahar caste (a group of SCs) of Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. He was an economist, a jurist, a writer, an activist, a philosopher, a revolutionary, and a political leader. After his studies abroad<sup>8</sup>, he returned to India in 1923 and was prepared to fight for Dalit liberation. During his sojourn/time abroad, India’s political atmosphere had

---

<sup>7</sup> A Naxalite is a member of armed revolutionary guerrilla groups in India and is associated with the Communist Party of India (Maoist).

<sup>8</sup> Dr Ambedkar completed his master’s and doctoral studies from Columbia University, New York, majoring in Economics and Politics. He also did his Barrister (in law) course in London while also doing further studies in the London School of Economics. He spent more years studying and engaging in variety of subjects such as history, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy.

changed with the independence struggle taking off actively across the country.

Ambedkar's various efforts for Dalit liberation started with the *Bahishkrit Hitakarni Sabha* (Association for the Improvement of the Condition of the Victims of Social Ostracism) in July 1924 which he spearheaded till 1928. The association's motto was "Educate, Mobilise, Organise" (Jaffrelot 45), and its main aim was to represent the grievances of Dalits, improving their economic state by opening agricultural and industrial schools, and helping the spread and development of culture among the Depressed classes. More specific campaigns were also launched. Given that untouchables were not allowed to draw water from the same well or tank as that of other upper caste Hindus, on March 20, 1927, Ambedkar led the 'Mahad Satyagraha' in Bombay, Maharashtra, challenging this inhuman act and demanding the rights of the untouchables to draw water from the public tank.

Furthermore, Ambedkar spoke and wrote extensively against *Manusmriti*<sup>9</sup> and the way in which it created hierarchies and promoted gender inequalities. For instance, the *Manusmriti* asserts that "a woman is never fit for independence" (Barnwal 394). Most spectacularly, Ambedkar burnt copies of the *Manusmriti* on 25 December 1927 at a Conference of Depressed Classes held in Maharashtra and defended this act by stating:

It is not that all the parts of 'Manusmriti' are condemnable, that it does not contain good principles and that Manu himself was not a sociologist and was a mere fool. We made a bonfire of it because we view it as a symbol of injustice under which we have been crushed across centuries. Because of its teachings we have been ground down... (Gore 109)

---

<sup>9</sup> *Manusmriti*- According to the Hindu tradition, Manu is believed to be Brahma's first son and hence, the one to lead the human race. *Manusmriti* translates as 'laws of Manu' and is the foremost authoritative book for the Hindu society. The exact age of *Manusmriti* is not known but it laid the foundation for the existing lifestyle and rules of a Hindu community in India.

Subsequently, many Indians, particularly Dalit communities observe December 25 as *Manusmriti Dahan Din* (The day the *Manusmriti* was burned) and *Stree Mukti Din* (Indian Women's Liberation Day). 2 March, 1930 witnessed a landmark struggle known as the 'Nasik Kalaram Mandir Satyagraha' spearheaded by Ambedkar. This movement demanded the rights for untouchables to enter temples and stressed equal rights to all regardless of caste. Most of Ambedkar's initiatives happened while India was still under the British colonial administration. On one hand, there were efforts and struggles for Dalit liberation socially, and on the other hand, Ambedkar fought for Dalit rights, politically. Ambedkar was critical of the dominant political discourse, inspired by "western liberal values" that "defined the nation as a collection of individuals" (Jaffrelot 56). He hoped for an individualistic society ridden of caste problems but he also believed that the Indian society is based on a socio-religious and economic hierarchy and so, "social equality could be promoted only by relying upon a logic of groups" (Jaffrelot 56). Thus, he fought for the collective freedom of the untouchables.

Ambedkar attempted to "rid the Hindu society of its evils and get the Depressed Classes incorporated in terms of equality" (Jaffrelot 31) but was convinced that there could be no equality "among the Hindus because on inequality rest the foundations of Hinduism" (Ambedkar 1982: 250). Ambedkar and his fellow Dalits no longer wanted to be a part of the Hindu society with a varna system subdivided into several *jatis* "whose hierarchy rests on a gradation of status" (Jaffrelot 37). For Ambedkar, "the *Purusha Shukta* establishes a completely unique social system because "no society has an official gradation laid down, fixed and permanent, with an ascending scale of reverence and a descending scale of contempt" (Ambedkar's 1946: 26). Ambedkar therefore concluded that such a system is held together by its "graded inequality" (Jaffrelot 35) which he attributes to the

‘Sanskritisation’ process. Sanskritisation was the process by which lower castes would emulate and mimic the customs and ways of the upper caste with the intention of moving up the caste ladder. The Anarya Dosh Pariharak Mandal (Association for Eliminating the Stigma of Untouchability), founded in 1886 by G.V. Walangkar, had also conformed to the reasoning of Sanskritisation. Kisan Fagoji Bansode (1879-1946) was a Dalit leader from the Mahar caste who stayed faithful to the morals of Hinduism. He believed that the “destiny of the Untouchables was inextricably linked to that of Hinduism and the Hindu society as a whole” (Gokhale 68-9). Ambedkar’s keynote address delivered at the 1927 Mahad Conference “was in step with the principles of Sanskritisation” (Jaffrelot 47). However, Ambedkar soon realised that Sanskritisation prevented the alternative, which was a new identity for the untouchables. Subsequently, Ambedkar “emancipated himself from the logic of Sanskritisation and embraced a complete rejection of the caste system” (Jaffrelot 48) by the late 1920s. He “consummated his break with Hinduism by rejecting all types of religious practice” (Jaffrelot 49) and favoured “egalitarian individualism” (Jaffrelot 51).

One of the crucial political fights for Dalit emancipation came Ambedkar’s way when he was approached by the Southborough Committee in 1919<sup>10</sup> to modify the “electoral franchise within the framework of the constitutional reform” (Jaffrelot 53). The committee redefined the qualification criteria in order to facilitate more Indians to cast their votes at the assembly elections in the various provinces. The 1919 reforms were highly crucial because they aimed at devolving more power to the provincial governments and assemblies of the provinces. Ambedkar refused territorial electorates because it would deny representation of the minorities and instead, he urged for a separate “community

---

<sup>10</sup> During the British colonial administration, the Southborough Committee on Franchise toured India in 1918-1919. The committee was tasked to look into the creation of electoral constituencies in India.

electorate” (Ambedkar 271) with “reserved seats for the Untouchables” (Jaffrelot 3). He understood that a separate electorate would allow untouchables to vote for untouchable candidates allowing representation and political power whereas unreserved seats could lead to untouchable candidates being co-opted by upper caste parties.

For reasons of their own, the British government was in accord with Ambedkar’s demand and in 1932, the British Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald declared the ‘Communal Award’ retaining separate electorates for Muslims, Sikhs and Europeans while also increasing the number of provinces under the Government of India Act of 1919 (Nugent 112). The Award granted separate electorates for Depressed classes as well, which created an outcry from caste Hindus, particularly Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948).<sup>11</sup> Ambedkar and Gandhi had different views on caste and untouchability and the Communal Award forced them to come head-to-head on this matter.

Gandhi supported the untouchables in many ways and his efforts to eliminate untouchability caught the attention of Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders. Gandhi influenced the Congress to pass a motion “declaring the work of Bhangis (sweepers) as respectable” (Zelliot 186) in order to assert that every occupation is respectable. He challenged the seemingly ‘natural’ link between low caste and unclean occupation by insisting that every resident of the Sabarmati ashram must clean the toilets. On public platforms, he condemned untouchability as “a corruption of Hinduism” (Jaffrelot 60). He strongly supported the untouchables’ demands to enter the temples because for Gandhi, equality before God was significant. Yet, he refrained himself from campaigning for the *social equality* of untouchables. This is could be because Gandhi focused on the religious aspect of untouchability and persistently refused to accept that social inequality could be as

---

<sup>11</sup> M.K. Gandhi was a writer, lawyer and a prominent freedom fighter in the Indian Independence movement. Since many Indians regard him to be instrumental in the freedom struggle, he is known as the father of the nation (Bapu) and his birthday (Gandhi Jayanthi) is celebrated as a national holiday in Indian till today.

oppressive as religious inequality. Gandhi asserted that the caste system is not based on inequality and hence, the question of inferiority is redundant (Gandhi 1966).

Moreover, Gandhi believed that caste saved 'Hinduism from disintegration' and hence, did not support attempts to erode the 'fundamental divisions' of caste (Gandhi 1966). He did not want to abolish the caste system because he believed it to be an 'eternal law of heredity', without which there would be 'utter confusion' (Gandhi 1966). Gandhi gives an example of this law of heredity:

I can see very great use in considering a Brahmin to be always a Brahmin throughout his life. If he does not behave himself like a Brahmin, he will naturally cease to command the respect that is due to the real Brahmin...If Hindus believe, as they must believe, in reincarnation, transmigration, they must know that nature will, without any possibility of mistake, adjust the balance by degrading a Brahmin, if he misbehaves himself, by reincarnating him in a lower division. (Gandhi 83-5)

Here, reincarnation is based on a hierarchical system wherein the virtues and vices of an individual decide which caste they are reincarnated into. However, Gandhi also spoke against the hierarchy of 'high' and 'low' which according to him were formed by untouchability and were not significant to the caste system. Gandhi advocated against the act of untouchability but wanted to retain the caste system and the hierarchies. He states:

Untouchability is the product, therefore, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it...The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnadharma, the four division of society,



each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other. (*Harijan* 3)

Here, Gandhi's views are discordant, particularly when he states that the 'distinction of high and low' results in untouchability alongside a belief that vices led to reincarnation into a 'lower' division or caste. He also states untouchability is the evil and yet suggests that the varnadharma or the caste system do not treat people as inferior or superior. Yet, Gandhi encouraged the upper castes to maintain "their rank in society as a positive element of social regulation" (Jaffrelot 62). Gandhi's defence of the caste system is contradictory, not because he consciously wanted to maintain hierarchies; rather, because he could not see that caste established an institutional hierarchy, no matter whether untouchability was practiced or not. Even though Gandhi claims to reject a rigid caste hierarchy, he considered the allocation of people into various castes as an important way of maintaining "social harmony and economic stability" (Jaffrelot 62) and encouraged the upper castes to maintain "their rank in society as a positive element of social regulation" (Jaffrelot 62). Gandhi believed that the varna system (*Varna Vyavastha*), which ensures that each individual has an occupation to do in the society leading to a socio-economic balance, is necessary for the moral functioning of a society. Gandhi also considered that "interdrinking, interdining, intermarriage" did not essentially contribute to the "spirit of democracy" (Gandhi 83-5). Therefore, for Gandhi, the individual's role is significant in relation to the collective whole and the collective result is more important than the individual itself. But for Ambedkar, the individual is the "basic unit of an egalitarian society, with castes as collective bodies serving only as a temporary means of advancing his politics of equality" (Jaffrelot 63).

Given that Gandhi promoted Hinduism and the varna system's idea of designated roles within a whole, he feared that the Communal Award would "threaten Hindu unity" (Jaffrelot 4) and hence strongly opposed the "political separation of Untouchables from Hindus" (Keer 166-7). At the second Round Table Conference held in London (7 September 1931 to 1 December 1931), Ambedkar and Gandhi sat on the Minorities Committee and discussed the place of minority groups - untouchables and Muslims (Jaffrelot 57). Gandhi disagreed with Ambedkar's demand to be the spokesperson of the untouchables and he also resisted the scheme for separate electorates and reserved seats for the untouchables. Gandhi stated that he would accept untouchables converting to other religions but would not tolerate if there are "two divisions set up in every village" (Keer 189), even though both are Hindus.

Despite all the disputes, the Communal Award (16 August 1932) recognised the untouchables' right to have a separate electorate and they were given the right to vote "within seventy-one separate constituencies which could be filled only by Dalit candidates" (Jaffrelot 60). Gandhi was in Yeravda jail in Poona for having incited the civil disobedience movement at the time, and he went on a hunger strike against the Communal Award. He had sent a statement to the Bombay government on September 15, 1932 in response to the Communal Award, in which he writes that the untouchables "are part of an indivisible family" and that there is a "subtle something" which cannot be defined in Hinduism that keeps the untouchables "in it even in spite of themselves" (Quoted in Pyarelal 1932: 114-15). This 'subtle something' is the "ritual harmony" (Jaffrelot 64) that occurs from the socio-economic "interdependence" (Jaffrelot 64) between castes. Here, Gandhi highlights the paradox of untouchability. He claims that untouchables are 'part of an indivisible family' even as they are not included or recognised within the varna system and the family (the cluster of castes) are divided into four castes and then several sub-

castes. The paradox lies in trying to keep the untouchables within the system when they are already and have always been outside the system. This once again points to Derrida's concept of supplementarity where the upper castes *need* the untouchables to do their lowly jobs in order for them to continue in the same status of power and purity.

Ambedkar was under a lot of pressure to renegotiate the terms of the Communal Award because by then Gandhi "embodied a form of holiness which allowed him to reconcile the Great and the Little Traditions of Hinduism" (Jaffrelot 65). Gandhi's status meant that he "transcended caste and his discourse was therefore acceptable by the majority, including Untouchables" (Jaffrelot 65). Gandhi had become an inexorable symbol of the national struggle against the British Raj and his health was deteriorating because of the hunger strike. Hence, Ambedkar and Gandhi met to discuss the Communal Award at a meeting entitled 'Conference of Hindu and Untouchable Leaders' in Bombay on September 19, 1932. The title of the meeting was itself "paradoxical" (Jaffrelot 65) because Gandhi refused to see the untouchables outside Hinduism and yet, denoted the term 'Hindu' to upper castes Congressmen. After several disagreements, Ambedkar was compelled to sign the Poona Pact September 24, 1932. According to this pact, "amongst Hindus no one was to be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth" (Moon 11). The Pact excluded a separate electorate for untouchables but instead provided reservations of 148 seats (instead of 71 as per the Communal Award) in the Legislative council to untouchables.<sup>12</sup> The chance of a separate electorate for untouchables was dispensed with and was replaced with equal opportunities for untouchables with regards to government jobs, education and the right to vote. The debates surrounding the Communal Award, the consequent Poona Pact and the resulting reservation system exposed the paradox of untouchability.

---

<sup>12</sup> Reservations are provisions available in the Constitution of India since 1950, based on which orders relating to reservations in services for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other Backward Classes (OBCs) have been issued by Department of Personnel & Training and Ministries of Social Justice of Government of India, to help gain easier access to education and employment opportunities.

Initially, Ambedkar had joined the Anti-Untouchability League started by Gandhi in 1932 which was later renamed as *Harijan Sevak Sangh*. But soon, Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders resigned from the league because their proposition demanding the various committees of the league to consist of a majority of untouchables was not brought to effect. On the contrary, the League was dominated and run by upper castes. Ambedkar converted from Hinduism to Buddhism in 1956 because he didn't want to follow a religion that practiced inequality, but was still a Hindu in 1932 and his opposition to Gandhi's views highlighted a fracture within initiatives such as the Anti-Untouchability League which aimed to end untouchability but did not actually address caste-based inequalities resulting in untouchability. Moreover, Gandhi called the untouchables, 'Harijans' meaning 'children of God' but the untouchables rejected this title or identity because they saw it as yet another way of fixing them in an inferior position. Gandhi viewed untouchability as a "moral stigma to be removed by acts of atonements" (Moon 11), while Ambedkar gave importance to the "role of law and Constitutional safeguards in protecting the interests of the Scheduled Castes" (Moon 11). Ambedkar did not give up on fighting for Dalits' rights and he paved the way for Dalits to enter and fight for their rights on a political platform. For Ambedkar, "emigration to conversion to a change of name" (Jaffrelot 52) were important strategies to liberate the untouchables, however, he believed that political action was "one of the untouchables' instruments of emancipation" (Jaffrelot 52).

In 1930, Ambedkar had founded the Depressed Classes Federation (DCF) and he then founded the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1937 which operated mainly in the Province of Bombay. This party was organised a few months before the 1937 Elections which was directed according to the Government of India Act (1935), giving more power to the governments and assemblies of the provinces than the 1919 reforms. The party was

elected to the Bombay Legislative Assembly<sup>13</sup> by capturing 13 seats out of the 15 seats assigned to the Scheduled Castes along with 2 general seats (Moon xvii) and Ambedkar was elected to the Bombay Presidency. In 1942, he started the Scheduled Castes' Federation (SCF) and in 1950, Ambedkar spearheaded a campaign to revise the Hindu Code Bill, which policed matrimonial relations such as laws of marriage and divorce, adoption, and inheritance. Ambedkar believed that the caste system was facilitated by endogamy wherein inter-caste marriages were socially not allowed. Ambedkar revised the Hindu Code Bill<sup>14</sup> and raised "unprecedented issues that cut to the heart of the caste contract: the abolition of birth right to property, property by survivorship, half share for daughters, abolition of caste in marriage and adoption. The principle of endogamy and the indissolubility of marriage for women are...at the heart of the caste contract" (Chandra 236), which in turn contributed to caste operating as a 'closed class'.

Ambedkar focused on two strategies of emancipation: one focused "on the organisation of political parties, aimed at obtaining a specific representation for untouchables in India's ruling institutions" (Jaffrelot 51), and the other "was none other than the conversion to a religion different from Hinduism" (Jaffrelot 51). From the 1930s, he alternated between both strategies, as his efforts "oscillated between the promotion of the untouchables in Hindu society or in the Indian nation as a whole" (Jaffrelot 7) and breaking away from the dominant system through a separate electorate or political party and/ or converting from Hinduism. By the time the Communal Award was declared, Ambedkar wanted the

---

<sup>13</sup> Bombay Legislative Assembly was brought to effect in 1937, as part of the legislature of Bombay Presidency, during the British Raj in India. The Assembly functioned till 1960 and was dispensed after Maharashtra and Gujarat became separate states.

<sup>14</sup> Efforts to examine women's status and rights in the Indian society came in the form of the Hindu Code Bill which was first introduced in 1946 but since it was not acted upon, Ambedkar reintroduced the Bill in the Constituent Assembly in 1947. The Bill itself was not taken seriously and Ambedkar resigned from his position as India's Law Minister in 1951. In 1955, the Hindu Marriage Act was passed granting divorce rights to Hindu women, and in 1954, the Special Marriage Act was passed which allows inter-religious and inter-caste marriage (qtd. in Roy 151).

untouchables to break away completely from the Hindu society. This desire to break away also operates within the paradox of untouchability because Ambedkar is attempting to locate a space outside a system, that never allowed him access to its inside. There is a seeming impossibility of escaping the reach and power of the caste system, leading to ongoing caste discrimination even in contemporary India. All untouchables would have experienced the failure of being outside the system and not being able to stay outside the system because they were drawn back inside, *where being inside also means being on the outside*.

If politics was used as means of resistance, it also became a factor that exacerbated the challenges of the Dalit situation, as a compromised and corrupted transition of power took place. The national leaders and the political parties such as the Congress (1947-1974), betrayed the common masses by turning the “freedom struggle into its own capital” (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto* v). Instead of taking “responsibility for the totality of the nation” (Fanon 162), the Congress proclaimed itself to be the national government and “endangered the very integrity of democracy” (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto* vi) by focusing more on ensuring that power remained within their grasp. The Dalit Panthers state in their manifesto that independence was handed over to India by the British because they “could no longer remain in power” (vi). So, “the national bourgeoisie steps into the shoes of the former European settlement...” (Fanon 122) and the “muck at the bottom of the pond remained where it was” (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto* vi). The national bourgeoisie replaced the colonial bourgeoisie and the independence struggle was a “trade union of individual interests” (Fanon 136) of the leading political party where the struggle was dictated by “national capitalists” (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto* vi) and “landlords” (vi). While “the national government, if it wants to be national, ought to govern by the people and for the people, for the outcasts and by the outcasts” (Fanon 205), the national government in fact

turned out to be a “continuation of the old Hindu feudalism” (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto* iv) which deprived the Dalits “of power, wealth and status for thousands of years” (iv).<sup>15</sup>

In 1984, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) was founded to represent the Dalits, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. But like most political parties, the BSP also was drawn towards fighting for power. Even the Left party joined forces with communalist parties such as the Muslim League to compete in the 1967 elections. Not only did the Left lose the elections, but they also lost the trust of the Dalits. Other political parties such as the Aam Admi Party (AAP) of India and the current (2014-present) ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), use the Dalit struggle as a forefront to gain votes in elections through rhetorical persuasion. The Dalit struggle can no longer be pushed aside, and Dalits are becoming a political threat through their social and political activism. So political parties, such as the BJP, found it a better option to address the elephant in the room and use the Dalit struggle to their advantage in the elections rather than to lose the votes of 16.6% of the country’s population.

However, the BJP’s allegiance lies with “the idea of Hindutva” (Anderson 137). This ideology of the BJP points to the “religio-cultural definition of nationhood” (Ahmad 2016: 171) that functions akin to how “theories of race used to function in the Nazi ideology” (Ahmad 171). For the BJP, “India is secular because it is Hindu” (Desai 62). Therefore, it is no secret that nationalism in India is largely and chiefly communal nationalism with a majority of political parties oppressing “the large mass of lower castes within the Hindu fold” (Aloysius 2). Such kind of nationalism stems from the belief that, “except for Hinduism, most faiths, including the secular ones, are intolerant” (Nandy 44-66).

Ambedkar turned away from Hinduism and urged Dalits to join him because they were

---

<sup>15</sup> Frantz Fanon’s paradigmatic analysis of the transition from colonised to independent nation is relevant here even though the spatial and temporal location Fanon worked on was different.

oppressed by the religious customs and beliefs propagated by the religion. On the other hand, Gandhi and other “[N]ationalist Hindus asserted that Indian unity could be found in its common culture derived from religion...” (Khilnani 154) which was Hinduism. Dalit emancipation and struggle were pushed down in the face of a larger Indian independence movement. Gandhi’s attempt to include the Dalits’ cause in this large campaign can be seen in his speeches against untouchability and naming Dalits, ‘Harijans’. However, while Indian independence should have emancipated the Dalits along with other Indians from the colonial grasp, instead, Dalits continue to be colonised by a larger Hindu community.

During the freedom struggle, the idea of one unified community gained prominence and hence was a motivating factor for the emergence of nationalism in India. Cabral (1970) states that domination by the foreigner can only be maintained by the “permanent, organized repression of the cultural life of the people concerned” (1). It follows then that national liberation “is necessarily an act of culture” (Cabral 4) and various studies on history of national liberation struggles reveal that in most cases these struggles “are preceded by an increase in expression of culture” (Cabral 4). Cabral states that culture becomes an element of resistance because it is a dynamic ‘manifestation on the ideological plane’ of the material and historical reality of the people (3). He states that “culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people’s history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of relationships...” (3). In India, the Hindu nation was projected as the predominant culture of Indian nationality which is not surprising with the revered Gandhi being a staunch Hindu and the national leaders surreptitiously effacing other religions from the concept of a nation.

However, rather than supporting a cohesive people-making project, this nationalism led to a “whole litter of communities divided from one another in terms of language, religion or caste” (Aloysius 1). This idea of India comprised of communities, particularly



determined by their religious orientation, is referred to as a ‘composite nation’ by Mondal (2003). The ‘singular’ religious communities: Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Christians, Sikhs and others formed the units of the composite nation such that a communal national unity comprising of ‘Hindu unity, or ‘Muslim unity’ and so on shaped the larger national identity (Mondal 62). Composite nationalism thrives on the concept of ‘unity in diversity’, wherein diversity is wrapped into a homogenising national identity, yet furtively, the term ‘nation’ was colonized by the Hindu majority (Mondal 66) and the minorities were quietly excluded (Mondal 67). Composite nationalism or even Hindu nationalism presented “a unified façade” (Mondal 64) to the British colonial opponents and this religious identity of the nation came to dominate the politics of nationalism. However, “the identification of nationalism with Hindu nationalism created an effect whereby oppositional stances were themselves premised upon religious identity” (Mondal 61) and religion became a fundamental element in Indian nationalism.

The Dalits’ struggle lost its significance and distinctive cause in this process of creating a nation. Dalit liberation still has to negotiate a largely Hindu nationalism with the currently ruling party, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lobbying for ‘Hindutva’. This continues to influence the possibilities for Dalit identity: are they part of Hinduism or are they part of a separate communal group? Therefore, the paradox of untouchability continues to exist in modern independent India. A purely republican nationalism that only has citizens, as promoted by Ambedkar, would not have faced this problem.

#### **4. Understanding Dalit Identity through The Tripartite Process**

In the context of Dalit struggle, Ambedkar argued that “the horizon of emancipation could not be contained within existing social relations” (Bhagavan and Anne 21). Throughout the Dalit struggle, there seems to be a persistent need to search for Dalit identity/ identities

beyond the caste system. Again, in order to resolve the paradox, which only appears from within the Hindu system, there is a necessity to go beyond existing identifications, to “a process of dis-identification” (Parthasarathi 43) from “pre-established identities” (Parthasarathi 43). Disidentification is the process of shedding the age-old despotic identifications of Dalits. “Disidentification brings liberation..., a breaking of the trance, a waking of the ‘I’” (Firman and Ann 59). For the most part, the ‘I’ in the case of Dalit narratives corresponds to the entire Dalit community with emphasis on ‘we’. Without disidentification, existing identifications can ‘control’ and ‘limit’ perceptions, and “block the availability of all other feelings, sensations, desires and opinions” (Ferrucci 63). Since Dalit politics demands “complete revolutionary change” (*Dalit Panthers Manifesto*), disidentification is a necessary part of the liberation struggle of the Dalits.

Disidentification can be understood better when approached as two types which I will refer to as ‘Autochthonous’ and ‘Relational’.

Autochthonous disidentification is an *individual* shedding of oppressive ideas and stigmatized notions associated with the Dalit’s identity. Autochthonous disidentification occurs on a personal and mental level enabling Dalits to reject the demeaning identifications imposed on them. This process of disidentification is already underway leading to resistance, as evidenced by Dalits’ choice to change the labels of ‘untouchables’ and ‘Harijans’ to a more confrontational identity: ‘Dalit’ (meaning broken and crushed). Hence, by (re)naming and controlling the act of representation, Dalits have created a “strategy to counter the Hindu religion and ideology” (Bhagavan and Anne 12). Such a counter-strategy or resistance is a result as well as part of the process of disidentification from a *given* name; and this paves way for re-identifying by *choosing* another name. Not only did Dalits abandon “the inauspicious and uncivilized name thrust upon them” (Limbale 85), but they could no longer identify with the Hindu religion that propagated the

fundamental caste-inequalities. So, some of them converted to Buddhism; some to Islam or Sikhism or Christianity as an attempt to attain “a new identity, a new image as that of a self-willed, self-propelled and dignified individual with the capacity to enjoy his basic rights at par with others” (Shah 223). These conversions are acts of resistance and can be viewed as a process of disidentification from one religion and re-identification with another.

In 1949, Independent India gave full citizenship to Dalits, abolished the practice of untouchability (India Const. Art.17) and introduced the policy of ‘reservation’. The Hindu majority feared that “reservation could provide a means for SCs to dis-identify with the Hindu community” (Virmani 83) because reservations promised “recognition, redistribution, and equal representation” (Rao 2005). The dynamics of the Communal Award and the underlying paradox can be noticed here. Even today, Dalits face widespread discrimination and extreme poverty in modern India (“India’s Caste System”). Non-Dalits still identify Dalits as untouchables. New categories, such as Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims, have emerged to simultaneously accommodate and separate them. Dalits are ‘legally-accepted but socially-unaccepted’ once again exposing the paradox of untouchability. This could be because the disidentification process is not successful in shifting socially-embedded practices among the dominant group which is why even with (re)naming, religious conversions and legal rights, discrimination continues. Since “Identity is psychosocial: [involving] self and others...” (Sluss and Ashforth 2007), the identity of Dalits is constituted in relation to non-Dalits (Derrida’s concept of the supplement). As long as non-Dalits identify Dalits as untouchables, autochthonous disidentification of Dalits becomes inadequate for empowerment. Thus, there needs to be a meaningful and sustainable re-ordering of the *non-Dalits*’ identifications of Dalits as untouchables. Therefore, ‘relational disidentification’ involves *non-Dalits* disidentifying

with the category of untouchability. Since disidentification, like identification, is relational, there needs to be a balance between autochthonous disidentification and relational disidentification. There is also a need for synthesis and negotiation within relational disidentification i.e., between Dalits and non-Dalits.

The next step in the tripartite process is ‘re-identification’. Re-identification is an attempt to search for a new identity or multiple identities that enable the empowerment of Dalits in a socio-political, economic and legal space. But the challenges that come with re-identification are numerous. For example, the reservation system (introduced by the Poona Pact) allocates reservations along caste and class lines. The reservation policies have thus “enshrined the idea of discrimination” (“Indian Reservations”), by allocating reservations along caste lines and thereby, implicitly reinstating oppressive identifications, just as affirmative action based on race entrenches the category of race. Some have addressed the Indian reservation system as an affirmative action because it seeks to implement equality by “shedding the legacy of oppression” (Harris 290). In his work, *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India* (1984), Marc Galanter states that the Indian central government’s support for the affirmative action (reservation system) comes “from an awareness of the entrenched and cumulative nature of group inequalities” (1). In India and USA, the implementation of affirmative action has led to unequal distribution of opportunities. For instance, in India, the reservation system distributes 27 percent of all government jobs and places in higher education institutions for the backward class and 15 percent of the same are reserved for SCs and STs. The affirmative actions also recognize “eligible collectivities, not individuals” (Zwart 245). So, there is a tendency “to recognise and to remove caste” (Rao 278) that has led to an “agonistic terrain of politics where caste identification is expected to lead to the annihilation of caste” (Rao 278). This correlates to the paradox of untouchability mentioned before. There is a “gap between substantive

equality and embodied difference” that has generated “a *corporeal politics* of caste” (Rao 278); and this brings out the social nature of caste issues and the challenges of re-identification for Dalits, both politically and legally.

Dalits therefore must attempt to create a counter offensive to the existing ideology of the varna system. If ideology is “a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group” (Williams 69) affecting a particular social situation through limited definition of meanings and values (Williams 69) then the varna system is an ideology that flourishes because of its hegemonic practice that manipulates the entire living experience, senses and perceptions of the untouchable’s self-identity. It performs the ideological work of “winning and securing of hegemony over time” (Lull 35). Williams (1977) explains hegemony as “a lived system of meanings and values - constitutive and constituting - which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming” (110) and henceforth, controls the reality of the people in the society. An identity arising from such a hegemonic system is referred to as “ideological social identity” (Devin 2014) or as “ideological identity” (Malka and Lelkes 2010). These ideological identities extend to every member of the society whether they are dominating or being dominated by the ideology. These social identities repeatedly cause in-group bias and the oppressed identities engage in offensive action when threatened (Tajfel 1981; Mackie, Devos, and Smith 2000) because hegemonic practices “are always reflexive and embedded in a complex, sometimes contradictory, ideological regress” (Lull 35) and counter-hegemonic strategies spawn in these contradictory seams and cracks of the dominant forms (Hall 1996). The paradox of the varna system could be seen as a contradictory loophole through which Dalits could engage in the ideological offensive and establish a counter-hegemony. In fact, Dalits have already generated counter-hegemonic acts through their unique form of writing, which is explored throughout the thesis.

## 5. Caste as A Performative Identity

The concepts of disidentification and re-identification are borrowed from Queer performative theory. The most popular theories around ‘performativity’ have been presented by J.L. Austin (1911–1960) and Judith Butler (b.1956). The idea of ‘performative’ was mostly of “philosophical or linguistic meta-language” (Andersson 2) and Austin considers ‘performatives’ as ‘utterances’. For Austin, performativity accounts for “the “deep structures” of certain sentences” (Andersson 2). For example, imperative sentences such as ‘go out’ could be considered as performative sentences implying, ‘I command you to go out’. Austin also makes distinctions between ‘constative’ utterances and ‘performative utterances’. The former stands for true or false statements whereas the latter is “neither true nor false but used in the performance of something other than merely saying something” (Andersson 4). Thus, the performative is an action and more than a mere utterance.

Austin also identifies three kinds of speech acts and distinguishes one from the other. The *locutionary act* “is an act of saying something”, the *illocutionary act* “is something we do *in* saying something”, and the *perlocutionary act* “is something we do *by* saying something” (Austin 94-107). Austin places more importance on illocutionary acts because illocutionary acts are performed in uttering the sentences. Austin’s idea that “performatives are used to perform a certain kind of “speech act”” (Andersson 44) is still widely used to understand how performatives are used to “perform *communicative acts*” (Andersson 80) which is underpinned by the idea that a “rule of communication is *accepted* by a population throughout a certain time” (Andersson 83).

Judith Butler, in her 1995 essay, “Burning Acts-Injurious Speech”, comments on Austin’s ideas on the ‘performative’. For Austin, “words will be distinct from the things

that they do” (Butler 198). However, for Butler “the meaning of a performative act” could be found in the “coincidence of signifying and enactment” (198). For example, injurious acts can be made through words ranging from a judge’s official verdict on a case to a racial slur. Butler states that if a word “might be said to “do” a thing, then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing, but that this signification will also be enactment of the thing” (198). Austin’s notion of performativity presumes the subject to be “sovereign” (Butler 202), that is, if a judge passes a sentence (and as long as the judge is legitimate), then the “pronouncement is the act by which the sentence first becomes binding” (Butler 202). However, Butler challenges Austin’s dependence on the ‘sovereign’ subject. For her, subjects are not sovereign, but constituted by discourse. This is why she draws on Althusser’s notion of interpellation and she finds commonalities between Austin’s ‘performative’ and the Althusserian concept of interpellation. Butler states that according to Althusserian interpellation, it is not the judge but another “regulatory agency” (203) such as a police officer or a doctor that begins the “long string of interpellations” (203). A white police officer who hails a trespasser of colour on the street: ““Hey you there!” brings the subject into sociality through a life-imbuing reprimand” (Butler 203). A doctor who pronounces a child ““it’s a girl”” constructs the subject through labelling. In the first example, the subject is “transitively racialised” (Butler 203) and in the latter one, the subject is “transitively girled” (Butler 203). Butler calls such words (as uttered by the police and the doctor) as *injurious words* because they name “a social subject” (203) but also “[construct] that subject in the naming” (203) through “a violating interpellation” (203).

To explore the situation of Dalits, it is instructive to apply Butler’s concepts to caste. Caste identity “is permanent and hereditary” (D’Souza 13), and established at birth. Just like the doctor who labels the child ‘as a girl’, a child born into a Hindu family in India, by

default is given a caste-based label and thus is constructed through the naming itself. Caste is mentioned in the family name of most Hindus in order for caste to be readily known, as if it is integral to identity. For example, in Kerala (South India), 'nair' or 'nayar' is a common family name which automatically exposes the person's caste identity. Nayars belong to the second category (the warriors) in the caste hierarchy and hence using it in their name is a matter of pride. Also, some names are considered common to Dalits making it easier for people to identify them as other. It is precisely that naming which is a performative speech act that establishes a subject's identity. Thus, naming and labelling are significant to understanding caste and Dalit identity because they initiate the starting point of the 'long string of interpellations'.

Furthermore, Butler (1995) explores how performativity needs power to enact injurious words. She states that the subject uttering the injurious words gains "a temporary status in the citing of that utterance, in performing itself as the origin of that utterance" (203). Butler emphasises that such an effect is derivative and successful only because the action of speech "echoes prior actions, and *accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*" (205). Butler clarifies that the emphasis is not on the idea that "the speech act takes place *within* a practice, but that the act is itself a ritualized practice" (205). She concludes that, "[w]hat this means, then, is that a performative 'works' to the extent that *it draws on and covers over* the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized. In this sense, no term or statement can function performatively without the accumulating and dissimulating historicity of force." (205)

These ideas of performativity can usefully be applied to how caste identity asserts itself on people. The caste hierarchy has been maintained and passed down "from generation to generation" (Bama 17) through words, acts, gestures and enactments that establish caste as



a 'ritualized practice'. Thus, it can be understood that the identifications of caste are "an enacted fantasy or incorporation" (Butler 1990: 136) with a certain performative function. To understand this 'performative function', we can look at Butler's ideas of gender and identity.

In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler understands primary identification as "the original meanings accorded to gender" (137) and states that consistency of identifications is "desired" and "idealised" through "corporeal signification" (136). Butler asserts that 'acts, gestures, enactments' become *performative* when the identity that such acts and gestures "otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (136). This means that there is no ontological base to the claim that the "gendered body is performative" other than "the various acts which constitute its reality" (Butler 136). Here, Butler is saying that *identity can never be essentialised and it is the work of ideology and discourse to make it appear essentialised*. That is, identity as performance is not the same as an actor leaving a role at the end of a play and returning to their true self because there is no true authentic self. The individual is always performing a role and it is this performance that determines the 'self' or 'selves', like the interpellation of Dalits by the dominant hegemonic system.

Butler (1990) asserts that if the basic truth of gender is that it is a fabrication and "a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies" (136), then genders can neither be true or false but are rather "only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (136). Such identities are "mere impersonations" (136), "an imitation without an origin" (138), and/or "a production" that "postures as an imitation" (Butler 138). This is what Butler calls "gender parody" (138). However, this "fluidity of identities" suggests an "openness to resignification and recontextualization" (Butler 138). Thus, gender identity can be explained as "a personal/ cultural history of received

meanings subject to a set of imitative practices which refer laterally to other imitations and which, jointly, construct the illusion of a primary and interior gendered self or parody the mechanism of that construction” (Butler 138).

For Butler (1990), the ‘subject’ is ‘constituted’, which means “the subject is a consequence” (145) of stringent discourses that dominate and regulate what does and does not constitute a specific ‘identity’. The subject “is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects” (Butler 145). Hence, any kind of signification occurs “within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat; ‘agency,’ then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation on that repetition” (Butler 145). However, “it is only *within* the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible” (145). Therefore, for Butler, “gender is ritualistically repeated, whereby the repetition occasions both the risk of failure and the congealed effect of sedimentation” (203). “Gender is a performance with clearly punitive consequences” (139) and it does not exist a priori, but is rather constructed by the ritualistic re-enactment. The acts “of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*” (Butler 140). Butler asserts that gender is a process involving “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame” (25).

Similarly, the practice of caste system or casteism requires a performance that is repeated through various socio-cultural customs. “Culture, religion, traditions – all these are viewed as embodiment of hegemonic influences emerging out of the caste system” (Shah 215) and these influences are reinforced across time through repeated practice or performance. This situation is articulated by one of the central Dalit characters, Kathamuthu in Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change*, who declares that there is no place “where caste doesn’t exist” (22) and that “caste will be around for generations yet to come” (22).

In *Karukku*, the author, Bama asserts that Dalits “have been enslaved for generation upon generation” (28) and so they have learnt “to believe that they are degraded, lacking honour and self-worth” (28). Thus, Dalits have been conditioned to accept their construction as subjects in line with how the Hindu ideology projects their ‘essential’ characteristics based on its invented purity/ pollution dichotomy. So, Dalits may willingly carry out their caste-based functions such as manual scavenging, leather-making, basket-weaving, washing clothes and others, along with performing acts of servitude to the upper castes on account of an internalised performance. The *repeated hegemonic performance* acts as an affirmation of the identifications imposed on Dalits and such repetitions are carried out by both non-Dalits and Dalits. Performance becomes the “activity of freelancing agents (what are popularly called fragmented subjects)” (Patton 182) or ‘bodies-in-performance’.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler explores Derrida’s notion of language being open-ended allowing repetition of linguistic utterances. Butler refers to this as resignification and even replaces ‘performativity’ with this term. For Butler, the term ‘resignification’ offers a more active role for the subject where the subject itself goes through the process of resignification through repetition. Butler (1999) claims that repetition is “bound to persist as the mechanism of the cultural reproduction of identities” (42). But every time a term is reused or repeated in a certain context, there is potential for the meaning to be revised and altered. Thus, Dalit writers can engage in *performative resignification* that could enable counter-hegemonic acts or, as mentioned in the previous section, an ideological offensive. One example is how “the connotation of the term ‘Dalit’ has been changing” (Kumar 146) with new interpretations taking the place of the original. The original meaning of the term is ‘crushed’ and now it means and stands for untouchables. Later on, the term did not limit itself to caste but resignified to a “symbol of change and revolution” (Kumar 146). Now, the term refers to “existential conditions of a group of people who are subjected to all

forms of oppression, that is, social, political, economic, cultural and religious” (Kumar 146). The resignification of the term also shows the transformation of the Dalit struggle from a victimised position to an activist standpoint.

Another term Butler uses to refer to this alteration of meanings is ‘reinscription’. Reinscription refers to altering or reinscribing words with normative meanings, and “the possibility for the speech act to take on a non-ordinary meaning, to function in contexts where it has not belonged, is precisely the political promise of the performative, one that positions the performative at the center of a politics of hegemony, one that offers an unanticipated political future for deconstructive thinking” (Butler 1997: 161). The transformation of the term ‘Dalit’ also can be seen as an example of reinscription. Thus, it could be said that Dalit narratives could hold many such acts of resignification and reinscription in their works. This *fluidity of identification* encourages the *possibility of re-identification*.

While Butler’s concepts focus on subjected and conditioned identities, the idea of freedom in identity is address by Allison Weir in *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory Between Power and Connection* (2013). Weir attempts “to loosen the knot of identity, to untangle some of the threads of identity” (2) in order to understand and enable “freedom from the threads of identity that imprison” (2). Weir’s core idea relies on the fluidity of identity categories. For example, she looks at queer and transgender theories and attempts to understand the identity of ‘woman’. Weir states that the gender of woman should be open to whomever might identify with the gender, “however partially or contingently, weakly or strongly, as women, with various bodies, sexualities, orientations, and gender identities, and in various transitions” (101). Weir explores this flexibility in being able to construct and reconstruct the same gender, to allow for the possibility of several re-identifications which is also similar to Butler’s concepts of resignification and

reinscription. Thus, both Butler and Weir concur in the notion of fluidity in identity. Weir's idea of freedom in identity is crucial for the Dalit's re-identification because it exposes the supplementarity of the varna system, wherein *the oppressive aspect of identification could also be the basis for Dalit liberation*.

Arundhati Roy states that caste is about 'entitlement' and/ or the 'denial of entitlement' whereas the practice of untouchability is the "performative, ritualistic end of the practice of caste" (98). Thus, understanding performativity of caste could contribute not only to understanding the paradoxical nature of the caste system and Dalit identity, but also to how Dalits can resolve and dissolve that paradox to their political advantage through disidentification and re-identification.

## 6. Literary Activism

One of the most striking things about the various movements and attempts made to liberate Dalits was that they were spearheaded by artists and writers. The Bhakti movement was predominantly a literary movement, which was one of the reasons why it wasn't popular among the common masses as it lacked the grass roots level activism. Ambedkar wrote several essays and speeches that are still referred to by Dalit activists and scholars. His most famous work *The Annihilation of Caste* (1936) was initially a speech he had prepared to be delivered at an annual conference organised by the 'Jat-Pat Todak Mandal' (Society for the Abolition of Caste system) based in Lahore.<sup>16</sup> The organisers found sections of the speech problematic with explicit attacks on the Hindu religion and hence asked Ambedkar to remove such parts. When Ambedkar refused to do so, the conference was cancelled entirely but the speech was subsequently published as a book. It stands as a single authoritative text on caste and the exploitation of the Dalits. Mahatma Gandhi's A

---

<sup>16</sup> Lahore was a part of Punjab India till the partition in 1947, after which it is currently part of Pakistan.

*Vindication of Caste* published in the weekly journal *Harijans*<sup>17</sup> in July 1936 was a response to Ambedkar's *The Annihilation of Caste*. Ambedkar responded to Gandhi further too. Thus, writing in the form of speeches, essays, and articles have been a commonly used method to talk, argue, agree and disagree about the Dalit situation.

Ambedkar's works and his responses reflect his activism in the literary sphere, where an activist attempts to "raise social consciousness", to "diagnose" the problems and attempt to "offer solutions" (Taib 5) and hence, Ambedkar's activism challenges issues of caste, class, gender and race in and through literature. Literary activism "is in a state of potential or movement, but one that arises in the midst of multiple, even paradoxical conditions: finding what it is, searching for what it is, realizing its possible configurations" (Cook 326). As discussed previously, the paradox of untouchability wherein Dalits are 'legally-accepted but socially-unaccepted', is highlighted in and through literary activism because the need to resist and protest still shows the rampant discrimination performed in the Indian society. This activist function of writing was later taken up by Dalit writers. Dalit literature acts as a form of activism, a "movement for social liberation" (Limbale 97) and an important method for "revolution, change, consciousness-raising, struggle and social commitment" (Limbale 97). Dalit writers attempt to "evolve a new aesthetics" (Kumar 148) hoping to create a "counter-culture and a separate identity for Dalits in the society" (Kumar 148). As discussed in previous sections, Dalits attempt to create an ideological offensive through their activism, especially against hegemonic acts ascribing identity. Williams (1977) refers to such acts as 'culture' which is propagated by the "lived dominance and subordination of particular classes" (110). The literary sphere is used to promote the varna system through texts such as *Vedas* and *Manusmriti*, and it is the same

---

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi had started three publications on 11 February 1932 when he was jailed during the British rule. Out of the three publications, *Harijans* (1933-1948) was in English.

platform used by Dalits to create a 'counter-culture'. This fluidity offered by literature could be the reason why Dalit activists resort to expressing their experiences and demands through their writings.

Culler (2000) states that "literary criticism involves attending to what literary language *does* as much as to what it *says*" (506) and that "the concept of the performative *seems to provide* a linguistic and philosophical justification for this idea" (506, original emphasis). Dalit literature carries implicit and explicit messages of activism in its works and Pratt's (1977) literary speech act theory helps in understanding the activism performed through literature. Pratt states that merely uttering a grammatical sentence is not enough to perform a speech act correctly because like all behaviour, speech acts "are correctly or felicitously performed only if certain conditions obtain" (81). She gives the example of someone making a promise because a promise depends on more than just uttering the word or a statement (81). The audience expects a certain action to follow the sentence. Thus, Pratt's ideas point to continuation of the performance after the speech act in order to complete the speech act. Similarly, without the continuation of Dalit activism from the literary sphere to the physical world, their speech act would remain incorrect and ineffective.

The speech act theory of Pratt studies utterances by not only examining their grammatical properties but also the context in which the speech act is performed, including the unspoken conventions in play when an utterance is produced and received by people who share the same language (Pratt 86). The context includes intentions, attitudes, the relationship between the participants and their expectations (Pratt 86). Pratt asserts that all communicative activities are "context-dependent" (86) and "literature itself is a speech act" (86). Pratt explains that to analyse a literary work, one should have contextual knowledge of its 'genre' (86). Pratt's theory is a context-dependent one, and she believes that the 'essence of literariness' lies not in the message itself but the 'particular

disposition' of the speaker and the audience in terms of the message (87). In the Dalit situation, the message and their use of aesthetics are similar in terms of intention and attitude. The message of activism and resistance is performed by hybridising the narrative form and using bold technique, which will be discussed in detail in this thesis. In choosing certain stylistic features to dispose an utterance, the speaker is attempting to send a message "of a certain type and that pre-suppose certain knowledge shared by the participants" (Pratt 87). Hence, studying the performance of the speech acts in the three primary texts, which includes their grammatical properties and context, is necessary to comprehend the texts as a whole and the implicit and explicit meanings in the message produced in and through the texts.

Dalit literature reflects the situation of the Dalits and portrays "a mirror image of the lives, sorrow and poverty of Dalit" (Limbale 96). Dalit literature encompasses novels, poems, essays, memoirs, and autobiographies. Dalit literature also includes personal narratives and they comprise a substantial part of Dalit literature. Dalit personal narratives are a social network of relationships creating a relational matrix, and are a valuable source given that identity formation takes place within such "relational settings of contested but patterned relations among narratives, people, and institutions" (McLaughlin and Ansgar and Sven 2009). These personal narratives are mostly autobiographical narratives and Dalit writers refer to their works as autobiographies or memoirs. Raj Kumar, in his work, *Dalit Personal Narratives* (2010), calls Dalit life writing as Dalit personal narratives because Dalit life writing cannot be contained within the autobiographical genre since Dalit writers attempt to "evolve a new aesthetics" (148) which includes features of autobiography, biography, memoir, *testimonio*, and novel. Hence, it is important to look at how Dalit writers have adopted features of several genres in their writing and specifically, why autobiography is insufficient to express the Dalit voice.



Kumar explains the word ‘autobiography’ as ‘auto’ meaning self, ‘bio’ meaning life and ‘graph’ meaning writing (2). Hence, autobiography “presupposes an autonomous individual subject” (Nayar 2006: 85). In her book *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson states that in the case of victim narratives (such as Dalit narratives), the ‘I’ of the autobiographical tradition or the self must face the ‘I’ which was a victim, that is, the author must once again face their victimhood through the narrator. The concept of the authorial ‘I’ facing the victimized ‘I’ and vice-versa can be seen in Dalit narratives where some authors reflect on the work they have written. Sivakami’s second book *Author’s Notes: Gowri* is a reflection on her first book, *The Grip of Change*, eight years after the publication of the first book. Sivakami criticises her own work and attempts to understand herself as a writer and as a Dalit woman. For example, in the *Author’s Notes*, the narrator puts these questions to Sivakami, “[w]hat is the force that compels the pen forward? Why and how are experiences transmuted in writing? How was the writer to venture in spirit to those places inaccessible to flesh and blood?” (160). Such a reflection is necessary because “a social movement, the activists, and the meanings associated with the movement are the units of analysis, the things to be explored” (Williams 2004: 94). Thus, autobiography has several features that prove useful for Dalit expression, yet Dalit writings go beyond autobiography in order to portray “the various dimensions” (Nayar 2006: 83) of Dalit life writing.

The focus on the individual or the ‘self’ in autobiography is the reason why the genre was not popular in India. The *Varnashrama Dharma* lays down the role of individuals in the society, and the individuals, and thereby collectives, are expected to adhere to the roles given to them. This limits subjectivity which is necessary in autobiographies (Kumar 57). It is not incidental that the first Indian autobiographies were by uppercaste men (Gandhi, Nehru, Chaudhuri) who spoke to a national and international audience. Doubrovsky (1977)

explains on the back cover of his French novel, *Fils*, that autobiography is a “privilege reserved for the important people of this world, at the end of their lives, in a refined style” (*Fils*). Later on, uppercaste women joined the Indian autobiographical tradition. But Dalits who have been raising their voices through their personal narratives “were rarely heard of and thus, systematically neglected in the academic circle” (Kumar 1). Hence, the autobiographical genre was seen as reserved for a ‘privileged’ group of people such as uppercaste men and women, politicians, authors, journalists, academicians, artists, public figures and others (Kumar 43). The genre also followed the Western autobiographical pattern with traditional autobiographical topics such as childhood, influences from family members, marriage, parents-in-law, home-making, births, deaths, and marriages in the family (Kumar 2010).

Even though Dalit life writing is an “individual’s life-writing” (Nayar 2006: 83), it is also a “community’s biography” (Nayar 84). Sharmila Rege in *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender* states that “the intention [of Dalit testimonies] is not one of literariness but of communicating the situation of a group’s oppression, imprisonment and struggle” (13). Dalit life writing is a means to expose the community’s “anguish” (Limbale 35) and pose “questions” (Limbale 35). Thus, the genre of autobiography seems insufficient for Dalit activism for “traditional norms no longer succeed in providing a satisfactory structure for behaviour” (Porta and Diani 13), and activists must resort to other ways, and in the case of Dalit writers, they resort to exploiting several genres.

As a result, *testimonio* seems to be the “closest literary relation” (Nayar 2006: 83) to Dalit personal narratives because Dalit personal narratives are “narratives of trauma, pain, resistance, protest and social change” (Nayar 83) which are features of *testimonio*. The aspect of trauma and the attempt to recreate the traumatic incident(s) are an important aspect of *testimonio* and “Dalit life-writing is about the re-construction of the self after the

traumatic event” (Nayar 83). Another striking feature about *testimonio* is that it acts as a “voice of one who witnesses for the sake of another, who remains voiceless” (Nayar 84). The *testimonio* genre recreates the traumatic incidents to reflect similar situations faced by others so, “the narrator stands in for the whole social group” (Nayar 85). Thus, *testimonio* narratives are at “once personal and public, singular and collective, autobiographical and biographical” (Nayar 2012: 237). Dalit personal narratives also employ the same features and therefore, can be regarded as a “collective document” (Nayar 2006: 84). Dalit personal narratives are also regarded as personal atrocity memoirs, which “calls attention to oppressive conditions within a community” (Nayar 2012: 238). The narratives fold “the atrocity narrative into testimonies and evidentiary statements that are explicitly political” (Nayar 238).

Swapan Chakravorty’s essay (2016) ‘Literary Surrogacy and Literary Activism: Instances from Bengal’ “illuminate[s] the intricate relationships between literary and other kinds of activism” (Cook 331). Chakravorty’s analysis shows how even Dalit activism can “act as a surrogate for a political task that politics itself cannot perform” (Cook 331). Therefore, Dalit writers use various genres to create a performative narrative that propagates activism in their writing with the hope of promoting the advocacy and activism through and beyond their writing. It could also be suggested that Dalit writers attempt a resignification of the genres which makes Dalit narratives “distinct” (Limble ix) in form and content, and this idea is explored in detail in chapter 4.

One of the striking features of Dalit literature, specifically Dalit personal narratives is the language which has “its own particular features” (Limble ix). The narratives do not follow traditional methods and ‘standard language’ to articulate their experiences because conventional features focus on “class” (Limble 33). So, the narratives purposely “rejected the class of this standard language” (Limble 33) and subsequently, the Dalit experiences

are portrayed through “uncouth-impolite language” (Limbale 33) which “does not recognise cultivated gestures and grammar” (Limbale 33). Dalit writers use these unconventional methods as way of protesting against the majority of existing discourses that dispense with “the realities and experiences of nearly a quarter of the country’s people” (Limable viii). By distancing their writing from the standards of civil speech, Dalit writers are performing their activism and claiming a space for disidentification and re-identification.

Furthermore, Dalit personal narratives locate their “personal and collective suffering within a larger discourse of human rights” (Nayar 2012: 237). The stress on basic human rights, not just as an Indian citizen but also as a human being is central to the Dalit struggle. In 2013, Dalits approached the UN Minority Forum (*International Dalit Solidarity Network* 2016) to declare or recognise caste-based discrimination as a crime because “all are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination” (*Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 7: 16) and casteism violates this right. Therefore, “as radicalised Dalits made bold public rights claims and launched an attack on the symbols of caste orthodoxy, they enlarged their repertoire of activism as well as their conceptual vocabulary of politics” (Rao 80) into and through Dalit literature.

In this context, Dalit narratives provide “critical insights on the question of Dalit identity” (Shah 214) and literature serves as a vital vehicle in the Dalits’ “search for an identity” (Shah 210). Dalit writers believe that the “quest for one’s identity is a prime mover in the struggle for social equality and justice” (Shah 238). Dalit literature focuses chiefly on “identity formation and its assertion to regain the self-confidence and self-worth of the marginalised sections in the society” (Shah 239). Furthermore, Dalit personal narratives could be assumed to foster re-identification through their creative search for empowered identity or multiple identities.

A significant aspect of performativity in literature is that works outlive the authors and may also perform functions not intended or thought of by the author. Allington states that “the sentences of which literary works are composed may thus resemble utterances that might perform particular speech acts, but the people who wrote them seem not to have done so in the attempt to bring about the standard perlocutions of those acts” (498). This could be because there is a tendency for “works [to] do and say what they do independently of their authors” (Allington 497). Derrida’s concept of the ‘supplementary’ “characterizes the literary as a form of writing that inscribes textuality within the text” (Derrida 163). This leads to an exposure of the text, resulting in “openings and openness that override the programmatic aims of mere activism” (Chakravorty 299). The activism of a literary text is therefore “never simply punctual, defined by a historical moment, task, or programmatic intention [because] texts outlive the contexts of their initial making and consumption” (Cook 331). Literature “is most active when it outstrips the activist intent” (Chakravorty 299). This fluidity of literature and the performativity of the text enables disidentification and re-identification, but it also raises questions regarding the *extent* to which Dalits can disidentify and re-identify through their activist personal narratives.

### **Scope and Structure of The Thesis**

In order to understand how a performative theory of caste enables a theorising of Dalit identity as a process of identification, disidentification, and re-identification, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent is caste performative?
2. How does performative theory help understand the gender and class issues within a caste society?

3. How is the paradox of ‘legally-accepted but socially-unaccepted’ scenario of Dalits addressed in the narrative(s)?
4. How do Dalit personal narratives (in translation) enable disidentification of Dalits and non-Dalits in and through their narratives?
5. To what extent do the chosen texts address the tension of re-identification between and across various contexts: social, cultural, political, economic, religious, and legal?

The choice of the texts is limited to a certain spatial and temporal period because of the vastness of the Dalit issue across India. The study analyses three Dalit narratives written by Tamil<sup>18</sup> Dalit writers covering a period between the late twentieth century to the twenty first century. Bama’s *Karukku* was originally published in Tamil in 1992, later translated into English by renowned translator, Lakshmi Holmström, and published in 2000. P. Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* was originally published in Tamil as *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum* (1989) and *Author’s Notes: Gowri* was originally published in Tamil as *Asiriyar Kurippu* (1997). P. Sivakami translated both texts into English which were then published in 2006. The three primary texts are similar on the grounds that they address “caste as a powerful force conditioning the mindset of Dalits” (Shah 215) and similar issues such as class struggle, gender discrimination, land rights, and the search for justice and identity, which necessarily overlap when dealing with texts separately in different chapters. Yet each text is different because they do not “constitute a homogenous or unified entity” (Shah 215), but instead offer “divergent currents and tendencies” (Shah 215). Hence, the thesis analyses the texts in separate chapters in order to examine their distinct qualities and ideas. Chapter two analyses caste and legal performativity, and entanglement of caste and class in Bama’s *Karukku*. Chapter 3 analyses intersectionality, theory in flesh and the Dalit body, and caste performativity in Sivakami’s *The Grip of*

---

<sup>18</sup> Tamil is spoken in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

*Change*. Chapter 4 analyses the aesthetics, form, and narrative styles in Sivakami's *Author's Notes*. Chapter 4 also looks at the responses of translators from the interviews conducted to understand the translator's role in the process of translating the context and content, aesthetics, and affect of Dalit personal narratives from the source language to the target language. The analysis undertaken in these chapters, and the implications of the tripartite process and the performativity of identity in relation to transforming Dalit identity are evaluated and summarised in the conclusion.

## Chapter 2: (Dis)Entanglements and Performativity in Bama's *Karukku*

### Introduction

Bama's autobiography, *Karukku*, is set in her native village in the state of Tamil Nadu in India and the narrative is based on recollections from her childhood and her adult experiences as a teacher and a nun. In Tamil Nadu, the practices of untouchability can be traced back to the Chola period between 850-1300 BCE. During this period, the Brahmins were powerful because of their religious duties in the temples but since their function was limited to places of worship, Ravikumar (2009) shows that they sought to retain social prestige by maintaining a "close relationship with land-owning castes" (9). The Brahmins were consequently "endowed with religious power, state support and land rights" which pushed them to "the pinnacle of caste domination, while the entire burden of maintaining this status fell on the Dalits" (9). The domination of the Mughals and the arrival of the British did not change this existing social order because the rulers preferred to preserve "the caste structure to safeguard their hold over power" (10). Even after the independence of India from the British in 1947 and the abolishment of untouchability in 1949, the conditions of the Dalits did not change substantially.

In considering why caste has proven so intractable as a mark of inequality and exclusion, it is important to attend to the way in which occupation and caste is mapped onto social geographies. Pierre Bourdieu (1996) states that the "idea of difference is at the basis of the very notion of space, that is, a set of distinct and coexisting positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through order relations, such as above, below, and between..." (11). Bourdieu's notion of space as distinct positions defined in relation to each other can be observed in *Karukku*, wherein Bama portrays a society split by caste-



divisions and, *literally*, segregated by spatial boundaries. The street one lives on reveals the caste of an individual and hence, people merely ask which street a person belongs to in order to understand their caste identity, instead of enquiring directly about their caste. The upper caste communities and the lower caste communities are separated into “different parts of the village” (Bama 7). Bama depicts the lower caste section of the village which is also sub-divided based on occupation. One section of the village, known as “Odapatti” is inhabited by “Nadars who climb palmyra palms for a living” (Bama 7). To the right of Odapatti, “there are the Koravar who sweep streets, and then the leather-working Chakkiliyar” (Bama 7). The “Kusavar” community that makes earthen pots comes next followed by the “Palla settlement” (7). Adjacent to them is the “Paraya settlement” (Bama 7) to which Bama belongs to. Bama also mentions that the residential spaces are inhabited by uppercaste groups such as “Thevar, Chettiyaar, Aasaari, and Nadar” (Bama 7). The Naicker streets are beyond these groups and the Udaiyaars also had their own settlement.

Bourdieu differentiates between physical space which is “the mutual externality of parts”, and social space which is “defined by the mutual exclusion (or distinction) of positions which constitute it, that is, as a structure of juxtaposition of social positions” (12). By depicting the village divided into various physically delineated sections based on caste identities, Bama’s narrative shows how such physical boundaries concretise caste divisions. Here, social space is “an invisible set of relationships which tends to retranslate itself, in a more or less direct manner, into physical space in the form of a definite distributional arrangement of agents and properties” (Bourdieu 12). Therefore, through the lived separation, caste has found a way to maintain itself on a physical level and is *performed* every day, thereby naturalising divisions as *habitus*. For Bourdieu *habitus* constitutes:

generative principles of distinct and distinctive practices -what the worker eats, and especially the way he eats it, the sport he practices and the way he practices it, his political opinions and the way he expresses them are systematically different from the industrial proprietor's corresponding activities / habitus are also structuring structures, different classifying schemes classification principles, different principles of vision and division, different tastes. Habitus make different differences; they implement distinctions between what is good and what is bad, between what is right and what is wrong, between what is distinguished and what is vulgar, and so on, but they are not the same. (17)

Bama mentions that the physical boundaries allow the upper castes to keep to themselves while the lower castes stay in their assigned space (7), and this falls in line with this idea of habitus, that is, the making of different differences and distinctions or, as Bourdieu understands it, the “structured structure” resulting in “structuring structure” (15). The lower castes are described as visiting the upper caste streets for work but the upper castes “never, ever” (Bama 7) come to the lower caste streets. Bama further points out that “[t]he post office, the panchayat board, the milk-depot, the big shops, the church, the schools- all stood in their streets. So why would they need to come to our area? Besides, there was a big school in the Naicker street which was meant only for the uppercaste children” (7).

Here, we can see that the goods and services remain in the proximity of the upper castes, both literally and figuratively. A caste-based typology is not just about easy accessibility to basic amenities necessary for all individuals. This control over inhabited space is about establishing the symbolic ownership of the goods and services and the opportunities they represent. The post office represents communication (social), the panchayat board represents governance and decision-making (legal and political), the

milk-depot represents food and in turn source of living (economic), the shops represent goods (economic), the Church represents religion and in turn faith, and the schools represent literacy and education. The locations of the amenities not only show that the social, political, legal, economic, religious and even educational opportunities are located to favour the upper castes, but also that Dalits are either deprived or have far less access to these amenities and what they represent. Even access to water is limited for Dalits. Bama depicts five streets that made up the part where her community resided. In the afternoon, the streets would be noisy with men and women shouting, yelling and fighting as they “waited their turn at the single water pump” (Bama 8). It took “an age to fill a single water pot” (Bama 8). In this way, it can be perceived from Bama’s description that *rights* to the spaces where the goods and services are located, and all that the goods and services represent - that is social, political, legal, economic, religious and education rights - are also limited or denied to the Dalits. Dalits are *abjected* through their positioning in relations to goods and services.

Moreover, the embodied affirmations of caste including physical spaces can be seen as “relational products of early socialization and it makes sense, therefore, to conceive of a caste habitus” (Gorringer and Rafanell 103). Then, an individual’s social position within a particular caste “informs one’s ‘caste’ habitus. This habitus results in the internalization of specific embodied characteristics, which constitute hierarchical boundaries and, consequently, structure relationships with other castes” (Gorringer and Rafanell 98). The birth-based distinctions created by the caste system and the subsequent practices of socially embedding these inequalities by marking physical boundaries and controlling goods and services, result in “serious violations across the full spectrum of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights” (Rajendra 4). In this way, naturalised caste divisions or caste habitus “is a way of describing the embodiment of social structures and history in

individuals. It is a set of dispositions, internal to the individual, that both reflects external social structures and shapes how the individual perceives the world and acts in it” (Power 48). Importantly, in this social situation rights as a lived practice – the performativity of a rights regime, as it were – as opposed to rights as an abstract concept (which we have already talked about) are available to persons only to the extent that the practices (of communication, of government, of law, or politics, and so on) through which such rights are enabled are *accessible*, both physically and ideologically/symbolically. Hence, this chapter pays close attention to the entanglement or intersections of class, education, religion and law in the practices and performances of caste as portrayed in Bama’s *Karukku*.

### **1. Performances and Performative**

In chapter five of *Karukku*, Bama explains specific games that she played with other children after school which mostly included role playing. In one such game, three boys would enact the role of a Naicker and the rest would address them as “Ayya, Ayya”, and “pretend to be their pannaiyaal” (Bama 56) or labourer. The boys would “act as if they had a lot of power” over the rest and would call out “Yeppa, Yeppa” to “humiliate” those performing as labourers (Bama 56). The boys would force the others to “do a lot of work” and these others would “pretend to work in the fields all day” and then collect their wages before heading home (Bama 56). Another game the children played was “keeping shop” wherein the boys pretend to be “Nadar Mudalaali” (Bama 56) which means, employer from the upper caste Nadar community. The rest of the children would go to the shop and give “tile-money” in return for “all sorts of groceries” (Bama 56). The tile-money is nothing more than “broken shards of mud-pots” (Bama 56) which were then modified and shaped. The striking part about the games these children played after school as “recreation

or pastimes” (Bama 56) is their mimicry of the actual workings of the society in which the children live. Bama’s term ‘recreation’ is a telling fit for this context because not only does it mean leisure time, but it indicates the act of re-creation. The children are recreating what they see, hear and feel about the roles played by each individual according to their belonging to a respective community in the society. By enacting the games, the children’s awareness of caste differences, class inequalities, power, labour, wages and lack of dignity is evident. While the knowledge and history of caste inequalities may not be fully known to the children, these games reveal how their experiences show them to be familiar with the practices of an unequal social order.

In a similar fashion, the children ‘recreate’ another situation where they enact marriage followed by “the husband coming home drunk and hitting his wife” (Bama 57) which then results in the police arriving and beating up the husband. The children possibly mimic the gender-based distinctions practiced in their households yet when they play, they do not distinguish between who plays the role of a girl and a boy, as Bama recalls. This could be because adult subjectivities are more constrained and subjected to social conditioning over space and time, while children’s subjectivities have a radical potential. Bama’s assertive tone in her statement that, “we made no distinction between boys and girls. We played together, as if we were all the same” (Bama 56) shows her individual and collective confidence in the less discriminatory mannerisms of the children which includes herself. Yet, the conditional clause ‘as if’ makes it evident that Bama is more aware of the reality of gendered differences now than when she was a child. Her tone could also be one of wonder or even nostalgia because she is able to reflect on a time when social differentiation had less influence on her and her world. Even though gender differences had less influence on the children, they unconsciously reinforced gender hierarchies. One example is the children’s enactment of domestic violence where a drunk husband beats up

his wife. Clearly such instances of aggression and gender inequality are normalised in the society and hence the seriousness of such acts have less bearing on the children who are slowly conditioned to think that domestic hostility is normal between married couples with the woman on the receiving end of the violence.

Such expectations and conditioning are not limited to gender in this narrated world but also apply to caste roles and caste identities. For example, the role-playing games show that the children are aware of their position and their community's position in the social order. As the children are only recreating and enacting existing social roles, an unsettling aspect of their games is the unconscious reinstatement of caste and class differences through a temporary subversion. The law-giver, Manu, in his text *Manusmriti*, "has warned against subversions" (Ravikumar 105) because it will result in *everyone's* "dispossession" and the "lowest will reach the top" (Ravikumar 105). The lower castes "are allowed to mimic their masters. Slaves take the role of masters, women act as men, and youths imitate elders" (Ravikumar 105). Such performances during festivals or celebrations suspend hierarchical rules to some extent, and this is similar to Bakhtin's ideas of carnival. Bakhtin (1984) states that:

carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed... The suspension of all hierarchical precedence during carnival time was of particular significance. (10)

Bakhtin states that aspects of carnival such as the carnival laughter is 'festive', 'universal' and also 'ambivalent' as it affirms and derides, and it "asserts and denies, it buries and

revives” (12). However, even when subversions are allowed and performed for short periods during special occasions such as celebrations or festivals or in role-playing games, they may not be entirely subversive. This is because even though there is a suspension (both ideal and real) of hierarchies during carnival enabling “a special type of communication impossible in everyday life” (Bakhtin 10), it is still *temporary*. The children’s games occupy an exceptional place within the established social order where micro / contained transgressions can take place, but they present no threat to the social order. Hence, such temporary subversions or mimicry can often “strengthen” (Ravikumar 105) the existing social order rather than subvert it because the mimicry is a theatrical performance that lasts only for a short period. Thus, children playing roles of upper castes helps perpetuate the dominance and power of these identities because the lower castes are only mimicking and consequently “safeguarding the existing power structure” (Ravikumar 106). Such theatrical practices reflect the everyday lived *performances* of individuals and their respective communities. These everyday performances are the ritualistic and repeated practices necessary to enshrine and naturalise caste in the society and the minds of its people as Bama demonstrates in her portrayal of the everyday performances of caste in her society.

The first mention of untouchability in *Karukku* can be seen in the second chapter as Bama plunges right into the issue in a striking opening line. Bama states that as a child, she hadn’t “yet heard people speak of untouchability” but she had “already seen, felt, experienced, and been humiliated by what it is” (13). This provokes the thought that a child could easily experience untouchability and even be humiliated by it without knowing its legal, religious and sociopolitical history because of the way in which untouchability is practiced and performed every day as a reality of distinction. Arundhati Roy (2014) states that “the practice of untouchability, cruel as it was- the broom tied to the waist, the pot

hung around the neck- was the performative, ritualistic end of the practice of caste” (98). This *performative* aspect of untouchability is noticed and recreated by the children in their games. Even feelings of indignity and humiliation are enacted in the games such that the feelings of humiliation and lack of self-dignity become a part of the Dalit identity, just like the images of the broom and the pot tied to the Dalit body. For example, Bama narrates that Dalits “suffer blows” and “pain” without any hope of “relief” wherever they go (27) and recalls how they are looked down upon “with disgust” as if they were “suffering from a repulsive disease” (27). It is evident to her that this causes “anguish” coupled with “anger” (Bama 27). Yet, she also notes how most Dalits “swallow their anger and carry on with their troubled lives” (Bama 27). Such feelings – both those expressed and those repressed - shape the life of the individual and the community and surface even in the children’s games through which they recreate the humiliation felt by the lower caste communities.

Moreover, an interesting element of the caste dynamic illustrated within the children’s games is the way in which both caste groups who are on extreme ends of the caste scale, maintain the caste hierarchy. The upper castes require the lower castes to recognise them as higher castes and observe those practices that maintain their distances and differences. Without this compliance according to caste, the oppressed can rise and then, “the symbols of power are destroyed and confiscated” which will lead to “a reversal of the existing social order” (Ravikumar 105). Julia Kristeva’s notion of the abject and Derrida’s concept of the supplement, which are both explained in the previous chapter of the thesis, are relevant to understanding this dynamic. They address the necessity of the abject to sustain the position of the subject, and the outside (abject) supplementing the inside (subject) rather than being in opposition, according to Kristeva and Derrida, respectively. The upper castes require the *recognition* of the lower castes to function in their imagined caste



superiority. Derrida states the possibility of no “absolute outside” as one exists only in relation to other and hence, the outside threatens the inside (135). The threat lies not so much in the relation itself, but its implication: namely, that the ‘outside’ is inside that which deems the ‘outside’ to be ‘outside’ and hence the identity of the ‘inside’ is constituted by that which it deems to be ‘outside’. The abject position of the Dalits is precisely that which confirms *and* disturbs the existing social order. So it is vital for the preservation of the superiority of the upper castes that the Dalits continue to stay in servitude to them; and that their servitude and subordination is embedded into the everyday practices of social life – that is, so that their abjection is naturalised as a *caste habitus* and this involves everyday humiliation as part of the very fabric of social practice. For example, Bama mentions that her community works for the upper castes and collect their wages from them. Both her grandmothers “worked as servants for Naicker families” (Bama 16). The children of these families would call Bama’s grandmothers by their names without showing the respect common among generational structures, “just because they belonged to the Naicker caste” (Bama 16). The grandmothers would call the babies ‘Ayya’ meaning ‘Master’ despite the stark age difference. Here, we can see reciprocal acts maintaining caste hierarchies. As a child, Bama is made aware of her lower caste identity and, like members of her community, she performs acts that maintain the caste difference.

Another example is Bama seeing an elder from her street offer the upper caste Naicker a small packet of food. The elder “bowed low and extended the packet” (Bama 15) to the Naicker. The elder held out the packet by the string, “without touching it” (Bama 15). Bama recalls being amused by what she saw as a child; but when she explained the incident to her elder brother, he was less amused. Her brother explained to her that “everybody believed that Naickers were upper caste, and therefore must not touch Parayas. If they did, they would be polluted” (Bama 15). This is why the elder carried and handed

the packet by its string. On hearing the meaning behind the act, Bama “felt terribly sad” and “infuriated” (15). Bama recalls being flooded with thoughts and questions such as how the upper castes could “believe that it was disgusting if a Paraya held that package in his hands, even though the vadai had been wrapped first in a banana leaf, and then parcelled in paper” (15). The young Bama wanted to touch the food herself as an act of rebellion. She could not understand why her people had to fetch food for the upper castes only to be humiliated, especially when it was an “important elder” (15) of her community. As mentioned before, abjection is naturalised as a habitus, involving and resulting in humiliation as a naturalised part of the social practice. Here, Bama’s narrative deliberately sets out a to represent an ‘emic’ or ‘insider’ viewpoint through the innocent child motif. Through her simple narration of an event she did not understand she reveals how caste operates and how her consciousness of caste creates a shift in her awareness of social justice issues.

Additionally, the elder shows his willingness to maintain his ‘lower’ caste status in relation to the upper caste Naickers. The elder’s gesture of handing out the food packet with a string attached to it - and the Naicker accepting it- untouched- shows how caste maintenance is a *relative* performance that includes both, lower and upper castes. The fictionality of this practice is apparent, insofar as the string and the paper covering the food itself must have been touched by the elder. The string’s function is therefore strictly and purely symbolic and performative, not practical. It performs the avoidance of touch in a symbolic way. The idea of reciprocal or *relational* identification is relevant here, where recognition from both castes regarding their own and the other’s caste status upholds the unequal caste identifications. This performative nature of caste ensures the survival of the caste system and since it is practiced for several decades, the performances from the lower

and upper castes are naturalised as caste habitus and perceived by both social groups as ‘essential,’ that is, as innately rather than socially determined.

Furthermore, Bama remembers seeing her Paatti (grandmother) bringing home “the unwanted food” (16) the Naickers were going to discard. Bama’s Paatti would bring home the food despite being subjected to offensive behaviour such as the Naicker lady tipping the unwanted food in her Paatti’s vessel being careful not to allow the vessels to touch because then the Naicker lady’s vessel “would be polluted” (16). On asking her Paatti not to encourage such behaviours, Paatti defends the practices to Bama emphasising that the Naickers “are the maharajas” (17) who feed Paatti and other workers their ‘rice’; and that Naickers are necessary for the survival of Parayars. Once again, we can see the *paradoxical reciprocal* relationship between the upper and lower castes where the former *needs* the services of the latter not only to maintain their status but also to maintain their household, fields, and other occupations; yet it is the latter who is deprived of food, power, wealth, and self-dignity that supports this unequal dynamic as the natural order. Dalits work as agricultural labourers and produce the goods to which they do not have adequate access unless granted by the upper castes. Paatti is unable to realise that her community toils hard on the fields owned by the upper castes to produce the rice that she feels grateful to be given as leftovers by the Naickers. Paatti and the other workers are essential and without their labour cultivating the rice the Naickers could be deprived of rice as well. In this situation, the identity of the ‘inside’ is constituted by that which it deems to be ‘outside’, and vice-versa. Once again, we can see the reciprocal relation between the abject and the subject.

When Paatti questions Bama, “Haven’t they been upper caste from generation to generation, and haven’t we been lower caste? Can we change this?” (17), her thought-provoking question not only highlights the relational aspect of caste performances but also

points out the psychological effect of such repeated performances. Bama asserts that “Dalits have been enslaved for generation upon generation and been told again and again of their degradation” (28). Thus, they have “come to believe that they are degraded, lacking honour and self-worth, untouchable; they have reached a stage where they themselves voluntarily, hold themselves apart” (Bama 28). The repeated performances and articulations of inequality that underpin caste discrimination have naturalised caste divisions on a social and psychological level, therefore reinforcing caste habitus. Bama states that even babies are “told” and “instructed” (28) on how to perform their caste duties. Hence, it is no surprise that the children’s games mimic and reinforce the existing social and caste roles.

Bama’s narrative points out the almost ubiquitous performative acts that maintain caste inequalities. As a child, Bama witnesses her grandmothers maintaining their servile position which reinforces the casteist idea of pollution and untouchability. For example, Bama’s grandmothers work for the Naickers and since everything in the Naicker household belongs to the Naickers, the workers need permission to use or consume anything, including water. Naicker women would provide water to the workers in a way that would prevent any form of ‘touch’ that could lead to ‘pollution’. The Naicker women would pour out water “from a height of four feet” (Bama 16) while Bama’s Paatti and other workers would drink the water “with cupped hands held to their mouths” (16), just like the elder handing the food packet to the Naicker through a string and the Naicker woman tipping the unwanted food into Paatti’s vessel carefully to prevent any form of ‘touch’. As a child who witnesses these incidents first-hand and as an adult recalling these performances, Bama feels terrible seeing such acts, but she is also aware that not all Dalits feel humiliated by this treatment. When lower caste women bring left over food from the upper caste household, they behave as if they had been “handed the nectar of the gods”

(Bama 16). This reference to upper castes as gods is not far-fetched especially since the lower castes refer to upper castes as 'Ayya' which not only means master but also 'god'.

The naturalising of caste inequalities or caste habitus affects all castes as they are all in a process of autochthonous identification as well as relational identification. Bama calls such acts of self-degradation as the "worst injustice" (28) because then "there is no way for Dalits to find freedom or redemption" (28), ideologically and practically. Here, ideas of injustice, freedom/ redemption are not only about freedom from caste habitus, but also freedom from other constraints such as occupational bonds which keep her community in poverty even though her community "was born to work" (55), and the fact that both men and women in her village "can survive only through hard and incessant labour" (48). Bama grew up seeing her people "working hard" (48). Her grandmother and mother "laboured from sunrise to sunset, without any rest" (48). Hence, it is important to understand the relation of caste and labour in the constitution of caste habitus.

### **1.1. Caste Entangled with Labour**

The necessity for and the preservation of the caste system in the society is defended by many, even today, owing to the fact that the caste system allocates occupations to each caste group with the objective that when all castes perform their expected occupational roles, the society will function efficiently. Even Gandhi fought against untouchability but wanted to retain the caste system because he did not consider untouchability as the product of the caste system but instead "of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it" (*Harijan* 3). Gandhi stated that if the "moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified" and the four caste divisions of the society will thrive, "each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other (3).

Additionally, in the 1980 report on the reservation of government jobs for Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes, the Mandal Commission affirms that the “social ranks and their respective duties, ordained by God for humanity, were intended to remain fixed and unmovable. Like the limbs of the body they cannot properly exchange either their place or function” (qtd. in “Human Rights Watch Report” 29). This notion of the separation of caste as occupation alone also surfaces in a response from Gandhi to Dr. Ambedkar:

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger...The law of Varna teaches us that each one of us earns our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. (qtd. in “Human Rights Watch Report” 29)

This version of different but equal overlooks how upper castes view untouchables as polluted and polluting beings, as evidenced in Bama’s portrayal of food and water exchange, and how caste-defined occupations contribute to this idea of pollution. The Mandal Commission points out a ‘corollary’ that the “real triumph of the caste system lies not in upholding the supremacy of the Brahmin, but in conditioning the consciousness of the lower castes in accepting their inferior status in the ritual hierarchy as part of the natural order of things” (qtd. in “Human Rights Watch Report” 30).

Here, Gandhi’s firm belief in the equality of caste occupations where no occupation is low or high, is theoretically different from the caste habitus in practice, as pointed out by the Mandal Commission. Since Gandhi and the Mandal Commission refer to the society as

a human body, their logic of caste practices can be applied to the analogy of the human body. According to Gandhi's logic, all parts of the body are equal and are necessary for healthy and effective functioning of a human being. According to the Mandal Commission's logic, all parts of the body are equal yet it is always the limbs, particularly the legs, that are closer to the ground or dirt, hence, they can be easily polluted; while the head always remains further away from the ground, hence, away from pollution. Since there can be no changes in the arrangement of the parts of the human body, the roles given to each body part can also not be changed. Also, the Hindu religious association of caste identities are significant here, wherein Brahmins were created from Brahma's head, Kshatriya's from Brahma's arms, Vaishyas from Brahma's thighs, Shudras from Brahma's legs, and, as mentioned before, untouchables did not even belong to this order of creation. Theoretically, Gandhi's ideas are agreeable to some extent because all castes, just like all parts of the human body 'can be' considered equal, but in practice, some parts are more prone to defilement and pollution, and thus, castes associated with those parts are also seen to be more prone to defilement and pollution. Gandhi and the Mandal Commission's references to society as a human body thereby refuse the distinction of social construction/biological determinism that caste seeks to blur. The untouchability associated with Dalits is essentialised as caste habitus to project and maintain the caste hierarchy, which ensures that power and wealth concentrate at the top or at the head.

Importantly then the social ranks or duties associated with the caste divisions are understood and projected as division of labour. Ambedkar states that caste is defended on the grounds that it is "but another name for division of labour; and if division of labour is a necessary feature of every civilised society, then it is argued that there is nothing wrong in the caste system" (2014: 233). Thus, given that the occupational divide is the major

justification of the caste system, this section attempts to understand labour and its relationship to the caste system through a textual analysis of Bama's *Karukku*.

Bama's narrative portrays the labour of 'her people' and gives an insight into the specific work tasks undertaken by her community such as gathering firewood, working palm-leaves, and construction labour which includes "digging wells, carrying loads of earth, gravel, and stone" (48), making bricks and so on. Each form of labour has its own difficulties and even dangers, but her people nevertheless perform this work because they "have to do some work in order to eat" (Bama 48). Even children are forced to work after school or during school hours to help their households. Bama recalls the trials of collecting firewood with other children from the jungle as a little girl. Getting into the jungle was not easy because firstly, she would have to pay "four annas" (Bama 51) to the "'Guarder' or forester" (Bama 51) in order to be allowed to collect firewood; and secondly, she would have to "climb the steep mountain slopes one by one, pick up the dried pieces of wood" (Bama 51) that lay around and then tie these together into bundles. While doing this work, Bama would suffer injuries on the face, hair, arms and legs from the twigs and thorns. Her skin would be "all torn and bleeding" (51) and her hair would be entangled in the branches, nearly splitting her skull apart. Despite such physical hardship Bama recognises that worrying about these risks this will not help gather firewood (52). Hence, she and the other children would "push and shove and crawl" (52) their way - most times unsure which way - "through bushes and briars" (52). Once out of the jungle, getting all the heavy bundles home was another tedious journey. Some children would sell the bundles in the Naicker street "for seven or eight rupees" (Bama 52). On one occasion, Bama recalls seeing her mother vomit "vast globs of blood" (52) after collecting firewood. Bama tells how it was "only by toiling like this, without taking any account of their bodies as human flesh and blood, that people of [my] community could even survive" (52). Their bodies



“got their strength” (Bama 54) by working hard “night and day” (Bama 54) despite being injured and bruised from the “various kinds” (Bama 48) of work they do every day. The emphasis on the body as instrumental is striking here and the significance of the ‘body’ is detailed in the next chapter.

Fishing is another important means of livelihood as there are plenty of ponds that gush with water during the rainy season. Even given the abundance of fish, the differing economic conditions of the various caste groups make some types of fish affordable only to some. Bama states that:

People would catch any amount of fish by placing earthen pots just where the water flowed through. The streets overflowed with fish like silabi kendai, paaru kendai, keluti, ayirai, koravai, viraal. But in our street, we mostly bought and cooked curries out of silebi kendai and paambu kendai. Because that was the cheapest we could get. The upper castes bought and ate ayirai, keluti, and viraal. But we couldn’t afford to pay that much for what we ate. (3)

Bama narrates how, as soon as “the man who held the fishing rights for the pond went off for his meal”, everyone, regardless of age, “would whip out their fishing rods” (3). People would cook and eat the fish as soon as possible because their access to them was both opportunist and transgressive so if the “caretaker” caught them, then he would “confiscate all the fish and smash up the rods” (Bama 3). But, *Karukku* illustrates how the main livelihood of many Dalits is agricultural labour which includes “ploughing, manuring, watering, sowing the seed, separating the seedlings and planting them out; then, weeding, spraying the fields with fertilizer, reaping the grain, working on the threshing floors, planting groundnuts, selecting ripe coconuts” (Bama 48). Yet, despite their relentless

labour, fishing and agriculture prove not to be profitable occupations and Bama's community cannot earn enough to sustain themselves as these occupations are still bound by caste differences.

Putting Bama's narrative into its historical context is helpful here. According to the 1901 Census, agricultural workers formed "70 percent of the total population" which decreased to "60 percent" in 1952 (Kumar 61-63). Various castes served as agricultural labourers but the "majority were Dalits" with 64.2 percent among the total population of agricultural labourers (Kumar 61-63). Ambedkar states that the majority of the Indian population rely on agriculture but "the land-owning section of rural society is small compared to other countries" (1918: 455-79). Ambedkar believed that land-related issues such as land distribution and ownership could be solved by "raising capital and bringing the capitalist mode of production into agriculture" (475). Ambedkar states that:

our economic organisation is conspicuous by want of capital. Capital is but crystallised surplus; and surplus depends upon the proceeds of effort. But where there is no effort there is no earning, no surplus, and no capital... When there is no surplus in Indian agriculture, can we ever increase the capital? (475)

Consequently, most of the land in India remained uncultivated and most workers were forced to turn to barren lands. This resulted in "a surplus of agricultural workers" (Ravikumar 11) and the surplus labourers continued to consume despite their failure to contribute to production (Ravikumar 11). Overall, in the nineteenth century workers earned scanty wages "resulting in starvation, deaths and frequent famines" (Ravikumar 11). Moreover, the Land Reforms Act did not favour Dalits as land was given to those who could "take it on a lease, and Dalits, who were mostly agricultural labourers, did not have

the capital to do so” (Ravikumar 13). The 1991 Census recorded a percentage of 63.54 of Dalits serving as agricultural labourers and according to the *Annual Report 2000-2001* by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes make up 86.6 percent of the total population of bonded laborers (181). Bonded labour is also known as debt labour or forced labour which is “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” as per ILO Conventions on Forced Labour and related UN Conventions, ratified by India in 1951 (qtd. in Srivastava 1). Bonded labour is a creditor-debtor relationship between the employer and the employee but can also include other members of the family. Bonded labour relationships are usually reinforced by custom or force and are not merely economic contracts (Srivastava 2). In 1976, bonded labour was abolished in India through the Bonded Labour Slavery (Abolishing) Act. Despite this Act, the Union Ministry of Labour and Employment has recorded cases of bonded labour in modern India (“India’s Ignorance”).

Bama’s *Karukku* was originally written and published in 1992, and since she recalls her childhood experiences, certain societal practices that she portrays could be prior to the Bonded Labour Slavery (Abolishing) Act of 1976, and hence the society she portrays, openly practices bonded labour. Her community consists mostly of bonded agricultural labourers and she exposes the unequal and caste-tainted relationship between the workers and their uppercaste landlords. Since, more than “three-quarters of land” (Bama 48) in parts of her village are “in the hands of the Naickers” (Bama 48), people of her community work for the Naickers where each Paraya family is attached to a Naicker family, “as pannaiyaal, bonded labourers” (Bama 48). Bama mentions that it is only the Palla and Paraya communities that work in such a way. For example, the “Koravar or gypsies, and leather-working Chakkiliyar would sweep the streets, dredge and clean the drains” and

sometimes even “wove winnowing trays, boxes, baskets for carrying paddy, and chicken coops” (Bama 49). In this way her narrative illustrates how each sub-caste is designated specific tasks and jobs to perform in the society. This specific designation of occupation contributes to the designation and reinforcement of spatial boundaries wherein each caste/sub-caste resides in their respective streets, as pointed out earlier on.

Bama’s grandmother, whom she refers to as ‘Paatti’, not only works as a labourer for a Naicker family, but she is also a “Kotthaal” (49) because she hires labourers for the Naicker family - brings them to work, supervises them, and ensures that they receive their wages (49). Since Bama’s family are Christians, her grandmother would work every single day except for Sundays. Even as a child, Bama would work in the fields and in her household. Her community toils hard, yet however hard they pushed themselves, they wouldn’t earn “more than five rupees” (50). Their working lives are governed by caste dynamics as they take what they are given and are not allowed to go to their homes in the evenings, until the Naickers have taken their share. Even when they return to their houses at dusk, it is only to toil again although this time for themselves.

*Karukku* offers detailed pictures of labouring bodies within a caste-driven system. For example, Bama explains the ordeal of shelling groundnuts. The dried groundnuts are measured “by the marakkaal” (Bama 50-51) by the Naickers. Then, the groundnut shells are broken by smashing them against the floor using both hands. If Bama and her grandmother were in a hurry, then they would use both hands as well as their teeth to shell. Bama explains that using their teeth would cause dust to fill up in the mouth resulting in choking. Bama explains their ordeal by asking the rhetorical question, “But could anyone afford to bother about all that? We had to work as hard as we could to shell all the nuts” (51). The term ‘afford’ implies the purposeful lack of attention given to personal health because of the necessity to earn a living. This in turn implies how the wealthy can afford to

take care of their bodies and health while communities such as the Paraya must disregard such health-risk factors in order to survive. This brings out the difference in the reasons for labour depending on caste hierarchy. The upper caste communities work or get work done to maintain their economic position and wealth, and to expand their wealth. The lower caste communities toil hard to survive every day. Hence, lower caste communities cannot afford to express their grief, sorrow and pain because expressing their emotions do not help them earn a living. They feel their emotions but hardly express them because they cannot afford to. The upper caste communities can afford to show their emotions because it is not a matter of life and death for them and hence, can be demanding.

The relationship between the stifled expression of negative emotions and the possibilities for social change are pointed out by Arundhati Roy who states that farmers cannot “afford” strikes because the seed “must be sown, when it must be sown, the crop must be harvested when it must be harvested” and through this, the labourer “must be terrorised into abject submission, into being available when he must be available” (99).

Roy also questions:

How do landlords force labourers, generation after generation to toil night and day on subsistence wages? Why would an Untouchable labourer, who is not allowed to even dream of being a landowner one day, put his or her life at the landlord’s disposal, to plough the land, to sow seed and harvest the crop, if it were not out of sheer terror of the punishment that awaits the wayward? (99)

Imposing a fear of punishment on Dalits could be seen not only to impose the position of power held by upper castes but also to remind the Dalits of their low status in the society.

In this way, being yelled at and being beaten by the upper caste landlords seem normalised

by ideas of caste entitlement, contributing to caste habitus. For example, if many of the groundnuts are broken while removing the shells, then the Naickers would be “furious” (Bama 51) and would hurl abuses at the workers. The workers do not revolt or hurl abuses back because they have accepted the differences in caste positions and are aware of the lack of power their lower caste status holds. This subsequently gives more power to the upper castes. Yet again, we can see the relational process of sustaining the caste system.

Despite their gruelling labours, the Naickers would only give her family “five to ten paisa per marakkaal” (Bama 51). Bama stresses that they “didn’t make much money this way” yet they would still shell groundnuts to earn the menial “five or six rupees” (51). After toiling hard and suffering blows on the bodies, the lower caste people are not paid enough and “they never received a payment that was appropriate to their labour” (Bama 54). Bama provides instances of how her community’s labour is exploited through scanty wages and exploitative merchants. For example, Bama mentions that whatever her family made or picked, they would sell it in the shops. Men from the Nadar community would set up shops in Bama’s street, “weigh the grain, and take it in exchange for tapioca or some such other goods” (53). Bama mentions that her community didn’t even realise that they were “swindled during these bartering sessions” (53). Similarly, when they gather cotton and exchange it for goods, the tradesmen “always managed to collect several bundles of cotton or grain for themselves by cheating” (Bama 53). Bama points out that her community’s “hard work was exploited half the time” (53) by their Naicker employers and the rest of time, they were swindled by tradesmen. Bama asks, “So how was it possible for us to make any progress?” (53). Bama feels that “there is no way at all for the Dalit who sticks to fair methods, and toils hard all her life, to make good” (53) when they are paid less, nakedly exploited, and forced to continue labouring without positive changes or progress in any aspect of their life.

Notably, Bama's choice of the feminine personal pronoun, 'her' when referring to her collective community, seems deliberate because Bama mentions that even if men and women "did the same work, men received one wage, women received another. They always paid men more" (55) and Bama contests this inequality by gently pointing out that she "could never understand why" (55). This intersection between caste, class and gender is interesting especially since there is "no significant change in the relationship between the work one does and the caste to which one belongs" (Ravikumar 8). They are identified as Dalits, collectively, regardless of gender and so paying men and women differently does not change the collective lower caste identity or the workload. The difference in wages could be because bodies of Dalit women are viewed as less valuable and hence, more exploitable. This relation between caste and the Dalit woman's body is looked at in the next chapter.

Furthermore, Dalits are "inextricably tied to the land but do not have any right over it" (Ravikumar 8) because land may be bought and sold between different upper caste individuals but Dalit communities continue to toil on the land as bonded labourers, without owning land. The practice of untouchability was exploited by landlords to keep Dalits as bonded labourers as they have been conditioned to accept that their lower caste status and employment situations will not change, as stated in the 'corollary' of the Mandal Commission. The abjected position of Dalits is maintained by upper castes through denial of suitable monetary compensation and employment opportunities, resulting in no progress and limited changes in their lifestyle. Bama's narrative exposes how Dalits earn less and eat the "same kuuzh every day", "same broken-grain gruel", and the "same watery dried-fish curry" (55).

However, Bama also points out that Dalits do not "reflect upon their own terrible state of affairs" because they do not have the time to (Bama 55). This active repression of

reflection could be a means for survival or Bama could also be hinting that reflection is a luxury reserved for the privileged who can *afford* it. Bama challenges her readers to wonder “how the upper castes would survive without these people” because it is only when Bama’s people “fall asleep at night that their arms and legs are still” otherwise they are “at work all other times” (55). Here, the structural dependency of upper castes on lower castes is exposed, while dominant casteist practices and perspectives only highlight the dependency of lower castes on upper castes. Bama further asserts the extremity of her people’s labouring lives by describing how they will continue to work “until the moment of death” in order to “even half fill their bellies” (55). Bama’s use of visual images stresses the fact that Dalits are shockingly underpaid and hence live in perpetual poverty and hunger, to such an extent that they would never be able to experience a full stomach.

Poverty has been a constant in this kind of work on account of the caste system and the ways in which its mechanisms mean that the “lower classes of Hindus have been completely disabled for direct action” (Roy 99). As mentioned before, caste divisions are often represented as divisions of labour sanctioned by the Hindu religion and performed for generations by the society. These divisions are constructed as duties or social obligations performed by individuals and caste collectives. Yet as Ambedkar points out the “division of labour is not spontaneous” (2014: 234) and is certainly not based on “choice” (235). Most of the labours performed by lower caste communities are regarded as “degraded by the Hindus” (Ambedkar 236) and hence, discrimination based on occupation is an entrenched stigma in a caste-based society. In the working paper, “Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Indigenous People and Minorities” (2001) submitted to the United Nations Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, Rajendra Kalidas Wimala Goonesekere states that discrimination based “on descent manifests itself most notably in caste- (or tribe-) based distinctions” (4) as the occupation



associated with a person results in the discrimination of the person. Goonesekere states that the persons “who perform the least desirable jobs in a society are often victims of double discrimination, suffering first from the nature of the work they must perform and suffering again by the denial of their rights because they perform work that is unacceptable” (4). Such discrimination based on descent targets those who are members of an “endogamous social group that has been isolated socially and occupationally from other groups in the society” (Goonesekere 4). Thus, the lower caste communities are discriminated against because of their caste status which is directly aligned with the kind of labour they do. In this way, the Dalits are trapped in the *caste loop* where they are compelled to do the specific work as part of their caste duty, yet this work does not provide them with decent wages to escape poverty and neither do they have the opportunity to change occupation. Roy states that these people were “condemned to be ploughmen- and they were never allowed to convert their ploughshares into swords” (99) hence, forcing caste-based communities to live a life of poverty and hard labour without much means of social progression.

Bama’s narrative details how her community is expected to fulfil their occupational duties such as farming, fishing, and so on, while observing their caste-based position and practices. As stated before, caste-based practices are repeated performances over time and space, and upper caste and lower caste groups are expected to perform their respective roles in reinforcing caste hierarchies. The question arises then of whether ‘caste roles’ are defined by boundaries rather than the labour performed (occupational duties)? And whether caste roles are symbolically and ideologically constituted, and subsequently mapped onto labour divisions?

In Bama’s narrative, we can observe that caste roles and occupational duties are similar yet different. As mentioned before, each Parayar family is attached to one Naicker family

as labourers. Each Paraya person is expected to know their limitations and *boundaries*. For example, Bama worked for the Naickers and she was aware that she “should not touch their goods or chattels”, or “come close to where they were”, and “always stand away to one side” to observe the purity/ pollution distinction (53). Bama says that she “often felt pained and ashamed” by these “rules” yet, there was “nothing” she could do (53). Bama was aware that the Naickers “belonged to a higher caste” and hence the threshold of ‘touch’ was strictly observed. Such observances and practices can be considered as caste roles which are not the same as occupational duties which include fishing, agricultural labour, and so on. The relegation of occupation and the denial of any other forms of employment other than that which their caste ‘essentially’ does, is an ideological strategy to ensure caste hierarchies. The performance of caste roles is symbolic, just like the elder handing out food through a string to avoid touch. The string itself would have been touched by the elder yet the distanced handing out of the food reinforces the symbolic nature of caste divides. Such roles are performative, as it involves a performance of some sort, be it the handing of food through a thread or tipping of food or water from one vessel to the other. Even Bama’s act of not touching anything in the Naicker household is performative as it is a symbolic observance of caste ideologies.

Furthermore, Bama states that the Naickers also “had money” (53) which made them superior by caste and class. So far, it is evident that the division of labour is accompanied by caste divisions based on constructions of purity and pollution. Yet this intersection of caste (roles) and class (occupational duties, wealth, land) in Bama’s narrative points to the caste system as not just a division of labour but “*also a division of labourers*” (Ambedkar 2014: 233). Ambedkar states that a civilised society “undoubtedly needs division of labour” (233) but in no other civilised society is there “a division of labour accompanied by this unnatural division of labourers into watertight compartments” (233-234) with “a

hierarchy in which the divisions of labourers are graded one above the other” (Ambedkar 234). Ambedkar states that such a “gradation of labourers” along with the division of labour exists in no other country (234), in which the hierarchy of labour is graded through a caste system. Bama exposes the cruel reality of this system and how, once born into a lower caste household, one is “forced to live a life of humiliation and degradation until death” (Bama 26). She further corrects herself and states that even after death, “caste-difference does not disappear” (26). The division of people or labourers and the “long string of interpellations” (Butler 1995: 203) begin at birth and continue even after death. Indeed, Bama reveals in her narrative that even the cemeteries are segregated in the caste-ridden society. The Christians’ burial ground is next to the Chaaliyaar community school but only Dalits bury [their] dead there” (Bama 29). The upper-caste Christians have cemetery exclusive to them. Eventually, a fight broke out between the Chaaliyaar community and Bama’s community over the actual claim to the cemetery. Bama here portrays tensions fostered between the sub-castes such as Chaaliyaar and Parayar because the Chaaliyaar community “apparently” had “much more by way of land, property, and money” and “their possessions” made them “so uppity” (30). The economic differences between sub-castes of the Dalit community replicates the structure of divisive hierarchies. The Mandal Commission report provides a helpful context here as it “identified 3,743 sub-castes as being socially and educationally backward” (Rajendra 5).

Importantly though, these sub-hierarchies do not change the fact that all of the subcastes are viewed by upper castes under an umbrella identity of Dalit. The slightly better economic situation in comparison with other lower caste communities does not affect or change their caste status. The irony is that the sub-castes discriminate against each other on the basis of caste while being collectively discriminated by the upper castes, (thus reducing the grounds for solidarity and resistance). Bama mentions that such inter-caste troubles

prevent the unification of lower caste communities. The sub-hierarchies keep the Dalits divided into sub-castes and hinders their unification against caste discrimination. There are altercations between the Pallar and Parayar communities as well. Bama records how “a hundred times a second there are scuffles amongst them” (47) and how the communities “fight to death one moment; the next moment they join together again” (47). Such strife is ridiculed by the upper-caste men who “laugh at them” (Bama 47). Bama mentions that instead of “uniting together in a village of many castes” (47), these men fight and kill each other for no significant reason creating more losses to their respective communities. Bama calls for solidarity in and through her narrative on several occasions demanding a unification of every lower caste individual and community, to fight against caste discrimination. Bama’s call for solidarity/unity shows her awareness that regardless of sub-castes, Dalits are collectively identified and there is potential strength in claiming this collective identity. Her constant use of collective first-person pronouns such as ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ shows her individual narrative voice as an expression of her collective Dalit identity and her objective of constructing a discursive community.

As shown in several examples before, even children do not escape the divisions of caste and class but instead are forced to believe at a young age that they are subjected to the “dogma of predestination” (Ambedkar 2014: 235). Labour exploitation is a key element of their discrimination. Bama states that at an age “when they should be going to school, studying like everyone else and playing about in the evenings, they are shut up inside the factories instead” (Bama 55). Her work narrates that for “these little ones’ fate is the smell of matchbox solution, not the smell of knowledge or learning. How can they afford to study, when it is such a struggle even to fill their bellies?” (Bama 55). Here, the olfactory image of the ‘matchbox solution’ in contrast to the image and metaphor of the ‘smell of knowledge’ exposes not only the denial of equal opportunity to study but also their fate of

being trapped in unhealthy and toxic environments such as factories. The factory also stands as a metaphor for the caste system itself because Dalits are trapped in the caste system which is an unhealthy and toxic environment. Her literary exposure of child labour paints a horrifying picture of the plight of Dalit children.

The designation of occupation according to caste rather than acquired skills or chosen ambition is seen as anti-progressive by Ambedkar who makes the argument that “social and individual efficiency requires us to develop the capacity of an individual to the point of competency to choose and to make his own career. This principle is violated in the caste system, in so far as it involves an attempt to appoint tasks to individuals in advance-selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the social status of the parents” (2014: 234). Ambedkar’s argument echoes John Dewey’s ideas in *Democracy and Education* (1916). As pointed out by Mukherjee (2009) and in the annotated critical edition of *The Annihilation of Caste* (2014), Dewey’s thoughts are “deeply embedded” in Ambedkar’s “consciousness” (Mukherjee 347, Ambedkar 234-240). Dewey states:

A democratic criterion requires us to develop capacity to the point of competency to choose and make its own career. This principle is violated when the attempt is made to fit individuals in advance for definite industrial callings, selected not on the basis of trained original capacities, but on that of the wealth or social status of parents. (qtd. in Mukherjee 364)

Given that the caste system does not permit “readjustment of occupations” and individuals are forced to take up jobs that “belong to them by heredity” (Ambedkar 2014: 235), as Dewey states, individuals are made to fit into definite callings rather than to select their occupation based on individual capacity and competency. Furthermore, most jobs

allocated to the lower castes bear a social stigma and subsequently occupational mobility is frozen as there is a “constant desire to evade and escape from such occupations, which arises solely because of the blighting effect which they produce upon those who follow them, owing to the slight and stigma cast upon them by the Hindu religion” (Ambedkar 236). Through access to respected work and better-paid labour, Dalits hope to escape the shadow of caste prejudices that affect them in all spheres of life. Hence, work becomes “the means to achieve goals that are not confined to the workplace but intrude in all spheres of life” (Ravikumar 102), particularly in the economic and social sphere. The idea of a better job resulting in better pay and in turn respect in the society also needs careful consideration. But their hopes are thwarted precisely because as stated before, it is the caste system’s function to obstruct such a possibility. The entanglement of caste and class precludes it because caste is not determined by occupation, but rather occupations are merely assigned and thereby practiced for decades according to the injurious logic of caste.

Thus, even an improved economic situation that might mean a change or rise ‘class position’ does not necessarily change the existing ‘class status’ because the caste status remains unchanged. Occupation then becomes a red herring wherein the logic of allocating and performing their respective occupational duties is used to dominate certain groups and keep the power concentrated in the hands of a few upper castes. Class is entangled with caste, but caste is more important to India and hence, caste overdetermines class. Then, let us disentangle caste and class by looking at caste through the language of class.

## 1.2. Disentangling Caste and Class

As shown in the introductory chapter, the caste system is “constructed by religion and divided by occupation” (Anderson 154). Ambedkar refers to the caste system as a “closed class” (Moon 15) because each caste group is bound to the duties, practices, customs and occupations of their respective caste group. Inter-caste marriages were not allowed in order to prevent an intermingling or dilution of caste groups beyond the existing caste-bound relations. The concepts of purity and pollution are central to the caste structure and are allotted in relation to the occupation each caste performs - as stated before, some occupations came to bear the stigma of the purity and pollution dyad. The upper castes were priests, warriors, business people and merchants while the lower castes were agricultural labourers who owned a little or no land of their own. Apart from farming, “many but not all were traditionally bound by certain caste occupations” (Shah 196) such as scavenging, leather work, hair-cutting, washing, weaving of baskets, and so on. Strictly adhering to caste-relegated occupations was part of the jajmani system which was a feudalistic agricultural system governing the production and distribution of goods and services based on “caste duties and land” (Rao 877). But, as Rao argues “land tenure is the power-determinant within the jajmani system” (877) structured according to two roles: jajman and kamin. The upper castes mostly fall into the jajman (owners) category while lower castes take up the role of the kamins (workers). The jajmani system is exploitative because the jajmans control who possesses the land depending on how much land they already own; and this ownership allows them to gain “economic-numerical-political power, custom, dogma, superiority in numbers, political connection” (Rao 877), all of which are predominantly always in favour of the upper castes, leaving the lower castes in constant subordination and economic deprivation. The system was practiced extensively during the first half of the twentieth century and it shows “how the concept of purity and

pollution” (Rao 877) intrinsic to caste has long determined not only work-relations but also a way of living, forming a complex matrix (877) of economics, culture and politics.

Caste as a way of living or caste habitus is an important concept because it highlights the social aspect of caste wherein everyday practices of caste legitimise the existence of the caste system. For instance, Bama shows that the clothes worn every day, the kind of food one eats, the size and location of a person’s residence influence the respect and dignity one receives from others. Bama initially wonders how “children belonging to other communities always had fine clothes and good food” and “realized” then that it was these children and their families “who had the money” (73) in a typical strategy of presenting her own raised consciousness to the reader in order to guide theirs. She further narrates that her community was lower-caste and hence, she “had no money” (73). It bothers her that her people “never seem to be able to have that cash in hand” (76) no matter how hard they toil. The intersection between caste and class with regards to possession of material assets such as money, clothing, food, land or property can be noticed here. These concepts come into play every day and hence have great social significance/consequence. In the case of lower castes, they “live on gruel every day”, “wear nothing more than a couple of rags”, and “they own neither property nor land nor even a decent house to live in” (Bama 77). Bama uses a simile to convey how hard her people work, writing that “they wear themselves out like potsherd” (77) and still their efforts contribute “only for the good of the rich” (77). In the hostel attached to the school where Bama lived and studied, she saw class differences in the food brought from home and the clothes worn by the children. She assumed that the children who wore “fine clothes” (73) and had “nice things to eat” (73) were “all upper-caste children” (73). Bama’s assumption reflects the aforementioned idea that being upper caste instantly implies being wealthy because of the repeatedly performed and naturalised/accepted powerful role of the upper caste as owner or jajman. The



occupations of the upper castes ensure that they remain economically superior to the lower castes. The occupational divide practiced for generations ensures superiority of upper caste groups and subordination of lower caste groups, economically. Then, caste develops a symbolic or ideological status with regards to economic power, which this thesis refers to as *class status*.

Class status of caste groups are determined by their position in the caste hierarchy because wealth and economic power is unequally divided in the caste system because of, as mentioned before, specific occupations assigned to and practiced for generations by caste groups. For decades, the higher castes have had better-earning jobs including ownership of land which have helped them amass a great deal of wealth, and in turn economic power; while lower castes have remained bonded labourers and daily wage workers, earning much less than higher castes. Just as how social power is concentrated among upper castes because of the ‘naturalised’ association and identification of caste superiority with higher castes (by upper and lower castes), economic power is concentrated among the upper castes because of ‘naturalised’ association and identification of class superiority with higher castes (by upper and lower castes). This is evident in Bama’s assumption that the children who wore ‘fine clothes’ and ate ‘nice things’ are upper caste because only they can *afford* it, while lower caste children ‘live on gruel’ and wear rags. In this way, *the caste status of an individual is entangled with a class status*. For example, the lower the position of a caste in the caste hierarchy, the lower the class status of that caste. Similarly, the higher the caste position, the higher the class status. So, class status is determined by the wealth and in turn, power, that is already assumed to be possessed by the caste group and stabilized over an expanded period of time – usually over several decades. This means that the individuals born into the caste groups are *simultaneously born into a particular class status* associated with those respective caste groups. Thus, the

idea of 'class status' is proportionately linked to caste ranking and consequently, possession of economic power.

This does not mean that class status and caste are interchangeable because class status is yet another symbolic or ideological idea that generates yet another relative binary of high class/low class like purity/pollution, which are essentialised into the fabric of the caste system to redeem and maintain the discriminating practices encouraged by caste hierarchies. For example, one of the ways caste hierarchies are maintained is by essentialising the idea that one is born into a caste group and hence, shifting from one caste group to the other is impossible. Then, shifting from one class status to the other is not possible either because the class status is determined by the caste ranking. Also, as mentioned before, caste hierarchy can be maintained with accumulation of power, which includes economic power that enables ownership of land, "economic-numerical-political power, custom, dogma, superiority in numbers, political connection" (Rao 877). There is nothing essentially economically superior about any caste groups yet the idea that upper castes are economically superior is an ideological act to ensure that ideas associated with economic power, even if upper caste individuals become poor, remain within the upper caste collective, in order to defend caste superiority. As mentioned before, the idea of caste superiority/ inferiority is part of the caste habitus and is already recognised by upper castes and lower castes through Hindu religious perspectives of the formation of the caste system, and repeated daily performances. So, economic status is not the only way to maintain caste hierarchy, but economic status or class status adds on to the intersectional nature of caste bodies. For example, the intersection of caste, class and gender allow upper caste men to have more power, while the same intersectional areas oppress Dalit women, three times as much. The idea of intersectionality of Dalit and non-Dalit bodies are explored in detail in the following chapter.

Hence, lower castes could earn money and become wealthy yet their lower caste status which determines their class status does not change. Similarly, upper caste people's class status remains less affected with decrease in wealth and possessions. This is because a decrease or increase in wealth and possessions does not necessarily change the class status because it does not have an effect on caste status. Then, what changes is the *class position* and not the class status. A rise in wealth and change in economic situation does not affect class status of a caste group but changes the class position of the *individual* who has acquired wealth in the form of money, assets, land or property. *Class status relates to the collective identity of the caste group, specifically caste ranking and control of power; while the class position relates to an individual's economic situation at a specific moment which need not be associated with caste ranking and/ or control of power.* Also, class position is not hereditary (like class status) and is linked to the economic situation or mobility of an individual at a specific temporal moment. So, caste groups should collectively move up and down the scale in order to bring about changes in the caste hierarchy because a change in caste status could bring about changes in class status while acquiring wealth alone does not change caste status. This is precisely why caste and class are entangled but they are not interchangeable because change in caste ranking can change class ranking/ status but not necessarily vice-versa, as evidenced by Bama's reflections that again foreground a constructed naivety that demands answers to inequality:

How did the upper caste become so elevated? How is it that we have been denigrated? They possess money; we do not. If we were wealthy too, wouldn't we learn more, and make more progress than they do? But when it comes to it, even if we are as good as they are, or even better, because of this one issue of caste alone, we are forced to suffer pain and humiliation. (27)

Here, the *translation of caste into a class register exposes what 'caste' tries to conceal, namely a distinction between caste (as class status) and class (as position)* that is not otherwise apparent simply by opposing the term 'caste' with class. Even if a Dalit acquires enough wealth to pass it down to their heirs, their class status remains unchanged because of their identification with a collective caste group. Even if Dalits disidentify from their respective lower caste groups, without relational disidentification, non-Dalits will continue to associate Dalits with their lower caste status and hence, lower class status.

Additionally, the relation between caste and class shows the effects of caste ranking (which is ideological) on class structures (as economic formations). We can observe this relation in Bama's narrative of the 'Warden-Sister' of the hostel attached to the school who "could not abide low-caste or poor children" (Bama 20). When the children returned to school after the holidays, she would point out that the 'Cheri' children are "just skin and bone" when they live at home but when they stay at the hostel, "they eat their fill and look as round as potatoes" (Bama 20). Bama felt such comments to be "really embarrassing" especially since she and other Cheri children paid their fees "like everyone else" (20) for the food and school provisions, yet they were singled out. Bama illustrates how paying equal fees does not guarantee equal treatment because Dalit children are lower in caste and class status and hence the Warden-Sister fears no punishment or consequence for discriminating against them. The acceptance of the lower caste status of the Dalits and their lack of wealth to fight injustices makes them vulnerable to discrimination and unequal treatment. The lack of wealth is related to their class status as a lower caste group. Thus, the entanglement of caste and class in Bama's narrative exposes denial of equal opportunities and continuing oppression caused by existing caste and class identifications.

Another element of the symbolic or ideological framework that constitutes caste identities and habitus, as distinct from the division of labour is the *dogma of predestination*, that prevents Dalits from progressing whereas those in possession of wealth and ownership of land practice the right to own their *dignity*. Hence, the lower castes do not own their dignity and are dependent on how much dignity is offered by the upper castes, in the same way that they are dependent on the leftovers from the food they labour to produce. Bama's brother, whom she refers to as 'annan' in her narrative, affirms those "born into the Paraya jati" (17) are stripped of "honour or dignity or respect" (17). Bama wonders if there is "even hope for luxuries" (77) when they can only "contrive to live a life of moderate comfort" (77). Dalits remain unable to earn well and progress because they are locked into essentializing identifications that seep into every part of their life. Even if the Dalits become wealthy, their caste identity which already has a class status attached to it only allows them temporary upward mobility in terms of class position. The class status remains the same and caste discrimination continues. While their wealth enables them access to education and jobs, it does not change their caste and class status. Bama states that, consequently, "it doesn't seem to matter whether people are educated or not" because they are "filled with caste hatred" (27). This disparity between class status and class position exposes the social aspect of caste because superiority in caste and class status is not only determined by economic power but also by social power. Ambedkar asserts that "No student of the human society can accept that economic power is the only kind of power" (2014: 227). Wealth and power determine class status while wealth alone determines class position, and those who possess power to control the society are an important part of the caste system.

Thus, associating class status (based on caste ranking) with class position can be seen as an *ideological move* to ensure that the social power remains in the hands of the upper/

dominant sectors of the social order, in order thereby to control everyday practices and transactions. This is because caste ensures that social power is collectively retained in the hands of the upper castes despite any economic gains by individuals from the lower castes, or economic loss suffered by individuals from the upper castes. Maintaining such control over social power thus ensures that lower caste people remain in perpetual servitude especially since Dalits' "freedom lies in toppling the existing order" (Ravikumar 106), not maintaining it. In this way, the Dalits remain stuck in the caste loop, and their agency is attenuated. The relation between caste and class sheds light on the limited power Dalits have to disidentify with the caste system, and it calls attention to the problem of relational disidentification - not just how but *why* would the upper castes wish to disidentify with the caste system.

Furthermore, Ambedkar's analysis of caste structures responds to Karl Marx's call to the proletariats to unite because they have "nothing to lose but their chains" (*The Communist Manifesto*) by drawing attention to "the artful way in which the social and religious rights are distributed among the different castes, whereby some have more and some have less" (2014: 295) and how this "makes the slogan of Karl Marx quite useless to excite the Hindus against the caste system" (295). Castes form "a graded system of sovereignties, high and low, which are jealous of their status and which know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do" (Ambedkar 295-296). Ambedkar further explains that people will not be a part of a revolution "for the equalisation of property" unless they are assured that once the revolution reaches its desired end, they will be "treated equally, and that there will be no discrimination of caste and creed" (232). The point being that economic equality (revolution in class position through the collapse of a class structure) will not necessarily lead to social equality for Dalits because of the caste structure and in turn, class status.

Everyone might have the same wealth and property, but the caste system will enable the hierarchies of class status to persist, thereby keeping Dalits unequal and subordinate.

Thus, Ambedkar posits that an “economic motive is not the only motive” (227) for action and activism. Ambedkar asks a question (aimed at mostly socialists): Can you have economic reform without first bringing about a reform of the social order?” (231). But, can there be a reform of the social order without economic reform? Is the relationship between the two a dialectical one? Dalits are at the bottom of the caste and class scale and hence, are less powerful, socially, economically and politically. When talking about caste in Tamil Nadu, Chatterjee points out that in the present times, sticking to *Manusmriti* and the age-old ideological notions caste will not suffice, because the fact is that “caste today is not about ritual and religion and scripture”, but is rather “about contemporary politics, about relations to the state, how one's represented in the political arena, all of those questions” (Chatterjee 1999: 420). The conflicts now with regards to caste are “almost exclusively centred on the relative positions of different caste groups in relation to the state” (Chatterjee 1998: 300). Even rights and laws are politically enforced as they are a result and function of a political system, and law does not transcend it. The intersection between law and politics is addressed later on.

Once again, we can see the intersectional nature of caste wherein caste, class, gender, and other areas intersect to make caste an entangled network of oppression. Ambedkar states that if the source of power and dominion is “social and religious” at any specific time or space, “then social and religious reform must be accepted as the necessary sort of reform” (2014: 230). His argument is that an economic reform alone is not sufficient to liberate Dalits because it would only mean a change in class position. The class status and its link to caste status is an ideological social connection. For generations, Dalits and non-Dalits have believed in caste superiority being attached to higher class status especially

with occupations being segregated and assigned. Since the caste system did not allow for any readjustment of occupations, caste was “a direct cause of much of the unemployment” in India till the early 1900s. Hence, as “an economic organisation”, caste was “a harmful institution” (Ambedkar 236) to the country. After independence, in 1947, modern India promised Dalits access to several types of jobs. This allowed many Dalits to work in a range of professions and also scale the economic ladder, yet they remain discriminated against because of the social dimension of caste (status). Ambedkar states that one cannot achieve political or even economic reform without killing the “monster” that is caste (233). The metaphor of a monster and its application in the context of caste possibly refers to the social aspect of the caste system, wherein everyday performances of caste roles entrench and enshrine the caste inequalities. Hence, an intersectional approach to reformation becomes significant with social reform necessary along with economic and political reform in order to rid the society of caste-based identifications.

Importantly, Bama’s narrative does address the possibility for social reform in its presentation of educational opportunities. Bama’s brother advised her to “study and make progress” so that they can throw away the “indignities” (Bama 18) imposed on them by the upper castes. Education becomes significant because it is a way towards other occupations with better pay and respect. For instance, Bama mentions that “only a few of the teachers’ families lived in any degree of comfort” (49) indicating that occupations such as teaching (which is not an ancestral occupation of the Paraya community or other lower caste groups because teaching and priestly duties were associated with Brahmins), could better their standard of living (class position). Hence, education could become the route to access more jobs or opportunities through which Dalits can disidentify with the caste status and re-identify with positive positions and labels. However, the education of Dalits as individuals or a collective is not sufficient to alter the caste and class status, even if it is



necessary, and might help some Dalits to alter their class position. Thus, education of Dalits could help in autochthonous disidentification and re-identification of Dalits, but need not enable relational disidentification and re-identification, which is as important as autochthonous disidentification and re-identification, because caste habitus stretches onto several spheres of life even education. So, the next section looks at caste practices in educational and religious institutions.

### **1.3. Caste Performances within Educational and Religious Institutions**

Through her recollection of experiences as a student, a teacher, and a nun, Bama portrays the intersection of caste and class within educational institutions such as schools and colleges; as well as religious institutions such as the Catholic Church. Bama points out that the “Harijan children” were looked at as “contemptible” (18) even though the school comprised of “about three-quarters” of students from the “Pallar and Parayar communities” (18). Strangely enough, the priests had built the school on Nadar street, like the church, and the priests also resided on the same upper caste street. The school “always spoke bad” about the people of her caste. If anything went wrong, they would blame the “Cheri children” without hesitation (Bama 18). Also, the school authorities used the lower caste children “for cheap labour” (Bama 18) such as carrying water to their teacher’s house, watering the plants, and doing all the chores that were needed about the school (18). Dalit children are forced to labour because of their existing caste status which prevents them from studying and in turn, progressing. The children do what they are told to do because “there are many who patiently accept and endure their hard lives” believing in the aforementioned ‘dogma of predestination’, “consoling themselves that this was the destiny given them, that they cannot see a way to change the caste they were born into, nor the poverty that is part of that caste, nor indeed the humiliation of it all” (Bama 80). As said

before, adult subjectivities can be more constrained whereas children's subjectivities have a radical potential, which is evidenced in the role-playing games children engage in. But, children themselves are subjected to limitations and discriminations, which slowly builds up over time to constrain their radical subjectivities because caste does not allow for imagining other lives.

Furthermore, Bama reveals how ashamed she and "all the Harijan children" (21) felt when they were asked to stand up during an assembly or during lessons, "in front of nearly two thousand children" (21). They would hang their "heads in shame" as if they had committed a crime. Bama states, "Yes, it was humiliating" (21). This affirmative statement commencing with a 'Yes' as if responding to a question, brings out the conversational tone of the narrative. Bama is conversing with her target audience, which is certainly Dalits, but perhaps also *non-Dalits* thereby enabling relational disidentification. Her experiences are mostly narrated using the collective first person 'we' clearly showing that her narrative is representative of her Paraya community and all other Dalit communities. She already narrates with the assumption that her experiences are not just hers but also of many Dalits. Hence, Bama's affirmative response could be directed to the imaginary question that could have been asked by non-Dalits who are suddenly exposed to the Dalit's perspective and are also being called out.

Moreover, Bama mentions that when she is awarded a prize for scoring the best marks among all Harijan pupils, she is not "embarrassed to be singled out as Harijan" (21). She feels "pleased" and "a certain pride then, a desire to prove" (21) that Harijan children "could study just as well as others, and to make progress" (21). So Bama studies "hard" with all her "breath and being, in a frenzy almost" (18). She even stood first in class and as a result, becomes friends with more people even though she is "a Paraichi" (18). Bama successfully completes her schooling and goes off to study in a college. She thought that

since she is far away from her village in a big college with students from various backgrounds and differences, “nobody would bother about such things as caste” (21). But Harijan students are again asked to stand because “the government has arranged that Scheduled Caste students should get special tuition in the evenings” (Bama 22). Bama and another student stand up only to hear the other students whispering with “a titter of contempt” (22). Bama is “filled with a sudden rage” (22) and she rejects the offer immediately. But it also struck her that she “would not be rid of this caste business easily” (22) no matter what she studies or where she went. So even measures ostensibly designed to tackle caste discrimination and privilege, become a vehicle for the everyday humiliation that reinforces caste hierarchy.

Another instance is when Bama is travelling on the bus and women ask which street she is travelling from/to, and once they get to know of the street and in turn caste, the women would “move elsewhere” (20) or demand Bama to “move off to another seat” (20). But Bama would settle into her seat “even more firmly” (20) forcing the women to stand all the way to their stop which they preferred rather than sitting beside any woman from the ‘Cheri’. In *Weapons of the Weak* (1985), James Scott explores “everyday forms of peasant resistance - the prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. Most forms of this struggle stop well short of outright collective defiance” (xvi). Scott mentions that such modes of resistance “require little or no coordination or planning; they make use of implicit understandings and informal networks; they often represent a form of individual self-help; they typically avoid any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority” (xvi). In this way, everyday resistance, such as Bama’s refusal to move to another seat, is different from other forms of resistance in “its implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals. Where institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change,

everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains” (Scott 33). Scott further explains that the “success of de facto resistance is often directly proportional to the symbolic conformity with which it is masked” (33). Open resistance incites “a more rapid and ferocious response” than an implicit resistance or insubordination “that may be as pervasive but never ventures to contest the formal definitions of hierarchy and power” (Scott 33). Such forms of resistance come as a relief to those subordinate classes (and caste) which historically “have had little prospect of improving their status, this form of resistance has been the only option. What may be accomplished within this symbolic straitjacket is nonetheless something of a testament to human persistence and inventiveness” (Scott 33).

Additionally, Bama states, with a tone of sarcasm, that the women would “be polluted, apparently” (20) if they sat next to someone from the lower caste. Bama wonders how people consider Dalits to be “too gross even to sit next to when travelling” (27). Bama did not even pretend to be of a different caste to avoid such situations because it is still “all the same” and the pain she felt is “not a trifling one” (21). This refusal to move or pretend to have a different caste could also be viewed as a resistance, using the fear of pollution to effect a minor humiliation on the woman. In the case of Dalits, Harper (1968) mentions that lifelong indentured servants express discontent in the way they are treated “by performing their work carelessly and inefficiently” (48-49). The upper caste employer or “master could retaliate by refusing to give his servant the extra fringe benefits” (Harper 48-49) but he is still under obligation to “maintain him at a subsistence level if he did not want to lose his investment completely” (48-49). Harper states that such as long as there is no display of open defiance, such methods of passive resistance are “nearly unbeatable” and they provide the lower castes “little recourse to action” (48-49). Also, Bama is able to refuse and firmly stay in her seat because she *can* do this since, legally speaking, she can

*access* her rights in this space. As stated before, rights as a lived practice or the performativity of rights can be utilised if they are made accessible, physically and ideologically. In Bama's situation, she is well in her rights to refuse the demands of the upper caste woman because she is in a public space that is not owned by any caste group.

So, whenever Bama is faced with any discrimination, she boldly condemns it by saying that "there cannot be different rules for different castes, only the same rules for everyone" (22). Once again, the idea of *performativity of rights* is stressed rather than rights as an abstract concept. Witnessing and experiencing the atrocities and injustice ignited Bama's determination to "study hard and make good" (73). She realises that only if the children belonging to her community acquire education and find jobs will they be able to "live reasonably well" (77). This takes us back to the idea of class position which can be altered through education and well-paying jobs enabling autochthonous disidentification and re-identification, but this may not effect a change in class status without *relational* disidentification and re-identification. Bama's solution to end poverty is immediately followed by a question around the practicality of the solution, "But then, how are they to educate themselves?" (77). Bama points out that the "struggle to fill their bellies is their main struggle, after all" (77). This points to the aforementioned idea of the entrapment of Dalits in a caste loop, wherein Dalits are forced to do specific occupations which provide them meagre wages contributing to their state of poverty and with no leeway to change occupations; thereby denying them and their future generations social and economic prosperity. Roy states that the "real violence of caste was the denial of *entitlement*: to land, to wealth, to knowledge, to equal opportunity" (98). In theory, rights are not bound and are available to concerned parties devoid of discrimination; but in practice, rights are bound by issues such as caste. There are boundaries both, physical and ideological, that divide various caste groups. Are the same imagined boundaries creeping into the enforcement of

law wherein the same rights available to upper and lower castes are not accessible to both parties equally? This question is addressed in this chapter in the following section titled ‘Dalits: Legally-accepted but Socially-unaccepted’.

Once again, we can see how caste differences are performed in various ways. Dalits understand the need and importance of education in their lives in order to improve their economic and class position. But they are denied access to education even when they are in schools because of their existing caste and class status. As Roy states, such a denial is at the root of the (symbolic and material) violence of caste and it prevents Dalits from thinking or knowing a way to their freedom. Ambedkar states that Dalits were “condemned to be lowly; and not knowing the way to escape, and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude which they accepted as their inescapable fate” (2014: 275). Ambedkar’s statement indicates the entrapment of Dalits in a caste loop.

Furthermore, *Karukku* exposes the intersectionality of caste, class, education and religion. Religion is a chief source of power as “illustrated by the history of India, where the priest holds sway over the common man often greater than that of the magistrate” (Ambedkar 2014: 227). Through her narrative, Bama exposes the hypocrisy of the Church, the nuns and priests “who claim that their hearts are set upon service to God, certainly discriminate according to caste” (27). Bama points out how Christianity preaches egalitarianism but practices caste-based discriminations. As stated in the first chapter, many Dalits converted from Hinduism to Christianity to escape the scourge of untouchability, only to be called Dalit Christians rather than just Christians. Even after religious conversions, the identity of caste remains and this shows the necessity for relational disidentification, not just autochthonous disidentification. There is no such hypocrisy in Hinduism since inequality is part of its structure through the caste system, as

explained before. The logic of caste is such that it embeds its inegalitarian structure into everyday lives (caste habitus) alongside a formal commitment to egalitarianism.

After her college education, Bama starts to work as teacher in a school run by nuns. Bama is shocked to see that the nuns “did not care for Dalits” (23) such as herself. They collectively oppress both Dalit children and teachers and hence Bama desires to “become a nun too and truly help these people who are humiliated so much and kept under such strict control” (23). So, Bama joins a religious order only to find caste discrimination in convents. Towards the completion of her training, a Sister mentions to Bama that “in certain orders they would not accept Harijan women as prospective nuns and that there was even a separate order for them somewhere” (25). Bama laments “inwardly that there was no place that was free of caste” (25). Eventually, Bama becomes a nun and is accepted at a convent but is once again “shocked” (25) to see the “state of affairs” (25) of the convent and the school attached to it because “this convent too was not without its caste divisions” (25). The nuns say, “that they will live in poverty” but it is “just a sham” (Bama 77). Bama points out that the convent does not know poverty and their meal contains all kinds of food including meat, fish, eggs, and variety of fruits and vegetables (77).

Bama goes on to expose the hypocrisy of the convent and the Church for discriminating on the basis of caste and class. In the school, there are students from varying economic backgrounds including “pupils from very wealthy household” (25) and Bama notices that the nuns “matched their attitudes and behaviour to the power and prestige” (78) of the wealthy families. The convent “only wished to serve the children of the wealthy” (Bama 77). The convent treats those who “suffer from poverty in one way” (Bama 77) and those “who have money in their pockets” (77) are treated “in a totally different way” (77). Bama shows how the students of her community did “all the jobs like sweeping the premises, swabbing and washing the classrooms, and cleaning out the

lavatories” (25). The entanglement of caste and labour can be observed here, and it is saddening that even children cannot escape this fate. The ‘dogma of predestination’ latches itself onto Dalit bodies at a tender age.

Moreover, all the menial jobs are done by Dalits who are “abused all the time and treated in shameful and degrading way. For example, the convent speaks “insultingly about low-caste people” (Bama 25) as if “they didn’t even consider low-caste people as human beings” (25). The people in the convent think that “low-caste people are all degraded in every way”, without any “moral discipline nor cleanliness nor culture” (Bama 26). They feel that things “can never be changed” and hence, aiding low-caste people is “like aiding cobras” (Bama 26). Bama is “pained” (26) to see even older people “trembling, shrinking like small children, frightened by the power and wealth the Sisters had, burying their pride and self-respect” (26). So, her consciousness is ‘battered and she leaves the convent (78). On returning home, Bama realises that she shares “the same difficulties and struggles that all Dalit poor experience” (78-79). She uses a simile, “like a mongrel” (78), to describe her situation without a permanent job or adequate means to secure food, clothing and shelter. The use of the simile is interesting because it suggests an *interstitial space* that she occupies between a higher class position (because of her education) and her unchanged class status, established by her caste. Bama narrates:

I share to some extent the poverty of the Dalits who toil far more painfully through the fierce heat and beating rain, yet live out their lives in their huts with nothing but gruel and water. Those who labour are the poorest of the poor Dalits. But, those who reap the rewards are the wealthy, the upper castes. This continues to happen in my village to this day. (79)



The phrase 'to some extent' indicates the interstitial space Bama occupies because she can rise in class position and does not have to take up the low-wage jobs her family and caste collective do, but she is also tethered to class status through her caste identity/status. Bama says that this never-ending shadow of caste prevents Dalits from finding "a way to study well and progress like everyone else. And this is why a wretched lifestyle" (26) continues to follow them.

After Bama leaves the convent, she finds a job at a boarding school where she works for five years. All the children who attend that school are from poor families and about 'three-fourths' of them are from Dalit families (Bama 103). The boarding is meant for "destitute children" (Bama 103) but these children are also forced to do "every menial task that was needed" (103). It is suggested to Dalit children that there is "no possibility of change" (Bama 103) for them and hence, they start to "accept everything as their fate" (103). As the Mandal Commission corollary states, the triumph of the caste system lies in conditioning the consciousness of the lower castes to accept their so-called inferior status in the natural order of things. Such a conditioning can be observed in Bama's narrative which shows how educational and religious institutions teach Dalit children to believe in the 'dogma of predestination'. This creates a sense of hopelessness for the children who are stuck in an ideological caste loop. Hence, the children toil away in the convent" from "dawn to dusk" (Bama 103). Bama is "angry" and "troubled at heart" seeing the hypocrisy of the nuns who claim to be "helping the poor and the needy, yet this is how they are" (103). Bama confronts and argues with the ways of the nuns. Also, some nuns who are "slightly humane had a difficult time" (Bama 103) and this points out that those nuns (who could be non-Dalits) who resist or stand in support of the oppressed face troubling consequences. Silencing Dalit resisters and troubling non-Dalit supporters ensures that the oppressed receives no support. This takes us back to the question of *why would non-Dalits*

*want to disidentify?* They are not only on the better-off side of caste issues but offering support to Dalits could lead to worrying consequences. Then, *how can non-Dalits be motivated to disidentify?*

Furthermore, even amongst nuns themselves, there are “caste divisions, divisions between the rich and the poor, and even divisions over the languages that they spoke” (Bama 103). Bama understands, sadly, that caste discrimination “stalks” the Dalits in “every nook and corner” (26). In this way, Bama points out the paradox and hypocrisy of the education institutions, especially those run by religious heads. Bama mentions that the God she believes in “has always shown the greatest compassion for the oppressed” (104). She further states that even Jesus “associated himself with the poor” (104). Yet, nobody takes their bearings from this just like how people are taught that “God is loving, kind, gentle, one who forgives sinners, patient, tender, humble, obedient” (Bama 104) but nobody insists that “God is just, righteous, is angered by injustices, opposes falsehood, never countenances inequality” (104). Bama mentions that there is a “great deal of difference between this Jesus and the Jesus who is made known through daily pieties” (104). The beliefs and values written in *The Bible* are different from what is practiced. This takes us back to the performativity of rights and rights as just an abstract concept. In theory, just like rights, Christian beliefs do not discriminate but in reality, they are bound by social practices. Bama points out that the oppressed are taught about “humility, obedience, patience, gentleness” (104) as a way of conditioning them to accept their fate. Such psychological ways have naturalised caste hierarchy and practices. This also reinstates the notion that to maintain superiority, the Dalits also have to cooperate to maintain a lower status in order to preserve the hierarchy. Bama narrates:

But the wealthy live off the labour of the poor, like leeches, and their children eat well and fatten; they wear fine clothes, attend good schools, take up high positions, and earn more and more money. It seems that our society is divided into those who toil and those who sit down and feast. They have separated out those whom they consider unfit to touch, pushed them to one side and marginalised them; they make them work like machines yet abuse them unjustly, never allowing them to make any progress. (79-80)

Thus, Bama's narrative sheds light on the intersection of class, education and religion in relation to caste revealing a cruel caste loop that prevents Dalits from progressing, or even escaping oppression. Bama wonders "when such atrocities will ever end. Is it likely that he who finds his comfort by exploiting us will ever change, or ever allow the system to change?" (79-80). This demand for change can be seen throughout *Karukku*. For example, the Preface to *Karukku* begins with the demand for a "new society made up of justice, equality, and love" (Bama xxiii) because Dalits have been oppressed by "unjust social structures" (xxiii). But, education of Dalits without relational disidentification, may not bring about sustainable social changes in identifications and practices.

Moreover, Bama's demand for a 'new society' could be perceived as only an individual's claim. However, as mentioned in the introductory chapter, individual Dalit narratives stand as a voice for an entire community of Dalits. This idea of an individual voice representing a collective group can be seen in *Karukku* too. For example, Bama states in the Preface that there "are Dalits hearts like mine, with a passionate desire to create a new society..." (xxiii). From the beginning of her narrative, Bama shifts between her individual identity and her collective identity. Considering the fact that those oppressing Bama and her fellow Dalits based on caste, are individuals and collectives,

Bama's attempt to address her individual and collective identity in response to her oppressors is necessary. Thus, Bama uses *The Bible* to assert that:

all Dalits who have been deprived of human rights must function as God's word, piercing to the very heart. Instead of being more and more beaten down and blunted, they must unite, think about their rights, and battle for them. (xxiv)

Bama's demand for a 'new society' points towards legal changes in India which require political will; and political will requires an ideological transformation, or relational disidentification of non-Dalit subjectivities. Also, Bama's call for activism is a demand for the implementation and practice of national laws and rights, and the universal basic human rights.

## **2. Dalits: Legally-accepted but Socially-unaccepted**

In *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014), Glen Sean Coulthard explains the idea of 'dispossession' with regards to rights of the Indigenous people in Canada. Primarily, Coulthard looks at the Marxian idea of "primitive accumulation" (10) which involves the "accumulation of capital through violent state dispossession resulting in proletarianization" (10). This model describes how capitalist societies take away the self-sufficient and self-providing means from noncapitalist societies which are then forced to join the capitalist processes. For instance, Coulthard points out that the Canadian State takes away the Indigenous people's land and rights to their land and consequentially the Indigenous communities are coerced to sell their labour to capitalist institutions.

Philip Blake, a Dene<sup>19</sup>, explains, that land is not just a source of income for the Indigenous people in Canada because they consider “land-as-resource” (Coulthard 62), “land-as-identity” (62), and “land-as-relationship” (62). Coulthard explains that in this context “Capital is not a “thing”, but rather a “social relation” (11) that relies heavily on the continuous separation of social workers from the means of production that effects a “history and experience of *dispossession*” (Coulthard 13) that has been “the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship between Indigenous people and the Canadian State” (13). Moreover, it is not just dispossession in a singular spatial or temporal moment but rather *repeated* dispossession of land belonging to the Indigenous community that results in capital accumulation. By taking away the land that is an important part of the Indigenous peoples’ identity, the State is making a conscious effort to destroy the “Indigenous ways of identifying the self in relation not only to collective identity but also to the land” (Lawrence 4).

We can also observe the idea of ‘repeated dispossession’ in the case of Dalits who are constantly denied land and rights to land. Dalits have not been known to own much land before the independence period (1947) since they were marked as untouchables and hence, “lead a life of near-slavery, dependent on the land and the land-owning people” (Ravikumar 186). While the post-independence period promised Dalits ownership of land, that promise remains empty until the present day. The Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms<sup>20</sup> and Land Ceiling Laws<sup>21</sup> have “gone into dilution through poor implementation

---

<sup>19</sup> The Dene peoples are indigenous communities in the Northwest Territories of Canada.

<sup>20</sup> A few years after Independence, the Zamindari Abolition bills and measures for land reforms were introduced in a number of states across India. Zamindars were land owners who maintained control and power over the land, the peasants and the workers. Under the British colonial rule in India, the Zamindars authority and function came to be the permanent settlement popularly known as the Zamindari system. The Zamindars exploited the peasants and denied anybody else rights to land, particularly Dalits.

<sup>21</sup> Land Ceiling Laws were introduced by 1961-1962. The laws determine the size of land that can be owned by an individual or family in India. To maintain uniformity of the ceiling limits across various states in India, the Land Ceiling Laws went through changes over the years. Another aim of the laws was to acquire surplus land and redistribute it among the farmers and landless peasants, which includes many Dalits.

of laws” (Kavitha 20) and the majority of Dalits remain landless. For Dalits, land has been identified as a source of “identity, dignity and livelihood and through gaining land Dalits can reclaim their human dignity as a human being” (NFDLRM 2017). So, repeatedly denying rights to land or poor implementation of existing rights can be seen as an ideological move to keep Dalits “powerless through the caste system” (Ravikumar 240).

In *Karukku*, Bama portrays a community of Dalits who are mostly “agricultural labourers” (2) but do not own land of their own. Bama states that most of the land belonged “to the Naicker community” which was “spread over in many miles” (6). Bama points out that upper caste people “own fields with boundaries; they have dug wells and established pumpsets; they can work their land all year; they eat well and live in comfort in their homes” (2). For Dalits, the right to ownership of land offers the prospect of construction and thereby secure housing, as well as self-sufficiency through the provision of agricultural and fishing land. In this way, rights to land provide a sense of dignity that is linked to ownership and independence.

If Dalits owned land, they wouldn’t have to work on the upper caste landlord’s lands as labourers but could grow, farm and reap for themselves on their own land. *Dalit identity would then include labourer and land-owner*. Hence, dispossession of land from Dalits by repeatedly keeping them landless is a necessity of the upper caste landlords to ensure that Dalits remain dependent on the upper castes for labour and wages. This dependency allows the upper castes to maintain power not only over the wages but also the identity and freedom of Dalits because land represents more than just a resource. Thus, the repeated dispossession of land and subsequent dependency can be seen as an ideological, political and economic move to preserve the functioning of the caste system, economically and socially. Dalits have a deep temporal and spatial relationship with land which becomes a part of Dalit identity. For example, Bama’s community knew every detail of the fields they

worked: the name given to each field, the direction and location. This was necessary for them because “they were required to work” (6) on these lands. Bama mentions how her people worked hard, “driving cattle in pairs, round and round, to tread out the grain from the straw” (14). This points to the idea of labour discussed in previous sections wherein Dalits understand land because they toil on it day and night and, through this, have created a relationship with it - a relationship upper caste landlords never had because they didn’t work on the land themselves.

Moreover, the issue is not just about denial or poor implementation of rights to land but also denial of entitlements to equal treatment by state apparatuses such as law enforcement. This harks back to the difference between rights as lived practice and rights as an abstract concept. On many occasions, the police side “against Dalits during caste clashes” (Ravikumar 198). Many Dalit organisations have advocated for at least “a nominal representation of Dalits in the police force to reduce this attitude” (Ravikumar 198). In *Karukku*, Bama exposes how the police handled a situation when a fight broke out between the Chaaliyar caste and the Parayar caste regarding which community owns the cemetery. The police were already rounding up Parayar folk and beating them “black and blue” (Bama 34), when the Chaaliyar folk invited the “Reserve Police” (36), arranged a feast for them, and won them to their side. The police are shown to take bribes and act on behalf of those who serve them, in order *to be served*. Bama exposes the corrupt law and order of the society that does not serve all people equally. Bama further narrates that the people of her community feared that the police would “whip them like they whip animals until they can neither see nor breathe, and then they’ll clap them in jail, just barely alive” (36). But if they are rich, or higher caste, or if the police are obliged to them in some way, the police “would just have given them a couple of light taps. They would have looked

after them well enough” (Bama 36). Bama further reveals how much her community feared the police. She narrates that:

nobody could sleep. All through the night the police prowled round and round our streets. There was no sound at all, except for the sound of the policemen’s boots and the barking of the dogs. The very sound of the boots was frightening. Each step felt as if the boot was treading on my chest and pressing down. I wanted to cry out aloud. But I lay there in fear, my hand pressed to my throat. If any of the young ones started to cry, our women hastened to quieten them in whatever way they could. It was like that in our house too. There was a fear in our hearts that if the police heard the noise, they would come into our houses. Even the slightest noise sounded huge to us, made our insides quake. (36-37)

The visual images of police prowling, and the auditory images of the sound of the policemen’s boots, barking dogs, and silent cries of the children and women, are upsetting and call to mind the atrocities against Dalits of all ages. Furthermore, Bama recalls hearing the “men screaming in pain, and women shouting and yelling in protest” (38) against the police brutality. She remembers seeing the police beating someone up: hitting, dragging, and stomping as a group. Bama’s use of visual and auditory images triggers a sense of fear and empathy, which could evoke familiarity and ‘fellowship’ among Dalit readers and a visceral awareness of the brutality among non-Dalit readers, through what Sara Ahmed calls attachments or ‘alignments’.

In *Affective Economies* (2004), Ahmed argues that emotions “do things, and they align individuals with communities - or bodily space with social space - through the very intensity of their attachments we need to consider how they work, in concrete and



particular ways, to mediate the relationship between the psychic and the social, the individual and the collective” (119). For Ahmed, “the individual subject comes into being through its very alignment with the collective. *It is the very failure of affect to be located in a subject or object that allows it to generate the surfaces of collective bodies.* The complexity of the spatial and bodily politics of fear has perhaps never been so apparent in the global economies of fear since September 11” (128), in the case of America. Ahmed looks at Heidegger’s notions of fear which is related to “that which is not yet in the present, in either the spatial or temporal sense of the here and the now. Fear responds to that which is approaching rather than already here” (Ahmed 125). Then, the object of fear may ‘pass by’, and “this structural possibility is part of the lived experience of fear” (Ahmed 129). Then, fear slides “quickly into anxiety, in which what was at stake was not the approach of an object but an approach to an object. The approach to the event—in which it is repeated and transformed into a fetish object—involved forms of alignment” (Ahmed 129). Ahmed explains alignment in the context of September 11, whereby “individuals aligned themselves with the nation as being under attack. This, of course, repeats the process of alignment whereby the nation aligned itself with individuals as having been or being attacked” (129). The concept of alignment could be sparked here through Bama’s use of imagery which could evoke fear, sympathy and empathy, enabling Dalits to align with the Dalit suffering as portrayed in Bama’s narrative, thereby furthering a sense of ‘fellowship’ (Ahmed 130); while non-Dalits could not only be made aware of but also possibly align with Dalit suffering through the evocation of the affect. The sense of familiarity and fellowship through alignment enables solidarity among Dalits while awareness enables sensitivity towards Dalit suffering, among non-Dalits. Awareness is necessary for non-Dalits to fathom the everyday struggle of Dalits and Bama’s narrative

helps in spreading this awareness to evoke sensitivity and a sensibility of shared experience towards Dalits.

Furthermore, Bama depicts the deplorable behaviour of the police toward the women of her community. Bama narrates that the police use 'obscene language', swearing at them and telling them that since their husbands are away "they should be ready to entertain the police at night" (40). The police would "wink at them, and shove their guns against their bodies" (Bama 40). Bama shows how the women are "scared out of their minds" (40) yet they return to work in the morning and "set off their customary coolie work" (40). But the police became furious because "the women were smart enough to continue working and taking care of their children even without their men" (Bama 40). So, the police rounded up the women, forced them into lorries and made them discontinue their work. Many of the men were hiding in the forest and almost "three-quarters of the total male population" (Bama 41) of the community got caught by the police. The women did not have any money to pay for court hearings, so they split the cost among themselves and made arrangements to collect the money. Bama depicts "all these atrocities" (39) to show how the law and order system in their society "also discriminates between communities" (Nayar 2006: 90). This hostile behaviour accompanied by the lack of adequate monetary means for legal support and lack of knowledge around rights results in the effective denial of justice to Dalits.

All of this occurs despite that fact that the Constitution of India has introduced and amended acts to protect the rights of Dalits and to prevent atrocities against them. The Scheduled Castes and Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, aims at preventing atrocities and offenses (verbal and physical) against SCs (Scheduled Castes) and STs (Scheduled Tribes). The Untouchability (Offences) Act, 1955 was amended to the 'Protection of the Civil Rights Act' in 1976 and proposes punishments for those still

practising untouchability, for example, compelling persons to do works such as manual scavenging, cleaning, preventing entry to places of worship, drawing water from public wells, refusing trade or business, violence, and so on. Despite such laws being in place, atrocities against Dalits have not stopped or even decreased. The 2016 crime report by National Crime Records Bureau Ministry of Home Affairs (NCRB) reveals that out of 953 cases being investigated under the SC/ ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, only two cases have been convicted. NCRB also reported an increase in atrocities against SCs from 38,670 in 2015 to 40,801 in 2016. The actual number of atrocities against Dalits is higher than recorded because those who have converted from Hinduism to Islam and Christianity are not legally categorised as Scheduled Castes or counted in the NCRB's statistics. As discussed before, those who have converted are legally Christians and Muslims even though they are not considered Christians and Muslims, but rather remain identified as Dalit Christians and Dalit Muslims. Thus, the caste identifications follow them regardless of religious conversion and legal validation because Dalits, regardless of religion, "are hurt and brutalized because social structures allow (even enable) the brutalization" (Nayar 2006: 89).

This brings us to the idea of the 'legally-accepted but socially unaccepted' situation of the Dalits which is mentioned in the introductory chapter. This paradox of the Dalit situation raises questions about the effectiveness of the existing legal, economic and political reforms. Even the reservation system<sup>22</sup> which allocates provisions to SCs in order to help them gain easier access to education and employment opportunities, enshrine caste discrimination. By recognising and therefore embedding the logic of caste in the governmental structures of the state and bureaucracy, the reservation system exposes the

---

<sup>22</sup> Provisions available in the Constitution of India since 1950, based on which orders relating to reservations in services for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other Backward Classes (OBCs) have been issued by Department of Personnel & Training and Ministries of Social Justice of Government of India,

discrimination but also reinstates it. In India, the logic of caste contains within it the logic of hierarchy and SCs bear the brunt of that logic. In *Karukku*, Bama mentions that her community were called out in schools in front of non-Dalits to record the number of SCs in class, possibly to inform them of the provisions they are entitled to and Bama mentions that it was a humiliating experience (21). Entitlement to these provisions cost them their self-dignity and caste differences are only highlighted more. This paradox of the reservation system can also be noticed in the Prevention of Atrocities Act wherein the Act attempts to prevent crimes against SCs but does not challenge the root cause of the discrimination that Dalits face- the caste system- which is the reason behind atrocities against Dalits in the first place. The Act and the reservation system show the limitations of the legal system to effectively help Dalits. As stated before, economic, political and legal reforms are not sufficient to prevent caste discrimination because caste is predominantly a social issue. The everyday performances of caste have engrained the caste structures and differences in the social life of the people, which includes individuals in political parties. Since law is politically enforced, casteist beliefs are also reinforced. Hence, the legal system needs to take into consideration the social aspect of caste. The next section studies the adaptive or rather ‘performative’ nature of law, and its relation to Dalit rights.

### **2.1. Performativity in Law**

It is important to understand the challenges and tensions resulting from the co-existence of equality and inequality, and universality and particularity in the performance of law. For this purpose, this section looks at perspectives from scholars and theorists who look closely at the Indian legal system and Universal Human Rights.

Ambedkar demands “a scientific outlook, class consciousness, and a completely atheistic approach” (*Dalit Panther Manifesto* viii) combined with a demand “for

humanism” (viii) as the effective means to understand and address the issue of caste. He believes that a solution to caste discrimination can be found in a space with “no roots in the Indian psyche and mystical value-structure” (Omvedt 90). Ambedkar imagines his ideal society without caste, and he asserts that his “ideal would be a society based on liberty, equality, and fraternity” (Ambedkar 2014: 260), “the three normative themes of the French Revolution” (Vasak 18) that also align closely with Czech jurist Karel Vasak’s ‘three generations’ which trace the development of human rights. In Vasak’s model, the first generation aligns with *liberté* which includes civil and political rights; the second generation aligns with *égalité* which includes economic, social, and cultural rights; and the third generation aligns with *fraternité* which includes solidarity rights (Slaughter 15). Hence, we can say that Ambedkar’s ideal society can be said to align with a human rights regime as understood globally. Moreover, Dalits have already recognised caste oppression as a denial of basic human rights and this rhetoric has become the cornerstone of Dalit activism since the onset of their fight against oppression. For example, Dalit writer and activist, Sharankumar Limbale, demands human rights stating that, “I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being” (Limbale 31).

As shown in previous sections, caste intersects with class, religion, education, law, gender, and politics. Bama’s demand for rights shown in her narrative encompasses all these contexts and intersections. If human rights must attempt to encompass rights of varied nature because the experiences of individuals are intersectional, then, rights can also be said to have an intersectional nature. Joseph Slaughter argues that human rights rest on “an inventory of axioms” (Slaughter 14) that everyone takes for granted about what it means to be human. Human rights are built on the inherent premise, or “*from the simple fact that man is man*” (Maritain 63) and all are entitled to human rights by virtue of being human. Yet, this universal idea of *being human* could mean more or less or different,

depending on specific contexts. As mentioned before, theoretically, rights in India are available to all without discrimination and in the case of human rights, law is universal as it applies to everyone, equally. However, in practice rights and laws are enforced or *performed as a practice situationally*, or non-universally; precisely because there is no ‘universal’ way of being a human that can be set apart from being-human-in-a-society. Hannah Arendt understands human rights as “the positive rights of citizens” rather than the “natural rights of humans *qua* humans” at least in practice if not in principle (Slaughter 12). The *individual (particular) is elevated to the universal (human)* and thereby moving the individual “from the confines of the nation-state to the realm of the universal” (Slaughter 22). Whereas human rights “speak the language of universalism” (Slaughter 3), the experiences of individuals have a “sociocultural particularity” (Slaughter 14). It is not just a matter of the contextual application of the universal human rights that creates challenges, but the tension at the heart of the theory of human rights too in terms of its underlying conceptual basis and axioms. It is this tension that international human rights addresses as it attempts to be “a speech act of recognition—simply an acknowledgment of ostensibly natural truths about the human” (Slaughter 14) and simultaneously to function “as a speech act of declaration that intends to effect the right of everyone” (14) everywhere as a person of the law and before the law. Following J.L. Austin’s ideas, law as a ‘speech act’ underpins the notion of legal performatives since the notion of the performative that is mentioned throughout this thesis is, in fact, derived partly from Austin’s work on language. Law as a speech act is detailed later on.

The 1948 Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Right (UDHR) intends to foster “the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want” (Slaughter 4). Then in this framework, human beings can be considered as “subjects of rights” (Slaughter 8) which means that it is

important to understand what constitutes a 'subject'. Butler (1995) examines Austin's ideas of performativity and understands that Austin presumes the subject to be "sovereign" (202). For example, if a legitimate judge passes a sentence, then the "pronouncement is the act by which the sentence first becomes binding" (Butler 202). However, for Butler, subjects are not sovereign, but constituted by discourse starting from a long string of interpellations (drawing on Althusserian concepts) and it is vital to recognise that the judge is not the first regulatory agency in the legal system. The police pass a judgement on whether a person is to be arrested, and only then is the person presented before the court (and many cases do not even reach courts). At this point the subject enters a legal discourse, starting with the police. But, in the context of India judges and police are also individuals who are not only part of the general society but also their respective collective caste groups which are influenced by sociocultural, political, economic and religious practices. As mentioned before, in *Karukku*, Bama depicts how the police take sides during caste clashes and, most of the time, they favour upper castes. This is why many Dalit organisations have advocated for "a nominal representation of Dalits in the police force" (Ravikumar 198) to reduce such biased practices. Just like the subjects of rights, Dalits in this context, the regulatory agency such as the police, are already part of the sociocultural, political, economic, and religious discourses, even before executing their lawful authority through warnings, arrests, court verdicts, and so on. In this way, Butler's notion of the subject being constructed by discourse is crucial in order to understand how caste habitus is present and practiced in all walks of life, even by those who are entrusted to protect the vulnerable and enforce laws regardless of any forms of discrimination.

In Foucault's "Two Lectures", the modern individual subject is shown as "an effect of power" brought to effect by "the element of its articulation" (98). As pointed out before, law is enforced politically and hence is used as a mere instrument of political will. Then in

Foucauldian terms, *law is an effect of power*. According to Althusser's theory of interpellation, the subject means two things: (1) "a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions"; and (2) "a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission" (182). Althusser's interpretation of the subject is similar to what Jean Jacques Rousseau declares as "forced to be free" (Slaughter 9) because they are "*interpellated as a (free) subject*" (qtd. in Slaughter 9).

This concept of being free or freedom is clearly the driving force and the aim of asserting Dalit rights and freedom is one of the core rights stated by the UDHR that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights" (Article 1: 4). The right to freedom under the UDHR has a strong purchase within state discourses in India. Not only is India a signatory of the UDHR but 'Right to Equality' under Article 14 and 'Right to Freedom' under Article 19 and 21 are two of seven fundamental rights stated in Part III of The Preamble of the Constitution of India, drafted by the Constituent Assembly in 1949. The idea of freedom is not only about individual freedom but also implies what Hegel (1967) states as the "imperative of right" that is to "be a person and respect others as persons" (*Philosophy of Right*). A 'person' is:

the legal vehicle of human dignity, what is common to each of us as social human beings and as theoretically equal subjects-subjects of legal and literary interest like any other, possessing equal capacity to be represented within the law and literature.

(Slaughter 18)

Personality then "is a technical term that means the quality of being equal before the law" or the "quality of being a person" (Slaughter 17). Hegel's understanding of 'person' and



‘personality’ implies something that is quite fundamental to this thesis which is the idea that a ‘person’ cannot have rights simply by virtue of their *autochthonous* being, but also because of their *relational* (social) being. Hence, equality (in theory and practice) of the legal personality is *reciprocal*, that is, the right to equality is something one is entitled to, but it is also something that one gives to others by recognising ‘the other’s’ entitlement to the same right (through the law).

This relational nature of laws (in theory and practice) which remind persons to recognise and respect others’ entitlement to the same rights is stated in Article 29(1) of the UDHR: (1)“Everyone has the duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of the personality is possible”, and (2)“In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society” (60). The Article reinforces the aforementioned idea of reciprocal and relational practice and enjoyment of rights, wherein a person does not have the right to infringe another person’s right while exercising their own rights. These ideas stated in Article 29 are in line with the *Fundamental Duties* stated in the Indian Constitution and are different from the Fundamental Rights stated above.<sup>23</sup>

Just like Article 29 of UDHR, the fundamental duties remind that every person is entitled to enjoy their fundamental rights but should also remember and practice their duties towards the society, even if that entails certain limitations in order to ensure full and free development of human personality (of the self and others). Out of eleven fundamental duties, two duties stand out in terms of respecting rights of fellow persons, which are “to

---

<sup>23</sup> The fundamental duties were added as Part IVA, Article 51A to the Constitution in 1976, by the 42nd Amendment, based on the recommendations of the Swaran Singh Committee who was assigned to study the Constitution during the national emergency (1975-1977).

promote harmony and the spirit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India transcending religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities; to renounce practices derogatory to the dignity of women” and “to develop the scientific temper, humanism and the spirit of inquiry and reform” (Article 51A, Part IVA). The notions of ‘harmony’, ‘common brotherhood’, and ‘humanism’ emphasise on autochthonous and relational behaviours and actions towards others. It is striking that the duties encourage a development of a spirit of ‘inquiry’ and ‘reform’, which could also be in line with autochthonous and relational disidentification and re-identification. Additionally, Singh’s (1985) ideas point to the UDHR statement that everyone has duties to their community in which *alone* the free and full development of the human personality is possible (Article 29). In the context of jural relations, Singh states that:

A rule concerning human action may either regulate the behaviour of a particular individual or a group. A rule that necessitates the performance or avoidance of some act or acts is a duty. Such a necessitation may be imposed upon the individual by his own will, such as when the individual’s understanding of morality makes his reason compel him to undertake certain actions, although his inclinations may be otherwise. (122)

Singh further states that there are certain rules that have ethical and juridical legislation. For example, a “moral rule, such as the duty to allow others to seek their own perfection, which concerns one’s relationship with others, can be both ethically and juridically legislated. But a moral rule which concerns only one’s relationship with oneself can only be a matter of ethical legislation” (Singh 123) because in this scenario, “ethical legislation is self-compulsion, which requires the autonomy of the will... no ethical act can be a matter of external necessitation. By internal necessitation an individual seeks, what Kant

calls, *inner freedom*, that is, freedom from his inclination to do wrong and thus to achieve his perfection and happiness. By external necessitation a society seeks *outer freedom*, that is, freedom in which all can achieve their perfection and happiness and avoid doing wrong” (Singh 123). The use of conditional phrasing and the notion that it is through performing duties ‘alone’ that development is ‘possible’ refers to autochthonous performance keeping in mind the relationality of the self with the other. Thus, in the Indian context, the enjoyment of fundamental rights entails a *relational* recognition of others’ entitlement to the same fundamental rights, as part of the fundamental duty of the individual to the collective society, respecting religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities.

However, duties are obligations with ethical motivations, and it becomes difficult to practically enforce fundamental duties in the same way fundamental rights and rules are enforced. Singh states that the ‘dispositions’ towards scientific temper, humanism, spirit of inquiry and reform as a fundamental duty:

concern autonomous will... If one chooses to develop a poetic disposition instead of a scientific one and becomes indifferent to inquiry, there is little that law can do about it. What law can do, as explained, is to provide the conditions for the required disposition and compassion, not by legislating duties but by delimiting the conditions which are inhibitive of states of affairs in which compassion can be shown or in which the desired dispositions can be developed, that is, legislating against the contraries of ethical duties, such as actions emerging from hatred. (126)

Hence, even at the theoretical level, there lies this tension between rights and duties in theory and the situational performativity of law. In *Karukku*, Bama describes the qualities of being human or a person. Bama narrates:

Are Dalits not human beings? Do they not have common sense? Do they not have attributes as a sense of honour and self-respect? Are they without any wisdom, beauty, dignity? What do we lack? (27)

According to Bama, common sense, honour, self-respect, wisdom, beauty, and dignity are attributes of being human or they contribute to having a ‘personality’; and Dalits possess all these just like every other human being. However, Bama narrates, “And in my heart I have even grieved over the fact that I was born as I am” (27). Her grief exposes that Dalits have not been “respected” by others “as human beings” (109), despite possessing a ‘personality’. As explained before, a person is dependent on other people for enjoyment of rights through reciprocal recognition and respect of their rights, as part of duty or ethical will.

This brings us to the idea of relational identification and disidentification. Non-Dalits continue to view Dalits as untouchables and as long as they do not *disidentify* from such labels imposed on Dalits, the implementation and practice of the laws remain incomplete or ineffective on a social level. Hence, it can be said that enjoyment and practice of rights are *relational*. Laws of human rights “recognize and construct the individual as a social creature and the process of individuation as an incorporative process of socialization, without which individualism itself would be meaningless” (Slaughter 19). The human personality is a result of “interaction between the subjective individual and the objective group” (Slaughter 20). The human personality develops through a process of socialization

and generates “social practices and rules, constitutional traditions and institutional habits, which bring individuals together to form a functioning political community” (Benhabib 55). Thus, the interaction between Dalits and non-Dalits shapes societal practices and also enjoyment of rights. If the society is already unequal and biased towards one section of the society, then it is quite possible that the legal systems will also favour one section despite the law’s profession (as a speech act) that all are equal before the law. Dalits are at a disadvantage economically, politically, and socially which affects the legal sphere as well. If Dalits are not considered as human beings in the first place, then human rights do not apply to them. This is precisely why understanding the tensions resulting from the co-existence of binary concepts of equality and inequality, and universality and particularity, is crucial to grasping the performative nature of law in theory and practice.

Bama mentions that the upper castes treat them “in whatever way they choose” as if they were “slaves who don’t even possess human dignity” (27). As mentioned before, Bama shows how even the police treat her community like they were animals (36). Dalits are not identified as human beings and so denying them basic human rights is not seen as an infringement on a social level, even though legally, it is still an infringement of rights. But even if Dalits are considered as human beings, the ways in which laws are socially and politically enacted can promote discrimination against Dalits.

Moreover, the material or tangible results of caste practices such as deprivation of money, assets, land, property, food, clothing, education, voting and employment can be recorded and quantified. Hence most laws in place attempt to provide equal access to these tangible ideas through reservation policies (95<sup>th</sup> Amendment of Article 334 of the Indian Constitution), land and property rights (Article 300A of the Indian Constitution, UDHR Article 17), right to education (Article 21a of the Indian Constitution, UDHR Article 26), right to vote (Constitution of India Sixty-first Amendment Act of 1988, UDHR Article 21,

ICCPR Article 25) and so on. Qualitative aspects such as self-dignity, honour, and respect are understood in relation to the material aspects. The denial of self-dignity, honour, and respect are seen as a result of the denial of access to the materials aspects. Consequently, most laws in place enable an economic or political reform with the assumption that social reform would follow. The legal system acquires “stability through the internal, systemic inter-linking of rules and concepts” (Deakin 16) but if laws are “imperfectly matched with its environment, its capacity to shape social outcomes through the production of norms is also constrained” (Deakin 16). Isn't this the very effect of caste on Dalits ensuring that there is an imperfect match? Indeed, the logic of what is said above is that there is always an imperfect match between the law-as-universal (in theory) and the law-in-practice. In India, this imperfect match is created through the intersection of caste with the legal system that tries to overcome caste discrimination while at the same time, not acknowledging that such discrimination is a *necessary* aspect of the concept and practice of caste itself. As mentioned before, caste identifications and practices have a dominant influence socially and so an emphasis on social reform cannot not be overlooked, legally.

Thus, there is a tension in the legal system “to maintain the internal order of the system, on the one hand, while finding a way to process and translate the information received from the environment, for example through litigation over individual cases, on the other” (Deakin 16). The result of such tensions is “the apparent paradox of legal rules which are simultaneously stable and mutable” (Deakin 16). This tension between the formulation of rights and its actual practice arises from “a historical disconnect between the world that the law imagines” and a world “that it addresses in fact - between the ideal and the real” (Slaughter 3). For example, international human rights is formed “either through formal agreements between sovereign states or as a consequence of state practice; that is, as custom” (Slaughter 24). Hence, the human rights law, like any law, does not exist prior to

social practices and relations, but is formed and *performed* through temporal and contextual applications. That is, when the application or the performance of a law is not reaching predicted outcomes or effects, then either new laws are introduced, or the same laws are amended. Then, law is *performative* in three ways: (1) *the actual application or performance of the laws in the real world*, (2) *the adaptive or mutable or performative nature of law that allows amendments, changes and in turn evolution of the law itself*, and (3) *as a speech act*.

We have looked at the first two ways of how law is performative. Let us look closely at law as a speech act. As explained in the first chapter, J. L. Austin gives importance to ‘illocutionary’ speech acts rather than ‘locutionary’ and ‘perlocutionary’ speech acts because the former refers to “something we do *in* saying something”, while the latter acts refer to “an act of saying something” and “something we do *by* saying something”, respectively (Austin 94-107). For Austin, illocutionary acts are *performed* in uttering the sentences. Furthermore, Austin understands ‘performatives’ as ‘utterances’, and places importance on ‘performative utterances’ rather than ‘constative utterances’. The latter denotes true or false statements whereas the former is not a true or false statement but “is used in the performance of something other than merely saying something” (Andersson 4). Thus, *the idea of the performative entails an action, more than a mere utterance*. Hence, it is important for laws to be illocutionary and/ or perlocutionary speech acts because they both demand action in one way or the other. Then, to what extent are laws performative utterances?

As stated before, enjoyment and practice of rights are relational. Article 1 of UDHR states that ‘all human beings are born free’ which means that a person is entitled to enjoy this right to freedom while simultaneously recognising ‘the other’s’ entitlement to the same right. Rights become effective only in this relational recognition and reciprocation.

Keeping in mind that everyone is a *subject to and a subject of* something, the relational nature of laws becomes crucial to those who are oppressed or victimised, and thereby, experiencing a loss of freedom. Thus, we can say that oppressed groups such as Dalits are not exactly demanding their rights because they already are entitled to them, but rather they are demanding a *recognition* and *reciprocation* of the practice of the same rights by ‘the other’ or non-Dalits. In that case, laws are performative utterances that are not just mere speech utterances but rather speech acts that demand an action. Here, the performativity is autochthonous, that is, it allows a person to enjoy the right; and it is also relational as it requires the person to recognise another person’s entitlement to the same right. Without autochthonous and relational performativity of speech acts, rights and laws are simply locutionary acts wherein they are mere utterances or statements without much practical effect. Thus, *it can be said that laws are performative utterances to a great extent as they are not mere statements but speech acts that constitute an action.* But it is this performativity of law that demands a situational and contextual positioning of laws, not just in theory but also in practice. Legal evolution of national laws and universal human rights do “not mean that the level of happiness of social life generally has been raised effectively, let alone that law correctly reflects the factual state of a given society” (Luhmann 141), particularly in the case of Dalits.

However, Dalits place their faith in the legal system which is evidenced in Bama’s narrative where they continue to demand (1) rights, (2) effective implementation of those rights and (3) upholding the constitutional values. Faith in the legal system is not hopeless because the performative nature of law allows scope for not just economic and political reform but also social reform. Since law is politically enforced, for the law to become more effective at producing changes in social practice, it needs to be both formulated and enforced by those who have relationally disidentified with the caste system and the



practice of untouchability. It is the achievement of such a disidentification that is fundamental, and Dalit writers and translators are pivotal in trying to make it happen. Since Bama's voice in *Karukku* attempts to encompass the collective voice of not just her community but also all Dalit communities, we can say that her faith in the legal system could be the collective faith of Dalits.

The extent to which the performative nature of law can enable Dalit emancipation across various contexts- social, cultural, political, economic, and religious- is unsure. But the idea of performativity in law, in terms of practice of rights and the mutable nature of law, can open new avenues and possibilities, and even find a way to respond to the paradox of the 'legally-accepted but socially-unaccepted' situation of the Dalits. Therefore, the performative nature of law is a promising and hopeful aspect of Dalit activism.

## **Conclusion**

In Bama's *Karukku*, we are able to see how caste habitus dominates the functioning of a society to an extent where segregation is naturalised on a physical and ideological level. The spatial segregation of caste communities leads to the problem of access – to goods, services, and amenities; thereby ensuring that upper caste communities have continuous and easy access to a better way of life. The everyday functioning of the society is dominated by caste distinctions making Dalit oppression intersectional, encompassing many different dimensions including social, gender, legal, economic, political, and religious. This chapter looks closely at the intersection between caste and class, through an analysis of labour in the caste system to illuminate the sheer complexity of caste oppression, even in educational and religious institutions. A disentanglement of caste and

class sheds light on the difference between ‘class status’ and ‘class position’, and its relation to caste hierarchy.

Bama’s *Karukku* also sheds light on how even though Dalits are entitled to their fundamental and constitutional rights as Indian citizens, as well as their basic human rights under UDHR laws, Dalits have been denied their rights or their rights have been poorly implemented or performed. Bama asserts that Dalits are not identified as human beings as evidenced by her trying to convince her readers otherwise both directly, “But we too are human beings” (15) and indirectly in her humanising depictions. Bama’s use of the conjunction, ‘but’, could be understood as her stirring effort to *convince* the upper castes portrayed in her narrative and in turn, her readers (both Dalits and non-Dalits) about her community’s humanity. This begs the question: who really lacks humanity? Is it Dalits who are being denied their rights to life and freedom or those who are denying Dalits their rights?

Moreover, even international legal apparatuses have had less motivation and in turn less success in persuading the Indian government to act on eradicating caste-based discriminations. For instance, India is required, or rather obligated, under several international agreements to uphold Dalit rights, yet “there is little enforcement power to ensure that India meets its obligations under international law. Most of the international enforcement mechanisms for Dalits involve making recommendations to the Indian government and publicizing its failures to uphold international obligations...” (Hanchinamani 19). For instance, the UN Special Rapporteur Diène reports that understanding and reviewing caste-based discrimination and then deconstructing it will help combat the ideological strategy of upholding discrimination (*The Hindu* 2016). Further effective actions with regards to such reports are minimal. Nevertheless, the

adaptive or mutable performativity of the law offers the possibility of its structural coupling with related social systems (Deakin 16), thereby offering hope for Dalits.

Also, Diène's suggestion aligns closely with the idea of understanding the history and rights of Dalits. There needs to be an understanding of the intersectionality of Dalit struggles and this intersectionality should be reflected in the laws introduced and amended because caste seeps into all contexts- social, economic, political, legal, religious. Bama's brother's advice that education can be a way towards progress and a better life is significant here. Education can be a way for Dalits to disidentify from existing identifications and escape the shackles of the caste system. But as explained before, educating Dalits alone is not enough to end the discrimination against them. This is because the caste system and the identifications that come with it are relational. Hence, education for Dalits and *non-Dalits* is necessary for progress of the society. Also, Dalits can demand their basic human rights but without a social reform in their respective societies, their rights will have less effect on their everyday life and identity. As pointed out before, a social reform requires both sections of the society to participate in disidentification wherein Dalits and non-Dalits understand Dalit history and recognise Dalit rights. Education can enable the process of disidentification for both, Dalits and non-Dalits, and such a relational disidentification would help individuals in powerful (political and judicial) positions to formulate and enforce laws that would be effective in bringing about social changes.

Furthermore, there is a "danger inherent in restricting the dalit issue to an object of debate within the framework of nation and class" (Ravikumar 241) because of the intersectionality of several contexts such as class, politics, religion, education and law with caste. There is uniqueness or "singularity" (Ravikumar 240) in the Dalit issue coupled with intersectionality of oppressions. Understanding this singularity accompanied by

intersectionality is important because the “general ideological climate is against dalits and their problems” (Ravikumar 240) and hence, one cannot approach Dalit issues from a neutral perspective because it will only result in “reproducing the dominant ideology” (240). Non-Dalits who are interested in studying about Dalits must strive to recognize the singularity of the Dalit situation (Ravikumar 240). This singularity is represented by Bama in her narrative, *Karukku*. *Karukku* can be understood as what Jean-Francois Lyotard (1995) calls “little narratives” that will “not yield to power but have the language of openness” (*States of Mind*). Bama’s narrative does not yield to existing power structures and even counters those structures. For example, Bama instructs Dalits to “not accept the injustice of [our] enslavement” and to “crush all these institutions that use caste to bully” Dalits into submission (28). Bama exposes these institutions which intersect with caste to trap Dalits in a never-ending loop of indignity and denial of rights. Bama attempts to expose the struggle and rights of Dalits through her narrative in order to create solidarity among Dalits, and spread awareness, sensitivity and sensibility among non-Dalits. She portrays the intersection of caste, class, education, religion and law and thereby, representing the singularity and simultaneous intersectionality of the Dalit issue. It is this singularity that creates the aforementioned tension in the formulation and human rights and its application in a particular context. In and through *Karukku*, Bama attempts to “demonstrate that among human beings there are none who are high and low” (28) and she calls upon fellow Dalits to unite and “bring about a changed and just society where all are equal” (28).

Therefore, her narrative suggests that the challenge of the national legal system is to merge contextual fundamental and constitutional rights within the universal human rights framework and the challenge of the international legal apparatuses is to form and apply universal ideas of rights taking into consideration the singularity of the Dalit situation.

What is assuring or rather hopeful is that law is adaptive, mutable or performative; and this performative nature of law should ideally be able to find a way to address this challenge.

## Chapter 3: Bodies, Intersectionality, and Ideological Offensive in Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

### **Introduction**

In her book, *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Elizabeth Grosz examines discourses on the concept of the 'body', particularly in Western Philosophy, and she shows how certain understandings of the body has led to a 'denigrated' outlook on what the body is and what it signifies. Grosz states that the body was and to a great extent remains "colonized through the discursive practices of the natural sciences, particularly the discourses of biology and medicine" (x). The body's naturalness, its "fundamentally biological and precultural status" and its "immunity to cultural, social, and historical factors" (Grosz x) were the notions that dominated the comprehension of the body. But bodies "are not inert" (xi) as they function "interactively and productively" (Grosz xi). Hence, the concept of the 'body' and what it entails is central to the discussions of philosophers and feminists. Yet the body has remained "a conceptual blind spot in both mainstream Western philosophical thought and contemporary feminist theory" (Grosz 3). For example, Plato's understanding of the body (*soma*) as a dungeon (*sêma*) entrapping the soul of the 'man' because he is a noncorporeal and spiritual being looks at the body as denigrated, confining and limited (Grosz 5). The Cartesian understanding of the body as one of the two "dichotomously opposed characteristics" that make up the 'human subject' (Grosz 3), the other characteristic being 'mind', remains highly contested. This philosophical dualism is based on the assumption that mind and body "are two distinct, mutually exclusive and mutually exhaustive substances" and each of them "inhabits its own self-contained sphere" (Grosz 6). Descartes reduces the body's "constitutive role in forming thoughts, feelings, emotions,

psychic representations” to “a predictable, knowable transparency” (Grosz 10). Such assumptions made in Western philosophy show how certain ideas and judgments are “clearly framed by the concept of mind” which then “marginalise or exclude considerations of the body” (Grosz 4).

The body is further marginalised and limited by infusing it into the binary of male and female, that is, coupling the “mind with maleness and the body with femaleness” (Grosz 4). Women and femininity “are problematized as knowing philosophical subjects and as knowable epistemic objects” (Grosz 4). Women are put into a singular category as ‘Woman’- philosophy’s “eternal enigma, its mysterious and inscrutable object” (Grosz 4). Nietzsche represents ‘Woman’ as an unattainable and impossible truth and Lacan also talks about the unknowable and unspeakable Woman’s pleasure (Grosz 212). All such notions “may be a product of the rather mysterious and highly restrained and contained status of the body in general, and of women’s bodies, in particular...” (Grosz 5). Women’s corporeality has been used to justify the unequal “social positions and cognitive abilities of the two sexes” (Grosz 14). Thus, modern Western philosophy implies that “women’s bodies are presumed to be incapable of men’s achievements, being weaker, more prone to (hormonal) irregularities, intrusions, and unpredictabilities” (Grosz 14). For example, in *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami portrays how men assume that women are physically weaker and hence, assume the responsibility of stepping up into their imagined masculine abilities. While preparing a marriage feast, the men took “up their positions” (115) and “moved around ordering the women” (Sivakami 115). When one of the older women asked the men why they do not “ever” cook a meal in their own houses, one of the men responded by saying that women cannot lift the big pot and strain the water from the rice and so, “only men can cook for marriages” (Sivakami 116). Such patriarchal gender roles

link women to the concept of the ‘body’ *more* than men and this way of identification restricts “women’s social and economic roles to (pseudo) biological terms” (Grosz 14).

Misogynistic ideas of the body and also the mind have been criticised by some feminist and social constructionists who regard the mind “as a social, cultural, and historical object” (Grosz 17), yet the idea of the body as natural, ahistorical and precultural persists. Then came a group of feminist theorists such as Judith Butler, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and many more who are concerned with the “*lived body*” (18) which is “neither brute nor passive but is interwoven with and constitutive of systems of meaning, signification, and representation” (Grosz 18). They see the body as “a cultural interweaving and production of nature” as well as a “political, social, and cultural object par excellence” (18), and they believe that “the body is crucial to understanding woman’s psychical and social existence” (Grosz 18).

Hence, this chapter studies the Dalit woman’s body to understand how bodily inscriptions form and reform identity; and to get a sense of the various interlocking oppressions faced by Dalit women. Sivakami portrays the experiences of her caste community, ‘Parayar’ and so this chapter attempts to understand the corporeality of the Parayar men and women portrayed in *The Grip of Change*. The question that motivates this chapter is: to what extent does Sivakami’s narrative, *The Grip of Change*, portray intersectionality of Dalit women’s experiences, represent caste performativity, and enable an ideological offensive? Addressing this question helps understand how Sivakami’s narrative is able to show identification, disidentification and re-identification. The ‘body’ is used as the locus of analysis for this chapter because caste is performed and practiced by and through Dalit and non-Dalit bodies. Also, *The Grip of Change* depicts the violence inflicted on a Dalit woman by her employer and his relatives. The concept of ‘theory in flesh’ which discusses the importance of the ‘body’ in the lives of women of colour, is



looked at early on in the chapter to enable an exploration of “*embodied subjectivity* [and] *psychical corporeality*” (Grosz 22) in Sivakami’s narrative.

The chapter is divided into three sections which also aligns with the tripartite process of identification, disidentification, and re-identification, respectively. The first section addresses the intersectionality of bodily experiences subjected to and by issues such as gender and caste; along with an exploration of Weir’s notion of ‘identification-with’. The second section addresses caste performativity and the ‘value’ of the Dalit female body. The third section attempts to understand how Sivakami addresses disidentification and re-identification through an ideological offensive which refers to the idea of offending or opposing the ruling ideology through acts of resistance. Ideological offensive is discussed in detail later in the chapter.

### **1. Intersectionality**

It is necessary to address the tendency “to reduce the complexity of identity questions to questions of category” (Weir 62), where all women are placed under the singular category of ‘woman’. In the seminal essay, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” (1984), Chandra Talpade Mohanty states that various Western feminist texts engage in “the production of the ‘Third World Woman’ as a singular monolithic subject” (333). Mohanty points out that Western feminist discourses create an “assumption of women as an already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradictions” (336). She asserts that by homogenising women, “a notion of gender or sexual difference or even patriarchy” (336) is applied regardless of geographical and cultural differences, even though for example, there is “no universal patriarchal framework” unless there is a suggestive “international male conspiracy or a monolithic, ahistorical power hierarchy”

(335). Subsequently, the ‘third world’ women’s experiences are understood by applying ethnocentric methodologies on the assumption that the category of ‘women’, experience the same powerlessness, exploitation, sexual harassment and so on, *universally*. This in turn, produces an image of the “average third world woman” (Mohanty 337) prior to any analysis of their individual or collective experiences. Thus, the category or the assumption of a homogenous identity of ‘women’ is limiting (Weir 63).

Additionally, Lena Gunnarsson (2011) points out that there was a “disappointment among feminist women of colour with what they saw as ethnocentric and homogenising modes of feminist thinking about women” (25) which gave rise to intersectional feminism. Intersectional feminism refers to the understanding that each woman who considers herself a feminist “draws her feminism from the culture in which she grew” (Moraga and Anzaldúa, xlv). Intersectionality has ““been heralded as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship’, even as ‘a feminist success story’” (Davis 67). Furthermore, Gunnarsson (2011) understands intersectionality as a “theoretical perspective, method and concept” that “refers to the intersection of different social relations in every concrete subject, so that studying gender through an intersectional lens means emphasising that women are not only women, but also black, white, rich, poor, heterosexual, homosexual, etc.” (25).

Hence, bodies should be understood in the body’s “historical rather than simply its biological concreteness” (Grosz 19). But there is no singular ‘body’ but *bodies* which come in all shapes, sizes and gradations. Bodies can be understood and represented “as a field, a two-dimensional continuum in which race (and possibly even class, caste, or religion) form body specifications” (Grosz 19). A similar idea of several power structures such as gender, sex, race, class, and so on forming the identity of the body is also

mentioned in the Combahee River Collective statement<sup>24</sup> which remarks that there is a ‘synthesis’ of ‘interlocking oppressions’ that create the conditions of the lives of Black women and all women of colour (2); and some of these interlocking oppressions that women struggle against are “racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression” (2). The interlocking oppressions stated by the Collective are similar to the intersectional experiences listed by Gunnarsson. Here, intersection does not refer to the “gridlike model presumed by structural analysis, in which the axes of class, race, and sex are conceived as autonomous structures which then require external connections with the other structures” (Grosz 19-20). The interlocking occurs “by way of mutual constitution” (Grosz 20). For example, bodies are “always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities” (Grosz 19).

Intersectionality then refers to the lived/ living experiences where “multiple identities converge at the crossroads of a woman of color life” (Moraga xxii). Intersectionality ensures that no aspect of a woman’s identity is ‘wholly dismissed’ from their consciousness (Moraga xxii). In this sense, Weir’s understanding of identity seems relevant. For Weir, “identities are produced through various intersubjective affective relations and relations of meaning that interrelate with, and are not reducible to, relations of subjugation” (9). Weir understands ‘identification’ as not simply a category but as what she terms, ‘*identification-with*’ (62) such as “identification with values and ideals, identification with ourselves, as individuals and as collectives” (62). Weir shifts the focus from the ‘objectivity’ of the category of identification to the “subjectivity of identifications” (62). By ‘subjectivity of identifications’, Weir refers to every individual’s identifications, commitments, values and solidarities that in turn shape the “designations of

---

<sup>24</sup> The Combahee River Collective was a Black feminist lesbian organization in Boston, Massachusetts, USA from 1974 to 1980. The Collective highlighted that feminism was largely catering to white women and did not express the particular oppressions and needs of women of colour. The Collective explores the intersection of multiple oppressions such as racism and heterosexism.

identity” (63). Thus, the value of Weir’s notion of ‘identification-with’ lies in its characterisation of intersectionality with the subjective perspective, complementing the more ‘objective’ sense of intersectionality as a turn of multiple constitution of the subject by external forces. Hence, Weir’s notion of ‘identification-with’ is beneficial in understanding Dalit identity, which in turn is necessary to comprehend what Dalits attempt to disidentify from.

Furthermore, the idea of intersectionality or interlocking oppressions can be seen in Dalit women’s experiences because Dalit women suffer “multiple layers of violence” (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee 3). By stating ‘Dalit women’, I do not mean to homogenise the varied experiences of every Dalit woman. This chapter attempts to “understand the Dalit women's need to talk differently” (Guru 2548) for which “it is necessary to delineate both the internal and external factors that have bearing on this phenomenon” (2548). This is precisely why Weir’s concept of ‘identification-with’ would be useful to understanding the several discriminations faced by Dalit women such as “labour stratification, untouchability practices and forced endogamy” (Borker 2016). Also, Dalit women writers and activists “lament that the caste factor does not get adequate recognition in the analysis done by non-Dalit, middle-class, urbanised women activists” (Guru 2548). Even Dalit men engage in “reproducing the same mechanisms against their women which their high caste adversaries had used to dominate them” (Guru 2549), which indicates ‘double colonisation’ of Dalit women. Thus, to facilitate the purpose of understanding the intersectionality of Dalit women’s experiences, the concept of ‘theory in flesh’ becomes significant.

### **1.1. Theory in Flesh**

The politics of ‘theory in flesh’ is explored in Moraga and Anzaldúa’s *This Bridge Called My Back* (2015) in order to make sense of the ‘paradoxes’ and the “complex confluence of identities – race, class, gender, sexuality – systemic to women of color oppression *and* liberation” (Moraga xix). For example, one of the paradoxes that is studied in this chapter is the state of abjection of Dalit men, and particularly Dalit women. Kristeva (1982) states that the power of the abject lies in its prohibition as it “does not succeed in differentiating itself as *other* but threatens one’s *own and clean self*, which is the underpinning of any organization constituted by exclusions and hierarchies” (65) because the “symbolic ‘exclusory prohibition’ that, as a matter of fact, constitutes collective existence does not seem to have, in such cases, sufficient strength to dam up the abject or demoniacal potential of the feminine” (65). Hence, exploring theory in flesh enables a deeper understanding of intersectionality and the nature of corporeal abjection, especially in the lives of women of colour. Moraga and Anzaldúa state that a “theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (19). Moraga and Anzaldúa’s *Bridge* is an experimental theory in praxis as it “lives in the flesh” (x1) of women’s lives in order to reveal “the exhaustion we feel in our bones at the end of the day, the fire we feel in our hearts when we are insulted, the knife we feel in our backs when we are betrayed, the nausea we feel in our bellies when we are afraid, even the hunger we feel between our hips when we long to be touched” (x1).

Moraga and Anzaldúa assert that it is “physical and psychic struggle” (x1i) and hence, theory in the flesh is an attempt to understand the “flesh and blood experiences to concretize a vision that can begin to heal...” (19). Through theory in flesh, the subject (entailing subjected to and subject of, and comprising both mind and body) is “recognised as a corporeal being” (ix) with physical and mental identifications.

Additionally, Nayar (2012) looks at the idea of abjectification as a representational process of generating ‘abject-types’ in literatures of trauma across the globe (238). Abject-types are “figures of abjection occurring in literatures of trauma across the world that are remarkably similar to each other and that possess qualities that are iterable out of context (for instance, in terms of “staging” and “performance,” affect and corporeality)” (Nayar 259). Abject-types “are tropes in the discourse of suffering and are universal” (Nayar 259) and are crucial in understanding theory in flesh. Dalit writers believe that the *embodied* trauma and suffering of the abject is portrayed through personal narratives which in turn link “the individual body’s suffering with [the] collective trauma” (Nayar 241) of the Dalit community. In Dalit life writing, particularly Dalit women’s personal narratives, “the body is the center of various kinds of unpleasant discrimination. Insults, for instance, impinge primarily upon the body” (Nayar 241). Since theory in flesh is an act of writing that recognizes and expresses the body as the “principal site of oppression” (Nayar 240) and abjection, it is useful to analyse Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* to see how it operates.

### 1.1.1. Gendered Bodies

The bodily experiences based on identification-with gender can be observed in Sivakami’s narrative wherein gender-specific roles are practiced by and also imposed on individuals, limiting the two genders portrayed, male and female, but certainly oppressing the latter. Weir states that “if we think our identities are just about what is salient for me, what I *choose* to identify with, then we are failing to understand who we really are. The fact that we are constituted through social contexts and through regimes of power means that we don’t know ourselves until we understand those contexts and those power regimes” (32). Sivakami portrays many such power regimes, such as patriarchy, that construct, shape and limit identities. In *Beginning Postcolonialism* (2000), John McLeod explains the term

‘patriarchy’ as “those systems – political, material and imaginative – which invest power in men and marginalise women” (199). In Sivakami’s work, there is evidence of a patriarchal system in place. The first chapter begins with one of the central characters, Kathamuthu, commenting on and disciplining the women in the house. Kathamuthu makes an observation of his second wife, Nagamani, who is sleeping with “loosened skirt, curly hair dishevelled, eyes half-closed” and “moaning in her sleep” as if “in pain” (Sivakami 3). The reference to the ‘second’ wife immediately exposes a polygamous marriage. Kathamuthu further mentions that he had “installed” Nagamani in his home (Sivakami 3). The use of the term ‘installed’ exposes Kathamuthu’s view of Nagamani as a mechanical object that is installed or put in place but currently does not have her body and clothes in its *rightful* place (Sivakami 3). So, the first chapter begins with Kathamuthu teaching his sleeping second wife about modesty as he tosses her sari over to her and demands she ‘cover’ herself even though she is in the privacy of her bedroom. Kathamuthu leaves “without waiting for an answer” (Sivakami 3) which shows his confidence in his views which in turn shows the authority he holds over Nagamani. Then, Kathamuthu checks on his first wife, Kanagavalli, who is sleeping in the next room with her two children, Gowri and Sekaran. Kathamuthu comments on the way the elder ‘girl’ child, Gowri, clings onto her mother’s back even as “a grown-up” (Sivakami 3). In this way, Sivakami’s exposition begins with depicting how women’s bodies are regulated and disciplined under the male gaze. She also represents a predominantly unidirectional flow of authority because of patriarchy.

But the most striking and shocking acts of disciplining women can be seen in Kathamuthu’s domineering responses to Thangam, a Dalit woman who is the victim of an assault and has come to Kathamuthu for help. When Kathamuthu asks Thangam to explain why she is crying, Thangam curses “imaginary figures” (Sivakami 4) as if they were in

front her. To this, Kathamuthu sharply responds by saying, ““Shut up, bitch. Don’t you dare use foul language here. I’ll hit your mouth. Don’t you have any respect for the man you’re talking to? If you’ve nothing more to say, piss off”” (Sivakami 4). Here, Kathamuthu cusses Thangam for cussing and also threatens to physically hurt her because she has disrespected him, ‘the man’. Kathamuthu’s patriarchal beliefs are transparently portrayed wherein he expects the woman to respect ‘the man’ while the woman exerting even the slightest amount of power or performing habits (such as cussing), which are *normally* reserved for men, is seen as going against the patriarchal *norm* of the society. Hence, Thangam’s acts are viewed as disrespectful by Kathamuthu and consequently, punishable (as evidenced by Kathamuthu’s physical threat to Thangam). Through this, Sivakami exposes society’s patriarchal practice wherein “certain representational systems” create “an order of the world” which is presented to individuals as “‘normal’ or ‘true’” (McLeod 199). The representational system could be sexed and/ or gendered identification (in Butler’s perspective) and/ or a regulatory power regime (in Foucauldian sense) including caste and class. Sivakami portrays such instances of identification and relational identification which develops in and through the formation, naturalisation, and practice of *norms*.

So, let us look at gendered identification primarily to understand how certain norms are naturalized in the thinking and practice of people. In Sivakami’s work we get a glimpse of gendered identities of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ inscribed on ‘bodies’. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Judith Butler states that “‘the’ body comes in genders” (ix) or is constructed as such. Butler states that thinking that “the body as constructed demands a rethinking of the meaning of construction itself” (xi) because if “certain constructions appear constitutive” (xi), that is, the “character of being that ‘without which’” one could not think at all, then “bodies only appear, only endure, only live within the productive constraints of certain



highly gendered regulatory schemas” (xi). Butler understands this idea of construction as “constitutive constraint” (xi). She also suggests that the same constraint could also produce “a domain of unthinkable, abject, unlivable bodies” (xi). Thangam could belong to this domain of abject beings and if that is so, then, Kathamuthu is the subject or is what Butler terms “the speaking ‘I’” (3). This subject is formed by going through a process in which a “bodily norm is assumed” (3), for instance, assuming a sex and/ or a gender (Butler 3). Butler links such a process with the idea of ‘identification’ and mentions how the “heterosexual imperative enables certain sexed identifications and forecloses and/ or disavows other identifications” (3). She terms such a situation an ‘exclusionary matrix’ wherein subjects are formed along with the simultaneous requirement of ‘abject beings’, those who are “not yet ‘subjects’, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (3). This idea is similar to Kristeva’s notion of the abject/ abjection wherein the abject beings are forced to the domain of the ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unlivable’. Butler states that the latter domain of social life is heavily populated with “those who do not enjoy the status of the subject, but whose living under the sign of the “unlivable” is required to circumscribe the domain of the subject” (3). Then, it can be said that the paradox of untouchability indicates abjection wherein the untouchable status of Dalits makes them unthinkable and unlivable, yet it is this abject status that is required to assert the position of the ‘touchable’ subjects living in the ‘thinkable’ and ‘liveable’ domain. In this way, the identity of non-Dalits is always tethered to the abject Dalits as (un)touchables, (un)thinkable, (un)liveable; with the abject’s position constantly threatening the existence of the subject.

Moreover, Kathamuthu’s authority is favoured by his gender or his state of *being* a man. Weir’s idea of identification-with ourselves as individuals (62) is useful here because as an individual, Kathamuthu identifies *with* the male gender, as evidenced by his demand

to Thangam to respect him. But, as Weir states, what an individual chooses to identify with (32) is not the only factor necessary for identity formation. There is a need to be *recognised by the other* and hence, Kathamuthu's identification with the male gender is imposed on Thangam who is forced to recognise Kathamuthu's identity as a man and treat him differently. Thangam is pushed to the domain of the unlivable and unthinkable but her recognition is needed to reinforce the domain of the subject. Kathamuthu's identity is never fully complete without the recognition of the abject and hence, always remains attached to the abject as (un)thinkable and (un)liveable. Butler terms this necessity for recognition from the abject as the "constitutive outside" (xi) because the intelligible bodies and abject bodies are not oppositions since "oppositions are, after all, part of intelligibility" (xi). The latter domain is 'excluded' and 'illegible', and it "haunts the former domain as the spectre of its own impossibility, the very limit to intelligibility" (Butler xi). Butler further explains the paradoxical nature of identification as:

This zone of uninhabitability [that] will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which – and by virtue of which – the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claims to autonomy and to life. In this sense, then, the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, "inside" the subject as its own founding repudiation. (3)

Butler's ideas of identification resonate with the concept of relational identification wherein the abject and the subject recognise each other's identities and positions, thereby informing their respective behaviours to each other. Also, Butler's concept of the

‘constitutive outside’ is similar to Derrida’s ‘logic of supplementarity’. In *Of Grammatology* (1976), Derrida states that the supplement “exists only in relation to the inside that it threatens” (135) because “the inside exists only in relation to it” (135). The relationship individuals share provide each other their identities through the reciprocal act of recognition. Kathamuthu’s dominance relies on Thangam recognising his gendered and sexed identifications. Hence, Kathamuthu’s and Thangam’s identities are *relational* and thereby, inseparable from each other. Even the phrasing of words such as ‘unthinkable’ reveal relationality, which although is generally seen as the abject’s dependence on or negation of the subject, it also shows the subject’s dependence on the abject, in order to be ‘thinkable’. In this way, the subject always remains (un)thinkable with the abject’s negation – the ‘un’ - always threatening the subject’s existence. Hence, the very phrasing of terms of negation such as unthinkable and unliveable, demonstrate the paradox of identification. This paradox of identification can also be observed in caste identifications wherein caste roles observed by Dalits and non-Dalits are relational – to be (un)touchable reveals the paradox of untouchability.

As mentioned before, Kathamuthu, being a man, bestows on himself the *right* to use foul language in front of Thangam, while vice-versa is disrespectful. Sivakami portrays Kathamuthu’s hypocrisy which reveals Butler’s exclusionary matrix wherein Thangam, being a woman, is expected to follow the accepted behavioural norms and *perform* accordingly. This performativity is not one of theatricality because it is “not a singular “act” (Butler 12). According to speech act theory, “a performative is that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler 13) and naming starts the long string of interpellation on a grammatical level. Therefore, “bodies provide the base, the raw materials for the inculcation of and interpellation into ideology” (Grosz 17). Thus, identification “is the assimilating passion by which an ego first emerges” (Grosz 13). It is

not enough “for a woman or colonial subject to be defined as a lower form of life: they must be actively *taught*” (Eagleton xv). The dominant power legitimates itself by “*promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable...” (Eagleton 5). This is why power structures do not erupt or establish themselves through a singular act but grow in practice and through repeated performances. Butler asserts that performativity is a reiteration of norms, and to the extent that it “acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition” (12).

Moreover, the repetition of customs, behaviours, and mannerisms is constructed and materialized, one after the other and/ or simultaneously. Butler states that there is “*a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface*” (9) which is termed as ‘matter’. This matter is materialized to bring certain effects favoured by the regulatory power (Butler 10). So, construction of an identity “takes place *in* time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms” (Butler 10). Sivakami portrays how reiteration and materialization over time normalizes and naturalizes certain identifications. For example, despite the crude remarks from Kathamuthu, Thangam maintains a servile position in front of him which could be the effect of the repeated performativity across time that has conditioned Thangam to grant a higher position to Kathamuthu. Thangam responds to Kathamuthu’s cuss and physical threat by addressing him as ““My saviour! Sami!” (Sivakami 4). ‘Sami’ is a term used in various Indian languages to address god, and also someone politically, legally and socially perceived to have the same power and authority as that of god such as those occupying decision-making and action-taking positions in the society. Thangam declares that she reveres Kathamuthu and tells him that she sees him with high regard and hence, has come to him for help. She then shows Kathamuthu the wounds inflicted on her

body which were raw wounds with dried blood. The visual images of Thangam exposing her wounds and begging to Kathamuthu to help her evokes sympathy for Thangam's paradoxical situation. The irony is that Thangam was brutally assaulted by men, yet she is seeking help from a man for protection against men. Thangam's paradoxical situation is maintained throughout the narrative wherein Thangam's 'Sami' does not give her the same respect that she gives him and yet she reveres him and adorns him with a godly position. Here, Sivakami's use of paradox could be a way of emphasising the intersectional suffering and double colonisation of Dalit women through the character of Thangam.

Sivakami shows that Kathamuthu holds a respected and feared position in the society because he was "once even elected president of the panchayat" (10). His past position is mentioned in passing by the narrator when Thankam first exposes her wounds to Kathamuthu and his family. His wives shriek in fear and even the little boy, Sekaran closes his eyes seeing the wounds yet Kathamuthu enquires about some facts in a "businesslike tone of someone who had once been the elected president of the panchayat council" (Sivakami 5). This revelation of his once-held position as the president of the panchayat is significant because it means that once, his decisions and ideas were lawfully accepted and executed, but this was not apart from the authority bestowed on him by his gender. His gestures and words *had* a lawful authoritative bearing and continues to have an authoritative bearing *as a man*. This shows the intersectionality of legal authority and patriarchal gender roles. Even when Kathamuthu no longer holds the position as the president of the panchayat, he believes his say has the weight and importance of a legal stamp. He believes that he is "a man with some say in the society" (10) and that "no one can question" him (Sivakami 10). This past identity of the president of the panchayat continues to stay with him as a performative identity which he attempts to use while inquiring about Thangam's assault.

Before narrating the incidents leading up to her assault, Thangam asks Kanagavalli if she knew “Paranjothi from the upper caste street” (Sivakami 5) to which Kanagavalli responds by saying that she was married off young and hence, does not know anyone from the upper caste street. Kanagavalli mentions that she has hardly been outside the village except to visit her family and she “never” steps outside her street (6) because there was “never any need to go further” (Sivakami 6). Along with portraying women who are forcefully limited and confined, such as Thangam, Sivakami shows another way of life in which women confine themselves to certain spaces they are familiar with. When Gowri “constantly goaded Kanagavalli and Nagamani with talks of women’s liberation”, both women were “happy for Gowri” but “felt it was too late for them” as they have become used to “bending” to their husband’s demands and orders (Sivakami 125). Here, the choices and consequent acts made by the women reveal a *foreclosure* which limits them to their abject position but does not necessarily further their abjection. Also, Kanagavalli does not see the ‘need’ to go out of these spaces especially when these spaces remain ‘protected’ by the presence of manly figures, in the form of a father or a brother or a husband. Hence, having the companionship of a man is seen as necessary for the survival of a woman and so one man can have several wives because women belong to the domain of the unliveable and being identified-with a man, make their lives liveable. Then, the woman’s existence is relevant when identified-with a man. For example, Thangam’s identity is relevant with reference to her husband and father. While drafting a written complaint, Kathamuthu enquires about Thangam’s father’s name but not her mother’s name. In the written complaint, Thangam is referred to as “daughter of the late Paramasivam and wife of the late Kaipillai” (Sivakami 11). The mother’s name is neither inquired about nor is mentioned. Sivakami shows that it is the man’s name that holds value, socially and legally.

Even upper caste women's identities are important in relation to the man. For example, Kathamuthu's second wife, Nagamani is a struggling uppercaste widow. She is having a "hard time after her husband's death" and she is disillusioned "with family and community" (Sivakami 16). Nagamani's identification with a man was necessary for her survival as a woman, because the heteronormative patriarchal society demands so and hence, even though Kathamuthu belongs to the lower caste, she "settled" (Sivakami 16) for him. Perhaps Nagamani's widowhood, that is, the separation from any identification-with a man, places her into a state of abjection that possibly intersects with the abjected position of Dalits thereby, opening the possibility of her marriage to a Dalit man. Also, Kathamuthu was "a young Panchayat President" (Sivakami 16) and this administrative position gave him power and an elevated status. The value of Kathamuthu's body was slightly more than other Dalit men who have not held administrative positions. So even though, Kathamuthu's words were tinged with "painful sarcasm" (16), she "learned to disregard" (Sivakami 16) them. For example, Kathamuthu's response to Nagamani pointing out his insensitive remarks towards Thangam was that 'nobody' cared about Nagamani until he took her into his home or rather 'installed' her. Without his identity attached to hers (legally), Nagamani is not seen to have an identity. Thus, Sivakami shows how upper caste women are also discriminated based on gender and their identities are also tied to the man.

Furthermore, Thangam reveals that her husband, Kaipillai, has passed away leaving her in a vulnerable position because she is "a single woman now" (Sivakami 6) and is 'unprotected' without a man. Thangam compares her abjected position to the privileged position of Paranjothi Udayar. Udayar is an uppercaste man who had employed Thangam to work on his field and he sexually exploited her multiple times. Thangam was assaulted by Udayar's wife and brothers on coming to know about Udayar's 'affair' with Thangam. Thangam states that Udayar is rich and owns land that goes up to the next village

(Sivakami 6), and that she started working in Udayar's farm only after her husband died, in order to earn a living. After the death of her husband, she identifies herself with a further abjected position as a "childless widow" without any protection (Sivakami 7). Even Kathamuthu reinstates Thangam's identities as "poor, lonely, lower caste woman" (Sivakami 22) and it shows how the positioning of man and woman as subject and abject, respectively, are naturalised in the society. This brings back the idea of limiting the choices and identifications of Dalit women characters in Sivakami's narrative, perhaps, as a way to highlight intersectionality through theory in flesh. Nayar (2012) mentions that there is a paradox in Dalit narratives which seek to "deconstruct "caste" as part of its political agenda yet also grounds caste oppression as "embodied subjectivity" that reinstates the Dalit body as "abject-type"" (260). Nayar further mentions that he acknowledges the risks involved in the essentialism of Dalit identity as an 'abject-type' but it also becomes "necessary to the Dalit narrative's focus on corporeal and emotional trauma" (260). Thangam's suffering is embodied and she is 'liveable' through her husband and/ or through a child. Without both, she is 'unliveable', thereby forcing her into further abjection. Hence, the need for autochthonous disidentification becomes important so that individuals can disidentify from imposed caste and gender identifications, inscribed on their bodies. Thus it can be said that understanding theory in flesh enables an understanding of autochthonous and relational identifications, and disidentification could be seen as theory in flesh in praxis.

According to Charles Taylor, individuals' lives have meaning 'only' if they experience themselves as *connected* to their defining communities, to their background horizons and to their ideals and goods (qtd. in Weir 34). For Taylor, identity is defined by that with which an individual "most strongly [identifies]" (qtd.in Weir 40). In the case of Thangam, she participates in constructing and reconstructing her identity. Her identity is determined



by the presence and absence of men. The irony is that her identity as a victim of assault and rape is because of men, and her identity as a survivor to some extent, depends on the judgement Kathamuthu makes. So even though she has some agency that involves an element of autochthonous identification, her thoughts and actions are conditioned by patriarchal structures resulting in a hegemonic acceptance of her imposed limitations. For Butler, agency is not pure or independent from “relations of power or discourse” because agency exists “within the citational chain – a chain, that is, of signifying relations” (Clare 51). Since the preservation of norms require repeated practice or performance, “there is the possibility of introducing difference into the chain of citationality” and the “gaps” rooted in the repetition become the location of and for agency (Clare 51). Thangam is a ‘docile body’ in Foucauldian terms because as mentioned before, docile bodies do not ‘lack agency’ but are “constituted in and through power relations” (Gorringe and Rafanell 109). Moreover, Sivakami shows how “similar to almost all other human communities, the women were considered to be lower than the men” (63). But it is this positional identity and the awareness of it that makes Kathamuthu remain in the domain of the subject. As mentioned before, Sivakami portrays him as the subject or the speaking ‘I’ particularly by placing abject beings such as Thangam alongside him. It can be assumed that this positional identity is necessary for the subject to remain the speaking ‘I’. Then we can reiterate that women’s identity especially, Thangam’s identity and Kathamuthu’s identity are *relational* in the sense they are “constituted through relations of power” (Weir 51). This idea will be further explored in the section, ‘Caste Performativity’, where gender, caste and class identifications converge to oppress the Dalit woman.

Additionally, Kathamuthu proudly tells Thangam that he is living with an ‘upper caste woman’, his second wife Nagamani, who doesn’t belong to the Parayar caste. He uses the collective first-person pronoun, ‘our’ while referring to his caste, which stresses the fact

that Thangam and Kathamuthu belong to the same caste. The use of 'our' is significant because Sivakami exposes how even though they carry the same caste identity, Kathamuthu's gender favours and allows him "rights and privileges patriarchal culture accords to men" (Grosz 15). Kathamuthu explains that the upper caste woman was a "struggling widow" (10) and hence he provided her a "safe haven" (Sivakami 10). Then, he says that he "liked her" and she "was willing" (10), and so she "lives like a queen" (Sivakami 10). Kathamuthu further explains that Thangam's "case is different" from his because Thangam is "a woman" (Sivakami 10). He explains that "upper caste men *may* fancy" her but "they'll not marry" her nor will they allow her to even step into their houses (Sivakami 10). Kathamuthu mentions that there may be rare cases or exceptions where the uppercaste man may let the lower caste woman spend her life as "a concubine" (Sivakami 10). Through Kathamuthu, Sivakami exposes the hypocrisy of the caste system wherein lower caste men can cheat the caste system and engage in intercaste marriage because they are 'men', but only when certain intersections or abject identities are at play, such as widowhood and childlessness. However, a lower caste woman cannot marry an upper caste man because the 'lower' status of women is not just their caste identity, but also their identity as 'woman'. Women are imagined as "*more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men" while men are "free to inhabit what they (falsely) believe is a purely conceptual order while at the same time enabling them to satisfy their (sometimes disavowed) need for corporeal contact through their access to women's bodies and services" (Grosz 14). But as hinted before, different intersections are at play depending on the context. For example, in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), a lower caste man, Vellutha, is in a loving relationship with a divorced Christian woman, Ammu. Vellutha's own father betrays him and exposes his relationship with Ammu, resulting in his brutal death. Ammu is shamed but does not meet the same fate as Vellutha, possibly

because she is upper *class*. In *The Grip of Change*, Kathamuthu marries an upper caste widowed woman and lives openly in the society, while Vellutha meets a different fate not just because of his lower caste status but also perhaps, because of lack of any political or legal positions, like Kathamuthu. Thangam is beaten for engaging in sexual relations with Udayar while Ammu is not punished in a similar way, possibly because even though Thangam and Ammu are no longer tethered to the man through their state of widowhood and divorce, respectively, Thangam's body is seen as barren while Ammu's body is seen as a maternal body, being the mother of two children.

Thus, the nature of the lower caste identity which is a collective identity inclusive of men and women, is not the *same* collective identity for lower caste women. As mentioned before, Thangam is a victim of rape(s) by the upper caste, Paranjothi Udayar. Udayar's memory of raping Thangam depicts the atrocity Thangam was subjected to, and how her body was an object of male gaze and desire. In the next subsection, we can observe the intersectionality of Thangam's experiences wherein her body is exploited and oppressed because it bears the inscription of woman and Dalit. In Thangam's case, the umbrella identity of 'woman' is broken down further to a woman who is widowed and childless. It is difficult to understand when and where one oppression ends and the other begins. Nevertheless, through Thangam, Sivakami attempts to expose the 'intersectionality' of Dalit women's embodied experiences.

## **1.2. Victimised Identity**

The body *remembers* and bears the marks of atrocities. In *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami uses visual images and similes to depict the extent of the atrocity inflicted on Thangam's body. Thangam mentions that her late husband's relatives spread the rumour that she had become Paranjothi's concubine. Consequently, Paranjothi's wife's brothers and brothers-

in-law address Thangam as “a whore” and “dragged” her by the hair out of her home, “hit” and “flogged” her with “a stick stout as a hand” (Sivakami 6). Thangam points out that no one in the village or her relatives came to help her. She begged for mercy but was denied and was beaten up, “abused”, and “threatened” to be killed if she stayed in the village any longer. Sivakami provides clear evidence of Thangam’s victimisation through many ways such as Thangam’s testimony, Udayar’s recalling of the rape, and so on.

Uli Orth (2002) discusses two types of victimization in the context of criminal proceedings: primary and secondary victimization. Primary victimization is the violation of legitimate rights, physical and mental space of the victim whereas secondary victimization is the negative societal reaction consequential to primary victimization. Orth states “victim blaming, insensitive remarks, debasement, and minimization of the harm caused by the victimization” are likely to have “particular negative effects on the victim’s self-esteem” (316). In Sivakami’s narrative, the assault of Thangam already shows that she suffers from primary victimization where her legal, physical and mental space has been violated. Through the character of Thangam, Sivakami sheds light on the atrocities faced by Dalit women. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) of India records the rape count of Dalit women as 1,346 in 2009 which escalated to 2,233 in 2014. There is an appalling increase of violence against Dalit women because of their “socio-economic vulnerability and lack of political voice” (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee 2). This situation is exacerbated with “dominant risk factors of being Dalit and female” (2). In *The Grip of Change*, the brutal gang assault on Thangam and her sexual exploitation by her upper-caste employer exposes the struggle of Dalit women wherein their identities as Dalit and female unwillingly earns them the third identity of ‘victim’. So, this subsection studies Thangam’s narration in detail to understand the intersectionality of her experiences

wherein her identities as a widowed woman and Dalit overlap on many occasions, contributing to the formation of her identity as a victim.

The primary victimization of Thangam is clear in Udayar's recalling of raping Thangam which is given as a separate section under a chapter, right after Udayar contemplates the shame and humiliation the exposure of his affair with "a Parachi" (Sivakami 32) would bring to him. His repeated use of the term 'parachi' more than the name Thangam shows his disgust for her caste identity. Udayar is not afraid of the police or the courts or the expenditure the whole case might cost but "only the caste concerns made him anxious" as he feels it is "a disgrace" to have to own up to the "relationship with a Parachi" (Sivakami 31-32). Udayar goes onto remember his "association" with Thangam (Sivakami 32). Sivakami uses third person narrative to recall the incident but since it is Udayar's memory, the narration is from the perspective of Udayar.

Udayar remembers "the beginning of his association with her..." (Sivakami 32). He recalls her attire as she worked on channelling the water from the borewell to Udayar's groundnut field. She wore a sari which had a matching blouse that "fitted her well" (Sivakami 32). The sari was "rolled up to her knees and the upper part lay twisted like a Brahmin's sacred thread, snug between her breasts" (Sivakami 32). Though "just average looking" (32), Thangam's "well-arranged, clean teeth...[and] naive smile that brought forth dimples on her cheeks, attracted Udayar" (Sivakami 32). The idea of cleanliness is significant because caste discrimination against lower castes stems from the act of untouchability which is based on dichotomies such as purity and pollution, cleanliness and dirt, and so on. Also, Udayar associates the twisted sari on the upper part of Thangam's body to "a Brahmin's sacred thread". The sacred thread is a visible and exclusive marker of Brahmanical identity. Since Udayar's disgust for Thangam's caste is clear, Udayar's association of Thangam with cleanliness and the sacred thread shows an attempt to

mentally bring Thangam to the same level as that of upper castes. Perhaps, Udayar's associations are a way of convincing himself to look past Thangam's parayar identity, in order to justify engaging in a sexual act with a lower caste woman. Udayar does not see his actions as a crime because Thangam "was his servant" (Sivakami 32). Udayar thinks that since she "was no princess or minister's daughter" and also because "she did not even have a husband", he can force himself on her (Sivakami 32). This once again portrays the positional identity of Thangam whose existence and survival are placed at the mercy of men. It also shows the powerless position of Thangam who is not associated with someone in a 'powerful' authoritative position such as a king or a minister. Udayar does not see rape as a crime, especially when a lot of intersections such as widowhood, childlessness, parayar identity, employee, lack of power and money, and so on are in play. Thus, the narration shows Thangam as a victim of not just the male gaze but also as a victim of an upper caste gaze. Moreover, Thangam "appeared attractively different" (Sivakami 32) to Udayar compared to his wife, Kamalam. The contrasting features of Thangam's "muscular body" as opposed to Kamalam's "soft flesh" and Thangam's "jutting cheekbones, etc." as opposed to Kamalam's "round, golden countenance" (Sivakami 32) attracts Udayar. Udayar secretly "enjoyed watching" (Sivakami 32) Thangam bathe in the tub near the well. Here, Sivakami portrays several layers of oppression and powerlessness of Thangam through Udayar's recollection. The readers get a chance to witness the perpetrator's lustful thoughts and actions which enable the readers to delve further into the embodied victimhood of Thangam, thereby relating back to the idea of theory in flesh.

Hypocritically, Udayar finds an upper caste woman desiring a lower caste man to be disgusting. For instance, the uppercaste man, Ramalinga Reddiar, was unaware of Santha, his wife's, indiscretion with their lower caste servant, Kaliyan. Santha's "lust" for Kaliyan was 'inspired' by his "beauty and youth" (Sivakami 47). Santha was harsh towards

Kaliyan in front of people but her “severity towards him during the day would be in proportion to her desire for him during the early morning hours” (Sivakami 48). When Udayar finds out about this affair, he is ‘disgusted’ (Sivakami 48), yet he didn’t feel the same when he raped Thangam but was only ashamed at being associated with her publicly. Arundhati Roy’s statement about such uppercaste desire, “Love is polluting. Rape is pure” (25) can be observed here because Santha and Kaliyan are in a consenting sexual relationship while Udayar rapes and exploits Thangam. There is less information about Kaliyan’s thoughts, so we are unsure if he is giving into Santha out of fear but Sivakami certainly portrays Udayar’s hypocrisy. This is similar to the hypocrisy shown by Kathamuthu when he curses but objects to Thangam cursing because Kathamuthu is aware of and practices the patriarchal codes, and expects Thangam to recognise and reciprocate the same. So, Udayar’s thoughts and actions stem from his own intersectional identity as a rich, land-owning, upper caste man who is aware of his powerful position in the society. But, the nature and effects of his intersectionality is different from the women’s intersectionality. That is, each intersection makes Udayar more powerful contributing to his identity as an oppressor, while Thangam’s intersections make her less powerful contributing to her identity as a victim.

For example, a factor that empowers Udayar is Thangam’s identity as “only a lower caste labourer” (Sivakami 32). In Arundhati Roy’s “Introduction” (2014) to the printed version of Ambedkar’s 1936 speech (“Annihilation of Caste”), Roy states that if the caste system can be imagined as a pyramid then, the “top of the caste pyramid is considered pure and has plenty of entitlements” (23) while the bottom “is considered polluted and has no entitlements but plenty of duties” (23). Roy further states that the “pollution-purity matrix is correlated to an elaborate system of caste-based, ancestral occupation” (23-24). As stated in the previous chapter, many occupations were bound by caste, and following the

caste occupations were part of the twentieth century feudalistic jajmani agricultural system of production and distribution of goods and services based on “caste duties and land” (Rao 877). Land tenure being “the power-determinant within the jajmani system” (Rao 877), the upper castes were mostly jajman or owners while lower castes were kamins or workers. The jajmans owned and controlled land and thereby possessed “economic-numerical-political power, custom, dogma, superiority in numbers, political connection” (Rao 877). As explained in the previous chapter, the concept of purity and pollution determines not only work-relations but also the way of living resulting in a complex matrix of economics, culture and politics (Rao 877).

Roy (2014) further points out that “men of the privileged castes had undisputed rights over the bodies of Untouchable women” (25). Similar ideas are stated in Audra Simpson’s article, “The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty” (2016). Simpson states that an “Indian woman’s body” (6) in settler states such as Canada and US is “loaded with meaning” (6). The Indigenous woman’s body signifies “land itself” and is henceforth “rendered ‘unrapeable’ (that is, highly rapeable)” because a woman is like land, “matter to be extracted from, used, sullied, taken from, over and over again” (Simpson 6). The Indigenous woman’s body is seen as matter that is already “violated and violatable in a great march to accumulate surplus” for ‘production’ (Simpson 6). Simpson’s concept of reability of land and the rapeability of Indian women in Canada can be observed and applied to Dalit women. Like the Indigenous women’s bodies, Dalit women’s bodies are deemed as “killable, rapeable, expendable” (Simpson 6) and historically less valuable because of what they represent – land, that can be taken and used.

Sivakami’s narrative also portrays the relationship between land and Dalit woman. Thangam is denied access to her dead husband’s paternal land because she has no children.



Even though legally Thangam has the right to her husband's land, her brothers-in-law "refused to hand over" her rightful "share of land" (Sivakami 26). The idea of fertility of Thangam is related to her right to land. Since she has no children, she is infertile and hence has no rights to the fertile land. She is not reapeable, however, this does not prevent her from being rapeable and consequently, Thangam is raped by Paranjothi. Landlords like Paranjothi follow a feudal system of owning land which gives them power and status. So, it is "their continuing socio-economic and political power and authority in rural agricultural regions, as well as their connection as employers of many" (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee 7) that lead to injustice and atrocities on Dalit men and women. *The denial of rights to land and the ongoing violence against Dalit women show that Dalit women are deemed to have no right to land and have no right to their bodies.* Violent atrocities against Dalit women are related to their "poverty levels or economic status, in terms of their landlessness combined with their dependence on dominant castes for their livelihood; that is, with regard to work, wages and loans" (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee 12).

All these factors combined, Udayar "did not feel restrained in anyway" (Sivakami 32) and lures Thangam into the sugar cane field by demanding she switch off the motor-pump that was used to water the sugar cane fields. Udayar "drove" Thangam to the "centre of the field so that no one could see them" (Sivakami 33). Thangam was unsuspecting and hence "before she could even guess what Udayar was up to, he grabbed her from behind and held her buttocks tight against his thighs, murmuring harshly, 'Don't shout.' His breath was hot on the skin of her neck and cheeks" (Sivakami 33). Thangam protested and "resisted him stubbornly" but her "resistance only excited him further" (Sivakami 33). Udayar revels in raping Thangam by enjoying the memory of how he *forcefully* "overpowered her and pushed her down" (Sivakami 33). Thangam "had spent her three years of widowhood

untouched by a man” and now she “succumbed to the loathsome old man’s lust” (Sivakami 33). Thangam “sobbed with anger sitting in the field” (Sivakami 33). After this “incident”, Udayar made “it a routine to have sex with her and slake his lust whenever possible – in the motorshed or in the fields” (Sivakami 34). Sivakami terms the later incidents as ‘sex’ because Thangam “no longer resisted him” as she believed that there was “no choice” (33). In return for allowing him to rape her, Udayar would give Thangam “twenty-five or thirty rupees each time” (Sivakami 34) in everybody’s presence. He would ask her to recruit workers and she would do as ordered, “though at times she felt disgusted with her life” (Sivakami 34). Here, Sivakami’s portrays the helplessness of Thangam as she feels she has no choices, and possibly even legal rights, because of her oppressed identities and intersectionality.

Furthermore, Sivakami shows that Thangam is forced to justify her position as a victim of rape to Kathamuthu because he accuses her of being a ‘whore’. Thangam hesitatingly mentions that Udayar “has had” (Sivakami 7) her. Her expression is a “mixture of fear and shame” (Sivakami 7) because she is forced to expose herself. Even the phrase “has had” is ambiguous as it could mean a mutual intimacy or rape. Thangam further asserts that she is not “easy” (Sivakami 7) and will not lie with anyone. Her husband’s brothers tried to force her (Sivakami 7) yet she didn’t give in. Thangam says that her brothers-in-law wanted her “to be a whore” and would approach her but, she “brandished the broom” (Sivakami 7). Even though Udayar “raped” her, Thangam says that she remained “silent” because he was her “paymaster” and he “measures” her “rice” (Sivakami 7). This is an ironical situation because Thangam’s silence to preserve her livelihood eventually destroys her livelihood, without any effect on her paymaster/ perpetrator. In this way, Thangam faces secondary victimization through the words and gestures of Kathamuthu and Kangavalli. Kathamuthu does not even attempt to console Thangam but responds by saying bluntly “okay okay”.

Kathamuthu refuses to believe her story and demands that she take her “story to someone else who might be fool enough to believe it” (Sivakami 6). After all, Kathamuthu is also subject to the hierarchy of caste and, despite being a man, he hesitates to set himself against an upper caste man. Once again, this shows the difference in the nature and effect of intersectionality. Kathamuthu is in a powerful position as a man but Udayar is more powerful because of his identities as an upper caste land-owning man. Kathamuthu is aware that the intersection of many powerful identities makes Udayar a formidable individual in the society.

Moreover, Thangam’s hesitation to tell the events in minute detail evokes sympathy for her, assaulted, alone and homeless as she is. She responds by addressing Kathamuthu as ‘Ayya’ which is a term used to refer to someone higher in terms of status, class and position. It is a term used from a position of servitude. Thangam says, “Ayya, you are all gods to me” (Sivakami 7). Thangam places herself in a lower position in terms of gender, caste, and class. It is unclear as to who she is referring to by “you are all” because “all” could mean Kathamuthu and his family or men like Kathamuthu who are treated as equal to gods by other lower caste women, and possibly also other lower caste men. Also, while narrating the events, Thangam refers to Kanagavalli as ‘Kanagu’ since they are from the same village. This shortened casual reference could also be for Thangam to feel closer to something or someone in order to narrate the traumatic incidents. Even the narrator refers to Kanagavalli as ‘Kanagu’ until Thangam reveals that Udayar ‘has had’ her, after which the narrator refers to Kanagu as ‘Kangavalli’ showing a sense of detachment because the sympathetic Kanagu has transformed to a blamer. Kanagavalli blames Thangam for spoiling someone’s marriage (Sivakami 7) and for hurting Udayar’s family. Kanagavalli stresses on this matter more in the presence of Nagamani, Kathamuthu’s second wife. It is clear here that Kanagavalli is not happy or in favour of Kathamuthu’s second marriage. It

is ironic because Kanagavalli should have been able to understand Thangam's struggle, yet she uses Thangam's state to taunt Nagamani. Kanagavalli points the finger at the woman for acts that involve both, a man and a woman. She blames Thangam and Nagamani but does not question or blame Udayar and Kathamuthu, respectively. Sivakami's portrayal of complicity can be linked to foreclosure of choices and actions made by women which limit themselves to abject position; and also create 'abject-types'.

Additionally, the blame and shame of being intimate with a man, through marriage or not, lies on the women and Sivakami points out that women are the first to blame. The same is seen with Udayar's wife who beats up Thangam and demands her to leave the village, yet she does not blame Udayar. When Thangam's assault is filed as a legal case, two policemen investigate the matter and debate over Udayar's wife, Kamalam's decision to beat up Thangam. The policemen refer to Kamalam as 'Udayachi', denoting to her identity as the wife of Udayar. The policemen refer to Thangam by her lower caste name, 'Parachi'. The identity of a Parachi is seen as disgusting or shameful which is implied by one of the policemen who justifies Udayar's wife beating up Thangam because "how can Udayachi put up with her husband having an affair with a Parachi" (Sivakami 30). Another policeman blames Udayachi saying that it is not "as if the Parachi can force the Udayar. If the Udayachi is not smart enough to keep her husband, why should she get the other beaten up?" (Sivakami 31). Here, Kamalam is blamed by both policemen, the former for beating up Thangam because her husband was having an affair with her and the latter for not being able to prevent her husband from having an affair. The blame for Udayar's indiscretion lies on Kamalam and yet the policemen do not blame Udayar. When Udayar finds out that Kamalam had gotten Thangam beaten up which led to his 'rape-affair' going public, Udayar yells at Kamalam saying, "Are you happy now? How long have you been scheming to belittle your own husband? You too will surely face the consequences..."

(34). This relates to performativity wherein the performative audience needs the gaze of the social interlocutor but is then subject to this gaze. Sivakami points out that men are not blamed for having relations outside marriage and are not condemned for raping women. But, women are blamed for *being raped*, for not being able to keep their husbands from seeing other women, and also for reacting to their husband's infidelity.

Another instance of women oppressing women while either refusing to question or justifying the acts of men, can be seen in an argument between two lovers, Lalitha and Elangovan. Lalitha is the daughter of a "padayachi widow Mangalavati" (Sivakami 55) who is in love with a lower caste man, Elangovan. During a conversation, Lalitha asks 'Elango', "why are your people are so violent?" and she "emphasised 'your people'" (Sivakami 56). Elango responds by asking her "why didn't you raise any questions when your people assaulted Thangam. He "too emphasised 'your people'" (Sivakami 56). Lalitha asks him why he talks in support of "a whore", to which Elango responds that if "she is a whore, what is Udayar?" (Sivakami 56). Lalitha responds by saying that "he is a man! He can do anything that pleases him" (Sivakami 56). Through this, Sivakami emphasises how Thangam's identity as a victim is not recognised by many (but not all, as Elango supports Thangam) Dalit women and men, and upper caste women and men, alike.

Sivakami also shows how polygamy is practiced by men and women but with only men having more than one wife, but not vice-versa. For example, Kathamuthu feels that his two wives have "ganged" up on him and hence, he will "have to bring another woman home" (Sivakami 16). This thought "made him smile" (Sivakami 16) and he boasts about his "ability to get another woman" (Sivakami 26) to Kanagavalli and Nagamani. Also, Kathamuthu's crude remarks to Thangam's situation show the trivialisation of rape. Kathamuthu states that: "All right, it happened. Now tell me, why didn't you go after someone of our caste? It's because you chose that upper caste fellow, that four men could

come and righteously beat you up. Don't you like our chaps?" (3). Kathamuthu's misogynistic and casteist comments evoke sympathy for Thangam who addresses him as a god and believes that only he can help her. Kathamuthu does not even address the events as rape but as 'it' and makes the rape look like a trivial matter. Indeed, he refuses to look at the incidents as rape which is clear in the way he asks Thangam why she didn't "go after their" chaps, referring to Parayar men. The blame of rape heavily falls on Thangam who is seen as the seductress here.

Also, Kathamuthu's casteist comments show how not only upper castes but also lower castes can discriminate on the basis of caste. Her identity as a woman and a Dalit overlaps here resulting in double subjugation. Since she is judged by Kathamuthu, who is a lower caste man, Thangam faces triple subjugation. Also, Kathamuthu's dialogue reveals the secondary victimization of Thangam who faces victim blaming, insensitive remarks, debasement, and trivialization of the harm. There is no concern shown for Thangam's physical and mental care. Thangam, who is clearly a victim of rape and assault, is faced with the unjust and cruel (non-)choice of justifying her victimhood. She feels that what happened was "wrong and horrible" but she is "not a desperate woman" and did not "be with" Udayar out of her will (Sivakami 7). Thangam is "ashamed" (Sivakami 7) and apologises for giving into Udayar. Here, Thangam is seen to blame herself for what Udayar did to her on many occasions. But, Kathamuthu continues to mock Thangam and remains insensitive to her trauma. He asks Thangam: "But tell me, why did they beat you up? Because you are lower caste, that's why. For all that's happened, Paranjothi has stayed out of it, hasn't he? That's why I said you should have chosen one of our men" (Sivakami 10). Here, Kathamuthu implies that Thangam is responsible for being raped and hence, she could have avoided one level of oppression (caste) by *choosing* to be raped by any lower caste man. For Kathamuthu, Thangam is in trouble not because she was raped but because

she was raped by an upper caste man. For Paranjothi Udayar, raping Thangam is justified because he is an *uppercaste wealthy man*. Udayar had plans to use his wealth to “pacify” Thangam and did not expect her to “act to the extent of filing a police complaint” (Sivakami 31). For Udayar, rape is justified as he ‘pays’ for what he has taken. Then, can the sexual acts after the initial rape be seen as consensual even though Thangam did not have a choice but to give in? However, this could be the effect of the ‘identification-with’ gender and caste roles in a patriarchal and casteist society because Udayar does “not feel restrained in any way” (Sivakami 32) from raping Thangam because she is only a Parachi labourer. He curses Thangam, stating: “Ungrateful whore! Even if she was hurt, she was hurt by the hand adorned in gold! A Parachi could have never dreamt of being touched by a man like me! My touch was a boon granted for penance performed in her earlier births! And then the dirty bitch betrays me! How can I face the world with my name thus polluted?” (Sivakami 31).

So, it can be said that there are *taboo* performative acts which secretly establish hierarchies (dominance of caste and gender roles) and enable certain individuals to enjoy the benefits (upper caste men). As mentioned before, citationality is performative and requires the gaze of the social interlocutor but one is simultaneously subjected to this gaze. Hence, performative acts such as rape are encouraged to establish and re-inforce hierarchies, but publicising the acts threatens the ‘essentially enclosed’ nature of the hierarchies. Such acts become taboo and citation of such acts are publicly shunned (although privately practiced) to maintain a false boundary between castes.

Furthermore, to most of Kathamuthu’s remarks, Thangam responds in sorrowful silence. Sivakami uses visual images such as “tears rolling down her cheeks” (10) to evoke sympathy and portray the struggles of Thangam. But the most striking image that can be observed consistently throughout Sivakami’s work is the auditory image of ‘silence’.

Thangam “remained silent” as she “slowly understood the abuses she had been subjected to” (Sivakami 10). Sivakami depicts the silencing of Dalit women by giving them no dialogues. The silence reverberates on many occasions. Thangam’s words and emotions are silenced or demanded to be silenced. For example, Thangam “felt miserable” and “the memories made her sob in distress” (Sivakami 10) to which Kathamuthu demands Thangam to “stop crying”. Thangam’s crying is mocked as “howling” (Sivakami 10) and her cries are immediately silenced. There is a mockery of Thangam’s emotions, thereby trivialising rape and assault with no regard for mental health and sensitivity. This also shows how the patriarchal society views rape and how women are conditioned to blame themselves if they are raped since women are told for generations that they are responsible for keeping their bodies from ‘defilement’ which includes rape.

Thus, Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* portrays the intersectionality of Dalit women’s experiences by emphasising theory in flesh. Intersectionality applies to men and women, and Dalits and non-Dalits. However, the intersectionalities of upper caste men, like Udayar, result in accumulating more power while the intersectionalities of Dalit women, such as Thangam, result in further oppression. This also leads to paradoxes. For example, by validating Thangam’s experiences and innocence through Kathamuthu who is an “authoritative masculine figure, Sivakami projects the paradoxical plight of the Dalit female subject who has to both resist Dalit patriarchies and seek an alliance with Dalit men to ‘protect’ herself” (Yadav 79). Dalit women are subjugated by the upper caste man, upper caste woman and lower caste man on the basis of caste, gender and class. Even Dalit women victimise each other leading to secondary victimisation, as a result of years of repeated ‘identification-with’ patriarchal and casteist performances. Therefore, the Dalit woman’s intersectionality of interlocking oppressions stretches across several contexts, leaving her powerless and living in an exclusionary matrix as abject beings. The following



section looks at how repeated performances of caste divisions or *caste performativity* have contributed to the abjection of Dalit women.

## 2. Caste Performativity

Caste discrimination is the predominant social evil exposed in Sivakami's narrative and identification-with caste identities plays a significant role in individuals' lives. Just like gender identification, caste identity is also relational where two parties are dependent on the mutual recognition by those individuals in the relationship. In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel presents the dialectic of the master and slave where the existence of both the master and the slave sustains itself on *reciprocity* of recognition. Hegel explains that it is not just the slave's existence which is recognised by the master but also the master's existence is recognised by the slave. Hegel understands self-consciousness as something that exists only by being acknowledged or recognised by the other. Hegel (1964) states that action from one side alone would be "useless, because what is to happen can only be brought about by means of both" (230) as "[t]hey recognise themselves as mutually recognising one another" (231). The upper castes and lower castes identify the upper castes as a higher and powerful category, while the lower castes are identified as a lower and abjected category by both upper castes and lower castes. The upper castes exercise their superiority and are willing to kill "if the Parayars cannot serve the upper castes" (Sivakami 50). In Sivakami's narrative, lower castes are shown to believe in their abjected position which has contributed to normalizing the existence of the caste system. For instance, while talking on behalf of Thangam to the police inspector, Kathamuthu mentions that "there is no unity amongst the lower castes" including himself because they are "afraid of the rich upper castes" (Sivakami 22). Kathamuthu further states that there is no place "where caste doesn't exist" and "caste will be around generations yet to come"

(Sivakami 22). Sivakami shows that this hegemonic acceptance of caste identity is accepted by individuals and collectives.

After enquiring about the assault, Kathamuthu's priority lies in understanding Thangam's identity, mostly her caste identity which he attempts to confirm by asking her about the place she is from and her name. This is because caste groups tend to live among the same caste in the same place or street and there are certain names common to certain caste groups. In Sivakami's work, Dalit communities reside in the 'cheri' while the caste Hindus live in the villages. There is no physical separation or a tangible boundary except for sometimes a few trees "positioned in between them that keep them apart" (Sivakami 25). Sivakami explains what a 'cheri' is by using a footnote, "[t]he Dalit communities are confined to the cheri, a ghetto located at the margins of the village. The village or gramam is that part where the caste Hindus live. The term village in the Tamil context denotes both the exclusive habitation of the caste Hindus and the combined settlements of all castes – touchable and untouchable" (25). The idea of what actually constitutes a village points to the paradox of untouchability which is a result of the many ambiguities in the material conceptualisation and practice of caste. Another example is that of Kathamuthu who comes from the village of Athur and Thangam from the village of Puliur, yet each of them resides in their respective 'cheris' which is different from the main village.

As for the names, the uppercastes are addressed by their caste names, which is their legal surname such as "Udayars, Reddiar, Mudaliar, Padayachi" (Sivakami 30). The uppercastes are "fuelled with caste pride" (Sivakami 50) and hence, they flaunt it in their legal name. Other caste groups including the lower castes refer to the upper castes by their surnames, hence recognising and reinstating the upper caste identity. When lower castes are referred to by their caste name (which isn't part of their legal name), it is used as a derogatory and abusive identity. So the caste name itself is imbued with a certain weight

which then ceases to become a constative sign, and becomes a *performative* sign. For instance, when Kathamuthu changes the facts of the incidents leading to Thangam's assault, he tries to use the 'caste' factor to strengthen her case. In Kathamuthu's version of the events, Paranjothi's wife supposedly called Thangam, "abusing her by her caste name" – 'Parachi' (Sivakami 30). Hence, the caste name becomes a performative sign and the act of using the caste name becomes a performative act since the utterance of the name leads to historical and social implications of ongoing caste practices. Then, it can be said that anything attached or associated with the bodies are also spaces or sites of performativity. For Butler, the body is a site of performativity because it is a sign that becomes meaningful (Clare 51) and agency lies in such a performative signification. Similarly, names attached to the body are also involved in the repeated performances and significations. Hence, names can be a site of performativity. In this regard, identifying with certain ideas can be imprisoning but since performativity offers scope for agency and transformation, the act of 'identifying-with' renders scope for liberation. This could be why a few Dalits attempt to reclaim or use their caste identity with pride, such as Rettaimalai Srinivasan who used the term 'Parayan' to proudly assert his caste identity and mobilise groups; which is evidenced in the entitling of a journal as *Parayan* (1893-1900).

Additionally, in *Annihilation of Caste*, Ambedkar talks about how caste Hindus attempt to maintain an imaginary caste purity by preventing the intermingling of castes. Ambedkar states that "it is said that the object of caste was to preserve purity of race and purity of blood" (236). Ambedkar had republished Annie Besant's<sup>25</sup> essay in the *Indian Review* (1909) because she vouched for segregating the untouchable children from children of 'purer' castes in schools stating that:

---

<sup>25</sup> Annie Besant was part of the Theosophical Society and a founding member of the Congress.

Their bodies at present are ill-odorous and foul with the liquor and strong-smelling food out of which for generations they have been built up; it will need some generations of purer food and living to make their bodies fit to sit in the close neighbourhood of a school room with children who have received bodies trained in habits of exquisite personal cleanliness and fed on pure food stuffs. We have raised the Depressed Classes to a similar level of purity, not drag the clean to the level of the dirty, and until that is done, close association is undesirable. (qtd. in Roy 59-60)

Sivakami shows how the practice of associating dirty and unclean with the lower castes is observed by government officials. For instance, the tahsildar<sup>26</sup> advises the new sub-collector not to go “inside the cheri” as it “is so dirty” and he will be “surrounded by pigs” (Sivakami 76). Another instance of segregation based on the dichotomy of purity and pollution can be observed when Kathamuthu’s relatives go to Naicker’s jewellery shop to buy silver araignan (a type of jewellery) for their newborn baby. Naicker keeps the relative “standing, and carefully dropped the silver piece on his palm from a distance in order to avoid touching him” (Sivakami 19). When Kathamuthu heard of this, he confronted Naicker and when Naicker touched his shoulder, Kathamuthu asked, “Why are you touching me Naicker? Isn’t it a sin if you touch me?” (Sivakami 19). To this Naicker responds elaborating his tolerance, “...You know I never pay any attention to caste. I am not a Brahmin preserving the old order, afraid of the wrath of the gods. All that I am particular about is cleanliness” (Sivakami 19). Kathamuthu responds by saying that he wasn’t aware that “there is another meaning to untouchability” (Sivakami 19). Kathamuthu showed his “admirable” teeth and “healthy pink” gums to prove what it means to be clean

---

<sup>26</sup> Tahsildar is an official administrative position in the Revenue Department of the Government of India. The Tahsildar has the official power to preside over matters regarding revenue, tax, and land, in their specific taluk. Each state and union territory in India are divided into many districts and each district has administrative sub-districts such as taluk or tahsil.

and simultaneously insulting the “foul breath and stained teeth” of Naicker (Sivakami 19). Kathamuthu’s response exposes Arundhati Roy’s view that the practice of untouchability is the *performative* end of the practice of caste (98). This performative nature of caste manifests itself by segregating bodies based on the binary of clean and dirty. Since there is nothing essential about caste and each body has no scientific or biological reason to be associated with a particular caste apart from being born into one, physical and visible aspects are exploited to normalise the divide between castes. The dichotomy of clean/dirty, and pure/polluted is used to segregate between the bodies of upper and lower castes. Annie Besant’s statement attempts to naturalise and, in a way, essentialise, the dichotomy of cleanliness and dirtiness of bodies by stating that years of training and ‘pure food stuffs’ have kept upper caste children clean. Here, the striking part is that the purity/pollution binary is imposed not only on bodies but also, anything associated with those bodies such as food. But if you look closely at food itself, then we can see yet another paradox because as Kristeva (1982) states, “all food is liable to defile” (75) because food can be seen as a “border between two distinct entities or territories” (75), that of human and non-human. In this regard, food becomes abject – as a polluting oral non-human object that enters the clean human body (Kristeva 75). Kristeva further states that “the Brahmin who surrounds his meal and his food with very strict regulations is less pure after eating than before” (75) because in this instance, food “designates the other (the natural) that is opposed to the social condition of man and penetrates the self’s clean and proper body” (75). Thus, abjection is yet again inevitable and threatening to the caste divisions.

Additionally, Kristeva looks at the “repulsion aroused by *food remainders* in Brahmanism” (76). Remainders can be understood as “residues of something but especially of someone. They pollute on account of incompleteness” (Kristeva 76). Yet, Brahmins consume remainders in order to “to undertake a journey or even accomplish his

specific office, the priestly act” (Kristeva 76), in which case, the remainders are not polluting but elevating towards holiness. Here, we can see the ambivalence of residues which has the potential to pollute and the potential to renew (Kristeva 76). Kristeva states that the concept of remainders or residue can be seen in other domains and not just food. As mentioned before, Dalits are oppressed by a caste system to which they do not even belong and are often pushed to the margins of society as polluted and polluting beings. Then, we can relate the concept of residue or remainder to the casteist view of who Dalits are: remainders who are polluted and hence have the potential to pollute. Then, if we apply Kristeva’s logic of the ambivalence of residue wherein, “there is nothing that is everything; nothing is exhaustive, there is a residue in every system—in cosmogony, food ritual, and even sacrifice, which deposits, through ashes for instance, ambivalent remains” (76), then Dalits also have the potential to renew. This poses a challenge to “our monotheistic and mono-logical universes” but “such a mode of thinking apparently needs the ambivalence of remainder if it is not to become enclosed within one single-level symbolics, and thus always posit a non-object as polluting as it is reviving—defilement and genesis” (Kristeva 76). Therefore, the paradox of untouchability created by many such ambivalences and ambiguities exposes the power of the abject to threaten the subject with the potential to renew or transform. This stresses the role of relational identification in the formation and perpetuation of identities, and the importance of and for relational disidentification.

Moreover, Sivakami’s narrative points out that receiving training in ‘exquisite personal cleanliness’ is an entitlement or privilege borne out of caste and class supremacy. Kathamuthu boldly confronts Naicker stating that, ““Cleanliness! Our chaps toil in the mud every day, worse than cattle. If you gave them enough money, you’d be surprised to see how handsome they could be. Cleanliness!”” (19). Sivakami shows how the idea of

cleanliness is used as a marker to segregate different castes. Through concepts of cleanliness, food, names and bodies, the “Hindu social order or the Brahminical caste order hitch-hiked on the shoulders of the toiling masses” (Prakash Louis 141). Sivakami also shows how lower castes attempt to hide their caste identity or fit in with the upper castes by mimicking their practices. For example, after his bath, Kathamuthu wrapped a wet towel around his waist, “faced the sun and folded his hands” (Sivakami 14). He started reciting the “taraka mantram to seduce the Devi...Om Sarvasoosari, Sankari, Chamundi, Rubi- destroyer of Taraka, protector of the devas...” (Sivakami 14). Kathamuthu points out that he picked up this practice from Vakil Venkatakrishnan, a brahmin lawyer. Kathamuthu would use three fingers to take the “thiruneer from the wooden box” and apply it on “his forehead in three broadstrokes” (Sivakami 14). He wore “spotless white veshti and shirt contrasting well with his healthy dark skin” (Sivakami 15). In this way, Kathamuthu mimics the Brahmin culture in his appearance and ways. Also, Kathamuthu defends everything he does and says by quoting “from the Mahabharatha and the Ramayana” (Sivakami 15). These two epics were stories of uppercaste men and women, and hence popular among the upper castes. Quoting from the epics gives Kathamuthu an aura of importance and the uneducated lower caste masses stand in awe. He mimics the practices and epistemes of the upper castes on the assumption that the mimicry would elevate his status and value to that of the upper castes. However, Kathamuthu can only mimic but cannot become a Brahmin or attain the same status as that of a Brahmin because caste groups are not interchangeable, and this exclusiveness results in the *imagined* stringent nature of the caste order. For example, Kathamuthu can mimic certain Brahminical ways but cannot move his residence to a Brahmin’s locality and can only continue to stay in the ‘cheri’ along with fellow Dalits. In this way, mimicry leads to incompleteness, and a state of *neither here nor there*.

However, the state of ‘neither here nor there’ could also result in ‘hybridity’. Homi K Bhabha (2004) explores the idea of cultural hybridity as something that “entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (5). Hybridity is a state of something new which is neither one thing nor the other (Bhabha 37, 49). Bhabha states that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in a “contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation” – a Third Space – which is why “hierarchical claims to the inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures are untenable, even before we resort to empirical historical instances that demonstrate their hybridity” (54-55). Bhabha further states that the ambivalent ‘Third Space’ “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (54-55). Then, we can say that Kathamuthu inhabits the ‘Third Space’ because the idea that Kathamuthu could mimic certain Brahminical habits shows that the idea of cultural purity or originality is flawed. For Bhabha (1994), mimicry “‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualises power” but it is “at once resemblance and menace” (Bhabha 86). The menace is “its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” wherein the “observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of *identity* and alienates it from essence” (Bhabha 89). In the case of Dalits, the idea of ‘double vision’ enables an ideological offensive. The ‘gaze’ is reversed through mimicry because historically, many untouchable communities were not allowed to look at or meet their eyes with upper castes, while upper castes had the power to do more than just look. So, the ‘double vision’ offered through mimicry reverses the gaze, thereby disrupting authority. Hence, the ambivalence of mimicry and hybridity enable an ideological offensive.



Another example of mimicry can be observed when Elango (Elangovan) confronts Lalitha by asking if she would be okay if he winked at another woman, which was his response to Lalitha defending Udayar's *right* to exploit Thangam but not vice-versa. To this, Lalitha comments that Elango is "showing" his "true colours" (Sivakami 56). Elango is hurt and yells at Lalitha and she insults him further by saying, "You've proved your caste, haven't you?" (Sivakami 56). Elango is humiliated and he feels he had failed to "hide his caste identity" (Sivakami 56). He "took great pains", wore "good clothes", "changed his language considerably, and behaviour as well" (Sivakami 56). Through this instance, Sivakami exposes the limitations of mimicry because Brahmins "enclosed" themselves and even closed it off against others (Rege 100) which makes Elango *sometimes alike but never the same* as the upper castes. Bhabha (1994) explains mimicry as "one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (85). Bhabha states that colonial mimicry is "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (86), just like in Elango's case. Then, the discourse of mimicry revolves around 'ambivalence' making mimicry "an ironic compromise" (Bhabha 86). Mimicry cannot be understood as disidentification because mimicry attempts to hide one identity while simultaneously mimicking another. Mimicry provides temporary detachment from Elango's lower caste identity but doesn't change or elevate it permanently. Mimicry provides an illusion or a fallacy of acquiring more status and value but never completely achieves it.

Also, mimicry or sanskritisation or Brahminism promotes graded inequality. The term, 'Brahminism' was used by the anticaste movement instead of the term 'Hinduism' (Roy 50). Here, Brahminism does not refer to "a caste or community" but rather a "domino effect" (Roy 50). Ambedkar calls this an "infection of imitation" (Rege 100) because Brahmins were the first caste to 'enclose itself'; thereby shutting themselves in and

shutting other castes out. This idea of closed class has been explained in the introductory chapter. The ‘infection of imitation’ decays exponentially as it moves down the caste hierarchy (“like the half-life of a radioactive atom”) but never completely vanishes (Roy 50). Ambedkar states that the effect of mimicking such ‘enclosing’ has led to graded inequality where the privileges are graded, and each group is more privileged than the lower group and hence, is invested in maintaining the gradation (qtd. in Roy 50-51). Brahminism has created “a labyrinth instead of a prairie” (Das 2010: 51) and as Ambedkar asserts “is the very negation of the spirit of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity” (qtd. in Roy 51). Brahminism or sanskritisation or mimicry is a double-edged sword because it hides one identity while trying to mimic another, and this creates a tension which is heightened by the temporariness of mimicking that gives an illusion of acquiring upper caste status but never really achieving the desired power or status or dignity. This tension is a manifestation of the ‘ambivalence’ produced by the paradox of caste which depends on essentialised identities analogous to essentialised colonial identities based on race, and so on. Just like the ambivalence of the food remainder which has the potential to pollute and renew, “defilement and genesis” (Kristeva 76) maps onto the ambivalence of mimicry, which can both upset essentialised hierarchies (both colonial and caste), and yet be contained by them.

Just like gender identifications, caste identifications are also formed and developed through repeated practices that promote caste distinctions. For example, Kathamuthu mentions that lower caste men “had to get off their bicycles as soon as they entered” the upper caste street and “walk the length pushing the vehicle” (Sivakami 67). Hugo Gorringer and Irene Rafanell (2007) discuss how caste is practiced because of its “continuing importance as a material social category” (98) which manifests itself in material factors such as housing, access to resources and “in the micro fields of comportment and bodily

expression” (98). As mentioned in previous sections, repetition of customs and ritualistic acts are embodied and materialized over time which normalises certain ways and systems. Gorringe and Rafanell use Pierre Bourdieu’s model of ‘class habitus’ and Michel Foucault’s idea of the ‘micro-physics of power’ to understand the embodiment of caste in Tamil Nadu, South India. Gorringe and Rafanell approach caste from a Bourdieusean perspective wherein “one’s social position within a particular caste informs one’s ‘caste’ habitus” (98). This habitus “results in the internalization of specific embodied characteristics” which create hierarchical boundaries and “structure relationships with other castes” (Gorringe and Rafanell 98). Gorringe and Rafanell argue that for Bourdieu, the social structural elements configure the individual embodied practices (habitus), but Foucault emphasizes the interaction between agents which “underlies the embodiment of individual and collective subjectivities” (98). Gorringe and Rafanell assert that Foucault’s approach to power enables an understanding of caste dynamics from the “specificities of contextualized caste interaction” (98). Even though Bourdieu and Foucault stress the “centrality of the corporeal” (111), Gorringe and Rafanell favour the Foucauldian notion that “individual identities are constituted by power relationships” (111). Bourdieu regards habitus “as the internalization of already existing structures” and Foucault sees power relations “as pivotal to the materiality of caste bodies, which in turn shape individual and collective consciousness and the practices that these engender” (Gorringe and Rafanell 111).

Foucault’s notion of power as pivotal to the materiality of caste bodies is important. In the beginning, Sivakami gives a glimpse of the unidirectional flow of authority from Kathamuthu to the women around him. However, the power relations portrayed in many other instances show a much more complex flow of power which includes hegemony, master-slave rhetoric, and mimicry (sanskritisation). It is complex because the lower castes

are provided with the illusion of having agency and power, yet they continue to remain at the bottom of the pyramid in the caste hierarchy (Roy 23). For example, during the panchayat meeting, Kathamuthu points out the atrocities inflicted on lower castes by their 'master'. He says that if a Harijan child "broke a couple of Kambu stalks because he was hungry, his Naicker master tied him to a pole and thrashed him" (Sivakami 73). The boy would be beaten up and also given less food. The boy's father would keep sending him back for work and "Naicker worked him to the bone, but fed him gruel to the fill" (Sivakami 73). Kathamuthu illustrates this master-slave relation with a metaphor, "the hand that strikes is the hand that embraces" (Sivakami 73). Again, the paradox of untouchability ensues from such conceptual and performative ambiguities in caste practices. Sivakami portrays a hegemonic relationship wherein the father continues to push the child into the master-slave relationship. This could be because the master is seen as someone with the *right* to discipline, as explained in Kathamuthu's metaphor.

Kathamuthu's use of the term 'Harijan' which means 'children of God' also automatically places the collective Dalit community in a lower position in the caste hierarchy – as children but never adults or equals to upper castes. The implications of the term 'Harijan' is in line with many conceptual imagined binaries (such as purity and pollution, lower and upper) which in turn reinforces the imagined boundaries or borders between the various castes. This is one of the reasons why many Dalits refuse to accept the term or identity of 'Harijan' because the identity does not elevate the status or position of lower castes.

Moreover, Kathamuthu explains that there have been conflicts in the past but "have been resolved" (Sivakami 73). According to Kathamuthu, "we are one people" (Sivakami 73) by which he refers to the one family of upper and lower castes. Kathamuthu says that "the upper castes and the Harijans of this village have always lived in harmony. They have been like fathers and sons of the same family" (Sivakami 67), respectively. Sivakami uses

the image of a family to expose the irony of equality in an unequal caste system. The simile 'like fathers and sons' reeks of caste and gender discriminations. Once again, the upper castes are given the higher position as the father while the lower castes are seen as the sons. Kathamuthu limits his collective identity as a Dalit, or in his case a Harijan, to colonial, casteist and patriarchal dichotomies of man/ woman, adult/ child and so on. Also, Kathamuthu's collective first-person narrative 'we' refers to his fellow Dalits, but which certainly does not include Dalit women.

Furthermore, Kathamuthu states that he was the first to walk on the upper caste street with his sandals and cycle on their streets. The upper castes "couldn't swallow that, but had to put up with it because he was politically active" (Sivakami 67). As mentioned before, Kathamuthu's identity as the president of the panchayat allowed him to have access to administrative power which he still attempts to use despite no longer being an acting president. Kathamuthu tells the upper castes that they "have to take care of the Harijan" as if they are their "own children" (Sivakami 69). What Kathamuthu expects is "a world of reciprocal recognitions" (Fanon 170) wherein the lower castes continue to do their jobs and in return, the upper castes should take care of them. The recognition of each other comes from appreciating the value of each other's work. Kathamuthu's speech on how things have been resolved and how upper and lower castes belong to the same family, erases or neglects the ongoing atrocities faced by Dalits. Kathamuthu only looks at temporary solutions while ignoring the long-term effects of his rhetorics. His narrative of all castes belonging to the same family has no effect on the upper castes and they will not reciprocate the lower castes' sweat and blood. *In Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon states that his ideas of 'master' and 'slave' and the functions each of the roles play are different from Hegelian notions of the master and slave. Reciprocity is crucial to Hegel's dialectic but for Fanon, "the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from

the slave is not recognition but work” (220). This is obvious when Kathamuthu demands to speak first and Paranjothi gives his consent with a smile because “it did not matter to them if Kathamuthu spoke first” (Sivakami 66). The upper castes are fully aware of their stature and power, and they exercise their power. For example, Paranjothi’s wife, Kamalam’s “casteism had exceeded all limits” (Sivakami 55). A twelve-year-old lower caste boy worked in her house “as a bonded labourer” (Sivakami 55). He was paid “one hundred kilograms of paddy a year” (55) and was fed “waste and spoiled food” (Sivakami 55). Kamalam flings threats and abuses at him every day and sometimes even “reduced his due of leftover food by throwing the remains into the cattle trough” (Sivakami 55). The boy would wonder why the term ‘Paraya’ studded her talk.

Additionally, Jotiba Phule’s (1873) *Gulamgiri* (Slavery) exposes how “the owners of slaves treated the slaves as beasts of burden, raining kicks and blows on them all the time and starving them” (Deshpande 25). Phule felt that the “Shudra and Ati-Shudra would understand slavery better than anyone else” (Roy 76) because “they have a direct experience of slavery as compared to the others who have never experienced it so; the Shudras were conquered and enslaved by the Brahmins” (Deshpande 25). So Kathamuthu’s version of the master-slave follows the Hegelian idealist philosophy while what is actually practiced follows the materialist and Marxist philosophy as pointed out by Fanon. Gorringe and Rafanell assert that continuously executed power mechanisms “dictate where Dalits can sit, what they can and can’t do, and thus, repeatedly condition them to accept their status” (10). Thus, the result is the construction of certain codes of conduct or unwritten laws of caste which favour upper caste men and women, just like patriarchal codes. When upper and lower castes gathered, the “rich upper caste men sat on one side” and lower caste men and women “stood about forty feet away from them” (Sivakami 64). This is an example of performing caste or materialising caste rules in the

form of practice. These codes of conduct become accepted as unwritten laws of the society which everyone is expected to follow, particularly lower-caste women. Gorringe and Rafanell use Foucault's notion of 'docile bodies', not as bodies that lack 'agency' but bodies that are "constituted in and through power relations" (109). The bodies of Dalit men and Dalit women are treated differently. For example, if intermingling of caste groups is not accepted, then Kathamuthu marrying an upper-caste woman is bending the caste laws. However, Kathamuthu makes it clear that a Dalit woman marrying an uppercaste man will not be accepted or at least the woman will be treated as a concubine/ a sexual object. Kathamuthu marrying an upper caste widow (which as mentioned before, is because of Nagamani's state of abjection through her widowhood) is still seen as a saving grace. Once again, the intersectionality of Dalit woman's experiences can be observed here.

Furthermore, Sivakami's narrative shows that the divisions between caste groups are psychologically entrenched and passed on from generation to generation through repeated practices thus, making the divisions stronger. In *The Grip of Change*, when Lalitha asks her mother, Mangalavati, why there are upper and lower castes, Mangalavati responds by asking more questions such as "[t]ell me why are some rich and some poor? Why are there different colours-black and red?... Now you know why there are upper and lower castes. The Chakkiliyan makes footwear, the Parayan beats the drum, the Vettiyan burns corpses and the Pallan cultivates the land" (108). Lalitha further questions Mangalavati pointing out that even caste Hindus cultivate land and can still be poor. Mangalavati tries to end the conversation by saying that "it is like that, don't question me any more" (Sivakami 109). The stress on the verb 'is', exposes the conditioning and normalizing of caste distinctions regardless of any reasonable explanation to the existence of caste differences. Moreover, when Lalitha tells her mother that she would like to marry "someone from a lower caste", Mangalavati mocks Lalitha's "Parayan" lover saying that "he will stand at the street corner

and beat his drum-janjanakku...janakku...janakku” (Sivakami 109). Lalitha asks Mangalavati if she didn’t enjoy the “*Thillana Mohanambal* where Sivaji Ganeshan played the nadaswaram and Balayya played the mridangam” (Sivakami 109).<sup>27</sup> Mangalavati is enraged by her daughter’s comparison between “the beat of the mridangam with the paramolam” (Sivakami 109). Sivakami exposes the differences in the musical instruments used by various castes and how each instrument’s aesthetic value is determined by which caste group uses it. We can see here how caste divisions spread onto the realm of art and music, thereby creating the binary between high art and low art, or in this case, pure music and polluted music. Thus, Sivakami portrays the performative nature of caste in various spaces. The ritualistic practices and even artistic performances reek of caste differences, normalising and widening the differences and value of each caste group, and in turn each body.

Another aspect that is closely tied with caste is class, which has been looked at in chapter 2. The monetary ability of the upper castes aids them to bend or cheat the legal system. For example, Paranjothi Udayar has no fear of the existing law and order system and he exerts his authority even in the presence of the police. Udayar “led the enquiry” rather “than the policemen” (Sivakami 40). His fearless attitude towards the police and judicial system stems from his economic stability and the belief that the police can be bribed. Udayar boasts that “money is not the problem” and hence, he was “confident that he could win the police over to his side” (Sivakami 41). Udayar’s confidence and actions should not be seen as a disaggregation of class (economic stability) from caste but rather the intersection of the class and caste privilege that enables Udayar to cheat the legal system. A wealthy Dalit would not be able to do this in the same way or to the same extent (and certainly not when acting against an upper caste person). Udayar’s attempt to bribe

---

<sup>27</sup> Allusion to Tamil actors, songs and movies.



the policemen was successful as they offer legal suggestions to tackle the complaint filed by Thagam. The policemen instruct Kathamuthu to lodge a “counter-complaint” against Thangam stating that she had stolen “a transistor and two thousand rupees in cash” (Sivakami 41). The police insisted that this counter-complaint be lodged quickly, and the evidence be planted in Thangam’s house that very night since she is in the hospital.

Udayar handed one ten-rupees bundle to each of the police officers. As a sign of gratitude for the bribe, the policemen justified their act by saying that they were “only helping a fellow human being in trouble” (Sivakami 42). The duty and the responsibility of the policemen are easily swayed in the promise of money. Through this, Sivakami portrays how class and caste are closely tied wherein upper castes are also upper class by being wealthy, owning land, and having means of production. This powerful intersectionality enables upper castes to use the law enforcement system to their favour, while the oppressive intersectionality of Thangam abjects her further.

Another example is that of Kathamuthu’s nephew, Chandran, observing the rice mill worker’s union. Chandran felt that the “union leaders were emerging as a caste in themselves” (Sivakami 111). Sivakami uses metaphors and similes to describe the intermingling of caste and class. Sivakami asserts through Chandran’s perspective that:

issues of caste and class were so deeply intermingled that they made him think of those blunt-headed snakes that were like rubber tubes. One could never be sure which end was the head and which end the tail. The problems workers had against the establishment often transformed into caste-related problems. The union’s office-bearers were chosen on the basis of caste. Chandran felt like one of the six blind men identifying an elephant. (112)

In this sense, Butler's understanding of performativity as 'citationality' is significant. As mentioned before, Butler understands agency as something that exists within the citational chain of signifying relations (Clare 51). Butler views citation as a way through which norms are "consolidated or resignified" which implies that agency is always positioned "in relation to the meaning of a performance, and this performance must be interpreted and recognized by another" (Clare 52). This harks back to the idea of relational identification. For a subject to be subjected to certain identifications, Butler states that there is a requirement for a lawful seal and the necessity of the norms and to what effect it is practiced is "functionally *dependent* on the approximation and citation of the law" (Clare 14). In the Foucauldian perspective, law or anything that imitates practices of law in a regulatory power regime is a representational system, like patriarchy that creates "an order of the world" which is presented to individuals as "'normal' or 'true'" (McLeod 199). Just like gendered identifications, the unwritten laws of caste and in turn caste identifications are also part of those regulatory representational systems. However, the "rich Reddiars" and Udayars were "equal in number and status" and hence, "joined hands over labour and wage issues" (Sivakami 63). The upper castes are also upper *class* and "owed political allegiance to the ruling party, so the new rules of land reform could hardly be implemented" (Sivakami 62). The Reddiars and Udayars differed in opinion "with regards to village and political affairs" (Sivakami 63) but they combined to maintain their caste dominance and suppress the lower castes. There is also homogenisation of the identity of lower castes. There are several caste groups within the lower castes such as "Parayan, Pallan, Chakkiliyan, Valluvan and Vannan" (Sivakami 62). They are "different" for the lower castes but for the upper castes, they are "all the same – all untouchables" (Sivakami 62).

Furthermore, Butler (1993) asserts that a norm is “repeatedly fortified and idealised as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced as the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command” (14). Butler asserts that the process of ‘sedimentation’ or ‘materialization’ is “a kind of citationality, the acquisition of being through the citing of power, a citing that establishes an originary complicity with power in the formation of the “I.”” (15). This law “is no longer given in a fixed form prior to its citation but is produced through citation as that which precedes and exceeds the mortal approximations enacted by the subject” (Butler 14). Caste is considered and followed by a caste-ridden society as a religiously sanctioned practice which in turn becomes a part of the law of that society over time since it is observed and performed as a ‘norm’. The rigidity and hierarchical nature of the caste system makes it a regulatory power regime which creates more hierarchies within similar lower caste groups, preventing the union of castes. Sivakami points out how hierarchies existed amongst the lower castes. The Pallars who are agricultural labourers consider themselves to be “first grade” and “superior” (Sivakami 63) to Parayars, the drummers and menials; and the Chakkiliyars, the cobblers. The Chakkiliyars believe that they are “superior to the Paravannars, the washer community” (Sivakami 63). The men of the Para-vannar community “washed clothes for the lower castes” while “the women worked as midwives for them” (Sivakami 63). Sivakami depicts how “everyone established their worth by pointing to those beneath them” (63), and thereby creating more power hierarchies. By “observing caste rules” (Sivakami 63) and maintaining the hierarchies in everyday life, the caste system is made into a ‘norm’.

## 2.1. Law and Dalit Identity

The legal narrative is an important aspect of *The Grip of Change* because the “language of the law and rights becomes a radical move” (Nayar 2011: 376). For instance, in the first chapter, Kathamuthu asks Gowri to write down Kathamuthu’s narration of a complaint to be filed with the police on behalf of Thangam. Thangam corrects Kathamuthu’s saying that the incident didn’t take place in the upper caste street, but in her street and in front of her house. Kathamuthu scolds her for correcting him because he intended to *retell* the story. He shouts at her saying “You are such a stupid bitch. I’ve changed the whole story ... If you say anything different from what’s written in the petition, you’ll be jailed” (Sivakami 12). In order to have some “leverage from the law (which is otherwise controlled by the upper castes)”, the Dalits “retell the facts” (Nayar 374). The language of the law used in the petition, for example zilla and taluk, is “appropriated by Kathamuthu in order to gain some advantage for the Dalits” (Nayar 374). This incident is first of many ‘legal’ situations presented by Sivakami. Some cases are solved by official legal systems such as the court while there are some that are solved by self-governing legal systems such as the panchayat system.

According to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act of 1992, panchayat means “an institution (by whatever name called) of self-government” (Indian Const. Art. 243 (d)). Article 40 of The Constitution of India (1949) addresses the organisation of village panchayats, and it states that, “[t]he state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government” (qtd. in *The Gender of Constitutional Jurisprudence* 187). The panchayat system in the villages bear an identity of ‘community’ which was even recognised during the colonial times. Metcalf wrote about the rural governance in the villages to the Select Parliamentary Committee of 1832 on the East India Company’s charter stating:

The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. This union of the village communities, each one forming a separate state in itself, has, I conceive, contributed more than any cause to the preservation of the people of India through all the revolutions and changes which they have suffered, and is in a high degree conducive to their happiness, and to the enjoyment of a great portion of freedom and independence. (Bates 168)

The panchayat system was not just a “means of indirect rule” but was “a symbol of the type of democratic government which Mahatma Gandhi and others wished to see supplanting that of the Europeans post independence” (Bates 171). In case of a dispute, “the village community and its panchayat remained a first resort” (Bates 169). Here, we can see how a legal system has sociocultural elements. In his book, *Human Rights, Inc.* (2007), Joseph R. Slaughter recognises how “law functions as culture” (44) by understanding the articulation of the narrative subtexts and implications of legal form(s). In the case of Sivakami’s narrative, the inclusion of Indian rural governance along with the larger legal justice system such as courts, is significant in understanding how “the law projects and depends upon cultural narratives for its effective operation, legitimation, and social compulsion; and, in turn, legal norms favour and disfavour the literacy forms in which those cultural narratives find social and conventional expression” (Slaughter 44). Sivakami portrays how legal norms and systems, such as the panchayat, favour and disfavour some depending on factors such as caste, class and gender.

On several occasions, people prefer to settle disputes in the panchayat itself rather than go to court for social and monetary reasons, but the panchayat system can be and is

misused. For men in power with monetary abundance, like Paranjothi Udayar, the panchayat becomes a space which they can manipulate to favour them. Sivakami portrays this through the panchayat meeting held to settle the issues related to the burning down of lower castes' houses. Kathamuthu demands ten thousand rupees each for the houses that are burnt down and a raise of one rupee in the daily wages of the labourers. The tahsildar asks Udayar his opinion and what he can afford. Udayar declares that he will "abide" by the tahsildar's decision and the narrator comments on this quick declaration that "perhaps they had discussed the issue during the break" (Sivakami 73). The tahsildar says his decision out loud which is providing three thousand rupees each for families whose houses "were completely destroyed", one thousand rupees for those whose houses "were partially burned" and an increase of the daily wage from three rupees to three rupees fifty paise (Sivakami 74). The tahsildar further states that "if both parties don't agree to this settlement, the matter will be taken to court" (Sivakami 74). Kathamuthu mentions that he is not "satisfied with the offer" but is willing to abide by the decision of "the government and the elders" (Sivakami 74). One of the reasons why Kathamuthu cannot take the matter to court is because of monetary constraints.

Furthermore, when the decision is carried out, the said money of three thousand and one thousand was not fully given to the families, and the labourers had to work an extra hour because they were given a raise of fifty paise. This was not discussed in the panchayat but Udayar had decided to "make them work an extra hour" because if he was paying them more, then he believes that he has "the right to demand more work from them" (Sivakami 75). Here, Sivakami shows the manipulation of the rural governance that was meant to settle disputes in a cost-effective and less official manner. Yet Paranjothi and the other upper castes who are also upper class, "pay off the tahsildar" (Sivakami 75) and bribe other officers to bend justice their way.

The panchayat system is meant to offer solutions and settle disputes yet how much justice is served through such a system is doubtful. Also, once “a panchayat has arrived at a decision, another cannot be called on the same issue. But the aggrieved party can go to court” (Sivakami 81). So, there is no way of ensuring that the decision is carried out effectively because once the panchayat is called off on one case, it is not discussed in another panchayat. The people most benefitting by such a system, as showed by Sivakami, are the upper castes and upper classes. The vulnerable groups such as lower castes and women are affected the most without getting much justice. When Kathamuthu mentions taking Thangam’s case to court, Udayar asks Kathamuthu if they could settle the matter in the panchayat instead of taking “a matter concerning a woman to the court” (Sivakami 74). Kathamuthu agrees to conduct the panchayat to resolve Thangam’s case in his village, Athur. Udayar didn’t want the case to go to court because for him, “this was about his shameful affair with a Parachi” (Sivakami 31). If this was “on some other issue”, Udayar would have used “his power and money” to dismiss the case and he would have “braved it out even if it had been a murder or a case of criminal assault” (Sivakami 31-32).

When the panchayat meeting is held to discuss the assault of Thangam, Udayar attempts to trivialise the atrocity inflicted on Thangam on several occasions saying that “the men were angry and she is arrogant” (Sivakami 41). He repeatedly strays from addressing the crime because “it’s over” (Sivakami 41) and “whatever has happened, has happened” (Sivakami 79). Kathamuthu attempts to bring out the seriousness of the crime by accusing Udayar for “being casual” when the reality is that “she could have been killed” (Sivakami 79). Kathamuthu offers a solution without asking Thangam which is to make her “part of” his “household” because she is “a poor widow with no children; an orphan with no one to take care of her” (Sivakami 79). Here, Kathamuthu emphasises Thangam’s positional identity wherein her value and survival depend on being with a man or with a child. As

stated before, bearing a child is an important part of positional identity of women because maternity becomes “an ultimate goal of femininity” (Grosz 16), as normalised by heteronormative patriarchy.

Another reason why Dalit women are targeted, violated and deprived of entitlements and rights is because of the ‘value’ assigned to their body. Weir’s concept of ‘identification-with’ values and ideals include identification-with caste roles and gender roles (which are usually imposed) and Weir states that the individuals’ and collective’s identification (autochthonous and relational) with such value systems form and transform identity. Such value systems are normalised when individuals perform the roles and in turn, each body comes to possess a certain value. Here, ‘value’ refers to worth based on power. For example, Kathamuthu bears the same embodied value as that of any other Dalit man but his past identity as president of the panchayat adds onto his value. Sivakami proves this by depicting on multiple occasions how people feared him (both upper and lower castes). Also, Nagamani ‘settled’ for the lower caste, Kathamuthu, because he had held a powerful position. Even Kathamuthu sees himself as an important figure and demands respect from everyone and so, “humility and restraint were non-existent words in the vocabulary of this domineering man” (Sivakami 15). He treated people differently based on their status and position in the society, which is influenced by political, social, legal and economic abilities. Another example is when the doctor, Muchamy, examines Thangam and “perhaps Kathamuthu felt a twinge of consciousness at his gruffness” towards Thangam’s state. Kathamuthu “softened the tone in which he spoke to the woman, quietened by the doctor’s touch” (Sivakami 8). Here, it is quite evident that Kathamuthu takes a tone of domination over women and is not softened by his wives’ plea or Thangam’s weeping but by the doctor – another man’s ‘touch’. The doctor’s identity bears more value and authority as a man and as a doctor. Also, Udayar respects people based on



the same value criteria. For instance, when Udayar agrees to increase the wages of the labourers, he mentions to Reddiar that they were not giving into Kathamuthu's "demands" instead they were only agreeing to the tahsildar's "suggestions" (Sivakami 75). The 'suggestions' of a legal authority bear more value than the 'demands' of a lower caste man. Also, when Udayar refuses Kathamuthu's solution, Kathamuthu asks for "ten or twenty thousand rupees in compensation" (Sivakami 79). Udayar refuses to give the amount and Kathamuthu tells Udayar to give Thangam "at least fifteen thousand" (Sivakami 79). When refused again, Kathamuthu finalises on "ten thousand" (Sivakami 80). Sivakami exposes how this auction was the price of Thangam's dignity, body, labour, and identity. If Thangam would have gone to court, she would have received legal justice for the assault and rape. But she had to *settle* for the decisions made by men. Sivakami shows how the panchayat system is also predominantly run by men and neglects the role and value of women. In fact, it was only in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992 that women were "ensured thirty three percentage reservation" in the panchayat system (Ghosh, Chakravarti, Mansi 300). Until then, the panchayat system was comprised of men, run by men, and mostly for men. Hence, it can be said that the panchayat system was largely patriarchal, not essentially, but in and by practice.<sup>28</sup>

Moreover, Sivakami gives an example of justice being served when Thangam takes the case of land rights to court after another panchayat "decided against" (81) her. She says that after her husband's death, her brothers-in-law "refused to hand over" her husband's "share of the family land" to her because she "didn't have any children" (Sivakami 6).

Through this, Sivakami stresses a crucial matter that affects the livelihood of the Dalits at

---

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that even though the translated version of *The Grip of Change* was published in 2006, the original Tamil narrative *Pazhainya Kazhithalum* was published in 1989. So, Sivakami's setting of the narrative looks at the rural governance and legal systems when women were not even allowed to be an administrative member of the panchayat system. This is significant because Sivakami exposes the lack of sufficient legal identity and rights of women, especially of Dalit women.

both micro and macro level, which is *land rights*. Dalits consider land as “identity, dignity and livelihood and through gaining land Dalits can reclaim their human dignity as a human being” (NFDLRM 2017). Of the 147 million Dalits presently in India, “36 percent of them are workers, of which 48 per cent are agricultural labourers” (Shah 196). Even if some of them own land, “a vast majority (around 70 per cent) are small and marginal farmers” (Shah 196), and they simultaneously labour on their land. A minor section of the farmers “less than 5 per cent” are wealthy (Shah 196). As mentioned before, Dalit women’s bodies and land are interconnected, and they have been denied rights to their body and land. Such unjust acts are contrary to the universal human rights granted to every individual which states that “everyone (has) the right to own property alone” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Art.17) and “no one shall be arbitrarily deprived” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Art.17) of their land. Despite the human rights which Dalit women are entitled to, they face more atrocities if they attempt to “assert their rights to own or utilise resources” (Irudayam, Mangubhai and Lee 12). For instance, Thangam’s helplessness is obvious in her rhetorical question and following answer: “How could I fight them? I couldn’t go to court. Who can spend that much money? Even if I had won, I wouldn’t be able to take care of my share of land in peace, not with everyone hating me. I am a single woman now” (Sivakami 6).

However, from the money Thangam gets as settlement from Udayar, she goes to court and “won her court case and the rights to her land” (Sivakami 93). This justice that Thangam obtains could be seen as Sivakami’s effort to show her fellow Dalits that even though the panchayat system can function as a corrupt and a regulatory power regime, the courts and general legal system in the country is not entirely corrupt; and that there is hope for justice. Thangam’s individual victory could be seen as a hope for collective justice for fellow Dalits facing similar or different issues.

Furthermore, Sivakami's portrayal of the rural governance is significant in understanding how being a Dalit and a woman, by default, puts Thangam in an underprivileged and oppressed situation. Sivakami shows that people, like Thangam, resort to the panchayat system not only because they can't afford legal representation and lose a day's work and in turn wages, but also because they are unaware of their rights as citizens and humans. In her article "Righting Wrongs" (2004), Spivak states that rights "entail an individual or collective" (523) or sometimes there is an intertwining of individual and collective rights. For instance, in the written complaint of Thangam's assault, Kathamuthu addresses the caste identity of Thangam as "Hindu Scheduled Caste" (Sivakami 11) which is the legal term used to refer to Dalits. Also as mentioned before, Kathamuthu changes the details of the assault to sharpen Thangam's chances of getting justice. He "changed the whole story" (Sivakami 12) by changing the location of the assault. According to Kathamuthu's version, Udayar's wife, Kamalam, shouted at Thangam saying, "You Paraya bitch, how dare you walk on this street? Is this not the upper caste street?..." (Sivakami 12). Kathamuthu's version of the story continues with Thangam responding to Udayar's wife saying "Amma, this road is laid by the government, and you can't order me away..." (Sivakami 12). Then -according to the story - Udayar's wife insults Thangam and her caste, threatens her, beats her and then calls her brothers to beat her as well. Here, Kathamuthu addresses Thangam's individual right as a citizen and collective right as a Dalit as well. According to Article 17 of The Constitution of India (1949), Untouchability "is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of "Untouchability" shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law. Article 19 also states that "All citizens shall have the right to move freely throughout the territory of India" (Indian Const.). Thangam is oppressed on the basis of her caste, gender and class. Such multiple layers of oppression are faced by Dalit women preventing them

from accessing even their basic human rights, as shown in chapter 2. Sivakami exposes how defending human rights is challenging because there is “gender discrimination inherent within traditional societies as well as within state structures” (Birwatkar and Nikam 173). This discrimination is evident in the panchayat meeting held to settle Thangam’s assault case. Thangam’s opinions are not asked before even calling a panchayat. Thangam wanted justice and had initially demanded that the “hooligans” be jailed “for at least a day and tortured” (Sivakami 5). This reveals Thangam’s lack of awareness of fundamental human rights as a ‘human’ and ‘citizen’ of modern India because Thangam hopes that the perpetrators will be jailed ‘at least’ for a day, in a country where assault results in at least a few years of jail time. Moreover, Thangam’s call for torture of the perpetrators is based on a very different conception of justice which is similar to ‘an eye for an eye’ kind of retributive justice which is not offered by any legal system based on rights; and torture would, of course, be a violation of human rights.

In the Concluding Comments on India, The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) “calls upon the State party to increase Dalit women’s legal literacy and improve their access to justice in bringing claims of discrimination and violation of rights” (Birwatkar and Nikam 173). In some cases, Dalit women are targeted when “they dare to assert their rights – be it for right to land, resources, government programs and for accessing legal justice” (Birwatkar and Nikam 173). Violence against women “is a concern for the public health as well as human rights” (Birwatkar and Nikam 173). Thus, through Thangam, Sivakami portrays the lack of education and awareness among lower castes which deprives them of basic knowledge about their rights. In theory, each body bears ‘equal’ value before the law; and that need not be the case either in the panchayat or in the official legal system because in practice, each body bears a certain value depending on their social, political, religious and economic

status which in turn affects their access to entitlements and freedom. As explained in Chapter 2, rights and laws are enforced or performed as a practice, socially and situationally. Caste and patriarchal structures are entrenched in the social life of the people, and this does not exclude individuals operating in legal systems and political parties. Since law is politically enforced, casteist and patriarchal beliefs are also reinforced. Thus, the Dalit woman's body is at the bottom of the pyramid and possesses the least value and hence, her entitlement to rights as a citizen of India and as a human is denied.

### **3. Ideological Offensive: Sparking Disidentification and Re-identification**

Terry Eagleton (1991) understands ideologies as “usually internally complex, differentiated formations, with conflicts between their various elements which need to be continually renegotiated and resolved” (45). A dominant ideology is a “dominant social bloc, made up of classes and fractions whose interests are not always at one; and these compromises and divisions will be reflected in the ideology itself” (Eagleton 45). Eagleton further states that a dominant ideology becomes powerful through “its ability to intervene in the consciousness of those it subjects, appropriating and reinflecting their experiences”, but this also makes the ideology “heterogenous and inconsistent” (45). Eagleton states that for a ruling ideology to be successful:

[it] must engage significantly with genuine wants, needs and desires; but this is also its Achilles heel, forcing it to recognise an ‘other’ to itself and inscribing this otherness as a potentially disruptive force within its own forms. We might say in Bakhtinian terms that for a governing ideology to be ‘monological’ – to address its subjects with authoritarian certitude – it must simultaneously be ‘dialogical’; for even an authoritarian discourse is addressed *to* another and lives only in the other's

response...Any ruling power requires a degree of intelligence and initiative from its subjects, if only for its own values to be internalised...If the oppressed must be alert enough to follow the rulers' instructions, they are therefore conscious enough to be able to challenge them. (45-46)

This ambivalence is the weakness of any ideology, and just like the 'abject', the dialogical nature of ideology, can oppress subjects but can also empower them. Eagleton's idea of 'oppositional ideologies' reflects the tendency of subjects to challenge the ruling ideology. Oppositional ideologies "reflect a provisional alliance of diverse radical forces" (Eagleton 45). Then, the idea of opposing or offending the ruling ideology can be referred to as an 'ideological offensive'. This section looks at how Sivakami's narrative enables such an ideological offensive.

Sivakami points out how autochthonous and relational disidentification and re-identification between the individual and the collective, that is, between individuals of the same caste and between individuals of different castes, are important. Weir distinguishes between disidentification and dis-identification, the latter being a "silent withdrawal" rather than "a challenge and a confrontation" (82). For instance, Kathamuthu confronts caste issues to a certain extent but chooses not to go further. He accepts most systems and structures, including stating that caste will be around for generations to come (Sivakami 22). Kathamuthu confronts the upper castes on behalf of the lower castes but his intention is more to do with his personal gain and less to do with Dalit resistance. This is evident when Kathamuthu resists any form of change that could aid in bringing long-term benefits for the Dalits because this would mean that his assistance will not be needed. However, Chandran and Gowri resist the dominant ideology in a way that Kathamuthu fails to do. One of the ways in which Chandran and Gowri resist is through education.

Sivakami shows that education gives people access to ‘power’ or means towards an ideological offensive. For instance, Sivakami differentiates between Kathamuthu and Chandran and sheds light on opposing attitudes within the Dalit community. Kathamuthu and Chandran are fellow Dalits but both are also different in their goals and manners of resistance. Kathamuthu is seen as “a man of consequence – a popular, respected leader of the people of Athur and the nearby villages” (Sivakami 15). He builds a career “helping people in distress” (Sivakami 15). This gesture is not one of charity as he takes money from the people he helps. Kathamuthu “was busy, running between various government agencies, the police station and the court” (Sivakami 112). Kathamuthu’s aid helps win cases and he “received his share of the spoils of victory” (Sivakami 112). So, Kathamuthu’s intention is certainly to help himself more than his community. He exploits the Dalit struggle to earn a living while his fellow Dalits continue to struggle. He helps them momentarily, but the benefits are short-lived.

On the contrary, Chandran’s resistance involves a different outlook and he aims at more long-lasting benefits, especially through education. Kathamuthu’s son, “the educated Chandran” joins the rice mill and becomes the “true leader” of the “rice-mill-workers-union”; and “like all new leaders, he too wanted to overhaul the system” (Sivakami 104-105). This awareness that the system needs to be changed is a necessary step towards any form of action. Since Chandran and another member, Gandhi, are the only two literates in the union, “they decided to teach others to write their own names” (Sivakami 104). Signing off one’s name is an important step towards recognising one’s own identity. This goes back to the idea of the name as a performative site. Writing and having access to letters is a tool to counter and challenge the dominant ideology. Consequently, Chandran earns the “respect and trust of not only the people of his caste, but also of other castes” (Sivakami 112). Kathamuthu’s relationship with Chandran “was democratic” and they

“interacted as equals” (Sivakami 112). Yet they were different, which Sivakami points out thus:

Kathamuthu manoeuvred and manipulated people and situations. Chandran’s associates were critical of such a mode of functioning. Kathamuthu did not know that Chandran had built up a strong team of workers. The former was like cactus that did not allow any other plant to grow in its vicinity. Chandran nurtured his associates. He was like the banana tree that flourished along with its offspring. (113)

Kathamuthu seems to prefer the current state of affairs wherein he is lower to the upper castes but is higher than most lower castes. His knowledge in legal matters lies in his experience as the president of the panchayat but his lack of education keeps him stunted. Yet, his daughter, Gowri, sees education as means to cross the boundaries created by caste and to challenge the dominant patriarchal and casteist ideology. For example, Gowri is determined to go to college but her father announces that Gowri, their “donkey will go to college [only] if she passes her exams” (Sivakami 94) otherwise she will be married off. Gowri “hated the idea” of marriage and the “fear” of being married off makes Gowri more determined and she “engrossed” herself in books (Sivakami 93). Finally, Gowri passes her exams and prepares herself to “test even proven fundamentals” (Sivakami 95) by pursuing further education. Gowri believes that she would fit in more in college like “waters from overflowing wells mingle with the waters of huge water bodies, transgressing their boundaries” (Sivakami 95). Sivakami uses this metaphor and visual image to expose how Gowri feels that “she had crossed over human-made boundaries – her father, her caste, her village – and merged with the ocean of people” (95). But caste cannot be erased that quickly because “when the rain stops, the floods recede and thorn bushes emerge”



(Sivakami 95). Such is the nature and reality of caste and people “can’t ignore it”

(Sivakami 22). Sivakami shows that Gowri’s happiness in college and amidst books is short-lived because when Gowri goes back to her home for the holidays, “caste revealed its murderous teeth like an invincible monster” (95). Yet, education is her means to empower herself and to resist the dominant system. Gowri is “rooted by the thrill of awareness” and “recognition of the life force in nature coursed through [her]” (Sivakami 127).

Gowri’s resistance to caste and patriarchal systems can be seen from the very beginning of Sivakami’s narrative. In the first chapter, Kathamuthu “summoned” (Sivakami 11)

Gowri to draft the complaint of Thangam’s assault. Gowri writes with “tears stinging her eyes” (Sivakami 12) from listening to the events of Thangam’s rape and assault. Gowri is terrified because Gowri and Thangam “belonged to the same caste” (Sivakami 14).

Gowri’s fear stems from the thought that she could also be “beaten black and blue” and consequently, she “felt revulsion for the society where such things could happen”

(Sivakami 14). Gowri’s “dislike of any mention of caste sharpened her voice” (Sivakami

12) towards her father, Kathamuthu. Here, the idea of ‘voice’ is significant. Sivakami

sheds light on how education provides a voice to Gowri. Nayar (2009) asserts that ‘voice’ is “the ability to represent oneself, to tell one’s story” (9) and voice enables agency. Nayar speculates that “if human rights is defined as the right to agency and individual

empowerment...and if agency is about voice and narration...then the denial of voice is

tantamount to the denial of agency, and therefore a violation of Human Rights” (9). Here,

the awareness of the chain of citation of power relations and the consequent fear caused by

the citation of caste atrocities is what empowers the subject with a voice. Having a voice

enables an ideological offensive and Gowri uses her voice, which is empowered through

education, to challenge her father’s patriarchal ways.

For example, when Kathamuthu changes details of the Thangam's assault, Gowri is left "uneasy at what was going on" (Sivakami 13). She wonders why "her father was the way he was" (Sivakami 13). Gowri's attitude towards her father is a mixture of fear and anger. "She was scared of him" and hence, "never brought any of her friends home" because she feared that "he would fly into a rage for no reason in front of her friends" (Sivakami 9). Gowri's analysis of her father as short-tempered parallels Sivakami's portrayal of him as rude, crude, insensitive, uneducated and patriarchal. His lack of respect for women spreads towards his relationship with his daughter whom he criticises and addresses as a "lazy girl" (Sivakami 9). He uses a simile "like a movie extra" (Sivakami 9) to mock at her appearance while going to school and also criticises her for not carrying a sack of rice on her head to the mill. His certain reservations about schooling and education can be seen here when he asks Gowri, "Is this what education teaches you?" (Sivakami 10). He also criticises 'cinema' to be another reason why she isn't willing to do physical labour but instead prefers to wear "a cartload of that black stuff" (Sivakami 9) on the eyes.

Kathamuthu's criticism of how a woman should present herself is seen from the beginning of the narrative. So, Gowri never misses an opportunity to take 'revenge' on him. She is proud of her education and corrects her father's "outdated language" (Sivakami 11). Gowri corrects and changes certain phrases such as using 'deceased' instead of 'late' in the complaint and "glowed at the change" (Sivakami 11). However, Kathamuthu is slightly proud as he thinks that "she is smart" and hence, will survive but he does not appreciate her application of her knowledge to correct him and asks her to stop "barking like a dog" (Sivakami 11). Kathamuthu resists change and refuses to give up his power and dominance. Nevertheless, the pride Gowri takes in being literate and being able to write is seen when she feels "like a professional writer of petitions sitting in the sub-magistrate's court" (Sivakami 11). Sivakami uses this particular simile to show the feeling of (legal)

power Gowri feels when she uses her education. Like Chandran, Gowri engages in autochthonous disidentification through education. Since education paves way for empowerment, education enables ideological offensive.

Furthermore, Gowri using her voice shows how she has recognised herself in “a relation of power” (Weir 79) with Kathamuthu, and how she attempts to “re-identify” or “re-cognise” (Weir 79) herself. Gowri is able to do so because through Thangam, through her mother and step-mother and through herself, she is able to recognise her own strangeness. Gowri is able “to recognise and empathize with” the parts of herself “that are repressed, abjected, repudiated, or simply strange” (Weir 80). Hence, Gowri is able to understand herself in interconnected “*relations of power and relations of identification*” (Weir 80). Weir states that recognising where an individual stands as individuals and as collectives must be particularly done by those who are in “positions of privilege or power” (80). This is similar to the idea of making someone’s privilege or abjection visible to them. This relational disidentification and re-identification suggested by Weir is “essentially dialogical” (69) because “we form our identities through our relationships, commitments to and identifications with particular others and collective “we’s”” (69).

Sivakami presents two instances of relational disidentification and re-identification through the lovers, Elangovan and Lalitha, and through Chandran’s view of Gowri and his wife. After Lalitha abuses Elangovan by referring to his (lower) caste, the two lovers keep away from each other, which makes Lalitha reflect on her actions and words. She even enquires to her mother about why there are caste distinctions between people. Her mother does not favour Lalitha’s decision to marry a lower caste man but Lalitha finds herself criticising the caste divisions existing in the village. Lalitha regrets abusing Elangovan by “referring to his caste” (Sivakami 109). She decides to meet with Elangovan and talk to him. On her way, she encounters a young man of her caste, Sabapathy, who is aware of

Lalitha's relationship with Elangovan. Lalitha is "shocked" (Sivakami 110) to know that someone from her caste knew about her relationship with Elangovan. Sabapathy explains to Lalitha that Elangovan is his 'friend' and they have many more friends from neighbouring villages who belong to various castes. He stresses and repeats the phrase, "we are all together" (Sivakami 110). Elangovan and Lalitha become determined to be married and also "set aside the caste feud dividing the village" (Sivakami 110). This situation is portrayed by Sivakami as another example of resistance to the dominant ideology. Marriage between individuals belonging to two castes are frowned upon and 'honour killings' of those who are in intercaste marriages was and is an ongoing atrocity in India. Ambedkar asserts on several occasions that *Shastras*,<sup>29</sup> Caste and Endogamy are the dangerous "three pillars of patriarchy" (Barnwal 397). Elangovan and Lalitha's decision to get married is dangerous yet the act can be said to enable an ideological offensive against endogamous casteist systems. Therefore, it is this ideological offensive that facilitates relational disidentification of non-Dalits because "if 'disinvesting' ourselves of an ideological viewpoint is as difficult as it usually is, it is because it involves a painful 'decathecting' or disinvestment of fantasy-objects [as arranged by ideology], and thus a reorganisation of the psychical economy of the self" (Eagleton 184).

Lalitha confronting her mother about the existence of caste and the materialization of caste norms marks the beginning of her disinvestment in the ideological objects and ideas. This confrontation could be seen as an ideological offensive since the act that follows (Lalitha's union with Elangovan) is enabled by it. Lalitha's decision to get married to Elangovan shows a disinvestment of caste-laden endogamous rules. This is an example of relational disidentification wherein the lovers decide to move away from caste distinctions and get married. Here, both individuals make the same decision without persuading each

---

<sup>29</sup>*Shashtra* is a Sanskrit word that means rules or commands.

other. However, Sivakami portrays Lalitha's thoughts and reflection rather than Elangovan's, which could be a way of showing disidentification from the upper castes or non-Dalits. Elangovan is already engaged in criticising caste distinctions but Lalitha was still adhering to caste-ridden norms. But, Lalitha starts reflecting and understanding the nature of caste identifications. This reflection and questioning could be considered as a part of disidentification which is "necessary in order to transform identities" because identities "must be questioned and criticised and queered if they are to be transformed" (Weir 82). Likewise, Sabapathy informing Lalitha that 'we are all together' exposes relational disidentification. Sabapathy from the upper caste and Elangovan from the lower caste transgress caste boundaries and have re-identified collectively as 'friends', which Sivakami shows is better than being a part of Kathamuthu's 'Harijan-upper caste' family. Sivakami points out that being friends refers to an idea of equality while Kathamuthu's idea of a caste family retains inequality. Additionally, Weir looks at the idea of transforming an existing identity and states that "if the challenged identity is worth fighting for, then disidentification must provoke transformation of that identity. This is why the identity of the feminist subject has been challenged and contested: so that it can be transformed" (82).

Hence, Sivakami portrays how women's protests attempt to retain identity but also transform it. Sivakami points out that a procession is held "in which women had walked blindfolded to symbolise the government's blindness with regard to them" (Sivakami 124). They protest against "the practice of dowry" (Sivakami 124). So, women attempt to get rid of the practices and ritualistic acts that oppress them but continue to fight for the value of their identity. For instance, at the age of thirty-one, Gowri teaches after receiving her doctorate and "stubbornly" refuses to marry because she didn't want to be tortured like her mother by "some man" (Sivakami 124). As with Lalitha's decision to marry a lower caste

man, Gowri's decision to not get married at all enables an ideological offensive. Sivakami shows that Gowri disidentifies from caste and patriarchal identifications by countering the dominant ideology through practices that interrupt its reinscription, and has re-identified with the Dalit struggle, as a feminist. From the beginning of the narrative, Sivakami portrays women's identities to be relevant only when attached to a man, and Gowri's decision to not be identified-with a man shows a disinvestment of ideological norms. Gowri's choice challenges and shakes her patriarchal father, Kathamuthu, who feels helpless, "like a defanged snake" (Sivakami 124). He feels like the "floods were rising to change the very structure of the world" (Sivakami 126). Sivakami shows how Kathamuthu recognises the resistance but only fears it. However, Sivakami portrays another view where a man accepts the change, unlike Kathamuthu. Chandran is proud of Gowri who "was one of the very few girls of their caste who had entered college" (Sivakami 117). Chandran also promises himself that "his wife would be an equal partner in the marriage" (Sivakami 117). Like Kathamuthu, Chandran also observes the resistance but unlike Kathamuthu, he welcomes it. Here, *the man*, Chandran, takes a pride in Gowri's achievements that is not based on her attractiveness or sexuality or physicality. This indicates Chandran's resistance towards the patriarchal standards of judging and appreciating women based on her corporeality. We can say that Chandran recognises the patriarchal codes and challenges them, and also attempts to disidentify from them. It is this relational disidentification from the objectified (solely) corporeal identity of the Dalit woman and re-identification as the educated independent Dalit woman that Sivakami underlines.

## **Conclusion**

The concept of 'theory in flesh' is similar to Hélène Cixous's idea of 'l'écriture féminine' (*The Laugh of the Medusa* 1976), which means 'feminine writing'. Cixous's 'l'écriture féminine' looks at the idea of writing the body, particularly marginalised bodies like the feminine body, which have been absent in phallogocentric language and discourses. The distinct facets of the female body (which is referred to as such not as singular or as a category), "its particular nature and bodily cycles-menstruation, pregnancy, maternity, lactation, etc." (Grosz 15) were and still are regarded "as a limitation on women's access to the rights and privileges patriarchal culture accords to men" (Grosz 15) but at the same time, the body is seen "as a unique means of access to knowledge and ways of living" (Grosz 15). The significance of the 'lived body' is reiterated here. In the beginning of her preface to *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami states that she is "one of the many exploring the inexhaustible mysteries of caste" (Preface). For her, writing is a "process of understanding and sharing" which still desires to "move events to their logical conclusion" (Preface). Sivakami states that her work, *The Grip of Change*, is a "process of understanding the dynamics of caste and the 'woman' who was inextricably involved in the process" (Preface). Sivakami points out that the two factors of being "a Dalit and a woman" which are "decided by birth" makes it "natural" for her to "write" about these factors (Preface). Therefore, she attempts to influence the "politics surrounding those factors" because "it is the need of the hour and the requirement of the future" (Preface).

Sivakami's attempt to influence the politics surrounding the *state of being* a Dalit and woman can be observed in her portrayal of various layers of identifications that are also layers of oppression faced by Dalit men and Dalit women. The intersections of caste, class, gender and law push Dalit men and women into a matrix of exclusion. She brings out the atrocities faced by Dalit women's experiences by exposing their intersectionality through *repeated* embodied suffering. Such repeated performances and citationality lead to an

essentialising of gender roles and identities, to such an extent that those occupying the abject domain believe in their abjection as normal. For example, Sivakami exposes how women are conditioned to believe in their victimised position and hence, are seen to subjugate and victimise each other while ignoring the man's role. If a man has an affair with a woman, he does not become a 'whore' because it is his right or nature by virtue of being a man to use women's bodies. Yet, the woman is identified as a 'whore'.

Dalit writers engage with trauma and testimony discourses in their texts by constructing "an abject human subject both denied his or her human rights and seeking to advance rights claims" (Nayar 2012: 239). The paradox of depicting the Dalit's body as an abject reinstates caste stereotypes and imagines binaries (such as pure/impure, and so on) but abject-types can also be "an anterior moment to deconstructing caste where the Dalit narrative shows the traumatized body to foreground affect, trauma, and injustice" (Nayar 260). Thus, Sivakami's narrative has been able to shed light on the intersectional abjection of Dalit women through theory in flesh to a great extent. This enables an understanding of the performativity of gendered identities.

Sivakami also exposes the performative nature of caste identity wherein caste identities are normalised through repeated acts. Sivakami's portrayal of and interaction between characters reveal an embodied value system which not only looks at corporeal identification-with ideals but also value assigned to each body. The caste and class value assigned to Dalit and non-Dalit bodies finds its way to the things associated with these bodies, such as food and music. Binaries of purity and pollution associated with caste bodies are imposed on objects and things, allowing further materialisation of caste divisions. In this way, the various interlocking oppressive identities of Dalit men and women trap them in a labyrinth of oppression. But Sivakami's narrative offers hope and possible solutions such as education, which can be instrumental in countering the dominant



ideology. Education becomes a way to foster autochthonous and relational disidentification, and re-identification. Hence, Sivakami looks at the significance of education to enable an ideological offensive, and in bringing individuals together to form a functioning political community.

Also, the character of Gowri, a scared little girl who grows into a confident and independent woman fighting for women's rights and Dalit rights, offers resilience and hope. The two oppressive identities of being a woman and a Dalit, are transformed wherein Gowri takes pride in being both, a woman and a Dalit. Butler (1990) states that the "woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (33). Following Butler, Weir states that "this understanding of woman as a term in process" is "open to intervention and resignification" (90). This performative nature of the identity of the woman could also be applied to the Dalit identity, which is also an identity open to transformation and resignification. Weir looks at Linda Zerilli's argument, which claims that rights are practices of freedom and that "a claim to rights is not – or not simply – a demand for recognition of *what* one is; it is a demand for acknowledgement of *who* one is, and, more important, of who one might *become*" (qtd. in Weir 112). Zerilli suggests that claims to rights "can open up a space of freedom rather than locking us into fixed identities" (qtd. in Weir 112) but struggles for recognition can also entrap individuals in those identities. The possibility of identities to transform and renew can be seen on many occasions in Sivakami's narrative. The master-slave dialectic, abject-subject relationship, and mimicry-hybridity-Brahminism dynamics have paradoxes and ambivalences; and it is in and through these paradoxes and ambivalences that transformation begins.

Therefore, Sivakami's narrative, *The Grip of Change*, is able to portray intersectionality of Dalit women's experiences, represent caste performativity, and enable an ideological

offensive to a large extent. This has helped in understanding the need for transformation of the identity itself or disidentifying with oppressive ideas; and re-identifying with empowering values and identifications is required to 'free' the entrapped body of oppressive identifications.

## Chapter 4: Kaleidoscopic Writing in Sivakami's *Author's Notes*, and Generic Performativity

### Introduction

The previous chapters of this thesis look at the embodied suffering of Dalits under material (economic, political, legal) conditions which are expressed in and through the content or subject matter of Dalit narratives. But Dalit aesthetics go “beyond” (Nayar 2014: 3) the content of agony, suffering and anger born out of years of oppression, and engage in a fascinating level of “linguistic experimentation” (Yadav 81). Since the “literary in Dalit literature exists on a material and experiential level”, Dalit writers use “an aesthetic very different from that of mainstream literature” (Jadeja 131). So this chapter, primarily, analyses Sivakami's *Author's Notes* which was published in 1997, eight years after the publication of *The Grip of Change*. The *Author's Notes* is a supplementary text to *The Grip of Change*, and stands in critical relation to it. The key thing about this text is the splitting of the ‘authorial persona’ into four personae: author-as-Gowri (who is also a character in *The Grip of Change*), the narrator, the author or novelist of *The Grip of Change* (Sivakami), and the Authorial self of the *Author's Notes* (which is Sivakami). The dynamics between the personae and the function of the authorial selves is discussed elaborately in this chapter in order to understand the idea of kaleidoscopic writing in *Author's Notes*. The chapter also looks at translation as yet another aspect of the authorial self or function by exploring the responses from various interviews of authors and translators that were taken for the purpose of this thesis. A total of seven interviews were conducted, and they can be found in the “Appendices” section. This is followed by a discussion of Dalit generic experimentation before concluding. The main focus of the chapter is to understand how kaleidoscopic writing, multiple authorial selves and persona,

and generic experimentation are all part of a literary performativity that celebrates an aesthetics of impurity that aims to provoke deep questions about the kinds of identities and selves produced by caste, and how to disidentify from them.

### 1. Personae, Perspectives, and Possibilities

The *Author's Notes* begins in third person narrative thereby clearly unveiling the narratorial persona. The narrator starts off by revealing another persona, 'she', who is "at the town mentioned in the novel the *Grip of Change*" (131). Since the full title of the text is *Book II Gowri: Author's Notes*, and because Gowri is from Athur (*The Grip*<sup>30</sup>15) – the town mentioned in the novel – it could be said that the person being referred to in first person feminine singular pronoun as 'she' is Gowri. Gowri could also be considered as the 'author' in the *Author's Notes* as indicated in the title of the text. Additionally, the narrator points out that 'she' has "come to gather information about the author of the *Grip of Change*" (131) but "her memories faded" and "she only remembered in snatches" (*Author's Notes* 131). This is further indication that 'she' is Gowri who is revisiting her hometown. Also, one of Gowri's uncles talks about her father, Kathamuthu (*Author's Notes* 134) who is portrayed as Gowri's father in *The Grip*. Through this, the narrator signals that it is indeed Gowri, the character from Sivakami's *The Grip*, who is being talked about as 'she'.

From the beginning of the *Author's Notes*, then, it is clear that there are three speakers or personae – the narrator, 'she' (Gowri), and the author of the novel (Sivakami). For instance, 'she' met with her 'amma' (mother) "to discuss the author of the novel"

---

<sup>30</sup> Since Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* will be referred to considerably in this chapter, *The Grip of Change* will be referred to as *The Grip*, for easier reference.

(*Author's Notes* 132). This begs the question of how Gowri's mother knows the author as there is no direct explanation provided, until the narrator reflects on the relationship between Gowri and the author. Gowri's Kuttaiappan 'periappa' (uncle) mentions a story about Gowri allegedly pickpocketing Kalimuthu periappa (another uncle), and Kalimuthu's wife spread this story to others in the village. The narrator contemplates if this is the reason "why Gowri, the girl in the novel, had such a poor opinion of Kalimuthu periappa? The novelist and the character in the novel, Gowri, must be one and the same person" (*Author's Notes* 133-134). This could be how Gowri's amma knows the author of the novel (Sivakami) because Gowri and Sivakami could be the same person. Also, one of Gowri's relatives, whom she has less recollection of asks her why she indulges in writing "this and that" when her level of education will allow her to "step out of the car onto the carpet" (*Author's Notes* 142). The relative suggests that Gowri should leave "all that writing aside" (*Author's Notes* 142). The narrator points out that such comments annoyed the "novelist" (*Author's Notes* 142) even though the comments/ suggestions were directed towards Gowri. This further indicates that Gowri and the novelist of *The Grip* are Sivakami.

Moreover, Gowri not only studies the spatial and temporal settings mentioned in the novel realising that the house and garden "looked different" (*Author's Notes* 131), but she also studies the authorial intentions behind the choices made in the novel. For instance, Gowri contemplates that the year *The Grip* was written, the author "had twelve brothers and sisters" and her household "had approximately two dozen children" (*Author's Notes* 131) yet why were there only two siblings shown in *The Grip*? Gowri demands justifications yet she wonders why the novelist tries "so hard to justify her work" (*Author's Notes* 134). Gowri exclaims, "Look at her! Here she was, analysing her novel trying to fit all the pieces into logical patterns. To whom did she owe explanations?" (*Author's Notes*

134). Since the narrator has stated that both (Gowri and Sivakami) “must be one and the same person” (*Author’s Notes* 134), the demand for justifications and questioning the need to justify is ironic when Gowri and the author of *The Grip*, Sivakami, are one and the same. The narrator also uses the term ‘novelist’ on many occasions instead of the ‘author’, and vice-versa.

Additionally, there are several occasions where the three personae overlap. For instance, since Gowri and Sivakami are one and the same, it is reasonable to assume that the narrator is examining both, the author and Gowri. Also, as mentioned before, the ‘author’ being referred to in the title of the text could be Gowri. But since Gowri and the author of *The Grip* is the same person, the author mentioned in the title of *Author’s Notes* could be Sivakami herself, which opens up the possibility that the narrator could be the author too since the *Author’s Notes* are from the narrator’s perspective, in third person. In the context of analysing Katherine Anne Porter’s “Magic”, James Phelan (1996) talks about a “basic configuration of teller-story-situation-audience-purpose” which he feels is:

at least doubled in most narrative: there is the narrator's telling the story to his or her audience and then the author's telling of the narrator's telling to the author's audience. Consequently, the narrator's telling is part of the author's construction of the whole narrative, and in that sense, what is a matter of the telling at one level becomes a matter of the told at the next. (8)

Hence, we can assume that all three personae (narrator, Gowri, and the author) are the Author, Sivakami. Furthermore, the narrator mentions that time had “destroyed all traces of existence...” (*Author’s Notes* 131) which indicates that there is a temporal distance, possibly the eight-years gap between the publication of *The Grip* and the *Author’s Notes*.

In Barthes' autobiography, *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, there is an attempt to recognize that "a coherent self is a fiction, that it must always involve being seen from a distance, through the perspective of the Other" (Anderson 68). The third person narrative technique used in *Author's Notes* and the temporal distance enable a different outlook on *The Grip* and choices of the novelist. Therefore, Gowri could represent the author's past (how she was eight years ago), and the narrator could be examining the author's development from Gowri to her present self as a more-informed, conscious and reflective being. In this way, Sivakami is attempting to understand her 'self' from a distance as an 'Other(s)', through the personae of the narrator and Gowri.

Thus it can be said that there are four personae: narrator, Gowri as the author in the *Author's Notes*, novelist of *The Grip* (Sivakami eight years ago), and the Author of the *Author's Notes*. The Author (with a capital 'A') is Sivakami who examines herself and her novel eight years later through and as the narrator and Gowri in and through the *Author's Notes*. The temporal distance adds another layer to the dynamics of the writing. This use of multiple personae by Sivakami produces a dynamic form of writing which this thesis chooses to refer to as *kaleidoscopic writing*. Helen Groth (2007) states that describing "an event or phenomenon as kaleidoscopic" evokes "a sense of perpetual transformation" as opposed to "the spectacular stasis and visual mastery suggested by contemporary popular sensations such as the panorama" (217). Since the kaleidoscope immerses "the observer in a visual field" that never allows the eye to rest and thereby, produces "a visual effect" that tests "the limits of verisimilitude..." (Groth 217), it can be said that kaleidoscopic writing produces a transformative narrative, such as the *Author's Notes*, that keeps the reader in a dynamic state by portraying interactions with several personae of the author, thereby demanding the reader's constant attention and active reading. Such a transformative writing style enables persistent reflexivity and not just reflectivity. It is therefore important

to understand the differences and similarities between the ‘reflexivity’ and ‘reflectivity’ in order to comprehend how Sivakami’s text engages with both processes.

D’Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez (2007) explore the meaning of ‘reflection’ and offer three variations of the meaning of the term ‘reflexivity’. Although the explanations are given in the context of social work, the article still provides a good understanding of the concepts of reflection and reflexivity which can be used to look at the *Author’s Notes* as well as the interviews of the translators in the later sections of this chapter. The article understands reflection as an attempt to gain objectivity by distancing oneself from experiences. This can be observed in *Author’s Notes* wherein Sivakami analyses *The Grip* from a temporal distance. Reflection acts as means to expose inconsistencies or gaps between theories and realities of practice, and critical reflection examines incidents as events of the past and as learning opportunities for the future (D’cruz et al. 83). On the other hand, reflexivity is concerned with the entire *process* of knowledge production that influences certain actions in a particular moment, and the article looks at three variations of reflexivity.

The first variation considers reflexivity “as an individual’s considered response to an immediate context and making choices for further direction” (D’cruz et al. 75). The individual’s ability to process information and produce knowledge to facilitate better choices is important for “social workers and the relationships between social workers and clients” (D’cruz et al. 75). Here, reflexivity includes reflection and is understood as “a self-defining process that depends on monitoring of and reflection upon, psychological and social information about possible trajectories of life” (qtd. in D’cruz et al. 76). For example, in *Author’s Notes*, the narrator mentions an incident where Gowri was actively engaged in her college’s students’ association and was collating the marks given by different judges for an oratorical contest, when one of the contestants approached her



demanding to know the marks before they were announced. On Gowri refusing to give in to the demand, the contestant “had walked away after calling her a ‘Scheduled caste bitch’” (*Author’s Notes* 140). Even though the contest was not related to caste, Gowri was left wondering why upper caste men and women “were governed so strongly by caste and employed it to abuse others at every possible opportunity. Perhaps the novelist had been affected by such prejudices” (*Author’s Notes* 140-141). Here, there is a reflection on the psychological effect of caste and in turn, the social enactment of the entrenched casteist ideas. The novelist wonders if she has been affected by similar prejudices as caste is a relational practice and caste roles are practiced and passed down by Dalits and non-Dalits. Hence, there is reflection and monitoring of the ‘self’ which could help inform future choices.

However, Gowri’s reflection on the actions of the contestant also delves deeper into the social and historical practices and effects of caste. This shows a critical reflection on the factors that go beyond the immediate context or incident. This level of criticality can be seen in the second variation of ‘reflexivity’ which deals with “an individual’s self-critical approach that questions how knowledge is generated and, further, how relations of power operate in this process” (D’cruz et al. 75). Here, reflexivity is understood as a process of looking “outward, to the social and cultural artifacts and forms of thought which saturate our practices” (qtd. in D’cruz et al. 78) by examining the relation between power and knowledge production. Individual stories and experiences are highly regarded and contribute to knowledge production, hence, the ‘self’, as in the personal or individual perspectives, is acknowledged greatly in this variation. In *Author’s Notes*, the narrator recalls an incident when Gowri’s father asks Gowri if she does not have another blouse to wear other than the one she was wearing. Gowri wants to ask him what is wrong with the blouse she was wearing, but she only responds by confirming that she has alternative

clothing options. Kathamuthu further asks Gowri to wear something that covers her back to which Gowri reacts by covering her blouse with her sari. Here, Kathamuthu ‘asking’ Gowri is more of a command than a request, even though his initial observation of her blouse was phrased in the form of a question. Gowri’s inner thoughts and the consequent conflicting act of ‘covering up’ shows her emotional nervousness in this situation. In his book, *Nervous States* (2018), William Davies understands a ‘nervous state’ to be “the murky state between mind and body, between war and peace” where individuals and collectives such as governments, live “in a state of constant and heightened alertness, relying increasingly on feeling rather than fact” (xii). Davies understands feelings as “physical sensation, including pleasure and pain” and as “emotions” which are experiences that can be consciously reflected on and articulated (xii). Davies states that some feelings such as “nostalgia, resentment, anger, and fear” have the potential to disrupt the status quo and hence, have “greater political potency than other feelings (xiv). Gowri’s initial thought of questioning her father shows her anger and even though her feelings borne from a state of abjection have immense potential to enable an ideological offensive through suitable speech utterance or action, she resorts to the performance of ‘covering up’ her body, which is also symbolic of covering up her actual feelings, possibly out of fear which later leads onto resentment. She is in a murky nervous state having to hide her true feelings.

What is striking is that Gowri comprehended the command intent in the question *only* because she has knowledge of the societal forms of thought such as the patriarchal idea of propriety with regards to the female body, and also because she is aware of the dominating position of her father as a parent and as a man. So the relationship between Gowri and her father is hierarchical, and hence Gowri is certain that her father’s speech utterance is a command which although masked in the form of a question, is a threat or warning of consequences if not corrected in favour of his opinion, especially since there had been

incidents where Kathamuthu slapped Gowri so hard “that food went flying from her mouth” (*Author’s Notes* 145). Sara Ahmed (2014) points out that sensations:

are mediated, however immediately they seem to impress upon us. Not only do we read such feelings, but how the feelings feel in the first place may be tied to a past history of readings, in the sense that the process of recognition (of this feeling, or that feeling) is bound up with what we already know. For example, the sensation of pain is deeply affected by memories: one can feel pain when reminded of past trauma by an encounter with another. (25)

Kathamuthu reminds Gowri that she should “fear her father” (*Author’s Notes* 145) and such statements are threats or warnings, and the memory of such threats prior to and/ or after physical acts of violence instil fear and in turn, inform future actions. The actual incidents and threats of violence create sensations and feelings which could be referred to what Ahmed calls an ‘*impression*’, that leaves *traces on the skin*. Ahmed states that “*the impression of a surface is an effect*” of intense feelings felt by the body on coming in contact with other objects (24). Ahmed states that one becomes aware of one’s body:

as having a surface only in the event of feeling discomfort (prickly sensations, cramps) that become transformed into pain through an act of reading and recognition (‘it hurts!’), which is also a judgement (‘it is bad!’). The recognition of a sensation as being painful (from ‘it hurts’ to ‘it is bad’ to ‘move away’) also involves the reconstitution of bodily space, as the reorientation of the bodily relation to that which gets attributed as the cause of the pain. (24)

The recognition of pain impresses on the skin, and thereby “moving away” from what could be the “cause of the pain”, which would create a distance from the pain itself (Ahmed 24). Ahmed states that it is “through the intensification of pain sensations that bodies and worlds materialise and take shape, or that the effect of boundary, surface and fixity is produced” (24). Gowri’s reflexivity understands the sociocultural and gendered practices that dominate her society, and she prevents a physical act of violence from her father by masking her own genuine feelings leading to her nervous state. The paradox of such intense impressions is that the skin surface appears to contain bodies but is still susceptible to impressions by others (Ahmed 25). It is interesting that both Kathamuthu and Gowri mask their thoughts, but the reasons are different. Kathamuthu’s intentions are masked on a superficial grammatical level, and Kathamuthu could achieve the desired result even if he does not mask the command in the form of a question. Kathamuthu is aware of his dominating position over Gowri, as a parent and as a man. On the other hand, Gowri’s masking of her thoughts and feelings becomes a necessity to avoid physical harm. This *divergence in the performativity* of the speech utterances is quite striking.

But performativity does not end on the verbal level and is followed by an action to complete the speech utterance. Gowri follows up on her speech utterance (that she has alternative clothing) with a physical act of reassurance (covering up). Here, the speech utterances are performative because it “repeats a coded or iterable utterance: it works precisely by citing norms and conventions that already exist” (Butler 1993: 13, Ahmed 93). Kathamuthu and Gowri are both aware of the conventions of the patriarchal society, with the former reproducing the norms and the latter unwillingly following the norms, thereby leading to a power struggle between the two parties. Kathamuthu’s speech utterance is one of dominance and could be followed by violence whereas Gowri’s speech utterance is followed by conformity to placate the situation. Hence, *speech utterances are*

*performative on a verbal and physical level*, which then through repeated practices become the ‘norm’ of the society, as *essential*, which are then passed on as knowledge. Dalit narratives reflect on such social and cultural processes that create forms of thought. Thus, it can be said that *knowledge production is a performative process* and hence, demands scrutiny or reflexivity.

The third variation of the term ‘reflexivity’ is closely associated with the second variation in being aware that various factors affect knowledge creation, but it also understands the role of emotions and acknowledges that there is a dynamic relation between thoughts and feelings (and vice-versa) (D’cruz et al. 75). This facilitates a better understanding of the reasons behind an emotional response to situations. For example, the “historicity of the performative and its role in the generation of effects cannot be separated” (Ahmed 93), so Gowri’s emotional nervousness around her father, her relatives and the general patriarchal casteist society is the effect of the performative nature of caste habitus and gender. Perhaps, it is the same nervousness that led to the creation of personae in the *Author’s Notes*, thereby placing a lot of significance to the ‘self’; and the second and third variations of ‘reflexivity’ give utmost importance to the ‘self’. Then it can be said that Sivakami adopts the technique of splitting the ‘self’ into multiple persona as a way of expressing or capturing that nervousness. But, the dispersal of the ‘self’ could also be produced by such nervousness. Either way, this emphasises on the notion of the dynamic self articulated through the concept of kaleidoscopic writing.

Furthermore, D’Cruz, Gillingham and Melendez explore Parton and O’Byrne’s concept of ‘relational reflexivity’ in the context of social work. Parton and O’Byrne state that relational reflexivity enables shared generation of knowledge through open discussions between practitioners and clients which could affirm, add onto, omit, understand further not only the emotions and experiences of the clients, but also the assumptions made by the

practitioners. ‘Relational reflexivity’ implicitly challenges the uneven power relations between the practitioner and the clients wherein the practitioner holds structural power to define the experiences of the clients which in turn creates ‘knowledge’ of and about the client. As mentioned in previous chapters, identity is relational and it is necessary for non-Dalits to disidentify with existing discriminatory labels and identities that promote caste-based biases. For this, the idea of relational reflexivity that challenges the uneven power relations of caste, gender, class, and so on becomes important in order to foster relational disidentification among non-Dalits.

Thus, the three variations elucidate that reflexivity encourages critical reflection on the emotional reasons behind individual choices and actions, and also incites critical examination of ‘power’ factors that influence the general rhetoric and outlook of a situation. Through reflexivity, one can make changes to current actions and thoughts that affect the future course of life, leading to a reshaping of “the very nature of identity itself” (qtd. in D’cruz et al. 76). Thus, while there is surely reflection and critical reflection in the *Author’s Notes*, *reflexivity* is a more apt term for the self-examination and scrutiny of the aesthetics, content and context of the text.

Reflexivity through the interaction between the personae in the text reveals a *dialogic narrative* which exposes the (un)conscious authorial intentions and choices made in *The Grip* as well as the *Author’s Notes*. The dialogic style of the text re-iterates the idea of kaleidoscopic writing wherein the lasting appeal of the kaleidoscopic vision is the “suggested interaction, a dialogue between hand and eye, inside and outside, as the observer turned the tube sending shards of coloured glass and fields of light into endlessly novel and fleeting configurations, or in the construction of kaleidoscopes or kaleidoscopic slides out of everyday objects” (Groth 217). The idea of interaction and dialogues between the hand and eye when viewing the kaleidoscope can be observed, and is quite literal in the

*Author's Notes*, since Gowri and the novelist engage in direct dialogic interactions on a few occasions. The 'hand' can be viewed as the writer or the author, and the 'eye' can be viewed as the reader or the author herself as a reader. These intricate authorial roles such as the author as a writer and as a reader, falls in line with the ideas explored by Foucault in his seminal essay, "What is an Author?" (1969). Foucault's "author-functions" can be used to understand various authorial roles and in turn, the dynamics of the personae in the text. This would facilitate a better understanding of kaleidoscopic writing in the *Author's Notes*.

## 2. Authorial functions

In the essay, Foucault states that it is "not simply a manner of indicating the source, but of providing a certain index of "reality" in relation to the techniques and objects of experience made use of in a particular period and in such-and-such a laboratory" (Foucault 1998: 213). Therefore, the contextual experience of the author is significant to understanding the authorial choices in the text. Through the character of Gowri in the *Author's Notes*, Sivakami attempts to study the authorial motivations and experiences resulting in the creation of her narrative, *The Grip*. Foucault further states that, "the author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design" (214-215). In the *Author's Notes*, the narrator questions several subjective decisions made by the author, Sivakami, which results in specific characters and stories, while leaving out many others. For example, the narrator speculates on why Sivakami chose to write about "the problems of the Puliur cheri" and leave out the story of the "mad son and his mother" even though "the mad elder brother existed even during the time of the novel's conception" (*Author's Notes* 139). The narrator ponders

over how “one chooses what to omit and what to select” (*Author’s Notes* 139). This indicates that the authorial decisions and choices of characters, events, and other matters, influence the perspective of the narrative. The narrator also asserts the need to examine and analyse the novelist’s experiences because the novelist’s childhood was “charred by the burning flames of caste” and that she was able to see “in the light cast by those flames” (*Author’s Notes* 139). Foucault states that “the author function is not a pure and simple reconstruction made secondhand from a text given as inert material. The text always contains a certain number of signs referring to the author. These signs, well known to grammarians, are personal pronouns, adverbs of time and place, and verb conjugation” (Foucault 215). As explained before, the multiple persona in the *Author’s Notes* could be the Author, Sivakami herself, which is evident from the text through descriptions of time and place, personal pronouns, and so on. The text offers signs and indications of various author functions which is explored in the following subsections.

Additionally, Foucault states that it is common knowledge that the writer of a novel need not be the narrator of the novel even if there is use of first-person pronouns but could be an “alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work...the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance” (Foucault 215). He further states that “all discourses endowed with the author function possess this plurality of self” (Foucault 215). Hence, it is important to understand the multiple functions of the author. Looking closely at each of the personae in the *Author’s Notes* can help to understand the following functions of the author of and in *The Grip of Change*: ‘author as a source’, ‘author as a writer’, ‘author as a critic’, and ‘author as a translator’.



## 2.1. Author as a source

In life writing, reflexivity as a process is a certain form of art where the author digs into her past and traces her development till the present, with the hope of influencing future actions. In *Memory* (2008), Anne Whitehead looks at the Latin text, *Ad Herennium*, which explores the ‘art of memory’ in detail. Whitehead states that the anonymous author of *Ad Herennium* elaborates on a ‘place system’ wherein “the individual memorizes a set of places, for example a street or a building with a series of rooms, which act as background images. Onto this background are then placed a second set of images which symbolize what is to be remembered, for example the points of a speech” (Whitehead 29). Whitehead points out that the author of *Ad Herennium* understands the ‘art of memory’ as a method of recollecting past experiences and finding the required images for future purpose or recall (29). *Ad Herennium* distinguishes between two kinds of memory – remembering ‘things’ and remembering ‘words’ – and Whitehead states that both kinds of memory “use the place system and, in each instance, recollection is achieved by association, using consciously selected visual images” (30). Whitehead mentions that remembering exact ‘words’ used or heard during experiences is strenuous and not easy but remembering certain ‘things’ and the general event(s) could be less cumbersome.

The concept of ‘art of memory’, where symbolic recollection and conscious selection or filtering of images are used, can be noticed in the *Author’s Notes*. Sivakami, as the author, is the source of the content and the subject matter through her experiences and thereby, memories. As mentioned before, there is a conscious filtering of memories, and the narrator in the *Author’s Notes* reflects on the novelist’s selective memory while writing the novel. For example, the narrator states that the author “had reduced her father to a counterfeit coin” and “into an old man reading a newspaper on an easy chair” (145) in *The Grip*; while Gowri (Sivakami herself) and her cousin, Chandran, were transformed into

revolutionaries (*Author's Notes* 145). The novelist “had to provide answers to some questions...What was the novelist’s opinion on fidelity and morality? Why were her male characters betrayers of women? Disgust seemed to inform her attitude to sex. What was the truth?” (*Author's Notes* 147). The narrator understands that the author had “constructed an effigy of her father and burned him in her novel” (*Author's Notes* 148). The portrayal of Kathamuthu was from the author’s perspective and does not constitute “the whole truth” (*Author's Notes* 148). This reinstates the idea of conscious and/ or unconscious filtering and display of memory, although the extent to which the selection of memories is conscious and/ or unconscious cannot be easily determined and is not necessarily important to establish the author’s function as a source. Also, the narrator feels that the novelist, perhaps, “wanted to prove that there was no such thing as the full and complete truth” (*Author's Notes* 148). So, this section will not attempt to distinguish between conscious selection and unconscious selection unless explicitly stated in the *Author's Notes*.

The narrator observes that the same childhood traumas and “biased characterisation” that had given rise to the character of Kathamuthu, has also made him “the nightmare of the upper castes” (*Author's Notes* 147). So, even though certain facts about Sivakami’s father were “selectively omitted” (148) from the novel, such as his staunch advocacy of manual labour (148), establishment of the first women’s hostel in town, conducting cases for the poor, and his firm belief in “helping the needy and feeding the poor” (*Author's Notes* 148), the portrayal of Kathamuthu as ‘the nightmare of the upper castes’ could be Sivakami’s attempt to portray the larger issues of her community, particularly the intricacies of Dalit leadership. Ironically, it is this *activist* attempt that is criticised in *Author's Notes*. The narrator states that the novelist “wished for a change in the leadership of the scheduled castes. She wished for a revolutionary leadership” (*Author's Notes* 178)

and this wish is justified or redeemed by portraying Kathamuthu as an exploitative Dalit leader. Also, Sivakami had asked her friend for a literary opinion on the manuscript of *The Grip*, to which her friend commented that he feels it is “not good to expose a Dalit leader’s exploitation of his own community. A leader who is conscious of his Dalit identity will not be exploitative, or rather should not be. Even if he is exploitative, exposing him will only strengthen the opposition” (*Author’s Notes* 178). So, Sivakami’s friend suggested she should “create an honest youth within the community and allow him to play the role of a revolutionary” (*Author’s Notes* 178). This shows that it is not just the recollection that is important but also conscious and selective portrayal or representation of the memories.<sup>31</sup>

Another example is when the narrator reflects on Kuttaiappan’s wife, Gowri’s periamma (aunt), who was rumoured to have been an upper caste Reddiyar’s concubine. In *The Grip*, Thangam had been Udayar’s concubine and hence, the narrator reflects if there was “a connection” (*Author’s Notes* 135) between Thangam story and periamma’s relationship with Reddiyar? Does this mean that the “Udayar was supposed to have raped Thangam. But where was the evidence?” (*Author’s Notes* 135). Perhaps, Sivakami’s intention is to portray the taboo sexual relations between the upper castes and lower castes, especially between upper caste men and lower caste women which predominantly involves the upper caste men (who are mostly the employers of lower caste women) raping lower caste women or forcing them to maintain sexual relations. Out of fear of losing their employment and daily wages, lower caste women unwillingly give in to the crude demands of their upper caste employers. Sivakami’s portrayal of Thangam’s situation shows an attempt to shed some light on the unjust issues of her society. Sivakami draws from the stories and experiences of the people around her to help portray the larger issues affecting the society.

---

<sup>31</sup> The author-function as a ‘writer’ is called upon here and will be looked at in detail in the next section.

Thus Sivakami's *The Grip* becomes a voice for her community and such a bold attempt paves the way for creativity and imagination. The narrator wonders if the novel was derived from "the novelist's imagination" (*Author's Notes* 135). Such imagination and creativity could be seen as a form of *activism* wherein there is a conscious and/ or unconscious attempt to portray events of her community. Here, it is the individual memory and the collective memory that becomes operational. For example, the narrator questions the intent of the novel which was not just about portraying caste-based exploitation but also the intricacies of exploitation between different caste groups and within the same caste community. A lower caste man can prey on lower caste women just like the upper caste. The narrator asserts that "men like Kathamuthu are perfectly capable of taking advantage of vulnerable women. The overall picture presented by the novel is that rich or poor, upper caste or lower caste, the seeds of corruption exist at all levels" (*Author's Notes* 148-149). Sivakami therefore portrays the intersectionality of Dalit women's experiences, which is looked at in detail in chapter 3.

Is Sivakami's conscious/unconscious filtering of memories and experiences therefore an attempt to show specific problems to Dalits and non-Dalits, as an attempt to help find solutions for her community? In that way, the author as a 'source' performs an active role of looking through individual memory which is indeed influenced by collective memory accessed through oral stories, readings from a variety of texts (such as history books, newspapers), discussions, and so on. Through accessing the collective memory of events and incidents, the author becomes a *witness*, either as a viewer and/or listener or and/or reader. For example, the narrator contemplates on Kathamuthu's polygamy and coarseness as the two aspects that make the author condemn him. The narrator reminds the reader that in *The Grip*, Kathamuthu "forces" (*Author's Notes* 149) a widow (Thangam) to have sex with him after helping her when she was in need. Thangam pleads to Kathamuthu that he

was “like a brother” to her (*Author’s Notes* 149). But, did the novelist “witness this happen” or did she “hear someone narrate it to her” (*Author’s Notes* 149). Thus, we can see how witnessing need not only be about personal experiences or ‘seeing’ something but also hearing about experiences through oral stories and/ or reading about matters through multiple platforms.

Hence, collective memory *inscribes* on the individual’s memory and understanding, so whether one is remembering exact ‘words’ or certain ‘things’, “recollection is achieved by association, using consciously selected visual images” (Whitehead 30). The witnessing of events influences individual thoughts and actions, especially the horrifying thought that the author could have been subjected to rape or some other form of torture just because of her caste identity. This association and further imagination of what ‘could be’ for her as an individual, based on ‘what has happened’ to many individuals of her collective, instil fear, anger, and a strong desire to revolt. Such desires pave way for the birth of the activist who wishes for change and freedom, not just for the individual but for the collective. Aravind Malagatti mentions in his interview that he believes that autobiographies for “social change” would be different from an autobiography which intends to record “all the things related to one’s life” (Appendix 1: 315). Malagatti’s statement is relevant to Sivakami’s *The Grip* which can be seen as a work of activism with activist intentions of exposing the issues of the community rather than personal challenges alone, which may have less bearing on a collective level.

Furthermore, the narrator shows that the novelist was feverish on one occasion when she was visiting her home and this made her “hyperactive” (*Author’s Notes* 173) forcing her to remember the sources of her characters and plots. She tries to remember the motivation for telling the story of “the nature of the lower caste Thangam’s relationship with the upper caste Udayar” (*Author’s Notes* 174). The novelist says that movies have an

ability to show “lovers transcending caste, religion and class. They find solace in death and earn their place in eternity” (*Author’s Notes* 174). The narrator reflects on why the novelist ventured into writing such stories that “questioned the purity of love, especially in the prevailing atmosphere of belief in it” (*Author’s Notes* 174). We are told the novelist was close to falling asleep and was aware that her “dream” (*Author’s Notes* 174) would end soon. The narrator then takes a gander at the novelist’s dream where lovers, “excised themselves from the tumour that was society. A silver cascade formed their backdrop. It was noteworthy that the extras in the frame were wearing white. The ideal lovers – freed from caste, creed, religion, etc. – were singing and dancing on the flower-filled mountainside, as a woman and a man. The music was pleasant” (174). Such spaces that surpass boundaries can be seen as *borderlands*, a space where binding identities either cease to exist or blend. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Gloria Anzaldúa studies border culture by looking closely at the border between the United States of America and Mexico. Anzaldúa states that a border is an imagined “dividing line” (3) that is used to demarcate between safe and unsafe spaces (3). Borderlands are vague and undetermined places that are in a “constant state of transition” (3) and are created by “the emotional residue” of unnatural boundaries (Anzaldúa 3), such as imagined borders. This concept of borderland can be seen in *Author’s Notes* where the novelist wants peace and love at the end of all the fights and struggles. Such peace and love can be attained only if Dalits and non-Dalits go beyond the imaginary borders created by the caste system, to a borderland.

Such a desire shows an important emotional response to ongoing atrocities. Hence, even though the novelist condemns the upper caste Udayar for raping Thangam, Sivakami re-imagines Thangam’s continuation of the relation (even though done out of a lack of choice and power) as an act that exposes how the borders of caste are imagined and hence can be

surpassed. It is not certain whether Sivakami's re-imagination is done ironically, sarcastically, or even subversively, however, love and peace between caste groups can only be attained through mutual or relational reflexivity and relational disidentification. As mentioned in the previous chapters, caste identities are performative in nature and hence can change and transition. The borderland, being a fluid space open to changes, can be the result of or the facilitator of relational reflexivity and disidentification. The borderland opens up possibilities since it is a space of transition, and this could enable re-identification as well. It is not enough for only Dalits to find or create a borderland, but non-Dalits should also be equally and passionately involved, as it should be a mutual process. So does the (un)conscious filtering of memories and selective expression of incidents in Sivakami's narratives (*Author's Notes* and *The Grip*) enable relational reflexivity and relational disidentification with the hope of creating a space such as a borderland? Aravind Malagatti mentions that he had two objectives when writing his autobiography, *Government Brahmana* (2007):

One is, by telling this story, I would like to convince the state of Dalits to non-Dalits, other people. The second thing is, after going through the book or after understanding it, I would like them to change. If they (non-Dalits) feel that they have made some mistakes, then they shouldn't repeat it [sic]. If they get that feeling after going through my book, then I feel that my writing is successful. (Appendix 1: 317)

Here, there is a certain action demanded from the readers after reading the text. James Phelan (1996) states that "narrative is not just story but also action, *the telling of a story by someone to someone on some occasion for some purpose*" (8). In that way, Dalit narratives

could be seen as an action-oriented text, telling a story or a community's story to a readership for a specific purpose. The purpose can be understood by determining the readership. If Dalits are the targeted readership, then creating familiarity and solidarity, and calling for and autochthonous disidentification and collective action (which Bama's *Karukku* clearly demands) could be the purpose. If non-Dalits are also part of the target readership (since many Dalit texts have been translated to reach an international audience), then creating awareness and consciousness of Dalit lives, and advocating Dalit rights and Dalit history to, perhaps, enable relational disidentification could be the purpose. Dalit narratives such as Sivakami's and Bama's texts demand action rather than a passive response of reading just any text for pleasure. Aravind Malagatti mentions that when people say that his autobiography is "very good", he feels "bad" because when he talks about "the pain that is suffered by a community and when people say that it's fine after reading it", that means that the book has not reached the readers effectively or has not touched them (Appendix 1: 315). The purpose of such Dalit narratives then would be to evoke self-reflexivity and consciousness among Dalits, while it could also help enable reflexivity and consciousness on the part of non-Dalits. The idea that speech utterances demand action is a core part of performativity and since there is action demanded in Dalit narratives, we can say that Dalit narratives are *performative since they demand action*.

Thus, we can assume that Sivakami's narratives, like other Dalit narratives, carry an *intent* of enabling non-Dalits to be reflexive about their (un)conscious roles in repeating the oppressive practices of the caste system. But is Sivakami successful in bringing about relational reflexivity and in turn, relational disidentification? This can only be known if Dalit and non-Dalit readership respond to the narratives by explicitly stating how the narrative affected them.



## 2.2. Author as a writer

There is a cautious yet daring representation of the lived experiences of Sivakami's community, and the process of representation, that is, the *act of writing* becomes yet another authorial function. The narrator of the *Author's Notes* extensively contemplates the process of writing *The Grip*. The narrator realises that the novelist "had to bend and twist her stories to prescribed endings" (*Author's Notes* 160). The narrator blames the novelist for her choices of portraying events differently. For example, the narrator reflects on an incident narrated by her Athai (aunt), that "perhaps" could have been the "motivation" for Kathamuthu's character (*Author's Notes* 155). Athai worked for a Gounder (landowning caste Hindu community) family. After an evening job, the old Gounder tried to trap her in the cattle shed but Athai pushed him away with all her strength calling him "Old rascal!" (*Author's Notes* 155). When Athai's husband (Gowri's thatha) came to know of this, he rushed to the Gounder's house to confront him and threaten him "with painful consequences" (*Author's Notes* 155). The Gounder apologised admitting that he had made a mistake. Athai completed the narration by acknowledging that in, "those days Gounders got away with such cruelty" (*Author's Notes* 155). The narrator feels that the novelist used her Athai's experience with the Gounder as a basis for Thangam's situation with the upper caste Udayar. Thangam is beaten up by upper caste people for sleeping with her upper caste employer, Udayar. Thangam then seeks help from Kathamuthu who is shown as the leader of the Parayar community. In an attempt to deliver justice to Thangam, Kathamuthu depicts the whole incident as an atrocity against a woman from an oppressed caste, rather than Thangam being punished for her "immoral behaviour" (*Author's Notes* 155). The narrator points out that depicting the incident "from an entirely different perspective" (*Author's Notes* 155) was the novelist's doing. The narrator further mentions that the novelist created an impression that "the upper castes had handled the

incident as a man-versus-woman problem, whereas the lower castes had given it the caste slant. How did the novelist dare to distort history with such impunity?" (*Author's Notes* 155) The narrator seems to blame the novelist for her choice to portray Thangam's situation as a caste problem when her Athai's experience was not necessarily a caste problem.

But her Athai states that the 'Gounders' could be cruel and get away with things, and this collective reference to the 'Gounders' could indicate the power and authority held by the Gounders caste community, which allows them to display and utilise their power to commit crimes and escape legal punishments (as shown in chapter 2). Hence, we can say that the caste aspect is still prevalent in Athai's experience, and in turn, amplified in the portrayal of Thangam's situation. Sivakami's portrayal of Thangam's plight in *The Grip* therefore emphasises the fact that across various Dalit communities in India, Dalit women become prey to their upper caste employers, particularly since there could be a tendency to record caste-specific crimes in the broader general category of 'crime' rather than specifying the caste motivations in order to escape the brunt of being casteist and discriminatory. If it was only a gender-specific incident, then it could be argued that the woman is as much to blame as the man or possibly even more so, as women are always burdened with protecting their dignity and bodies. Just as Gowri is demanded to dress appropriately to gratify the patriarchal ideas of propriety, Thangam is also burdened with the patriarchal norms imposed on women such as chastity. So, portraying the incident as just an individual problem could garner hatred towards the character of Thangam from not only the Dalit men and women characters in the novel, but also the general readership, for being 'immoral'. The man-versus-woman problem could be narrowed down to an individuals' acts, but emphasising the caste-specific injustice would not only highlight the intersectionality of Dalit women's experiences (as shown in chapter 3) but would also be

related to by the collective group thereby mustering support. It could be these reasons that must have led the author to portray Kathamuthu's view on the incident as a caste atrocity. This does not make it untrue but rather captures the intersectionality of the larger community's experience. Perhaps, the narrator's criticism of the 'author' by offering this alternative to the man-woman narrative highlights how Sivakami's consciousness of this intersectionality has developed in the intervening time. As mentioned before, Phelan's idea that 'the narrator's telling is part of the author's construction of the whole narrative' and thereby 'a matter of the telling at one level becomes a matter of the told at the next' (8), can be observed here. Sivakami's developed understanding of matters can be observed through the narrator's reflexivity and consciousness, which in turn is the Author, Sivakami's consciousness. Thus, the splitting of the authorial personae facilitates the Author to understand, critique and express herself through the other(s), and thereby allowing multiple possibilities and perspectives arising from a single source (Author) – just like the multiple images and perspectives one can observe when looking through a single kaleidoscope.

Another example is when the narrator remembers incidents of caste-based discrimination even from Catholic nuns wherein during a celebration, she was separated from her classmates when food was served because she was "one of the five lower caste students" and the narrator recalls finding it "difficult to eat" at the celebration (*Author's Notes* 162). Additionally, the narrator remembers how the drama committee in her school decided that lower caste students "should not be given roles in school plays" (*Author's Notes* 163). Also, the narrator mentions that certain "words had been generously scattered" in *The Grip* but the "publishers had carefully removed them so as not to upset their respectable readers" (*Author's Notes* 163). The narrator adds that the novelist:

had struggled to complete her novel. She had only wanted to portray the deep roots of caste oppression in villages, and how violence erupted even within a caste group...But her pen was compelled to go further... She was told that socialist realism was not merely the reflection of society, and that a logical analysis should be presented, connecting the past with the present and the future. She was advised that the author's intention ought to be revealed in full clarity to the reader...The novelist had erased the full stop and continued...The novelist was just a mute witness...But in the story, Chandran organised the workers in order to keep the mentor of the novel happy. The pen was amazing, it had extended the story, overriding the novelist's conclusion.

*(Author's Notes 177)*

The act of witnessing can also be observed here and it shows the interaction between the 'author as a source' and the 'author as a writer', wherein the 'author as a source' (un)consciously selects stories while the 'author as a writer' (un)consciously represents them in a certain way. The 'pen', which could refer to the act of writing, enables the author to 'override' their original intentions while choosing the experiences to be written about. So, even after filtering of memories to select certain experiences, the narrative can develop or evolve during the process of writing. Also, the 'author as a writer' is compelled to highlight individual stories of not just the author, but of members of her community. Hence, it can be inferred that the function of the author as a writer in the *Author's Notes* could be *advocacy*, since advocacy is "the act of translating private problems into social issues" (Taib 2). Advocacy is an important part of activism which is "a conscious act of being on the side of those who suffer" (Taib 5) and is an active "process of reflecting and acting upon" (Maxey 201) the everyday contributions of the individuals and collectives to the society. An activist aims to "raise social consciousness", "identify and define" the

issues prevalent in the society, and endeavour to “offer solutions” (Taib 5). Advocacy and/or activism facilitate reflexivity and vice-versa. Hence, advocacy and activism are reflexive processes, which can be observed in Sivakami’s *The Grip* and *Author’s Notes*.

As stated before, the *Author’s Notes* is Sivakami’s attempt to examine her choices and decisions made during the process of creating *The Grip*. Such reflexivity is a result of looking at the text as the author’s story, but *The Grip* is not just about an individual but a collective, and it is this collective voice that dominates the narrative. *The Grip* draws the attention away from the ‘I’ to the ‘we’ through the use of the novel genre with third person narrative, plot, characters, dialogues, and so on. The narration of the *Author’s Notes* is in third person narrative, and attempts to stay away from the ‘I’ except for dialogues and conversations between Gowri and the novelist and other relatives. Foucault states that the point of writing “is not to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language, it is, rather, a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears” (Foucault 206). In both texts, Sivakami, as the writing subject disappears yet the authorial functions remain. Sivakami is, (un)consciously aware of the collective struggles and ends up portraying incidents that reflect those struggles. What then:

is the force that compels the pen forward? Why and how are experiences transmuted in writing? How was the writer to venture in spirit to those places inaccessible to flesh and blood? She felt that she was guided by the reader rather than by her own instinct. At times, both seemed to be the same, until she carefully analysed them. Why did she have to change herself so much to suit the reader? Or was the change a mask that she willingly wore to attract attention? (*Author’s Notes* 160)

Here, Sivakami's use of the article 'the' followed by the singular noun, 'reader' is interesting because 'the reader' and the author seems 'to be the same'. However, she could also be referring to the Dalit reader because changing, bending and twisting stories to arrive at a particular conclusion would enable relatability and in turn, solidarity with and among Dalit readership. But also, 'the reader' could include the non-Dalit reader as well because readers of texts become witnesses of the collective memory of Dalits. Sivakami's texts have made this witnessing possible, and since the texts are read by Dalits and non-Dalits, the witnessing could stimulate reflexivity from Dalit communities and non-Dalit communities. This is necessary to ease the burden of solving caste-based problems off the backs of Dalits because caste-based issues are relational and performative in nature. The narrator points out that the author's subjective conclusions could also be suggestive solutions to ongoing problems. The narrator says that atrocities were inflicted on Dalit communities by certain 'Backward Castes' that had "absorbed Brahminism. When the novel was written, a number of violent clashes were taking place between Vanniars and Parayars" (*Author's Notes* 179). Many people from both communities were killed. So, the novelist offered "a logical solution" which was "simple arithmetic according to her – two plus two is four...Easy! The Vanniars are poor and the Dalits are poor; what if they join together in a powerful movement! Nothing but arithmetic" (*Author's Notes* 178). She also "suggested inter-caste marriage and united struggle against casteism..." (*Author's Notes* 179) to help in the union between the two warring communities. Even the novelist's mother suggested that Dalits should "join hands with those who perpetrated violence on them –Vanniars"; instead of Dalits organising themselves "around the focal point of Dalit identity, fight against oppression and extract equality by presenting a united front" (*Author's Notes* 179). Furthermore, the novelist's literary friend was of the opinion that "if

writers, novelists, maths teachers and intellectuals scribbled on paper that Vanniyars and Dalits must unite, that it might really happen” (*Author’s Notes* 178). The novelist’s friend added that there must be at least an expression of a ““desire for such an union”” (*Author’s Notes* 178).

However, there is a clear tension between the representation of the reality of the Vanniyars working against Parayars (deriving from the ‘author as a source’ function) and the simplistic solutions proposed by the ‘author as a writer’, which the narrator highlights and critiques. In reality, the Vanniyars joined the upper castes to fight against Dalits, even though according to the novelist, the Vanniyars should ‘ideally’ join Dalits based on Marx’s idea of ‘workers of the world unite’, and Vanniyars and Dalits are “the workers in the society” (*Author’s Notes* 156). The narrator mentions that following Marx’s ideology of unifying the workers would result in a revolution “overturning the country” (*Author’s Notes* 156). The narrator criticises the naivety of the ‘author as a writer’ who “had been overwhelmed by an ideology that seemed to offer an instant remedy to thousands of years of history” (*Author’s Notes* 156). Ambedkar criticises Marx’s panacea as not applicable in societies that are not just divided by class but also caste (as shown in chapter 2). The narrator feels that “there must be a basic flaw in the novelist’s makeup for her to have been able to reach such a conclusion. When had the novelist begun to write?” (*Author’s Notes* 156). The narrator seems to be shocked at the idealisation of the novelist and that if she “had really attempted to write about the caste system, she should have talked about equality of opportunity rather than the universality of corruption. She had acted like a self-appointed judge delivering a verdict” (*Author’s Notes* 149). The narrator also criticises the novelist for allowing her imagination to run wild in depicting the Padayachis united with lower caste communities when in reality, they “refused to link hands with the Parayars” (*Author’s Notes* 156). Moreover, the narrator points out that the author of *The Grip* “had

criticised the leadership of the Dalits – the lowest of the low – at the point when Dalit movement was gaining ground. She had poked fun at the leaders of Ambedkar Associations in villages just as they were engaged in consciousness raising. Novels have to be read against the background of their times” (*Author’s Notes* 150-151).

The narrator therefore feels that the author betrayed her community and her community’s efforts by portraying the internal conflicts and problems within the Dalit communities to upper caste people. The narrator criticises the author’s simple division of caste groups into upper and lower castes when “the village caste structure was complex – with various internal hierarchies and a myriad restrictions in the interaction between castes” (*Author’s Notes* 156). The disaggregation of the various personae using the Foucauldian notion of ‘author functions’ demonstrates what Sivakami is trying to do in the *Author’s Notes*. The author’s choices and decisions are being critically analysed from the perspective of an individual who has emotionally grown and intellectually developed over the past eight years, and this temporal distance enables Sivakami to look at the intricacies of intersectional issues and offer “a solution to a social problem” (*Author’s Notes* 179).

However, the narrator understands that the novelist “trembled at the prospect of being a writer who also had to be a do-gooder and problem-solver” (*Author’s Notes* 159). The narrator mentions that the novelist was expected to find solutions if she portrays a problem even though she was dealing with her own daily problems. This particular position of being a problem-solver is the burden of writers from oppressed communities and unlike certain writers who do not have to bear the burden of being an advocate for their community or seeking solutions for theirs and their future generation’s freedom from oppressive systems. Although this level of reflexivity and advocacy helps in personal development and better understanding of the ‘self’, as long as there is no relational reflexivity on a social level, Dalit writers would be burdened with solving their



intersectional problems which would yield desired results only to a certain extent and only for certain individuals but will not solve or change the collective situation. Non-Dalits (even more so) should engage in relational reflexivity which would facilitate relational disidentification; and this mutual involvement in the problem-solving process would yield more effective and sustainable results. The narrator (also the Author) seems to understand this relational nature of problem-solving, something the novelist (of *The Grip*) did not necessarily get a grasp on while writing the novel. This also shows the intellectual growth of the Author from the novelist, perhaps aided by the temporal distance.

Thus, in the *Author's Notes*, the narrator is in a persistent process of understanding what kind of a writer Sivakami was (156). Since Sivakami's *The Grip* echoes her community's problems and focuses the attention of the readership on the atrocities committed against the Parayar men and women, it can be said that Sivakami, in her writing and as a writer, becomes an advocate and in turn, an activist. Furthermore, the narrator mentions that the novelist made some changes based on her friend's suggestions as it was "her first novel. Writing, correcting, rewriting, seeking opinions and carrying out corrections had consumed a considerable amount of time" (*Author's Notes* 178). Thus, the process of writing involves constant reading, editing, and reflexivity of choice of diction, and so on. Sivakami is reflexive and even at times, examining, herself from a distance. Foucault states that:

we can understand the inevitable necessity, within these fields of discursivity, for a "return to the origin." This return, which is part of the discursive field itself, never stops modifying it. The return is not a historical supplement that would be added to the discursivity, or merely an ornament; on the contrary, it constitutes an effective and necessary task of transforming the discursive practice itself. (219)

Through the *Author's Notes*, the author has the “luxury” (164) of returning to the origin and reviewing her work from a temporal “distance” (164), “bearing the weight and pressure of her present life” (175). The narrator states that a “sense of nihilism” came over the novelist as she examines how “her personal and public lives would be constantly impinged by change” resulting in uncertainty (*Author's Notes* 175). The narrator mentions that the novelist “kept swinging between states of confusion and clarity” (*Author's Notes* 175). For example, the narrator points out that the novelist had painted Kathamuthu as a villain who had taken a large sum from the money that belonged to Thangam. However, the actual father of the novelist is a “benevolent man” who was “kind to the poor” (*Author's Notes* 165). The narrator contemplates that, perhaps, the character of Kathamuthu “was not based on her father” and that the character could be “drawn from her general impression of politicians who took bribes even from their poor constituents” (*Author's Notes* 165). This impression could have been influenced by the “encounters or narratives” the novelist had “of men who have assaulted or tried to assault or man-handle women” (*Author's Notes* 172). The narrator wonders if “she had remembered only those men when she wrote her novel” (*Author's Notes* 172). The portrayal of Kathamuthu, then, is an impression of what was, and the feelings that were impressed on the skin and mind that made its way into the narrative. Ahmed states that it is “through the recognition or interpretation of sensations, which are responses to the impressions of objects and others, that bodily surfaces take shape. I am not saying here that emotions are the same thing as sensations, but that the very intensity of perception often means a slide from one to another, as a slide that does follow as a sequence in time” (25). The interpretation or perception of the impressions influenced the characterisation of Kathamuthu. Moreover, even though the novelist’s father knew that he and Kathamuthu had less in common, his

presence was significant in the novelist's life, so he compared himself with Kathamuthu. The novelist's father found Kathamuthu's characterisation "cruel and damaging, and was saddened by it. He thought that the novelist had taken revenge on him" (*Author's Notes* 183). Furthermore, in an argument between Gowri and the novelist on the portrayal of characters, Gowri accuses the novelist of addressing "the rapist Udayar, the tahsildar, the police and other upper caste men respectfully in first person plural. Whereas the rest do not even appear to be human beings" (*Author's Notes* 183) for the novelist. What, then, is "the language of the novelist? Has she written mechanically to suit her cooked-up story or is there life in her language? Has she lived with those characters and what has been her experience? She would have to clarify this personally" (*Author's Notes* 188). Since there is constant editing during the process of writing, certain stories have developed from their original source (which could be the author's experiences or the stories that she heard about or witnessed) and it is the intention behind such a development that is being traced and scrutinised here because as mentioned before, it is the interpretation or perception of the impressions of emotions and sensations that have resulted in certain characterisation and stories. These impressions could be said to inspire the authorial intentions. The kaleidoscopic writing in and through the *Author's Notes* not only delivers reflexivity through self-examination and scrutiny of the content and context of the text, but also shows the process of reflexivity in motion, as it were.

Additionally, the narrator ruminates on the meanings of certain concepts used in *The Grip*. The narrator looks at terms such as 'widow', 'vulnerable', and 'protection', and understands that the definition of each term is decided by "values" (*Author's Notes* 171). The narrator also tries to understand the meaning of happiness and states that the novelist easily blamed her father's polygamy as the reason for her family's unhappiness instead of understanding unhappiness "against the background of societal and historical forces"

(*Author's Notes* 171). The narrator points out that the author of the novel “had misunderstood the concept of morality” and there should be reflection on whether the author “assessed her characters with value-based judgements, or with what she believed were personal experiences” (*Author's Notes* 171). The narrator also wonders if novels could ever be written without a “generalised perception of life” (180) and if the author’s work has any “literary merit” (*Author's Notes* 181). Additionally, the narrator looks closely at the contextual choice of words used in the society. For example, ‘Kuvilai’ and rose are both flowers yet they are both referred differently as ‘kuvilai malar’ and ‘roja poo’. The narrator points out that ‘malar’ and ‘poo’, both mean flower, but, because ‘kuvilai’ was introduced through Sangam poetry, it is generally referred to as ‘malar’; while rose is quite common and found in almost every garden. Hence, it is called ‘roja poo’. The narrator poses the question – “When language is the expression of one’s own experience, what then is Dalit language, or the language of the oppressed?” (*Author's Notes* 188) The narrator further examines the language used by the novelist in her writing and wonders if that is Dalit writing or the language of the oppressed. The narrator questions if it is:

just writing about huge pits full of shit and pigs roaming in the neighbourhood of such pits, ignoring traditional descriptions about the moon and the stars in the sky, and the colourful kolam decorating the front yard every dawn? Or replacing the names Ranganatha Iyer and Vasakam Pillai with Kathamuthu, Chinnan, Chengandi, etc? Or replacing rice, paruppu and ghee with red cholam and sour keerai? Or replacing words like idiot with sister-fucker? (*Author's Notes* 188)

It is not just the diction and choice of terms that is being examined but also the story or plot line, which the narrator feels is not different from other writers “who write formulaic stories” (*Author’s Notes* 179) involving poverty-stricken villagers exploited by powerful rich landlords while revolutionary intellectuals try to make a difference with conducting night schools, spreading awareness and raising consciousness among the helpless villagers. Eventually, the villagers unite to fight oppression regardless of caste, creed, and other labels. The stories end on that note. The narrator points out that “sprinkling of female characters are added to spice the preparation” (*Author’s Notes* 179).

The author’s function as a writer and the choices of the writer such as diction, plot line, characterisation are therefore scrutinised with regards to the larger implications for Dalit writing and Dalit language. It almost feels like Sivakami is worried about a *homogenisation* of Dalit narratives, where the plot line and the atrocities (although quite pertinent to existing reality) would be predictable and repetitive, thereby categorising Dalit writing and narratives as one specific thing, perhaps, as victim narratives (and nothing more). It is granted that the similarities between several Dalit narratives helps foster relatability with the experiences, and creates solidarity between Dalits while exposing the atrocities to non-Dalits. But, it becomes easier to label Dalit narratives as one specific type of narrative because of these similarities, and Sivakami seems worried about such a homogenised labelling or categorisation that could fall under certain discussions that are said to limit Dalit literature to only “the political merit of the text (how the representations assist Dalit identity politics)” and/ or to (life) narratives that are perceived as “‘authentic’ narratives of the self, re-created through experience and memory” (Yadav 77). It could also be vexation with expressing the same issues and problems over time and space, without substantial changes happening. As stated in chapter 2, many Dalits have soared the economic ladder and have acquired high levels of educational qualifications, yet they

continue to face discrimination. Hence, the details of the stories (such as setting, names of characters, incidents) change but the core ideas remain the same. This is because the majority of non-Dalits have not moved on and continue to recycle oppressive identifications and practices of the caste system. A social change could be brought about by self-reflexivity *and* relational reflexivity in order to achieve relational disidentification, as well as understand the deep systemic problems preventing sustainable changes in the Dalit situation, which could enable re-identification. Perhaps this is why Sivakami is writing such a self-reflexive text as the *Author's Notes*. We could also suppose that she is worried about the homogenisation of Dalit narratives because she is concerned that they are becoming formulaic and 'generic' – and when things become formulaic and generic, they could foreclose reflexivity resulting in minimal impact in terms of activism or creating consciousness or other reforms. The dialogic narrative style and self-reflexivity in *Author's Notes* appears to be a conscious effort to go against the grain, resulting in a transformative narrative.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, the narrator reflects on the kind of person the author is and how she is represented in the *The Grip*. The narrator wonders if the novel reflects "her desire to seek answers for the numerous questions generated by life" or if it reflects "an arrogance that constricts life within her narrow understanding and limited knowledge" (*Author's Notes* 181). To know more about the novelist's personal life, Gowri asks what her "kulam, gotram, caste" is, to which the novelist responds by saying that all "three are the same – Parayar" (*Author's Notes* 189). Gowri further asks the novelist to give a brief account of her life without "branching into philosophical digressions" (*Author's Notes* 189). The narrator obliges and starts with mentioning her parents' name and how many people live in her house. She uses the collective first person 'we' here. The novelist mentions that her

---

<sup>32</sup> The transformative aesthetics of Dalit narratives is discussed later on.

family “owned small plots of irrigated as well as dry land” (*Author’s Notes* 189). Her father’s childhood was spent collecting pig shit; and with the “backbreaking labour” of her grandparents, her father and her siblings, they came to “own some land” (*Author’s Notes* 189). It is interesting that the novelist does not speak about her mother here and the hard work of the women folk, while she “thanks” only the men for their labour (*Author’s Notes* 189). Such instances, despite the advocacy for solidarity among fellow Dalits based on their lived caste experience, could reveal a loss of the “sense of criticality as far as gender-based subjugation is concerned” (Yadav 84) in the *Author’s Notes* itself, even when the text makes critical observation of the shortcomings of *The Grip*.

So, Sivakami’s attempt to trace her intentions and politics behind her narratives, goes all the way back to her own identity, upbringing and life. The narrator understands that nothing shown in the novel “was untrue” but there is a lurking feeling that the novel “was false” because characters were muddled up in events that were not related to them (*Author’s Notes* 150). Here, the idea of ‘false’ refers to the author’s choice to not portray people and the stories the way it happened, without any filtering or mediation from the author. However, such narratives have some ‘truth’ value because the stories are not ‘untrue’ but rather ‘revised’ as clearly shown in the *Author’s Notes*. Every single detail of an experience need not be portrayed but the relevant issues and related aspects are highlighted for perhaps activism or advocacy purposes, as pointed out earlier on. The *Author’s Notes* contemplates on how and why certain characters and stories are portrayed in *The Grip*, and this shows how the author has mediated or *translated* her own experiences along with her community’s experiences. The narrator feels that the novelist “wanted to share her experiences, but at the same time protect her own self and identity. The novelist had been saved, but what about the novel?” (150) and the novelist “raised her hands to cover her face in shame” (*Author’s Notes* 150).

Shame and guilt are repetitive emotions shown in the *Author's Notes*. As mentioned before, Sivakami reflects on her *The Grip* as an individual even though the work resonates on a collective level. Since there is an (un)conscious filtering of events, some stories are narrated differently on each reflection with new developments or with emphasis on certain perspectives such as the *Author's Notes* which is a reflection on *The Grip*, which is itself a reflection on 'events' from the 'source'. But this neither makes the new developments or perspectives fabricated, nor the older versions untrue. For example, when one falls down and injures oneself, the focus is on the most dominant pain caused by an injury in a specific location, especially when accompanied by a visual aspect such as wound, blood, redness, and so on. Once the focus moves away from the dominant location of pain, then the other injuries such as scraped knees, or torn clothes, and other things can be noticed or felt. Yet feeling and recognising all the injuries on separate occasions does not make them untrue because it just means they have surfaced to a conscious level at a different time. Reflexivity enables a 'return to the origin' thereby allowing a surfacing of injuries or memories or stories; and this level of reflexivity depicts the author as a constantly developing individual. The 'return to the origin', then, paves way for transformation of the individual, *by weighing past choices with present knowledge to inspire future decisions*. The various authorial functions facilitate this process of transformation.

### **2.3. Author as a critic**

In *Author's Notes*, Sivakami criticises herself through the character of Gowri from her work, *The Grip*. Sivakami refers to Gowri as her 'critic'. Gowri possibly represents what Sivakami was eight years ago and hence, is chosen to "check whether the contents of the novel and contemporary reality match" (*Author's Notes* 179). The narrator states that Gowri seems determined to "examine" the novelist "in such microscopic detail" that she



will be able to “differentiate and count [your] her white and red blood corpuscles”

(*Author's Notes* 152). The conversation between Gowri and the author is given in single quotes like dialogues in a drama and the narrator's voice remains in third person narrative.

The author is referred to as the 'novelist' during the conversations. The narrator states that 'she' “had travelled quite a distance from the novelist. She saw herself differing from the hopeful and egoistic novelist. She felt alienated from the novel” (*Author's Notes* 183).

When Gowri and the novelist engage in conversations, the narrator appears to be a kind of neutral arbiter between the two, rather than being critical of the novelist. Gowri's critique of the novelist is based on the authorial choices made in *The Grip* while the narrator's critique looks at the character of Gowri as well as the novelist fully aware that they are the same person. The narrator's presence is almost dramatic irony because the narrator is the persona behind the curtain seeing everything unfold (in the text) while Gowri focuses on the novel and the novelist's choices. This could be why the narrator reveals that Gowri and Sivakami are one and the same. Outside the text, the Author (Sivakami) is the one who is actually seeing everything unfold including the narrator's role. This intrinsic dynamic is precisely why the narrative style of the *Author's Notes* is kaleidoscopic as there is a different persona and perspective at different times.

The narrator points out that the novelist was forced to “address some starkly direct questions” (*Author's Notes* 151) such as why she chose to mock Dalit leadership instead of just writing about her personal life. When the novelist does not answer a question, Gowri comments on the silence as 'guilt'. Gowri is quite critical and her tone is harsh and direct. She asserts her role as a critic saying that 'I am a reviewer, a critic. I am the one who asks questions. To the readers you are dead. I have brought you back to life. Let that inform your attitude.' (*Author's Notes* 166).

Gowri demands the author step down from the pedestal possibly given to her through her “much talked about novel of the eighties” (*Author’s Notes* 151). Gowri points out that the author is under the illusion that she has created “a literary masterpiece” (151) when the reality is that those who have commended her work are “blessed with the best opportunities that life can bestow and have carefully established themselves in the field of literature” (*Author’s Notes* 151). Gowri further states that the upper castes applaud the author because she had “accepted their rules of the game” which she “mistook” as praise for her book (*Author’s Notes* 151). Gowri asks the author what these rules are and if it involves oppressing Dalit communities by stomping on their attempts to liberate themselves from caste oppression, which expresses the guilt felt by the novelist. Her attempt to portray various issues in her book has led to her feeling guilty and shameful, yet it could be the same affect that perhaps motivated and enabled the creation of the *Author’s Notes*, thereby giving some productive value to the emotions of guilt and shame. Additionally, the novelist is forced to answer Gowri’s questions about her conscious and subconscious intentions in the novel. The novelist says that Gowri has “grossly misunderstood the spirit of the novel. Caste is still an indomitable force, challenging all those who try to break it down. The present leadership lacks spirit and is inadequate. The combined effort of all oppressed castes is necessary; continuous focus on the problem of caste is necessary” (151). In turn, Gowri points out that the novelist’s conscious, educated, logical expressions can be seen in the novel, but they are poorly presented. Gowri asks the novelist if she has given any thoughts to the “subconscious mind and its contrary thoughts” (*Author’s Notes* 151) because her subconscious can be clearly noticed in her choice of words and construction of phrases. Gowri feels that the novelist “carefully” guarded the image of the upper castes and addressed them with respect through various characters while those who laboured for the upper castes were hardly respected or endowed with any

dignity (*Author's Notes* 52). For example, in the exposition of the novel, Kathamuthu can be seen “standing whereas his second wife is in a supine position. His erect posture suggests his dominance over her” (*Author's Notes* 152). Gowri feels that this visual image is the novelist’s subconscious mind taking the reins. Similar examples of the subconscious mind addressing the “rich with respect and the poor with disrespect” and thereby, following “their rules of the game” (152) can be observed through the “symbols, metaphors and words” (*Author's Notes* 152) used in the novel. The narrator states that the “novelist had to concede that some of the accusations were true” (*Author's Notes* 152). The narrator understands that the novelist “had grown weary of the word games, but she did believe what had been said. She began checking her narrative and her choice of words” (*Author's Notes* 152).

Is the subconscious mind, then, a performative space demanding constant reflection on the conscious mind, just like Gowri pointing out certain things to the novelist? Then, Gowri’s voice can be seen as the personification of the subconscious mind of the author. Gowri states that the novelist believes that she is ‘Gowri’ because everyone calls the novelist by that name. Just because they share the same name, the novelist begins to believe that she is “a Dalit” just like Gowri, and “because others think you [novelist] are...” (*Author's Notes* 152). The sentence is incomplete and left to the imagination of the reader to fill in the blank here. Since Gowri accuses the novelist of believing that she is ‘Gowri’ and thereby a ‘Dalit’, the ellipsis could mean either of the two identities – Gowri or Dalit – but at the same time indicate a union of both identities since Gowri clearly believes in her identity as a Dalit while questioning the novelist’s loyalties towards the Dalit community. But as pointed out by Gowri, “everyone calls” the novelist by the name of ‘Gowri’ and they are one and the same. This could be indicative of what Foucault states about the writer of a novel not necessarily being the narrator of the novel but

possibly an “alter ego whose distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work...the author function is carried out and operates in the scission itself, in this division and this distance” (Foucault 215). Gowri could be the novelist’s and thereby Sivakami’s alter-ego, bolstered by a scission through temporal distance.

Also, there is silence at the end of some conversations. This could be because the novelist has emotionally and intellectually matured, and understands that there are no black and white answers but rather grey areas. Gowri understands her community’s problems and stands in solidarity with them while the novelist feels like she has betrayed her community. Hence, Gowri’s sarcastic statement that the novelist ‘believes’ that she is a ‘Dalit’. Through the alter-ego of Gowri and/or the novelist, Sivakami is questioning if she is deserving of the Dalit identity. As mentioned before, guilt and shame are consistent emotions seen in the *Author’s Notes*. The ‘silence’ also shows reflection from both parties, as they both are one and the same. However, Gowri questions the novelist’s silence and accuses the novelist of acting differently to the beliefs she preaches. Additionally, Gowri questions the novelist’s decision of using “familiar life with not so familiar imagination” to “tell a story in a traditional narrative form” (*Author’s Notes* 190). The novelist confirms her decision. Gowri feels that the novelist changed terms like ‘zila’ to district and ‘taluk’ to circle, and quoted people’s thoughts and decorated their speech with narration because the novelist saw herself as different from the people she quotes and this why is she failed to portray “their life or the aesthetics of their life effectively” (*Author’s Notes* 190). Gowri feels that the novelist could not “comprehend that their life *is* literature” and hence, the novelist was “limited by existing literary standards” (*Author’s Notes* 190). The novelist retorts by saying that her ‘critic’ denies that “writing as a form constructs its own language” (*Author’s Notes* 190). Gowri responds to this by asserting that many people “attempt to enslave” Dalits through their writings, in which they refer to Dalits’ spoken

language as “slum language” (*Author’s Notes* 190). Gowri strongly feels that “language should be constructed on the basis of life experience and the questioning of life” rather than “performing a mechanical translation in the name of skill or identity” (*Author’s Notes* 190).

The concluding conversations see the novelist sarcastically address Gowri as, “Dear critic” (*Author’s Notes* 190). Gowri ends the conversation by calling the novelist ‘silly’ for being proud that her novel “had been widely discussed” (*Author’s Notes* 190). The *Author’s Notes* ends with Gowri using the term “self-examination” (190) while arguing with the novelist. The use of this term at the end is culmination of the reason why the novelist chose to write the *Author’s Notes*. The bold use of the term ‘self-examination’ rather than ‘self-reflection’ begs the question of the extent to which individuals should scrutinise themselves. Is this level of scrutiny done because of Gowri’s rebellious youth or the author’s growth or even the tension between the two? Is self-examination a burden reserved for the author who is expected to uplift her community, and in order to do so should set aside her individual beliefs and views for the betterment of the community? When she is blamed and when she blames herself for being critical on the Dalit leadership, should she have not shown that truth?

During the argumentative conversations with Gowri, the novelist tries to justify her actions and even lifestyle, where she tries to do the right thing for her community and herself through her writing and in other small ways such as traveling by second class only and doing “agricultural work” during the holidays (166), even if she does not nurse the “wounded soldiers of her country” or “volunteer time in the hospital” (*Author’s Notes* 165). As pointed out towards the beginning of this chapter, Gowri criticises the author for trying “hard to justify her work” and wonders to whom she owes explanations (*Author’s Notes* 134). Since the author, the novelist, Gowri, and the narrator are aspects of the same

person, it is clear that Sivakami is trying to justify her choices to herself, as well as those in her own community whom she feels she has betrayed, for example, by portraying the corruption in Dalit leadership. Perhaps, such thoughts come from concerns of the possibility that non-Dalit oppressors could use the fact of corruption among Dalit leaders as ammunition against Dalit communities; and this is similar to Sivakami's concerns about the homogenisation of Dalit narratives. She is questioning and assuring herself that her reasons were bound to the actual truth rather than a truth that *ought to* have been presented to non-Dalit readership. Sivakami lists out her real actions such as traveling in second class and so on, to let her community know that she is still grounded to her community's problems. If she was only justifying her choices to herself, she need not have published the *Author's Notes* and could have still been reflexive. The publication of the text is proof that her justifications are extended beyond the individual to the collective that she has portrayed in *The Grip*. If Sivakami felt "responsible" (*Author's Notes* 179) enough to offer solutions to and for her community through *The Grip*, then she also believes she owes explanations to the same collective. Who better to question the author's intentions than the author herself? Hence, Sivakami becomes her own critic through the character of Gowri.

#### **2.4. Author as a translator**

The "unmediated expression" of the lived experiences of Dalits constitute "authenticity" in their narratives (Jadeja 130). When seen in the light of the reflexive splitting of the authorial persona in the *Author's Notes*, is it possible to have 'unmediated expression' since the text highlights its impossibility? The preceding discussion of other authorial functions in the *Author's Notes* has shown that in a way, the 'author' *translates* themselves when writing about their experiences through the (un)conscious filtering of stories, changes to details of the actual events, and so on. Jaydeep Sarangi states that when a

person is reading an autobiography of a Dalit individual, “you are not only reading one person’s history, it is the history of the society and the lived experiences of his community” because “[h]istory travels through the person and shed lights on questions like - what was the community’s condition decades ago? What were the rules and nuances of the society the author was born into? What was the prevailing condition of education then? How were the social occupations?” (Appendix 4: 344). Hence it is important to translate Dalit personal narratives to reach a world-wide readership, particularly translation from regional Indian languages such as Tamil, Kannada, Marathi, and so on into the English language. English being a global language “has a tremendous reach all over the world and it automatically gives prestige and supremacy to these authors who were denied that by their own cultures” (Pandit 175). Since Dalit narratives such as the *The Grip* and *Author’s Notes* provide a sense of the Dalit experience through the author’s translated view of their personal experiences and the community’s stories, then the actual act of ‘translation’ (from the source language to the target language) can be seen as an ‘author-function’ even if the translator is a different person to the author. Hence, this section is titled, ‘author as a translator’ since there are similarities between the functions of the author and the functions of the translator, even though the process of translation is different from the authorial process of creating the source text. So, understanding the functions of translators require a separate outlook and hence, this section uses the responses from the interviews with various translators of Dalit narratives<sup>33</sup>. This method is significant as the experiences of the translators could shed light on the translator’s functions while translating Dalit texts from regional Indian languages to the English language.

---

<sup>33</sup> Only a few participants who have requested anonymity are referred to as ‘Participant 1’, ‘Participant 2’, and so on. The interviews are attached at the end of the thesis as ‘Appendices’.

Arun Prabha Mukherjee (2020) states that translation “is never an easy task” (162) and the laborious work of the translator “is often undervalued” (153) when it should be celebrated because translation widens the readership, considerably, across space and time, which would “otherwise remain limited” (153) to specific communities. But Mukherjee also points out the need for examining “the shortcomings” (153) of the translator and the translations, in order to understand the translator’s role in the translation, which is consciously or unconsciously not confined to literary motivations. Mukherjee renounces the idea of a perfect translation while insisting on “*linguistic hospitality*” (153), drawn from Paul Ricoeur’s ideas. Mukherjee also quotes Lawrence Venuti’s conception of the process of translating as something that “can never simply be communication between equals because it is fundamentally ethnocentric” (qtd. in Mukherjee 154). Then, in the context of the caste-ridden Indian society, Mukherjee states that there are “caste/class-centric blind spots” that need to be kept in mind when “reading, evaluating and/ or translating Dalit texts” (154). Mukherjee’s ideas of ‘blind spots’ could be with regards to subjective interpretations, unconscious biases and ideological conditioning of the translators who are individuals tethered to the very same society that is being critically represented by the authors. Mukherjee uses Venuti’s words to explain that “asymmetries, inequities, relations of dominance and dependence exist in every act of translating, of putting the translated in the service of translating culture” (154). So, translating is not an *innocent or ahistorical or apolitical act* because it involves translating cultures and in turn, translating histories that lead to the production and practice of those cultures.

In her essay, “Translating Dalit Literature: Redrawing the map of cultural politics” (2020), Maya Pandit states that translation “as cultural production in India...is situated in regimes of power that legitimise and privilege articulations of Hindu upper-caste patriarchal male writers” while marginal communities such as Dalits, women, tribals,



“remain on the margins of the social imaginary as invisible or ignored entities” (166). So, translating Dalit texts into English “is a political act which seeks intervention on behalf of the subalterns in the power politics of academic, literary and cultural regimes” (Pandit 170). Pandit further states that translating Dalit texts paves the way for “alternative perceptions, reinterpretation of history and creation of ‘new knowledge’ that changes the map of cultural imagination in Indian languages” (170). Pandit also mentions that there are ‘gaps’ in translation as a result of the “limits of translatability” (175), and the most obvious limit Pandit states is that “English has no caste system!” (175).

So, Mukherjee and Pandit’s caution of ‘blind spots’ and ‘gaps’ demand a closer look at not just the process of translation but also, the functions of the translator. This echoes Foucault’s authorial functions and demands a closer look at the translator’s role in making choices and taking decisions about the diction, expressions, concepts, and so on. The translator is neither the author nor the co-author (unless the author is the translator), or perhaps both (author and/ or co-author); and hence, Dalit works in translations are sometimes seen as independent works of literature. As one of the three translators of Aravind Malagatti’s *Government Brahmana*, Janet Vucinich does not believe that the translated work is an independent piece of literature although she feels that this is not the same for many other works. She gives the example of David Hinton’s translations of early Chinese poetry as “he admittedly says that translations are “creative”” and could be considered as “independent works spun off the inspiration of originals” (Appendix 2: 331). Susheela Punitha, translator of Lakshman’s *Samboli! Beware!* (2018) from Kannada to English, mentions that:

By definition, I would not regard translations as independent works of literature; they are derived from a source text to which they have to be faithful. I have found that the

translation of the intention in a piece of literary writing is achieved through multiple levels of reading that lead to multiple levels of writing. The spontaneity of retelling a story is stalled by the meta-reader in the translator as she sees gaps in meaning, significance and ambience and closes them by choosing from both languages to make the third language of the specific translated text. And this third language keeps changing to meet the peculiar demands of each text. It is true that the translated versions of Dalit writing, like any other writing, can gain the stature of independent works at the hands of skilled translators, true. And yet we know that they are but English representations of a very local indigenous variety of experiences. (Appendix 3: 339)

Here, there is an equivocation of ideas wherein Punitha does not regard translations as independent works of literature but like Vucinich, Punitha does not entirely disregard the possibility of it. The denial of independence could be because the translator is bound to a text and its author, and we have seen the (un)conscious functions of the author in their respective works. Although the translator is tethered to the source text, studying the (un)conscious intentions and functions of the translator are important. For example, there is conscious and/ or unconscious filtering or selection of events, expression, and diction during translation based on translatability of language and cultural aspects from the source language to the target language, in order to increase understanding and relatability from the readers. Also, Punitha's point of the translator being a 'meta-reader' who is able to close the gaps in the source text, resonates with the function of the 'author as a writer' which engages with 'writing, correcting, rewriting, seeking opinions and carrying out corrections' (*Author's Notes* 178). Punitha's idea of 'gaps' and the attempt of filling those gaps reiterates Maya Pandit's ideas.

Mukherjee states that cultures and societies “develop specialised vocabularies, which are grounded in their history” (160). So, finding the perfect equivalent of some words and concepts in the target language becomes almost impossible and to simply “assimilate the text into the dominant culture” is to “cut it loose from its unique cultural and historical context” (Mukherjee 160). This could also explain Vucinich and Punitha’s equivocation regarding the (non)independent status of translated works. Hence, it is better to use the regional words and phrasings from the source language in order to retain the cultural and historical significance of the text as a whole. Sivakami’s *The Grip* and *Author’s Notes*, and Bama’s *Karukku* provide a ‘glossary’ at the end of their texts. Such an inclusion of a glossary with culture-specific terms and names borrowed from Tamil language or other regional languages, helps give an explanation to the terms and their significance in the specific cultural and historical context to the English readership. Even though Dharani Devi Malagatti, one of the translators of *Government Brahmana*, is from Karnataka, she found it difficult to translate the specific Kannada dialect of the region of Bijapur in Karnataka, where the author (Aravind Malagatti) is from. She mentions that Bijapur Kannada slightly varies from textual Kannada and most of the dialogues in the source text were in Bijapur Kannada (Appendix 1: 319). Certain vocabulary and expressions, such as “Indian kinship terms” or other terms and ideas are difficult, “if not impossible, to translate in English” (Mukherjee 162). Then, the use of glossary and also, footnotes, could be helpful. Janet Vucinich feels that “using footnotes respects the fact that when the author is telling a story, he/she is able to use the key words they are comfortable with and then the reader is responsible for going to the footnotes for clarification” (Appendix 2: 329).

Also, Susheela Punitha mentions that even though she translates from Kannada to English, she is aware that Kannada has variety of dialects, and the stories are “in the regional varieties” such as Mangalore Kannada and Dharwad Kannada, and so on

(Appendix 3: 335). She points out that the dialogues in the stories “have a smattering of Tulu in the Mangalore variety and Urdu or Marathi in the North Karnataka variety” and so, she cannot:

rely on their face-value for the meaning. For instance, in *Karya*, Aravind Malagatti, a Dalit writer from North Karnataka uses expressions like *dusnumbri* and *kalanumbri*, compound Kannada words with a blend of Urdu and English. They mean, ‘number ten’ and ‘black number’ respectively. But this bit of lexical information does not help to get at the contextual significations. *Dusnumbri*, here, refers to the supplier of beef; *dus* being ten, is the highest number allotted to grade meats like fish, chicken, mutton, beef. And *kalanumbri* refers to Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code as the *kala* or black number because it prohibits people on the streets during curfew! (Appendix 3: 336)

Hence, the challenge is not just about translating from one language to another but rather translating a dialect of the source language to the target language, thereby creating what Punitha calls “the third language of the specific translated text”. This blending or meeting point between two languages in order to create a third one could be associated with the idea of ‘borderlands’. The two languages (source and target) surpass linguistic and grammatical borders to create a borderland that facilitates both languages, and in turn cultures. Vucinich gives an example from her teaching experience where she encouraged minority cultures “to integrate their language in a piece of writing (even if just a few critical words)” and she noticed that “it had a positive effect not only on the quality of the result (an authenticity) but on the emotional experience of the writer” (Appendix 2: 329). Vucinich further mentions that “the writers/students were often from communities that felt

alien or as outsiders in educational institutions” so it seemed like a good way to “bridge separations” than “disrespect a culture by silencing one’s language by putting such emphasis on standard language” (Appendix 2: 329). The idea of bridging separations or ‘gaps’ through writing, where texts become “multi-dimensional space(s) in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” (Barthes 146), contributes to the idea of the borderland. The (translated) text becomes “a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture” (Barthes 146). Additionally, in *Undoing Gender* (2004), Judith Butler states that:

It is crucial to recognize that the notion of the human will only be built over time in and by the process of cultural translation, where it is not a translation between two languages that stay enclosed, distinct, unified. But rather, translation will compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other, and this apprehension, at the limit of what is familiar, parochial and already known, will be the occasion for both an ethical and social transformation. (38–39)

The ability of translation to “compel each language to change in order to apprehend the other” not only resonates with the nature of borderland which is a transformative hybrid space, but also reveals a certain amount of performativity due to the changing and transformative nature of translation. This performative nature of translation resonates with the idea of relational disidentification which requires not just Dalits but also non-Dalits to change in order to comprehend each other, thereby facilitating an ethical and social transformation. Furthermore, Punitha mentions that the third language of the translated piece “keeps changing to meet the peculiar demands of each text” (Appendix 3: 339). The fluid nature of the ‘third language’ to change to meet the needs of specific texts, affirms

the idea of borderlands which are vague and undetermined places in a “constant state of transition” (Anzaldúa 3). Then, it can be said that the transformative or performative nature of translation results in borderlands in and through the translated texts. The translator enables borderlands through the use of glossary and footnotes to the original regional terms and expressions which help retain the cultural ‘essence’ or sense of the dialects and in turn, the originality of the source text as much as possible, while also providing a description or explanation to the terms, for the English readership. In this way, the translated text nurtures and promotes a space for borderlands.

Furthermore, the readers of Dalit narratives in translation engage in a performative reading wherein, they have to actively browse through the glossary and footnotes while reading the text to facilitate better engagement with the text. This performative reading involving flipping pages to check the glossary should not be seen as an exhausting process because the readers are not just given stories, but a community’s biography (in the case of Dalit narratives). So the literal performance of going back and forth to the glossary or scanning down to the bottom of the page for the footnotes in order to understand the meanings of specific terms, should be viewed as an active process of engaging with not just language, but also witnessing the culture and history of Dalits. Moreover, engaging in performative reading of Dalit texts makes the readers involved in fostering the translated text as a borderland because the target readership includes Dalits and non-Dalits, and the performative reading contributes to autochthonous and relational disidentification. So it can be said that the borderland of translation is a space that promotes relational disidentification through both writing/translating and reading. Aravind Malagatti mentions that non-Dalits understand the problems of Dalits on reading Dalit texts and they also, “have realised the ways in which they have to behave with Dalits” (Appendix 1: 316). Malagatti further mentions that:

A person has written that he is a Brahmin and he is actively working with coolies. He brought this book home and his relatives asked him why he is reading this book. His father asked him to not read the book and even threw the book out. But this person picked up the book and kept it in his cupboard. He then said that it is a good book and is not less worthy than the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which are kept in the house.

(Appendix 1: 316)

Even the very act of reading is performative, in the sense that, by reading Dalit narratives, the reader is incited to act, like a performative speech utterance, thereby contributing to disidentification. Ahmed states that if one thinks of identification “as a form of alignment (to bring into line with ourselves – the subject as ‘bringing into line’)”, then it also shows “how identifications involve dis-identification or an active ‘giving up’ of other possible identifications” (*The Cultural Politics of Emotion* 52). As stated in chapter 3, ‘disidentification’ is slightly different from ‘dis-identification’, in that, the latter is a “silent withdrawal” as opposed to “a challenge and a confrontation” (Weir 82). Ahmed’s idea of ‘dis-identification’ complements her idea of ‘cutting’ or ‘giving up’ on the repetition or ‘iterability’ of performative speech utterances. This ‘cutting’ or ‘giving up’ can be seen as a starting step towards *disidentification* which involves active resistance towards the oppressive identifications. Then, ‘dis-identification’ helps towards disidentification, which is a necessary step “to transform identities” (Weir 82). Thus, translation’s ability to widen the readership becomes crucial to engage more Dalits and non-Dalits to read, understand and possibly, engage in autochthonous and relational disidentification.

Additionally, decisions on the format and vocabulary are subjective conclusions of the translator, in accordance with the author. The interaction between the author and the

translator is an important and interesting matter. Janet Vucinich mentions that she worked side by side with the author, Aravind Malagatti. Vucinich would suggest “standard English options and Aravind would weigh his intentions and word choices” because this was “a literary/poetic work” being translated and so, “there was more play between options in the process” as opposed to the translation of “a legal or scientific document” (Appendix 2: 327). Even the vast “Indian language dictionaries do not include words that articulate” Dalit’s experiences and lives “in the fullness of its material and cultural aspects”, let alone the English dictionary (Mukherjee 162). It then becomes the translator’s responsibility and burden to “educate the reader through glossing and extensive introductions” (Mukherjee 162).

For example, Susheela Punitha mentions that she has tried her best to be “faithful to the cultural details that bring out the social undercurrents” which she could do “only with the help of the writers” (Appendix 3: 336). She “used extended interpolations in the English version only where they are absolutely necessary to bring out the essence of the expressions used” (Appendix 3: 336). Punitha gives an example from *Samboli!* where Lakshman provides a description of a certain group of people that had fascinated him as a child, at a village fair. Punitha points out that a literal translation of the passage would read:

*“There were those who played with gangethu...And there were Muslim tribes who did the kankattu.”* Such a transliteration does not ensure the impact of the original even if I were to provide footnotes...I had to transcreate the passage elaborating the two expressions, describing in greater detail how some Hindus paraded a bull decked up as Rama and begged for alms to get him married to Sita, the cow. And how men from Muslim tribes entertained spectators by splitting granite slabs in two or writhing through



small loops and went around begging for alms in the name of Allah. But how could I justify such an interpolation? I could, because Lakshman's vision in his *athma-kathe* includes an eschatological dimension, a hope he mentions later that, 'We talk to one another with open minds and laugh with one another with open hearts.' This hope recalls the village fair of his childhood as an image of a community where people with different religious convictions but with a shared culture come together in fellowship to have fun and also earn a living. Here the interpolation is not an intrusion since the scaffolding is organic, not structural. (Appendix 3: 336-337)

Such a recasting of the story echoes Whitehead's idea of recalling memories by way of "association, using consciously selected visual images" (30). Then, it can be said that the conscious or unconscious filtering of memories based on the author's association with what those memories could represent, not only happens during the authorial process of writing the original text but, also during translation of the same text. Translation provides the author yet another opportunity, through the translator, to reflect on the original text; and in this way, the translated text could show further reflexivity from the original. If the text shows more or less reflexivity, this can only be understood through a comparative analysis, by those who can read and understand the source and target languages.

Thus, it is not only the interaction between the author and the translator that is dynamic, but also, the process of translation. Another reason for this dynamic nature of translating Dalit narratives is the translation of emotions. Susheela Punitha states that translating emotions is not too difficult because "people everywhere feel the same emotions, more or less" (Appendix 3: 335). Punitha also points out that "the narrative format in Kannada" makes it often easier to translate because it "is generally one of showing, not of telling. The situation is graphically presented and it helps to be faithful to the set-up to describe

the emotions the context arouses” (Appendix 3: 335). Once again, this shows that the nature of translation varies based on the dialect and linguistics of the source language. In contrast, Dharani Devi Malagatti mentions that it “was a challenge to bring all the emotions such as sorrow in the same way as it is in the original text” (Appendix 1: 319) and she still feels that she has failed to bring the same emotions in some parts of the translated text. But, since she is married to the author and would ask the author’s opinion as much as possible, she feels that she has been able to do justice to the original text but “translation has its inherent limitations” (Appendix 1: 320). Janet Vucinich mentions that pain, trauma, and emotions in general, “are always difficult to communicate” but she tries to stay “with the direct honesty of the text” (Appendix 2: 328). Vucinich remembers the “emotional weight” (Appendix 2: 329) of translating the section on the author’s first love, because Dharani Devi, the author’s wife was present. Vucinich affirms that many sections were emotionally loaded and the whole process “was definitely an intimate experience of sharing someone’s life rather an academic or professional exercise” (Appendix 2: 329).

However, emotions are “performative: they both generate their objects, and repeat past associations” (Ahmed 92). Here, associations are “between words that generate meanings” which are usually concealed and it is this concealment of associations “that allows such signs to accumulate value” (Ahmed 92). Ahmed calls these ‘sticky signs’, which are effective due to “a history of articulation, which allows the sign to accumulate value” (92). As mentioned before, sensations are mediated and so are emotions, which in turn play a huge role in the “politicisation of subjects” (Ahmed 171). Then, “knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world” (Ahmed 171). Knowledge of Dalit struggles and experiences are thus tied to *Dalit affects* which are political. To what extent, then, should the translator grasp Dalit affect to understand the

Dalit struggle, or vice-versa; and does this have an impact on their translation? Susheela Punitha mentions that she has “not let any preconceived idea of the Dalit struggle or Dalit experience to have a bearing on the text” because she wanted to stay “true to the intention in the original story as it unfolds itself in the course of the narrative” but she has certainly gained “invaluable insight into their awareness, their fight, their disillusionment and their commitment to rise” (Appendix 3: 338). Janet Vucinich also asserts that it was not her “place to interpret or embellish” (Appendix 2: 330). So the translator expects or they (consciously) choose to only give their literary input in order to not let their own emotional and ethical responses deviate from the perspectives of the source text. Jaydeep Sarangi mentions that through translation, some say that “you are sanitizing the original language” but “the involvement of the translator with the author and the culture may give you a degree of correctness or degree of faithfulness” to the author and the text (Appendix 4: 349). He further states that:

Dalit literature was written with a purpose and a zeal to change society. The kind of experience Dalit writers have is not familiar to so-called non-Dalit writers. We all know the Bengali writer and activist, Mahasweta Devi, because of her engagement with Adivasis, Dalit and marginalised communities, but she was not a Dalit. Dalit writings come from their own experiences of how they have been denied social status and how people reject them. This insider view is absent in non-Dalit texts. So I think non-Dalit texts and Dalit texts are remarkably different. A Dalit text gives us a picture of Bengal - the history, the sociology, the politics - that we don't talk of and hence, it is a hidden resource that shows the potential of our [Indian] literature. (Appendix 4: 343-344)

Then it can be understood that translators (particularly non-Dalits) of Dalit narratives, as opposed to non-Dalit narratives, are or become aware of the affect, the advocacy, and the aesthetics of the Dalit narratives in order to translate Dalit narratives. But it is the translator's responsibility and also burden to aid in the process of challenging and changing the "asymmetrical relations of power in the fields of cultural production" by bringing Dalit's "cultural, linguistic, political and civilizational history to light, not as 'quaint' pieces of 'exotic' cultures but as inspiring struggles for equality, self-respect and enfranchisement" (Pandit 177). To aid in such a process which requires "more introspection and reflexivity" (Mukherjee 162), should translators commit to the text's activism (authorial intentions of advocacy, initiating disidentification, and so on) or to the act of translation as a purely literary process (as these translators seem to suggest)?

Committing to the text's activism involves tapping into the linguistic knowledge of Dalit texts, being aware of the contextual axes (sociocultural, historical, political, legal, religious and others), and the array of emotions evoked; and being mindful of the advocacy and activism, and other authorial intentions and functions, in and of the text. It therefore involves reflexivity and consciousness. Committing only to the act of translation (although powerful on its own) involves linguistic awareness, and reflection on the text and authorial intentions, only to the extent of aiding the act of translation.

This difference between awareness and consciousness works on similar lines as that between reflection and reflexivity. In his work, *Dalit Personal Narratives* (2010), Raj Kumar looks at S. P. Punalekar's concepts of 'demolition' and 'reconstruction' which can be considered as the two main functions of Dalit literature. 'Demolition' emphasises "destroying what is considered as 'deadwood'" which are the "decaying components of existing social and cultural order" (Kumar 149). On the other hand, 'reconstruction' looks at the transformation of the "social reality in the direction of total freedom, equality and

human dignity” (Kumar 149). Kumar states that these two processes do not easily function together, and hence, R.G Jadhav says, “Dalit literature, like every Dalit individual, is struggling to achieve its goal” (qtd. Kumar 149). Punalekar’s concepts of ‘demolition’ and ‘reconstruction’ are similar to the ideas of ‘disidentification’ and ‘re-identification’ proposed by this thesis. Disidentification by Dalits and non-Dalits is important and the process of relational disidentification is necessary for not only being *aware* of Dalit struggles, but for having *Dalit consciousness*. Awareness concentrates on imparting knowledge and information on the struggles whereas consciousness enables reflexivity on the individual and the collective. Awareness can spark reflection without much emphasis on reflexivity. Dalit narratives show a sincere effort to change individual and collective lives, but may not achieve their goal of dignity, freedom, right to education, equality and equity, effectively, possibly because reflexivity becomes the burden of the oppressed groups, rather than relational reflexivity. Reflexivity, and search for borderlands and possibilities in and through their works, allow Dalits to transform and develop as individuals and collectives, thereby, enabling a process of autochthonous disidentification. However, if non-Dalits do not engage in the same level of reflexivity, then the ongoing inequality and discrimination will continue. Not just awareness but Dalit consciousness is necessary for ‘reconstruction’ or ‘re-identification’ of Dalit identities and in turn, their freedom. Aravind Malagatti states that it is possible for non-Dalits to have Dalit consciousness and once it “enters one’s head, it won’t let the person sleep peacefully” (Appendix 1: 324). He provides an anecdote about Dr. B.R.Ambedkar wherein a foreign journalist came to meet Jawaharlal Nehru,<sup>34</sup> M.K. Gandhi and other Indian leaders, including Ambedkar. The journalist could meet neither Nehru nor Gandhi at night, but was

---

<sup>34</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) was a national leader during the Indian independence struggle against the British rule in the early 1900s. Nehru was closely associated with the Indian National Congress. He became the first Prime Minister of India in 1947 and held this post until his death in 1964. He also served as a foreign minister of independent India.

able to meet Ambedkar who was wide awake. So, the journalist asked Dr. Ambedkar as to why he was still awake while the other leaders slept. Dr. Ambedkar responded that “their people are awake so they are sleeping but my people are sleeping so I am awake” (Appendix 1: 324). Malagatti says that this thought made Ambedkar work his whole life and this “consciousness makes somebody awake all the time” (Appendix 1: 324). Just by being aware of Dalit struggles does not create the level of passion and determination shown by Ambedkar and many other Dalit leaders and writers. Thus, Dalit consciousness is what non-Dalits should strive for in order to join the journey of Dalits towards liberation. Here, liberation is for all, Dalit and non-Dalit readers, writers, translators, publishers, and everyone involved in the production and publication of a text and its translation; because like Dalits, even non-Dalits are socially and psychologically imprisoned by the practices of an age-old system that only ties them down and creates borders between them and their fellow country people.

It seems many translators function at the level of reflection and awareness. Perhaps, they refrain from engaging with Dalit texts in the way a reader would and could engage, allowing the text to influence, effect and affect the reader in order to avoid consciously or unconsciously influencing the translated work. So, in order to stay true to the original text and the author’s intentions, translators (as individuals, beyond their function as translators) could fall short of achieving the very goals (such as disidentification, social change) the Dalit texts they translate aim for. This re-iterates R.G Jadhav’s point that Dalit literature ‘is struggling to achieve its goal’. This is a *paradoxical function* of the translators, wherein, through translation, they enable a borderland but never truly engage in the possibilities offered through the borderland.

Furthermore, Mukherjee states that “theoretical reflections on acts of translation will lead to more self-reflexive translations that highlight rather than hide the gaps across

various hierarchies we are enmeshed in” (162), akin to the self-reflexivity of a text like *Author’s Notes*. This is also vital because the “source text may be held to be the origin (the beginning) for the translation, but that translation can still yet originate something new in its own right” (Rose 495). Reflexivity and consciousness are crucial and necessary for translators because as mentioned before, translating the source language also involves translating the cultural and historical context of the source text, hence, translating Dalit text involves translating the specific context and experience of Dalits. This is where the possibilities and in turn, power, of translation as “a process of interpretation and knowledge creation” (Pandit 176) becomes crucial. The translator has the ability or power, “through his or her interpretation”, to impose “his or her caste and class values on the source text” (Mukherjee 162). Just like how the author’s narration has the power to influence the perspective of the narrative, the translator’s narration in and through translation has the power to influence and perhaps, even reproduce the “ideological designs hidden” (Mukherjee 162) in the translator’s own experiences. Translation, just like all writing, “is always re-creation or revision, and the translator is thus empowered as the (re)writer of the source text” (Rose 495). Since “narratives of collective suffering increasingly have a global dimension” (Ahmed 32), and Dalit narratives attempt to encompass the collective sentiments of their respective communities and societies, there is a need for more translations and hence, translators. Thus, gaining reflexivity and consciousness could only aid in translating Dalit narratives as powerfully as possible.

In conclusion, the dynamic relation between the authorial functions and the personae in the *Author’s Notes*, enables a serious level of reflexivity on the part of the Author, Sivakami. Foucault states that author functions do “not refer purely and simply to a real individual, since it can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subject-positions that can be occupied by different classes of individuals” (Foucault 216). Yet, the

personae in the *Author's Notes* show the different functions of the author while simultaneously indicating a relationship with a real individual who is the author, Sivakami. This could be why the *Author's Notes* does not “privilege a single voice in its narrative but maintains a constant struggle between the writer and the critic” (Yadav 86), and between the other authorial functions. Similarly, the author’s various functioning roles overlap, and one cannot exist without the other. Foucault states that “the author is not an indefinite source of significations that fill a work; the author does not pre-cede the works; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction” (Foucault 221). He further reflects on who “can assume these various subject functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?” (222). Thus, it does not matter in which order the various authorial functions perform because they are constantly overlapping. For example, while writing, there is constant editing and referring to the source or memories. The process of translation is also performed with constant interaction with the author and persistent editing. The idea of interaction between authorial roles and the dialogic relationship between the personae highlights the dialogic nature of the text, drawing attention to its kaleidoscopic writing style. The kaleidoscope offers “a different perspective on a perennial aesthetic and cultural fascination with the moment that precedes resolution and definition, when the mind and eye are open to sensation and difference” (233) and hence, there is a “celebratory “multiplicity”” (Groth 219) captured in and through kaleidoscopic writing. As pointed out before, the *Author's Notes* displays multiple possibilities through multiple persona, all arising from a single source, like a kaleidoscope. Hence, the *Author's Notes* can be said to have ‘celebratory multiplicity’ through multiple



personae, and various authorial functions resulting in multiple perspectives about the authorial selves, the writing and narrative style, the contextual choices, and the larger framework of Dalit literature.

The dynamic and transformative nature of kaleidoscopic writing that fosters multiplicity can also be perceived as performativity which also emphasises transformative, dynamic perceptions and actions. Butler states that performativity is “that aspect of discourse that has the capacity to produce what it names . . . performativity is the vehicle through which ontological effects are established” (1994: 33). In the *Author’s Notes*, through ‘celebratory multiplicity’, Sivakami offers a performance of self-criticism through a transformative journey towards a more conscious writer and individual. The performance in the text through the interactions and dialogues between the personae result in many perspectives and possibilities, just like a kaleidoscope that offers different and multiple possibilities. Hence, the kaleidoscopic writing in Sivakami’s *Author’s Notes* is performative in nature – as an actual performance of self-examination and reflexivity by the Author, as well as the transformative and dynamic nature of dialogic narrative technique.

Therefore, the *Author’s Notes* and the responses from the translators in their interviews point to a great deal of experimentation and creativity in Dalit narratives and their translations, not just in Sivakami’s narratives but also in Bama’s *Karukku* and other Dalit narratives. Such experimentation suggests that Dalit narratives do not in fact offer ‘unmediated authenticity’ because it is better to provoke reflexivity. As mentioned before, the narratives present a mediated or translated perspective of actual events and experiences to advocate the various issues affecting Dalit communities, which does not make the events ‘untrue’. This tension between authenticity, and experimentation and reflexivity plays out especially in relation to the genre in which these texts appear to be situated in, that is, life writing.

### 3. Generic Performativity

Sivakami's *The Grip* is called a novel, but the *Author's Notes* highlights that the author's personal life and her community's experiences are included in *The Grip*. Is *The Grip* an autobiography or a semi-autobiography or a community's biography? Linda Anderson's book, *Autobiography* (2001), looks closely at the genre and some of the historical conceptions of it. For example, Anderson states that social distinctions (between someone with historical importance or noble reputation and someone without one) crept into "literary distinctions, and autobiography was legitimised as a form by attempting to restrict its use" (8). Thus, only a few privileged individuals with a life story lofty enough to be told engaged in autobiographical writing, thereby limiting the use of the autobiographical genre to a few. Anderson states that language has the power to give a voice and also to take it away. She looks at the Derridean understanding that "there is always 'an inclusion and exclusion with regard to genre in general'" (qtd. in Anderson 9) and that when it comes to genre, "one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly or monstrosity" (Derrida 1980: 203-204). Anderson states that genre could be perceived as "a way of creating a dynamic relation between texts, encoding tradition in formal features which operate like 'family characteristics'" (10). This idea of "encoding tradition" to operate like "family characteristics" seems quite similar to how caste operates. The word for caste, 'jati' or 'jat' in Indian philosophy refers to any group of things that share the same characteristics. In Latin, this concept is termed 'genus', from which is derived the word 'genre'. Then it can be said that *the law of 'genre' is endogamous like caste*, but on a literary level. The inclusion and exclusion with regards to genre bear a striking resemblance to the concept of inclusion and exclusion with regards to caste communities. The law of 'genre' helps maintain an aesthetics of 'purity' through

rules and standards, which is yet again similar to the logic of 'caste' purity through divisive rules and practices. Here, the analogy between the law of 'genre' and the logic of 'caste' show an explicit link between the conception and maintenance of 'genre' and 'caste'.

Anderson further points out that “writing of women, or perhaps of any subject who is deemed to be different, allows us to read back into genre the heterogeneity or transgressiveness it tries to exclude” (11). It is this exclusion from the accepted genre or generic conventions, especially, those associated with life writing such as autobiographies, *testimonio*, and so on, that forces oppressed communities to branch out into more experimental and radicalised forms of writing. This radicalisation of generic conventions is explored in Raj Kumar’s *Dalit Personal Narratives*. Kumar states that autobiographical writing is “an act of a conscious self which is documented through the active help of memory” (3) and since Dalits are marginalised beings, “their autobiographies are bound to be different from others” (4). Dalit writers have broken generic traditions of the autobiography. A simple example is that autobiography means “auto-self, bio-life, graph-writing” (Kumar 2), which is life writing of the ‘self’ or an individual. Traditional autobiographies look at the achievements and accomplishments of the ‘noble subject’ or individual, mostly to let the public have a record of the individual’s biography written from the first-person perspective. Here, the individual or the “subjecthood of ‘self’ is the focus. However, Dalit writers use the genre to mobilise resistance to “fight against all forms of oppressions which they have been experiencing for ages” (4) and hence, autobiographical writing is a “special act” (5) for Dalits in order to “challenge the hegemony of the upper caste and make way for the marginal self” (Kumar 1). Dalit autobiographical writings are not the celebration of the rise of the ‘self’ or just *an* individual to positions of power and acclaim, but rather, an emphasis on the “complex

interpersonal relationship and sense of solidarity concerning a much wider spectrum of issues, relating to social relations at the micro-level encompassing village, family, caste, peer groups, school, factory, urban streets, slums and the like” (Kumar 151). For example, Bama mentions that she “understands that her own experience is part of a larger movement among Dalits” (Introduction to *Karukku* xvii).

Also, autobiographies such as *Government Brahmana*, do not follow generic conventions. For example, the text is divided into stories or incidents rather than providing a chronological record of the author’s life. Each chapter is a story that need not be a sequel to the previous chapter. On asking the author, Aravind Malagatti, about his intentions of writing his autobiography in chapters, Malagatti mentions that it was done “intentionally” because his aim is “social change” (Appendix 1: 320). In order to portray certain aspects or parts of the society that have to be changed, he conveys them through separate parts or stories. Malagatti gives an example of how “water and untouchability are inter-related” and he will portray his experience in this matter “in the form of a story” (Appendix 1: 320). He mentions that he would like the problem or the issues to “be the hero” and to “be the focus”, and not him. He feels that a conventional autobiography would glorify him and not the problem which is why he “consciously” (Appendix 1: 320) divided his text into stories or parts. Hence, Dalit writers call their narratives “‘self-stories’ (Atmakatha) or ‘self-reportings’ (Atma vritta)” (Kumar 150). These self-stories play a huge and significant part in Dalit literature because these narratives are “tales of personal sufferings of the Dalit writers fused with their interpersonal responses and community feelings” (Kumar 150). The idea of the individual merging with the collective is resonant in Dalit self-stories.

Hence, Dalit self-stories are different from non-Dalit autobiographies because the former explores the “values of life” (148) while the latter insists on “so-called literary

values” (Kumar 148). Dalit narratives have experimented with multiple genres and techniques, thereby “creating a counter-culture” (Kumar 148) challenging conventional ideas of maintaining purity and respecting the norm of the genre. Considering that Dalits were untouchables who were discriminated on the basis of purity, or rather lack of purity, their attempt to “evolve a new aesthetics” because “the genteel expectations of the existing elite literary standards cannot do justice to the quality of the life they know and render in writing” (Kumar 148), is a literary revolution emphasising the importance of dignity, equality, equity, education, freedom, and so on; most of which are basic human rights which they have been denied for centuries. Then, the radical blend of genres in Dalit narratives could be seen as an ‘*aesthetics of impurity*’. Here, aesthetics of impurity does not mean impure in terms of dirty or unclean like the caste logic but rather a powerful performative space showing the potential of the abject or the outside, to transform the tools of the subject or the inside, to suit the abject’s expressions and performances. So, the aesthetics of impurity counters the casteist purity/pollution rhetoric to highlight the *heterogeneous and diverse literary standards* created by Dalit writers as opposed to the homogenous and pure standards that constitute the laws of genre in mainstream national and international literature.

Furthermore, Dalit self-stories disrupt the generic conventions of not only autobiographical writing but other specific forms of life writing, or rather we can trace aspects of various other genres in Dalit narratives. For example, Sivakami’s *The Grip* uses the novel genre to convey her experiences and portray multiple issues prevalent in the society. *The Grip* uses the conventions of the novel with an exposition and setting, plots and subplots, characters, dialogues, and chapters in third-person narrative. Sivakami’s

work could be said to follow an auto fictional<sup>35</sup> narrative style because the *Author's Notes* reveal that the character of Gowri in the novel is the author herself, and hence, *The Grip of Change* could be seen as autobiographical writing using the conventions of the novel genre. The *Author's Notes* is clearly a reflexive attempt of the author, Sivakami, to critically interrogate her novel and the autobiographical characters and incidents. The *Author's Notes* is written in third person narrative yet also has conversations between the author and Gowri, that are in the form of dialogues, which echo the conventions of a play script as well as the novel genre. In this way, Sivakami's *The Grip* "hybridises the form of the novel by creating a distinct language which retains the tone of oral Dalit cultures and voices myriad Dalit experiences while remaining situated in historical and political contexts" (Yadav 79-80).

There are multiple occasions in the *Author's Notes*, where Gowri and the narrator examine the author's decision of changing the details of certain events. Although, Gowri and the narrator criticise this decision of the author, the changes in the actual events and stories in *The Grip* could show Sivakami's understanding of those stories and how those events affected her, on witnessing it as a listener or a viewer or a reader. *Author's Notes'* staging of a critical interrogation of the authorial self of *The Grip* by her later 'self' (as a narrator) and by an alter-ego such as Gowri highlights the unstable nature of the 'self' that underpins the genre, and thereby draws attention to the multiple constitution of the 'self' by social and political contexts as well as the passing of time. Instead of writing about herself and her experiences entirely, there is an effort to deviate the focus from her life to the general tensions and problems of her community, as the narrator states that writing "about one's own experience did not constitute literature" (*Author's Notes* 158). The

---

<sup>35</sup> The term 'autofiction' was officially coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 to describe his novel *Fils* (Threads/Son). Doubrovsky discussed about a genre that merges fiction and autobiography in which the author, protagonist, and narrator share a single identity.

*Author's Notes* “resists harmonisation of meaning” by portraying “a generically ambiguous narrative which juxtaposes autobiographical experiences with fictional worlds, each providing space for the other” (Yadav 86).

Since Dalit narratives are stories of “trauma, pain, resistance, protest and social change” (Nayar 2006: 83), they could be seen as *testimonio* because trauma and recreation of the traumatic event through writing are important aspects of *testimonio*. *Testimonio* narratives are at “once personal and public, singular and collective, autobiographical and biographical” (Nayar 2012: 237). For example, Bama asserts that *Karukku* is not her “story alone” but it is also a “depiction of a collective trauma” (Bama 2001: n.d.) suffered by her community. Also, *Karukku* “moves from individual to community through a narration of trauma” (Nayar 2006: 84) and this can be easily noticed in the shift between the first-person singular nouns such as ‘I’, ‘my’ to first-person collective nouns such as ‘we’ and ‘our’, as discussed in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Additionally, Aravind Malagatti points out that after the publication of *Government Brahmana*, many Dalits have written to him saying that his work “reflects their story” (Appendix 1: 315) or they find their story in his work. Aravind says that when his story becomes “other people's story also, it becomes the story of the society and it becomes the story of the country” making it difficult to “differentiate between individual experience and collective experience and the country’s experience. It’s not the life story of a person rather it’s a story of a community” (Appendix 1: 315). Thus, Dalit life writing can be understood as “collective biography” (Nayar 2012: 248) of Dalit communities and in this way, Dalit writers such as Sivakami and Bama, portray their narratives as their respective communities’ testimonies of “everyday resistance and organised anti-caste struggles” (Rege 15).

Furthermore, in her book, *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*, Helen Cixous emphasises that “all biographies like all autobiographies like all narratives tell one story in place of another” (Cixous 177). Cixous’ statement underlines the (non)fictionality in every story be it biography or autobiography or any other piece of writing, making it difficult to point out the ‘authenticity’ of stories or experiences in general. The author’s mediation or translation of experiences into writing is indicated here. Hence, this thesis prefers to refer to Dalit life writings as Dalit personal narratives (inspired by and borrowed from Raj Kumar’s *Dalit Personal Narratives*) as they are narratives of the collective and also personal stories of the individual. Dalit personal narratives are a “historic break-through” (259) as they provide a space for their voice – a unique space they carved out for themselves to share their unique experiences. This unique wave of literature blurring and/or surpassing the conventions of and/ or blending of genres could be seen as a ‘borderland’. It seems only fit that Dalit narratives reject the logic of ‘purity’ with regards to literary genres and standards, and embrace the ‘impurity’ and multiplicity and possibilities offered through borderlands, carving out a space for aesthetics of impurity. Such borderlands facilitate what Foucault terms as ‘transdiscursive’ authors who are “unique” because they are not just authors or creators of their individual works, but they have also produced “the possibilities and the rules for the formation of other texts. In this sense they are very different, for example, from a novelist, who is, in fact, nothing more than the author of his own text” (Foucault 217). However, Foucault excludes literary authorship from this category of ‘transdiscursive’ authors yet this thesis attempts to extend or apply the idea of ‘transdiscursive’ authorship in a way that Foucault did not intend or could not have anticipated such as the circumstances of Dalit literature where a transdiscursive literary writing becomes possible. Authors from marginalised and deeply oppressed caste communities such as Sivakami and Bama are doing what can be



considered akin to what Foucault's 'transdiscursive' authors such as Marx and Freud did, which is to open up a discursive space in and through their writings, rather than produce stasis texts. This takes us back to the point of kaleidoscopic writing which emphasises on the transformative and performative style of writing. Sivakami's *Author's Notes* reveals various authorial functions but these also go beyond the text to emphasise the real author's commitment and engagement with Dalit politics and activism (hence the need to justify her choices made in *The Grip* to her community), possibly because of the transdiscursive nature of Sivakami's writing. Foucault asserts that transdiscursive authors "have created a possibility for something other than their discourse, yet something belonging to what they founded" (Foucault 218). Dalit narratives occupy borderlands in order to experiment with identities positioned on the literary and generic borderlands.

Then, it can be said that Dalit personal narratives are performative and/ or nurture performativity, not only through their content (as shown in previous chapters of this thesis) but, also through linguistic experimentation and radical use of genres. Dalit narratives have surpassed literary boundaries and borders in order to create a literary explosion of creative and imaginative styles which are fluid and transformative, carving out a refreshing and revolutionary generic and literary performative space. They thereby enable the fashioning and exploration of new identities and 'selves' that are not determined and therefore delimited by the logic of caste and the law of genre. Thus, generic performativity becomes a defining feature of Dalit personal narratives.

## **Conclusion**

Dalit personal narratives portray and constitute "a powerful public Dalit self through acts of writing, recalling and forgetting" (Kapoor 145). The act of filtering/selecting, writing and "reconfiguring Dalit lifeworld [sic] in and through public debate and circulation of

texts is an important political act” (Kapoor 145) for the Dalit movement. Since Dalit personal narratives are not just individual stories but also affective histories and lived experiences of the collective, *the content with advocacy intent and the unique aesthetics with radical impetus*, carve a distinct space for Dalits, in a predominantly casteist, classist, patriarchal literary and social space. The experimental modes of writing in Dalit narratives show the plurality of experiences and in turn, writing styles. Sivakami’s *Author’s Notes*, like *The Grip of Change*, derives its power from the kaleidoscopic writing and the “disharmony” that dwells within the hybrid and ambiguous narrative which is “part-novel-part-autobiography” (Yadav 87). This hybridity and ambiguity are presented through various authorial functions and generic performativity; and such “generic inconsistencies reveal how Dalit women’s writing radicalise the narrative not only through its political impetus but also in distinct aesthetic modes” (Yadav 87). Access to Dalit aesthetics is furthered through translation enabling a broadening of readership, within and outside India. The more people read about Dalit lives, which includes not only their historical and ongoing suffering but also their individual and collective achievements, and customs, the more there is reflexivity, consciousness and disidentification. Autochthonous and relational disidentification provokes a “transformation” of identities (Weir 82) which is necessary to allow re-identification on an individual and relational level. Disidentification and re-identification is possible because identities or what we ‘identify with’ are relational and stem from repeated practices over time and space. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (1993), Butler states that performativity concerns the “power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration” (20). However, Ahmed states that importantly “the historicity of the performative and its role in the generation of effects cannot be separated. If the performative opens up the future, it does so precisely in the process of repeating past conventions, as to repeat something is always to open up the

(structural) possibility that one will repeat something with a difference” (922). So Ahmed points out the possibility of ‘cutting’ off from the repetition or ‘iterability’, which could “loosen the knot of identity, to untangle some of the threads of identity” (Weir 2) in order to bring about “freedom from the threads of identity that imprison” (Weir 2). The performative iterations Butler talks about, which has been explored throughout this thesis, constitute established and hegemonic gendered identities, and can themselves be seen as ‘generic’, which is why it is important to break generic borders and boundaries. Here, ‘genre’ refers to the literary as well as those identities rooted in caste. In and through the *Author’s Notes*, Sivakami is performatively destabilising the notion of the ‘self’ because existing notions of the self are caste-driven and rely on what is ‘standard’ and ‘pure’. Thus, Dalit narrative aesthetics surpass the boundaries or borders of ‘genre’, which is endogamous like caste, thereby embracing their aesthetics of impurity. The aesthetics of impurity enables an ideological offensive through a radical blend of genres, leading to a borderland.

Therefore, Dalit personal narratives go “beyond” (Nayar 3) the law of genre and engage with “linguistic experimentation” (Yadav 81) to create “an aesthetic very different from that of mainstream literature” (Jadeja 131) in order to effectively represent the traumatic lived experiences and affective histories to both Dalits and non-Dalits. This prompts further questions: is linguistic experimentation an important step towards relational disidentification from caste-based identities by Dalits and non-Dalits? Does such generic performativity provoke a re-thinking through reflexivity of the kinds of ‘self’ produced by caste, and of the possible other kinds of selves that might be possible?

## Conclusion

In this study, I have attempted to explore Dalit identity through the tripartite process of identification, disidentification and re-identification, and understand the performative nature of caste and Dalit identity. For Weir (2013), the concept of identification involves ‘identification-with’ as individuals and as collectives (62). For Ahmed (2014), if identification can be thought of as ‘a form of alignment’ which brings it into line with ourselves (52), then identifications involve ‘dis-identification’ or ‘cutting’ or ‘giving up’ of further possible identifications” (52). But, this thesis is more interested in ‘disidentification’ which is not just a ‘giving up’ or “silent withdrawal” (Weir 82) as in the case of ‘dis-identification’, but rather an engagement in the form of “a challenge and a confrontation” (Weir 82). Disidentification involves active resistance towards the oppressive identifications, and is the process of shedding away of the age-old despotic identifications. Re-identification is an attempt to search for a new identity or multiple identities that enable the empowerment of Dalits in a socio-political, economic and legal space.

This thesis places importance on identity because identity and resultant identifications are *relational*. Identities are recognised by the ‘self’ and by ‘others’ resulting in labelling, categorising, and so on. Caste identities have been recognised by Dalits and non-Dalits for centuries resulting in imagined identities and hierarchies that have been naturalised as caste habitus. But, the performative nature of identity opens up possibilities for changes in identifications. Caste is not an essential identity but is considered to be one through ages of repeated practices, and the paradoxes and ambiguities portrayed in this thesis expose the fissures and gaps of the caste system. It is through these paradoxes and fissures that an ideological offensive is enabled. Since there is no absolute identity, the oppressive space of identifications can be a space for freedom. The use of the term, ‘Dalit’ by Dalit

communities, rather than imposed identities such as outcaste and untouchable, shows the effort to shed oppressive identities. The term, Dalit, means broken or crushed, and hence is an identity exposing their struggle and conflicts. The term itself enables an ideological offensive by making it clear that Dalits are aware of their oppressed state, which is going against the grain of the submissive lower caste role expected of Dalit, as per the caste system.

The caste system has been practiced for years and has been passed down from generation to generation. The knowledge and associated practices become a crucial part of the collective memory of the society which in turn, is inscribed on the individual memory. Such inscription leads to a conditioning that makes individuals justify the existence of the caste system as 'essential'. This inscription is relational as it influences Dalits and non-Dalits, and is also performative in nature. So, bringing about social and collective change will influence the collective memory which will in turn lead to a change in the individual's understanding and associations. If the caste system was established and normalised through repeated performances, then perhaps, social change starting with relational disidentification, over a period of time, could help break the 'norm'.

So in order to eradicate discriminations on the basis of caste, Dalits and non-Dalits need to disidentify from the real, symbolic and ideological identifications and practices of the caste system. For that, we need to look at caste as a performative idea. Since Dalit literature portrays the everyday life and social fabric of individuals and collectives in a caste-driven society, analysing select Dalit personal narratives has helped shed light on the formation and transformation of Dalit identity. Each chapter has helped understand existing identifications, disidentifications and reidentifications of Dalits, by Dalits and non-Dalits, in Bama's *Karukku*, and Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and *Author's Notes*.

Each chapter has explored the performative nature of caste and Dalit identity, thereby highlighting the paradoxes and ambiguities of caste identifications and practices.

Chapter 1 not only traces the sociopolitical history of Dalit identity, but also introduces the core theoretical concepts and framework of the thesis such as the tripartite process as well as the fluidity of identity or performative nature of identity. Judith Butler applies the terms 'performative' and 'performance' to gender, and for her, gender is a construction naturalised through repeated performances. Performativity involves iterability (Ahmed 93), starting from the identities given at birth which sets off what Althusser calls 'interpellations'. Performativity "depends upon the sedimentation of the past, it reiterates what has already been said, and its power and authority depend upon how it recalls that which has already been brought into existence" (qtd in Ahmed 92, 93). Such iterability or repetition leads to what Bourdieu terms as 'habitus' which makes different differences through generative principles of distinctive practices expected to be followed by the society on a daily basis, and Chapter 2 explores the idea of caste habitus, and analyses caste performances and performativity in Bama's *Karukku*.

Chapter 2 sheds light on the paradoxical nature of caste habitus and caste performances. The paradox lies in the relational nature of identification which results in a dependency between upper and lower castes, wherein, upper castes require the lower castes to recognise them as higher castes and observe practices that maintain their distances and differences. Without a compliance to caste habitus, the oppressed (Dalits) can rise up and revolt. Kristeva's notion of the abject and Derrida's concept of the supplement is useful to understand this paradox. Kristeva addresses the necessity of the abject to sustain the position of the subject, and Derrida explains how the outside (abject) supplements the inside (subject) rather than being in opposition. *The upper castes require the recognition of the lower castes to function in their imagined caste superiority.* The abject position of the

Dalits is precisely what confirms *and* disturbs the existing social order. So it is important to maintain caste differences through repeated performances, in order to preserve the superiority of certain castes while keeping Dalits in servitude. Bama mentions that the upper castes “seem to conspire” to keep the Dalits in a submissive place, especially since they have “worked throughout history like beasts” and hence, “should live and die like that” without ever moving on or going forward (27-28). The essentialising of caste and abjection of Dalits on a material, physical, and ideological level is naturalised as a *caste habitus* which affects all castes as they are all in a process of autochthonous identification as well as relational identification.

Chapter 2 also looks at the relation between caste and labour, and how it contributes to caste habitus, since occupations are bound by caste and practiced for generations. Occupational divide is the major justification of the caste system contributing to increasing wealth and land ownership of upper castes, while leading to lack of respect and dignity, and poverty among Dalits. Dalits face discrimination because of their caste status which is closely aligned with the kind of labour they do, and Dalits are compelled to do certain occupations as part of their caste identity and duty, but the occupations do not provide them with good wages to escape poverty. Bama’s narrative shows that Dalits neither have the opportunity to change occupation because of caste habitus nor are they able to shift occupations or escape the poverty, resulting in *entrapment of Dalits in a caste loop*. Caste habitus is performed over time and space, and upper caste and lower caste groups perform their respective caste roles in reinforcing caste hierarchies, which includes occupational roles, and symbolic and ideological roles. However, in the present times, Dalits have access to various educational and employment opportunities, and the stringent nature of occupations have started to blur. Yet, Dalits still face discrimination despite having better

jobs and wealth. This discrepancy is analysed in chapter 2 by looking at the complex relationship between caste and class.

By disentangling caste and class, this thesis was able to translate caste into a class register exposing *a distinction between caste (as class status) and class (as position)*. Class status is based on caste ranking while class position is possession of wealth on an individual level, rather than a collective level. The need for relational disidentification and re-identification is important here because Dalits can disidentify from their respective lower caste groups but without relational disidentification, non-Dalits will continue to associate Dalits with their lower caste status and hence, lower class status. To add to this, the ideological framework, the *dogma of predestination*, prevents Dalits from progressing in any context – economic, social, political, educational, religious, and legal. This is because Dalits are told time and time again through performances and caste habitus that they are destined to the caste occupation and caste roles. Even if they change occupations, their caste roles and identity remain with them. Wealth and power determine class status while wealth alone determines class position.

Hence, *associating class status with caste status is an ideological move to ensure that the social power remains in the hands of the upper/ dominant sectors of the social order, in order thereby to control caste habitus*. The difference between class status and class position has exposed that social power is collectively retained among upper caste communities despite any economic loss suffered by individuals from the upper castes and economic progress by individuals from the lower castes. The symbolic or ideological fabric in caste habitus, dogma of predestination, and class status linked to caste status help upper caste communities to maintain control over social power thus resulting in individuals and collectives of lower caste communities continually being denied dignity and freedom from oppressive identifications and caste habitus. In this way, Dalits seem to



have less power to *sustainably and lastingly* disidentify with the caste system without relational disidentification.

However, there are various national laws introduced in India to protect Dalits from atrocities and discriminations based on their legally-expired status as ‘untouchables’. But as Arundhati Roy states, untouchability is only the performative end of caste and hence, discriminations continue on a social level. The legally-accepted but socially-unaccepted paradox of Dalits is clearer when looking at caste as a performative category. Caste habitus works strongly on a social level because daily practices and actions (however small) naturalise ideas. The current laws in place such as the Prevention of Atrocities Act, record atrocities committed against Dalits, but the Act does not necessarily try to ‘prevent’ the atrocities from happening by addressing the root cause of the problem – the caste system. Certain laws, such as fundamental rights can be legally enforced but *the enjoyment of fundamental rights entails a relational recognition of others’ entitlement to the same fundamental rights, as part of the fundamental duty of the individual to the collective society*, respecting religious, linguistic and regional or sectional diversities. Hence, any law, be it a country’s laws or universal human rights laws, does not exist prior to social practices, relations and transactions, but is formed and *performed* through temporal and contextual applications. New laws can be introduced, or existing laws can be amended, and this adaptive or transformative scope of law shows performativity in law. Law is also performative in terms of the actual application or implementation of laws in the real world which is necessary for enjoyment of rights by all. Another striking performative side is law as a speech act, wherein, the speech act demands an action rather than a mere speech utterance. The words (speech utterance) of the laws, the intent behind the laws, and its actual application are action-oriented. Law is adaptive and mutable, and this performative nature of law offers hope for better laws encompassing all contexts, including the social.

Chapter 3 explores the concept of ‘theory in flesh’ and the intersectional oppressions that inscribe on Dalit and non-Dalit bodies. Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change* exposes the triple subjugation of Dalit women who are oppressed by Dalit men, and non-Dalit men and women. Chapter 3 looks at Dalit women’s identity with regards to their positionality. For example, Thangam seeks help from Kathamuthu to get justice for being raped and assaulted by upper castes. Thangam also prays for the help of “Munusamy, the god on the mountain” and believes that ‘he’ will “take their measure” (Sivakami 6). This evokes pity for Thangam as she seeks the help of a supernatural god who is addressed by the masculine pronoun, ‘he’, just like her human god (Kathamuthu). Women’s identities are placed alongside men and mostly “in opposition to men” (Weir 66). Sivakami portrays a kind of ‘positionality’ which reduces “women’s identity to a simple matter of category, defined through opposition to another category” (Weir 66). Thangam’s servile and oppressed state is understood in opposition to Kathamuthu. Kathamuthu’s wives are defined by their marital status of being his wife which he states later on is the only means by which they survive. If Kanagavalli or Nagamani dare to talk back to Kathamuthu, he insults their status and threatens them. The women hesitate to respond to Kathamuthu’s insults and physical threats because Kanagavalli and Nagamani are forced to accept their value with regards to what Kathamuthu, their ‘husband’ and the ‘man’ decides it to be. In fact, women are conditioned to accept the insults and threats as natural and normal. The *silence* observed by Kanagavalli and Nagamani on most occasions is a result of *naturalising or normalising* domestic violence.

In Sivakami’s *The Grip of Change*, the female Dalit body has been paid attention to providing an opportunity to explore the casteist and sexist identifications, and abjection faced by Dalit women pushing them to the domain of the ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unlivable’. But as mentioned before, the relation between the subject and the object or the outside and

the inside are not contrasting, but rather relational. Hence, the paradox of untouchability is that the abject status of the ‘untouchable’ Dalits is required to assert the position of the ‘touchable’ subjects prevailing in the ‘thinkable’ and ‘liveable’ domain. Then, *the identity of non-Dalits is in relation and tethered to the abject Dalits through reciprocity of recognition*. This stresses the role of relational identification in the formation and perpetuation of identities, and the importance of and for relational disidentification. Also, the paradox of untouchability can be seen in the ambivalences and ambiguities of ‘pure food’ and ‘food remainders’ and ‘residue’ which exposes the potential of the abject to renew or transform, and this power threatens the existence of the subject. The ambivalences and paradoxes are the weakness of any ideology, and this enables an ‘ideological offensive’ by acts of active or passive resistance towards the dominant ideology.

The fluidity of identity or performative nature of identity enables multiple identifications, offering a liberated space, like a borderland. Dalit narratives become borderlands in a radical attempt to break away from ‘generic’ identities. Chapter 4 looks closely at the writing style of Sivakami’s *Author’s Notes* by paying close attention to the authorial self, experiences and memory. The kaleidoscopic writing style through various authorial functions and the intense level of self-reflexivity in *Author’s Notes* is an attempt at breaking accepted generic conventions and standards. Dalit writers advocate for shedding away of despotic caste identities and going beyond caste borders, and they set an example in and through their narratives by breaking away from generic borders and engaging in the possibilities of a borderland. The creation of such unique aesthetics is itself a form of disidentification from the dominant standards and generic conventions practiced for a long time. The borderland of translation is a transformative and performative space that promotes relational disidentification through translating and reading. Dalit personal

narratives have become a revolutionary space of diverse unity, then, embracing the aesthetics of 'generic' impurity, with regards to the literary genre as well as caste.

For Ambedkar, an "economic motive is not the only motive" (227) for action and activism because it is doubtful if there can be economic reform without social reform, and vice-versa. Since laws are politically enforced, without political reform, laws may not be effective. This brings us to the idea of the intersectional nature of caste wherein caste, class, gender, and other areas intersect to make caste an entangled network of oppression. Then, the solution to eradicating Dalit oppression could lie in an intersectional approach to reformation. But, this thesis emphasises on the social aspect of caste because economic, political and legal reforms are not enough to deal with caste issues because caste practice is predominantly a social issue. The everyday performances of caste have entrenched and naturalised caste structures and differences in the social life of the people, which includes individuals in political parties. Since law is politically enforced, casteist beliefs are also reinforced. Hence, there is a need for social reform along with economic and political reform to rid the society of caste-based identifications. It is on the social level that caste habitus works, and it is on the same level that a change can be effective. Since caste is a performative category to a large extent, a 'return to the origin' through relational reflexivity paves way for transformation. This is precisely why this thesis looks at the caste system as a process of repeated performances over time and space, which has led to its normalisation. Hence, repeated practices of disidentification, social reform and reparations over time and space could help lead to Dalit liberation. It cannot be done overnight since caste habitus has been shaped over centuries, so changes will also take time but relational reformation (Dalits and non-Dalits) on a social level should be given the same importance as economic, political, and legal reforms.

Thus, Dalit narratives have portrayed oppressive identifications in their texts and have searched to re-identify with empowering identities. Yet, the re-identification remains ineffective as evidenced through ongoing violence and discrimination against Dalits. This is because disidentification and re-identification mostly happens on an *autochthonous* level, which although important for Dalits as a collective to be liberated from the shadow of untouchability and caste, does not include the engagement of the majority, that is non-Dalits, in the same process of disidentification and re-identification. There is a necessity for *relational* disidentification and re-identification so that the majority also shed the oppressive and discriminatory identifications, without which the majority would continue to recognise Dalits as untouchables or outcastes or inhuman. The performative nature of caste and identities offer scope for changes and Dalit liberation. Dalit narratives attempt to “foster political consciousness” (Brueck 2014: 121) among Dalits and “reveal the ‘reality’ of caste-society” (Brueck 121) *to non-Dalits*, in order to raise *Dalit consciousness* among Dalits *and non-Dalits*. So, it can be assumed that Dalit narratives attempt to create a site for relational disidentification wherein both, Dalits *and non-Dalits* shed away the despotic identifications imposed on Dalits. However, the extent to which Dalit narratives enable relational disidentification is not completely clear even though there is evidence of efforts to portray the Dalit struggles to non-Dalits in narratives, and author Aravind Malagatti mentions the desire to see a change in behaviours towards Dalits after reading the narratives. Also, the problem of relational disidentification remains: *why* would the non-Dalits wish to disidentify and how can non-Dalits be motivated to disidentify? Answering these crucial questions could provide solutions that can be implemented on a practical level. But, these questions cannot be answered in this thesis, as the two texts that have been analysed do not address these questions. Hence, the scope of these questions is beyond speculation for this thesis.

## Bibliography

- Ahmad, Aijaz. "India: Liberal Democracy and the Extreme Right." *The Socialist Register*, 2016, pp. 170-192
- Ahmed, Sara. "Affective Economies." *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 2 (79), summer 2004, pp. 117-139. [https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2\\_79-117](https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-22-2_79-117).
- . *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. 2nd ed., Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2014.
- A.I., Dr. Sakunthala. "From Wounds to Wonders: A Critique of P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*." *Contemporary Research in India*, vol. 5, issue 3, 2015, pp. 150-153.
- Allington, Daniel. "How to Do Things with Literature: Blasphemous Speech Acts, Satanic Intentions, and the Uncommunicativeness of Verses." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2008, pp. 473-523. DOI 10.1215/03335372-074.
- Aloysius, G. "Introduction: Historical Sociology and the Study of Nation and Nationalism in India." *Nationalism without a Nation in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi*. Nagpur, Samata Prakashan, 2004.
- . *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Edited and annotated by S. Anand, UK, US, and Canada, Verso, 2014.
- . "Castes in India. Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development." *Indian Antiquary*, vol. 61, May 1917.
- [www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt\\_ambedkar\\_castes.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00ambedkar/txt_ambedkar_castes.html).
- . "Castes in India." *Social Justice and Political Safeguards for Depressed Classes*, edited by K.L. Chanchreek, New Delhi, Shree Publishing House, 1916.

---. "Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India." *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar:*

*Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, vol. 3. Government of Maharashtra, 1987.

---. *Who were the Shudras?*. Samyak Prakashan, 1946.

---. *BAWS*. vol. 1, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1979.

---. *BAWS*. vol. 2, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1982.

---. *BAWS*. vol. 7, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1990.

---. *BAWS*. vol. 9, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1990.

---. *BAWS*. vol. 11, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1992.

Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography*. 2nd ed., London and New York, Routledge: The New

Critical Idiom, 2011.

Anderson, Perry. *The Indian Ideology*. London and New York, Verso, 2013.

Andersson, Jans S. *How to define 'Performative'*. UPPSALA, 1975.

Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco, Aunt Lute Books, 1987.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. London, The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Austin, J.L. *How to do things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered in Harvard University in 1955*. Edited by Urmson, J.O., Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1962.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1984.

Balibar, E., and I. Wallerstein. *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London and New York, Verso, 1991.

Bama. *Karukku*. Edited by Mini Krishnan and translated by Lakshmi Holmstrom, Chennai, Oxford University Press, 2012.

- Barnwal, Bijay K. "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's Quest for Gender Equality: It's Relevance in Contemporary Feminist Discourse." *Online International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 4, issue 2, March-April 2014, pp. 393-400.
- Barry, Brian. *Culture and Equality*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Barthes, Roland. *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*. Translated by Richard Howard, California, University of California Press, 1977.
- Bates, Crispin. "The Development of Panchayati Raj in India." *Rethinking Indian Political Institutions*, edited by Crispin Bates and Subho Basu, London, Anthem Press, 2005, pp. 167-184. <https://doi.org/10.7135/UPO9781843317524.010>.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *Transformations of Citizenship: Dilemmas of the Nation State in the Era of Globalization: Two Lectures*. Assen, Koninklijke Van Gorcum, 2001.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York, Routledge Classics, 2004.
- Bhagavan, Manu Belur, and Anne Feldhaus. *Claiming Power from Below: Dalits and the Subaltern Question in India*. New Delhi, Oxford India Paperbacks, 2009.
- Birwatkar, Santosh, and Megha Nikam. "Impact of Caste Atrocities on Dalit Women." *Social Sciences International Research Journal*, vol. 3, issue 1, march 2017, pp. 173-176.
- Borker, Suhas. "How to Be Free of Caste." *The Hindu*, 12 Apr. 2016.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. "Physical Space, Social Space and Habitus." Institutt for sosiologi og samfunnsgeografi (ISS), Universitetet i Oslo. Rapport 10, 1996.
- Brueck, Laura R. "Conclusion." *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*, New York, Columbia UP, 2014.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London, Routledge, 1990.
- . *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York, Routledge, 1993.



- . "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler." Interview by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal. *Radical Philosophy*, no. 67, 1994, pp. 32–39.
- . "Burning Acts-Injurious Speech." *Performativity and Performance*. Edited with an introduction by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, London, New York, Routledge, 1995.
- . *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York, Routledge, 1997.
- . *Undoing Gender*. New York, Routledge, 2004.
- Cabral, Amilcar. 1970. "National Liberation and Culture." *Transition*, no. 45, 1974, pp. 12-17. DOI: 10.2307/2935020.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in memory*. Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Chakravorty, Swapan. "Literary Surrogacy and Literary Activism: Instances from Bengal." *Literary Activism: A Symposium*. UK, Boiler House Press, 2016, pp. 279-306.
- Chandra, Shefali. "The world's largest dynasty: caste, sexuality and the manufacture of Indian "Democracy"." *Dialect Anthropol*, vol. 38, issue. 2, 2014, pp. 225–238. DOI 10.1007/s10624-014-9337-2.
- Chatterjee, Partha. "Caste and subaltern consciousness." *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, edited by Ranajit Guha no. 6, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 169-209.
- . 1999. "Partha Chatterjee: In conversation with Anuradha Dingwaney Needham, Oberlin College." *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 1, issue 3, 2006, pp. 413-425. DOI: 10.1080/13698019900510621.
- . 1998. "A Brief History of Subaltern Studies." *Empire and Nation: Selected Essays*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2010.

Chatterjee, Sarajit Kumar. *The Scheduled Castes in India*. New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 1996.

“CASTE DISCRIMINATION: A Global Concern.” Human Rights Watch: United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, vol. 13, no. 3, Sept. 2001, p. 29.

Cixous, Hélène. “The Laugh of the Medusa.” *Signs*, translated by Keith Cohen and Paula, vol. 1, no. 4, summer 1976, pp. 875-893.

---. *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*. London, Routledge, 1997.

Clare, Stephanie. “Agency, Signification, and Temporality.” *Hypatia*, vol. 24. No. 4, fall 2009, pp. 50-62.

“Combahee River Collective.” *Off Our Backs*, vol. 9, no. 6, Jun 30 1979, pp. 2- 6.

*ProQuest*,

<https://www.proquest.com/magazines/combaheerivercollective/docview/197139464/se-2?accountid=10637>.

Cook, Jon. “Literary Activism: Where Now, What Next?” *Literary Activism: A Symposium*, UK, Boiler House Press, 2016, pp. 309-339.

Cosgrove, Shady E. “Reading for peace? Literature as activism – an investigation into new literary ethics and the novel.” *Activating Human Rights and Peace 2008 Conference Proceedings, Centre for Peace and Social Justice, Australia, Southern Cross University, 2008*, pp. 232-239.

Coulthard, Glen Sean. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Culler, Jonathan. “Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative.” *Poetics Today*, vol. 21, issue 3, fall 2000, pp. 503-519.

<https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-21-3-503>.

*Dalit Panthers Manifesto*. Bombay, 1973.

“Dalit Speaks at UN Minority Forum.” *International Dalit Solidarity Network*, 05 Feb 2015.

Dangle, Arjun. “Introduction: Dalit Literature Past, Present and Future.” *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, Hyderabad, Orient Blackswan, 2009.

Das, Bhagwan. *Thus Spoke Ambedkar: A Stake in the Nation*. vol. 1, New Delhi, Navayana.

Davies, William. *Nervous States: How Feeling Took Over the World*. London, Vintage, 2018.

Davis, Kathy. “Intersectionality as buzzword: A sociology of science perspective on what makes a feminist theory successful.” *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, issue 1, 2008, pp. 67–85. DOI: 10.1177/1464700108086364.

D’Cruz, Heather, et al. “Reflexivity, its Meanings and Relevance for Social Work: A Critical Review of the Literature.” *British Journal of Social Work*, vol. 37, Issue 1, Jan. 2007, pp. 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl001>.

Deakin, Simon. “Legal Evolution: Integrating Economic and Systemic Approaches.” Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge, working paper No. 424, 2011.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. USA, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

---. “The Law of Genre.” *Critical Inquiry*, translated by Avital R, The University of Chicago Press, vol. 7, autumn 1980, pp. 55-81.

Desai, Radhika. “Forward March of Hindutva Halted?” *New Left Review*, issue 30, Nov./Dec. 2004.

Deshpande, G.P. *Selected Writings of Jotirao Phule*. New Delhi, LeftWord, 2002.

- Dewey, John. 1916. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. New York, Macmillan, 1958.
- D'Souza, Oliver. *Truth about Dalits: Caste System and Untouchability*. Britain: London Institute of South Asia, 2012.
- Doubrovsky, Serge. *Fils, Collection Folio*. Paris, Gallimard, 1977.
- Dumont, L. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*. Translated by Mark Sainsbury, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1970.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*. London, Verso, 1991.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of The Earth*. New York, Grove Press, 1963.
- . *Black Skin White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann, London, Pluto Press, 2008.
- Fassin, Didier. "Racialization: How to do Races with Bodies." *A Companion to the Anthropology of the Body and Embodiment*, 1st ed., USA, Blackwell Publishing, 2011.
- Firman, John, and Ann Gila. *The Primal Wound: A Transpersonal View of Trauma, Addiction, and Growth*. Albany and New York, State University of New York, 1997.
- Fish, Stanley. "Is there a Text in Class?" *The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Ferrucci, Piero. *What We May Be: Techniques for Psychological and Spiritual Growth*. New York, Penguin Putnam Inc., 2000.
- Foucault, Michel. "Two Lectures." *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, edited by Colin Gordon, Brighton and Sussex, Harvester Press, 1980, pp. 78-108.

- . "What is an Author?" *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 Volume Two*. Edited by James D. Faubion and translated by Robert Hurley and Others, New York, The New Press, 1998, pp. 205-222.
- Gajarawala, Toral Jatin. *Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste*. New York, Fordham University Press, 2012.
- Galanter, Marc. *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1984.
- Ganguly, Debjani. "Pain, Personhood and the Collective: Dalit Life Narratives." *Asian Studies Review* vol. 33, issue 4, 2009, pp. 429-42.
- Ghosh, Ratna, et al. "Women's empowerment and education: Panchayats and women's Self-help Groups in India." *Policy Futures in Education*, vol. 13, issue 3, 2015, pp. 294-314. DOI: 10.1177/1478210315571214
- Ghurye, G. S. *Caste and Race in India*. London, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1932.
- Gokhale, J. *From Confessions to Confrontation: The Politics of an Indian Untouchable Community*. Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1993.
- Goonesekere, Rajendra Kalidas Wimala. "PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND MINORITIES." Working paper on the topic of discrimination based on work and descent, submitted pursuant to Sub-Commission resolution 2000/4, Economic and Social Council, United Nations, E/CN.4/Sub.2/2001/16, 14 June 2001.
- Gore, M.S. *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought*. New Delhi, Sage Publishers, 1993.

- Gorringe, Hugo and Rafanell, Irene. "The Embodiment of Caste: Oppression, Protest and Change." *Sociology*, vol. 41, issue 1, 2007, pp. 97–114. DOI: 10.1177/0038038507074721
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Groth, Helen. "Kaleidoscopic Vision and Literary Invention in an "Age of Things": David Brewster, Don Juan, and "A Lady's Kaleidoscope"." *ELH*, vol. 74, no. 1, Spring, 2007, pp. 217-237. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/30029552](http://www.jstor.org/stable/30029552). Accessed 17 June 2021.
- Gunnarsson, Lena. "A defence of the category 'women'." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 12, issue 1, April 2011, pp. 23–37. *SAGE Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700110390604>.
- Gupta, Dipankar. "Caste Infrastructure and Superstructure." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 16, no. 51, 19 Dec. 1981, pp. 2093-2104. <https://www.epw.in/journal/1981/51/special-articles/caste-infrastructure-and-superstructure-critique.html>.
- . *Social stratification*. Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Guru, Gopal. "Dalit Women Talk Differently." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 30, no.41/42, 1995, pp. 2548-2550. [https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1995\\_30/41-42/commentary\\_dalit\\_women\\_talk\\_differently.pdf](https://www.epw.in/system/files/pdf/1995_30/41-42/commentary_dalit_women_talk_differently.pdf).
- Hall, Stuart. "The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees." *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Edited by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, London, Routledge, 1996, pp. 24-45.

- Hanchinamani, Bina B. "Human Rights Abuses of Dalits in India." *Human Rights Brief*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2001, pp. 15, 18-19, 29.  
<https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/vol8/iss2/6/>.
- Harijan: Under the auspices of The Servants of Untouchables Society*. Edited by R.V Sastry, vol. 1, Poona, 11 February (1933).
- Harper, Edward B. "Social Consequences of an Unsuccessful Low Caste Movement." *Social Mobility in the Caste System in India: An Interdisciplinary Symposium*, edited by James Silverberg, supplement no. 3, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Mouton, The Hague, 1968, pp. 48-49.
- Harris, Cheryl I. "Whiteness as Property." *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 106, no. 8, 1993, pp. 1707-1791. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1341787>.
- Hegel, G.W.F. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. 2nd ed., translated. by J.B. Baillie, New York, Humanities Press, 1964.
- . *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*. Translated by T.M. Knox, London, Oxford University Press, 1967.
- Heredia, Rudolf. C. "Subaltern alternatives on caste, class and ethnicity." *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 34, no. 1, Feb. 2000. *SAGE Journals*,  
 DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/006996670003400102>.
- "India's Caste System: 'They Are Trying to Erase Dalit History. This Is a Martyrdom, a Sacrifice'." *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 24 Jan. 2016.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/24/student-suicide-untouchables-stuggle-for-justice-india>.
- "India's Ignorance Over The Bonded Labour System Exacerbates Caste Differences." *EPW Engage: Economic and Political Weekly*, 17 Sept. 2019, ISSN (Online) - 2349-8846.

- “Indian Reservations.” *The Economist*. The Economist Newspaper, 29 June 2013.  
<https://www.economist.com/banyan/2013/06/29/indian-reservations>.
- Irudayam, Aloysius, et al. *Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India*. New Delhi, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, 2006.
- . *Dalit Women Speak Out: Violence against Dalit Women in India*. New Delhi, Zubaan, 2014.
- Jadeja, Gopika. “Mother as fucked: reimagining Dalit female sexuality in Sahil Parmar’s poetry.” *Dalit text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined*, edited by Judith Misrahi-Barak, K. Satyanarayana and Nicole Thiara. London and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 121-137.
- Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System*. New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.
- Jodhka, Surinder S. *Caste in Contemporary India*. New Delhi and Oxon, Routledge, 2015.
- Kapoor, Shivani. “A pox on your house: exploring caste and gender in Tulsi Ram’s *Murdahiya*.” *Dalit text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined*, edited by Judith Misrahi-Barak, K. Satyanarayana and Nicole Thiara. Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 38-150.
- Kavita, Dr. S. “Land Distribution and Status of Dalits.” *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 21, issue 2, ver. VII, 2016, pp 16-20. e-ISSN: 2279-0837
- Keer, Dhananjay. *Dr. Ambedkar: His life and mission*. Bombay, A. V. Keer, 1954.
- Khilnani, Sunil. *The Idea of India*. New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Approaching Abjection, Powers of Horror*. New York, Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Kumar, Raj. *Dalit personal narratives: Reading caste, nation and identity*. Hyderabad, Orient BlackSwan, 2010.



- Lakshman. *Samboli!Beware!*. Translated by Susheela Punitha, New Delhi, Niyogi Books, 2018.
- Lawrence, Bonita. "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview." *Hypatia*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2003, pp. 3-31.  
DOI:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2003.tb00799.x.
- Limbale, Sharankumar. *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature: History, Controversies and Considerations*. Translated by Alok Mukherjee, New Delhi, Orient Longman, 2007.
- Lee, Hermione. *Biography: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Louis, Prakash. "Hindutva: Historicity of Dalit Connection." *Hindutva and Dalits: Perspectives for Understanding Communal Praxis*, edited by Anand Teltumbde, Kolkata, SAMYA, 2005, pp. 136-162.
- Lull, James. 1994. *Media, Communications and Culture: A Global Approach*. USA, Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Mackie, Diane M., et al. 2000. "Intergroup Emotions: Explaining Offensive Action Tendencies in an Intergroup Context." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 79, no. 4, 2000, pp. 602-616. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.79.4.602.
- Malagatti, Aravind. *Government Brahmana*. Hyderabad, Orient Longman Private Limited, 2007.
- Malka, Ariel and Yphtach Lelkes. "More than Ideology: Conservative-Liberal Identity and Receptivity to Political Cues." *Social Justice Research*, vol. 23, issue 2-3, Sept. 2010, pp. 156-188. DOI:10.1007/s11211-010-0114-3.
- Mandelbaum, D. G. *Society in India*. Two volumes, London, University of California Press, 1970.

- Maritain, Jacques. *The Rights of Man and Natural Law*. Translated by Doris C. Anson, New York, Scribner's Sons, 1943.
- Marx, Karl and Friedrich Engels. 1848. *The Communist Manifesto*. London, Penguin, 2004.
- Maxey, Ian. "Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research." *Area*, 31.3, 1999. pp. 199-208.
- McLaughlin, Brian P., et al. "Subjectivity." *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Mind*. Oxford, Clarendon, 2009.
- McLeod, John. *Beginning Postcolonialism*. Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 2000.
- Ministry of Labour, Government of India, *Annual Report 2000-2001*, p. 181, qtd. in Human Rights Watch, *Small Change: Bonded Child Labor in India's Silk Industry*, January 2003.
- Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *boundary 2: On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism*, vol. 12, no. 3, spring-autumn, 1984, pp. 333-358. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i213373>.
- Mondal, Anshuman A. *Nationalism and Post-Colonial Identity: Culture and ideology in India and Egypt*. London, RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- Moon, Vasant. *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. Translated by Gail Omvedt and contributed by Eleanor Zelliott, Lanham and Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001.
- . *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*. vol. 1, New Delhi, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2014. ISBN (Set): 978-93-5109-064-9.

- Moore-Gilbert, Bart. *Postcolonial Life Writing: Culture, Politics and Self Representation*. New York, Routledge, 2009.
- Moraga, Cherrie and Anzaldúa, Gloria. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. New Jersey, Kitchen Table Press, 1983.
- Mukherjee, Arun P. "B.R. Ambedkar, John Dewey, and the Meaning of Democracy." *New Literary History*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2009, pp. 345-70.
- . "Dalit literature in translation: a symptomatic reading of Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi* in English translation." *Dalit text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined*, edited by Judith Misrahi-Barak, K. Satyanarayana and Nicole Thiara, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 153-165.
- Muthukkaruppan, Parthasarathi. "Dalit: The Making of a Political Subject." *Critical Quarterly*. vol. 56, issue. 3, 2014, pp. 34-45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/criq.12136>.
- Nandy, Ashis, "History's Forgotten Doubles." *History and Theory*, vol. 34, no. 2, May 1995, pp. 44-66. *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2505434>.
- National Federation of Dalit Land Rights Movements (NFDLRM). "Property Rights: Identity, Dignity & Opportunity for All." *Ashoka Changemakers*. <http://www.changemakers.com/property-rights/entries/national-federation-dalit-land-rights-movementsnfdlrm>.
- Nayar, Pramod K. "Bama's Karukku: Dalit Autobiography as Testimonio." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2006, pp. 83-100.
- . "Dalit writing, cultural trauma and pedagogy: The testimony of Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 19, 2008, pp. 51-56.

- . "The Politics of form in Dalit Fiction: Bama's *Sangati* and Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*." *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 18, issue 3, 2011. pp. 365–380. *SAGE Journals*, DOI:10.1177/097152151101800304.
- . "The Poetics of Postcolonial Atrocity: Dalit Life Writing, *Testimonio*, and Human Rights." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 42, no. 3-4, 2012, pp. 237–264.
- . "Dalit Poetry and the Aesthetics of Traumatic Materialism," *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 22, Issue 1, 2015, pp. 1-14.
- Newman, Saul. "Derrida's deconstruction of authority." *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2001, pp. 1-20.
- Nugent, Helen M. "The communal award: The process of decision-making." *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 1-2, 2007, pp. 112-129. DOI:10.1080/00856407908722988.
- O'Hanlon, Rosalind. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and low caste protest in nineteenth-century western India*. United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Omvedt, Gail. *Dalit Visions*. New Delhi, Orient BlackSwan, 2006.
- Orth, Uli. "Secondary Victimization of Crime Victims by Criminal Proceedings." *Social Justice Research*, vol. 15, no. 4, Dec. 2002, pp. 313-325.
- Pandian, M. S. S. "On a Dalit woman's testimonio." *Gender and Caste*, edited by Anupama Rao, New Delhi, Zubaan, 1998, pp. 129–35.
- Pandit, Maya. "Translating Dalit Literature: redrawing the map of cultural politics." *Dalit text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined*, edited by Judith Misrahi-Barak, K. Satyanarayana and Nicole Thiara, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 166-180.

- Parker, Andrew and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. *Performance and Performativity*. London, Routledge, 1995.
- Patton, Cindy. "Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology." *Performativity and Performance*, edited with an introduction by Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, London and New York, Routledge, 1995.
- Phelan, James. *Narrative as Rhetoric: Technique, Audiences, Ethics, Ideology*. Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1996.
- Porta, Donatella Della and Mario Diani. *Social Movements: An Introduction*. USA, Blackwell Publishing, 2006.
- Power, Elaine M. "An Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's Key Theoretical Concepts." *Journal for the Study of Food and Society*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1999, pp. 48-52.  
DOI:10.2752/15289799978669075.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Toward A Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. London, Indiana University Press, 1977.
- Pyarelal. *The Epic Fast*. Ahmedabad, Mohanlal Maganlal Bhatt, 1932.
- Rao, Anupama. *Gender & Caste*. London, Zed, 2005.
- Rao, M.S.A. "The Jajmani System." *Book Review: The Economic Weekly*, vol. 13, no. 23, 10 June 1961.
- Ravikumar. *Venomous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture and Politics*. Kolkata, Samya, 2009.
- Rawat, Ramnarayan S., and K. Satyanarayana. *Dalit Studies*. Durham, Duke UP, 2016.
- Rege, Sharmila. *Against the Madness of Manu: B.R. Ambedkar's Writings on Brahmanical Patriarchy*. New Delhi, Navayana, 2013.
- . *Writing Caste/ Writing Gender*. New Delhi, Zubaan Books. 2014.

- Rose, Emily. "Keeping the Trans in Translation: Queering Early Modern Transgender Memoirs." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3–4, Nov. 2016, pp. 485-505. DOI 10.1215/23289252-3545179.
- Roy, Arundhati. *The God of Small Things*. London, Fourth Estate, 2009.
- . "The Doctor and the Saint." *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*, edited and annotated by S. Anand, UK, US, Canada, Verso, 2014.
- Satyanarayana, K., and Susie J. Tharu. *The Exercise of Freedom: An Introduction to Dalit Writing*. New Delhi, Navayana Publishing Pvt. Ltd, 2013.
- Scott, James. C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1985.
- Siebers, Hans. "'Race' versus 'ethnicity'? Critical race essentialism and the exclusion and oppression of migrants in the Netherlands." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2017, pp. 369-387. DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2017.1246747.
- Simpson, Audra. "The State is a Man: Theresa Spence, Loretta Saunders and the Gender of Settler Sovereignty." *Theory & Event*, vol. 19, issue 4, 2016. *Project MUSE*, [muse.jhu.edu/article/633280](http://muse.jhu.edu/article/633280).
- Singh, Chhatrapati. "The Inadequacy of Hohfeld's Scheme: Towards a more Fundamental Analysis of Jural Relations." *Journal of the Indian Law Institute*, vol. 27, no. 1, January-March 1985, pp. 117-127.
- Sivakami, P. *The Grip of Change and Author's Notes*. Translated by P. Sivakami, Hyderabad, Orient BlackSwan, 2006.
- Shah, Ghanshyam. *Dalit Identity and Politics*. New Delhi, Sage Publication, 2001.
- Sharma, Ursula. *Caste*. Great Britain, Open University Press, 1999.

- Shivkumar, Vaishali. "A Dalit Woman Under a Strong Clutch of Patriarchy: A Comprehensive Study of The Grip of Change." *Language in India*, vol. 13. no. 4, 2013.
- Sikka, Sonia. "Untouchable Cultures: Memory, Power and the Construction of Dalit selfhood." *Identities*, vol. 19. no. 1, 2012, pp. 43-60.
- Singh, Shweta. "Representation of Dalit women in Dalit men's and women's autobiographies." *The Delhi University Journal of The Humanities & The Social Sciences*, vol. 1, 2014, pp. 39-47.
- Singh, Tanya. "Identity Politics: Dalit Literary and Dalit Panther Movement." *New Man Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, vol. 2, issue 6, 2015, pp. 31-36.
- Slaughter, Joseph R. *Human Rights, INC: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*. New York, Fordham University Press, 2007.
- Sluss, D. M., and B. E. Ashforth. "Relational Identity and Identification: Defining Ourselves Through Work Relationships." *Academy of Management Review*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2007, pp. 9-32.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Righting Wrongs." *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, no. 2-3, 2004, pp. 523-581. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00382876-103-2-3-523>.
- Srinivas, M.N. *India's Villages*. London, Asia publishing House, 1955.
- . "The Dominant Caste in Rampura." *American Anthropologist*, vol. 61, issue 1, 1959, pp. 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1959.61.1.02a00030>.
- Srivastava, Ravi. S. "Bonded Labour in India: Its Incidence and Pattern." Working paper, International Labour Office Geneva, June 2005. ISBN 92-2-117322-4.
- Taib, Mohamed Imran Mohamed. "(de)Meaning of Social Activism." *Karyawan Magazine*, vol. 7, Issue 1, 2006.

- Tajfel, Henri. *Human groups and social categories*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981.
- Tarrow, Sidney. *The New Transnational Activism*. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Teltumbde, Anand. "Dichotomisation of Caste and Class." *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 51, no. 47, Nov. 2016, pp. 34-38. <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/47/caste-and-class/dichotomisation-caste-and-class.html>.
- Thapar, Romila. *The Penguin History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300*. New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2002.
- The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol 22, India, Publication Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1966. ISBN:9781508520436.
- The Gender of Constitutional Jurisprudence*. Edited by Beverley Baines and Ruth Rubio-Marin, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511617393>.
- The United Nations. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. 1948.
- Vasak, Karel. "Pour une Troisième Génération des Droits de l'Homme." *In Essays on International Humanitarian Law and Red Cross Principles in Honour of Jean Pictet*, edited by C. Swinarski, The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1984.
- Virmani, Tina. *Contesting Community and Nation: Caste, Discrimination and Reservation Politics in India*. 2014. Ontario, York University, PhD Dissertation.
- V.K, Navya. "Caste, Gender and Resistance: A Critical Study of Bama's *Sangathi*." *SOCRATES*, 2nd edition, vol. 1, 2014, pp. 20-27.
- Vogele, William B. "Passive Resistance." *International Encyclopedia of The Social Sciences*, 2nd edition, 2008, pp. 166-168.



- Waldrop, Anne. "Dalit Politics in India and New Meaning of Caste." *Forum for Development Studies*, no. 2, 2004, pp. 275-303.  
DOI: 10.1080/08039410.2004.9666283.
- Weber, Max. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. Edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Weir, Allison. *Identities and Freedom: Feminist Theory Between Power and Connection*. USA, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Memory*. Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2008.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Great Britain, Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Williams, Rhys H. "The Cultural Contexts of Collective Action." *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by D. Snow, S. Soule, and H. Kriesi, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2004, pp. 91–115.
- Women of Weaker Sections: Socio-Economic Development of Scheduled Caste Women*. National Commission for Women, New Delhi, 1996.
- Yadav, Kanak. "Author's notes or revisions? The politics of form in P. Sivakami's two novels," *Dalit text: Aesthetics and Politics Re-Imagined*, edited by Judith Misrahi-Barak, K. Satyanarayana and Nicole Thiara. London and New York, Routledge, 2020, pp. 77-90.
- Zelliot, E. "Congress and Untouchables, 1915–50." *Congress and Indian Nationalism: The Pre-Independence Phase*, Berkeley, 1988, pp. 182–97.
- Zerilli, Linda. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Zwart, Frank de. "The Logic of Affirmative Action: Caste, Class and Quotas in India."

*ACTA SOCIOLOGICA*, vol. 43, issue 3, 2000, pp. 235-249.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/000169930004300304>.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Interview Transcript

[Participants: Dr. Aravind Malagatti and Dr. Dharani Devi Malagatti]

**Surya Simon [SS]:** Dr. Aravind, what was the motivation to write your autobiography, *Government Brahmana*?

**Aravind Malagatti [AM]:** I want to convey social problems...emmm...Shall I speak in Kannada?

**SS:** Absolutely.

**[From this point on Dharani Devi Malagatti [DDM] translates AM's responses. AM responded mostly in Kannada except for occasional input in English]**

**AM (pauses and then speaks in Kannada):**

**DDM (translates):** I write to convey the social problems. These problems may be pertaining to untouchables or the entire society as a whole. My intention is to analyse those problems and convince people. The caste system and varna system which is prevalent in our society is still pestering the society. The caste system and varna system were once upon a time, thousands of years back, inevitable. Today they are irrelevant. During the time of kings, the caste system was practiced as a part of the administration but now, the system of administration and governance has changed. Even the structure of society has changed now. Therefore, caste and varna are irrelevant now. But still we are continuing the practice of caste which are just the remanence of the old practice. They don't have life in them and are relics without life. My writing talks about how these practices have been

detrimental like a hanging noose for my people even during the present period when these systems are irrelevant. My writing concentrates on what to do in order to come out of this system.

**SS:** When it is not that relevant, how does it still affect people?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** The practice of untouchability is still there in our society and it's also practiced on the animals which human beings rear. The animals belonging to the untouchables are harassed because of untouchability practices. It's not just applied to the animals and birds they rear, rather it also applies to the plate in which they eat and also the roads on which they walk. This practice has been deep rooted in our society. Even our mythological stories and folklore justify these differences. For example, there is an incident of sacrificing the buffalo before goddess Marama shown in his book. The folk story behind it talks about an inter-caste marriage, wherein a Dalit boy marries a Brahmin girl by convincing her that he was a Brahmin. When she comes to know of it, she kills him and then, he becomes a buffalo. Thus, the practice of sacrificing the buffalo to goddess Marama, remains. So, what we face in our life is reflected in folkstories as well as our mythological stories. Mythological stories reflect history whereas folk stories reflect the present life. Our life story talks about the present status of our life and it is our Indian history that has been passed on.

**SS:** I noticed questions in the translator's preface by Ms Janet Vucinich, "Is this a Dalit story or is this an individual Dalit's story? What is the difference?" What are your thoughts?

**AM:** Both! It is an individual's Dalit story and it is the society's story. It is not only Aravind Malagatti's story but also experiences of many Dalits, like me. **(continues in Kannada)**

**DDM (trans):** When people say that the book is very good, I feel bad. When I talk about the pain that is suffered by a community and when people say that it's fine after reading it, that says that it has not reached them or has not touched them. Also, the practice of untouchability was grasped in a superficial way earlier. This book showed that untouchability has myriad avatars, many forms and shapes; something which cannot be imagined. People have also commented that this autobiography is lacking completeness and that this book has not talked about non-Dalits. He (AM) would like to say that autobiography is not a sack in which we have to put everything. Autobiography for social change would be different than autobiography which records all the things related to one's life. So he would like to tell them not to expect him to give all the details of his life.

**SS:** Then, how do you negotiate or understand that individual and collective consciousness together?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** After the publication of this book, many Dalits have written to me saying that it reflects their story or there is *our* story in this. Many have said that it is *our* story. When my story becomes other people's story also, it becomes the story of the society and it becomes the story of the country. We can't differentiate between individual experience and collective experience and the country's experience. It's not the life story of a person rather it's a story of a community.

**AM:** More than five hundred members have written letters to me. They are giving their opinion about the text and other matters. They express what is the effect of this text to them. I think these letters convey to me, as a writer, the effect the book has on the readers. Most of the readers who reacted are high caste peoples. They say that this text is like a guide to them, a handbook.

**[Aravind asks Dharani to help translate]**

**DDM (trans):** He has received many letters about this book, and they are being published now. Some have written that this book has helped them to know and understand their society. It has taught them how to behave with the Dalits and this is guiding them in every step. Most of the people who reacted are non-Dalits. Dalits also have reacted. They say that they have found themselves in the stories in the book. Whereas, non-Dalits say that, in addition to finding about the problems of Dalits, they have realised the ways in which they have to behave with Dalits. A person has written that he is a Brahmin and he is actively working with coolies. He brought this book home and his relatives asked him why he is reading this book. His father asked him to not read the book and even threw the book out. But this person picked up the book and kept it in his cupboard. He then said that it is a good book and is not less worthy than the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* which are kept in the house. Also, there are people who have come searching to see and speak to him after reading this life story. He tells them that there is no point in seeing me rather it's better for them to see the people in their area, in their villages, in their places, who are like me and treat them in a better way.

**SS:** There are some parts that really struck me for example, the first paragraph of the third chapter describes a punishment. It goes something like this, "Fold your hands in the style of a namaskar. Then interweave your fingers together, okay?... Have you hung yourself?"

No, not like that...” Then, you ask questions such as, ‘can you imagine...’ For me as a non-Dalit, it felt like those questions were for me and it made me reflect. There are so many parts where the chapters end with such questions encouraging me ‘to imagine’ and ‘to think’. So even when the text shows solidarity with fellow Dalits, does it also demand or encourage non-Dalits to reflect on their actions. Is that intention there in the questions and the dramatic narrative style?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** I had two objectives. One is, by telling this story, I would like to convince the state of Dalits to non-Dalits, other people. The second thing is, after going through the book or after understanding it, I would like them to change. If they (non-Dalits) feel that they have made some mistakes, then they shouldn’t repeat it. If they get that feeling after going through my book, then I feel that my writing is successful.

**SS:** When the work was translated, did the target readership change or grow further?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM:** I had more similar responses after this book was translated into English. When it was in Kannada, only Kannadikas (people from Karnataka) used to respond. But once it got translated into English, people from all over the world started responding to it. I didn’t have any intention of translating it into English when I wrote it initially. I have written a few books in fiction before my autobiography and critics were telling me that in those writings, Dalit is absent. When we write a story without experience, imagination also will be included in that. Instead of writing fiction, if you come out without experience directly, I thought maybe we can give answer to those people who were criticising that Dalit is absent in Dalit literature. I just wanted to respond to those criticisms, that’s all but I didn’t

have any idea for getting this autobiography translated into English. All the parts and experiences were written over a period of almost ten years or different periods. When it came out as a book and when there was a lot of discussion about it, then I felt it would be better if it comes out in English too.

**SS:** It's very interesting. There is a sentence as well in the text mentioning that some people assume that Dalit is absent in Dalit literature. Also, I noticed two words in the text 'Dalitism' and 'Brahminism'. Can you elaborate on those words?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM:** In our society, there are some biases. One is that Dalits are dirty and another is Brahmins are very pure and clean. This is a superficial understanding. The reality is different and it is not that way. The thing is we [Dalits] don't follow their (upper castes) rituals and practices, that's all and that is why they treat us like that because we don't follow their rituals and practices. It is not about purity or cleanliness. Dalit is the most related to whatever that is dirty. Now even when most of the Dalits are intellectuals and scholars, they (upper castes) don't receive us in the same way. They don't accept us like them. Take the example of Babu Jagjivan Ram Mohan who was the Deputy Prime Minister of the country in 1979. He was not allowed to enter the temple and if they enter the temple, the temple then undergoes a process of purification, whatever post or designation he may have. When a Dalit enters the temple, they feel that the temple's purity is lost.

**SS:** Yes, that is very interesting. Would you like to elaborate on your choice of the autobiography's title 'Government Brahmana'?

**AM (in Kannada):**



**DDM:** This title was something which hurt me when I was studying in college. We (Dalits) used to get a caste certificate and on the caste certificate, there would be a round seal stamped by the Tahsildar. All the other people (non-Dalits) in that college used to call us ‘Gundu Sikka’. ‘Gundu’ is round and ‘Sikka’ is seal. They used to call us round seal.

**[Aravind is quite emotional while remembering and narrating. He takes a long pause]**

**SS:** I can pause...

**AM:** No... (continues in Kannada)

**DDM (trans):** Our own friends used to tease us saying that you are all government brahmins. Government treats you like brahmins, so government gives you all facilities. They used to tease us and say, ‘in the government’s view, we are not brahmins, you are brahmins’. So, I thought of using the same word as a symbol of self-respect.

**SS to DDM:** When you had to translate this emotion, this pain and this trauma, how challenging was it to capture and express that in the English language?

**DDM:** Out of sheer interest, I thought of translating his work. I found it very difficult to translate because most of the dialogues were in his dialect, Bijapur, since he is from Bijapur. Bijapur Kannada is a bit different from the textual Kannada. It was a challenge to bring all the emotions such as sorrow in the same way as it is in the original text. I still feel that in some places, I must have failed in bringing the same emotions. I took many years, almost four years to translate this but I didn't translate it in one stretch. I started translating part by part and I would ask him every time if I have translated a sentence correctly. I used to keep four-five equivalent phrases and synonyms, and I used to ask him whether that has

come out right. Since the original writer was with me, I have a feeling that I have brought about as far as possible from the original, but translation has its inherent limitations like we can't bring the entire gist completely in another language.

**SS to AM:** When I was reading the autobiography, at some point I actually forgot that this was an autobiography because each chapter are little short stories for me or are little incidents and events on their own. Did you choose to do that for a reason?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** It was written that way, intentionally. I look for social change and I wanted to convey as to what aspects of the society have to be changed. I have told whatever I wanted to tell consciously. I want to touch upon the problems so when I want to do that, I have to say through separate parts. For example, I want to talk about how water and untouchability are inter-related. I bring my experience in relation to water and present it in the form of a story. If I write a novel related to it, I can't say this because in the novel I become important rather than the social problem. In my book, I would like that the problem should be the hero, not me. The problem should be the focus. A novel would glorify me and not the problem. I didn't want that. So, I prefer to write in separate parts.

**SS:** Yes, I remember that in the first chapter, you have mentioned that your motive for writing this is not self-gratification. Also, there are beautiful poems in the work. How was the dynamics between prose-writing and poetry?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** I didn't have any intention as to the form of writing but my idea was to write about problems, that's all. The form and the flow came as it is. That was not

conscious writing. Also, I can't say everything in poetry and I cannot say everything in prose also. I have also written plays when I felt that these matters can be presented in the form of a play. Readers are of different categories. Readers of poetry are different, readers of fiction are different and those who watch plays and dramas, they are different. I would like to reach all types of readers and audience. The choice of the form depends on the subject. The subject chooses the form or genre, not me.

**SS:** That brings us to my next question. Towards the end of your work, you have written about carving a Dalit identity for yourself. Did that happen while writing? Did remembering and writing somewhere help you to recreate or carve out that identity that you have been looking for?

**AM:** Poetry, criticism, my research work. All most all books are my identity. (**Continues in Kannada**)

**SS to DDM:** I haven't read the original version, because I am not familiar with the Kannada script but this translated text has deeply touched and influenced me. How much do you see this text as an independent text on its own?

**DDM:** The reader should say that, especially someone who is well-versed in both the languages. They can say whether it stands on its own. But any translated version is not different from the original work because there are similarities. There may be some additions or deletions because translation is that way; we can't translate everything and verbatim translation also will not work. Translation is a skill.

**SS to AM:** The term 'Dalit' is highly discussed now. What does that term mean to you?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** The neglected lot from all viewpoints - political, economical, social, educational, religious.

**SS to DDM?:** What does that term mean to you, Dr. Dharani?

**DDM:** I don't know. I was seeing them as a caste earlier and there were Scheduled Castes and Schedules Tribes as per the Schedule of the government. Since I was not a Dalit, I used to see them from the outside only. But later I started reading about all these things and became exposed to the social inequalities during my postgraduate education. I had an interest in reading all those things and Dalits are, as he said, depressed people. We have Acts such as the SC/ ST Prevention of Atrocities Act. If you go through the cases that are registered under those SC/ ST Prevention of Atrocities Act, there are very cruel cases and many of them. There was one incident in Bendigeri wherein high-caste fed excreta into the mouths of the Dalits. There are many such cases. One happened in Belcchi. There are many incidents that took place in Karnataka in many places of India which necessitated the implementation of the SC/ ST Prevention of Atrocities Act. There are also volumes of books on atrocities committed to Dalit men and women, especially women. Not for their wrong doings but for the sole reason of being Dalit, as it happens in the case of gender also. For the sole reason of becoming a girl or a woman, she becomes a target of many atrocities. So for me, I have seen different Dalits like intellectual Dalits who have had an exposure and all, but still there are Dalits who are experiencing these atrocities even now.

**SS:** When you say there are different types of Dalits, it strikes me because there are also different views of what a Dalit should be. I remember that you had mentioned something in the text about how people accused you saying, 'oh now Dr Malagatti is not a Dalit'.

**DDM:** Or shouldn't call him a Dalit now. People think that if a Dalit becomes economically stronger, he is no more a Dalit. But it's not that way. The social stigma is *still* there even if he becomes economically stronger. So that is experienced by our next generation as well. There is this specific pattern among people about how Dalits are or should be.

**AM:** Also, there's a feeling that Dalits cannot speak properly or articulate properly. People cannot master all the languages in the world. If one can master one language, that is sufficient that I have done at least. When they criticize us on the basis of knowledge of some language and when we get mastery over the same language and tell them that we are using it in a better way than them, then they will say that we're making mistakes in the way we use the language.

**SS to AM:** There's a phrase that I came across in your text and other texts which is Dalit consciousness. What does that mean to you?

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** Past, present and future, involving all this three. Dalit consciousness is not just concern with the past or it's not just concern with present. It is to choose from the past and then analyse it with the present and find ways for the future.

**SS:** Okay, so, can I, as a non-Dalit, have Dalit consciousness? Can I say that I have Dalit consciousness?

**AM:** It's possible. It depends upon how much you have a consultation with Dalit. I mean involvement and some other things. It depends upon how you react with Dalit issues, how you define and how you interpret it. **(Continues in Kannada)**

**DDM (trans):** Once if Dalit consciousness enters one's head, it won't let the person sleep peacefully. There's an anecdote about Dr. B.R. Ambedkar; that a foreign journalist came to meet people like Nehru, Gandhi and other Indian leaders, including Ambedkar. When he wanted to meet Gandhi, Gandhi was asleep as it was night-time. Nehru was also asleep but Ambedkar was awake. So he asked Dr. Ambedkar why they were sleeping and taking rest while he is still awake? Ambedkar said that their people are awake so they are sleeping but my people are sleeping so I am awake. So that made him work his whole life. That consciousness makes somebody awake all the time. One Ambedkar made the entire country awake but we are in need of more such Ambedkars, in the present society. We should not bring another constitution. The constitution we have in our country has to be implemented properly and values in the constitution have to be followed. Some people say that Dalits don't have patriotism but that's not true. Probably, the way Dalits love their country, other people may not. Dalits love their country first, religion is secondary for them. Unless and until politics and religion are separated, we can't have a peaceful society. They should be seen separately and shouldn't be mixed.

**AM (in Kannada):**

**DDM (trans):** Some put religion first and then their country. Our country is of different religions so if people start saying that religion is first then our country will be side-lined. Country should be put in first place and religion should be in the second place. Many of our Dalit writers including me have written about the country earlier but it doesn't mean that we are criticising the country. We are criticising certain values that are practiced in our country. It's not criticising the country. We are the original inhabitants of this country and if we deny our country, it means we are denying our original source. It's inevitable that we have to live in this country hence the conflict and agitation is also an inevitable

part. Social change does not come by reading alone. Social experience is also quite important. When we talk about the country and society, since we have suffered a lot, there may be anger in our words but that is situational and not a permanent thing. It is contextual. The criticism about the upper castes is not about the entire group of people but certain practices. Even the practice of hating the upper caste people, based on hundred-thousands of years' old practices, is like breaking up the old wound and making a fresh wound. That is not justified. Society is changing, upper caste people are changing. We too should change. They should come two steps further and we should go two steps further. It should be mutual. Change will take place by the activity of both communities, not just by one community alone. Two hands are required for a clap.

**SS:** That's very interesting. Thank you so much Dr. Aravind and thank you Dr. Dharani for continuing your role as a translator today.

**Appendix 2: Interview Transcript**

[Participant: Janet Vucinich]

**Surya Simon [SS]:** What was your motivation to be a translator? What was your motivation to translate Dalit literature?

**Janet Vucinich [JV]:** I was a Fulbright Scholar in Manipal, India and met Aravind and Dharani Devi Malagatti through a faculty friend. I have worked extensively with multicultural literature in my teaching at the community college. I was interested in this translation project. We met and decided to work on a section and see if my approach was what Aravind was looking for. My background in both linguistic and literature meant that I had an appreciation for the language being as close to Aravind's original as possible.

**SS:** Would you be able to give one example of other kinds of 'multicultural literature' you have worked on/ with during your teaching? How was the experience working with other multicultural literature different and/ or similar to Dalit literature?

**JV:** I refer to it in the forward I wrote to Aravind's book. Teaching in the US, I used Indigenous, Black, Hispanic literature; both Hispanic and Native American cultures were heavily represented in my classes at the community college, so it was a rewarding experience for me to be able to use texts reflecting their experience. Several of my students won awards for their writing in school competitions, and I felt this was directly related to their being inspired by the text we had created that included their culture alongside standard canon pieces. Examples: stories by James Baldwin, poetry by Langston Hughes, stories by Leslie Marmon Silko, poetry by Joy Harjo , stories by Simon Ortiz.

**SS:** What approach of translation do you use when translating any work? Do you use a different approach when translating Dalit works?



**JV:** I have only translated this one work. I worked side by side with Aravind and Dharani Devi, pointing out where a word choice or sentence was not clear. I would give standard English options and Aravind would weigh his intentions and word choice because this was a literary/poetic work rather than a legal or scientific document there was more play between options in the process.

**SS:** So, this is your first translation or first translation of Dalit writings? Would you be able to elaborate on your personal preparation before starting the translation work, for example, did you read other Dalit texts other than *Government Brahmana*? What were your thoughts before starting the translation of the text?

**JV:** I did similar translation work with an Indian friend in the nineties. Veena Howard was in graduate school and had written a book on her Guru from Bihar. We worked side by side, drinking Chai discussing the word choices and sentence structures of what she had written in English (she felt her English needed editing because she was a recent immigrant). Before I worked with Aravind, I had read general information about Dalit experience but had no specific background. I guess you could say I came to it without and concepts other than my experience in America with indigenous communities. I taught on reservations in the US and in Native American schools and worked with Native Communities on educational issues. Since working on this project, I have read other Dalit literature.

My thoughts about working on the translation were strongly influenced by linguistic study that encouraged a respect for dialect in the states ( appreciation of Black English and research related to Brown versus Board case in Supreme Court which raises question about equal opportunity in education. I guess you could say I have been and activist for racial justice since I was in college (University of California , Berkeley) and feel education is a critical place for understanding others....this is makes hearing/reading their voices in the

classroom critical. Aravind's experience with these issues made this project particularly interesting when I became involved.

Another influence is my study of modern poetry. Modern American poetry has been influenced by many voices that respect dialect and are not necessarily what we call standard legal English. William Carlos Williams is mainstream white author who tried to capture the language he heard. There are many, many examples of dialect writing from minority authors. When I taught English classes at the community college, students were encouraged to use dialogue from their communities. At that time, I had them use quotation marks around this dialogue, so they also learned to distinguish between standard English and dialect. This was a professional issues; I was hired to teach standard English.....This could be questioned today as a way of creating hierarchy; however at the time it was unusual to allow students to write in dialect although in literature it has been the case for many years.

**SS:** When translating, is the target readership the same as the original work or does the readership change or grow further?

**JV:** In this case the target audience was broader than the original work. Translating to English for an international audience meant more clarification than translating for a local readership.

**SS:** To what extent did you rely on suggestions and opinions of the authors of their respective narratives?

**JV:** As I explained earlier, Aravind was present to weigh choices.

**SS:** When you had to translate emotions, pain and trauma from the source language, how challenging was it to capture and express those in the English language?

**JV:** Emotions, pain and trauma are always difficult to communicate; however, in this case we stayed with the direct honesty of the text.

**SS:** Then, how challenging was it to translate certain emotions? For example, did any section take longer to translate because of the sentimental weight of the content?

**JV:** It has been almost twenty years since I did this; however, I remember the emotional weight of the section on his first love. I was very moved (maybe surprised) by our talk because his wife was there and open to such a painful part of his romantic history. I remember many sections being emotionally weighty. It was, definitely, an intimate experience of sharing someone's life rather than an academic or professional exercise.

**SS:** What are the challenges you faced when translating the regional diction and dialogues to the English language?

**JV:** Aravind's wife had done the first translation so I was not involved in translating regional diction and dialogues into English.

**SS:** There are footnotes explaining certain regional words that have not been translated but put as it is. Would you be able to elaborate on the choice of having footnotes to regional words? What made you all decide to do this?

**JV:** I think using footnotes respects the fact that when the author is telling a story, he/she is able to use the key words they are comfortable with and then the reader is responsible for going to the footnotes for clarification. When I was teaching minority cultures and allowed them to integrate their language in a piece of writing (even if just a few critical words), I noticed it had a positive effect not only on the quality of the result (an authenticity) but on the emotional experience of the writer; in these situations the writers/students were often from communities that felt alien or as outsiders in educational institutions. It seems critical to look at the ways we can bridge separations in these situations that often disrespect a culture by silencing one's language by putting such emphasis on standard language. These thoughts are related to a situation twenty years ago; I imagine the discussion is quite different these days.

**SS:** To what extent were you able to translate the specific, social, cultural, political, economic and legal issues affecting Dalits presented in the original works?

**JV:** I stayed with the work as it was; it was not my place to interpret or embellish.

**SS:** Do you feel it is necessary for non-Dalit translators of any Dalit writing to understand the Dalit struggle before translating? To what extent do the translators gain considerable understanding of the Dalit experience prior to translation.

**JV:** It is necessary for any translation process that the translator understand the context of the work, but that shouldn't affect the translation process. Or I should say I can't understand when it would be important to include translator's interpretation based on information outside the work.

**SS:** Does advocacy and/ or activism have a heavy bearing on the act of translating or does the translation process remain or expected to remain subjective and/ or neutral?

**JV:** Translators are human, and it is a human process we involved in; however, respect for the author and the work require remaining neutral. Translating these works admittedly is an act of activism in that it involves participating in a community with an agenda of furthering communication and understanding.

**SS:** A person who has read the translations of Dalit works need not have read the original works in respective regional languages. In that case, have you felt that the translations can be regarded as independent works of literature?

**JV:** I don't believe in my situation that the work was an independent work of literature; however, other cases may be different.

**SS:** You mention that in your case the translation was not different from the original work. Is this from your position as a translator and/ or as a reader? You also say that 'other cases may be different'. Would you be able to think of any cases or contexts where the translated work could be seen as an independent text?

**JV:** You are correct. I couldn't know the difference since I haven't read the original. Translations of poetry are often seen as independent works. I read David Hinton's translations of early Chinese poetry and he admittedly says the translations are "creative" and I would consider them independent works spun off the inspiration of originals. I also think the poet Robert Bly's collections of poetry include many that could be considered independent works.

**SS:** Did translating Dalits works somewhere help you shape a part of your identity?

**JV:** This translation process taught me a lot about the Dalit experience, expanding my awareness/understanding of the world; however, I don't think it shaped my identity.

**SS:** Are you familiar with the phrasing 'Dalit consciousness'? If yes, what does it mean to you? If no, then, does it mean anything to you?

**JV:** I am not familiar with the term. I would assume it means that consciousness is shaped by one's experiences in a broad manner recognizing that individuals are also unique. Since I did this work, I have also taught in Belize where I lived for five years and in South Africa where I did a small workshop on writing. These experiences along with almost thirty years of teaching in New Mexico have continued to affirm for me the challenges of labelling which often carries judgement of other cultures. My daughter is married to a Belizean and more recently I parented my biracial grandchildren while they attended high school in the states. All of this has made me more aware of the complexity of culture and consciousness. I understand academic needs to see patterns and use labels, which can facilitate positive change but can also lead to generalizations that limit perception of experience. I would be interested in an article to explore "Dalit Consciousness".

**SS:** Thank you so much Ms Janet Vucinich.

### Appendix 3: Interview Transcript

[Participant: Susheela Punitha]

**Surya Simon [SS]: What was your motivation to be a translator?**

**Susheela Punitha [SP]:** I wasn't self-motivated if that's what you are implying, Surya. On Teacher's Day, 5 September, 2008, when Mini Krishnan (Editor of Translations at Oxford University Press) came home and asked me to translate U.R. Ananthamurthy's novel, *Bharathipura* (1973) as Prof. Ananthamurthy was not very happy with an earlier translation of the novel, I was nervous because I had never translated anything before. But Mini put me through the paces. She sent me three stories by Vaidehi (pen name of prominent Kannada language writer, Janaki Srinivasa Murthy) to translate, and she liked what I had done with them. So, Mini felt that I could translate Ananthamurthy's *Bharathipura*. She trusted me when I did not know what it was to be trusted as a translator. I was new to the translating experience, but I knew Mini would steer me. She had been my student of the English Honours batch of 1971 at Mount Carmel College, and she was guiding me in the same way I used to guide my students, which is by gently pushing them off the edge of a cliff, knowing they would fly!

Late one evening, I sent her the first chapter of my translation of *Bharathipura*, as a sample. I told her she could take a call after reading it on whether I should continue with the translation of the rest of the text. The next morning, I received a call and the conversation went like this:

A (Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy introduced himself in Kannada): *Naanu, Ananthamurthy (I am Ananthamurthy)*

SP (I greeted back and continued): *Namaskaara Meshtre (Greetings Teacher), I sent the first chapter to Mini last evening.*

A: *I've got it. I've read it. I don't know how to tell you how good it is... I couldn't have written it this way.*

SP (I protested): *But, it's yours.*

[SP gives a note to SS: I was new to translation, you see]

A: *Yes, it's true. I can write this way in Kannada but I can't do it in English. My English is good for academic writing. You've written from your heart, from your spirit.*

Prof. Ananthamurthy was telling me that I had found my voice as a translator; he could hear it in my English version of his Kannada novel. That was an invaluable insight. It helped me to see my mission as a translator; I was to transport the spirit of the text in Kannada into its English counterpart. And I've been learning along the way, for each narrative has needed different ways of the 'show, don't tell' technique of story-telling.

**SS:** What was your motivation to translate Dalit Literature?

**SP:** In 2013, I was working with a team to bring out *An Anthology of Kannada Dalit Literature* for OUP (that never took off, anyway). While translating the anthology, I was impressed by their [Dalit] culture and their perspectives. I had chance to see them as an insider and I was amazed at what I saw. I wanted to share what I have seen. Since then, I've been translating Dalit writers to present their world-view in the way they write about it. It's a challenge, of course, but I like it.

**SS:** What approach of translation do you use when translating any work? Do you use a different approach when translating Dalit works?

**SP:** As I've explained to you in great detail, I'm a hands-on translator. I don't know any approach because I don't know the theory behind them. To me, every story, even a life-

story like *SAMBOLI!* by Lakshman, is a way of telling a personal story in Kannada language, not necessarily the life-story of a Dalit man. I don't approach it differently from the way I would approach, for instance, Vaidehi's *Lekhakiya Putagalu*, the life-story of an upper sect Brahmin woman writer.

**SS:** When translating, is the target readership the same as the original work or does the readership change or grow further?

**SP:** The very purpose of translation is to reach out to those who cannot read the text in the original language, isn't it? Though there will be some who can read the text in both, the original language and the translated language, I guess there will be many more who can read it only in English. Many of my grandchildren's generation who are Kannadigas (people who are native to or whose ancestry lies in Karnataka) cannot read or write Kannada though they may speak it. In our pluricultural society, there are readers from various parts of India who may not be able to read Kannada. Then, they have to rely on translations just as I do, reading stories in other regional languages only in translation. And, of course, there is the wider reading public from other countries whose only access to literature in alien languages is through English. After all, we read Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* in English, thanks to William Jones' translation of the Sanskrit version<sup>36</sup>, didn't we?!

**SS:** To what extent did you rely on suggestions and opinions of the authors of their respective narratives?

**SP:** Not so much the opinions as much as the clarifications and suggestions I need as an outsider. As a Kannada Christian, I have relied greatly on the writers I have translated who are Hindus and Muslims. I needed their explanation to the rituals or the religious

---

<sup>36</sup> Kalidasa's *Abhijnanashakuntala* (The Recognition of Shakuntala) is a Sanskrit drama believed to be composed during the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE; and translated into English by Sir William Jones in 1789.



references or even to the subtle implications of ‘othering’ in the proverbs they use in casual conversation, in order to understand them as potent signifiers in the text.

**SS:** Would you be able to provide an example of potent signifiers and the challenges of translating those?

**SP:** The story I am translating right now comes to mind. Mogalli Ganesh’s *Buguri (The Spinning Top)* uses human excreta as a poignant signifier in the hilarious twists to the conspiracy of situations in the story. Its full impact comes through only when I subtly weave in a specific detail; the protagonist who is ‘modern’ enough to build a toilet in his backyard isn’t allowed to forget that he, nevertheless, belongs to the caste that cleaned latrines manually barely a few generations ago.

**SS:** When you had to translate emotions, pain or trauma from the source language, how challenging was it to capture and express those in the English language?

**SP:** Translating emotions is not much of a problem since people everywhere feel the same emotions, more or less. It is easy also because, most often, the narrative format in Kannada is generally one of showing, not of telling. The situation is graphically presented, and it helps to be faithful to the set-up to describe the emotions the context arouses.

**SS:** What are the challenges you faced when translating the regional diction and dialogues to the English language?

**SP:** Now that is a constant challenge, a new kind of challenge with every text! I translate from Kannada, true. But which variety of Kannada are we talking about? The stories are in the regional varieties, Mangalore Kannada and Dharwad Kannada, apart from my Mysore Kannada. The dialogues have a smattering of Tulu language in the Mangalore variety and Urdu or Marathi in the North Karnataka variety. And I can’t rely on their face-value for the meaning. For instance, in *Karya*, Aravind Malagatti, a Dalit writer from North Karnataka uses expressions like *dusnumbri* and *kalanumbri*, compound Kannada words with a blend

of Urdu and English. They mean, ‘number ten’ and ‘black number’, respectively. But this bit of lexical information does not help to grasp the contextual significations. *Dusnumbri*, here, refers to the supplier of beef; *dus* being ten, is the highest number allotted to grade meats like fish, chicken, mutton, beef. And *kalanumbri* refers to Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code as the *kala* or black number because it prohibits people on the streets during curfew!

**SS:** That’s quite interesting. Also, to what extent were you able to translate the specific, social, cultural, political, economic and legal issues affecting Dalits presented in the original works?

**SP:** As I translate only Indian narratives, I’ve tried my best to be faithful to the cultural details that bring out the social undercurrents. And this too, I’ve been able to do only with the help of the writers. I have used extended interpolations in the English version only where they are absolutely necessary to bring out the essence of the expressions used. For instance, in *SAMBOLI!* Lakshman describes the people at a village fair who fascinated him as a child. A literal translation of that passage would read: *There were those who played with gangethu...And there were Muslim tribes who did the kankattu*. Such a transliteration does not ensure the impact of the original even if I were to provide footnotes (and I am averse to footnotes anyway, because they distract the reader while soaking in the ambience of the story). I had to transcreate the passage elaborating the two expressions, describing in greater detail how some Hindus paraded a bull decked up as Rama and begged for alms to get him married to Sita, the cow. And how men from Muslim tribes entertained spectators by splitting granite slabs in two or writhing through small loops and went around begging for alms in the name of Allah. But how could I justify such an interpolation? I could, because Lakshman’s vision in his *athma-kathe* (autobiography) includes an eschatological dimension, a hope he mentions later that, ‘We talk to one another with open minds and

laugh with one another with open hearts'. This hope recalls the village fair of his childhood as an image of a community where people with different religious convictions but with a shared culture come together in fellowship to have fun, and also earn a living. Here, the interpolation is not an intrusion since the scaffolding is organic, not structural.

**SS:** Do you feel it is necessary for non-Dalit translators of any Dalit writing to understand the Dalit struggle before translating? To what extent do translators gain considerable understanding of the Dalit experience prior to translation?

**SP:** I wouldn't like to generalize my specific experience as a translator of Dalit stories. I have not let any preconceived idea of the Dalit struggle or Dalit experience to have a bearing on the text I'm translating, as I let the original text unfold its story in its own words.

My first attempt at translating Dalit writing was Lakshman's life-story, *SAMBOLI!*. It steered me through his shock at realising that he was not seen as a person but as a Madiga, the lowest of the outcastes. The text showed me his commitment to fight for the down-trodden as a social activist, his realistic realization that the Dalits who had benefitted from Government policies favouring them in education and jobs had begun to exploit their own fellowmen in more heinous ways than the 'outsiders' (the upper castes), and his unconditional commitment to fight for the cause not counting the cost or expecting fulfilment.

Aravind Malagatti's *The Aul and the Kumkuma* is about a Brahmin purohit who cannot earn a decent living as Brahmins no longer flock to the temple with the offerings for daily pujas. He admires a cobbler, a Madiga, who makes enough as a cobbler sitting by the wayside. And, eventually, the Brahmin takes his family to an unfamiliar town to work as a cobbler, recognizing the dignity of labour.

Janardhana Erpakatte's *Untouchable* is about a Dalit senior Government official who is invited to lunch by the Brahmin head of a village panchayat. The Brahmin official's father will not let his house and his gods be polluted by the entry of the Dalit and his retinue. The Brahmin host is at a loss and the Dalit officer saves the situation by suggesting that the meal should be served outside in the backyard where Dalits are generally served in Brahmin households. The Dalit officer rises above the situation with magnanimity when he says they should understand the old man's die-hard beliefs and respect his age. Modern Dalit writers have come far beyond the phase of hurt and protest to suggest solutions, and also to show they are like anyone else, with warts and all.

And B.T. Jahnvi's *Sexy Durga of Dhoopadahalli* spins on its head the notion that exploitation is a male prerogative with women as hapless victims.

With every narrative, I have gained, **1.** an invaluable insight into their awareness of their predicament and their fight, their disillusionment and their commitment to rise above it, and **2.** yet another way of transferring their angst through humour and irony.

**SS:** Does advocacy and/or activism have a bearing on the act of translating or does the translation process remain or is expected to remain subjective and/or neutral?

**SP:** I believe the primary commitment of a translator is to be true to the intention in the original story as it unfolds itself in the course of the narrative and not the furtherance of an agenda. Fortunately, any story gains significance not only through its language but also through the tropes that flesh out the undercurrents of meanings. Sometimes the way I saw these images interacting, helped me to interpret the texts in ways not envisaged by the authors. In collaboration with two of them, I could transcreate the titles to highlight the positive connotations in the story instead of translating them verbatim. The English version of Vaidehi's *Asprushyaru* (Untouchables) became *Vasudeva's Family* and S Diwakar's *Kraurya* (Cruelty) became *Epiphany*.

**SS:** A person who has read the translation of Dalit works need not have read the original works in their respective languages. In that case, have you felt that the translations can be regarded as independent works of literature?

**SP:** I would presume that a person reads the translation because she cannot read the work in the original language. If a reader can read both the original and the translation, they could sound like a duet! And the same can be true of any writing, not necessarily Dalit writing.

By definition, I would not regard translations as independent works of literature; they are derived from a source text to which they have to be faithful. I have found that the translation of the intention in a piece of literary writing is achieved through multiple levels of reading that lead to multiple levels of writing. The spontaneity of retelling a story is stalled by the meta-reader in the translator as she sees gaps in meaning, significance and ambience and closes them by choosing from both languages to make the third language of the specific translated text. And this third language keeps changing to meet the peculiar demands of each text. It is true that the translated versions of Dalit writing, like any other writing, do gain the stature of independent works at the hands of skilled translators. And yet we know that they are but English representations of a very local indigenous variety of experiences.

**SS:** Did translating Dalit works help you shape a part of your identity?

**SP:** I guess it helps me refurbish certain patterns; an athma-katha like Lakshman's *SAMBOLI!* can be seen as an allegory, similar to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Just that it is not a linear progress towards personal salvation. It is an account of Lakshman's efforts to redeem his self-worth by redeeming the self-worth of his people. And he plods on relentless, with the conviction that he is the voice of his people. His commitment is similar to mine. As I have explained at the outset, I was literally 'called' to be a translator and I

believe I am committed to be the ‘English voice’ of the Kannada stories I translate. I guess it has helped me shape my identity as a translator for I choose not to translate stories with an ‘agenda’. I prefer stories of literary merit that provide positive ways of looking beyond gut-wrenching situations.

**SS:** Are you familiar with the phrasing, ‘Dalit consciousness’?

**SP:** Yes, I do know the phrase in the context of a variety of literatures of marginalized people, like Women’s Writing or Black American Literature. But as a woman I have seen, in both life and literature, that women have gone beyond ‘Dalit consciousness’, and the concomitant distinctions that men maintain. Most often, women can relate to one another at a personal level even in a social relationship, like that between the mistress and her servant. Women of upper caste households forge bonds of friendship with Dalit women who may turn out to be mentors or counsellors. They interrelate as women drawing strength from each other. Vaidehi’s *Vasudeva’s Family* and *Worlds within Worlds* provide an insight into the world of women where the implications of the term, ‘Dalit consciousness’ is turned on its head!

**SS:** Do you have any upcoming translation projects?

**SP:** Yes, I do. As I told you at the outset, Mini Krishnan started me out on this journey and she is still with me asking for stories. And I am happy to be playing with the two languages to weave a suitable blend for each story I translate, knowing that I will be equipped as I carry on with my commitment.

**SS:** Thank you Ms. Susheela Punitha for that insightful interview.

## Appendix 4: Interview Transcript

[Participants: Jaydeep Sarangi and Manohar Mouli Biswas]

**Surya Simon [SS]:** Good afternoon.

**Jaydeep Sarangi [JS]:** Good afternoon.

**Manohar Mouli Biswas [MMB]:** Good afternoon.

**SS:** Thank you so much for meeting with me today. Let me start off by asking what the term ‘Dalit’ means to you both.

**JS:** The term ‘Dalit’ has taken its own transformation. In the 1950s, the term Dalit included women as well as labourer class. The definition of the term Dalit was all sweeping and all inclusive. In the 70s, it focused mainly on Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) was added later on. Dalits have their ideological leaders like Dr. Ambedkar and Phule so, SCs and OBC follow Ambedkar and Phule’s views. But, STs need not follow the same views since their situation is based on indigeneity, rather than caste. So the situation is more complex. The term ‘Dalit’ is taken from the word ‘Dalan’ which means oppressed. It was the original etymological meaning, but now the term has different dimensions of meaning and different interpretations in different times.

**MMB:** At this moment, Dalit means marginal people. If you look at it specifically through the caste phenomenon in India, then they are schedule castes. Now the term has expanded to include religious and other minorities who are suffering in the same manner. I was born into a Dalit community and for generations after generations, we have been deprived socially. My forefathers are all illiterate as they did not get any formal education. I am the first man, the first generation to receive the spirit of education. When I look back at my previous generations, I feel very sorry and wonder why my people were not getting even a

little bit of prestige in the society. Now, I am educated and feel the need to write about all the sufferings of Dalits, in various forms such as poetry, short stories, essays, and many more. I'm very much acquainted with my mother tongue and naturally, most of my writings are in my mother tongue, Bengali. I also have some friends who study and teach English literature in universities/ colleges, and they have taken the Dalit subject very kindly in their own way of thinking and they have been gracious enough to translate our works into English. I am thankful to Professor Jayadeep Sarangi who took the initiative to translate my autobiography, *Amar Bhubane Ami Benche Thaki*, to English as *Surviving in My World: Growing up Dalit in Bengal (2015)*. I came to know that my translated autobiography was included in the syllabus, including postgraduate courses in universities in India such as Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, West Bengal. I would not have received such opportunities if not for the reach and scope of translation.

**SS: That's amazing. Professor Sarangi, what was your motivation to translate Mr. Biswas' autobiography?**

**JS:** A long time ago, I was attracted to and wanted to study about the Aboriginal Australians. And then when I started working with Indian Dalits, I became familiar with Sharankumar Limbale, Bama, and many Dalit writers, especially Bengali Dalit writers such as Manohar Mouli Biswas and Kalyani Thakur. I felt that this discourse was not being explored at all and there are talented writers who could not see the limelight because of not being translated into a so-called international language. My motivation came from within me and I started translating Manohar babu<sup>37</sup> works. I first helped translate and edit his collection of poems, *The Wheel will Turn*, which got a great response and of course, an international readership. Then, Angana Dutta and me translated his autobiography, *Surviving in My World*, and while translating this text, we stumbled at different places

---

<sup>37</sup> In many parts of India, 'babu' is often used as a respectful designation such as 'sir' or 'mister'.



because the Bangla used by him is different from the Bangla used by people in Calcutta. Manohar Babu's Bangla is a regional dialect with terms that were difficult to translate. We sat with him multiple times for prolonged periods at his residence, and he was so nice and patient. We learnt many things from him. As a translator, I felt that his autobiography challenges the 'Babu English'<sup>38</sup> in Kolkata usually associated with people who write in exceptionally good English, especially if they have received education from schools and colleges where the medium of instruction is English. And then comes this man (Mr. Biswas) whose Bangla is overburdened with the flavour of the soil, flavour of the land, flavour of migration, flavour of partition and his engagement with the Dalit community. So, his text is quite different from the traditional texts. His text shows what Dalits think of Bengal, mostly coming from the Namasudra community, which is a lower caste community that was originally in Bangladesh and now also present in some parts of Bengal. This community was a major political force even before the partition of India. So, Manohar babu's text gave me another angle to look at Bengali culture, politics and social change; and this was an eye-opener for me. For me, engaging with Dalits is a commitment and it is always a movement.

**SS: How different was your experience translating Dalit narratives and non-Dalit narratives?**

**JS:** I have translated works of several non-Dalit writers of Bengal. For example, I translated the works of Subodh Sarkar from Bengali into English. But what is special about translating Dalit narratives into English is that the language used by Dalits are quite different. For example, the powerful use of the idiom is quite absent in non-Dalit texts because Dalit literature was written with a purpose and a zeal to change society. The kind

---

<sup>38</sup> During colonial times, the 'Bengali babu' and 'Babu English' were derogatory concepts used to mock British mannerisms of and English spoken by Indians.

of experience Dalit writers have is not familiar to so-called non-Dalit writers. We all know the Bengali writer and activist, Mahasweta Devi, because of her engagement with Adivasis, Dalit and marginalised communities, but she was not a Dalit. Dalit writings come from their own experiences of how they have been denied social status and how people reject them. This insider view is absent in non-Dalit texts. So I think non-Dalit texts and Dalit texts are remarkably different. A Dalit text gives us a picture of Bengal - the history, the sociology, the politics - that we don't talk of and hence, it is a hidden resource that shows the potential of our literature.

**SS: Since Dalit literature is different from mainstream literature, has it contributed to creating history or recording history?**

**JS:** Translation of autobiography is an important task of history, if you are looking into the narration of a nation. When you talk of history, you are talking about the history of the society as well as the real individuals who form the society. History travels through the person and shed lights on questions like - what was the community's condition decades ago? What were the rules and nuances of the society the author was born into? What was the prevailing condition of education then? How were the social occupations? When you are reading Manohar babu's autobiography, you are not only reading one person's history, it is the history of the society and the lived experiences of his community. So it's of course an important way to know the real history. Also, I think Dalit literature needs more genuine translators who can be committed to devoting their time to translating Dalit literature from regional languages into English and other European languages, as well as into various regional Indian languages.

**SS: Like you said, there are a lot of personal lived experiences in Dalit narratives.**

**Then, while translating Mr Biswas' autobiography and works by other Dalit writers, how much interaction did you have with the author(s)?**

**JS:** I have known Manohar babu for nearly three decades, but we took up the translation project only ten years back. Initially, we tried to get to know each other because without feeling what is going on within the author, it is difficult for a translator to translate his work because I don't think that translation is mere transcribing from one language to another language. I believe translation involves a total immersion into the author's thoughts and affect, without which one will not be able to translate the author's works properly. My engagement with Dalits for three decades has instilled a confidence in me to translate Dalit works from Bengali to English for international readers.

**SS: Mr. Biwas, did you have translation in mind when you initially wrote your works?**

**MMB:** So, I started my career in the late 60s in Nagpur, Maharashtra. At that time, Dalit communities in Nagpur initiated a movement of writing Dalit literature and naturally, I became acquainted with them because coming from West Bengal, I found similarity or rather familiarity in the suffering of Dalit people in Nagpur. We all were marginalised communities suffering the same kind of discrimination and alienation from the mainstream society. Inspired by the literary movements in Nagpur, I started to write about my experiences and express my identity, as well as highlight the experiences of my community. There was a time when I would try to suppress my identity, but some societies tried to dig out my identity despite my efforts to hide it. They would identify me saying, 'you are untouchable and you are Namasudra'. Such a mentality became my driving force to write, and if scholars who are acquainted with the English language take the initiative of translating Dalit works, then people like us who are coming from marginality will get a chance to project ourselves to the international community. Several times when I approached publishers of Bengali works, they would tell me that if they publish my works, it will not get enough buyers and hence, they are not willing to publish. So in 1994, I

helped start a trimonthly magazine called “Chaturtho Duniya”, edited by Dr. Achintya Biswas, Mondal Hembram, Shusnato Jana, and me; to provide a space for Dalit literature and culture. The magazine was published by the Bengali Dalit Sahitya Sanstha (literary society) which was formed in 1992, and I was the President of the Sanstha at that point. We started getting our books published from the Sanstha and in “Chaturtho Duniya”. Since then, we have had many scholars approach us to publish their works and translations of Dalit works. It gives me a lot of joy to see my books and other Dalit works being translated and published, because this gives us exposure and representation.

**SS: When you are speaking, I noticed that you switch between 'my' and 'our', and I can't help but think about the individual and collective consciousness. Professor Sarangi, as a translator, when you were reading Mr Biswas' works, did you notice the negotiation between the individual and collective?**

**JS:** Brilliant question. I think Dalit literature is literature of a community. Even when we talk of an autobiography, our personal life sketch becomes synonymous with the life of the community. When you talk of Bama’s *Karukku*, it's not Bama's personal tale only, it’s a tale of every individual women in that society. Similarly, when you talk about the autobiography of Manohar babu, it’s surely his personal tale. But in the autobiography, there is an instance where his family is debating whether he should be educated or not. This happened to Manohar babu, but it also happened to all Namasudra communities. These communities did not know whether they would be at all educated in life. And to think that a man who was not sure if he would be educated at all is now a writer, is inspiring. It’s the life of every person coming from Namasudra communities, who are trying to cross all hurdles in their life. When you talk about Ambedkar, you talk about the Mahar caste community he belonged to. It’s not Ambedkar alone. It’s every individual Mahar, and collectively as a community. So Dalit literature is a good departure from

traditional literature in the way it highlights the subjugation and silencing of the collective, and allowing the margin to speak. When Manohar babu speaks, the margin speaks; and when he speaks, he hits back or writes back (referring to Biswas' book *Bangla Dalit Writer Writes Back*).

**SS: Mr. Biswas, did you have a target readership in mind when writing and publishing?**

**MMB:** Yes. You see, I am very much devoted to B.R. Ambedkar's writings. I had no financial provisions from my family to help with my education but fortunately I had merit scholarships which helped me financially to pursue my education. As soon as I started working and getting my salary, I started collecting books and I have all the writings of Dr. Ambedkar at my residence. I have taken a sincere effort to understand what Dr. Ambedkar tried to expose, and that struck me and gave me the courage to raise my voice and express myself. What I have learnt from him is that it is important to tell the society about what is actually happening so that they can listen to the people from the margins. Some people say that Dalits are writing for themselves. When a Dalit goes through writings of Dalits, he will feel sympathy because he has faced similar things in his life. But I think we should also take the literature to the people who do not have the sympathy. They are the people who should listen to us and our experiences in order to bring about equality in the society. There will not be change otherwise. This has been my modus operandi.

**SS: Professor Sarangi, as a translator, did you have a target audience in mind?**

**JS:** Yes, of course. The first question is, why are you translating and to which language. Since I'm translating into English, of course, I have international readers in mind. A translator should avoid any gaps of information because you are translating not only a language but also a culture, to another language and culture. For an English readership, the regional content should be placed and codified in the English language so that it won't be

difficult for them to understand the work properly. This is definitely a challenge.

Translation of culture is very difficult. Mere literal translation may be an easier part, but translation of culture is a real challenge. If you are able to cross this, then you are qualified as a translator.

**SS: Can we delve more into that aspect of how translation is a challenge, especially when it's translating culture?**

**JS:** Most of the Dalit narratives I have been working on, have a memory of Bengal and Bangladesh, and they talk a lot about water bodies, the algae, the flora and fauna. This is part of the culturally active vocabulary in West Bengal. For example, the term 'hoglbol' generally comes from the interior part of Bangladesh of algae body, but when you try to translate that into English, you won't find an immediate equivalent of that. So you try to explain it in English words - not in one word, but in several words and phrases. I think there is always a cultural gap. You can't get into the metrics of what is being meant because those who are in the target culture has no knowledge of that locale and practices of the source culture. In Dalit writing, there are so many references to the folk culture and it's a challenge for the translator to translate that culture or transmit that culture and keep a check on how the culture travels with your translation.

**SS: I can't help but think about translation of dialogues. As a South Indian, when I read translations, I can imagine the original regional tone of the dialogues. How difficult is it to capture the tone in the translation?**

**JS:** You can't capture that suprasegmental feature and that is a limitation of translation. So for me, all translations are transcreation. We can't capture the suprasegmental features you are talking about such as tone.

**SS: Can the translated text be considered as an independent text?**

**JS:** Some say that through translation, you are sanitizing the original language but you know, the involvement of the translator with the author and the culture may give you a degree of correctness or degree of faithfulness. Translation can be said to be a faithful act of culture but of course, every translator should think that no translation is definite. There is another version of translation.

**SS: My next question is to you, Mr. Biswas. How much were you able to explore your own identity through writing?**

**MMB:** Many times we say that Dalit literature is identity literature. We have expressed our identity very vocally. There was a certain time when we suppressed our identity and we did not write anything about it. Once I explored my identity, naturally, I tried to expose it and not to suppress any part of my civic, self and community identities.

**SS: As a translator, when you were translating Mr Biswas' autobiography, did you get a sense of Dalit identity and what it entails?**

**JS:** The Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra 1970s was instrumental in shaping Dalit identity and Dalit narratives in many parts in India such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, West Bengal. They tried to translate the Marathi texts into English. Activist, writer, and co-founder of the Dalit Panther movement, Arjun Dangle, became instrumental in shaping the revolution in other parts of India because when Marathi texts were translated into English, these texts were also translated through English, into regional languages. For instance, in the early 1990s, Bengali writers translated from English into Bangla in their magazines so that Bangla Dalit writers could have a picture of what other regional Dalit writers are writing about. Through English, Dalit writings penetrated into the hearts of India. That was a mammoth contribution and it was instrumental in Dalit literary movements in different pockets other than Maharashtra.

**SS: This brings me back to the question of readership because through translation, you reach Dalits and non-Dalits. For example, when I read Dalit texts, I start reflecting on my own actions as a non-Dalit.**

**JS:** Me too. I also come from a non-Dalit background - Brahmin background. But I found Dalit writings to thrilling stories that uncover the darkness that we carry in our society.

**SS: I have a question for both of you. What does the phrase ‘Dalit consciousness’ mean to you? I’ve been coming across that phrase a lot and I think I first noticed that in the Sharankumar Limbale’s *Akkarmarshi*.**

**MMB:** Consciousness cannot come within a Dalit personality on his own unless he’s getting proper education. My community is a big community in the eastern part of Bengal with at least six or seven districts, but none of them would have risen to the occasion of fighting back or educating themselves because they don’t have the consciousness as to why they are suffering. They are not conscious about the various things that oppress them. Education has helped me and has given me the chance to read and understand.

**JS:** For me, Dalit consciousness means total living conditions, that is, consciousness from within and also where the person is culturally placed. So when we talk of Dalit consciousness, it unconsciously comes as a package, that is, your attitude, your involvement, your ideological stance. It’s also a kind of anger against the age-old practices of the society that gives you a different dimension altogether, isn’t it? So many years from *Manusmriti*, you are silencing me and that kind of protest and anger makes you involved with the collective. So if Dalit literature is about revolt, then Dalit consciousness is the consciousness of revolt, isn’t it? Dalits have had a suppressed life and suddenly there is a community to come forward with and walk together for a kind of egalitarian society. In a way, all Dalit writings are humanistic by nature, and as he (Mr Biswas) says, they are identity literature or cultural identity markers. Then, Dalit consciousness is a political



identity marker in India because political candidates are important matters for the central government as well as for the state government. So Dalit consciousness is a culturally important and a politically-loaded term with sociological engagement.

**SS: Thank you so much, Professor Sarangi and Mr. Biswas. This has been very insightful for me.**

**JS:** We congratulate you for taking up Dalit subject for your PhD work. I think people should know more about Dalits because they have been marginalized for centuries. So it's time that they are highlighted. Thank you.

**MMB:** Yes. I am proud that you are doing your PhD in Dalit literature. Thank you.

## Appendix 5: Interview Transcript

[Participant is kept anonymous]

**Surya Simon [SS]:** Good morning. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today.

**Participant [P]:** Good morning. It's my pleasure.

**SS:** I will encourage you to elaborate on the answers. But just to honour our time constraints, I may redirect the conversation. Are you okay with this?

**P:** Okay.

**SS:** What was your motivation to become a translator?

**P:** Translation has been my passion since my student days. Then it has become something of a validation to me as a translator to be able to read and understand a deep subject (Dalit). It is an important kind of writing about how the community feels about itself. My motivation to translate Dalit narratives was to convey their perceptions and experiences in an effective way. Each narrative I translated was a different experience because if one focused on the content such as society's interactions then, another offered a challenge in terms of translating the regional dialect used by the author. So, I sit with the authors for many days trying to understand the original work - straight from the horse's mouth. I would ask them to explain the words. I think the use of things like a glossary is good for the average reader who does not have any kind of familiarity with the subject or the region or the regional language. I don't want to take any chances with misinterpretation by the readers because a translator's worst nightmare is that the target text does not convey the same thing as the source text, and it goes for print. To avoid this, I have very lengthy discussions with the authors, and they are quite patient.

**SS:** So, it is important to interact with the author?

**P:** Definitely. If you just take it otherwise, then a book is a non-living entity unless you talk to the author himself/herself in person. There are so many things which are not written in the book, but which are very much a part of it, like the background or context or customs. In that way, I also a researcher. So very systematically I put together the key points and verbatim, and only then will I start the actual translation.

**SS:** It was not just the form, but also the content that was necessary to understand from the author?

**P:** Definitely content and context also. For example, one text I was working on is about a funeral ritual and the characters come alive in the context of death. In the context of such a serious matter as death, the story unfolds depicting the interplay of politics, the mutual animosities, and the mutual biases of the intra-community and intercommunity. There is a multidimensional kind of narration.

**SS:** How did you feel when you came to know of the experiences and stories of the Dalit authors?

**P:** It was really touching to me because I don't belong to that social group (Dalit communities) so their stories were amazing as well as shocking to me. I felt bad hearing about the poverty and the consequent customs and actions.

**SS:** You have mentioned providing glossaries to help the average reader. But still, how challenging was it to explain cultural codes in a language used by cultures and nations that are not familiar with the same customs and culture?

**P:** That was a challenge. Some of the footnotes or explanations or glossary is not required for an Indian reader is familiar with the culture and customs. They can easily make out what I am talking about. So, glossary and explanations were meant for a global reader, as you said, from a different culture and different nationality who have no idea of these things. So, the challenge for me to effectively convey was an important challenge, because

we use the expression 'lost in translation'. I didn't want that to happen to my work. So, I proofread my work many times, comparing it with the original to make sure I have not left out anything.

**SS:** Some narratives talk about myths from Hindu texts as well as the tone of the 'insults' used in a regional context. How difficult was it to capture those?

**P:** The language spoken by the rural folk in a geographical context and/or the cultural context is different. The language is colloquial had to be brought to English in the best way possible. When it came to insults in the texts I have translated, I don't think it was very explicit. But sometimes I had to smoothen the edges so that it doesn't come off as gross. Also, some insults can be used in a very friendly way, for example among friends, and that is common. I try to use different terminology in different context. In a way it was challenging, but it was not that difficult for me to because I belong to the same State and I'm very familiar with the language used. So, I knew the context and manner of the insults.

**SS:** Did you use any particular translation method or an approach to translate this text?

**P:** I go by my instinct. The source text has a feel. I'm comfortable to get under the skin of the characters - how he/she thinks, and thereby understand the feel of the text. Even silence can be very meaningful. The pauses can be very meaningful. Sometimes they don't have the answer, and sometimes they do but due to social restrictions, they stay silent. For example, a lady character is unable to respond, even if she has the answers, because she is forced to accept what is told to her. I can relate to somethings, for instance, I can feel the pulse of any person who has received the love of mother and grandmother, and in that way I can relate with the relationship of the authors and their mothers/ grandmothers.

**SS:** How challenging was it to translate autobiographies since they are the personal experiences of the authors? Did you have to step into the shoes of the authors to write it? Were you able to be objective or neutral?

**P:** It is neutral, but I must say, frankly, somewhere you must get into the character to understand what the author is saying. You need to imbibe a bit of that because first person narratives are kind of challenging. You can translate and come up with something which could be distant from what the author has said. The author is on the scene and he is the person narrating it, so how he felt is important to me. There is limit to which he can talk and explain but what he felt - it could be a humiliation by the society or a relative or the social structure - how he feels is more important to me. I try to convey that as effectively as possible.

**SS:** If you don't mind me asking you, do you have a religious affiliation, and do you practice any religion?

**P:** I am a practicing Hindu, but not an Orthodox one, as I don't visit temples every day or practice the weekly rituals stringently. But I visit temples on specific occasions, and I love the divine vibrations in temples. I have stood in Buddhist temples, and I feel the fragrance of the incense and the flowers creates a connection between us and God.

**SS:** Okay, and do you have a caste identity?

**P:** Yes. I am a Brahmin.

**SS:** Did your identity/ practices clash with anything that was being mentioned in the texts? Did you have to detach yourself from your everyday life to translate Dalit texts?

**P:** No. A good translator should never let his own caste identity overshadow the work he is translating. In a way, it is an attachment with detachment because it could be a contributing factor to the quality of work. I may make a very general statement here which applies to the whole world. Most of the people who are otherwise capable are held back by their identities. We must come out of the shackles at some point. It took me many years through meditation and stuff like that. You must liberate yourself. We are caught in a cage which we ourselves built unless we must get out of the cage.

**SS:** In the Dalit texts you have translated, were you familiar with the rituals and customs mentioned?

**P:** Not exactly because in a country like India, there are so many castes and they are all important. I can understand some rituals, but they are so diverse, and everybody cannot be familiar with all of them. The strong point is that you can understand and make sense out of it and this helps in the translation.

**SS:** How much were you able to imbibe the Dalit struggle or Dalit experience to produce the tone/effect of the original text?

**P:** Most of the time, the translator should do what we call 'parkayapravesh' which is the soul entering into another body. In simple terms, place yourself in the author's situation or step into his shoes. It's a kind of simulation to understand what the author feels. For example, what is perceived as a humiliation for one person is not the same for another.

**SS:** Do you see the Dalit texts you have translated as collective texts that reflect the Dalit community's problems, or do you see it as an individual's story?

**P:** The strength of the works I have translated lies in its collective perception. It is very natural that the collective perception enters or seeps into the individual perception because somebody else from the same social group would have undergone similar things. It is a two-way process - we draw from the collective and we give something back to that. One thing is one person cannot undergo all the experiences. It also includes something that you hear or something that you see or something that you read. It is not possible to experience everything. The bottom line is that this process of an individual and a collective perception is a natural process. It is continuous two-way process.

**SS:** When I read Dalit texts, I see a lot of activism. Do you have to believe in the same activism or advocacy to translate Dalit texts?

**P:** No because I'm not a stakeholder. I don't gain anything by activism and I'm not a part of the game. I'm only a spectator. I don't have anything to say. But I have done a genuine objective and professional translation. I have told you before that we have to unburden ourselves of the shackles and liberate ourselves. I'm lucky that I could do it.

**SS:** Who is your imagined readership when you were translating this?

**P:** An educated, sensible, and sensitive reader which could be national or international, anyone. That's why I said I don't have any shackles. We talk about the problem of farmers and all the issues in India, but I also think beyond the Indian context and look at the problems of the Tibetan or Chinese or Vietnamese or Burmese farmer. They all become characters in my understanding, and I should be able to feel the pulse of the person or the farmer in those countries because they also face famine and other issues. I am able to think beyond the Indian context to a global level. In the same way, a good-hearted person can understand the feelings of the Dalit community - whatever they have undergone. You don't have to be a part of it to understand it.

**SS:** As a non-Dalit, some texts made me reflect and I couldn't help but think critically about whether I knowingly/unknowingly discriminated or became blind to their suffering and struggle. Do you think Dalit texts motivate non-Dalits reflect on their actions?

**P:** I must say that I have played a positive role in conveying all these things to the wider readership and that itself is a good work done by me. I'm not being very idealistic but texts that would have been available only in the original language to regional readers are now available to anybody in the world who can read and understand English. In that way, I think that way I have done my bit. Also, anybody from any other country with a similar social group where similar things happen can relate to it.

**SS:** When you were translating into English, did you have to change certain verbs, adjectives, or certain examples like, for example, idiom or a proverb that could be used in common enough?

**P:** No. I have not made any substantial kind of correction. A translator is not expected to take the liberty of changing anything. And if at all, I needed a little bit of a correction or an adjustment here and there, I would discuss with the author and take his concurrence. For every Indian proverb, you need not get the English equivalent. So, such things have to be adopted, I won't say modification, but adopted to make sense. See, an author has a pride and a translator has a pride. It is not in conflict. The translator has a pride that he has conveyed the meaning properly into the language.

**SS:** I haven't read the original regional texts but only the translations. Many readers will only read the translations. So, is there a pride in seeing the translated texts standing on their own?

**P:** Definitely. The very fact that you have read it possibly a few times means that you are happy with it. If there were loose ends, then you will not take the trouble to study translated texts for your doctoral thesis. This means that I have conveyed the original text well. I am not saying that I did a wonderful job, but I've done a reasonably good job. The translated version should also sound like an independent version because many people would not have read the original and those who have read the original may not have read the English version. There are very few people who have read texts, both the original language and in English.

**SS:** What is the goal there then in that translation? Is it to bring out an experience or is it a literary sensibility?

**P:** I told you no one must be able to communicate everything as much as possible. You don't bring the words into English. You bring the feelings, you bring the pain, the



humiliation the happiness. Happiness is again a relative term. You can't do verbatim translation as it's not enough. And you can't do translation half-heartedly. I always look for experiences and challenges. I am exploring myself.

**SS:** That's very interesting because then after the publication of one text, it doesn't end there.

**P:** No, no. I look for the next project - more challenging.

**SS:** I've come across the term 'Dalit consciousness'. Does this these mean anything to you?

**P:** My well-meaning observation and solution would be not to get trapped in one particular ideology. Sooner you become a part of the mainstream, sooner you are the mainstream, you are in the mainstream - like anybody else, without these 'isms'. You don't have to restrict yourself to a particular thing. We should try to move on.

**SS:** Absolutely. Then what if when even you, when you want to move on, when you want to change things, sometimes you society people constantly remind you or tell, you know, you can't do that. How does that work when there is a disparity when you want to move on, but then you can't move on due to certain socio economic or political barriers?

**P:** Who has prevented anybody from moving on? We ourselves are discriminating. We are otherwise intelligent, we are otherwise capable, then why don't we that to ourselves and move on. Firstly, others hurt us and secondly, we hurt ourselves. I want everybody to be a free bird. Nobody is saying that you are less. You introduce somebody to me, and we decide to coffee together, do you think I am worried about his caste? It is not one person who can shed the burden, but both the people should shed the baggage.

**SS:** So, mutual understanding and respect is necessary?

**P:** Yes. On record I am telling you that treat everybody with their due respect as a fellow human being. That's enough for me. I don't need any branding for myself or for them. Be

a human being, that's it. Human beings need only two things - one is love and the other is respect. Honestly, I don't know the caste of half of my friends, and I don't care. I would have cared if I were to marry into their family or to give a girl from our family to their family, in that case we'll ask, because I don't control the society. I am only a minuscule part of the society. Otherwise, why would I worry? I treat everybody as a fellow human being and that is enough for me. I am not discriminated. I'm not going to discriminate anybody also. A human being is a human being. I have feelings and you also have feelings.

**SS:** Before, we started recording you mentioned the sentence, 'you look at divergence as you also look at points of convergence. I really like that phrase and the concept.

**P:** Thank you. I don't look at you as something very different from me. You could be another image of myself. Gender, age, country doesn't count. You are similar to me because we are Homo sapiens. You are a human being - sensible, sensitive human being. That's enough for me.

**SS:** Is there anything you would like to add as we wrap up?

**P:** I want to do some good work and very good translation. This is an experience, so I am looking forward to more of such work. I will update you in case of that. Also, you covered a lot of ground. And the best part is that you give me space to go a little bit here and there. That is like taking a child for a walk. You don't expect to walk like a soldier by your side. Children are inquisitive. They go here and there. You didn't allow me to go away but gave me good enough space to express myself. So, I should thank you specifically for that and for the understanding.

**SS:** Thank you very much for this interview.