

Chapter 2

Politics of Representation and Marathi Dalit Theatre

2.0 Introduction:

I try to explore, in this chapter, how non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists share similarities and differ from each other with respect to the representation of Dalits. Non-Dalit dramatists accept Dalit as a class identity whereas Dalit dramatists recognize Dalit as a caste identity. As far as linguistic identity of Dalits is concerned both use a similar variety of language for upper caste and educated Dalits but use a distinct variety of a language for uneducated Dalits. Dalit dramatists differ from non-Dalit dramatists as occasionally, they portray educated Dalit characters speaking a distinct variety, especially spoken by uneducated Dalits. Educated Dalit characters use it to either irritate upper caste characters or make them believe that educated Dalits are still connected with their past though they have moved upward in the class hierarchy.

Non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists are similar in their approach towards inter-caste marriage as a means to eradicate caste hierarchy. Both believe that one cannot overcome one's caste identity by marrying outside one's caste but they may do so by scrutinizing the caste system and *shastras* which have codified the caste system. Though they accept that one cannot be free from one's caste identity, they differ from each other on how they treat the failure of inter-caste marriage to challenge the caste system. Non-Dalit dramatists like Vijay Tendulkar holds Arun, a Dalit character responsible for the failure of inter-caste marriage whereas Dalit dramatists like Datta Bhagat hold Dalit and upper caste characters responsible.

In terms of the representation of rural Dalits, non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists also differ from each other. Non-Dalit dramatists like Ratnakar Matkari, in *Lokkatha* 78, (Mumbai: 2000) depict rural Dalits as subservient to upper castes. On the contrary, Dalit dramatists like Premanand Gajvee, in *A Sip of Water* (Navayana: 2013), portray Dalit characters as victims of upper castes

but they are also shown as aware of Dalit activism and are aggressive against caste discrimination.

2.1 Representation of Dalit with Class and Caste Identity.

The play, *Purush*, (Mumbai: 2006) opens with a radio news that mentions that someone called Banda has been blinded by a political leader and landlord, Khanderao Patil, for his involvement in the rape of a Dalit woman, Maya. Khanderao Patil has been acquitted by the court, as the court does not find any strong evidence against him. Though he has openly committed a crime, nobody appears against him in the court because of his economically and politically privileged position in society.

The radio news is discussed by two upper caste female characters, Tara and Mathu. During the discussion, they express sympathy for Maya Gawai and they reckon her rape as an outcome of her class identity rather than her caste identity, because they do not consider caste as one of the main reasons behind her rape. They do not even mention the caste identity of Khanderao Patil, but in its place, they emphasize his class identity as a landlord and political leader. Though the word, Dalit is used by Tara and Mathu to refer to Maya Gawai, they use it as a class and not as a caste identity.

The issue of the word Dalit to mark a class identity, also comes up in the conversation between Ambika, an upper caste female character and Siddharth, a Dalit character in the play, *Purush* (Mumbai:2006). Being a socialist activist, Ambika reckons caste as class by holding the class of Khanderao Patil responsible for the rape of Maya. It is evident in the following statement, made by her when talking to Siddharth about victimization of Maya. Ambika says:

...But she (Maya) is insulted because she is a woman

...and insulted by the power of political power and money. ¹

(Act I, Scene I)

In the conversation with Siddharth, Ambika appears to ignore the caste identity of Maya because she seems to limit the identity of Maya to her gender and class as a poor woman

Besides limiting the identity of Maya to her gender and class, the play, *Purush* (Mumbai:2006) also seems to project Siddharth's identity as a class identity rather than a caste identity. Siddharth, a Dalit character, is introduced by Tara and Mathu, upper caste female characters in the play. They mention the Mahar caste, but give more importance to his economic status as they consider the financial status of Siddharth responsible for his exploitation rather than his caste identity as a Dalit.

A similar opinion about Siddharth has been expressed by Anna, a socialist school teacher in the play. Anna advises Siddharth to concentrate on improving his financial status rather than complaining about caste discrimination. This is because Anna believes that one's economic position determines one's position in the social hierarchy. Therefore, he always criticizes Siddharth for considering his caste identity responsible for his social exploitation. On one occasion, he tells Siddharth to stop blaming upper castes for the exploitation of Dalits and in its place, he asks him to work for financial development of the Dalits.

Siddharth challenges Anna's views about exploitation of Dalits and holds a view that it is caste identity of Dalits which is responsible for their exploitation at the hands of upper castes. He justifies his stand by pointing out socio-cultural differences between Dalits and upper castes. However, he has been silenced by giving him comparatively less space in the play. On the other hand, Anna enjoys enough space in the play to voice his views about one's class identity.

¹ Dalvi, Jaywant. *Purush*. Pune: Majestic Prakashan, 2006. p.15

Giving comparatively more space to Anna in the play to defend his views about caste as class, Jaywant Dalvi, the dramatist of the play, projects caste struggle as class struggle.

The Dalit identity as class identity appears to have also been represented in the play, *Kanyadaan*, (New Delhi: 2011) written by Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008). It is one of his most controversial plays that has brought him a *Saraswati Samman* Award and criticism from Dalit intellectuals for depicting a Dalit male character, Arun as responsible for the failure of the inter-caste marriage between him and Jyoti, a Brahmin female character. (Loomba, 2013:101-02) Basically, *Kanyadaan* (New Delhi: 2011) is about a failed inter-caste marriage between a Brahmin girl from a socialist family and a Dalit, Arun Athawale. The marriage is a failed attempt by upper caste characters because they fail to understand caste identity. For instance, Nath, Jyoti's father, associates class identity with caste and ignores the differences between upper castes and Dalits which are rooted in their different socio-cultural histories.²

The marriage between Jyoti and Arun looks like an experiment by Nath to bring class and caste struggle together. Being a socialist politician, he does not make a difference between these two separate socio-cultural identities. Through the marriage between Jyoti and Arun, he wants to prove that the marriage is between two classes rather than two socio-culturally distinct castes. When he realizes that Arun and Jyoti have failed to understand each other's socio-cultural differences, he asks his wife, Seva to save the marriage not for the sake of their daughter but to save his dream of bringing class and caste together through the marriage. He tells Seva to save this experiment:

[With passion.] Seva, let not this wonderful experiment fail!
this dream is struggling to turn real, let it not crumble into dust
before our eyes! We will have to do something. We will save

² Loomba, Ania. "Inter-Caste Marriage and the Liberal Imagination: Vijaya Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48.43 (2013): 101-111. p. 101-02.

this marriage. Not necessarily for our Jyoti's sake ...
This is not just a question of our daughter's life,
Seva, this has...a far wider significance...this
experiment is very precious experiment.”³

Nath justifies his attempt to draw equation between caste and class through the inter-caste marriage between his daughter, Jyoti and Arun, a Dalit character. He does not blame himself for his failure to understand the caste hierarchy and socio-cultural differences between castes. On the contrary, he considers Arun responsible for the failed experiment because he expects Arun to give up his socio-cultural identity as a Dalit. Thus, in the case of *Kanyadaan*, (New Delhi:2011) one may observe that the play attempts to represent caste as class.

In the case of both the plays, *Purush* (Mumbai:2006) and *Kanyadaan*, (New Delhi:2011) it seems that the attempt has been made by upper caste characters to define caste, especially the Dalit identity, as class identity. The reason behind representing caste as class appears to lie in the socio-political identity of upper caste characters who perceive caste as class. It is evident in their identity as socialists because this upper caste perception of caste as class is found among socialists in the 1970s who were mainly urban middle class Brahmins.⁴ It is evident in the above-mentioned plays that socialist Brahmin characters like Anna in *Purush* (1980) and Nath in *Kanyadaan*, (New Delhi:2011) follow what has been proposed by socialists in 1970s.

Dalit dramatists appear to have responded to the socialist perception of caste as class in plays like *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) and *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune:2009)) by Datta Bhagat and Sanjay Pawar respectively. In both these plays, socialist characters are presented accepting Dalit identity as a caste identity and not a class identity. Apart from the recognition of Dalit as

³ Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.41

⁴ Pandit, Nalini. "Caste and Class in Maharashtra." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 14, no. 7/8, 1979, p.435.

a caste identity by socialist characters, Dalit characters are represented as victims of caste discrimination in these plays, though they are well-educated and economically belong to the middle class. In order to establish Dalit identity as a caste identity, in these plays, Dalit dramatists locate caste discrimination in the socio-cultural identity of Dalits rather than just a class identity.

Wata-Palwata (Pune: 2006) is written by Datta Bhagat, a Marathi Dalit dramatist. The play portrays differences among three generations of Dalit activism. Kaka, a Dalit character represents a period of Dalit activism belonging to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar as he is seen always nostalgic about how he would fight against caste violence under the leadership of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Satish, his nephew, is a college teacher and is of a different opinion about caste struggle because unlike Kaka, he does not consider religion as a source of liberation. Arjun, another Dalit character, is completely different from Kaka and Satish because he seems to be more aggressive than them. Apart from the differences between these Dalit characters, there is a similarity also. It is located in their caste identity. It is because of their caste identity; they face discrimination at the hands of upper caste characters in the play. Thus, the play is an attempt to justify the victimization of Dalits irrespective of their class identity.

Especially the victimization of Satish based on his caste identity as a Dalit appears to negate the notion of caste as class, advocated by upper caste characters in Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists like Jaywant Dalvi and Vijay Tendulkar. Satish faces caste discrimination though he is well-educated and working as a teacher in a college. When he joins the college, he looks for a home on rent. He contacts one of his colleagues, Dasrao Joshi, a Brahmin by caste and requests him to give a room on rent as he rents rooms. Joshi does not do so saying that someone has already paid the advance. By saying so, he avoids Satish because he knows his caste identity.

The victimization of Satish is revealed when Hema, Satish's wife questions Joshi about his decision not to rent his home to Satish. She says:

... Satish was going to take rooms on rent in your house,
Guruji, after getting a job in this town. Remember?
And you 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. ⁵ (Act I Scene I)

Dasrao Joshi accepts what he has done but hides behind his reputation as a high caste. He says that had he given a room to Satish on rent, he could have been excommunicated by his caste people. Joshi says that he could not have married off his daughters within his caste and could not have tenants from upper castes. For the sake of his daughters and tenants, he says that he had to deny a room on rent to Satish. Thus, even Dasrao Joshi, Brahmin by caste, is a victim of the caste system for though he wishes to rent rooms to Satish, he does not do so because he is afraid of getting ostracized by upper castes.

It is not just Satish and Dasrao Joshi who are victimized because of his caste identity but Arjun also seems to face caste discrimination. Arjun is a college student and a Dalit activist. He is working for the rights of people living in Bhimnagar who are mainly Dalits. He wants to accommodate them in newly built homes for the flood victims. According to Arjun, though they are the real victims of the flood, their names are missing in the list, made by the

⁵ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.14

government officials. Instead of them, the list consists of people from upper castes only. Here we can see how systemic violence operates.

As a result, Arjun organizes a demonstration against the government officials especially against the guardian minister of the district. The demonstration turns out to be violent because upper caste people with the help of the police to instigate Dalit demonstrators to be violent. The police hold Arjun responsible for the violent demonstration in which a Dalit widow, Shewanta, loses her life. Consequently, the college in which Arjun is studying, takes disciplinary action against him and expels him. On the contrary, the college does not take any action against Arvind Deshmukh, an upper caste student, who is involved in the violence.

The denial to allocate homes to Dalits in Bhimnagar may also be considered as an example of caste discrimination. When the flood hits the town, people irrespective of their caste and class become homeless. Nevertheless, when the list is made to rehabilitate people, the government officials give more attention to upper caste people affected by the flood. As a result, Dalits remain outside the rehabilitation scheme. When they demonstrate against the unjust treatment, they were beaten by the police and upper caste people burnt down their *basti* because upper caste people consider the demonstration against their interests and a challenge to their position in the caste hierarchy.

The victimization of Dalits in Bhimnagar because of their caste is pointed out by Kaka when Satish justifies the rights of poor upper caste people over the rehabilitation scheme. Kaka says that no doubt upper caste people are economically poor but they are not like Dalits who are poor and at the same time victims of the caste system. He raises the question of why poor upper caste people have burnt down the homes of poor Dalits. He himself answers in the following quote:

But why do you think of all the poor? Granted,
of course, that they are poor. But that certainly did
not prevent them from burning the houses down.
Arjunya broke the law. All right. They should have
burnt down the police station. But no. What they burnt
down was the *basti* of the Dalits, what they burnt
down was the living Shewanta. Why? Because we are
Dalits. Never will they forget that.⁶ (Act II, Scene II)

Thus, in the play, *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) the caste identity of Satish, Arjun and Dalits in Bhimnagar plays a significant role in the discrimination they face. Though being a middle-class person and a college teacher, Satish faces caste discrimination. Arjun faces expulsion from the college because of his caste identity as a Dalit. Besides these two Dalit characters, Dalits in Bhimnagar also face caste violence because of their caste identity and not because of their class identity as pointed out by Kaka.

Apart from *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997), and *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune:2011), a Marathi play written by Sanjay Pawar, projects Dalit identity as caste identity rather than class identity. In the beginning of the play, it is quite evident that the play is going to challenge a perception that caste discrimination is a bygone thing in India and it is replaced by class discrimination. It begins with the letter, sent to upper caste families by the government, that mentions that the caste system has disappeared due to the reservation policy in education and employment. According to the letter, to prove that the caste system has disappeared, every upper caste family must accommodate a person from any socially and educationally backward caste or tribe for ten years.

⁶ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.61

The government order creates uneasiness among upper caste families which is reflected in the conversation between upper caste female characters Vimla and Mrs. Nadkarni. They criticize the government decision and express unwillingness to follow the government order. When they realize that it has been made mandatory by the government, they attempt to manipulate it to suit their interests. Mrs. Nadkarni wishes to accommodate a tribal in order to manipulate her/his skills to make tribal artifacts.

Unlike Mrs. Nadkarni, Vimla finds it difficult to make a decision to choose a socially and educationally backward person. She does not want a person from other caste to be accommodated in her family. When she is persuaded by her husband and daughter, Kamlakar and Sukanya respectively, she expresses her concern about her family values, lifestyle, cleanliness and purity. By paying attention to cleanliness and purity, she considers the presence of a low caste person as a threat to her family values, which are nothing but her caste values. She expresses her views about such values, when her daughter Sukanya asks her to accommodate a Dalit in their family. Vimla responds to Sukanya's suggestion:

Vimal: But our views and values, our lifestyle, our
cleanliness, our purity.”⁷

(Act I Scene IV)

By emphasizing the presence of a Dalit in her family as a threat to her upper caste values like purity and cleanliness, she is dealing with Dalit identity as caste identity rather than a class identity.

Vimala's son, Sudarshan also agrees with her as far as caste as a distinct socio-cultural identity is concerned. Like her mother, he is of the opinion that each caste has its own values and lifestyle which he locates in intelligence and aesthetics. He makes this point when he argues

⁷ Pawar, Sanjay. *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila*. Pune, Nilkanth Prakashan. 2009. p.19

with her sister about differences among castes. He responds to her sister's argument that all castes have equal values:

Every tribe and caste have its own type of
intelligence and aesthetics! ⁸ (Act I, Scene V)

By recognizing the differences of intelligence and aesthetics between castes, Sudarshan counters the equation between caste and class, made by upper caste Marathi dramatists through the representation of Dalit as class identity.

Apart from these two upper caste characters, Vimala and Sudarshan, Kachrya Dhiwar, a Dalit character also points out socio-cultural differences among castes, especially his caste and caste of other characters in the play who are mainly Brahmins. Kachrya Dhiwar is a Dalit who has been brought to Vimala's house by her daughter, Sukanya. She has done so as per the order of the government. In order to prove socio-cultural differences between Dalits and upper castes, he places a stone-god beside Vimala's gods in the god's room. It annoys Vimala and she tells him to remove his god from the god's room but he does not listen to her and keeps his god in the god's room. When Sukanya intervenes, he removes it by saying that he wants to just remind Vimala and Sudarshan that the caste system exists in socio-cultural differences among castes.

Kachrya Dhiwar's effort to locate caste identity in socio-cultural differences between castes is observed in the following conversation among Sukanya, Vimala and Kachrya Dhiwar:

"Vimla: (Sukanya) There is one more god there; right next to ours. A big stone.

Kachrya: That's my god Mummysaheb!

Vimla: but how dare you to keep your god in our god's room?

Kachrya: Hein? Tell me, where I keep my god if not in your god's room? In your kitchen? Or in the bedroom? ...So where does the god go? In the god's room.

⁸ Pawar, Sanjay. *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila*. Pune, Nilkanth Prakashan. 2009. p.24

Vimla: Look here Sukanya! Where he keeps his god is your problem! But I'll certainly not allow it in my god's room.”⁹ (Act I Scene VII)

In the above conversation between Vimla, Sukanya and Kachrya, it is quite apparent that differences between castes reside in hereditary socio-cultural elements. It is evident in the following quotation:

A person's physique, his likes and dislikes in food, his language, the manner of speech, and his whole bearing, show the impress of his caste heritage.¹⁰

Nalini Pandit (1979) highlights the aforesaid socio-cultural differences which distinguish one's caste identity from class identity. She points out these differences as limitations of Marxist ideology that overlooks caste identity.

“For them (Marxists), class is defined by its relationship to the means of production. There are basically two classes in any community, those who own the means of production and those who work on them, the exploiters and the exploited. Caste, therefore, will have to be distinguished from class and the relationship between the two independently ascertained.”¹¹

Apart from considering socio-cultural differences as distinguishing elements among castes, the play, *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune: 2009) justifies legitimacy of caste-based reservation. The play begins with the assessment of caste-based reservation in education and employment, implemented by the government of India. It may be because before the play was written, there was a debate on what should be the basis of reservation in education and employment. Some

⁹ Pawar, Sanjay. *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila*. Pune, Nilkanth Prakashan. 2009. p.28.

¹⁰ Pandit, Nalini. “Caste and Class in Maharashtra.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 14, no. 7/8, 1979, p.435.

¹¹ Nalini Pandit. “Caste and Class in Maharashtra.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 14, no. 7/8, 1979, p.425.

writers would support one's class identity whereas some would justify one's caste identity as the basis for reservation in education and employment. Such a debate features in the articles, *Should 'Caste' Be the Basis for Recognising Backwardness?* (1984) and *Caste, Class and Reservation* (1985) written by I. P. Desai and Ghanshyam Shah respectively.

I. P. Desai endorses class as the basis for reservation because Desai believes that by making caste as the basis, the government maintains the caste system and according to him, there are different classes within a caste. Further, he says that educated and employed class within a caste gets the benefit of the reservation and one who is illiterate and unemployed remains deprived of the reservation policy. Therefore, he believes that class should be the basis of reservation in education and employment.¹²

On the other hand, Ghanshyam Shah holds one's caste identity should be the basis of reservation rather than class. He is of the opinion that poor people belonging to two different castes, especially Brahmin and Koli, cannot be put together under a class because they are socio-culturally different. According to him, a poor Brahmin enjoys more advantages than a poor Koli because a poor Brahmin has neighborhood, family environment and historical traditions suitable to excel in education. Besides the cultural differences, Shah also explains his argument against class-based reservation by stating that there are different classes within a caste but still people, belonging to same caste having class differences, face caste discrimination, though it varies in degree.¹³

The latter part of the debate, endorsed by Ghanshyam Shah, seems to be accepted in the play, *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune:2009). It is noted in the case of Kacharya Dhiwar, a Dalit

¹² Desai, I. P. "Should 'Caste' Be the Basis for Recognising Backwardness?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 19, no. 28, 1984, pp. 1106–16. p.1106.

¹³ Shah, Ghanshyam. "Caste, Class and Reservation." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1985, pp. 132–36. p.133-34.

character, though he is educated and employed like other upper caste characters in the play, faces caste discrimination when he comes to stay with an upper caste family according to the government order. He has been discriminated against because of his food habits and socio-cultural differences. He was not allowed to place his god beside the gods of upper caste characters. Thus, the play challenges the thought, that one who is educated and employed does not face caste discrimination, which is the basis of the argument in favour of class-based reservation.

Thus, both non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists are different from each other as far as the representation of Dalit as class and caste identity is concerned. Non-Dalit dramatists portray Dalit identity as class identity whereas Dalit dramatists depict Dalit as a caste identity. Dalit dramatists prove that even if Dalits get educated and move upward in the class hierarchy, they are mistreated because of their caste identity.

2.2. Representation of Linguistic Identity of Dalits

Each caste has its own way of speaking and intonations, based on the social environment in which the respective caste is **locked**. Vinaykumar Shrivastava, in his article, *Speaking of Caste: Merits of the Principle of Segmentation* (2016), has found language as a distinctive unit among castes in India in his description of caste as a cultural whole.

Each *jati* is a 'cultural whole': has its own words and intonation in a commonly shared dialect... ¹⁴

The term "dialect" used in the aforementioned quotation by Shrivastava does not refer to a dialect in the traditional sense, which is a linguistic category smaller than language, but rather to a variety of languages that belong to a specific social class and are also known as sociolects,

¹⁴ Shrivastava, Vinay Kumar. "Speaking of Caste: Merit of the Principle of Segmentation." *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2016, pp. 317–38. P.321.

having unique characteristics based on the socio-linguistic identities of speakers. (Crystal, 2008:441)

Kancha Ilaiah (1995) has also noted that each caste has its own language, based on its occupation. As he belongs to the Kurumma caste in Andhra Pradesh which is known for sheep-rearing, his language has been influenced by the occupation of sheep-rearing. He ascertains his linguistic identity which is different from other castes in the following words:

Each one of us was supposed to pick up the language of our particular caste. I was introduced to the specific language of sheep and sheep-rearing tasks. I was taught the different names of the sheep, *bolli-gorre*, *pulla gore*, *nulla-gorre* and so on. ¹⁵

Rita Kothari has also made contribution in locating the linguistic identity of Dalits. She locates it in their occupations, locality and inheritance. The issue of occupation is situated, by her, in words associated with certain occupations of Dalits especially tanning. (Kothari, 2013:65) According to her, the words associated with tanning are known to Dalits who are in the tanning occupation and as far as locality and inheritance are concerned, the language of Dalits differ from languages of other castes with respect to words associated with the locality in which Dalits live, and inherited words from their ancestors. ¹⁶

Apart from differences in terms of occupation, location and inheritance, Dalits also differ from other castes linguistically, especially upper castes as far as the spread of education among Dalits is concerned. (Ilaiah, 2012: 130) The language, used in schools, is different from the language, spoken by Dalits in their locality, therefore Dalit students feel uncomfortable at

¹⁵ Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I am not a Hindu?: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*. Calcutta: Samya, 2009. p.03-05

¹⁶ Kothari, Rita. "Caste in a Casteless Language? English as a Language of 'Dalit' Expression." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 39, 2013, pp. 60–68. p.65

school and do not excel in education. They feel inferior to upper caste students who easily identify with the language, used in school.¹⁷ The linguistic difference is also noticed between educated and illiterate Dalits because educated Dalits speak the language of upper castes which they have learnt in schools and colleges whereas illiterate Dalits remain limited to their linguistic identity, caused by the locality in which they live. Thus, illiterate Dalits not only feel linguistically inferior to upper castes but educated Dalits as well in terms educational as well as linguistic differences.

2.2.1 Non-Dalit Dramatists and Representation of Linguistic Identity of Dalits

Non-Dalit dramatists have employed the language of upper castes and urban middle class because Marathi theatre has been under the influence of upper castes residing in cities like Pune and Mumbai as far as dramatists, directors, actors, and spectators are concerned.¹⁸ Even after the rise of Dalit Panthers and its effect on Marathi theatre, they remained confined to the use of upper caste language. Due to the activism of the Dalit Panthers, non-Dalit dramatists had to take notice of caste discrimination as one of the main issues to be discussed in Marathi theatre. They mainly dealt with the aggressive activism of educated urban Dalits. Even though Dalit life entered Marathi theatre, the language of Marathi theatre remained the same. It might have happened because the language of education in schools and colleges has been the language of upper castes which might have been acquired by educated Dalits residing in cities like Pune and Mumbai.

There are instances in which linguistic differences are noted in Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists. These differences are noted in case of illiterate Dalit characters who not only linguistically differ from upper caste characters but educated Dalit characters. Both upper caste and Dalit characters converse in a variety of language that differs from illiterate Dalit

¹⁷ Ilaiah, Kancha. *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism*. Kolkata: Samya Prakashan, 2012. p.13.

¹⁸ Sathe, Makrandh. *A Socio-political History of Marathi Theatre*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015. P.975.

characters. It is because of the language, used by illiterate Dalit characters, they are not allowed to enter public places, which are dominated by the language of the upper castes. There are occasional differences between upper caste and educated Dalit characters. Dalit characters deliberately shift to a different variety of language, which is considered obscene and impure by upper caste characters. They do so, more often than not, in order to assert their identity as a Dalit.

Upper caste and Dalit characters speaking the language of upper castes are noticed in *Purush*, a Marathi play written by Jaywant Dalvi. In *Purush*, Siddharth is the only one Dalit character who appears on stage to converse with upper caste characters, especially Ambika and her father, Anna. He is a graduate and works with Ambika for an organization that works for socio-economic equality. Though he works with Ambika and has cordial relationship with her family, he shares differences with Ambika and Anna. The conversation between them brings out the differences in their perception of Dalit activism. Though they differ from each other on issues of caste conflict, they share the similar variety of language to express their differences. Throughout the play, there is only variety of language used that seems to be the language of upper castes.

Kanyadaan (New Delhi:2011) a play written by Vijay Tendulkar appears to be different from *Purush* because the linguistic difference is noticed between a Dalit character Arun and other upper caste characters. Arun is a graduate. He marries an upper caste character, Jyoti. Before the marriage, Jyoti invites Arun so that he meets her parents and brother, Jayprakash. He comes and meets her parents who ask him questions about the future of Jyoti after the marriage. He deliberately informs them that she will distil illicit liquor and sell it to customers. In order to provide this information, he uses a language that is considered as obscene by Jayprakash who says that such language will not be accepted by him. He finds it uncomfortable to utter what

Arun has said in front of his parents and sister. He expresses his disgust against Arun's language in the following manner:

Jayprakash: Never mind me and Ma. Will you listen to
what he has said to Jyoti? She tried to say something
to support him and he said 'You... (Shrinking a bit.)
...don't know a shit. You shut up!' Such obscene language
in this house, to a daughter of this house! And in mother's
presence?¹⁹ (Act I Scene II)

In his views about language, used by Arun, Jayprakash seems to be worried about obscenity and his house. He opines that Arun's language cannot be accepted in his house because it is obscene and cannot be used in the presence of his mother.

Zhunj (Mumbai:1982) a Marathi play written by Madhukar Toradmal (1932-2013) is different from *Purush* and *Kanyadaan* (New Delhi:2011) as far as linguistic identity of illiterate Dalit character, Rakhma is concerned. She stays with Professor Gaikwad in a Dalit locality. As Professor Gaikwad is a teacher in a college, his language differs Rakhma's who is illiterate. He speaks like upper caste characters in the play whereas the difference between Rakhma and Gaikwad is noticed when professor Gaikwad is appointed as principal of the college. After his appointment, he gets a quarter in the college to stay on the campus. He wants Rakhma to move with him to the college quarter and to give up her language because Gaikwad thinks that her language is not suitable for a place like the college. Rakhma does not accompany him because she also thinks that her language does not suit the college. She calls her mouth a flowing sewage and the college a *makhar* (a sanctified place):

¹⁹ Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011 pp.26-27

Rakhma: ... my mouth is like a flowing sewage. Why are you taking a whore like me to *makhar* (a sanctified place)? I am fine where I am now.²⁰

(Act I Scene II)

Rakhma says that her mouth is a flowing sewage because she may be comparing her language with the place where she lives, a Dalit locality. The equation between her language and the place where she lives seems to be an upper castes' perception as upper caste character Chavan, a teacher in the college expresses similar views about her language when she uses it in a meeting in the college in which the issue of sexual allegation against professor Gaikwad is discussed. She enters the room and abuses Sindhu who has made the allegation against Professor Gaikwad. When she abuses her, Chavan, an upper caste character, interrupts her by saying:

Chavan: Is this the college or Maharwada (A Dalit locality)?²¹

(Act III Scene III)

The equation between language of Rakhma and the Dalit locality has also been pointed out by Dalit characters like Professor Gaikwad and Kamble who says that her language does not suit a place like the college.

Thus, non-Dalit dramatists represent upper caste characters and educated Dalit characters as users of a similar variety of language. As far as uneducated Dalit characters are concerned, they are represented as using a variety of language which is reckoned to be obscene, impure, and not suitable for public places, dominated by upper castes.

2.2.2 Dalit Dramatists and Representation of Linguistic Identity of Dalits

²⁰ Toradmal, Madhukar. *Zhunj*. Mumbai: Majestic Prakashan, 1982. p.15

²¹ Toradmal, Madhukar. *Zhunj*. Mumbai: Majestic Prakashan, 1982. p. 65

Dalit dramatists appear to be like non-Dalit dramatists on the issue of the representation of linguistic identity of educated Dalits. However, they differ from non-Dalit dramatists when it comes to the deliberate use of a variety of language by Dalit characters to irritate upper caste characters because upper caste characters find it unacceptable and impure. Upper caste characters in *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:2011) and *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila* (Pune:2009) are deliberately reminded that linguistically Dalits are different from upper castes in order to make them uncomfortable.

Kaka, a Dalit character in the play, *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997), belongs to the first generation of Dalit activism as the play convers three generations of Dalit activism. He is proud of belonging to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's generation of Dalit activism. His language differs from the other two generations of Dalit activism. It is interesting that he does not expect Satish and Arjun, Dalit characters to recognize his linguistic identity. He expects Hema, an upper caste character to recognize his linguistic identity by reminding her how to respond to him whenever he gives her a call:

Kaka: Shit! Shit what shit? How many
times I told you? Whenever I call you, say
'yes' and don't say 'what'.

Hema: (Passively) Yes.

Kaka: That's it... ²² (Act I Scene I)

Kaka not only expects Hema to learn how to respond to his call but it is a kind of linguistic dominance. He wants her to follow him by saying 'yes' in the name of his linguistic identity as a Dalit.

In the play, *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune: 2009) by Sanjay Pawar, Kachrya Dhiwar, an educated Dalit character uses the dialect of Marathi, meant to be used by illiterate Dalits in Marathi

²² Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.01

plays, to annoy upper caste characters because they find it polluting. Therefore, Sukanya, an upper caste female character asks Kachrya about his language:

Sukanya: you are such a thinker...you read
books...you can debate so well...then why
is your language so...²³ (Act II Scene VI)

Though Sukanya does not mention that his language is polluting, it seems to be apparent that she is hinting at the difference between educational qualification of Kachrya and his language. She seems to raise this issue because his language appears to be polluting.

Kachrya answers her by saying that he is using a language, meant for illiterate rural Dalit characters in Marathi plays, to make the presence of his caste identity to be felt by upper caste characters in the play. He seems to have done this as he is placed, as per the government order, in an upper caste home to prove that the caste system does not exist. However, he wants to prove it wrong by creating an image of a Dalit, possessed by upper castes. Interestingly, he calls his use of such language as a drama rather than a reality. It means that he looks like aware of the difference between languages used by educated-urban and illiterate rural Dalits. It is evident in the following quote from the play in which Kachrya justifies his use of so-called impure language, Kachrya says:

When I first got this metro, I spoke like
that...like a rustic, country guy...school taught
me to feel shame for the way I spoke...I got major
complexes...then I realized...all my people...my
relatives, caste and community, all around
spoke the same language...what was I nervous
about...who decided which language was pure

²³ Pawar, Sanjay. *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila*. Pune, Nilkanth Prakashan. 2009. P.54

and which was impure...why accept that slavish
shame...Books are different and life is different
...in any case the language of real people still has
to surface yet...that feeling prompted me to
deliberately speak in this 'non-standard form' ...
you felt that. ²⁴ (Act II Scene VI)

Like non-Dalit dramatists, Dalit dramatists appear to have also used a dialect of Marathi for illiterate and rural Dalits that is not accepted by upper castes as suitable for a high caste space like Brahmanwada. It is evident in the play, *Bamanwada*, written by Ramnath Chavan, a Marathi Dalit dramatist. In the play, when a Dalit character Aai comes to stay at Bamanwada, other upper caste characters like Tatya, a Brahmin character does not like the language used by her. Whenever Tatya meets her, he tells her to change her language and to give up her identity as a Dalit. One may observe it in the following citation:

Tatya: ...(Aai) I always tell your community to get
educated, change your behaviour and improve your
language...then nobody will call you Dalits. ²⁵ (Act III Scene I)

Thus, both non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists agree that educated Dalits are linguistically similar as far as the use of language by upper caste as well as Dalit characters are concerned. They also accept that illiterate Dalit characters differ from both upper caste and educated Dalit characters and it is the language, used by illiterate Dalits that deny them access to public places which are dominated by upper caste language. Nonetheless they differ from each other in case of the use of language of Dalits except educated Dalits to prove that Dalits are linguistically different from upper castes.

²⁴ Pawar, Sanjay. *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila*. Pune, Nilkanth Prakashan. 2009. p.55

²⁵ Chavan, Ramnath. *Bamanwada*. Pune: Shivam Prakashan, 2007. p.96

2.3. Representation of Dalit Activism

Apart from the different opinions about caste and class, non-Dalit Marathi dramatists and Dalit Marathi dramatists also differ from each other in the representation of Dalit male identity as an activist. Non-Dalit dramatists in the plays like *Purush* (Mumbai:2006) and *Kanyadaan* (New Delhi: 2011) portray Dalit male characters as opposing socialist upper caste characters and opportunists. On the contrary Marathi Dalit dramatists in plays like *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) and *Kon Mhant Taka Dila*, (Pune:2009) describe Dalit male activists working with upper caste socialists and not as opportunists as mentioned by non-Dalit dramatists.

In the play, *Purush*, (Mumbai:2006) the clash between Dalit activism and socialist ideology seems to be evident in the conversation between Siddharth, a Dalit character and Anna, a socialist who is Brahmin by caste. Siddharth, is seen arguing with Anna, an upper caste socialist character. Siddharth is compared with Anna to symbolize the struggle between Dalit activism and socialist ideology. Siddharth represents militant Dalit activism as he believes in bypassing the law to punish perpetrators of caste violence whereas Anna stands for socialist ideology that believes in equality irrespective of class, and in carrying out social work legally. Siddharth is aware of the limitations of socialist ideology therefore he always makes mockery of Anna and socialism. He calls it a movement of upper caste old people in which there is no place for Dalits like him.

On the other hand, Anna castigates Dalit activism for being noisy only and ignoring the actual social issues. Anna says that Dalit activism is meant for popularity only as he believes that after getting publicity in the newspaper, Dalit activism stops to fight against caste discrimination. Anna's aforesaid views about Dalit activism are noticed in his conversation with Siddharth. Anna says :

You people are more noisy than

rebellious... because by creating noise
one gets popularity and one can be a political
leader... ²⁶

(Act I)

In the clash between Siddharth and Anna, Siddharth is portrayed as an opportunist because she is shown compromising with his ideology. He gives up the fight against caste discrimination for a job, offered by an upper caste political leader, Gulabrao Jadhav. He also forsakes his relationship with Ambika, Anna's daughter when he realizes that she is sexually assaulted by the same political leader who has offered him a job.

Kanyadaan (New Delhi: 2011) by Vijay Tendulkar is a similar example of the representation of Dalit male activist as an anti-socialist and opportunist. In the play, Arun Athawale, a Dalit character is represented as a contrast to what has been proposed by Nath, an upper caste character who believes in incorporating caste struggle in socialist ideology. Arun does not recognize Nath's efforts to understand caste differences but instead he attempts to manipulate the popularity of Nath as a socialist Member of Legislative Assembly.

Nath's identity as a socialist is revealed in the beginning of the play. It is evident in the conversation between Nath and his wife, Seva. When Seva criticizes him for being just a MLA for a long period of time, Nath replies:

Nath: Just you wait! Let our Socialists get hold of
the government, and then watch out! Who else is
there to take the chair? ²⁷ (Act I Scene I)

²⁶ Dalvi, Jaywant. *Purush*. Pune: Majestic Prakashan, 2006. P. 32

²⁷ Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.09

When he encounters Arun for the first time, he reckoned himself fortunate that he has broken the caste barrier in the real sense. It is because Jyoti, his daughter, is going to marry Arun. Nath says that he has made speeches on inter-caste marriages in support of equality irrespective of caste differences but Jyoti's marriage has given him an opportunity to be a socialist in real terms.

Nath's dream to be a socialist in real terms is shattered by Arun, a Dalit male writer and activist in the play. Arun brings out the socio-cultural differences between Dalits and how Dalits are perceived by socialists like Nath. According to Arun, Dalits' life is socio-culturally different and the difference lies in history of caste discrimination. He wonders how one can erase one's history from one's mind. He describes how his parents had to suffer because of their caste differences with upper castes.

Besides Arun's views about caste differences, Arun is represented as violent as in a fit of anger, he beats the pregnant Jyoti. He treats Jyoti cruelly because he does not tolerate her identity as an upper caste. Along with violent behaviour of Arun, the play also represents him as an opportunist because though he has differences with Nath, he comes to invite him to be chief guest at the book launch programme. He intends to manipulate the popularity of Nath as an MLA. He keeps aside the differences between him and Nath, when it comes to taking advantage of Nath's popularity.

The representation of Dalit activists' opposition to socialist ideology and their opportunism in Marathi play, written by non-Dalit dramatists appears to be the outcome of bypassing Dalits by socialists in demonstrations which were jointly organized by the Dalit Panthers and socialist leaders like S. M. Joshi (1904-1989). Attempts were made by socialists to take over demonstrations and ignore the presence of the Dalit Panthers. Lata Murugkar (1995) has noted such attempts by socialists in the case of Namantar Movement. (Murugkar, 1995:207-08) She

says that in 1978, it was carried out jointly by Dalits and socialists to name the Marathwada University after Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. According to her, when the committee was set up by the government to investigate the matter, especially violence against Dalits during demonstrations in Marathwada region in Maharashtra, the Dalit Panthers boycotted the meeting with the government whereas socialists under the leadership of S. M. Joshi attended the meeting.²⁸ Such differences between socialists and Dalit activists appear to have caused the rift between socialists and Dalits which is represented in Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists.

As far as the representation of Dalits male activists as opportunists in Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists is concerned, it seems to be a perception of the Dalit Panthers by upper castes. Murugkar (1995) points out the so-called opportunism of the Dalit Panthers especially in case of Namdeo Dhasal and Raja Dhale, the Dalit Panther activists and Dalit poets. According to her, Dhasal embraced political parties like the Congress and Shiv Sena whereas Dhale remained limited to Neo-Buddhists, especially Mahar caste, for his activism.²⁹ She says that they are blamed for such decisions but according to her, one should also consider the prevalent socio-political situation which was suppressing Dalit activism by registering false criminal cases against the Dalit Panthers. In order to get rid of such cases, she believes that the Panthers might have become opportunists. The representation of Dalit male activists in the plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists seems to have ignored the explanation, given by Murugkar, for the opportunism of the Dalit Panthers.

²⁸ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 1995. pp.208-209

²⁹ Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, 1995. p.113

In response to the representation of Dalit male activists as anti-socialist and opportunists, the Dalit dramatists represented them as working with their socialist spouses and taking a firm stand against caste discrimination even in difficult times. It is evident in *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) and *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune :2009). The plays also depict socialist characters assisting Dalit male activists by taking a stand against characters belonging to their own castes. As far as Dalit male activists in the plays are concerned, they are represented criticizing the upper castes for caste discrimination and at the time they also disagree with other Dalit characters because of their over aggressive stance against caste discrimination.

The healthy relationship between a Dalit male character and a socialist character may be observed in the case of Satish, a Dalit character and Hema, a socialist character in *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1197) by Datta Bhagat. They prove to be an ideal couple as far as inter-caste marriage is concerned. Arun is a Dalit and Hema a Brahmin by caste. In the play, they are represented as respecting each other's socio-cultural differences rather than criticizing each other as it is found in the plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists. Unlike socialist characters in Marathi plays by non-Dalit dramatists, they hold one's caste identity as a responsible marker for one's caste oppression rather than class.

It also appears that both Satish and Hema not only respect each other's caste differences but do not hesitate to scold characters belonging to their castes for their caste discriminatory misdeeds. Hema especially criticizes Dasrao Joshi, who is a Brahmin character in the play, for not renting a room to Satish because of his caste identity as a Dalit. On the other hand, Satish reprimands Arjun, a Dalit character in the play, not to follow the idea of mobocracy and militant thoughts to solve the problem of caste discrimination. Satish scolds Arjun for being over aggressive in the following manner Satish says;

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 cannot 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.³⁰

(Act I Scene II)

The difference between Satish and Arjun looks like the difference between Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar and the Dalit Panther. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar believes in dealing with caste discrimination within the limit of legal procedures whereas the Dalit Panthers do not believe in legal procedures and want to solve caste discrimination through violence.³¹ Such difference between Dalits seems to be missing in Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit dramatists as they appear to represent only Dalits' aggression and militant nature. On the contrary, Marathi play, *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) looks like representing both the sides of Dalit activism through Satish and Arjun.

A similar example of an alliance between Dalit activism and socialism seems to be observed in *Kon Mhant Taka Dila* (Pune:2009) in the relationship between Kachrya and Sukanya, a Dalit and a Brahmin respectively. They agree with each other at various levels as far as their socio-cultural differences are concerned. For instance, Sukanya supports an act of Kachrya to place his stone god in god's room along with other gods, worshipped by her mother Vimla. She justifies Kachrya's act by saying that he should be accepted with his caste identity and according to her, it is rooted in his sociocultural background.

³⁰ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.37.

³¹ Murugkar Lata Dalit Panther Mumbai, Pupolar Prakashan ,1995. pp.130-132.

2.4 Representation of Inter-Caste Marriage and Dalit Identity

The social institutions such as caste and marriage are associated with each other because caste maintains its position in the caste hierarchy through endogamy which means that one is socially mandated to marry within one's caste and its violation is strictly punished. By making endogamy an obligation, caste remains a closed social unit that does not allow its membership to members from other castes. It is not just high castes which are concerned about maintaining caste as a closed social unit but low castes are seen marrying within the caste. (Shah, 2002:1317) It happens due to the idea of caste hierarchy in which every caste considers itself superior to other castes. Interestingly, it is noticed among Dalits. In Gujarat, people belonging to the ex-untouchable castes follow endogamy as they also marry within their castes.³²

Though inter-caste marriage is strictly prohibited, sometimes marriage outside caste is allowed between high caste man and a woman belonging to a caste lower than the caste of man. As caste is patrilinear in its nature, the marriage between high caste man and low caste woman is allowed. Such marriages do not disturb the position of the man in the caste hierarchy. This type of marriage is called hypergamous (anuloma) marriage. On the other hand, hypogamous (*pratiloma*) marriage is strictly prohibited with severe punishments because nobody from high castes allows his/her daughter to marry a person belonging to a caste, lower than theirs in the caste hierarchy. It is considered as an insult to high castes and a threat to their position in the caste hierarchy.³³

As endogamy has been considered an important feature of the caste system, inter-caste marriage, either hypergamous or hypogamous, functions as a remedy to caste discrimination.

³² Shah, A. M. "The Dalit Category and its Differentiation." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37.04 (2002): p.1317.

³³ Abraham, Janaki. "Contingent Caste Endogamy and Patriarchy: Lessons for Our Understanding of Caste." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49.02 (2014): 56-65. P.56.

It has been accepted by both, Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948) and Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar (1891-1956). Nevertheless, both are different from each other because Gandhi looks at it as an act of social movement whereas Ambedkar considers it as an act of an individual based on scrutiny of the caste system. Gandhian idea of inter-caste marriage is a romantic one because he does not believe in the scrutiny of the caste system before one gets married outside one's caste. (Loomba, 2013:103) On the other hand, Ambedkar holds the scrutiny of *shastras*, in which the caste system is codified and justified, as a prerequisite of inter-caste marriage. For him, inter-caste marriage without scrutiny of the caste system does not make any difference to the caste hierarchy as both, man and woman stick to their caste identities, even after their marriage.³⁴

Since Marathi theatre after the rise of the Dalit Panthers turned to the representation of caste discrimination and its eradication, inter-caste marriage became its inseparable part. Initially non-Dalit dramatists, influenced by liberal views about the caste system, handled the issues of inter-caste marriage to prove that it does not contribute to make oneself free from one's caste identity. They are of the opinion that inter-caste marriage creates a situation which becomes socially suffocating for both, man and woman, who marry outside their castes. It happens because they do not give up their caste identities which results in domestic violence. Non-Dalit dramatists hold Dalit male characters responsible for domestic violence against upper caste female characters. Marathi Dalit dramatists do not differ from the perception of inter-caste marriage by non-Dalit dramatists but they do not represent Dalit male characters, causing domestic violence against upper caste female characters.

2.4.1 *Kanyadaan* (2011) and Inter-caste Marriage

³⁴ Loomba, Ania. "Inter-Caste Marriage and the Liberal Imagination: Vijya Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48.43 (2013): 101-111. p. 103.

Kanyadaan, (New Delhi:2011) written by Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008) is about an inter-caste marriage that is hypogamous in its nature because Jyoti, an upper caste female character, marries Arun Athawale, a Dalit. Though it is an example of a hypogamous marriage, the marriage is accepted and celebrated by her father which is contrary to what is experienced in case of hypogamous marriage. In case of hypogamous marriage, woman's parents express disapproval because they think it to be an insulting act. Despite the permission from Jyoti's father, the marriage between Jyoti and Arun remains an unsuccessful attempt to challenge the caste system because Arun does not lose a chance to taunt his in-laws for their upper caste identity and expresses his anger against upper caste through violence against Jyoti.³⁵

The inter-caste marriage between Jyoti and Arun is firstly mentioned in the conversation between Nath, an upper caste character and Jyoti, his daughter. Jyoti informs him that she has decided to marry Arun Athawale who is a Dalit by caste. Though Nath is under the influence of liberal view of the caste system, he is prejudiced about the surname, Athawale which is found in upper castes and Dalits. When Jyoti mentions the surname Athawale, Nath asks her if he is a Brahmin and Jyoti responds that he is a Dalit:

Jyoti: [Both diffident and serious] His name is Arun Athawale.

Nath: [Wind out of his sails] A Brahmin?

Jyoti: No, he is a Dalit.

Nath: [Excited.] Marvellous! But the name sounded like
a Brahmin's.³⁶ (Act I Scene I)

³⁵ Loomba, Ania. "Inter-Caste Marriage and the Liberal Imagination: Vijaya Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48.43 (2013): 101-111. p. 102.

³⁶ Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.08

Nath expects that Jyoti is going to marry an upper caste but when he realizes that Jyoti wants to marry a Dalit, he changes his stance and becomes a person for whom caste does not make any difference. His son, Jayaprakash calls him casteist for his prejudiced view about the surname Athawale. Nath ignores him by changing the topic and shifting to other issues about Arun Athawale such as his economic background.³⁷

Though Nath seems to be prejudiced about the surname Athawale, he endorses Jyoti's decision to marry Arun Athawale and opposes his wife, Seva who raises the issue of economic and cultural background of Arun Athawale. Seva seems to be more worried about economic and cultural background of Arun. She is of the opinion that Arun belongs to a different cultural background and it may be problematic for Jyoti. Nath responds to questions, raised by Seva about economic and cultural background of Arun. He says that Arun's educational background will solve economic and cultural differences. When Jyoti says that she will manage the economic and cultural differences, Nath supports her calling Jyoti 'no homebound housewife' because he believes that she will work and support Arun in managing household issues and cultural differences.

Seva differs from Nath in the understanding of cultural differences between high castes and Dalits. She says that Nath and Seva are fighting against caste differences for a long period but still they are not able to cope with cultural differences between high castes and Dalits. She says that she is anxious about Jyoti's decision to marry Arun because she opines that cultural differences cannot be erased overnight. Though she does not explain what she means by cultural differences, it is quite sure that she is referring to their caste identities. Seva states her anxiety in the following manner, Seva says::

³⁷ Tendulkar, Vijay. Kanyadaan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.09

My anxiety is not over his being
a Dalit...you have been brought up in a
specific culture. To erase or to change
all this overnight is not just possible. He
is different in every way. You may
not able to handle it.³⁸ (Act I Scene I)

The difference between Nath and Seva arises due to their distinct understandings of inter-caste marriage. Nath is led by a view of inter-caste marriage, possessed by liberal reformers which believes that inter-caste marriage is an instant solution to the caste system. On the other hand, Seva seems to be cautious and influenced by Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar's idea of inter-caste marriage which believes in the scrutiny of the caste system before one can think of marrying outside one's caste.³⁹

Though Jyoti and Arun have decided to marry each other irrespective of their caste differences, Arun is not ready to give up his caste identity. It is noted when Jyoti invites Arun to introduce him to her parents. When Arun arrives at her house, he finds it uncomfortable because of the size of her house. He finds it too big and compares it with sharks and crocodiles because he considers it as a sign of capitalist upper castes.⁴⁰ He compares her house with the hut where Arun's parents live and describes how they are coping with the caste system and poverty. Here, Arun tries to remind Jyoti that they belong to different social backgrounds. When Jyoti tries to stop Arun talking about his caste identity, he becomes violent and twists her hand badly that

³⁸ Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.13

³⁹ Loomba, Ania. "Inter-Caste Marriage and the Liberal Imagination: Vijay Tendulkar's *Kanyadaan*." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48.43 (2013): 101-111. p. 103.

⁴⁰ Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.16

brings tears to her eyes. He gets violent because he holds Jyoti as an upper caste woman, responsible for the exploitation of his fore-fathers.⁴¹

Arun does not lose caste identity even after marriage and he maintains it by being violent to Jyoti. He says that it is not in his hands to be nice with Jyoti after he gets drunk. It means that anger against the upper caste is deeply rooted in his unconscious mind. He says that after getting drunk, he loses his temper and does not know what happens after that. When Seva asks him the reason to be violent, he justifies it by saying wife-beating is a normal thing in his caste. He does not regret his violent behaviour and violence against Jyoti. Arun:

What am I but the son of scavengers. We
don't know non-violent ways of Brahmins like you.
We drink and beat our wives... We make love
to them...but the beating is what gets publicized⁴²

(Act II Scene I)

It is interesting that Jyoti does not complain about the violence, perpetrated against her, by Arun. It may be because she does not want to prove her father wrong. He is the one who has motivated her to marry outside her caste to justify his liberal ideas about caste discrimination. Despite violence against her, she prefers to stay with her husband and calls herself a scavenger. She abandons her caste identity as an upper caste and becomes a Dalit.⁴³

In this way, the play is about the failure of inter-caste marriage in erasing caste identities of those who marry outside their castes. Arun does not give up his caste identity as a Dalit (scavenger) and Jyoti gives up her caste identity as an upper caste and becomes a Dalit in order

⁴¹ Tendulkar, Vijay. Kanyadaan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p. 17

⁴² Tendulkar, Vijay. Kanyadaan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.44

⁴³ Tendulkar, Vijay. Kanyadaan. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.70

to save the idea of inter-caste marriage and the face of her father who has done *Kanyadaan* (New Delhi: 2011) in order to demonstrate his liberal ideology of caste.

2.4.2 *Wata-Palwata* (1997) and Inter-caste Marriage

Wata-Palwata (Pune:1997) portrays differences between three generations of Dalit activism. Kaka, a Dalit character represents a period of Dalit activism belonging to Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar as he is seen always nostalgic about how he has fought against caste violence under the leadership of Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar. Kaka also believes that Buddhism is a source of liberation for Dalits. Satish, his nephew, is a college teacher and is of a different opinion about caste struggle because unlike Kaka, he does not consider religion as a source of liberation. Arjun, a college student, and activist, is completely different from Kaka and Satish because he seems to be more aggressive than them as he does not hesitate to violate laws in order to do justice to demands of Dalits. Apart from the differences between three generations of Dalit activism, the play also deals with inter-caste marriage and its impact on the caste system.⁴⁴

Apart from the portrayal of three generation of Dalits, the play, *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) also deals with an inter-caste marriage between Hema, an upper caste and Satish, a Dalit. Both, Hema and Satish, do not want to be called by their caste identities as they believe that after their marriage, they have become casteless. However, they are reminded of their caste identity by Dalit as well as upper caste characters like Kaka, Dasrao Joshi and his daughter, Sonal. It is Hema who faces more casteist remarks than Satish because her marriage with Satish is not accepted by both, Dalit as well as upper caste characters whereas Satish is criticized by only a Dalit character, Kaka who blames him for doing injustice to a Dalit girl by marrying an upper caste, Hema.

⁴⁴ Sathe, Makrandh. *A Socio-political History of Marathi Theatre*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015. pp.1041-44.

The play, *Wata-Palwata* (Pune:1997) begins with the conversation between an upper caste character Hema and a Dalit character Kaka who try to prove each other wrong as far as the caste conflict is concerned. Hema does not want to be called upper-caste because she thinks that she has abandoned her caste identity before she has married Satish, a nephew of Kaka. However, Kaka reminds her that she is an upper caste either through the mockery of her language, which is different from Kaka, or by referring to comments, made by people, about their marriage.⁴⁵ By reminding her of her caste identity, Kaka wants to prove that caste does not go easily even though one marries outside one's caste. Kaka says:

Whatever is truth come out of mouth—
(Hurt by Hema's words) Who likes caste?
Who likes caste? I have worked with
Babasaheb! The same work! Thirty-forty
years worked hard. But did caste disappear?
How many years have passed after your marriage?
Five. Three and half years have passed since
you have come to this town! What do people say?
Satish Godghate, a Buddhist professor! And his
wife a Brahmin.⁴⁶ (Act I Scene I)

Kaka not only keeps on reminding Hema of her identity as an upper caste but blames Satish for marrying her. He considers the marriage between Hema and Satish as a loss to a Dalit girl. He opines that Satish could have given shelter to a Dalit girl by marrying her. For him, inter-caste marriage between Hema and Satish is an injustice to a Dalit girl who could have enjoyed luxuries, earned by Satish. He expresses this view in Hema's absence when he converses with Dasrao Joshi, an upper caste character who is a teacher and freedom fighter:

⁴⁵ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.03

⁴⁶ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.03

Kaka: Now look at this woman, Hema. Now she is
my daughter-in-law.

Das: What then?

Kaka: She is too good, though being a Brahmin.
But if she is not brought here, our poor girl
could have enjoyed this luxury. I call it
benefits from both sides. Our coin is fake,
what can we do?...⁴⁷

(Act I Scene II)

Apart from Kaka, Dasrao Joshi and Arjun, a Dalit college student also reminds Hema of her caste identity. He comments on her caste identity when he summons Arjun, a Dalit college student and threatens him not to meet Sonal, Joshi's daughter. He finds that Arjun and Sonal are in love with each other which he disapproves of because he does not want his daughter to be married off to a Dalit. He holds Hema responsible for their love and therefore in Arjun's presence, he doubts her caste identity as an upper caste. Later, when Arjun meets Hema, he informs her what Joshi has said about her. Though Dasrao Joshi makes comment on Hema's identity, it is Arjun who directly reminds her of her caste identity to provoke her against Dasrao Joshi.⁴⁸ Dasrao Joshi's casteist comment on Hema surfaces in the conversation between Hema and Satish. Infact Hema says:

From where that Ghodghate (Satish) has
brought the woman and he says that she is a
Brahmin.' The gentleman (Joshi) talked about me
like this. Always he comes home, speaks gently
and this much junk in his head! On top of that,
he is a teacher and freedom-fighter.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.10

⁴⁸ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.38

⁴⁹ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.47

(Act I Scene II)

Though Kaka, Dasrao Joshi and Arjun are unhappy with the marriage between Hema and Satish, Hema's father who is a judge in a local court supports it. Hema locates his approval in her family background. She says that he belongs to a family of freedom fighters and social reformers. She opines that initially her mother was not happy with the marriage but she has accepted it because she has forgotten the past. Hema reveals that her parents are not against her marriage when Sonal, an upper caste college student, asks her what difficulties Hema has faced before and after the marriage. Hema tells her:

My father is a judge. My family belongs
to social reformers. My father was in the freedom
struggle since its beginning. Yes, my mother
was a bit unhappy but now she is not against it.
She has forgotten the past. Day before yesterday,
they had come to meet me.⁵⁰

(Act I Scene II)

Hema relates the idea of inter-caste marriage with freedom struggle as she seems to say that her father approved her marriage with Satish because her father was freedom fighter. She does not explain how freedom struggle and inter-caste marriage are associated with each other. Even, she does not illustrate why her mother was against her marriage and what made her mother change her view about the marriage.

Though Hema and Satish have married outside their respective castes and given up their caste identities, Satish also faces caste discrimination when he looks for a room on rent. Dasrao Joshi is an upper caste character who does not give Satish a room on rent because he is a Dalit. Initially, he does not object to allocate Satish a room when he does not know Satish's caste

⁵⁰ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.29

identity as a Dalit. Even he takes advance from him but when he realizes that Satish is a Dalit, he returns the advance and tells him that all the rooms are already allocated. Victimization of Satish due to his caste identity has appears in the conversation between Hema and Dasrao Joshi. Hema reminds him how he denied Satish a room on rent. It is Hema who says:

You began the issue; therefore, I am speaking
. When Satish got the job in this town, he was looking
for a room. Do you remember? You have taken
advance as rent of a room but what did you do
when you realize Satish's caste? You said, "the room
is already given to someone and my wife has already
taken advance from someone." You returned the
advance amount to Satish.⁵¹ (Act I Scene I)

Mistreatment at the hands of Dalit and upper caste characters makes Hema and Satish turn to the worship of the Lord Buddha. Especially Hema who says that she feels comfortable worshipping the idol of Buddha. Satish questions her if she is doing it wholeheartedly and she replies affirmatively. He does not want her to worship Buddha to make him happy because Satish believes in Buddhism. She says that she is interested in the act of worshipping and not the idol. She tells him that she has no problem in worshipping the idol of a Hindu god, Ganesha instead of Buddha. Satish does not obstruct her but instead he endorses her right to worship any idol she like.⁵² It is the casteist remarks, made by Dalit and upper caste characters that might have made Hema to turn to worshipping idols. Her acceptance of worshipping gods signifies that she finds it difficult to continue with casteless identity as she is reminded of her caste identity by other characters like Kaka and Dasrao Joshi. Even Satish asks her if she has

⁵¹ Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.14

⁵² Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. pp.66-67

become conservative as she worships the idol of Buddha. She replies negatively and says that the act of worshipping the idol does not make her conservative.

Thus, in both the plays, *Kanyadaan* (New Delhi:2011) and *Wata-Palwata* (Pune: inter-caste marriage fails as a means to eradicate the caste system because in case of *Kanyadaan* it is a Dalit character, Arun who is held responsible for sticking to his caste identity even after his inter-caste marriage with Jyoti, an upper caste whereas in *Wata-Palwata*, it is characters like Kaka and Dasrao Joshi who keep reminding Hema and Satish that one cannot be casteless, though s/he marries outside one's caste.

2.5 Representation of Rural Dalits

The representation of rural Dalits also appears to be a distinguishing thing between non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists. Non-Dalit dramatists seem to be limited to the representation of urban male Dalit identity and though they represent rural identity, they represent it not as a revolutionary Dalit opposing caste discrimination at the hands of upper caste. Instead, they seem to represent rural Dalits subservient to upper caste landlords. It is observed in a play, *Lokkatha 78*, written by Ratnakar Matkari, a non-Dalit dramatist. On the contrary, Dalit dramatists like Premanand Gajvee, in his play, *A Sip of Water* (New Delhi:2013) portrays rural Dalits, influenced by revolutionary Dalits, fighting equal access to public water resources in rural area.

The submissiveness of Dalits to upper castes seems to be one of the main concerns of non-Dalit dramatists as far as the representation of rural Dalits is concerned. One may locate it in *Lokkatha 78*, by Ratnakar Matkari. In the play, low castes mainly Koli and Chambhar, a formerly untouchable caste, are shown as victims of caste violence. A Chambhar girl is raped and murdered by upper castes but low castes do not dare to oppose the perpetrators out of fear. Jagnya Koli, a retired soldier, tries to fight for justice but he loses his life as he is killed in front

of his caste people. Even then they do not oppose upper castes. Savitri, Jagnya's wife files a case against upper caste characters for murdering her husband but she also succumbs to upper caste hegemony. In this manner, the portrayal of low castes as subservient to upper castes and as victims of caste violence remains one of the main themes of this play.⁵³

On the other hand, Dalit dramatists represent low castes and rural Dalits as conscious about their rights to equal access to public water resources. Premanand Gajvee, a Marathi Dalit dramatist, in the play *A Sip of Water* (New Delhi:2013) describes the plight of rural Dalits as they are access to potable water and how they fight against such caste discrimination. He has used numbers One and Two as characters in the play. These two characters, One and Two, play the roles of upper castes and Dalits respectively. When One does not allow Two to have access to potable water resources, Two raises the issue before the government authorities:

We do not have water to drink. The city folk
come and take our pictures. The village folk come
and break our pots and throw them out. How are
we to live my lord?⁵⁴ (Act I)

Through this quotation from the play, *A Sip of Water*, (New Delhi:2013) Gajvee suggests that Dalits are not just victims of caste discrimination in rural area but they are aware of the victimization and their rights as human beings.

2.6 Conclusion:

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to explain how non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists negotiate Dalit identities differently. They represent Dalit identities as per their understanding

⁵³ Sathe, Makrandh. *A Socio-political History of Marathi Theatre*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015. p.1156-57.

⁵⁴ Gajvee, Premanand. *Strength of our Fists: Three Plays*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013. p.15

of the notion, caste. Non-Dalit dramatists reckon caste as class and represent Dalits as a class identity whereas Dalit dramatists represent Dalit as a caste identity. Both, non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists agree with each other as far as the use of language by upper caste and educated Dalit characters are concerned. Upper caste and educated Dalits use similar variety of language. Nevertheless, Dalit dramatists like Sanjay Pawar and Ramnath Chavan project a variety of language, spoken by illiterate Dalit characters as a variety different from language spoken by upper caste and Dalit characters. The language, spoken by illiterate Dalit characters is reckoned to be impure and not suitable for public places which are dominated by upper caste characters. Non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists appear to be agreed with each other because they believe that inter-caste marriage is not a solution to the caste discrimination. Even if one marries outside one's caste s/he does not forget his caste identity, especially Dalits who locates his/her exploitation in the past and holds upper castes responsible for their plight in the present. It is noticed in *Kanyadaan*, written by Vijay Tendulkar. Though one wants to forget her/his caste after marrying outside one's caste, other characters remind her/his caste deliberately which is found in *Wata-Palwata* by Datta Bhagat. The difference in terms of the representation of Dalits residing in rural areas is also noticed in Marathi plays, written by non-Dalit and Dalit dramatists. Non-Dalit dramatists such as Ratnakar Matkari in *Lokkatha* 78 portray them as subservient to upper castes whereas Dalits dramatists like Premanand Gajvee in *A Sip of Water*, represent them aware of anti-caste movement and aggressive against the caste discrimination.

Works Cited

Abraham, Janaki. "Contingent Caste Endogamy and Patriarchy: Lessons for Our Understanding of Caste." *Economic and Political Weekly* 49.02 (2014): 56-65. P.56

Bhagat, Datta. *Wata-palwata*. Pune: Continental Prakashan, 1997. p.14

- Chavan, Ramnath. *Bamanwada*. Pune: Shivam Prakashan, 2007. p.96
- Dalvi, Jaywant. *Purush*. Pune: Majestic Prakashan, 2006. P. 15
- Desai, I. P. "Should 'Caste' Be the Basis for Recognising Backwardness?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 19, no. 28, 1984, pp. 1106–16. p.1106
- Gajjee, Premanand. *Strength of our Fists: Three Plays*. New Delhi: Navayana, 2013. p.15
- Ilaiah, Kancha. *Why I am not a Hindu?: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*. Calcutta: Samya, 2009. p.03-05
- Ilaiah, Kancha. *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism*. Kolkata: Samya Prakashan, 2012. p.13
- Kothari, Rita. "Caste in a Casteless Language? English as a Language of 'Dalit' Expression." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 48, no. 39, 2013, pp. 60–68. p.65
- Loomba, Ania. "Inter-Caste Marriage and the Liberal Imagination: Vijya Tendulkar's Kanyadaan." *Economic and Political Weekly* 48.43 (2013): 101–111. p. 101-02.
- Murugkar, Lata. *Dalit Panther Chalwal*. Mumbai, Popular Prakashan, P. No 208-209
- Pandit, Nalini. "Caste and Class in Maharashtra." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 14, no. 7/8, 1979, pp. 425–36. p.435.
- Pawar, Sanjay. *Kon Mhanta Taka Dila*. Pune, Nilkanth Prakashan. 2009. P.14
- Sathe, Makrandh. *A Socio-political History of Marathi Theatre*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2015. P.975.
- Shah, A. M. "The Dalit Category and its Differentiation." *Economic and Political Weekly* 37.04 (2002): 1317-1318. p.1317.
- Shah, Ghanshyam. "Caste, Class and Reservation." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 20, no. 3, 1985, pp. 132–36. p.133-34.

Srivastava, Vinay Kumar. "Speaking of Caste: Merit of the Principle of Segmentation." *Sociological Bulletin*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2016, pp. 317–38. P.321

Tendulkar, Vijay. *Kanyadaan*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011. p.41

Toradmal, Madhukar. *Zhunj*. Mumbai: Majestic Prakashan, 1982. p.15