

Caste Oppression, Dalit Consciousness and Protest in Joseph Macwan's *The Stepchild*

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Abstract: Dalits have been encountering social, economic, cultural, educational and political oppressions right from the inception of caste system, which was roughly about 500 B.C. Designation of Dalits as defiled or polluted people by *Shastras* and *Smritis* of Hinduism has been enshrouding Dalits with the social stigma of untouchability and has been harbouring contempt on them. These in turn have been oppressing Dalits even after untouchability had been outlawed in the Constitution of India. Oppression of Dalits takes the form of atrocities in India. Dalit consciousness derives its energy from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's world-view and philosophy. Dalit consciousness is essentially a consciousness of revolt, revolution and change. Protest is the awareness that arises when man confronts an unjust and inhuman situation, and decides to get rid of it by way of raising his voice against it and acting to remove it. The basic ingredients of protest that naturally comes into conflict with the establishment are a consciousness regarding fundamental rights, a tendency to struggle, and a sense of independence and liberty. The paper endeavours to find how Dalits are oppressed, their consciousness is aroused and they protest in Joseph Macwan's *The Stepchild*.

Index Terms – Dalit Literature, Dalit Consciousness, Protest, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Joseph Macwan, *The Stepchild*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient time, caste has been playing a crucial role in shaping the destiny of millions of people in India. It especially affects those who are located at the bottom of the caste-ladder as they are forced to live a life of deprivation and disgrace thrust upon them by the Brahmanical Indian society. Traditional Brahmanical literature used two terms- *varna* and *jati* to describe the Hindu system of social stratification. According to Professor Uma Chakravarti, the term *varna* originally referred to the four divisions of Hindu society known as *Brahmana*, *Kshatriya*, *Vaisya* and *Sudra*. It implies a status-order system.

Later, a fifth *varna* that consists of the 'untouchables' was added to the *varna* division prevalent in Hindu society. They are the worst hit by the system. They were called as untouchables, depressed classes, *Harijans* by others. These groups christened themselves with the name 'Dalit,' which means 'broken' or 'crushed' that reminds them of their status in Indian society. *Jati*, as Chakravarti defined, refers to "an endogamous unit within which one must marry; members of a *jati* are members of a descent group, traditionally assigned to a specific occupation" (Charavarti 9). In the present social context, *jati* provides the structure for comprehending the hierarchical pattern of a specific region. Explaining these divisions Chakravarti says:

Broadly there are three major divisions: the upper castes which may comprise of the *brahmanas*, *rajputs*, *banias* and other castes such as the *kayasthas* in northern and eastern India; the middle castes such as the *jats*, *yadavs*, *kurmis* and other castes which could be dominant, but could also be part of the 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs) as these backward castes are called officially, especially with reference to indicators of social status but who are not polluting; and the low castes who are at the bottom of the hierarchy and whose touch was often regarded as polluting. There is great regional variation in the placement of castes/*jatis* within a framework of hierarchy. (Chakravarti 9-10)

A definition of caste system would therefore refer to a system that "...comprises a series of hereditary groups or *jatis* characterized by hierarchy or gradations according to ritual status" (Chakravarti 10). Nevertheless, it is clearly understood that the notion of inequality is deeply entrenched in the very basis of Hindu society and caste which is separate from class, though not completely unrelated to it (Chakravarti 10) is one major social category through which this disparity is disseminated. The notion of the 'pure' high and the 'impure' low which influences diverse aspects of our lives ranging from marriage to national politics has its root deeply planted in the customs and rituals instituted by Vedic Aryans.

II. DALIT LITERATURE

The literary development which is called as Dalit literature in India emerged in the 1960s. The principal motive of Dalit literature is the liberty of Dalits in India. The aim of Dalit literature is to protest against the established system which is based on inequality and discloses the maliciousness and duplicity of caste system. Dalit literature is based on experience rather than assumption. Therefore, the legitimacy and vivacity is the indispensable attribute of Dalit literature.

Indian Dalit Writing is a post-independence literary trend. However, it does not mean that there was no Dalit writing before independence. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century Dalits began writing and publishing their anguishes, adversities and inhuman treatment encountered by them, through booklets and small brochures. There were some significant Dalit writers in the pre-Ambedkar period. Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, who fought arduously to destroy the caste system, is indisputably called the first writer in the Dalit literary convention. Alok Mukherjee, “characterizes Dalit literature as ‘purposive,’ and describes its purpose variously as ‘revolutionary,’ ‘transformational’ and ‘liberatory’” (“Intro.” to Limbale 14). A Dalit writer has no choice but to be an avant-garde. He has to be a writer and activist in the same breath. Limbale explains the social responsibility of a Dalit writer thus: “Dalit writers write out of social responsibility. Their writing expresses the emotion and commitment of an activist. That society may change and understand its problems - their writing articulates this impatience with intensity. They regard their literature to be a movement” (“Intro.” to Limbale 33). Mukherjee invokes an old phrase “literature of commitment” (Limbale 14) to underline the activist ideology of this literature. According to Arjun Dangle, “Dalit literature is not simply literature. It is associated with a movement to bring about change” (Dangle 266). It in the words of Arun Prabha Mukherjee’s has a “transformative power” (qtd. in Valmiki, *Joothan* x).

Limbale defines Dalit literature as “that literature which artistically portrays the sorrows, tribulations, slavery, degradation, ridicule and poverty endured by Dalits. This literature is but a lofty image of grief” (Limbale, 2004, 30). There is a blatant lack of humour in Dalit writings; hardly does a Dalit writer break into non-serious laughter. Locked as he is in the rigid social hierarchies, he is always a self in anger. Kancha Illaiah, an educated OBC Dalit ideologue admits of his being perennially angry; “I was born, brought up and have struggled through a viciously hierarchical society. Naturally I carry the pain, the anger and the prejudice that the Indian system has injected into me” (62). Dalit writings avoid elevated other-worldly metaphysical musings; rather they concentrate on the material and political aspects of life. Consequently even Buddha emerges more as social reformer or political philosopher than as a divine being seeking escape from life.

III. JOSEPH MACWAN’S *THE STEPCHILD*

Joseph Macwan’s *Angaliyat* (1986), which is conferred with the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1988, is the first novel in Gujarati written by a Dalit about the *Vankars*, a Dalit weaving caste, many of whom converted to Christianity like Macwan himself to escape caste oppression by the upper castes. *Angaliyat* proves to be the first authentic voice of the Dalits in Gujarat. It was translated into English as *The Stepchild* in 2004 by Rita Kothari. It is rightly called “a corner-stone of Gujarati literature” as noted by Hiral Macwan (Macwan 5).

The Stepchild is set in rustic Gujarat of the 1930s and allures to its own aesthetics and dogmatic ideology. The word ‘*Angaliyat*’ (step-child) equates the Dalits to the stepchild, fated to remain on the periphery of the stepfather’s family, as it clasps its mother’s finger (*angali*) while she crosses the threshold of new home. Correspondingly, the Dalits are also looked upon as outsiders in the mainstream society. Set in Charotar of pre-independence time, it describes the political setting before *Swaraj* (self-rule). It is a story about three communities – *Vankar*, *Patel* and *Thakore*, *Patels* being the dominating and affluent caste and *Thakore* being a majoritarian caste, whose social standing in the caste hierarchy is between, *Patels* and *Vankars*. Shanta Gokhale reviews the book as follows:

It is a gripping tale of love, heroism, humiliation, revenge and death. It is a vividly coloured picture of the lives of two neighbouring villages in the Charotar district of central Gujarat. It is a document of the politics of the pre- and post-Independence years, as seen from the perspective of the downtrodden; and finally, it is an account of the struggle of one Dalit community against its upper-caste oppressors, spurred on by two opposing ideologies, the Gandhian and the Ambedkarite. (Gokhale, *The Hindu*)

The novel portrays the community of Dalit weavers oppressed by the more powerful and affluent castes-Hindus, the *Patels*. It underlines caste oppression of Dalits and animosity between the two communities. The *Patels* are quite unhappy with the British rule because it resolves everything not according to *Manushastra* but through common law. The British law does not accommodate the supremacy of the *Patels*. The *Patels* await eagerly for *Swaraj* (self-rule) so that they can hold the reins of the nation.

The story moves in three villages –Shilapar, Ratnapar and Keradiya and exhibits the exploitation of Dalits by the *Patels* on different levels – social, economic and political. The *Vankars* are primarily engaged in weaving and *Thakors* of the village work as farmers under the *Patels*. Although the population of the *Patels* is quite lesser than that of *Thakors*, the former rules over the latter. *Patels* also take advantage of *Thakors* working under them. They are paid fewer wages for their labour. The labourers would attract harsher punishment if they complained.

IV. CASTE OPPRESSION ENCOUNTERED BY DALITS

Dalits have been encountering social, economic, cultural, educational and political oppressions right from the inception of caste system, which was roughly about 500 B.C. Designation of Dalits as defiled or polluted people by *Shastras* and *Smritis* of Hinduism has been enshrouding Dalits with the social stigma of untouchability and has been harbouring contempt on them. These in turn have been oppressing Dalits even after untouchability had been outlawed in the *Constitution of India*.

Oppression of Dalits takes the form of atrocities in India. *The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989* has listed a series of crimes against Dalits as atrocities. They are: forcing Dalits to eat obnoxious substances, dumping excreta or carcasses in Dalit premises, assaulting a Dalit women with intent to dishonour or outrage her modesty, using a position of dominance to sexually exploit a Dalit woman, parading Dalits naked or with painted face or body, forcing Dalits to do forced or bonded labour, dispossessing Dalits of their land and forcing Dalits from their homes, preventing Dalits from voting, corrupting or fouling a Dalit water source, publicly humiliating Dalits, using fire or explosives to damage Dalit property, and fabricating evidence in order to convict innocent Dalits. Murder of Dalits does not come under the purview of this act. It is treated as homicide.

Despite this act, the present scenario of Dalits in India is quite appalling. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), India has published its latest report in 2018, which has highlighted the crimes against Dalits recorded at the police stations across India. The report states that:

- 9 Dalit women are harassed in India every day.
- 7 Dalit women are raped in India every day.
- 3 Dalits are grievously attacked in India every day.
- 3 Dalits are kidnapped or abducted in India every day.
- 3 Dalits are murdered in India every day.
- 5 riots against Dalits are orchestrated in India every day.

This statistics show the nature of Indian society and the horrendous position of Dalits in India.

4.1. CASTE OPPRESSION ON DALITS IN MACWAN'S *THE STEPCCHILD*

The oppressions faced by Dalits in the novel *The Stepchild* by Joseph Macwan range from mild verbal assault to horrid extermination. The novel begins with Teeho (Teeharam) and Valji, the two Dalits among many others going to an auction sale in a nearby village to sell their clothes. On their way, they meet a *Thakor* who tells them about the wicked nature of the *Patels* and then asks them to unburden themselves by putting their bundles on his cart. But he instructs Teeho and Valji to walk behind. The *Thakor* does not want his cart or his person to be defiled by the Dalits mere touch. Caste-Hindus in India observe untouchability against Dalits. They consider Dalits unfit to be touched because they believe that Dalits are a polluted lot and a mere touch would also pollute them for which they have to observe penances to become pure again. Macwan observes, "That was a hard luck. A cart can be loaded with goods, but the manufacturer of the goods cannot be accommodated in the cart; or else it is called untouchability. People talk as if their hearts are one, but they can't be one in body" (Macwan 11).

Dalits are denied assistance of any sort even in the times of crisis. Recalling the days of flood narrated by Teeho's father, Teeho tells Valji that flood had taken a heavy toll of their entire locality. But caste-Hindus did not provide medicines at the least. Ranchhod Dhelavala, a caste-Hindu, sold grains, medicines and clothes to others. But when the *Vankars* went to request them, apart from denying them, they were told to clean the village first. They had to live in mud for a fortnight, pull out dead animals and eat the remains. The tin-sheets brought by *Vankars* to cover the thatched roofs were appropriated by the *Thakors*.

While on business, Teeho observes caste-Hindu men outraging the modesty of Methi, a *Vankar* girl. The *Patel* boy Nanji notices Methi approaching with a pot of water on her head. He aims a stone at the pot, wetting her completely. When she raises her voice in protest, one of the men calls her slut. "Their eyes roved over the woman's nipples visible through her wet blouse. Flustered under their lascivious gaze she re-adjusted her wet pallav across her chest" (Macwan 15, 16). Dhoolsingh Thakor while advising Teeha, who pick up a fight to protect the dignity of Methi says, "Look Teeha, this happens every day and it will go on. You shouldn't have unnecessarily picked a fight" (Macwan 17). This shows that harassing Dalit women has been one of the favourite time-pass of caste-Hindu youths.

Almost all Dalits in villages have been living in fear of caste-Hindus. Dalits like Teeha and Valji are exceptions. The penal code of caste system is oppressive against Dalits, though it was outlawed by the Government of India. It has been terrorizing Dalits right from the inception of caste system in the Indian sub-continent. Caste-Hindus easily get away using their money and influence. Moreover, most of the personnel of law enforcing agencies are caste-Hindus and though they belong to different castes, there has been mutual understanding and support between the caste-Hindus of different castes. What disturbs Teeho is that although he saved a girl of his own caste, nobody comes out of the house to laud him. When he calls a few men of the locality, their daughters or wives lie that they are not at home. Macwan comments, "Nobody wanted to come in Patidar's [Patel's] eye... Nobody could think of going against them, and how can they? Patels had money. They had influences. Police was in their hand" (Macwan 21).

Patels set fire to the fields and cut down the trees of Dalits. Caste-Hindus destroy the source of livelihood of Dalits and ransack their properties. Caste-Hindus believe that Dalits should always be dependent on them for their livelihood. They consider that Dalits' economic independence would give them the audacity to rebel against them. They ask the village-head to expel Teeho from his village. But the village-head Dharamshi Thakor denies. For that they say, "You're forgetting Thakor. You're on the position of power till the British are there. Once Swaraj comes you have to oblige us" (Macwan 38). It is quite attention-grabbing to discover Dalits see British as their ally. It is so because the British had brought everyone under their rule under the purview of common penal code irrespective of caste.

Dalits are entirely dependent on caste-Hindus, economically. Most of the Dalits do not possess farmland in India and those who possess small tracts of land are dependent on caste-Hindus for cultivation. The loss incurred by Dalits in cultivation is indeed a big loss, which would direct them to the caste-Hindus to avail loan from them by pledging their land or to earn money by doing odd jobs in order to cultivate in the next season. Enmity with them simply means no loan or no odd jobs.

After the way the fields were damaged, there was still the monsoon. The seeds for bajri and pulses had to be got from the Patels. The Patels used to employ the low-castes for the odd seasonal jobs and money thus earned came in handy; this too stopped after Teeha's adventure. (Macwan 37)

The repercussion on Dalits due to their enmity with the caste-Hindus not only stops with economic oppression rather it extends to other realms. The houses in the entire Dalit locality would be set on fire. Fearing this, Dalits have been leading a cautious life, which Moti, Methi's brother describes metaphorically: ". . . one can't live in water and risk enmity with the crocodile" (Macwan 19). Because of this, Teeho was not appreciated by Dalits for saving the damsel in distress. Dalits of Shilapaar are afraid of the threat uttered by the Patidars. Their fear is well-highlighted by the author: "If anyone offered shelter to

Teeha after his fight with the upper castes, they would set the entire mohalla [settlement] on fire. Afraid of this, no one dared even to greet Teeha although he had rescued a young girl of the community from disgrace” (Macwan 18).

Caste-Hindus have been in the habit of appropriating the wares sold by Dalits in the pretext of credit purchase and not repaying the price of the wares brought on credit. Teeha is quite aware of this tactics employed by the caste-Hindus. Therefore he refuses to give two bales of cloth on credit to the *mukhi* [leader], Dhelavala’s nephew. Dhelavala has become the minister of the state and his nephew the *sarpanch* [village head]. Deeming the refusal as an insult to his caste-honour, the *mukhi* attacks Teeha but gets defeated by Teeha. On seeing this, *mukhi’s* men and policemen attack Teeha and leave him half-dead. “Eight to ten young men came crashing down upon Teeha. With sticks and punches, they left Teeha half-dead. Two policemen were seated in the square. They dragged Teeha there and beat the remaining life out of his body and threw the bloodied body outside” (Macwan 226). The police machinery in India is dominated by caste-Hindus, who has strong contempt for Dalits. A 2006 study by International Dalit Solidarity Network, Denmark on untouchability in rural India covering 565 villages in 11 states revealed that in 27.6% villages taken for the study, policemen have been preventing Dalits from entering the police station (*Dalits of India*, <www.idsn.org>).

When Teeha is beaten to death by the *Patels* and policemen, trust-run hospitals deny treat to him. The unconscious Teeha is taken to different hospitals for treatment, but nobody admits him. The Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) is out rightly denies to file a complaint. The Master requests the DSP to help Teeha on humanitarian ground. To their shock, the DSP retorts, “We have an order all the way from Mumbai. He is a troublesome fellow and keeps sticking his neck out. Thank your stars that the mukhi has not lodged a complaint against him for assault. Go away” (Macwan 227-8)! Teeha dies a pathetic death orchestrated by the caste-Hindus in power. The state by joining forces with the caste-Hindus eliminated Teeha as a warning to other Dalits.

V. AROUSAL OF DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS

Dalit consciousness springs forth from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s world-view and philosophy. Dalit consciousness is essentially a consciousness of revolt, rebellion and change. It is a state of cognition of a Dalit that oppressions, rapes, murders, massacres, harassments, injustices, discriminations, contempt, insults, abuses, alienation, economic disabilities, cultural rejection, denial of education and opportunities, invisibility in history, press and media and political disadvantages confronted by Dalits in the past and in the present are due to the broken or the crushed state thrust on them by Brahmanism. Along with it comes, the Dalit’s search for the ways and means to destroy Brahmanism to reclaim dignity. The Dalit eventually turns into a disbeliever of Hinduism and an agnostic of the deities of the Hindu pantheon. To the Dalit, who is overcome with Dalit consciousness, self-respect is of paramount importance. Hitherto, the self-respect of the Dalit which had been being allowed to assaults, henceforth the Dalit will never ever allow such assaults. Rather, the Dalit will be ready to retaliate at the slightest provocation. The Dalit after equipping with sufficient information on Brahminism will foray into the hostile territory to expose its hypocrisy. Aroused with Dalit consciousness, it becomes inevitable for the Dalit to declare war on Hinduism. Laura R. Brueck points out:

The term Dalit consciousness has significantly influenced the lives of millions of Dalits by awakening them and inspiring them for self-realization of their identity as a human being beyond caste and creed, though it is a complex term to be described. It is a general perception that Dalit consciousness is the awareness that makes Dalit realize what they actually are and what they are said to be. Various Dalit writers, scholars and critics have defined Dalit consciousness differently some call it ‘a revolutionary mentality’ whereas some others call it, deconstructive consciousness. (Brueck 51)

To Valmiki, “Dalit consciousness is deeply concerned with the question, ‘Who am I? What is my identity?’ The strength of character of Dalit authors comes from these questions” (Valmiki 28-29). He states that ‘Dalit consciousness’ is what gives Dalit literature its unique power. He opines that this character of Dalit literature sets it apart from ‘traditional’ literature. Any literary enterprise by Dalits devoid of Dalit consciousness should not be accepted as Dalit literature. At the same time, a literary activity by any intellectual, who has internalized the entire corpus of Dalit ideology, sworn allegiance to Dalit cause and authentic in his narrative of Dalits should be accepted as Dalit literature as Jothirao Phule’s writings are accepted as Dalit literature. Dalit consciousness serves as the acid test to determine a literary enterprise’s recognition as Dalit literature.

5.1. AROUSAL OF DALIT CONSCIOUSNESS IN MACWAN’S *THE STEPCHILD*

Joseph Macwan has vividly etched instances in his novel *The Stepchild*, which arouse Dalit consciousness in Dalits. It inspires Dalits to protest against the oppressions encountered by them from the hands of caste-Hindus. Teeha is a character who is seen bubbling with Dalit consciousness throughout the novel. He is hardly 23 years old. His perennial anger against caste system and caste oppressions has been keeping him constantly at boiling point. But on the contrary, Methi’s brother, Moti endures the oppressions. He is of notion that Dalits are a helpless lot and it is beyond their reach and capacity to fight against their oppressors. He, instead of defending his sister’s modesty and dignity by expressing his protest, speaks of arranging her *aanu* [the ceremony of uniting a girl with her husband, who got married in their childhood but had been living in their respective homes]. Moti expresses his view of prudence that one cannot live in water and risk enmity with crocodiles. But Teeha indefatigably says, “To hell with water and crocodiles... people like us either become extinct or we suck up all their water itself... the British sun is still warm. Once Independence arrives, our days will be numbered” (Macwan 23). There are some Dalits who passively give in to the customs set by the Patels and silently follow the dictates of caste-Hindus. But there are Dalits like Teeha, Valji, Kanku, Methi and others who are overcome with Dalit consciousness and resist the injustices. Lack of Dalit consciousness in Dalits becomes the strength for caste-Hindus like Dehlavala. He says to his nephew, “...they are not able to unite for their own benefit... The day they become aware, the sun will set on us” (Macwan 115).

Master tries to arouse the consciousness in Dalits to resist the oppressions. He has a photograph of Dr. Ambedkar on his table, which serves him a source of inspiration. He constantly discusses the battles fought by Dr. Ambedkar to reclaim the dignity

of Dalits. Valji inspired by the ideas infused in him by the Master tries to rouse Dalit consciousness in his fellow Dalits as follows:

Master rightly says that we are not humans, we're mere cadavers. Even when thorns prick us, we rub dust on ourselves and keep walking. Don't we ever feel hurt? But if we have to fight among ourselves, then we can be more warrior-like than even the Rajputs! . . . But if we have to confront them, we are like scared kittens! (Macwan 42, 43)

Like Dr. Ambedkar, Dalits in *The Stepchild* are cynical about the *Swaraj*. They find political freedom without social freedom is quite dangerous. To them, Indian society is immature to rule themselves. Unless the pernicious notion of caste is removed from the minds of the caste-Hindus, *swaraj* cannot achieve its ideal. Bhavankaka says:

Don't blame the Swaraj Master! Blame the human heart. Till Ram inhabits their human heart, Ramrajya will be a distant dream. And I feel the death of a single Valji or a single Teeha cannot bring that Rajya. Many more Valjis and Teehas will have to die like this. Our eyes will not open otherwise. (Macwan 263)

VI. PROTESTATION OF DALITS

Protest is the awareness that arises when man confronts an unjust and inhuman situation, and decides to get rid of it by way of raising his voice against it and acting to remove it. According to Douglas O. Willium, "Protest is not ideological in its orientation, but is, essentially activist" (Willium 9). The basic ingredients of protest that naturally comes into conflict with the establishment are a consciousness regarding fundamental rights, a tendency to struggle, and a sense of independence and liberty. Protest is, thus, primarily the result of intense human consciousness, which involves values. It is both a manifestation of human concern and an endeavor to add meaning to human existence by strengthening the concepts of social justice, equality, and liberty. Protest has the quality of identifying itself with the downtrodden and the oppressed.

Protest in literature is a kind of evolution. It is a course of change and the need for reform. Dalit literature is a literature of protest. And a Dalit writer is one who writes with the experience of his community, the pain of his past burdens subverting the history, revitalizing the denigrated spheres of language and creating an alternate vision of the future. Raising the consciousness of the Dalits, and recovering their self-respect and challenging the traditional Hindu values are the Dalit writers' expressed goals.

Though Dalit writings seem to be revolutionary its central concern is promoting equality, freedom and justice. Dalit protests can be perceived in two ways: first, as an ideological effort to counter the hegemony of the caste-Hindus, often led by *Brahmanas*, who continue to wield the political control, reinforce economic domination and exercise cultural hegemony over the original inhabitants through the caste system. In this process Dalits rebelled against the exploitative character of Hinduism and the institution of caste and expressed their ideological protest through literature, in the form of poems, dramas and novels. Second is their refusal to perform traditional duties. The disobedience assumed two forms, one an organized planned and overt protest and the other an unplanned, unorganized and covert protest.

6.1. PROTESTATION OF DALITS IN MACWAN'S *THE STEPCHILD*

Dalits, whose Dalit consciousness is raised invariably, protest in the face of oppression. In *The Stepchild*, there are a few protesting Dalits and Teeho is one such. With anger, Teeho dashes to champion Methi, when he observes her modesty and her dignity being assaulted by the caste-Hindu boys. Teeho challenges and fights with them. Badly injured, one of the boys addresses Teeho with the most offensive Charotari term *dhedh* (untouchable) and *pargami* (outsider) and wants to register a police complaint against him. In the challenges and counter-challenges that follow, Teeho humiliates the man so thoroughly that he swears revenge. He responds that he himself will complain as he trusts the British justice. For *swaraj* [self-rule] will bring more discrimination between the two castes. Surprisingly, the wronged Dalits see the British in India as a boon. They find them impartial, free from the prejudice of caste and evils of corruption. Even more astonishing is the fact that despite the presence of some Gandhian elders in the *Vankar* community, they are afraid of *Ramrajya* [Hindu government] that the Congress-led independent India will bring. For it will elevate higher caste to the national office and announce further repression for them. The evidences are seen later in the novel when the caste-Hindus pressurize Dalits by intimidating them to live under their feet after *swaraj*. Teeho worries, "Swaraj is to come and the condition of sisters and daughters is pitiable! Don't you have any regard for our women?" (Macwan, 20)

When Teeho, Valji, Mukhi and Methi file complain against the caste-Hindus, the *Patels* try to take Methi in confidence by offering her money. But she rejects strongly. A Gandhian leader from the Congress party comes to give judgment and asks the *Patel* residents of Shilapar village to pay the damage to the afflicted. This is for the first time in the history of the *Patidars* that they had to bow down to the Dalits.

The widows of the *Vankar* community marry their brother-in-law in defiance of the upper-caste norms and also for their protection from the sarcasm of the community folk. This is the reason that Kanku, Valji's wife marries his younger brother Danji after his death. Widow remarriage during the British rule is a valorous protest by Dalits against caste-Hindus.

Valji loses his life in saving Methi when she is kidnapped by the caste-Hindus. Valji's murderers are caught by the police and beaten harshly in the presence of the *Vankars*. Valji's wife Kanku honors him by calling him *joddha* (warrior). Mourning the death of Valji and determined to take revenge, Dalits makes an armed attack on the *Patels* of Ratnapar village. The caste-Hindus get frightened. A strong revolt breaks out. In the political assembly held by the Thakors it was declared that because Dehlavala is supporting the Congress in the movement of *Swaraj*, he is being conspired against by the *Vankars* under the guidance of the British government. In the second speech it was said, "The untouchables are revolting guided by the priests" (Macwan 115). One can find that *Thakores* have joined hands with *Patels*.

An assembly to mourn Valji's death is arranged. His photo is kept beside Ambedkar's to pay tribute. But community people remain unconcerned as on the same day *Patidars* have also called a congregation. They cannot raise their voice against caste-Hindus nor can they participate in their own gathering. Bhavankaka advises, "Learn to have courage like Valji in life. You tolerated the wrong a lot. Now learn to fight" (Macwan 119).

Towards the end when Dehvalava inaugurates the first school in Ratnapar village he announces that the one who pays a donation of over Rs. 5,000/- to the school will have his name inscribed on the marble plaque. Goka, Methi's son and the adopted son of Teeha steps forward and offers Rs. 7,001/- "in the name of Teesabhai Gopalbhai Parmal" (Macwan 270). Inscribing the name on the plaque is an expression of rigid protest for the Dalits, who had been being so far pushed into the margins, denied basic rights and humiliated by the caste-Hindus. By donating Rs. 2001/- above and over the minimum amount, the name "Teesabhai Gopalbhai Parmal" would be the first name to be inscribed in the marble plaque above the caste-Hindu names, which is a candid sign of stiff protest by Dalits.

VII. CONCLUSION

Rita Kothari believes, "In an interesting and paradoxical way, the assertion of a Dalit identity takes place through physical valour in the men and through purity as far as the women are concerned" (Macwan xxviii). Goka is the legacy of Valji and Teeha. Dalit consciousness has been successfully transferred to the next generation. Goka is not only valiant but also prudent. He has learnt a lot of lessons from the lives of his father Teeha and his uncle Valji, which makes him to protest in a subtle manner, which would leave an indelible inscription in history.

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