

## **CHAPTER I**

### **The Search for Identity and Stigma of ‘Caste’: Datta Bhagat’s *Wata-Palwata***

## INTRODUCTION

To understand the dramatic world of Datta Bhagat which is expressed in *Wata-Palwata*, we need to look at two streams of thoughts. The first stream of thought is during the Ambedkar period and second one is during the post-Ambedkar period. Both streams of thoughts lead us to the undercurrent of Dalit movement for transformation of socio-economic and political conditions of Dalits. The first stream of thought moves towards socio-economic and political conditions during the British colonial period while the second stream of thought leads to Independent India with democratic political scenario. In both stream of thoughts transformation through political intervention becomes a core issue. One aspect of transformation in the condition of Dalit can be observed by conversion of *Mahar* (untouchable) community to Buddhism in the post-Independence era. It leads to the formation of religious identity of *Mahar* community leaving aside stigmatic social identity which is attached for centuries. Here *Mahar* gets support of religion to bring transformation within their socio-political structure as government had not paid much attention to their conditions. So Caste is central to Dalits and Datta Bhagat through his play, *Wata-Palwata* attempts to intertwine social, economic and political aspects connected to caste.

Datta Bhagat (born on July 13, 1945 in Maharashtra, India) is a Dalit writer. His major contribution as a playwright includes *Jahaj Phutle Aahe*, 1982 (Trans. The Broken Ship), *Ekti*, 1982 (Trans. The Alienated Woman), *Paranhhute*, 1982 (Trans. The Defeated One) and *Wata-Palwata*, 1987 (Trans. *Routes and Escape Routes*) that is translated by Maya Pandit into English.

Datta Bhagat represents the left-Dalit movement within a democratic framework which attempts to press the voice of the left movement. The play *Wata Palwata* is a story about multiple levels of conflicts of three generations –Kaka (Uncle) belongs to the first generation; Satish and his wife-Hema belong to the second generation whereas Arjun is associated with the third generation.

Kaka believes in Dalit movement and fights for Dalits for their rights and he

always mentions the contribution of B. R. Ambedkar for the Dalits in his arguments with people. Though he knows Shewanta, a widow who needs teaching experience certificate to get admission in D.Ed., he asks Hema to inform Satish to get her experience certificate. But Satish denies getting her experience certificate as she has not worked in any school and to get such certificate for her is illegal. Finally Kaka meets Dasrao and informs him to get experience certificate for her. Dasrao suggests that it is difficult to get experience certificate as she has not worked in any school. Kaka forces him to get such a certificate. Therefore Dasrao finds a path though illegal one to get her an experience certificate from a school that is situated in a remote village. So no one can doubt about her experience certificate. Both, Satish and Hema however insist on a strict ethical attitude towards Kaka's recommendation to Dasrao to get a fraudulent experience certificate for Shewanta. On the other hand, Dasrao, a retired freedom fighter and an upper caste teacher does not know about the caste to which Satish belongs to and offers him his house on rent but when he comes to know he is Buddhist, he finds excuses to get back his house and returns the money that he has received in advance for the house on rent. Later on in the play, when the government decides to give out houses to flood-affected people, Dasrao, even though his family does not get affected by flood, gets his name registered in the list of flood affected people to get a house. Moreover, Like Kaka, Arjun also believes in social transformation by any means. He seems always eager to do something for his community. He breaks the lock of the houses that is made for the flood affected people and hands over those houses to Dalits unofficially as he comes to know that the contractor is going to give these houses to his community people and relatives. Further, he even loves the daughter of a Brahmin community and though she is eager to get married to him, he refuses to marry her because he thinks his marriage with her may bring obstacles towards social transformation for his community.

So the play deals with multiple levels of ideological conflicts among Kaka who witnessed and was a part of Ambedkar and post-Ambedkar movement for transformation in the condition of Dalits. Satish and Hema, nurtured under the post-Ambedkar ideology, try to find a legal solution to help the Dalits. Arjun like Kaka

finds ways even illegal ones to bring transformation in the condition of Dalit. To understand the treatment of Dalits from centuries and their marginalized status in society we need to look at the historical perspective on the formation of identity and the status of Dalits.

## **THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY AND STATUS OF DALIT**

The identity of Dalit is constructed variously. A variety of sources define it. The word, Dalit was used in Marathi and Hindi translations for Depressed Classes in the 1930s (Webster 76). The word, *Dalit Bandhu* was used to refer to them by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar in his speeches (76). He also used the term, 'broken men' in his *The Untouchable* (76). Moreover, the British used the word, 'Scheduled Caste' for Dalits (76). So I think it is difficult to look at a universal term to define their identity. Each one constructed their identity variously as we have seen above. But the words to define them imply negative connotations. The identity of Dalits can be broadly defined in the following words. According to Pantawane,

To me, Dalit is not a caste. He is the man exploited by the social and economic traditions of the country. He does not believe in God, Rebirth, Soul, Holy Books, teaching separatism, Fate and Heaven because they made him a slave. He does believe in humanism. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution (qtd. in Zelliott 268).

Therefore, Dalits are victim of socio-economic systems that prevailed from centuries. Therefore they question socio-economic structure of society which made divisions in society. Dalits believe in human values which stand for equality in society where there is not any kind of oppression either from social or economic structure. The Dalit wants to break socio-economic structure of society and wants to maintain harmony. Therefore, Dalit is revolutionary by nature. This may be summarized as follows:

It (Dalit) is a category of self-definition of Untouchable in post-independence India; it signifies the state of radical consciousness and seeks to interrogate and challenge the previous stereotypes that caste Hindu

society had employed to describe untouchable as well as near-untouchable castes and communities (Nagaraj 94).

Here, Dalits in post-independence period are conscious towards their socio-economic and political scenario and they question the ideology of Hindu society which is constructed on the basis of *varna* system. The Hindu society put *shrudra* at the lowest rank as per their work. In that sense upper caste Hindu believes Untouchables are Hindu. If untouchables are Hindu, why they have been prohibited to enter into temple to worship God? Moreover, if we would know how Dalits become conscious for their present conditions, we need to look back during the British colonial period. According to B. R. Ambedkar:

Until the advent of British, the untouchable were content to remain untouchables. It was a destiny preordained by the Hindu god and enforced by the Hindu state . . . Fortunately or unfortunately, the East India Company needed soldiers for their army in India and it could find none but untouchables . . . In the army of the East India Company there prevailed the system of compulsory Education for Indian soldiers and their children, both male and female. The Education received by the Untouchables in the army . . . gave them a new vision and a new value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their personality by the cunning contrivances of the priest. They felt the shame of it as they never did before and were determined to get rid of it (qtd. in Zelliott 31).

So the consciousness of untouchable towards socio-economic and political conditions was brought by Western education. They realized their status and attempted to get rid of the constructed identity imposed upon them by Hindu priest for centuries. Even Western education gives equal opportunity to male and female for education. On the other hand, we need to understand comment given by Zelliott who puts untouchable a step higher in Hindu caste hierarchy. As:

Untouchables were former Kshatriyas, demoted by Peshwa at the time of

the Mahadurga famine in 1676 for eating whatever they could find to save their lives. Because of education in the army, they have begun to read the religious books of the Hindus and to question the behavior, thought and the ancestry of the caste Hindus (32).

. . . The 19<sup>th</sup> century claims of a Mahar that he was of Kshatriya status was dropped in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, replaced by the claim that the Mahar was of worth simply as a human being . . . The Mahar military past was now no longer employed as a ground for higher *varna* claims, but a source for the educated, of discontent with their economic and social status, and of a mystique of militancy used by Mahar reformers to break down the apathy and sense of inferiority of the traditional Mahar (35-36).

So basically reformers motivated untouchables from orthodox attitude of Hindu caste system to bring consciousness. It can also important to note down that “Many of the Military Mahars joined the Kabir and Ramadi panths, sects which stress equality” (34). Hence, the question of equality was important and that concept was brought by saints and further spread by Western education. Srinivas states, “. . . Western education gave new political values such as liberty and equality . . .” (qtd. in Jodhka 7). So from above discussion we can conclude identity of Dalits in the words of B. R. Ambedkar, "You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation; you cannot build up a morality. Anything you will build on the foundations of caste will crack and will never be a whole" (qtd. in Jodhka 23).

Further, Ambedkarite Buddhist identity challenges the “immoral”, unscientific and regressive mode of social system and is hopeful of building a modern social order based on human values (Wankhede 50). So there is a clear division between past and present identity of Untouchable that is formulated as discussed above. Wankhede states, “Buddhism for Ambedkar was not just a tool for identity formation among Dalits but he wanted to establish concrete moral norms in the society, which was hardly encountered in the past” (52). The effect of Dalit treatment can be understood by Dalit literature.

## THE ROLE OF DALIT CULTURE (LITERATURE)

According to Limbale, “Dalit culture and critical productions made a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian society, history, culture and literature” (Mukherjee 1). Here, Dalit literature is not restricted to Dalits but covers larger aspects of Hindu society. In the context of Limbale, we need to look at how the cultural representation becomes a source of expression and also we need to look at two cultural representations in theatre employed for the sake of entertainment but they became a vehicle to awaken consciousness of Dalits towards their present socio-economic and political conditions.

Dalit *Rangbhoomi* and *Natyachalwal* lead to *Jalse* which attempted to make people conscious towards their conditions and stimulated them to be revolutionary. The origin of *Jalse* can be traced from folk performances called *Tamasha*. The people performing in *Tamasha* were basically Dalits. While addressing to the crowd B. R. Ambedkar said, “my ten assemblies cannot do the work that work can do the *Jalse* of Bhimrao Kardak” (Bhagyavant 24). From the views of Ambedkar, we can assume the popularity of *Jalse* to Dalits and they became a vehicle to spread messages to the villagers. There are different kinds of *Jalse* like *Satyashodhaki Jalse* which may be defined in search of truth’s while *Ambedkari Jalse* can be defined to spread the messages of Ambedkar.

### *Satyashodhaki Jalse*

*Satyashodhaki Jalse* engaged in spreading the views of Mahatma Phule to villagers residing in the remotest villages (Mokashi 17). Ramchandra Baba Ghadge began folk performance-*Tamasha* in *Satyashodhaki Jalse* around 1915s (17). He attempted to raise the consciousness of people towards class oppression through the *Jalse* as well as the importance of education for socio-economic and political transformations (17). Basically, he focused on Brahmins who exploited Dalits variously (Mokashi 18, Bhagyavant 22). Tukaram Bhosle and Keshavrao brought the views of *Satyashodhaki Jalse* to the people. The pain of the Dalits can be realized from the writing tradition of *Satyashodhaki Jalse* which begun from

Mahatma Phule. Then after the tradition of *Jalse* against Brahmin were led by Krishnarao Bhalekar, Jawalkar, and Jedhe (18, Bhagyavant 22). Since 1915s, the *Satyashodhaki Jalse* had been dealing with issues like caste, untouchability, and repression towards Dalits (Bhagyavant 22, Mokashi 19).

### ***Ambedkari Jalse***

The basic contribution of *Ambedkari Jalse* was to make Dalits conscious towards their condition and their identity (Bhagyavant 22, Mokashi 19). It propounded social and cultural values of Ambedkari movement (Mokashi 19). Therefore, it became a basis of modern Maharashtrian Dalit *Rangbhoomi* and *Natya* Movement (19). It has changed the definition of traditional performance of *Tamasha* (19). Basically, the evolution of the *jalse* was the need and social condition of the time (19). The basic work of it was to bring transformation in society (19). The portrayal of the life of Dalits and the struggle of Dalits had been displayed through *jalse* since 1930s (19).

From *Satyashodhaki* and *Ambedkari Jalse*, we can conclude that social consciousness and transformation were the key issues. And they prepared Dalits for their rights. Chiefly, the *Jalse* were performed for entertainment purposes and therefore the masses were easily attracted to *Jalse*. So through entertainment, the views of Phule and Ambedkar about social transformation made Dalit, even illiterate ones, politically conscious. On the other hand:

In modern Marathi literature, Dalits have been portrayed from a middle class perspective, which expresses sympathy for Dalits from a reformist-liberal standpoint. Because the middle-class, upper caste writers' world of experience is limited, there is no realistic representation of Dalits in their writing. In those writers who have portrayed Dalits, there is compassion, but there are no images of Dalits with self-pride (Limbale 27).

So, the clear picture of the nature of Dalits' struggle and oppression was never disclosed. I think the problem is in the delineation of middle class perspective which is restricted to show the pathetic condition of Dalits. Further, Limbale



establishes the Dalits' subalternity in the caste-based social, cultural and economic structure of Hindu society (Mukherjee 2). Therefore we need to look at the relationship between Hindus and Dalits and how upper caste treated and looked at the work of art of Dalits.

Dalits are the upper caste Hindu's Other. But this Other is not only separate and different, like the member of another ethno-cultural, religious or linguistic group. This other is a part of Hindu society, and yet apart from it. Inscribed in that apartness and difference is inferiority. Dalit occupy the lowest place in the Hindu hierarchical order (Mukherjee 2).

I think it suggests Hindu society wants to include Dalits in their community but Hindu society wants to put them in the lowest rank in social hierarchy and thus keeping them the lowest Hindu society do not want and expect any kind of progress in their condition. But Dalits play a central role in our nation as Mukherjee said:

Dalits are an important political and social force in India. Their literary and critical writings constitute a major challenge to, and questioning of, the theorizing about Indian politics, society, culture and literature by intellectuals from upper caste Hindu and other dominant communities, and by non-Indians. To fail to pay attention to this challenge and questioning, is to engage in a hegemonic discourse that excludes the realities and experiences of nearly a quarter of the country's people (vii, viii).

Therefore, the exclusion of Dalit from social and political scenario and their writing back through different cultural forms questions dominant ideology. Further, the clear picture of nation as a secular nation may not be available without the viewpoints expressed by them. So giving place to Dalits in political and social scenario, we can enrich the intellectual asset of our nation. Further, we also need to look at what had been happening with Dalit for centuries:

Historically, Dalits were not portrayed truthfully or with fairness, from the time of Hindu religious literature to contemporary Marathi literature. Therefore Dalits writers reject this alienating literary tradition and write

with the objective of explaining to people their own pain, problems and questions. Because of their commitment, and the inspiration of Ambedkar's thought, Dalit literature has acquired the form of a movement (Limbale 38).

It's clear that leaving behind literary traditions of upper caste writers, Dalits writers make their own tradition. Dalit literature has established its own tradition with anti-caste or untouchable thinkers like Buddha, Kabir, Phule and Ambedkar as its signposts (Mukherjee 10). The purpose of Dalit writing was to disclose their agony, pain. According to Arjun Dangle, "Dalit literature is marked by revolt and negativism, since it is closely associated with the hopes for freedom by a group of people who, as untouchables, are victims of social, economic and cultural inequality" (qtd. in Mukherjee 1). Moreover, "Dalit literature is not simply literature... Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change... At the very first glance, it will be strongly evident that there is no established critical theory or point of view behind them [i.e. Dalit writings]; instead, there is new thinking and a new point of view" (qtd. in Mukherjee 2).

Therefore, Dalit literature is a strong revolt against established authority. It becomes a critique of social, economic and political condition of the time to bring transformation in their conditions. So there is always struggle for freedom from oppression. The Contemporary Marathi Dalit literature emerged from a political movement-the Dalit Panthers- which many of these writers had been instrumental in founding (Mukherjee 14). But generally, freedom from British also did not make transformation. Instead, the new issues rose towards the middle class and lower middle class of society.

After India's independence, the spirit of nationalism gained strength in society and in the hearts of the people. The fundamental transformation occurred in the lives of the people as a result of five-year plans, decentralization of power, public welfare schemes and spread of education. Common people began to understand the language of entitlements and rights due to the emergence of a democratic form of government. They felt that independence had set them free. Independence brought hope that all the

issues facing the Indian people would be resolved. However, with time, the problem increased. Unemployment, poverty, growing population, communal conflicts, corruption in public life, the din of the Hindutva forces, and the ever-threatening spectre of famine led to a loss of popular faith in independence and saw the beginning of mass movements to seek redress for the various injustices (Limbale 23).

So instead of solution, political acquisition generated other issues and the solution to the problem was mass revolution against the government because the issues were not just connected to individual but whole community, particular class and caste. Like India's independence new problems formulated rose on the other side with the formation of Maharashtra state and the issue that arose need to be looked at.

## **DALITS AND POLITICS**

Before the formation of the Maharashtra state in 1960s, there was debate about the formation of state on the basis of language, caste, class and so on. The organizations, like *Samyukta Maharashtra Sabha* established in 1939 and *Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti* in 1946, engaged in the formation of Maharashtra state on linguistics basis (Rao 182). On the other side, Republican Party of India (RPI) was formed after the demise of Ambedkar, to spread his principles (Rao 186). But it was associated with the *Praja Socialists* and the *Shetkari Kamgar Paksha* (Peasant and Workers Party), and the *Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti* (186). Together they demanded for a separate Maharashtra state as a political opportunity in the elections of 1957 and 1961 (qtd. in Rao 186). Finally, the debate over the formation of Maharashtra relies on uniqueness of the state. Here the importance is given to the domination of *Marathas* who were associated with *Kshatriya* status and claimed for cultural and political domination across caste, region, language and history (Rao 182). It seems the formation of state was not for the transformation of the condition of Dalits but it was a strategy for political domination.

After political Independence, *Marathas* controlled rural economy which was based on agriculture like sugarcane and they presided over educational and

banking institutions (Rao 183). During the time Congress came to be associated with *Maratha* power while Dalit was rendered marginal to the common regional identity on which politics was based after 1960s (183). The conversion to Buddhism in 1956 became a decisive step of Dalits leaving behind the stigma of untouchable to open a new political culture which emerged after demise of Ambedkar in that flags, statues, naming and writing practices suggested political symbology and on which a new community identity began to emerge (183). So the voice of the untouchable could be heard at the national level. The first Republican Party of India (RPI) split in 1958 from rural and illiterate leadership of B. K. Gaikwad to form the *durustha* (Reformed) RPI led by B. C. Kamble (qtd. in Rao 186). Kamble wrote, 'When Congress got power they destroyed Ambedkar's organization and now communists are getting Dadasaheb's (Gaikwad's) support and they are conducting a mischievous smear campaign against Ambedkar' (qts. in Rao 186). So there was an ideology working for the destruction of untouchable in the political scenario.

On the other hand, during the 1960s, the students educated from Siddharth College and Milind College were influenced by Babasaheb Ambedkar's philosophy, and expressed their sentiments in writing (Limbale, 24-25). Their writing propagated the messages of revolution (24). These students felt that there was no one to lead Dalit society after Babasaheb. Therefore they decided to create an organization to give society direction, and fight against social problems and the caste system. Taking inspiration from America's Black Panthers, they established a revolutionary, militant organization which is called Dalit Panthers, on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1972 (Mukherjee123). The newspapers *Navakal* and *Prajasattak* noted the formation of the Dalit Panthers by organizers Arjun Dangle, Namdeo Dhasal, and J. V. Pawar (Rao 188). This movement was a movement of writers. Other people including common people were involved later. The role of the writer was to convey the consciousness to the people through literature (Mukherjee 124). The contemporary Marathi literature emerged from a political movement known as the Dalit Panthers (Mukherjee 14). The focus of Panthers was on the casteism of the Indian state (Rao 188-189).

Therefore we can state, the formation of Dalit identity and status of Dalit traces identity of Dalits from centuries and various interpretation of the caste as it is a symbol of change and revolution. The education of British government makes Dalits conscious for their status and made them realize the oppressive nature of upper caste society towards them from centuries. The role of Dalit literature as well as performance in the form of *Jalse* functioned positively to make people conscious for their conditions. They comment on socio-economic and political conditions, their marginalized status in the formation of caste structures and deliberate attempt of upper class political parties to destroy Dalits in political scenario. Such framework is needed to understand Datta Bhagat's play, *Wata-Palwata* and it can also be utilized in next section for thematic analyses of *Wata-Palwata* to label the play 'Political'.

## **Thematic Study of Datta Bhagat's *Wata-Palwata***

This section deals with thematic analyses of Datta Bhagat's *Wata-Palwata*. The framework has been constructed is used for analyzing the socio-economic and political conditions of Maharashtra state during 1970s-80s. The thematic analyses deal with themes such as 'Unforgettable Stigma of Caste', 'Upper Caste Orthodox Approach', 'The Formation of Identity', 'Frustration of Young Generation', 'Transformation', and 'Development of Society' to observe treatment of Upper class society as well as the Government authorities towards Dalits. The thematic analysis begins with a theme 'Unforgettable Stigma of Caste' at socio-economic and political levels to highlight the nature of power and conservative ideology of upper class society.

### **UNFORGETTABLE STIGMA OF CASTE**

Datta Bhagat complicates the issue of caste in *Wata-Palwata* at socio-economic and political levels. He attempts to project the stigma of caste to upper caste-Brahmin as well as Dalit to identify by labeling collective identification such as caste. With reference to social life in Maharashtra, G. P. Deshpande observes there is need to locate the status of caste and class (Bhagwat 374).

In *Wata-Palwata*, Sonal, the daughter of Dasrao Guruji belongs to upper caste, falls in love with Arjun, a Buddhist. She thinks that Hema, belonging to upper caste and wife of Satish should support her as she married out of caste. Moreover, Dasrao, belonging to upper caste, by profession teacher and freedom fighter criticizes Hema as she belongs to upper caste and is married to Satish, a Buddhist. On the other hand, Arjun, a Buddhist speaks bluntly with Hema as she belongs to upper caste. In this context, Hema says the following words:

HEMA: ... if you call someone a Mahar, that's an insult! And what if you call someone a Brahmin? Is that supposed to be an honor? I rejected my caste when I married you. It's a deliberate insult to me to be called a Brahmin! . . . (Bhagat 321).

So the collective identification of caste is a stigma that is not erasable either for the Brahmins or the Dalits. Hema belongs to the upper caste and feels insulted to be called by her collective socio-economic identity such as Brahmin. If to call someone by caste is an insult then how does the Dalit feel for centuries as they have been addressed by their caste names? Is it not an insult to them? So Datta Bhagat problematises the issues of caste through the words of the upper caste. On the other side, we also need to look at how Dalit reacts to the issue of caste when Hema, the daughter-in-law of Kaka and belonging to Brahmin caste does not like to be referred by caste:

KAKA: ...Who likes caste? Tell me, who does? I have worked with Babasaheb for more than forty years against the caste system. But has it disappeared? No. How many years has it been since your marriage? Five. Why, it's more than three years since Satish came here, to this town, to take this job. But what do people say even now? Tell me: Satish Godghate, a professor, a Buddhist, and his wife, a Brahmin! And there is no dearth of peeping Toms around us, let me tell you. Even small girls bend over backwards just to see what's happening in our house. Tell me why? (287).

The play seems to suggest that people like Kaka who worked to eradicate caste system with B. R. Ambedkar still does not witness much improvement in this direction either the state or the central government. Though Datta Bhagat suggests a solution to caste system by arranging inter-caste marriage, a solution suggested by Ambedkar himself, it does not seem a fruitful solution. Because through inter-caste marriage, the outlook or worldview of people should be changed but instead of that it has created a wall between two castes and inter-caste married family disintegrates rather than coheres the social fabric. So instead of harmony in nation, the nation stands on unhealthy social construction. One more instance of caste that leads to the destruction of nation is that when Kaka, a Buddhist strictly follows principles of Ambedkar and forces Hema to utter "ji" in response to elder instead of her regularly spoken word, "what" at her parent's residence. Here, Kaka scolds and

insults her in front of people for her upper caste manners and pronounces her caste. In that context, we can understand the following dialogue:

HEMA: But I absolutely don't like it!

KAKA: What? Caste, or my talking about it?

HEMA: Both. We broke away from our castes and got married.

In the face of stiff opposition. Who supported us? No one. Our parents, relatives, no one! Not even you! (286-287).

Here, instead of a solution to the inter-caste marriage, the condition becomes worse because the problem is generated by people belonging to old generations. Inter-caste marriage attempts to break traditional thinking and generates a new outlook towards healthy relationship, even harmony in society. However, inter-caste marriage problematises castes as Hema gets tortured for her upper caste manners. Instead of setting an example for healthy society and have harmony, the situation becomes more problematic in the case of Arjun and Sonal. Though Dasrao, father of Sonal considers himself as a social reformer, he does not agree to get her daughter married to Arjun, an untouchable. Therefore, Sonal wants to get support from Hema as she has done inter-caste marriage. Here in the given contexts, inter-caste marriage of Satish and Hema, and Arjun and Sonal generates problem in the context of caste. Similarly, we also need to look at how upper caste people treat even educated Dalit, Satish. Dasrao, a teacher and freedom fighter agrees to offer house on rent to Satish, a Buddhist and professor by profession. But when he comes to know that Satish is a Buddhist, he finds excuses to rent his house:

DASRAO: I don't deny what you say, Hematai. But I, too, was helpless, you know. Three grown-up daughters, waiting in a queue to be married off. My father bedridden with paralysis. No land. No source of income except my job. I really had no objection to Satish as a tenant, otherwise I wouldn't have taken an advance from him...but...

HEMA: But ...? Go on.

DASRAO: If I'd rented rooms to Satish, then the other tenants would have



immediately vacated their rooms. They warned me about that! (297).

Here, Datta Bhagat draws our attention at caste through economy. Dasrao seems eager to find excuses. So the issue of caste is expanding deliberately. There is no attempt to find solution here. So basically the root of caste has reached so deep that it questions the formation of society. Likewise, Arjun provides house to the untouchables at Milind Nagar and is collecting revenue from them. Shewanta, a widow does not pay revenue to Arjun. Therefore he disallows Shewanta to stay at Milind Nagar. Therefore, her belongings are scattered on the road. Under the context Dasrao comes to meet Satish for solution:

DASRAO: ...We consider you half Brahmin, sir! By that, of course, I mean rational!

SATISH: Are only the Brahmins qualified to be rational, Guruji? (*Gives him tea.*) Have tea, Guruji. Don't worry. It has been prepared by Hema. (*Takes his tea and sits down in a chair.*) Kaka's quite right. People'll never forget caste (318-319).

The comment that Dasrao offers itself is problematic. The question is what's half Brahmin? To be rational as an attribute of Brahmin generates question about caste. Dasrao seems to hesitate to consider Satish, Dalit though he belongs to Dalit. I think this hesitation of Dasrao raises question on humanity. On the other side, Dasrao drinks tea though it has been made at the house of Dalit. Satish, an educated person has a moderate view on caste but finally he willingly accepts the views expressed by Kaka to caste as it mixes like water into milk. Even Dasrao has contradictory views that seem to emanate from the upper caste structure:

HEMA: (*With tears in her eyes.*) Guruji called Arjun and not only did he revile his caste but ... but...

SATISH: Go on Hema!

HEMA: He said, "God knows from where this Godghate has brought that female! Boasts she's a Brahmin! But who knows what she really is!" That's what he said about me, that man! And he comes here so

often! Speaks such honeyed words! But what a filthy mind! And he's a teacher, even a freedom fighter! (321).

Here, Dasrao in front of Arjun criticizes Hema for her action while he cannot open his mouth at Hema who is educated and belongs to upper caste. He speaks in favor of his community in front of people belonging to his community. Therefore it seems Datta Bhagat problematizes the ideology of upper caste.

### **UPPER CASTE ORTHODOX APPROACH**

Like stigma of caste, Datta Bhagat discloses conservative outlook of upper caste to Dalits. As we have seen above, Kaka worked with Ambedkar to abolish caste system but it remains unchanged yet. Like caste, upper caste people possess orthodox outlook which has not been changed for ages. Kaka accepts Hema as his daughter-in-law and forgets about her Brahmin root. He thinks instead a girl belongs to Brahmin to be daughter-in-law, if a girl from Dalit caste be a daughter-in-law of our family, she may have better life. Still, leaving aside such attitude, he accepts Hema as his daughter-in-law. But what kind of attitude Brahmin possesses towards caste:

KAKA: She's gem of a girl recently. So what if she's a Brahmin! But suppose he hadn't married her . . . wouldn't a girl from one of our own poor families have lived like a queen in this house? . . . We, as a people, are ready a hundred times over to forget caste, but are you people ready to forget it, Guruji? . . . (Bhagat 293)

Here, we find Kaka expresses liberal views as he appreciates Hema who belongs to upper caste though he is illiterate and adamant. Dasrao being educated and a 'reformer' makes distinction on the basis of caste. Dasrao strictly maintains orthodox outlook towards Dalits. Datta Bhagat questions the problematic outlook of upper caste people. Moreover, Datta Bhagat draws attention at the attitude of upper caste to reservation policy of government that is offered to Dalits. As, Kaka mentioned, by marriage, Kaka and Dasrao are relatives. Dalit and Brahmin are

relatives by inter-caste marriage. In that context, Dasrao keeps close watch towards the government policy that is offered to Dalits:

DASRAO: Yes. So what if we are related by marriage! You won't give us any place in your thirty-three percent would you, Kaka? Tell me seriously, would you?

KAKA: (*Understands the taunt.*) Oh, oh, oh! A sharp eye, indeed, on our reservation! (292)

Though the government provides reservation policy and schemes for the development of Dalits socially and economically, the upper caste closely looks at them. The upper caste is not happy with government policies and schemes that are offered to Dalits which they think maintain imbalance in society. Here the government puts a step ahead to maintain equality by giving opportunity to Dalits to be equal. So Datta Bhagat critically raises the political issues of reservation policy and problematises the constitutional framework. When Hema is married to Satish, a Buddhist- still she discloses honestly the nature of Dasrao, a Brahmin:

DASRAO: Oh well, he is always sarcastic, isn't he? It's only you who can put up with it. No one else could have, in your place.

HEMA: Oh no! It absolutely isn't like that, Guruji. He barks all right, but he doesn't bite like you.

DASRAO: Like me? What do you mean, Hematai?

HEMA: Since you've asked, let me tell you something. Satish was going to rent rooms in your house, Guruji, after getting a job in this town. Remember? And you had even collected your rent from him in advance! But when you came to know his caste, what did you do? You simply told him that the house had already been rented; that your wife had taken an advance from someone else without informing you! That was your pretext, remember? And you returned his money (296).

Hema being born in Brahmin family does not hide the conservative nature of -----

Dasrao. She freely in front of him shows differences in attitude between Kaka and Dasrao. Even she focuses on his treatment towards Satish when he comes to know he is Dalit. Therefore, Hema discloses the problematic nature of Dasrao. On the other hand, Satish also points out upper caste attitude. Here it seems upper caste themselves become victim of their treatment to Dalit as they are doing to Dalits for centuries. As:

SATISH: There was this project for simple toilets, you know. A group of four or five boys was working at a money-lender's place. In spite of their protests, the moneylender arranged tea for them. The tea came, eventually. The moneylender distributed the cups among the boys. When, however, they looked at one tea cup, they were furious and immediately walked out of his house without drinking his tea? They told their teacher that they would never go to the moneylender's place again.

DASRAO: Why?

SATISH: The teacher in charge of the NSS made inquiries and discovered that one of the cups distinctly different! It was set aside specially for Dalits (298).

As we have seen in the previous section, Dalits gets their residence outside the villages so that they cannot contaminate Brahmins' activities as there are certain vessels kept separately for Dalits in upper caste houses. Whenever Dalits come, people belongs to upper caste offers meals in specially separated vessels. It has generated gap in society. If we can find such gap in the formation of nation, how can we become developing nation in the eyes of the world? If there is a gap, we also need to look at how the identity of Dalits and Brahmins separately formed.

### **THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY-DALIT AND BRAHMIN**

As we have discussed identity of Dalits in the previous section, here we need to understand how Datta Bhagat formulates identity of Dalit in the eyes of Brahmins. The four or five students were working on a project of simple toilet at

moneylender's place and he willingly made tea for them and distributed tea in cup to all. Out of all cups, a cup was distinctly different which was usually kept aside for untouchable. That cup was handed to ugly boy. Satish said that “. . . That cup was given to that one ugly, dark boy from that group. You know who that boy was? Arvind Deshmukh . . .” (Bhagat 298). The upper caste people not only look strangely at the assigned work to Dalits but they also make identification of Dalits by color. Such identification to what extent proves valid is a debatable question. The Dalits engage in works which today someplace is done by upper caste through machines and the color of body cannot change as it is gifted therefore we need to change the conservative outlook towards Dalits. Such defective outlook of identity questions human existence.

On the other side, Kaka come to know that Shewanta, a widow is expecting admission in D. Ed and in future she may stand on her feet financially. Therefore, she needs to submit experience certificate to get admission in D. Ed. Kaka finds Dasrao who is a teacher and discusses with him to provide her experience certificate. We can find Dasrao who formulates identity of Brahmins collectively:

DASRAO: But Kaka, she has never worked in my school.

KAKA: Had she really worked in your school, where was the need for me to come and plead with you?

DASRAO: But Kaka, a false certificate?

KAKA: What's the hell do you think she's going to use for it? A highway robbery? That poor thing will get a job at least.

DASRAO: Yes . . . but a false certificate! Right here in this town, where people know . . .

DASRAO: Kaka, you know, a false record has to be prepared for that. And doing that here in the same town as she is in . . .

DASRAO: Kaka, I'll tell you what. Shewanta's doing her D.Ed. from here. So it wouldn't be nice to arrange for a certificate from around here. What I'll do is this: I'll get her a certificate from the school at Kasarkheda (294).

Here, identity is not constructed on the basis of problem but identity is formulated on the basis of solution offered. Kaka being illiterate expects Dasrao to provide experience certificate to Shewanta on friendly basis. Here Dasrao finds a solution that is illegal. He even finds faulty ways to provide experience certificate so that he can maintain healthy relationship with Kaka and easily break the rules of government. Such kind of identity of upper caste that has been portrayed by Datta Bhagat draws our attention to the faulty foundation on which government sector stands. On the other hand, Upper caste wants to show their caliber:

SATISH: . . . But the *SAVARNA* students, supporting the flood victims, wanted to observe a *bundh* in the college... You know who their leader was?

. . .

SATISH: ... The one insulted by the moneylender in the NSS camp! You know, the one who was taken for a Dalit and given the broken cup of tea, set aside for the Dalits! That same one!

HEMA: How come he's become so active?

SATISH: After that incident, I'd thought he would do some introspection. But his ego seems to be terribly hurt! He's desperately trying to pull something off which declare to the whole world that he's got *SAVARNA blood* in his vein! (*Pauses.*) . . . (317).

Here upper caste glorifies power structure that they possess. Here flood victims become instrument of larger power structure and upper caste wants to abolish an old image by supporting Dalits and establishes new image as a powerful leader who takes care of Dalits. So the deceptive nature of upper caste is disclosed. The foundation on which the ideology of upper caste stands as discussed above makes Dalits- a lower caste victim. Therefore young generation gets frustrated.

## **THE FRUSTRATION OF YOUNG GENERATION TO THE PRESENT CONDITIONS**

Datta Bhagat in *Datta Bhagat Yanchi Natake* draws our attention to three

generations. Kaka belongs to the first generation and associated with Ambedkar movement, Satish and his wife, Hema belong to the second generation who possess education and possess patience to solve present caste problem while Arjun represents the third generation after the two decades of political independence (qtd. in Tribhuvan 43). The policies of the government prepared for the Dalits fail to fulfill the expectations of people. Therefore, expectations of young generation during the post-independence period meet with frustration with the present government.

Satish explains to Arjun to follow legal course to provide houses to Dalits but the latter follows violence as a means to get success and mentions the name of Dasrao Guruji, a Brahmin who registered his name in the list of flood victims. Arjun thinks government policies have always failed to provide shelter to real victims:

HEMA: Arjun, has somebody insulted you?

ARJUN: Yes.

SATISH: Who?

ARJUN: My caste. The caste I wasn't born into by choice. I don't want an education. Is there any dearth of those who are educated and unemployed in this country? Anyway, what will I get from this kind of education? Who's going to wipe off the stamp of caste from my name? You, too, are educated. Plus yours is an inter caste marriage. Did Dasrao Joshi rent you his house? And now he poses as a reformer (Bhagat 303).

Here, I think Arjun realizes to be born in Dalit community is a stigma and therefore he is suffering. He thinks that the nation was constructed on the basis of Hindu religion and there is no place for Dalits. Even policies of state and central government are faulty as educated people belonging to lower caste remains unemployed so what's the meaning of getting such education by Dalits. Education makes people to do something for the nation but for this young generation there is no opportunity to do anything for the development of nation. Therefore, the

frustration is not only of the people who belong to Dalit caste but upper caste also towards established policies of the government. Further, to provide houses Arjun collects subscription. When Hema comes to know the activity of Arjun, she asks Kaka about it. She has an impression that illegally Arjun is collecting money for personal gain. Hema informs Kaka that Arjun is engaged in an illegal activity.

HEMA: It is rumored that he's going to break the lock open and allot the houses to all slum dwellers in case the government refuses to give them the houses, Is that true?

KAKA: What's wrong in doing that?

HEMA: That means, Kaka, you know perfectly well what's cooking at Milind Nagar. But, Kaka, are you aware that doing such thing would be illegal? Arjun's hiding it even from Satish . . . (290).

Here Hema is aware of the aftermath of illegal activity so she inquires about the illegal activity of Arjun to Kaka. Kaka has long experience of Dalit movement against the government yet instead of making Arjun conscious of the situation, he supports Arjun. So as discussed above three generations, Kaka the first generation and Arjun the third generation are both unhappy with the policies of the government. They expose their frustration through illegal activity disregarding the legal outcome. Hema and Satish belong to second generation and are aware of such danger so that they attempt to make Kaka and Arjun conscious towards the situation. This frustration erupts in violence at the end of the play. As:

ARJUN: We settled the affair today, in our own way. We forcibly broke the locks open and gave the houses to the flood victims.

SATISH: What?

ARJUN: People are rushing there. All the flood victims in Bhim Nagar are occupying those houses.

SATISH: And Kaka? Where is he?

ARJUN: I've asked him to wait there, to supervise the whole operation.  
(301)



Here Arjun takes violent action against the present government for the benefit of masses. As we know Government is for the people and if government fails to do anything who will look after the people. Arjun is working to look after people. Though he commits an illegal act, he is conscious of the outcomes:

ARJUN: . . . I want to trample on those who pretend to be reformers. I want to expose those who capitalize on our caste. I want to tear the masks off their faces. I have chosen my path, sir. Consciously. With my reason intact. I know what the ultimate consequence will be. Handcuffs, prison. What else! I'm prepared for that! (*The POLICE INSPECTOR enters*). Goodbye sir. Come, Inspector. Come in. You have nothing whatsoever to do with order. Protect the law. The law may be an ass, stupid, merciless. But what's that to you? Here, come on, arrest me (303).

The frustration of young generation takes a formidable political nature. As Arjun is aware of the consequences of his deeds, he understands that the legal ways of amending larger misrepresentation of truths cannot look at what has happened to mass by his activity. Arjun's action can be seen in the light of the generational conflict that the play offers.

## **TRANSFORMATION**

The play is about transformation in the condition of Dalits. As, we have seen above, Arjun takes law in his hands in frustration but what kinds of transformation he wants that needs to be looked at. As:

SATISH: Oh Arjun? Come on in! Aayushyaman Arjunrao Jadhav, please come in. You're going to live a hundred years.

ARJUN: Hundred years! I don't mind, sir. I don't mind at all, living on for a hundred years. Even a hundred years would be too short a time to cleanse this society of all the filth it has accumulated over thousands of years. Well, let it pass, sir. This is an endless topic... (Bhagat301).

Arjun thinks that society has accumulated so much filth that he would be unable to clean the society in this birth. I think he is frustrated with the present conditions like unemployment, corruption, caste system prevailing in the society. Actually as he has taken the work to clean society it is not an individual work but needs collective effort to bring transformation. But looking at the present scenario, he thinks he has to bring transformation in society anyhow. He makes society responsible itself and even foundation of government.

SATISH: Dasrao Guruji's name? In the list of flood victims?

ARJUN: And these are the people who brand me a casteist! People in Bhim Nagar have been living in hutments that leak. The rains are just around the corner. I made arrangements for them. I don't have monopoly rights to think on behalf of everybody! I won't think for the others. I'll think only of my caste. That's all (303).

Here, Arjun points out that the government policies that have been offered to Dalits for the development are coming to nothing since upper caste people like Dasrao gets benefitted by registering their names as victims. So how can the government policies that are formulated for the development of Dalits reach them? Therefore Arjun attempts to provide benefits of the government policies to the needy and wants to expose people who illegally register their names as victims. So basically, there is an attack on faulty ways to provide benefits. Further:

ARJUN: . . . What can be the demands of the slum-dwellers? They want a house. (*Deliberately looking at SONAL.*) The freedom fighters are ruling the country. What do they care whether Dalits get houses or not! (310).

Here, Arjun points out that Dasrao who claims to be a reformer does not do anything. His ideology becomes a question as we have seen above. As Arjun points out and questions ideology, Satish makes Arjun conscious about taking steps against the government:

SATISH: Arjun, you aren't prepared to respect the law. You don't bother

about earning people's sympathy. You aren't prepared to consider other castes even as a strategy. Where are you leading them all? Where? Arjun, the fight for justice can't be fought with crowds alone. That is sheer mobocracy. It always claims the poor man as the victim. Forget about the others. At least we have to fight more carefully (314).

Satish is aware of the working ideology of Arjun and so he warns him to fight carefully as he himself fights for Dalits peacefully. He thinks Arjun's steps may bring violence and innocent people may be victim of his action. So such kind of battle for transformation is not considered transformation. Satish thinks that to fight legally for the mass will consume time but it may pave the way of transformation for all. This theme can be seen in Hema who discloses the nature of transformation in her father, a Brahmin and who is a judge:

HEMA: My father is a judge, you know. Ours is a family of reformers. My father fought in the freedom struggle right from the beginning. But yes, my mother was bit unhappy about it to begin with. But all that is over. She's forgotten her displeasure now. Both of them paid us a visit quite recently (308).

Here transformation can be observed in the ideology of Hema's parents. Her parents did not approve inter-caste marriage but as Hema's father is a reformer and he attempts to bring transformation as he did with nation. There is also change in the ideology of Hema's parents. We also need to look at the direction of development.

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIETY**

As we have seen above, Kaka struggles for the abolition of caste system, likewise he is also struggling for the development of the condition of Dalits. As Shewanta, a widow got admission in D.Ed., she needs to submit experience certificate for D.Ed. under the context Kaka expects Shewanta should get experience certificate anyhow. Therefore, such context we come to know how the

Dalits visualize their future.

KAKA: Why? How does it harm anyone? In what way? The poor girl wants to learn. She's a widow. Shouldn't we help? She's even got admission to that course B.Ed. or D.Ed., whatever they call it.

HEMA: Maybe you are right. But Satish has absolutely refused to do it.

KAKA: Who the hell does he think he is? The God of Truth? Why did he get educated if he didn't want to help his own people? Ha! I would have procured ten such certificates had I been in my own village! (Bhagat 288).

For the development of our society, Kaka disregards Satish's opinion though he is educated and Kaka is illiterate. He also condemns the views of Satish who thinks rationally about the problem. But Kaka's claim to bring experience certificate highlights the lacuna in government system. Moreover, Dasrao keeps a close watch at reservation policies for Dalits and thinks about inequality in a society. Kaka, to counter him, points out the perks provided by the government to freedom fighters:

KAKA: Guruji, aren't you a freedom fighter? You, too have your own green pasture, don't you, thanks to Mother Indira! How much does it come to a year? Surely not less than twelve hundred? No? Concessions in railway fares, college fees, plus several other perks of various kinds. Then why look enviously, sir, at our reservations? Our kids have started getting an education only recently. Let them learn a bit, enjoy good posts, be DSPs and collectors. Then you can have it all for yourselves (292-293).

Here, Kaka accepts reservation policy of government for the development of Dalits while he also makes conscious to Dasrao for the benefit provided by government to the freedom fighters. So there is development of society. Here also we get contradictory opinion towards development as:

SATISH: Arjun, your action is illegal.

ARJUN: I know that.

SATISH: Arjun, this is called *goondalism*.

ARJUN: Sir!

SATISH: And *goondalism* isn't social service.

ARJUN: Only needy people have occupied those houses. You call that *goondalism*? You call me a *goonda*?

SATISH: Arjun, think with cool head. How many people are you pushing into a sea of trouble along with yourself? Our housing society has been registered now. We'll get a loan next month (302).

Here we can find separate path of development as Arjun believes in violence for the development on the other hand Satish peacefully and legally finds permanent solution to the development of Dalits. As, Arjun is a college student and belongs to Dalit caste after Independence from the hands of British and formation of Maharashtra, there is not any substantial transformation either from the central government or from the state government so Arjun wants to take law in his hand to make transformation in society anyway. So formation of modern India is questioned. Further:

SATISH: Are you aware of the implications if both the *morchas* are taken out at the same time?

ARJUN: There'll be *lathi* charges, firing, a few will be injured, and someone may become martyr, too.

SATISH: Those will be the immediate results. What about the long-term implications? Have you considered that? It doesn't matter if Kaka doesn't consider this. But you? You can't afford to avoid thinking about that. That will be dangerous.

ARJUN: Don't you dare taunt me by talking about danger!

SATISH: Oh it is undoubtedly dangerous for you! But more importantly, it would be dangerous for the Dalit movement. All the needy Dalits will have to do without the sympathy of the others (315).

Satish makes Arjun conscious about his step that is taken against the government. Here, Arjun doesn't care for the loss of people's lives while Satish sympathizes

with the Dalits and warns Arjun about the outcome. So Arjun takes violent action disregarding the long term effects of his action and its impact on his movement overall. Further, Arjun follows faulty ways because then only he can do progress of the society:

ARJUN: I had to give bribes, sir, in order to maintain the status quo of the colony. Where could I have got such an amount from, sir? I had to make several trips to Bombay. Where was I going to get money for them? The others understood and gave money without complaining, didn't they? Were they stupid fools? Besides it wasn't as if Shewanta didn't have the money. But she didn't want to pay. She insisted that I declare the accounts of the collection (323).

Here Arjun has to succumb to the present condition as he offers a bribe that is illegal but he has no other ways to make his demands fulfilled in stipulated time. Development thus remains a catchword in government policies and the paths exposed in the play are shown to be in conflict with each other. On the one hand, we have the generation of Kaka who still are wavering between the pre- and the post-independence status of Dalits. On the other, we have Satish who have attained a middle-class educated stature and are finding legal means to find the corrupt system. Finally, there is the new generation of Arjun who takes violence as the only means to achieve their objectives.

## **CONCLUSION**

The stigma of caste problematises caste at socio-economic and political contexts. The question of caste has gone so deep into the social fabric that it is impossible to eradicate because society stands on caste system that has prevailed for ages. So the question can be raised on the foundation of society. The upper caste orthodox approach highlights false notion on which the ideology of upper caste stands. Instead of the development of society, upper class criticizes government for facilities like reservation provided to development of lower caste but they as freedom fighter disregards perks that are provided to them in the form

of concession in railway. With education, there is an expectation of transformation in society but upper class society yet at social level maintains distance with lower caste people. The formation of identity discloses multiple levels as an attempt to weaken the foundation of government by illegal transaction with government. Frustration of young generation highlights upper class attempts to get illegal benefits that are of Dalits so Dalits show frustration and question government system. The frustration of youngsters leads to violence to highlight the fault in the system like corruption. The upper caste attitude that focuses on faulty ways for development, leads to frustration. All these issues at socio-economic and political levels foreground caste. Further, the government system can be destroyed, formulated, reformulated only for the sake of benefit to the upper caste society. All these keep caste as central and the resultant power struggle that is portrayed in the play *Wata-Palwata* can lead us to term it as 'Political'.

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