

# STIGMA TO FREEDOM: REFLECTION OF CASTE AND IDENTITY IN POEMS OF VAIBHAV CHHAYA

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## Background

In the first half of the twentieth century large number of Marathi speaking population belonging to Scheduled Castes<sup>1</sup> from the neighbouring areas migrated towards Mumbai (Pradhan, 1938). Some of them found employment in organized public sector establishments like Municipality, Port, Railways, B.E.S.T. Co. Ltd.; private sectors like factories, workshops, Mills and companies as unskilled or semi-skilled manual labourers. Many were engaged in an unorganized sector, mainly in less rewarding occupations like hamals, loaders, etc. The search for livelihood with dignity and self-esteem were key motivating factors behind migration of this destitute section of Indian society who attempted to escape from the caste yokes at their villages of origin. Inspired by the movement of Babasaheb Ambedkar many amongst them educated their children with the hope of social and financial mobility. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, their next generations are either graduate or are in the process of becoming one. Journey of this class of the Indian population from traditional village-bound caste-based hierarchically ordered society to the modern urban cosmopolitan liberal space of Mumbai is not just the story of struggle for material gains. It is an account of transformation of social self, embodied in inner self, from birth ascribed stigma of untouchability to the self-constructed identity of freedom and humanity. Indeed, it is the chronicle of their efforts to de-caste their identity.

The present paper is an attempt to look into the identity issues of young generation among the scheduled castes. For the purpose, selected poems from the anthology titled '*Delete Kelele Saare Aakash*' (*All of the Deleted Sky*<sup>2</sup>) by Vaibhav Chhaya are selected to serve as a gateway into the socio-psychological temperament of the scheduled caste youths situated in the beginning of the twenty first century.

The period is characterized by tremendous fluctuations in the political and economic life of the Indian society. Amidst the progress of globalization, the forces of communalism, casteism, linguism are gaining the center of the politics and society. The context in these early decades of the twenty-first century has fashioned ground for the interplay of multiple social identities. Youths like Vaibhav are dealing with the issues of such multiple identities by retaining their ideological linkages with the movement of Babasaheb Ambedkar and thereby positioning themselves in the constantly fluctuating socio-political environment. Vaibhav's poems are seen here as a social document. The paper consciously ignores the aesthetics of his poetry and looks into the reflections on society, politics and economy of globalization and eventually reaching out to the identity position that his poems signify.

#### About the Poet

Vaibhav Chhaya is 1988 born Marathi poet-columnist. He was encouraged to put together his first anthology of poems on caste, exploitation and society, *Delete Kelela Saara Aakash (All of the Deleted Sky)*, by Namdeo Dhasal<sup>3</sup> himself (Pawar, 2015). His anthology published in 2014 at the age of 26 is popular. He is a media professional and is active on social media of Facebook where he regularly posts his prose and poems. In his blog *Samyak Samiksha* he writes on language, culture and politics. He understood social media as an instrument of change in today's globalized world (Bhatkhande & Chandrasekharan, 2015). He acknowledges roots of his deviance in his childhood memories of abuse. He lived in a ghetto in Vitthalwadi, suburb of Thane. His father was employed in Indian Railway as Class IV employee. He was alcoholic who used to beat Vaibhav's mother, who bore him nine children. Only Vaibhav survived of them. Sufferings of his mother are deep in his subconscious mind. His father left the family when Vaibhav was two year old. His whereabouts are not known since then. Vaibhav gives all credit to his mother for his education and career, who took job as a booking clerk with the railways. Vaibhav dropped his last name in 2010 and adopted his mother's first name Chhaya.

#### Problematic of Caste Identity

Caste is ubiquitous in India. As early as in 1916, Ambedkar warned of global consequences of the caste problem in India. In his words, "as long as caste in India does exist ... if Hindus would migrate

to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem” (Ambedkar, 1982). So, the spread of caste has been across time and space. More than hundred years of scholarship and heaps of ideological reasoning from Right, Left and Center did not wipe out this system from the society. It continued to regulate social, economic and political behaviour of the people. Construction of social identities and continuation of practices of identification are integral to the process of perpetuation of caste as a system of social organization. Identity appears to be the link between individual and social structure. In another way status of individual in the social structure can be understood by the social identity the individual carry in given society.

Caste is a system of differential rewards to individuals with cultural sanctions depending upon their birth in particular groups which are hierarchically ordered and culturally distinct (Berreman G. , 1979). The hierarchy determines differential evaluation, rewards and association. It is not merely the division of labour but is essentially the division of labourers (Ambedkar, 1970). There are thousands of such birth ascribed castes in India and the hierarchical arrangement among them is highly contested. Still there is a consensus that those who were treated as untouchables are attributed with lowest status and rest all are ascribed the higher status in social hierarchy. Borrowing from Goffman (1963), caste is an oppressive system which imposes stigmatized identity to the members of untouchable community/castes. It deeply discredits them and ascribes intrinsic unworthiness relative to other touchable castes in the society. It is the identity of oppressed which implies ‘deprivation, denigration, subjugation and exploitation’. Berreman (1979) argues that despite of all the religious, economic, social or political rationalization of this oppressive system by the upper castes, lower castes in India never confirmed to their ideology and maintained the culture of resistance and resentment against inherited deprivation and subjection. Therefore, there are consistent attempts by the lower castes to escape the implications of their inborn stigma and put in their efforts for mobility and emancipation. This accounts for the universality of mobility and emancipation efforts in such groups. It is in the light of this theoretical framework of interactionism the paper is addressing the issues of identity in Vaibhav’s anthology of poems.

### Poems

Vaibhav’s poems are part and parcel of the emancipatory anti-caste movement in India commonly known as the dalit movement. From

nineteenth century critique of Brahmanism of Jotiba Phule to Dalit Panther movement of 1980s, Vaibhav inherits legacy of nearly 150 years of resistance. This movement of resistance was not disassociated from the social, economic and political development in the country. Colonial rule, liberal education, industrialization, urbanization were the major components of the context in which dalit movement took shape since nineteenth century. In Mumbai this context is more visible owing to distinct place the city occupies in the economy. Today in the twenty-first century too, the context is playing crucial role in shaping the dynamics of the movement of Dalits. Globalization, post-industrialization of economy, growth of fundamentalism, aggressive nationalism and terrorism are among the major elements of this context. One thing that remained constant amidst changes in last 150 years is Caste with its robustness and resilience. It continued to be the least common denominator of society in India. Therefore, this young poet Vaibhav pens his experiences in his poems and admits in the prologue of his collection,

“My poem is my political act. My introduction is my every action that transcends my caste and class character and takes me closer to humanity<sup>49</sup>”

(Chhaya, 2014, p. 7).

True to the argument of Berreman (1979), the Dalits steered historic anti-caste movement in Maharashtra. And it won't be an exaggeration to claim that it is the most successful social movement in India which pressed the agenda of social change on the mainstream and maintained the pressure for more than 150 years. In such a long span of one and half century the Dalits contested the stigmatized identity ascribed by the Brahminical Social Order. Today Dalit youths are at the crossroad of identities. Attempts to escape from social stigma is forcing them either to align and coalesce with other available identities or construct them a tag of their own which will not only free them from unwanted memories of past but also maintain their hopes of future alive. This direction links them to the goals of modernity which identifies every person as a human being and celebrates humanity devoid of any religious or primordial identity. This dilemma is visible in Vaibhav's poem, *Identity Crisis*. Poet asks to himself,

Who am I?  
 Being 'educated' or mere stamp as 'educated'?  
 Ideology or dominion?  
 I am lost in the quest

(Ibid, p. 24)

Here the self in the poem is enquiring about his identity and getting lost in the quest for the answer. Education is questioned as an identity marker. One can take this in two senses. Firstly, being educated is personal identity not so salient where strong identity markers like caste and religion easily overcome it (Vryan, 2007). Secondly, the poet says that if education is not empowering the individual to identify himself then it is only façade. True freedom is to unmask him and carry real core in the world which is consistently attempting to impose their ideologies over you (James & Jongeward, 1978). A true educated one is the one who is liberated.

In the next stanza, Vaibhav exposes markers of social identity and how different ideologues are trying to capitalize those markers and trying to attach to him political identities. He writes:

Name proclaims my caste  
 Body offers exhibition of my crushed ancestors  
 My words are highlighting my ideology  
 On my rear  
 On my white shirt  
 Everyone attached labels  
 You are our Communist  
 You are our Marxist  
 Ambedkarite, Socialist, Atheist  
 Extremist, Naxalite  
 My identity  
 A complex thing  
 Or it must be  
 A mask imposed by somebody  
 Real but severely injured  
 Or fake like plastic plant

(Ibid., p. 24)

Speech, dress and adornment, manners, lifestyle and physiognomy are the indicators by which people are identified as members of social categories (Berreman G. D., 1972). Vaibhav is conscious about his social identity markers. Name, body and words are few that are named in the poem. As he maintained they all indicate his lowly and broken social status. Although he resents this labelling him as ‘broken one/ depressed’, what annoys him more are the efforts to tag him as Communist, Marxist, Ambedkarite, Socialist, Atheist, Extremist and Naxalite. A social identity determines what should be expected from the identified persons and where he should be fitted within various interactional network level, and sociocultural structures (Vryan, 2007). All these are in a way the ideologies of resistance and for

them depressed identity of the Dalit which reflects from the identity markers is an opportunity to incorporate him in their network. These ideologies acquired meaning as rebellious, revolutionary and hence attempted to construct solidarity network of all the oppressed. Although the poet does not reject them altogether but he maintains his own stand with conscious decision. He is aware of the complexity of this identity recognition, and at the same time he is aware of his exploited past and not denying it altogether. He retains the capacity to reason, to question and to decide independently without any enticement of his right to search his identity. He proclaims this in following lines:

In this journey to search the identity  
 My wisdom has retained  
 My right to freedom

(Ibid., p. 25)

Vaibhav's quest for the answer to his identity is rooted not only in the past which is history and is full of narrations of subjugation, degradation but also in his day-to-day experiences. In his poem, *Tevha Pasun* (Since Then) he narrates his experience of morning walk and his interactions with various persons to whom Vaibhav denote through symbolism of names and greetings. First he met Maharashtrian Brahmin women, he greeted *Namasker*, and she smiled. Then he said *Salaam Walekum* to Usman Chacha, a Muslim, he reciprocated; he greeted *Ram Ram* to a Police Officer, Maratha by Caste; *Jay Maharashtra* to political workers of a political party in Mumbai, Shiv Sena, which claim to protect interests of Marathi language speaking people of Maharashtra; *Good Morning* to the Christian, James who is corporate employee; *Red Salute* to Comrades gathered in the Union Office. Finally he greeted a transgender Shabnam:

While returning from walk I saw Shabnam  
*120, Kachha Pakka Ilaichi*<sup>5</sup>,  
 Stuffed in the mouth,  
 He came spitted  
 We hugged each other  
 I clapped for him  
 He too thundered *Jay Bhim* at me  
 I can't understand  
 Since then Allah, Jesus, Ram, Marx  
 All of their devotees turned their back to me  
 Why are they angry with me?

Here, Vaibhav brings two things for the readers. First, two most stigmatized identities, a Dalit and a Transgender, are brought together to display the exclusionary behaviour of the so-called cosmopolitan society in Mumbai, and secondly, which is most crucial for Vaibhav, is the identity as Ambedkarite, which is asserted by his greeting of *Jay Bhim*, and is not received by others with same meaning which Vaibhav constructs for it. Here for others Vaibhav's Dalit identity is transmitted to his newly acquired selfhood. Being Ambedkarite for others is similar to being Dalit and hence equally stigmatized. Vaibhav draws commonality between being transgender and being Dalit and figures out the exclusion and discrimination as common factors between them. He also exposes hypocrisy of modern cosmopolitan social life of people in Mumbai. Despite of these experiences of discrimination he is not perturbed by the fact of sheer existence of atrocious social structure which degrades the existence of fellow humans.

Vaibhav writes on the vast canvas of contemporary civilization and reflects upon large number of issues through which he connects with everyone who is victim of one or the other form of exploitation. He elaborately sketched the details in the poem, "*Manasane Jagave Manus Mhanun*" (Human Should Live as Human) (Ibid, 44). In this long poem Vaibhav prescribes humanism as remedy for all sorts of exploitation. He emphatically argues against war and advocates destruction of nuclear weapons and disarmament. He challenges patriarchy rooted in prevalent institution of marriage and feudalism by asking for return of land of indebted farmers and freedom from the yoke of money lenders. He expects impoverishment of capitalists, asks for destruction of drug and liquor mafia. He wishes to restart all the Mills of Mumbai. He wants to spread education among the deprived masses. He desires to punish the doctors involved in sex selective abortions, dowry seekers, corrupt bureaucrats, those who discriminate on the basis of caste and rapists. He extends his support to those who are resisting. At the same time he wants to punish those who are stealing sand for civil constructions and wants to stop atrocious behaviour of police with social activists. He demands for the audit of NGOs, for job security and permanent employment for contractual workers. He demands Corporate Houses to be held accountable of unbridled destruction of environment, corruption in Spectrum/oil/gas allocation. He seeks clarification from Media about news behind news, shares in advertisements, editorial policy and politics of opinion polls. He expects slum dwellers should be free from the inhuman living conditions. He expects to demolish

ghettoes, to give access to the deprived ones in the sky scrapers. He wants to break cultural censorship over food and expects humans should learn how to crush riots and destroy brokers lobby. Humans should challenge fiefdoms of religious bodies and distribute all the wealth equally among all. They should teach not to pray before stones. He expects humans should construct the semantics of revolt, to design ornaments of love, to develop new enterprises. They should build hospitals with affordable treatment and medicines, new dams, irrigation canals, roads, new universities and will develop the software of new society where they will teach new lessons of humanity. Finally, he says that to live like human, they should revolt against everyone who are destroying the values of non-violence.

Vaibhav delineates list of issues which are of greater concerns for humanity today. And therefore do not want to restrict him to single identity. There is complex matrix that develops by identification with every form of exploitation like Dalit, women, labour, environmentalist and so on. For Vaibhav exploitation is universal and thus need to expand borders of his identity to encompass humanity as a whole. This web of identities pose serious dilemma for him. At this point his own exploitation became one part of the universal presence of exploitation. He rejects his identity as a Dalit as he wrote in the poem *Shabdani Sangitlay Amhala* (Words Have Told This to Us).

Amidst the carnival of *Buddham Sharanam Gachhami*  
 Amidst the lyrics of *Bhimraom Sarami*  
 We are reborn  
 We have thrown the shackles of serfdom long before.  
 Identity of this revolt cannot be Dalit  
*Dalitatva* cannot be an honor for me  
 My war cry is Ambedkarite revolution  
 It does not emboss impression of *Dalitatva*  
 But engages with open dialogue in the ground of inequality  
 It proclaims true duty of accountability to humanity  
 And prepares for construction of new world

(Ibid., p. 56)

Vaibhav has a firm stand on his rejection of the term Dalit. He likes to recognize himself as Ambedkarite than Dalit. He is rejoicing conversion to Buddhism, and singing songs of Babasaheb Ambedkar and celebrating his rebirth as a free human being. For him this newly found identity cannot be Dalit, he no more accepts depressed state as a state to be proud of. His identity is Ambedkarite by means of which he now openly challenges inequality and proclaims his accountability towards humanity and prepares for construction of



new world. In the telephonic talk with the author he cleared his views:

Lot of self-victimization happened by the use of the word *Dalit*. In order to progress we should not indulge in self-victimization. The term is derived from '*Dal*' means depressed or oppressed. When we challenge the depressed status and oppressive structure we in a way reject '*Dalitatva*' also. Moreover it is stative word, and we should leave the state of being depressed.

(Chhaya, Telephonic Conversation, 2015)

With rejection of the term Dalit he enters into the debate which was rigorously held in the literary circles of anti-caste movement. Dalit Panther movement of 1970s popularized the term. It caused greater political awareness among the scheduled castes and created new identity for the downtrodden (Sirsikar, 1995). It was concerned with identity formation and its assertion to redeem the self-confidence and self-worth of the marginalised sections (Punalekar, 2001). The term was not acceptable for many writers and at least six different terms were used by them in Maharashtra, mainly Dalit Literature by Keshav Meshram, Dr. Sharankumar Limbale, Daya Pawar; Ambedkarite Literature by Dr. Yashvant Manohar, Dr. Yogendra Meshram; Non-Brahmin Literature, by Sharad Patil; Buddhist Literature by Vijay Sonawane, Bhausaheb Adsul; Literature of Phule-Ambedkar Motivation, by Raja Dhale, Prof. Gautamiputra Kamble; and Bahujan Sahitya, by Baburao Bagul, Anand Yadav (Ratnakar, 1997).

From Dalit Panthers of 1970s to the present, things have changed considerably and Vaibhav is conscious about those changes. Globalization has brought paradigmatic shift in the politics, economy, society and culture in India. Innovations in Information Technology swiped earlier assumptions about human behaviour. State entered into laissez faire mode. Many agendas of social transformation undertaken during post-independence period remained inconclusive. Rise of service sector and increasing privatization drastically reduced bargaining capacity of labour unions. Primordial identities of caste, religion and language have resurfaced.

Failure of Dalit politics in Maharashtra weakened morals of the activists. Dalit leaders are either coopted by other political parties or formed separate political parties and failed the efforts of unity of Dalit Politics in Maharashtra. Atrocities on Dalits continued unabatedly. It is in this context Vaibhav, as a poet, is carving the path of liberation. His poem *Samajun Ghe*, (Try to Understand) addresses to the activists of the Ambedkarite movement. He is realistic in his

understanding of problems of earlier generation of activists. He appeals them to shed off the old stereotype of activist. Enough of the *Shabnam* bag on shoulder, shirt torn in armpit, dusty pant, high power spectacles, grown beard and wrinkles on face. He advises to change the method of struggle or else, he cautioned that their loss will be ultimately be the loss of movement. Therefore he suggests them to:

Feed yourself first  
 Take off tattered vest  
 Check your bones and ribs  
 Make them strong  
 People may call you capitalist  
 They will insult you as traitor  
 But you keep on walking

(Ibid., p. 98)

All this he advises with the intention of strengthening the movement. His observation of the movement at grassroots level is minute. He knows that if activists are not financially independent then they may fall into trap of cooptation by the dominant sections resulting into their loss of autonomy and freedom to think. This results into slow death of the movement. Hundreds of police cases, false FIRs, subsequent arrests, neglect of family life all this results into weakening the morale of activists. Therefore, he counsels:

Try to understand  
 Economy of the movement  
 Compose new definitions of economics of movement  
 And revolt  
 Against that rope  
 Which you have weaved  
 To tie against your neck once you get demoralized.

(Ibid., p. 99)

Vaibhav speaks in the times when 150 years of movement resulted into gains for the dalits in terms of space and sense of empowerment. He wishes to capitalize those gains for the sake of the movement itself. Since he has seen the movement from close quarters and is also part of it he is aware of plight of those hundreds of Dalit social workers whose selfless service to the community ultimately destroyed their personal growth and neglect of family. As the goal of the movement of Dalits is the upliftment of the lot of exploited sections of the society, it is imperative that activists should financially secure themselves.

In his title poem, “Delete Kelele Saare Aakash” (“All of the Deleted Sky”), Vaibhav proposed the strategy of the movement in the age of globalization. The sky in Vaibhav’s poem signifies the history, the memory, the past, the life world of the dalit. It comprised of the lost ground in the battle towards the end of caste notified existence. Days of Dalit mobilization when Ambedkar stirred the conscience of the upper caste brought the issue of exploitation on the national platform. Vaibhav offers subtle observation of the old instruments of the movements that were used by Ambedkar very effectively as a strategy to fight for the cause of dalits. Three fronts of struggle deserve mention here, academic scholarship, diplomacy and political mobilization of masses. More than twenty-two volumes of his writings and speeches published by the Publication Division of Government of Maharashtra comprised of essential writings of Ambedkar on diverse topics ranging from sociological, political, economic, cultural, religious are evidence of the strategic employability of knowledge, its production and spread for the advancement of the cause of the movement. On the diplomatic front his relationship with Gandhi, Congress and other political leaders of the country at one side and with British Government and other anti-caste movement leaders on the other exhibit his highly skilled maneuvers in very hostile social and politically context of early twentieth century. Despite of limited resources his strategy of mass mobilization tested the time during numerous agitations he carried out not only on the issue of untouchability but also for the labour class in Bombay Province as a founder of Independent Labour Party.

Babasaheb Ambedkar and his life is the major component of the identity of dalit movement. Dalit Panther movement too employed the strategies of writing, mobilization effectively in 1970s. It brought the wave of Dalit literature and produced generation of aggressive activists who were inspired by the Black Panther movement of America. Ambedkar’s were the days of pre-Independence colonial phase of industrialization in India and Dalit Panther born in the post-colonial welfare state era. In the twenty-first century, Vaibhav is decoding the situation in the globalized India where global market is more powerful than ever and instruments of knowledge, mobilization and context of diplomacy has changed completely. Therefore, in the poem “Delete Kelele Saare Aakash”, he urges to modify the instruments and adopt new strategies of resistance.

We have to design our own softwares  
 And computers to run those softwares  
 And antivirus to protect them

We only have to design for ourselves  
 Strength of wrist  
 Now let's reach to fingers  
 Fire from the eyes should enter into Brain  
 See, now demand is more for software than  
 Hardware  
 Let's change the language of movement  
 And centers of knowledge  
 Overthrow the monopoly over intellect  
 Like oxygen in the air  
 Free knowledge as well  
 Then only will be free the human from within the human

(Ibid., pp. 58-59)

Software symbolizes strategy, planning, attitude, ideology; computer implies the activists who are motivated by the desire to serve the community; and antivirus is the ultra-software meant to protect the former two; it is the identity which is the need of the hour. Power in the wrist symbolizes agitational tactics of movement, the dangers of which are already highlighted by Vaibhav in early poem *Samajun Ghe*; therefore he expects that now dalits should write on Facebook wall, they should write blog. He is aware that print media and electronic media of television and radio are already monopolized by upper castes; hence it is sensible to use social media of Facebook, Blog, WhatsApp and Twitter. He appeals to the young generation of Ambedkarites to use Information Technology as their new instrument of struggle.

### Discussion

In order to deal with the problematic of identity as positioned in Vaibhav's poems, I shall summarize my understanding in three themes; firstly, caste is integral to social interaction in the cosmopolitan city of Mumbai. It is lived and experienced by the people in overt and covert forms. Secondly, the present generation of the dalits desires to assert themselves in positive way as 'being something' rather than 'not being something'. This position indicates ideological orientation of their acquired identity which is inseparable from the thoughts and life of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Thirdly, there is a visible continuity in the way dalit panthers defined the term 'Dalit' in 1970 and the position that Vaibhav's poems are adopting vis-à-vis universal presence of exploitation in this twenty-first century. The poem indicates aligning of the political self with

other exploited sections and 'being human' is the inclusive identity that it resorts to fulfill the purpose.

If coping up with the stigmatized identity associated with untouchability is the problem in caste ridden rural society then negotiating with multiple identities is the inevitability of urban context. As compared to the rural society, the urban environment offers the individual certain amount of freedom to pursue its own capacities. Deciding which identity should be prioritized over other identities—although in limited sense—is possible in urban environment. The free space offers potential to de-caste the identity that the generation of Vaibhav is looking forward. But the process of de-casting is not as easy as it appears to be at first glance. The problem is inherent in the clash between personal identity and social identity. By personal identity one may think of 'one's characterization of oneself in the light of the beliefs the one may own', and social identity connotes 'one's identification by others based on the stereotypes associated with the one's ascribed social status'. Here identity acquires political domain as contested ground, within the mind of the individual—between nurtured self and ambitious or ideal self that one aspire to build on its own. Similarly, it also engages in the politics of identification where social identity as ascribed by the social structures engages into confrontational mode with the self-constructed identity crafted by the individual himself<sup>6</sup>.

In such a complex situation newly defined identity may get trapped into in-group and out-group differentiation (Tajfel, 1978). Almost every social identity thrives on such differentiation where association with those who share similar positioning and antagonistic or confrontational relationship with those who differ in such identification does exist. Any attempt to free one's self from the burden of past—that is to relieve oneself from the stereotypes of stigmatized identity—is pregnant with the possibility to alienate in-group members. On the other hand if out-group members continued their discriminatory behaviour with such individual then there is a possibility of the crises of identity for the individual. Accumulated negative experiences (a dystonic outcomes<sup>7</sup>) (McKinney, 2001) of others behaviour affects identity formation among the persons. An attempt to de-caste can therefore be such a complex phenomenon. This does not mean that de-casting is impossible at all. Here we enter into the domain of ideology. Ideologies carry potential to influence both in-group as well as out-groups, means it can develop its followers in both the sides. If more people believing into particular ideology coalesced together, in such a situation it is quite possible that de-

casting will get legitimacy and the situation may avert the identity crisis for such individuals, for whom ideological comradeship may work as buffer to avoid the crisis of clash of self-defined and socially ascribed identity.

Now we can get back to three themes derived from Vaibhav's poems and look at the dynamics behind the de-casting process of the identity, and conclude hereafter. As the caste, overtly or covertly, is the part and parcel of daily experiences of the dalits in one of the most cosmopolitan urban space in the country, the continuity into their shared existence is the matter of fact. Therefore, the effort to negate those experiences, carving our own niche, is also integral to their struggle to survival in the city. In order to do that present generation of the dalits expects to move away from 'escaping stigma of untouchability' to 'de-caste their existence' and to move towards greater freedom as human. Ambedkar's imagery, his ideas and philosophy is the reference point for these youths who are acquainted with them through their socialization. In the age of globalization their individualistic position should not be interpreted as capitalist in classical form. They see into it the new possibility to close their rank with other victims of exploitation. This may contain the possibility of obliterating the in-group and out-group differentiation based on caste, based ascribed status and frees them to acquire the identity which is more accommodative and universal in nature.

### Notes

1. The term Scheduled Castes is constitutional term used for the section of population against whom practice of untouchability was prevalent in India.
2. Translation of the title is borrowed from report published in DNA (Pawar, 2015)
3. Namdeo Dhasal was Marathi poet, writer and Dalit activist from Maharashtra, India. He was the founder member of Dalit Panthers, prominent organization of young Dalit authors and activists in 1972. His notable works are *Andhale Shatak*, *Golpitha*, *Tujhi Iyatta Kanchi?* And *Priya Darshini*. He was awarded with Padma Shri by Government of India in 1999 and with Lifetime Achievement Award by the Sahitya Akademi in 2004.
4. All the poems quoted in the paper are liberally translated by the author of the paper.
5. A mixture of Tobacco, Arecanut, Cardamom and slaked lime which is chewed for its stimulant and psychoactive effects.
6. Psychosocial identity depends on a complementarity of an inner (ego) synthesis in the individual and of role integration in his group (Erikson, 1968).
7. According to Erikson, each stage of psychosocial development culminates in a balance of both syntonic and dystonic outcomes. A syntonic outcome is a positive experience through which the individual strives to attain and

consequently maintain the experience in the overall ego structure. A dystonic outcome is a negative experience whereby the individual strives to avoid and consequently rectify the experience of in the overall ego structure (McKinney, 2001, p. 723).

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