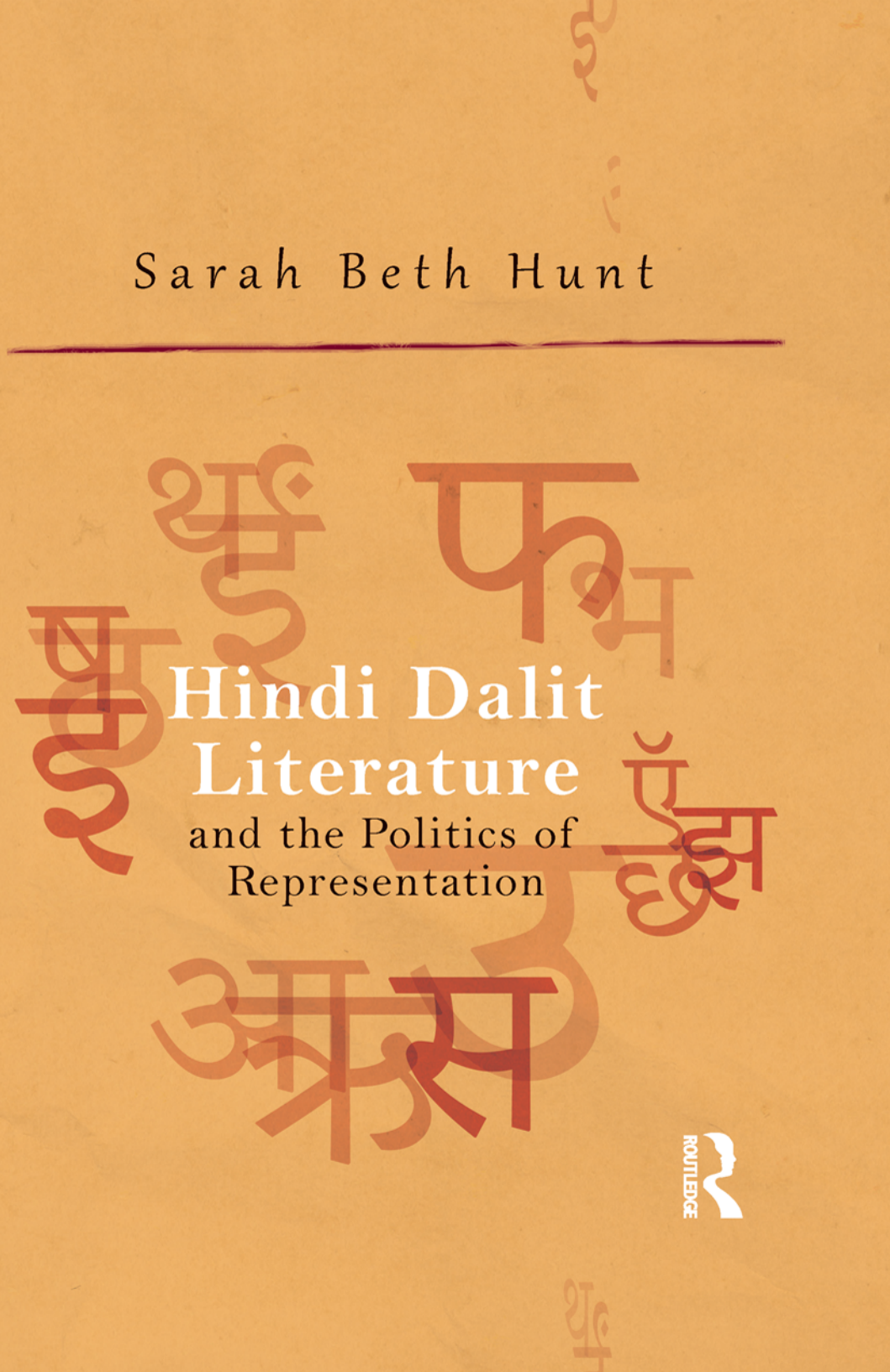
Sarah Beth Hunt

Hindi Dalit Literature

and the Politics of Representation



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Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation

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Introduction

On 14 April 2004, the broad street of Sansad Marg in Central Delhi was filled to its capacity with smartly-dressed families laughing, eating, meeting friends, visiting booths and buying festival paraphernalia. It was Ambedkar Jayanti — the most important contemporary festival of the Dalit community. From every angle, one's vision collided with the colourful portrait of the most beloved Dalit leader, Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, smiling from framed pictures, small T-shirt buttons and banners rippling atop decorated trucks. As one of the most marginalised and oppressed communities in India, it has taken decades of struggle for Dalits to celebrate their identity in such a public way. The continual marginalisation of Dalits is perhaps no more apparent than on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti, as Dr Ambedkar, Father of the Indian Constitution, continues to be commemorated only by members of the Dalit community. Celebrated next to the Indian Parliament at the heart of the nation's capital, Ambedkar Jayanti symbolically represents the community's fight to claim a central place in the nation. Over the past several decades, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) has made similar efforts to defend the position of Dalits at the centre of political power and has increasingly politicised Dalit identity across both urban and rural north India.

In the cultural arena across India, Dalit writers have presented an equally important challenge to the dominant representations of the lower castes in Indian society. In the north, Hindi Dalit literature has gained widespread recognition as a powerful new literary movement, with mainstream Hindi commercial presses publishing Dalit autobiographies, short stories and literary criticism written by some well-established Hindi Dalit writers. Hindi Dalit literature is also gradually being incorporated into the curriculum of a few north Indian universities and is beginning to gain international recognition through several recent English translations of Hindi Dalit autobiographies and short stories.[1]

Through this literature, Dalit writers have argued that the dominant cultural representations of Indian society cloaked in the guise of the universal norm, in fact, reveal a specifically upper-caste perspective which is neither representative nor benign. Using literature as a means of contesting such hegemonic cultural images, they have offered new depictions of Indian life from the perspective of the lower castes. In north India, Hindi Dalit writers argue that all literature is deeply implicated in the power structure of society and thus, 'art for art's sake' or 'pure' literature cannot exist in India. They insist that because the value of any piece of literature and its ability to exist in the public arena is inextricably a function of the social position and power of its creator, all literature in India is caste-ist, and to claim otherwise is a privilege reserved only for those with social power, i.e., the upper castes. By saying so, these writers strike at the heart of the Hindi literary world's belief in the autonomy of art and the value of 'art for art's sake', which has persisted since the 1920s and 1930s through prominent literary movements, such as Chayavad.[2] Thus, Hindi Dalit literature's critique of an upper-caste dominated field of cultural production constitutes not only a direct attack on the mainstream Hindi literary field, but also on some of the most prevalent imaginations of Indian society.

Given the growth of Hindi Dalit literature and its central place during Ambedkar Jayanti, it was surprising that although the most well-known Hindi Dalit writers were present at the festival in Delhi, they were not distributing their literary works. While these writers had, during previous interviews, related their desire to spread Hindi Dalit literature to a wider audience, on this occasion they seemed largely unconcerned that throngs of potential Dalit readers were slipping through their fingers. In fact, the large amount of Hindi Dalit literature found on Sansad Marg that day did not include the Dalit autobiographies and short stories that had become the most prominent examples of that genre, but rather stacks of small Hindi Dalit pamphlets spread neatly on the ground on cloths and small tables.

The occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti thus juxtaposed the distinct characteristics of two entirely different fields of Hindi Dalit literature — an 'autobiographic' and a 'pamphlet' field. As this book will argue, these two fields function independently, are created by different groups of Hindi Dalit writers, are based on different codes of literary practice, and are aimed at two very different audiences.[3]

The most widely recognised field of Hindi Dalit literature today began in the mid-1980s, with a network of Hindi Dalit writers who took inspiration from the Marathi Dalit literature of the Dalit Panthers and employed literary genres such as autobiography, fiction, poetry and literary criticism to fight for their place in the mainstream Hindi literary field.[4] Participants of this 'autobiographic field' of Hindi Dalit literature frequently claim that all Hindi Dalit literature began in the 1980s. However, this book will argue that this perspective speaks more to these writers' own perception of what constitutes 'literature' than it does about the beginnings of Dalit literary production in Hindi.

In fact, another field of Hindi Dalit literature emerged in north India in the 1920s, in the form of small, inexpensive pamphlets published by privately-owned Dalit presses and distributed to an exclusively Dalit audience at community festivals and political meetings. Thus, on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti in Delhi, while cheap Hindi Dalit pamphlets sold on ground cloths dominated the space of the Dalit *mela* (festival), the 'autobiographic' Hindi Dalit writers virtually ignored the mela as a space of literary distribution and instead aspired to sell their books and literary journals at 'proper' bookstores, such as the Shri Ram Centre at Mandi House, the Hindi Book Centre on Asaf Ali Road, or the bookshops on university campuses. The attitudes of the 'autobiographic' Hindi Dalit writers at Ambedkar Jayanti thus reveal that members of the same marginalised community will not always use literature in the same way to contest social discrimination. Therefore, while all Hindi Dalit writers foregrounded their caste-ist 'Dalit' identities, it was their other identities, namely their class, regional, gender, and jati identities, that largely determined their literary practices, the genres they employed and their access (or lack thereof) to the mainstream Hindi literary field.

Dalit literary production has inevitably evolved in direct relation to Dalit institutional politics (i.e., Dalit political parties). This was visually apparent at the Ambedkar Jayanti festival, as members of many political parties, including the Congress and the BSP, gave speeches amongst the bookstalls to the crowds gathered on Sansad Marg. However, while it could be argued that Dalit politics and the politically-assertive 'Dalit' identity it proclaims have created an important space for the growth of the Dalit literary movement,

Dalit literature has had a long, complex and at times uneasy relationship with Dalit institutional politics. This has come into sharp relief each time the BSP, a Dalit party, has joined in coalition with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a right-wing Hindu party. At such times, Hindi Dalit writers have been caught uncomfortably between their strong stance against the BJP and the public necessity of supporting and defending Dalit political assertion under any circumstances.

Thus, while all Dalit-authored texts in both fields of Hindi Dalit literature can be characterised as 'political', this book attempts to examine the relationship between Dalit literature and Dalit institutional politics with a finer grain. Several other questions have guided this research, particularly regarding the role of literature in instigating social change and how Dalit literary assertion has had a different way of expressing the experience of caste discrimination and Dalit identity than either Dalit politics or Dalit social movements. For instance, what is it like for an educated Dalit man to work in a professional office with upper-caste colleagues, or what happens within a Dalit family when some members gain higher education and become politicised while others do not? While many studies have already contributed to our understanding of the evolution of Dalit identity within the context of Dalit politics and Dalit social movement, this book will explore to what extent Dalit literature has had a unique influence on both Dalit and mainstream conceptualisations of Dalit identity and Indian society. It will argue, for example, that Hindi Dalit writers have used literature in a distinct way to re-conceptualise their relationship with the rest of the Indian society and the nation. It will also consider how Dalit writers have fought for the authority to speak in the Hindi public sphere and will map out the production and dissemination of Dalit-authored texts.

Dalit Assertion in 20th-century North India

Throughout the 20th century, Dalit groups have employed a variety of political and discursive strategies to represent themselves. In Maharashtra, anti-caste protest began in the mid-19th century, with Jyotiba Phule's many literary works and organisation, the Satyashodhak Samaj (or Truth-Seeking Society), and continued

through the 20th century with the activism of Dr Ambedkar (Jaffrelot 2005; O'Hanlon 1985; Omvedt 1994; Zelliot 2001). In the north, however, it was not until the late 19th century that many lower-caste groups, including some untouchable castes such as the Chamars, first began making what we might call 'political statements' about their identity by rewriting their caste histories, in an attempt to acquire higher social status by claiming descent from Kshatriya lineages.[5] Forming numerous caste associations, separate lower-caste jatis instituted social reforms, such as vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol, and promoted Sanskritic education; some even took the controversial step of donning the sacred thread (Pinch 1996). The production of 'untouchable' caste histories was closely linked to such social reform efforts through caste associations, such as the Jatav Mahasabha in Agra (Lynch 1969; Rawat 2004).

However, Dalit attempts to gain social recognition of their claimed Kshatriya status were largely unsuccessful, and thus, by the 1920s, many so-called 'untouchable' communities began to reject this form of social mobility and instead, re-imagine themselves outside of the realms of Hinduism. The most influential among those to reject upper-caste Hindu authority was Swami Achutanand, a Chamar from Farukhabad, Uttar Pradesh. He had initially been active in the Hindu reform movement, particularly in the *shuddhi* (purification) campaigns of the Arya Samaj, but had grown disillusioned and eventually left the Arya Samaj to found the Adi Hindu movement (Gooptu 2001; Jigyasu 1968). The Adi Hindu movement was based on the notion that Dalits were the original inhabitants of India, enslaved by foreign Aryan invaders who overpowered the peace-loving Adi Hindus and oppressed them by imposing the hierarchical system of caste. Swami Achutanand set up Adi Hindu Sabhas for lower-caste political organisations, and began writing plays and pamphlets portraying all lower-castes as the original inhabitants of India.

With the decline of the Adi Hindu movement by the late 1930s and early 1940s, Dalits in north India became increasingly active in the formation of Dalit political parties. The establishment of the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF), with an active branch in Uttar Pradesh (UP), constituted the first overtly Dalit political party in north India and drew upon the institutional foundations of earlier Dalit organisations (Brass 1965; Jaffrelot 2003; S. Pai 2002; Rawat 2003). Caste associations such as the Jatav Veer Mahasabha and Adi

Hindu activists became increasingly involved in the larger political scene and began to adopt discursive imaginings of a united 'Dalit' community, whose common historical past also inferred common contemporary interests.

Up to this point, Dalit political organising and literary productions were almost inseparable, in the sense that the activists who were working in the caste associations and then the Adi Hindu Sabhas were the same individuals authoring the majority of the literary texts. However, with the rise of institutionalised Dalit politics, namely Dalit political parties that began competing in local and general elections, Dalit politics and Dalit literature began to take increasingly separate whilst mutually supportive paths, so that what we see today are two very separate movements fighting for and representing Dalits.

In the political arena, Dalit activists in the north also joined with other regional Dalit assertion movements, particularly with Ambedkar's movement in Maharashtra, to lobby the British Raj for separate electorates for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) and later, to protest against the infamous Poona Pact (1932) as Independence neared in 1946.[6] In 1956, multiple Dalit groups in north India followed Ambedkar in his conversion to Buddhism.[7] After his death that same year, Dalit activists established a branch of the Republican Party of India (RPI) in Uttar Pradesh, which experienced significant electoral successes in 1962 and 1967.[8] Importantly, Dalit activism in north India seems to have remained strong even after India's independence in 1947 when many other social movements (for example, the women's movement) faltered in their attempt to define their position in the new nation or held out expectantly for institutional change after Independence itself. In fact, some of the strongest Dalit agitations in 1946 were against the decisions of the Poona Pact and stretched across the moment of Independence. Extensive Dalit mobilisation took place again in 1956 with mass public conversions of Dalits to Buddhism occurring in many urban areas. While the decade of the 1970s saw a downturn in Dalit politics with the decline of the RPI and the subsequent co-optation of many RPI leaders into Indira Gandhi's new 'populist' Congress Party, the Dalit movement in UP picked up momentum again with the beginnings of the All India Backward and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF), a labour union for Dalits founded by Kanshi Ram, a Chamar Ramdasi Sikh from the Punjab

(Jaffrelot 2003; S. Pai 2002). Since then, the BSP, with its figureheads Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, has experienced stunning electoral success and has formed a series of governments with Mayawati, a Dalit woman and former chief minister of UP.[9]

Becoming Middle Class

The most significant impact of Dalit assertion as well as the reservation system set out in the Indian Constitution has been the rise of a Dalit middle class, made up of individuals who have gained higher education and acquired jobs in reserved government posts. Under the influence of Ambedkar, the Indian Constitution of 1950 included articles ensuring reserved places for SCs and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in the legislature (both the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha), government jobs, and higher education.[10] Although this system of reservation was originally meant to be a temporary aid, which would become unnecessary once the situation of Dalits improved, reservation for SCs and STs has been extended indefinitely. These reservation measurements have been the single-most important act by the state regarding the welfare of Dalits, and by far the most significant influence on the rise of the Dalit middle class. Reserved seats in the legislature — though the Poona Pact ensured there would be no separate electorates for SCs — has meant that Dalits are finally able to participate in the state apparatus.[11] Reservation in government jobs and higher education has also had an important impact on the rise of a professional Dalit middle class.

However, controversy has raged over the continuation of reservation, particularly in higher education, where protests by upper-caste medical students led to several self-immolations. Criticism of the system of reservation habitually includes accusations that reservation leads to inefficiency, by allowing unmeritorious candidates to take up positions. Consequently, members of SC communities who acquire a reserved government post or a place at a university are often stigmatised as undeserving of that place.[12] While opponents of reservation assert that reserved posts only perpetuate an established elite within the Dalit community, Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany's study of Dalit Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) found no evidence of such a 'Harijan elite'. This study on Dalit writers further supports their conclusion since almost all the

Hindi Dalit writers in this study are first-generation middle class (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998; Sundaram and Singh 1987).

Criticism of reservation, however, has also come from inside the Dalit community, with the Bhangi community claiming that the benefits of compensatory discrimination schemes are monopolised by members of the Chamar community. The numerically largest and most influential SC jati in UP is the Chamar or Jatav community, traditionally known as a caste of leather-workers.[13] Due to their early politicisation and modest economic security, as well as their large numbers, the members of the Chamar community in UP have been most successful in taking advantage of state benefits for SCs, particularly reservation facilities.[14] Consequently, the majority of educated Dalits rising to the middle class in north India are Chamars. The Bhangi community, by contrast, represents one of the most deprived Dalit jatis in UP, revealing the disparity between different jati groups within this 'Dalit' identity.[15] Because of their advantaged position, the Chamar community has monopolised the majority of state benefits such as reservation, while the Bhangi community is marginalised from such benefits and are bypassed by most of BSP's programmes.[16] As we shall see, this internal differentiation between various Dalit jatis is apparent in the literary world too where there is a predominance of Hindi Dalit writers from the Chamar community.

D. L. Sheth of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) agrees that the reservation system has been the most significant factor in the creation of a small Dalit middle class. He views opposition to the Mandal Commission's extension of reservation benefits to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in terms of upper-caste resistance to the entry of lower-caste groups into the middle class (Sheth 1999). Based on a study conducted by CSDS, he claims that today's middle class identifies itself according to four criteria: (*a*) having 10 or more years of education, (*b*) owning a motor vehicle, TV, electric water pump and/or non-agricultural land, (*c*) residing in a *pukka* (brick or cement) house, (*d*) being employed in a white-collar job. Sheth has argued that now, 'entry of an individual in the middle-class is facilitated by the collective political and economic resources of his/her caste' (ibid.: 2507). As class remains a more open and flexible category than caste, individuals retain their lower-caste identities even while adopting a self-conscious belonging to middle-class lifestyles and ideals.

Moreover, as Pavan K. Varma's *The Great Indian Middle Class* (1998) reminds us, the middle class is not a homogenous category, but rather, is made up of a small elite upper-middle-class and a larger lower-middle-class group. These two groups within the middle class distinguish themselves in cultural terms by the products they buy (or aspire to buy), the clothes they wear, the spaces they inhabit and the linguistic idiom they employ. Thus, while the upper middle class in India embraces international cosmopolitanism and uses a largely English-based linguistic register, the lower-middle-class associates predominantly with Indian products and speaks primarily in the vernacular (K. Kumar 2001). This distinction is important to this study, since members of the Dalit community have entered the lower middle class in significant numbers, but few have been able to access the upper reaches.

The middle class is, therefore, much more than an economic category, and should also be seen as a cultural project to which Dalits must now compete for belonging. In his study on the historical rise of the Indian middle class, Sanjay Joshi claims,

> the power, indeed the constitution of the middle-class in India … was based not on the economic power it wielded, which was minimal, but from the abilities of its members to be cultural entrepreneurs. Being middle-class … was primarily a project of self-fashioning (2001: 2).

As Joshi argues, it was a new group of otherwise unimportant men, bound by ties of common education, ideologies and institutional loyalties, rather than genealogy, who came to hold significant social and cultural authority by the late 19th century. Being middle class — and thus gaining the benefits of this newfound cultural authority — became aspirational, rather than a simple matter of economic status. Furthermore, Joshi reveals how members of this new middle class used the discourse of modernity to consolidate and support their new position as cultural entrepreneurs. While Joshi's research deals with the late 19th century, it provides a useful category for tracking the middle class as a self-consciously 'modern' cultural group through the 20th century. According to Francesca Orsini, during the age of nationalism in the 1920s and 1930s, when men began dressing in 'modern' clothes, writing in the new linguistic idiom of standardised Khariboli Hindi, debating issues of citizenship and the modern nation and experimenting with new literary styles in a developing public sphere, their behaviours

revealed the cultural workings of a new Indian middle-class, including its habitual claims to represent the nation and its obsession with the discourse of modernity. Orsini's work, thus, not only documents how new social networks were formed and negotiated amongst key members of this class, but also focuses on the important discursive process of developing new modern cultural tastes (Orsini 2002: 43). As I will argue during the course of this book, writing literature continues to be an important act of middle-class performance for both 'pamphlet writers' and 'autobiographic' Dalit writers in north India. And as readers of this literature, the Dalit audience is also engaged in a process of redefining and refining their cultural tastes, social behaviours and political perspectives on their own identity.

Still, despite the entry of some Dalits into the middle classes, members of the community continue to face social discrimination, most evident from the continuing occurrence of atrocities against Dalits in rural areas, but also clearly a problem in spheres such as education, with literacy rates among Dalits being much lower than the national average (Krishnan 1996: 122–39; Radhakrishnan 1991: 44–73). Although Mendelsohn and Vicziany have argued for a 'new civic culture of tolerance' in cities, based on the practicalities of an urban lifestyle, Hindi Dalit writers have shown that caste-based discrimination cannot be avoided even in cities such as Delhi, despite the possibility of temporary anonymity. As we shall see in later chapters, even middle-class Dalits in Delhi continue to face discrimination in the workplace where, for example, colleagues persistently ask revealing questions until the caste identity of their fellow workmate is exposed, and landlords often refuse to rent to individuals belonging to Dalit castes.

In such instances, Dalit literature exposes what Dalit politics does not — the subtlety and widespread experience of caste discrimination among not only the Dalit poor, but the Dalit urban middle class. In other words, Dalit literature highlights the inescapability of caste identity and the emotionality of discrimination in a different way to Dalit politics. It convincingly argues that although the state has enacted both constitutional and social reforms to abolish the practice of untouchability, severe bias against Dalits persists in contemporary Indian society. In this way, Dalits efforts to become middle class pose a particularly serious challenge not only to the established members of the middle classes (who are primarily

upper caste), but also to the contemporary conception of middle-class modernity, since caste has been perceived as a strictly feudal and hence 'un-modern' identity since the time of Nehru. Thus, as aspiring participants of the middle class who also openly maintain their caste identity, Dalits have proposed new definitions of what it means to be a middle-class Indian.

Representing Dalits

Although both Dalit politics and Dalit literature employ the same appellation 'Dalit' to represent their politically assertive, low-caste identity, both look at Dr Ambedkar as their inspirational leader and both claim to be fighting for social equality for the Dalit community, does this imply that Dalit politics and Dalit literature represent Dalit identity in the same way? Numerous studies have focused on Dalit politics or the rise of Dalit identity within the context of Dalit social and political grassroots mobilisation (Guru 2001a, 2001b; Jaffrelot 2003, 2005; Jogdad 1991; Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998; Omvedt 1994, 1995, 2004; S. Pai 2002; Rawat 2001, 2003; Shah 2001, 2002; Zelliot 1992). However, few studies have considered how Dalit literature differs from Dalit political movements, not only in terms of methods of Dalit assertion, but also in the kinds and scope of the Dalit identity(ies) it portrays. This study will argue, for instance, that while Dalit politics portrays a very specific Dalit identity linked to social and economic oppression, historical disenfranchisement and a shared set of civil rights that must be regained, Dalit literature displays a much broader and more fluid set of characteristics and experiences that constitute Dalit identity.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1990a) has provided a very useful way to think about the differences between political and literary representation, in her discussion of the terms *vertretung* and *darstellung*. According to Spivak, political representation can be imagined in terms of vertretung ('stepping in someone's place'), which refers to 'a representative who appears to work in another's interest'. This kind of representation where, for instance, a Dalit politician or political activist claims to represent the entire Dalit community is, as Spivak has written, 'as much a substitution as a representation' (Spivak 1988: 71). Literary or discursive representation, on the other hand, is discussed in terms of darstellung ('to place there'), as

it seeks to represent individuals or groups by creating a representative portrait.[17] However, what is most important is Spivak's efforts to differentiate these two processes, rather than collapse discursive and political representation and treat them as if they were the same. For instance, in the case of political representation (vertretung) where one individual literally steps into the place of another, where one individual says 'I speak for them and I represent them' (Spivak 1990a: 109), it is most important to simplify identity and emphasise the fundamental similarities between the person who is 'doing the representing' and the 'represented'. In other words, the mode of identity formation moves towards increasing simplicity and the primary relationship is between the representer and the represented, in this case, between the Dalit politician and members of his/her Dalit constituency. This is not the case for literary representation, where there is much greater room for complexity and varying experiences. In literature, images can reveal conflicting aspects of the same identity or multiple experiences felt at the individual level. The primary relationship, in this case, is not between the author and the reader, but between the portrayal and the portrayed, in this case, between the Dalit character(s) and members of the Dalit community. This distinction becomes significant when, for instance, Dalit writers claim that only authors of Dalit identity can write Dalit literature, or when Dalit writers are called upon to act as public representatives of the whole Dalit community on a wide range of social and political issues (see Chapters Three and Five).

In addition, cultural studies' conceptualisation of 'identity formation' has emphasised that identities are always relational and in a process of transformation. This focus on the fragmentary nature of identities and the multiplicity of positions within any specific identity reveals the complex work both political and literary representation attempt when claiming to represent a singular Dalit identity. However, because literary representation is much more fluid and flexible, it is able to incorporate a diversity of experiences and perspectives under one identity. For instance, in their study of black identity, David Bailey and Stuart Hall (1992) show that identities can be contradictory, that black can signify a range of experiences and that the act of representation becomes about exploring the various conditions of blackness, rather than presenting a singular, cohesive picture of the black experience. In this sense, we could argue that literary representation in general, and Dalit literature in

particular, emphasises experience rather than simple identity — in other words, that it moves beyond identity.

Still, all forms of representation come from a privileged position of power. Thus, two important points remain in a discussion of Dalit representation — who can represent Dalits, and who is the audience of this representation. Or to use Spivak's phrasing: who can speak, and who can listen? Spivak has famously shown the complexities that occur when a spokesperson from a marginalised community begins to speak, as the act of speaking itself infers a power differential between themselves and the rest of their 'silenced' community (Spivak 1988: 78). In other words, once they are able to speak publicly, they cease to be truly subaltern. As we shall see, Hindi Dalit writers have had to face this criticism head-on every time their middle-class status is used against them as proof that they no longer represent their 'poor' Dalit community. Ironically, as Gyanendra Pandey has shown, these same writers are also called upon, not only by other members of the Dalit middle class, but also by the Hindi-speaking public as a whole to do precisely that — to speak for and represent their community. This is true to such an extent that, as we shall see, some young Hindi Dalit writers such as Kavitendra Indu have rejected the idea that they must always write about being Dalit, as if this was their only identity and the only subject they had authority to write about (see Chapter Five).

Then, there is the question of who is at the receiving end of this representation. Who reads Hindi Dalit literature? Who listens to this public portrayal of Dalit identity? This is a particularly important question in a study of Dalit literature, since the majority of the community remains illiterate and thus, to 'listen' to Dalit literature at all also implies a position of privilege and power, whether we are talking about a Dalit or non-Dalit audience. Thus, we must ask that if the audience of Dalit literary representations is always privileged, how is the text read, or perhaps misread? As Spivak claims, hegemonic listeners — listeners with power — will approach such a text with specific expectations for the individual to 'speak as', and therefore, notions of authenticity or authentic experience are read through a lens of hegemonic constructions, and certain kinds of readings will be privileged over others (Spivak 1990b: 61–61). In her article 'Subaltern Talk', Spivak has further argued that even when an individual becomes a spokesperson for their marginalised group, they are heard by a dominant group that is fixated on individuals

being totally representative and insists that what this individual says must be true for all members of the group (Spivak 1996: 292). In the case of literary representation of minority groups, characters in the text are read by hegemonic readers as allegorical of the group as a whole — in other words, the characters are forced to be representative of the whole group, a process which acts in opposition to the possibilities literature can open up for identities, namely, to encompass a variety of experiences and characteristics, which may not necessarily be representative of every individual within that identity group. Ella Shohat, in her article on 'The Struggle over Representation', has argued this very point: representations of dominant groups are so common and so varied that negative images are seen as a part of the natural diversity of people; in contrast, representations of marginalised groups are so rare that they are charged with allegorical significance and taken to represent the entire group (Shohat 1995).

This relationship between the marginalised speaker/writer and the privileged listener/audience thus becomes particularly important to remember in a study of Dalit literature. It reminds us that we must explore not only the authenticity of the relationship between the portrayal (Dalit character) and the portrayed (members of the Dalit community), but we must also consider how Dalit writers themselves negotiate these expectations once they take on the mantel of 'representative'. In other words, there are three distinct relationships this book will consider: (*a*) the relationship between the literary portrayal of Dalits through fictional Dalit characters and the living members of the Dalit community who are being portrayed (portrayal–portrayed); (*b*) the relationship between the Dalit author and the represented Dalit community (creator/portrayer–portrayal); and (*c*) the relationship between the text/portrayal and the wider public audience (portrayal–audience/readers).

The Politics of Dalit Literary Production and Reception

As members of a marginalised and oppressed community, Dalit writers have had to struggle to make their voices heard. The production of Dalit literature — namely, the way Dalit writers have fought to publish their work, and gain recognition in the mainstream literary world — has been an intensely 'political' struggle, a process of

constant negotiation and confrontation. It is unsurprising then that the emergence of a Dalit literary movement by the urban Dalit middle classes has been met by significant opposition from the mainstream Hindi literary world. Its powerful autobiographies chronicling the Dalit experience in contemporary India have challenged dominant literary portrayals of Indian life, while these Dalit writers' efforts to delineate Dalit literary criticism have accused the literary world of caste-ism and stirred up heated debates in literary circles.

How have Hindi Dalit writers fought for the authority to speak in the mainstream literary world? Why have certain Hindi Dalit writers been more successful than others? How has the commentary on Dalit literature influenced the way it is read and interpreted? These questions require a broader theoretical framework for considering the conditions and politics of Dalit literary production in Hindi. Pierre Bourdieu's conceptualisation (1993a) of the 'field of cultural production' provides the most illustrative description of a literary field, which he defines as a site of struggle between positions held by individuals or institutions over certain resources. In other words, the Hindi literary field, which Dalit writers are attempting to join, would be defined by individual writers as well as literary institutions and people that influence Hindi literary publication, distribution and reception. These may include Hindi publishers, small independent presses, Hindi literary journals, literary critics and even members of university literature departments. There are, according to Bourdieu, four different kinds of resources, or capital, which these actors compete over: economic capital (wealth), social capital (valued relationships), cultural capital (legitimate knowledge) and symbolic capital (prestige, status). Yet, in any particular field, certain kinds of capital are more valued than others. For instance, Bourdieu has famously called the field of cultural production 'the economic field reversed', pointing out the fact that individuals in the literary world often value types of symbolic capital — i.e., recognition by other writers, academic institutions, literary organisations, etc. — over making money.[18]

Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'habitus' is also helpful for understanding the way in which the two fields of Hindi Dalit literature function. Habitus encompasses the sum total of a participant's behaviours, tastes and attitudes in conjunction with personal disposition, which informs his/her social practice in a field (ibid.). This notion provides a means of analysing the process by which,

for example, Hindi Dalit writers in the 'autobiographic' literary field have gradually acquired high levels of mastery over middle-class cultural practices, even to the extent of valuing particular literary genres (such as autobiographies, short stories and literary criticism) and literary practices (Dalit literary conferences and award ceremonies) over others (such as pamphlets of Dalit history sold at community festivals, as we see practised in the 'pamphlet field'). In addition, even while Hindi Dalit literature in both fields introduces a significant new critique of Indian middle-class identity, Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field are better able to rely on their acquisition of middle-class habitus to insert their critique into the middle-class dominated mainstream Hindi literary world.

While Bourdieu thus provides a theoretical vocabulary with which to differentiate the two fields of Hindi Dalit literature and to discuss the internal 'politics' or struggles within these two fields, a study of Hindi Dalit literary production necessitates certain revisions of his original theory of the field. For instance, rather than a single form of capital which defines a field, this study will show that Hindi Dalit writers in each field compete over a variety of economic, social, cultural and symbolic forms of capital. Furthermore, while the field of Dalit pamphlet literature conforms to Bourdieu's model by eschewing economic profits in favour of the status associated with a commitment to community *seva* (service), neither field of Hindi Dalit literature holds 'art for art's sake' as its fundamental guiding principle. Instead, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers judge their literary production on the basis of how far each Dalit literary pamphlet spreads Dalit political consciousness. The autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature also deviates from Bourdieu's model, in the sense that economic profits and the ability to present oneself as a full-time writer, fully supported by one's literary production, is an important marker of prestige. Hence, the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, while placing a greater emphasis on the separation between literature and institutional politics (such as from the Dalit politics of the BSP), is not 'the economic field in reverse', as Bourdieu originally describes the literary field.

Hindi Dalit writers have used literature not only to challenge the dominant representations of Indian society but also to reveal the underlying power structure that disguises the conditions of upper-caste dominance over the Hindi cultural arena and marginalises

the lower-castes from participating in the construction of such public cultural representations. In short, Hindi Dalit writers attempt to expose the direct relationship between the mainstream Hindi literary field and the field of power. Bourdieu's theorisation of the field similarly argues that the literary and artistic fields are contained within the field of power, which is based on existing social hierarchies. In other words, while the literary field is somewhat autonomous, in that it functions on different principles than the wider field of power (i.e., valuing symbolic capital such as prestige and reputation over economic profits), it is still subject to existing social hierarchies and thus, those who are from the dominant social classes will also most often attain positions of dominance in the literary field (Bourdieu 1984). The dominant social class, which, in the north Indian context, consists of members of the upper-caste middle classes, use their social and economic power to impose their own system of values on to the literary field. Thus Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field have had to conform to certain literary styles, genres and practices in order to gain recognition in the mainstream Hindi literary world. For this reason, Hindi Dalit literature produced in the autobiographic field has gained much greater publicity and respect, both nationally and internationally, than the Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets, which are viewed as 'political' and therefore 'unliterary' according to the dominant hierarchy of values.

Just as a discussion of the 'fields' of Hindi Dalit literature sheds light on who can write Dalit literature and how Dalit authors compete for the authority to speak, the notion of the reception of Dalit literature (the question of who listens/reads Dalit literature) is best understood in terms of the concept of the 'public sphere'. This study of Hindi Dalit literature thus also relies on a revised version of Jürgen Habermas's theory of the discursive public sphere, as it provides a way of understanding how different kinds of Hindi Dalit literature are received and read (or, as Spivak reminds us, often misread). Conceptualising the two fields of Hindi Dalit literature which function within a larger Hindi public sphere encompassing all Hindi language literature, journals, newspapers, television, radio, as well as public speeches and now even the internet, helps to envision who is at the receiving end of Hindi Dalit literature. It also helps reveal the dominance of certain literary fields over others

and thus, the way the dominant Hindi literary field exercises a certain hegemony over wider public imaginations of self, society and the nation.

In their discussion of late 19th- and early 20th-century Hindi literary production, Vasudha Dalmia (1997) and Francesca Orsini (2002) employed Habermas's notion of the public sphere to highlight the importance of literary circulation and reception. As Orsini shows, the nascent Hindi public sphere of the early 20th century conformed to many of the theoretical propositions first made about the European bourgeois public sphere by Habermas, including the common belief that the public sphere represented the general interests of Indian society, that it was based on rational modes of debate rather than the identity or social status of the participants and that it should function 'as if' social inequalities did not exist within the sphere of public debate. As Habermas (1989) asserted, the middle class came to think of itself as constituting the public (i.e., society as a whole), and consequently transformed the abstract notion of the public into a concrete set of middle-class practices, which became institutionalised in the public sphere.[19] Yet, as Orsini demonstrates, for the Hindi public sphere of the 1920s and 1930s, the members of the Indian middle class differed from Habermas's conceptualisation of the European bourgeois in that they were a 'subordinated elite' largely employed in teaching or journalism and working in a multiplicity of languages, including standard Hindi, English, Urdu and other Indian vernaculars. Few owned land or were wealthy government officials, but were most often poorly paid and worked under the authority of a school, journal or press editor (Orsini 2002: 14). However, the Hindi public sphere did not only consist of a discursive realm of public debate, but also included, as Sandra Freitag (1991) has noted, political speeches, festivals, parades and protests. These various realms of the public sphere have been important to Dalit literary assertion, since literary practices and distribution engage with these wider notions of public performance, as in the case of the Ambedkar Jayanti mela.

As it exists today, the discursive Hindi public sphere is the creation of, and is still dominated by, the middle classes that are primarily upper caste or *savarna*. Thus it is their vision of society, citizenry and nationhood which is dominantly represented in the Hindi public sphere, and it is this hegemonic lens through which much of Dalit literature is read. The mainstream Hindi public

sphere is therefore not as inclusive as it claims to be, as can be seen by the intense opposition the Hindi literary world put up against the emergence of Hindi Dalit autobiographies and other literary creations, and instead often works to exclude socially oppressed and marginalised groups from gaining the authority to represent society that participation in the public sphere affords.

Critiques of Habermas's original theorisation of the public sphere show how the middle class's projection of itself as the 'normative' or 'universal' class served, in fact, to exclude all those who could not lay claim to such universality (Fraser 1992; Landes 1988). With respect to the Hindi public sphere, Orsini notes that topics which were perceived by the upper-caste male-dominated middle classes to be particular or socially-specific (for instance, un-touchability or women's issues) were accorded the status of 'private issues' and were summarily excluded from public debate. Instead of speaking themselves, these groups and their interests were 'represented' (Orsini 2002: 13). This is still often the case in the Hindi public sphere, where Dalit writers continue to fight for the authority to speak and represent the Dalit experience in the public arena, and where the Hindi literary giant Munshi Premchand's famous portrayals of Dalit life are still often given more legitimacy to represent the Dalit experience than Dalit-authored autobiographies. The notion of representation, in fact, lies at the heart of the discursive public sphere and becomes a way of justifying the limits on participation, since not every individual can speak for themselves, but rather, their interests must be represented by someone who speaks on their collective behalf.

One way Hindi Dalit writers have fought their way into the Hindi public sphere and contested its hegemonic representations of Indian identity and Indian social experience has been by forming what Nancy Fraser has termed 'subaltern counter-publics', defined as 'parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs' (Fraser 1992: 123). According to Fraser, counter-publics function both as a space of 'withdrawal and regrouping' as well as 'training grounds for agitational activities directed towards wider publics' (ibid.: 124). This was the response, for instance, of Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers in the early 20th century, when, excluded from the growing discursive Hindi public sphere, they set up their own Dalit presses

and alternative literary distribution methods for the pamphlets. Hindi Dalit writers in the 'autobiographic field' also established a counter-public sphere in the mid-1990s, not because they were excluded from the literary mainstream, but in order to gain mastery over certain literary practices highly valued by the mainstream Hindi literary world in preparation for challenging it on its own terms. The concept of the counter-public thus gives us an analytical framework through which to name and examine the processes relating the fields of Dalit literary production to the wider Hindi public sphere. Thus, while the idea of the counter-public is imposed at the analytical level, it speaks to purposes and active strategies employed by the Hindi Dalit writers themselves, sometimes out of necessity and sometime out of clearly articulated intentions.

Therefore, although Hindi Dalit literature seems a recent phenomenon to many, this book will demonstrate that Dalit literary production in Hindi has a much longer history, beginning in the early 20th century. It examines two dominant fields of Hindi Dalit literature which have emerged over the course of the 20th century in north India, defined in terms of the different writers, literary institutions, genres and literary practices that have come to define their structure.[20] In order to examine the politics of Dalit literary production, distribution and meaning in Hindi, it relies upon an interdisciplinary methodology, including history, sociology of literature and narrative discourse analysis. It uses the lives of individual actors to highlight and interrogate larger processes of change in both Dalit literary fields. Existing scholarship on Hindi Dalit literature, particularly studies produced within Hindi departments in north India, has itself been largely implicated in these political processes. Instead, this book situates the critiques of Hindi Dalit literature by Hindi literary scholars within the larger context of struggle in the literary field.

The first part of this book considers the formation of the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlets, while the second part focuses on the more recent 'autobiographic' field of Hindi Dalit literature. Chapter One examines the historical beginnings of Dalit literary production in north India, which resulted in the formation of a field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature. Chapter Two examines the content of the Dalit pamphlets produced within this field and argues that Dalit pamphlet writers use the idiom of Dalit history to negotiate the relationship between themselves and the nation. Chapter Three

considers the rise of a new field of Hindi Dalit literature, which took inspiration from Marathi Dalit literature and gave priority to autobiographical storytelling aimed at exposing contemporary caste discrimination. It examines the ways in which Hindi Dalit writers of this field struggle to master the literary tools necessary to both gain access to and challenge the mainstream Hindi literary field. Chapter Four explores how Hindi Dalit autobiographies have contributed new representations of Dalit identity to the mainstream literary world and, thus, have reinserted caste identity into the heart of the Indian experience. Finally, Chapter Five discusses the proliferation of Hindi Dalit literary criticism and the struggle between Hindi Dalit writers and the mainstream Hindi literary world over the meaning of Dalit literature. As we shall see, both fields of Hindi Dalit literature have brought important new imaginings of Dalit identity to the north Indian context and have re-conceptualised the relationship between the Dalit community and the Indian nation.

Notes

1. For the international awareness of Dalit literature, see S. Anand (2003).
2. Even the Marxist literary movement Pragativad (Progressivism) of the 1930s, while emphasising the important role of literature in instigating social change, was most emphatic about proving that even art which is socially engaged is still art, hence partly autonomous from the realm of ideology and politics. Employing a new radical aesthetics, including characters from the so-called 'working classes' and an ideological commitment to realism, Progressive writers still insisted that their literature was not subservient to politics. For 'art for art's sake', Chayavad and Pragativad, see Orsini (2002); Schomer (1983).
3. The disparate social and political conditions of the states which comprise the area of north India known as the 'Hindi Belt' — Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh — make a study of Dalit literary production in Hindi a challenge. Thus, in order to explore Hindi Dalit literature in its historical and political context, this study will, for the most part, centre on the state of Uttar Pradesh, commonly known as the 'Hindi heartland'.
4. For more on Marathi Dalit literature and the Dalit movement in Maharashtra, see Dangle (1992); Guru (2001b); Jogdad (1991); B. Joshi (1986); Murugkar (1991); Omvedt (1995); Punalekhar (2001); Zelliot (1992).
5. This process was originally theorised by M. N. Srinivas as 'Sanskritisation', i.e., the process by which lower castes claim higher caste status

by mimicking upper-caste ideals, including vegetarianism, teetotalism and creating historical genealogies which trace the caste community back to Kshatriya lineages (often that of Lord Krishna or Lord Ram). However, scholars including Susan Bayly, Lucy Carroll and Ramnarayan Rawat have noted the problematic nature of this term as it not only ignores the longer historical development of Kshatriya ideals before and during the colonial period, but also fails to recognize the subversive and strongly political nature of these activities. Thus, I will refer to these activities as 'kshatriya reform movements'. For M. N. Srinivas's original theorization of the process of Sanskritisation, see Srinivas (1968). See also Bayly (1999).

6. The Poona Pact constituted the final rejection of Ambedkar's request for separate electorates for untouchables (those labelled SC), which he made based on the claim that Dalits were not Hindus but should be considered a separate cultural community. This pact, in its rejection of separate electorates, reaffirmed the Congress's position that Dalits were Hindus and provided new impetus for Dalit political radicalism, leading to numerous social protests and agitations organised by the UPSCF (see Rawat 2001).
7. For an account of Dalits' relationship with Buddhism across India and especially in Maharashtra, including why Ambedkar chose Buddhism as the new religion of the Dalit community and details of the first conversion ceremony in Nagpur, see Omvedt (2004). For more on neo-Buddhist organisations in north India, see Das (1998).
8. For more on the formation and electoral successes of the RPI, see Brass (1985); Hasan (1989); Lynch (1969); S. Pai (2002). For a description of the RPI as a party of Jatavs and the political affiliations of other Dalit jatis such as the Balmikis, see Prashad (2000).
9. For more on the BSP's impact on Dalits in rural north India, see Ciotti (2003).
10. The state has additionally implemented various poverty-alleviation programmes. For more on the ways these programmes have had an impact on the Dalit community in north India, see Das (1996: 234–57); Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998: 128–46); Shah (2002: 296–315).
11. The Poona Pact constituted the final rejection of Ambedkar's request for separate electorates for untouchables (those labelled SC), which he made based on the claim that Dalits were not Hindus but should be considered a separate cultural community. The Poona Pact, in its rejection of separate electorates, reaffirmed the Congress's position that Dalits were Hindus and provided new impetus for Dalit political radicalism, leading to numerous social protests and agitations organised by the UPSCF. For more on Dalit agitations in North India in protest of the Poona Pact, see Rawat (2001).

12. Articles in *Economic and Political Weekly* in 1990–1991 demonstrate the range of positions on the reservation debate, as controversy raged over Prime Minister V. P. Singh's implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, which extended reservation to members of the OBCs. Dalit intellectual Kancha Ilaiah's article entitled 'Reservations: Experience as Framework of Debate' from 13 October 1990 demonstrates a pro-reservation standpoint, arguing that the current system, which measures merit (i.e., examinations), are biased against the lower castes and that reservation facilities will uplift the lower castes and promote national progress. Aditya Nigam's article 'Mandal Commission and the Left' (1990) and Sharad Patel's article 'Should "Class" Be the Basis for Recognizing Backwardness?' (1990) both illustrate the Marxist position, which claims reservation should be based on economic status (i.e., class) rather than caste identity. Ashok Guha's article 'Reservations in Myth and Reality' (1990) wholeheartedly argues against reservation for OBCs, which he claims aids only a small elite within the OBC community. Instead, Guha calls for India to return to a meritocracy since, he argues, reservation generally promotes less qualified people and has a disastrous effect on the economy. Ramaswamy R. Iyer's article 'Toward Clarity on Reservations Question' (1991) exemplifies a common upper-caste perspective that reservation discriminates against the highly qualified and instead promotes under-skilled, inefficient and, in fact, undeserving individuals. Finally, B. Sivaraman's article 'This Mandalist Myopia' (1991) argues that the debate over reservation is obscuring the real problems with the Indian economy, namely, the scarcity of jobs as compared to the number of highly educated and qualified aspirants.
13. They are followed by the Pasi community, a caste of pig-rearers; the Dhobi community, a caste of washers; the Kori community; and the Bhangi community, a caste of sweepers. The Chamars have commonly worked as leather workers, removing and skinning dead animal carcasses in order to make leather products such as shoes. Recent work by Ramnarayan Rawat (2011) demonstrates the ways in which, over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Chamars in UP mobilised against colonial and upper-caste discourses, which defined them as 'untouchables', to reconstitute their community in terms of a new assertive *achut* identity. Owen Lynch's excellent social history (1969) of the Jatav community in Agra shows how the booming leather industry in Agra and Kanpur enabled certain individuals within the Jatav community, whom Lynch calls 'big men' (*bade aadmi*), to rise in wealth and political power.
14. Both leaders of the BSP, founder Kanshi Ram and the BSP's current leader Mayawati, are from the Chamar community. Hence, with the

rise of the BSP in UP politics, programmes for Dalit uplift such as the Ambedkar Village Program have specifically targeted the Chamar community (see S. Pai 2002; Pushpendra 2001; Shah 2001b: 17–43).

15. Vijay Prashad's study of Bhangis in Delhi discusses the history of this community from the late 1880s through the 1960s. Prashad charts how the community of sweepers now known as Bhangis were originally composed of many different jatis, known collectively as Mehtars. Prashad tracks the history of this caste in Delhi and shows how members of the Bhangi community increasingly came under the influence of the Hindu Right, adopting the new appellation 'Valmiki' to show their reverence for Maharishi Valmiki, the supposed author of the Ramayana (see Prasad 2000).
16. This is the primary reason why Bhangis do not vote for BSP and remain politically aligned with either the Congress or the BJP (V.K. Rai 1999: 2407). (See also S. Pai 1997: 1360.)
17. Obviously, there remains a complicity between the two kinds of representation; for instance, a politician must also paint a portrait in the public imagination of his/her own identity as the collective identity. And certainly, both vertretung and darstellung involve varying degrees of essentialism.
18. In fact, as Bourdieu points out, for the mainstream literary field, making money is often viewed as detrimental to the writers' legitimacy and is seen as evidence of 'selling out'.
19. Critiques of Habermas's work referred to here include Fraser (1992) and Freitag (1991: 1–13).
20. The emphasis here is on 'dominant'. This research is confined to those fields of literature which explicitly associate with Dalit identity, although there are certainly other fields of literary production with texts authored by members of SC jatis, such as the literature produced by the Valmiki community seen in Chapter Three, and oral narratives, such as those documented by Badri Narayan (2001).

1

The Beginnings of Dalit Literature in Hindi

The Field of Dalit Pamphlets

Along a winding lane of an old Lucknow neighbourhood, where the front porches of tall wooden houses lean precariously towards the street like ancient trees, stands the family home of Chandrikaprasad 'Jigyasu', one of the earliest Dalit writers and publishers of north India.[1] Sitting in the front room, Jigyasu's son Brahmanand reminisced about his father's lifelong career as a publisher and 'man of service' who continually invested what little money the family had into his publishing ventures. In fact, Brahmanand claims he was pushed out of the publishing business by his father who wanted him to become an engineer to support the family.[2] As he moved towards the back portion of the modest house, Brahmanand explained, '[s]ome people say that with [Jigyasu's] death, this [publishing venture] has declined. This is one reason which has been inspiring me to not only revive it but to bring it back to that scale.' With that, we entered a dimly lit room at the back of the house — the centre of early Dalit publishing activities in Hindi, from the 1930s until the mid-1960s. The old typeset Hindi press first used by Jigyasu was perfectly preserved and printing equipment hung from wooden rafters, while stacks of newly-printed pamphlets stood alongside the small modern press Brahmanand now uses to republish many of his father's most popular pamphlets.

This small room gives us an important glimpse into the development of the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature in north India. Excluded from the burgeoning Hindi public sphere in the early 20th century, both by their low-caste identity as well as by their topics of concern (caste, discrimination and Dalit history), 'untouchable'

writers used alternative means of literary publication and distribution to establish a separate space for public intellectual exchange amongst members of their own community. Thus from its very beginnings, this field of Dalit pamphlet literature was established as a counter-public, which was consciously constructed by Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers to circulate discourse that contested those of the mainstream Hindi public sphere. Despite circulating amongst an exclusively Dalit audience, small-scale publishing ventures like Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's published literary texts written by 'untouchable' authors that spread across north India on a massive scale by the mid-20th century — some of them running into the tens-of-thousands after several decades of successive print runs.[3] Small literary pamphlets of songs, poetry, dramas, short ideological articles and, especially, narratives recounting the ancient past were distributed at community gatherings, political meetings and annual community melas. These pamphlets were eagerly consumed by an emerging audience of literate SC readers.

This chapter explores the beginnings of Dalit literary production in north India and looks at the ways in which Dalit literary institutions and literary practices shifted in response to the changing social and political environment of the 20th century. It identifies three major historical phases of the development of a field of Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets. First, the institutions and discourses established by Swami Achutanand (1879–1933) in the 1920s and Jigyasu in the 1930s became foundational to the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature for the rest of the century. Hence, I devote significant attention to this period, situating it within the long-term perspective of the pamphlet field as an arena for social activism. Second, the rise of Dalit institutional politics in the 1940s, including the SCF and the RPI, linked the pamphlet form to political and religious forms of assertion. Third, from the 1980s, the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature has again shifted in the context of an increasingly popular 'Dalit' identity in north India from the 1980s, with the growth of the BSP, the Mandal Commission controversy and the impact of Hindutva politics. This chapter argues that early Dalit literary production in Hindi arose within a consciously constructed Dalit counter-public, marked by the publication of small, cheap pamphlets printed by privately-owned Dalit presses and distributed at the Dalit mela. This has remained the consistent form

of Dalit literary production and distribution in this Dalit pamphlet literary field.

Early Dalit Literary Production: 1920s–1930s

The first Dalit literary texts by members of the SCs were jati histories, written as part of late 19th- and early 20th-century Kshatriya reform movements. As we shall see, these literary works argued simply that their jati had been incorrectly registered in the colonial census as SC (i.e., 'untouchable') and should instead be listed as Kshatriya. Thus, early 'untouchable' assertion in north India emphasised the primacy of the jati community and used the *varna* system mainly as a malleable structure to advance their social position. Literary production remained integral to this assertion, both in terms of the legitimising force of the text in society (particularly for a largely illiterate community) and as a space in which 'untouchable' writers could explore questions of their jati's relationship to other social groups.

However, by the 1920s, a new radical stream of pamphlet literature was initiated by Swami Achutanand, intimately linked to his Adi Hindu movement.[4] The discourse embodied in the Adi Hindu literature made previous jati histories seem apologetic and conservative to a number of low-caste individuals. These 'untouchables' began to reject both categories of jati and varna, instead embracing new imaginations of themselves as non-Hindu, part of a larger community of indigenous inhabitants called 'Adi Hindus' (original inhabitants). This section argues that it was the pamphlet literature associated with the Adi Hindu movement which determined the basic institutional and discursive structures that later came to define the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature. These included a discursive imagination of 'untouchables' as a united community of non-Hindus descended from the indigenous inhabitants of ancient India, a dependence on privately-owned printing presses and literary distribution at community gatherings.

The pre-history of the pamphlet field

Pamphlet literature in Hindi by authors belonging to so-called 'untouchable' castes first took the form of jati histories, written in support of petitions sent to the British colonial government to change the varna status of their jati as listed in the colonial census

(Dirks 2001; Rawat 2011). As their claims to a higher social status depended on proving their relationship to an ancient Kshatriya lineage, in addition to the letter of petition, a body of caste histories written by members of the lower castes flourished during the early decades of the 20th century, alongside the large corpus of upper-caste booklets, which were making similar efforts to document their ancestry.[5] While these pamphlets certainly constituted the first publishing efforts by members of the 'untouchable' castes and, in a way, laid the foundation of the future field of Dalit pamphlet literature, the radicalism denoted by the name 'Dalit' only became apparent in the writings of Adi Hindu-inspired activists. Therefore, I argue that the beginnings of what we might call the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature can only really be seen with the Adi Hindu movement, when writers first rejected the natural superiority of upper-caste Hindus and instead began to imagine a new collective and politicised identity for all members of the so-called 'untouchable' castes.

Jati history-writing among members of the SCs reveals how the concept of jati identity was conceptualised by many members in the early 20th century as a self-contained community, which had no stronger relationship to other SC jatis than it did to communities of higher caste. Understanding the reasons for the decline of their once-great jati was of central concern for these authors. Consequently, these jati histories illuminate how early SC writers attempted to explain 'the fall' of their jati from the high position of Kshatriya kings to the degraded 'untouchables'. Unlike the discourse of early Hindu nationalists, who explained their 'fall' and subsequent suppression under Muslim rule as the result of 'decadence' (thus placing both the blame and the possibility for revival squarely on the shoulders of the Hindu community), the SC authors could not afford to take on such culpability for their low social position (Orsini 2002: 175–92). Consequently, their 'fall from grace' was most often understood in the context of some trickery or deceit.[6]

Ramnarayan Rawat's work on the history of the Chamars has been particularly illuminating on this subject. In his book, *Reconsidering Untouchability* (2011), he looks closely at several examples of early Chamar-authored jati histories. One is U. B. S. Raghuvanshi's *Shri Chanvar Purana,* written around 1910 and published from

Kanpur, which claims that the Chamar jati was originally a community of powerful Kshatriya rulers renamed 'Chanvars'. Raghuvanshi mobilises the narrative authority of the *Purana*s to support his history by claiming that his text is based on a 'Chanvar Purana', discovered by a *rishi* in a Himalayan cave and translated from Sanskrit by the author (Rawat 2011: 123–24). In it, Raghuvanshi writes, 'It is commendable that our Hindu brethrens [sic] have such faith in the *Puranas*, and it is our humble request that they will show similar devotion to the Chanvar Purana' (ibid.: 124). Here, the author is clearly addressing an audience beyond the jati community, revealing how the text was also intended for an audience whose notion of community was informed by data presented in the colonial census, in accordance with the goals of the Kshatriya reform movements.

According to Raghuvanshi's caste history, while the Chanvars were once both powerful and just rulers, the lineage declined after the great king Chamunda Rai was tricked by the *devta*s (gods) into worshipping a *murti* (statue) in violation of his worship of the god Vishnu. In an attempt to investigate this deviance from Chamunda's previously devoted worship, Vishnu himself appeared to Chamunda as a Shudra (for reasons unexplained). When Chamunda chastised the disguised Vishnu for reciting the *Veda*s, an act forbidden to the lower castes, Vishnu revealed himself and replied that a man is not a Shudra by birth, but by actions. In his anger, he cursed Chamunda's lineage to be Chamars, a community even lower than Shudras. After many appeals, Vishnu added a final prophesy — the Chanvar lineage would have another opportunity to rise and become great in Kaliyug (the dark age) when the birth of a new rishi (identified by the author as Ravidas) will reveal the true history and heritage of the Chamars as ancient Kshatriyas (ibid.: 125–26).

In this way, Raghuvanshi contextualises 'the fall' of the Chamars as the accidental misfortune of King Chamunda, who is first deceived by the gods and then fails to recognise a disguised Vishnu. Astonishingly, the very cause of the Chanvars' fall is their adherence to Hindu strictures, which forbid anyone of lower-caste origin to recite the Vedas. Thus, the narrative positions the Chamar jati squarely within the Hindu religion, and shows them to be devoted followers of Hindu law. At the same time, Vishnu's assertion that one is Shudra by actions rather than birth and his prophesy of redemption through a new rishi are narrative strategies that strengthen the

case for the Chamar jati to reassume its previous social position as Kshatriyas. Like the discourse of the Hindu reformers, Raghuvanshi's *Shri Chanvar Purana* insists that the jati's decline has continued because Chamars have forgotten their glorious past, and that the path to revival is in remembering this true history (Rawat 2011: 123–27). In these early jati histories, Sant Ravidas is symbolically positioned as an upper-caste figure; in Raghuvanshi's *Shri Chanvar Purana*, the narrative begins with Ravidas's attempt to enter the *devlok* (world of the gods). The narrator, identified as Narad Muni,[7] tells the story of the Chanvar lineage and the fall of Chamunda in an attempt to convince the gods that Ravidas' entry into the devlok is not a sinful transgression, since Ravidas is not a Shudra, but is actually of Kshatriya descent. In such jati histories then, Ravidas becomes the saviour of the Chamars when he reveals to them their true historical ancestry as upper castes. Later, as we shall see, Ravidas is repositioned by the Adi Hindu pamphlet writers as a prophet who discloses lower castes' true identity as indigenous inhabitants of India.

From their inception, jati histories were intimately linked to the institutional structures of 'caste associations' and supported the reforms these associations promoted amongst their members. This institutional foundation was especially important for early publishing ventures in terms of their financial support and it is not surprising, therefore, that the majority of early low-caste jati histories were published by caste associations. In Agra, for instance, the Jatav Veer Mahasabha (Jatav Men's Association) established in 1917 by Manik Chand, Khemchand Bohare and Ramnarayan Yadavendu provided the institutional basis for the local Chamar community's claim to Kshatriya status as 'Jatavs', associated with the Yadavs and, hence, the Yadu lineage of Krishna.[8] Pandit Sunderlal Sagar's *Yadav Jivan* (Life of the Jatavs, and originally entitled *Jatav Jivan*; 1929) and Ramnarayan Yadavendu's *Yaduvansh ka Itihas* (The History of the Yadu Race; 1942), were both published in Agra with the support of the Jatav Veer Mahasabha (Rawat 2011: 126–27). The institutional origins of these literary pamphlets reveal how important literary production was to early caste associations and explains why reform discourse, such as promoting vegetarianism and teetotalism, became embedded in these early SC jati histories.[9] Sagar's pamphlet, for instance, contains not only a detailed account of the Chamar community's Kshatriya ancestry traced back to the Yadu

race but emphasises that the name 'Jatav' is simply a mispronunciation of 'Yadav'. The pamphlet also lays out a second section, describing important reforms in diet and drinking habits recommended by the author (Rawat 2004: 165).

Pandit Sunderlal Sagar's preface to *Yadav Jivan* (1927) also shows how these Kshatriya reform efforts had practical impacts on the personal realities of low-caste individuals and hence, how writing caste histories could also be a very personal act. Sagar claims to have written his pamphlet in the context of his personal struggle to record his surname as Yadav on the official voters' record. In the preface to *Yadav Jivan*, he writes that when he was prevented from recording his surname as Yadav, he wrote the caste history as evidence, which was later used in a lawsuit that the author brought before the commissioner of Agra (Rawat 2011: 127). Thus, these reform movements and the literature they inspired were not simply a theoretical ideal for a few caste associations. More than a literary exercise, they constituted an attempt by these low-caste authors to change their lives, affecting individuals at a personal level.

Nicholas Dirks, Sanjay Joshi and others have argued that the construction of a community's genealogical history was crucial to the social and cultural processes involved in producing modernity (Dirks 2001; S. Joshi 2001). SC jati histories represented a fundamental challenge by 'untouchable' authors to the dominant representation of their jati's low-caste position, revealing how literary publishing has been construed as an act of modernity. Although the majority of jati histories failed to meet with their desired effect of again registering the SC community in question as 'Kshatriya' in the colonial classification system, this literature remained an important aspect of early 'untouchable' assertion.[10]

Adi Hinduism and literary radicalism

As we have seen, in the early 1920s, the new Adi Hindu movement initiated by Swami Achutanand took 'untouchable' assertion in a new direction by making bold claims to the underlying unity of all lower-caste communities as non-Hindu descendants of India's indigenous inhabitants.[11] Achutanand's Adi Hindu movement initiated the formation of an alternative literary field of Dalit pamphlets, which functioned alongside (although separately from) the mainstream Hindi literary public. Through his Adi Hindu ideology as well as his own social practices, Achutanand inspired other

'untouchables', including his prolific follower Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, to identify themselves with a larger community of 'Adi Hindus' and to 'uplift' this oppressed community, both through social and literary activism.[12]

While literary production and consumption of these pamphlets on Adi Hindu philosophy became an important means of participating in the Adi Hindu movement and of serving the community, this section argues that Adi Hindu literary practices ultimately established the foundations of a new field of Dalit pamphlet literature in Hindi. The institutional structures and literary practices of Adi Hindu literary production — including the use of private printing presses, publication of small, cheaply printed 'pamphlets' and the dissemination of this literature through inter-SC jati and inter-regional networks — provided the early foundation of the contemporary field of Dalit pamphlet literature. Led by disillusioned 'untouchable' activists who had been excluded from participation in the mainstream Hindi public sphere, the field was also necessarily set up as a counter-public sphere. A consideration of this Adi Hindu pamphlet literature further demonstrates the discursive continuities of Adi Hindu ideology far beyond the decline of the Adi Hindu Sabhas as the movement's institutional base, since Achutanand's reinterpretation of ancient Indian history remained the primary means by which members of the so-called 'untouchable' castes came to understand their own history and relationship to each other for the remainder of the century (see Chapter Two).

Swami Achutanand began his new Adi Hindu movement in an attempt to bring together members of all the 'untouchable' jatis into a new community of 'Adi Hindus' by claiming that they were all descendants of the original inhabitants and ancient rulers of India.[13] Achutanand asserted that the so-called 'untouchables' had once ruled over a thriving civilisation; however, this 'golden age' in Indian history came to an end when invading Aryans overpowered the peace-loving Adi Hindus and oppressed them by imposing Brahmanical Hinduism and, with it, the hierarchical system of caste. Adi Hinduism was particularly radical in its reinterpretation of the theory of Aryan race, by subverting the main categories of 'indigenous' and 'foreign' and by positioning the Aryans as foreign invaders.[14] Additionally, by stretching the 'beginning' of Indian history farther back in time, Adi Hindu activists laid claim to the powerful category of indigeneity, naming themselves the original inhabitants

of India. Achutanand's Adi Hindu movement was able to make claims strikingly similar to Kshatriya reform movements, namely, that 'untouchables' had once been powerful rulers of ancient India. Yet, rather than working within the upper-caste paradigm, where to be an ancient ruler necessitated Kshatriya lineage, Achutanand subverted the dominant historical narrative, claiming that the current 'upper castes' were actually foreigners to the subcontinent and that Adi Hindus had ruled India until their invasion. In other words, Achutanand was able to the make the strong moral claim to indigeneity over Kshatriyahood as the new authority to govern, an idiom increasingly valued during a time of growing Indian nationalism.

While Achutanand was the first to disseminate this history in the north Indian context, he was not the first to articulate this particular reinterpretation of ancient Indian history. He was also greatly influenced by the writings of Jyotiba Phule, the mid-19th century radical social reformer of Maharashtra, who presented an early critique of the caste system as a Brahmanical imposition used to dominate the lower castes. Phule was also one of the first to popularise the alternative interpretation of the Aryan race theory given above, and Achutanand seems to have been influenced not only by this but also by Phule's use of drama as a means of spreading his message. However, unlike Achutanand's later reinterpretation of this discourse, Phule's central critique was focused against the Brahmans alone. While imagining a new collective identity for all lower-caste communities, he did not believe that they were oppressed by a social system supported by all upper castes, but rather, were exploited specifically by the Brahmans (O'Hanlon 1985: 131–41).

The Adi Hindu movement continued to retain certain concepts borrowed from the Hindu reformers and the Arya Samaj, including the 'notion of the forcible imposition of religion'; the categories of the mainstream Hindu narrative, including indigenous inhabitants versus foreign invaders; as well as the image of an ancient golden age (Gooptu 2001; Orsini 2002). As we shall see, in their organisational strategies as well, the Adi Hindus made productive use of Arya Samaj-like *upadeshak*s (preachers) to spread their subversive ideology, and it is most likely not a coincidence that at the same time as the Arya Samaj was striving to construct a collective Hindu community, the Adi Hindus began to construct new imaginations of a community which encompassed all the disparate 'untouchable' jatis.

Nandini Gooptu (2001) has highlighted the new social and political developments that increasingly affected the lives of urban 'untouchables' in the 1920s as the impetus behind Adi Hindu mobilisation. These new developments include an increasing scarcity of jobs, especially for second-generation urban 'untouchables', increasing licensing regulations imposed by the colonial government after the First World War and local administration policies which caused the displacement of 'untouchable' communities from their neighbourhoods. In addition to these, Gooptu emphasises the impact of *Bhakti* revivalism as a basis for the Adi Hindu critique of Hinduism. According to Adi Hindu ideology, the true religion of the original inhabitants of India had been Bhakti, a devotional form of Hinduism, which encouraged direct interaction between the individual and God, thus denying the importance of Brahman priests and Vedic rituals as a means of communicating with the divine. Achutanand also stressed the importance of introspection as the path to true knowledge. In this way, Adi Hindu ideology sought to empower members of the 'untouchable' community to think for themselves rather than rely on the knowledge and belief systems of the upper castes, and Achutanand emphasised this principle of self-reliance through his repeated use of the words *atmavad* (self-realisation), *atma-anubhav* (introspection) and *atmagyan* (self-knowledge) (ibid.).

The Adi Hindu leaders were not, however, members of the mass of 'untouchable' urban poor, but of a small group of urban 'untouchable' elite who had attained high levels of education. Although they remained financially poor, their participation as students in institutions of higher education through colonial reforms had given them cultural access to the discourses and even habitus (personal practice) of 'modernity' as articulated by the Indian middle classes. However, this cultural access remained essentially partial and 'untouchables' remained excluded from full participation in the nascent Indian middle class due to their low-caste status. Swami Achutanand, for instance, was born to a Chamar family in Umari village in Mainpuri district, UP. He led a relatively privileged life for a young man from an 'untouchable' caste at the time, having been raised in the military cantonment in Devali where his father was employed. Achutanand received his early education at the cantonment school from Christian missionaries, where he learned to read Urdu, English, Hindi and

Gurumukhi. Between the ages of 14 and 24, Achutanand travelled across north India with mendicant saints, associating himself with Swami Sacchidananda, from whom he learned Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi and Sanskrit. According to his biographer and younger contemporary Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, he was also extremely well-versed in religious ideology, having studied the *Guru Granth Saaheb*, the *Bijak* of Kabir as well as works by other Bhakti poet-sants, including Dadu Dayal, Ravidas and Namdev. He had also supposedly read the Bengali translation of Ramesh Chandra Dutt's *Rig Veda* and various history books (Jigyasu 1968).

In the early decades of the 20th century, the small elite group of educated 'untouchables' like Achutanand, who would later become the most active Adi Hindu ideologues, aspired to participate in the burgeoning sphere of Hindi public debate. Understandably, their views and social concerns were coloured by their experiences as members of the 'untouchable' castes and thus, they first attempted to raise caste-related concerns through both the social uplift programmes of the Arya Samaj as well as Hindu reform literature. However, as Francesca Orsini asserts, the Hindi public sphere's normative attitude meant that 'only matters which appeared under the *jatiy* or "national" guise were fit to be discussed. Anything which appeared particular or heterogeneous was, as a consequence, not part of the "public"' (Orsini 2002: 12). 'Untouchable' writers were already at a strong disadvantage, since their caste identity excluded them and their concerns from what were considered issues of national public interest. The issues raised by 'untouchable' writers and activists, such as the practice of untouchability, caste discrimination and the historical origins of the lower caste communities, seemed distinctly 'particular' and were, therefore, excluded from the mainstream Hindi public.

Thus, while Swami Achutanand may have desired to participate in the wider social debates of the day, Francesca Orsini's study of the developing Hindi public sphere in the early decades of the 20th century demonstrates how little the participants of this mainstream Hindi literary field took notice of lower-caste literary figures. Apart from several brief mentions of Adi Hindu demonstrations in Hindi literary journals, such as an article on a meeting of the Adi Hindu Mahasabha in Allahabad, which appeared in a 1928 edition of *Chand*, the vast majority of the Hindi literary public continued

throughout the 1920s and 1930s to act as if the growing field of Dalit pamphlet literature did not exist.[15] Orsini adds that

> exclusion [in the mainstream Hindi public] was also implicit: women and members of the subaltern classes could be kept out of the ostensibly equal discursive interaction by, for example, protocols of styles and decorum in public interaction . . . or by bracketing status 'as if' it did not exist when in fact it still counted (2002: 13).

This did not mean, however, that this small group of 'untouchable' literati were disengaged from the debates going on in the mainstream Hindi public. 'Untouchable' writers associated with the Adi Hindu movement, on the contrary, intimately engaged with both regional and national debates, particularly those concerning caste. Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, for instance, corresponded with Mahatma Gandhi, met Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar on his visits to Lucknow and maintained a close relationship with the Buddhist monk Bodhanand, who was a well-known political activist in eastern Uttar Pradesh in the 1920s and 1930s.[16] Gooptu confirms that there was, in fact, a

> growing familiarity of the untouchables, especially of a newly literate section among them, with the ideas preached by religious reformist groups such as the Arya Samaj or by Christian missionaries, as well as deliberations about the representation of the caste and religious communities in government and political institutions (2001: 154).

As we shall see, Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu is one exception to the exclusion most lower-caste writers experienced from the Hindi mainstream. Jigyasu worked for many years in subordinate positions in the evolving Hindi print market of the early 20th century. However, his failure to rise to higher positions of literary authority in this sphere, his later rejection of Hindu reform ideology and the intense commitment he displayed towards the establishment of an alternative Dalit literary field in Hindi all expose the false promise of inclusion promoted by the mainstream Hindi public sphere.[17]

Participating in middle-class 'modernity' in early 20th-century north India also meant associating with new social reform institutions and 'serving' the nation through volunteering and charitable giving. Carey Watt, for instance, has shown that these community

service associations, such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha, became increasingly popular between 1910 and 1930, and seva functioned as a mode of performing one's middle-class identity (Watt 2005). While the Hindi public sphere excluded this elite group of 'untouchable' intellectuals from participation in literary debate, the Arya Samaj was one institution which welcomed the active participation of these educated members of untouchable castes.[18] In this way, the Arya Samaj provided an opportunity for socially concerned members of the lower castes to enter the arena of public debate, to associate themselves with a 'modern' institution and to fulfil the prevalent contemporary desire to serve the community through volunteer work. These 'untouchable' intellectuals became some of the most enthusiastic participants in Arya Samaj social reform and social uplift campaigns. Achutanand himself was an energetic worker in the shuddhi campaigns, which the Arya Samaj initiated to prevent lower-caste communities from converting to Islam or Christianity.[19] However, this activism, at least for Swami Achutanand and many other future lower-caste ideologues such as Ram Charan[20] and Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, was short-lived. After only a few years of working with the Arya Samaj, Achutanand became disillusioned with the lack of true social equality between 'purified' members of the lower castes and upper castes, even amongst members of the Arya Samaj itself. Achutanand's biographer notes his feelings of 'disillusionment' as he questioned the ulterior motives of the Hindu reformers, who, he now believed, had had no intention of instituting true social equality among the castes, but simply desired to strengthen the Hindu community as their numbers had dropped in the colonial census (Jigyasu 1968). Achutanand was known as 'Harihar' while working for the Arya Samaj, yet after leaving the Samaj to initiate his own Adi Hindu movement, he took on the name of Swami Achutanand. While at first this name was referred to derogatorily in the vernacular press as 'Achut' (untouchable) to emphasise his low-caste status, Achutanand replied that 'Achut' meant 'untouched' and connoted purity (ibid.).

For north India, then, the 1920s and 1930s marked the first period of Dalit literary production, as the rise of several independently owned presses in Kanpur and Lucknow at this time brought about a proliferation of small, inexpensive Dalit literary pamphlets in Hindi, which began to circulate at 'untouchable' political meetings,

community gatherings and local melas, and which spread a new political consciousness amongst the various 'untouchable' communities. Achutanand's own press in Kanpur was the source of his many literary works and newspapers, including the monthly newspaper *Achut* from the early 1920s (which later became a daily and changed its name to *Adi Hindu*, continuing publication until 1932) and a monthly journal called *Usha* (Dawn) published from 1928 (Jigyasu 1968: 114; Narayan 2004: 19).

While Achutanand's press initiated a new field of radical pamphlet literature written by members of the so-called 'untouchable' castes, by far the most influential press in this field, both in terms of its longevity and number of publications, was the Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan, established by Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu in Lucknow in the early 1930s. Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu was born in 1899 to a relatively prosperous low-caste family in Lucknow and, like Swami Achutanand, was also from an unusually privileged background. His father was well-educated and held the position of headmaster in the American Mission School. At school, Jigyasu studied English, Sanskrit and began to study Farsi. However, his father's premature death meant that Jigyasu could not finish higher education beyond class 10. Thus, as a second-generation educated man of lower-caste background, Jigyasu was another member of the small section of socially-oppressed literati, with presumably similar cultural aspirations to 'belong' to the growing Indian middle classes by participating in public debate and associating with 'modern' institutions.

As a young adult, Jigyasu came under the influence of the Arya Samaj, and it was in the context of Hindu reform that he first began his literary career. When he was as young as 16, Jigyasu wrote his first book on Maharana Pratap Singh, which was published by Arya Pustakalay from Bareilly. He also worked on a translation of the Bhagavad Gita from Urdu into Hindi with commentary by Swami Ramatirtha. Later, he worked in several subordinate positions as translator and proof-reader for some of the most established Hindi journals and publishing houses in Lucknow, including the journal *Madhuri* and the publishing house Ganga Pustak Mala. Inspired by the nationalist movement, Jigyasu left the mainstream Hindi publishing world and shifted into writing nationalist pamphlets. It was also at this time that he founded his own press, the Hindu Samaj Sudhar Karyalay (Hindu Society Reform Office), through which he

printed booklets of songs and poems on nationalist themes, including his famous 'Vir Javahar' on Nehru, which was proscribed by the government and went through twelve editions and 450,000 copies in one year. The Hindu Samaj Sudhar Karyalay had published over thirty titles by 1931, including a tract by Jawaharlal Nehru entitled *Rashtriya Dhanka Athava Swadeshi Khadi* (published into its fifth edition by 1930), tracts against alcoholism and pamphlets on Congress, *swadeshi*, Gandhi and Motilal Nehru, all part of a 'Hindu Social Reform Series'.[21] Due to his continuing support of the nationalist movement, Jigyasu's press was raided by the British five times, and he was jailed for several months for his nationalist writings. According to his own account, he first came into contact with Achutanand in 1926, when he was still involved in the Hindu reform movement (Jigyasu 1968: 102). He also became increasingly influenced by a Buddhist monk, Swami Bodhanand, who was also active in the Adi Hindu movement, and together 'with the thoughts of Bodhanand and the pen of Jigyasu', they wrote three books: *Mul Bharatvasi aur Arya, Bhagwan Gautam Buddha* and *Bauddhacharyapaddhati* (Anon. 1972). The first of these, *Mul Bharatvasi aur Arya* (The Original Inhabitants of India and the Aryans) was published in 1930 and became the most important historical text of the Adi Hindu movement, according to Jigyasu's biographer (ibid.). Through his work with Bodhanand, Jigyasu came increasingly under the influence of Adi Hindu ideology and, after he came into contact with Dr Ambedkar (also through Bodhanand), Jigyasu became disenchanted with the efforts of the Hindu reform movement. Consequently, he changed the name of his press from Hindu Samaj Sudhar Karyalay to Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan (Bahujan Welfare Press).[22]

This symbolic transformation of Jigyasu's press from an ideological alliance with the Hindu reform movement to a new assertion of *bahujan* (literally meaning 'the majority') identity, reflects the larger ideological changes slowly taking place among members of various SC communities in north India in the early decades of the 20th century.[23] Later, Jigyasu wrote his own history of the Dalit community in ancient India based on Adi Hindu ideology, entitled *Bharat ke Adi-Nivasiyon* (The Original Inhabitants of India). For this, he claimed inspiration from Achutanand, who 'always [urged] me to write a book on Adi Hindu principles substantiated by history, archaeology and scientific methodology' (ibid.: 102–3).

The first part of the history, entitled *Srishti aur Manav-Samaj ka Vikas* (Universe and the Development of Human Society), was published in 1938, and the second, entitled *Bharat ke Adi-Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata* (The Civilization of the Original Inhabitants of India) was published several years later. Jigyasu also wrote several works on the Bhakti poet-sant Ravidas including *Sant-Pravar Ravidas Sahab* (The Eminent Sant Ravidas) and *Sant Ravidas ka Jivan Darshan* (The Life Philosophy of Sant Ravidas).[24] In Jigyasu's writings, Ravidas is not portrayed as a prophet bringing Dalits back to their ancestral roots as Kshatriyas, but as a new Adi Hindu poet-sant reminding the community of its ancient heritage as indigenous inhabitants of India (Jigyasu 1955). Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan also continued to publish works in Hindi throughout the 1940s–1960s on various Dalit issues, including works by Ambedkar, pamphlets on Buddhism, caste discrimination and reservation.

Thus, while certain economic, political and religious conditions in the early 20th century set the stage for lower-caste mobilisation and protest, the beginnings of the Adi Hindu movement should also be located in the desire among educated members of the urban 'untouchable' community to participate in the forms of cultural modernity in Indian society. These educated 'untouchables' were deeply affected by their exclusion from the mainstream Hindi public sphere and their marginalisation even within the Arya Samaj, and it was this ideological conflict which inspired the beginnings of the Adi Hindu movement. Therefore, it is essential to see the Adi Hindu movement of Swami Achutanand as a means of articulating a new language of 'belonging' which was no longer about an association with middle-class Indian society, but rather, rearticulated new claims to indigeneity and cultural authority.

Achutanand first expressed his Adi Hindu philosophy through poetry in 1917, five years before the Adi Hindu movement officially began agitations in 1922 (Jaffrelot 2003: 201–4). His poems outlined a basic history of the original inhabitants of India and their oppression by the invading Aryans, consciously calling upon members of all 'untouchable' communities to 'remember' their past as Adi Hindus and rise to reclaim their true heritage as the descendants of these ancient rulers (Achutanand in Narayan and Misra 2004: 111). His poems include *Itihas Gyan* (Knowledge of History) and another entitled 'Adi Vansh Ashtak' (The Original Lineage in

Eight Stanzas), through which the audience was able to re-imagine the greatness of their lineage and their subsequent 'fall' due to an Aryan conspiracy (Jigyasu 1968: 112–13). Achutanand's early use of poetry, song and later drama as a means of spreading Adi Hindu ideology reveals his attempts to bridge the gap between the text and the largely illiterate Dalit audience.[25] In other words, Achutanand relied on literary genres which stood comfortably between textual and oral modes of communication.

The Adi Hindu rereading of the dominant historical narrative pervaded Dalit understandings of the past long after the decline of the organisational institutions of the movement. For instance, literary pamphlets extolling this basic historical narrative have since been written by Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu in the 1940s, S. L. Sagar in the 1970s (see Chapter Two), and the basic historical narrative was repeated to me in several interviews of contemporary Dalit writers who are now functioning in a new autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature (Jigyasu 1937; Sagar 1991). This continuity stems not only from its endurance in the sphere of orality and communal memory but also from the way Adi Hindu ideology became embedded as a discursive foundation of the field of Dalit pamphlet literature. Thus, while many scholars, including Christophe Jaffrelot and Sudha Pai, have argued that the decline of the Adi Hindu movement's institutional base (i.e., the Adi Hindu Sabhas) by the late 1930s constituted the ultimate failure of the movement. Nandini Gooptu reminds us that the greatest power of the Adi Hindu movement lay in its ideological contribution to Dalit consciousness (Jaffrelot 2003; S. Pai 2002). She writes,

> the emphasis of the Adi Hindu movement was not . . . on formal organisation, but on a shared religious and ideological perspective between the Adi Hindu preachers and local untouchable groups who practised bhakti. Various *panchayats* (village councils) and caste groups in their neighbourhoods were informally associated with the Adi Hindu Sabhas of the towns or with individual leaders. Adi Hindu preachers were regularly invited to address meetings of local caste panchayats and bhakti religious congregations (Gooptu 2001: 159).

This is confirmed by Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp (2007) who shows that even as committed Ambedkarites, Dalits maintained their loyalty to Adi Hindi ideology.

The continuity in this historical Adi Hindu counter-discourse also emphasises the vast impact of literary pamphlets. This early Dalit literature spread a new political consciousness by convincing members of its audience that they were part of a separate cultural community with a glorious past. Institutionally, the field was structured by small Dalit publishers of pamphlets and newspapers, which were largely subsidised by private funds as seva to the rest of the Dalit community. We remember, for instance, Brahmanand's description of his father, Jigyasu, as a 'man of service'. The field was also defined by alternative modes of distribution including selling pamphlets at political meetings, community gatherings, melas or through social networks (via friends and postal orders). It was not a money-making venture, but rather, a field which dealt in social bonds, political consciousness, identity performance and social service, which stretched far beyond the realms of the previous jati associations in its imagination of a new 'Dalit' community.

Dalit Pamphlet Literature and the Beginning of Dalit Politics: 1944–1970

In the 1920s and early 1930s, membership in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature was defined through discursive loyalty to the Adi Hindu historical narrative. By the 1940s, however, political developments brought on by the nationalist movement and the rising influence of Dr Ambedkar in north India instigated shifts in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature. Membership in the field increasingly became a function of one's fidelity to the leadership of Dr Ambedkar and a mastery of new literary practices and sensibilities that coupled literary production with a new kind of activism in electoral politics.

This section explores the shifting relationship between Dalit literature and Dalit politics from the 1940s to the 1960s. It asks to what extent early Dalit pamphlet literature found political expression in the activities of Ambedkar's SCF and, later, the RPI, and how the rise of Dalit institutional politics shaped both the literature of the Dalit pamphlet field and the literary practices of a new generation of Dalit writers. Furthermore, it explores what happened to the field of Dalit pamphlet literature with the decline of Dalit politics in the 1970s.

The impact of Ambedkar and Dalit politics in UP

By the 1940s, communities increasingly relied on political institutions such as the Congress party and the Muslim League to express their social dissent (Bose and Jalal 1998). In this context, Dr Ambedkar's growing influence in north India through the SCF led to important changes in Dalit activism in the region. It provided a new politicised 'Dalit' identity, as well as a new political institution through which Dalits could express their dissent. By the 1940s, most Dalit political energies across the Hindi region were channelled into the political mobilisations of the SCF, which set up a branch in Uttar Pradesh in 1944, only two years after its inauguration in Maharashtra.[26]

This next section argues that the SCF and its successor, the RPI, set up in 1957, came to embody notions of a wider 'Dalit' community which had first been expressed in the literature of the Adi Hindu movement. In this time of intense political activity, the field of Dalit pamphlet literature continued to provide an important space for Dalit writers and activists to debate certain social questions which were raised during the nationalist movement. One question in particular loomed above all the rest — what was the Dalit community's relationship to the rest of Indian society? If Dalits had racial origins as the indigenous inhabitants of India and a separate historical experience as an oppressed community, where would their future place be in the modern Indian nation? As we shall see, a new generation of educated Dalit writers and political activists rose to meet the great challenge this question posed.

In 1944, two years after its establishment in north India, the Uttar Pradesh Scheduled Caste Federation (UPSCF) had already made a significant impact on the political arena in the state, marked by high support in the primaries of the 1945–46 elections in Agra, Allahabad, Kanpur, Rae Bareilly and Sitapur.[27] This was largely due to the UPSCF's reliance on earlier 'untouchable' political networks, as the Adi Hindu Sabhas, Bhakti *sampradaya*s and even caste associations, which had previously distanced themselves from the Adi Hindus, now merged with the UPSCF.[28] The Congress party attempted to hinder the growth of Dalit assertion through the figure of Jagjivan Ram, a Dalit politician who was promoted by the Congress to counteract the influence of Ambedkar, and certainly had a strong impact on Dalit voters.[29] Thus, while many SC voters

continued to be loyal supporters of the Congress, many others began to contest the Congress through the UPSCF.

As the moment of Independence approached, the Dalits' sense of betrayal and anger towards the Indian National Congress, brewing since the Poona Pact a decade earlier, instigated widespread Dalit political agitations.[30] On 16 July 1946, a demonstration was organised in Lucknow and hundreds of Dalit protestors from across UP, led by the president of the UPSCF, Tilak Chand Kureel, marched to the Legislative Assembly. From July through November 1946, there were protests in 23 districts in UP (including rural areas near Eta, Etawah, Raizabad, Gorakhpur, Fatehgarh, Ferozabad, Agra, Azamgarh and Ferrukhabad) and ten districts saw prolonged agitations (Rawat 2001). In addition, leaders of the UPSCF including Manik Chand, Faqir Chand, Tilak Chand Kureel and Swami Chamanand travelled throughout these regions, continuing to call for separate SC electorates and making emphatic demands for the Congress to define the Dalit community's future position in independent India. Protests emphasised that Independence would not mean freedom for Dalits, but simply replacing one tyrant (the British) for another (the Brahmans). A second round of agitations just before Indian independence, between 26 March and 14 May 1947, reiterated the Dalit critique of the Congress.

In 1957, as mentioned earlier, the SCF was transformed into the RPI.[31] The RPI's most important contribution, like the SCF, was to offer Dalits an ideological alternative to the Congress, whose members continued to place Dalits within the Hindu fold. In addition, while the Congress, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, considered discussions of caste distinctions to be a traditionalist discourse, contrary to notions of modern citizenship, the RPI fought to place the realities of caste discrimination at the heart of national debate. The Congress directed the nation towards increasing industrialisation in the 1950s, and the RPI proposed radical land redistribution and agricultural reform to improve the economic position of the lower castes (Brass 1985: 224). However, the dominance of the Congress party in UP made for fierce electoral competition, and the RPI was continually plagued with difficulties, due to lack of funds. Still, several Dalit leaders including Tilak Chand Kureel,[32] Cheddi Lal Sathi,[33] and B. P. Maurya,[34] were able to establish the RPI as a strong alternative to the Congress party for the lower castes in UP, so

much so that it became even more electorally successful in UP than in Ambedkar's home state of Maharashtra.[35] Yet, while attempts were made by RPI leaders including B. P. Maurya to broaden the electoral base of the RPI beyond the Jatav community to other Dalit and poor peasant groups, these efforts were largely unsuccessful, and the RPI remained a party dominated by Chamar/Jatavs.[36]

The field of Dalit pamphlet literature both contributed to and was affected by these changes. While Dalit pamphlets supported the activities of the SCF and RPI, these Dalit political organisations, in turn, encouraged Dalit literary production in Hindi and instigated several changes in the pamphlet field. First, the meaning of what constituted 'literature' in the Dalit pamphlet field shifted from the use of dramas, poetry and histories by the first generation of Adi Hindu ideologues to increasingly employing literary forms such as pamphlets and journal articles to respond to contemporary political challenges confronted by the RPI and to spread the ideology of Dr Ambedkar among the Dalit community of north India.[37] Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, for instance, whose press continued to be active during this period, shifted his literary focus from historical themes of the ancient Dalit past and began to write pamphlets such as *Bhartiye Ripablikan Parti Hi Kyon Avashyak Hai?* (Why is the Republican Party of India Necessary?), *Baba Saheb ki Bhavishya Vani* (The Prophesy of Baba Saheb), *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangharsh* (Baba Saheb's Life of Struggle) and *Baba Saheb ka Updesh-Adesh* (Advice of Baba Saheb) as well as translations of Ambedkar's books such as *Who were the Shudras* (Ambedkar 1946), *The Untouchables* (Ambedkar 1948) and *Annihilation of Caste* (Ambedkar 1982) into Hindi. This change in the thematic preoccupations of the Hindi Dalit pamphlets also shaped the reading habits and literary practices of the small but growing Dalit literary audiences. In his study of the Jatavs of Agra, Owen Lynch, for example, notes that by the 1950s, the Jatavs in Agra were using newspapers and pamphlets to discuss political issues facing the RPI (1969: 102). From Aligarh, the newspaper *Stars of the Soil* came out bimonthly and another newspaper, *Ripublikan Sandesh* (Republican News), was published, albeit irregularly. From Agra, Lynch claims that 'a series of newspapers have been published since 1956, but all [were] short-lived,' most probably due to lack of funds (ibid.: 121).

Ambedkar's public conversion to Buddhism in 1956 also sparked a series of mass mobilisation as lakhs of Dalits across Maharashtra,

UP and elsewhere took part in communal conversions.[38] This initiated the sudden popularity of Dalit pamphlets on Buddhism and Dalit religious identity. When Ambedkar had first publicly announced his intentions to convert from the Hindu religion in 1935, his statement had been denounced by Hindu revivalist groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha as well as by Gandhi himself (Das 1998: 35–37, 43–46; Jaffrelot 2003). These same groups all strongly condemned his conversion in 1956 along with the Congress's Jagjivan Ram and the upper-caste-dominated Mahabodhi Society. Bhagwan Das claims that the state's denial of reservation facilities to Buddhist converts was actually a strategy aimed at impeding the spread of Buddhism among the lower castes (Das 1998: 67–70). However, conversion to Buddhism became an important political strategy for members of the Dalit community, as conversion sent a strong message of individual commitment to the radical political consciousness associated with Ambedkar's movement. Numerous Buddhist organisations sprung up across north India during the late 1950s, including both local associations and national ones, such as the Buddhist Society of India founded by Dr Ambedkar. Various Buddhist activists, including Bhadant Anand Kaushalyayana, Lama Lobzang and Jaganath Upadhyaye, travelled across north India, propagating Buddhism among rural Dalit communities and in Lucknow, the Buddhist monk Bodhanand continued his activities in collaboration with other Dalit activists to establish a Buddhist mission at Buddha Vihara Risaldar Park (carried on after his death by his adopted son Mahathera Pragyanand), where he established a rich library and co-edited a newspaper with G. P. Prashant (author of the pamphlet *Mul Vansha Katha*, see Chapter Two).[39] In addition, according to Bhagwan Das, a pamphlet written by the Buddhist monk Bodhanand entitled *Buddhacarya Paddhati* (The Path of the Buddha) was 'one of the first books written in Hindi containing instructions for Dalits regarding the celebration of Buddhist festivals, performance of rituals and ceremonies' (ibid.: 18–19, 68). These instructions were enthusiastically followed by Dalit activists as an alternative to Hindu ceremonies and rituals.[40]

These new efforts to incorporate Buddhism as the 'true Dalit religion' not only fed into earlier Adi Hindu notions of Dalits as the original inhabitants of India but added that their original religion (before the imposition of Brahmanical Hinduism) was, in fact,

Buddhism (Lynch 1969: 92). This trend was coupled with a parallel revival of Bhakti devotionalism, particularly with respect to Sant Ravidas, among a new class of educated urban Dalits who were gaining employment in new 'modern' government institutions.[41] By virtue of a continuing discourse of Adi Hinduism and the new impact of Buddhism, Dalit discourse in the 1950s constructed a historical narrative of the Dalit past, which included Buddhism and Bhakti as a single stream of lower-caste assertion against Vedic Hinduism. This has allowed an unproblematic amalgamation of the traditions of the Kabirpanthis, Ravidasis, and Buddhists by Dalit activists. However, despite the enthusiasm for Buddhist conversion and the important role Buddhist organisations played as Dalit institutional structures, Dalit activists in the 1950s and 1960s were more intent on participating in the vibrant political arena than on promoting a new religion. Thus, according to Owen Lynch, the Jatavs in Agra were 'on the whole, more Ambedkarites than they [were] Buddhists' (ibid.: 148).

A New Generation of Dalit pamphlet writers

By the 1950s, a new generation of Dalit writers, who were increasingly influenced by Dalit institutional politics and Buddhist conversion, wedded literary production, political mobilisation and religious conversion as the new literary practices and sensibilities of the Dalit pamphlet writer. For example, during an interview in the home of Dalit activist Dr Cheddi Lal Sathi in a suburb of Lucknow, two pictures hung side by side. One of the images was a colourful portrait of Dr Ambedkar clad in his western suit and tie — a portrait found in many Dalit homes across north India. The other was a picture of the Buddhist temple in Kushinagar, set in deep blues and greys with sombre lighting reflecting softly off the face of the Buddha. When Dr Sathi emerged from a back room, he made clear the personal connection he perceives between these two images as he reminisced about his meetings with Dr Ambedkar while handing me a battered copy of Dr Ambedkar's book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma* (1974). For Sathi, like many Dalit intellectuals of his generation, being a Dalit activist has meant, above all, a steadfast loyalty to the ideals of Dr Ambedkar, including spreading his ideology through literature, participation in Dalit politics and a personal practice of Buddhism and deep study of Buddhist religious philosophy.

Dr Cheddi Lal Sathi himself was the son of a poor Kewat fisherman who struggled to gain an education, eventually earned a PhD in Hindi and went on to train as an advocate. Previously a member of the Congress, Sathi joined the UPSCF in 1952 in Lucknow and, later, served as president of the RPI in UP from 1960–64.[42] He has also been a prolific writer on issues of Dalit socio-economic oppression, SC reservations and Dalit politics. Some of his publications still in circulation include: *Pichare Vargon ka Arakshan — Is Yug ki Chunauti* (Reservation for the Lower Classes — The Challenge of this Age) and *Bharat ki aam Janta Shoshan Mukt va Adhikar Yukt Kaise ho*? (How will the Common People of India Attain Freedom from Exploitation and Gain Rights?).[43] He continues to be active in the contemporary Dalit pamphlet field by assisting in the publication of the journal *Ambedkar Today* in Lucknow.

In this way, Sathi is representative of his generation of Dalit writers in Hindi who, from the 1940s through the early 1970s, wedded literary assertion to political activism and Buddhist religious practice. They were enthusiastic participants in the various official state commissions, which were formed to assess the state of the lower castes in north Indian society. While they wrote in Hindi, this generation of Dalit writers were also often well-versed in English, and spent their lifetime committed to the political and religious initiatives first begun by Dr Ambedkar, including the expansion of the RPI and the proliferation of Buddhism, as well as upholding constitutional and legal protections given to the SCs at the time of Independence. All these characteristics came to define the literary practice and sensibilities of the Hindi Dalit writer during the mid-20th century and, later, gave these writers invaluable cultural capital as they became the official arbiters of Ambedkar's ideology by virtue of their personal experiences working with him in the 1940s and 1950s.

One of the most active Dalit intellectuals of this period has been the writer Bhagwan Das. Das' family's financial stability and high levels of education make his life an exceptional one for a member of the SC (even more so as one from the Bhangi jati). Still, Das's participation in the various streams of Dalit activism, including his literary activities, involvement in the RPI and propagation of Buddhism, exemplifies the ways in which Dalit writers of this generation negotiated the complex nexus of literary assertion, political

mobilisation and religious protest in the decades of the 1950s and 1960s. First, his deep commitment to all three arenas reveals the fluidity with which these Dalit activists perceived the relationship between the various strands of Dalit literary, political and religious assertion. Second, like Cheddi Lal Sathi, Bhagwan Das displayed the new literary sensibility of this generation of Hindi Dalit writers, characterised not only by the perception that literary production, political activism and religious protest went hand in hand, but also by a recognition of Dr Ambedkar as their leader and an enduring commitment to his ideology and political initiatives. The time spent working with Ambedkar in the 1940s and 1950s, however intimate or brief, became defining moments in their lives and gave them legitimacy as leaders in both the Dalit political and literary arenas in north India. Third, Bhagwan Das' career highlights how the field of Dalit pamphlet literature continued to negotiate the growing tension between Dalit claims to a separate identity and their position as citizens within the new nation.

Bhagwan Das was born in Shimla in April 1927.[44] His father was a contractor for the British army in Lucknow, Nimbala and Shimla, and owned some property in Shimla.[45] Das claims that while he was always a bright student, beginning school early at age five and completing his university matriculation at age 15, he continued to face the typical caste discrimination, such as not being allowed to draw water from the school taps. His father's premature death in 1943, when Das was only sixteen, meant that Das was forced to leave higher education in order to find employment.

Around the same time, Dr Ambedkar came to Shimla and Das went to meet the 'hero in my family'. He recalls this first meeting with Ambedkar as a landmark moment in his life. After waiting outside Ambedkar's room for seven hours, Das was led into the room, where he asked Ambedkar if he could serve in Amedkar's department. Two weeks later, he received a letter of appointment in government service. Although Das's real contact with Ambedkar began years later when he worked with Ambedkar researching the pervasiveness and impact of corruption in India in the early 1950s, this first meeting with Ambedkar made a powerful impression on him and strengthened his commitment to the Dalit movement. It was at this time that he wrote his first article on 'Untouchables and Freedom in India' (in Urdu) which was published in the journal

Kranti (Freedom) from Lahore in 1943 and for which he recalls receiving 'a lot of flattery and praise'.[46] Das's position as a native Urdu speaker reminds us that Dalit writers in north India were also caught up in the struggle between Hindi and Urdu. Das recalls that

> [i]n the 1930s and 1940s, I found that they [Dalits] had turned out some very good writers because enthusiasm was very strong in those days. They wrote in Urdu … They wrote poetry and it was very good quality … In those days there was a lot of enthusiasm and zeal, [although there were] not as many [writers] in Hindi … Most of the writing was in Urdu.[47]

Das' comment reveals that despite Dalit writers' marginalisation from the public sphere, they were still very much influenced by contemporary trends in the Hindi and Urdu mainstream, and many Dalit writers who may have preferred to write in Urdu were increasingly pressured by their surrounding literary environment to write in Hindi.

In 1956, Das, along with lakhs of Dalits across north India, joined Ambedkar in converting to Buddhism.[48] This was not an easy decision for most Dalits at that time, since conversion to Buddhism meant getting disqualified from reservation facilities in higher education, government jobs and the legislature. For Das, this decision was perhaps made easier by the fact that he was working outside the reservation system as an advocate in the Delhi High Court.[49] After his conversion to Buddhism, Das continued to be an active participant in the numerous so-called neo-Buddhist organisations formed during the late 1950s and early 1960s. He also claims that his marriage was the first Dalit Buddhist wedding ceremony held in Lucknow after Ambedkar's conversion.[50] In Delhi, he became involved in the activities of the Indian Buddhist Society (first founded by Ambedkar) located in Ambedkar Bhawan in central Delhi. Then, dissatisfied with its disorganised methods of propagating Buddhism, he joined the Buddhist Laypersons Society, which held weekly meetings at the homes of its various members and organised excursions into neighbouring localities to spread the Dalit community's awareness of Buddhism and Ambedkar's thought (Das 1998).

Furthermore, despite the fact that he was not a member of the RPI, Das remained intellectually committed to its aims and seems

to have felt personally invested in its successes and failures. In an interview, he discussed his views on Ambedkar's Dalit party:

> It was proclaimed several months after [Ambedkar's] death, but unfortunately it didn't become the kind of party he [Ambedkar] wanted. Scheduled Caste Federation people … didn't understand that the RPI was to be a different organisation … This party couldn't take up the programme and work according to the manifesto prepared by Ambedkar. He wanted it to be a party of SCs and minority communities — and when I say minorities I mean religious and social minorities.[51]

Here, we see how Bhagwan Das used his past relationship with Ambedkar as cultural capital, asserting his role as legitimate arbiter of what Ambedkar's true intentions were regarding the aims of the RPI. Das also emphasised the RPI's failure to reach out to other SC jatis and minority communities such as the OBCs, MBCs or Muslim groups, and its continuing domination by Jatavs. This was a particularly personal issue for Bhagwan Das since he himself is a member of the Bhangi jati (one of the most oppressed SC jatis in north India). In this context, he related the story of his own effort to contest a seat for the RPI during the Lok Sabha elections in the early 1970s. Although he held large meetings and seemed to have had many supporters throughout most of the campaign, at the last minute, most of his supporters turned against him. In his opinion, this was because his supporters thought, '[h]e is not from our community. We are Jatavs and he is not a Jatav. We are from Delhi and he is from Himachal Pradesh. We will support our own caste man.'[52] Maintaining his commitment to the RPI, Das recently published a pamphlet entitled *Ripublikan Parti of India: Vartman rajniti ki avashyakta* (Republican Party of India: The necessity of political change) from Dalit Today Prakashan in Lucknow, and continues to be invited to RPI meetings at the Delhi office by the only current RPI Member of Parliament, Ramdas Atawale.

Das used the Dalit literary sphere as a means of supporting Dalit politics and propagating Buddhism as the new 'Dalit' religion. He claimed to have continually written articles for both Hindi and Urdu journals and recalls,

> I was writing articles, translating Ambedkar's work into Urdu. I contributed some articles on caste and untouchability to some very progressive papers. That was my hobby … In those days, many people belonging to the so-called backward classes and untouchable communities were

> enthusiastic about expressing their thoughts in the form of articles. They started some journals . . . I wrote about the problems of the untouchables, Buddhism and Ambedkar to promote the ideology of Ambedkar.[53]

Thus, the vibrancy of Dalit politics and religious protest brought new life to the field of Dalit pamphlet literature. In order to spread Ambedkar's ideology and Buddhist thought, many Dalits established Hindi Dalit–Buddhist journals. For instance, Das emphasised the importance of a rural paper called *Bhim Patrika* (Ambedkar Journal) edited and printed by a Mr Bali from an area of Punjab called Buddhamandi, which, he claims, was an Ambedkar stronghold. The journal came out in the early 1960s, first in Urdu and then in Hindi. Das contributed numerous articles on Dalit issues to this journal and even acted as editor for the English edition for several years.[54] The Indian Buddhist Society (Bharatiya Bauddh Mahasabha) located in Ambedkar Bhawan, also brought out a journal called *Dhamm Darpan* under the editorship of S. S. Lal from 1975. Although the journal was published irregularly, it had brought out 97 issues by 2000.[55]

Bhagwan Das's engagement with all three arenas of Dalit protest continues even today. While not a member of the RPI, he is continually invited to RPI political meetings by the current MP Ramdas Atawale held at the party office in central Delhi, and each month, he receives a vast amount of Dalit journals and newspapers from across north India including *Janta* from Kanpur, *Bhim Patrika* from Jalande, *Ambedkar Mission Patrika* from Bihar, *Dhamm Darpan* from Ambedkar Bhawan in Delhi to name only a few. Furthermore, he has arranged for all of his children to have Buddhist marriage ceremonies. As an example, his lifelong activism in Dalit political, literary and religious protest is representative of a generation of educated Dalit activists who felt that an enthusiastic engagement in all three arenas was the best way to fight for an end to caste discrimination.

The increasingly close relationship, which developed between this literary field and the political arena, transformed the Dalit literary pamphlet field in several important ways. For one, Dr Ambedkar became an iconic figure in Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature, and a large proportion of Dalit pamphlets written after the 1940s centre around the telling and retelling of Ambedkar's life story (see Chapter Two).[56] Second, those Dalit activists who knew Ambedkar

and even those who had only met him briefly were to gain an immeasurable amount of cultural capital in the literary sphere (as Das demonstrated previously), and were able to wield this authority over Ambedkar's ideology — and therefore on legitimate political consciousness among Dalits. Third, Das' generation of Dalit activists, struggling across the moment of Independence in 1947, were forced to negotiate the increasing tension between their claims to a separate identity and their position as equal citizens of the new nation. As Nehru's 'modern' agenda pushed caste-related issues to the corner of acceptable public debate, Dalits increasingly depended on the field of Dalit pamphlet literature as a counter-public sphere where they could discuss issues of constitutional policy, political mobilisations and religious affiliations related to their caste identities. This irony of being proclaimed a 'citizen' without gaining an equal voice in the public sphere highlights the difficult position Dalit intellectuals faced in the 1950s. In order to confront this social reality, and by virtue of their status as equal citizens of a democratic nation, Bhagwan Das and many other educated Dalit activists joined the battle in mainstream electoral politics by supporting the RPI. In this arena, they fought to make India's proclamation of the equality of all citizens a lived reality. Yet, many Dalit activists also highlighted their separate minority status by converting to Buddhism and by continuing to actively participate in the Dalit counter-public sphere by writing and reading pamphlet literature, small journals and newspapers.

However, the intimate relationship formed between Dalit literature and politics from the 1940s to the 1960s also had important implications for the survival of Dalit literary production in Hindi — a fact which became obvious in the 1970s, with the decline of the RPI and the subsequent co-optation of many RPI leaders, including Cheddi Lal Sathi, into Indira Gandhi's supposedly new 'populist' Congress party. Although the Dalit pamphlet literary sphere had, for the past several decades, been somewhat overshadowed by the dynamism of Dalit politics, it had not become inextricably linked to the RPI due to the continuation of certain Dalit presses, including Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan and another press established by Periyar Lalai Singh's press in Kanpur (Jain 1973).[57] In fact, despite the decline in Dalit politics, these presses continued their print runs of the most popular Dalit literary pamphlets throughout the 1970s.

Additionally, a new generation of Dalit writers whose experiences were informed by the realities of Indian independence, SC/ST reservations and an assumed relationship between the oppressed Dalit castes began enter this literary field in the 1970s. Hindi Dalit newspapers such as *Bhim Dainik* (Ambedkar Daily; 1970) and *Samta Shakti* (Power of Equality; 1972) came out of Meerut (a previous RPI stronghold) edited by G. S. Maurya and Mohandas Naimisharay (who was to become one of the most well-known Hindi Dalit writers two decades later — see Chapters Three, Four and Five). Another monthly journal, *Bhim* (Ambedkar), was published from Kanpur and Vijainagar in 1977 under the editorship of Danwal Dari, and in 1978, the newspaper *Dalit Chetna* (Dalit Consciousness) edited by Mohan Lal Shastri and *Bhim Bhumi* (The Birthplace of Ambedkar) edited by R. K. Gautam appeared on the Dalit literary scene. In 1979, Sundarlal Sagar brought out the newspaper *Dainik Hindi Senani* (The Daily Hindi General) from Mainpuri. Furthermore, several new Dalit presses were established by Dalit literary figures including Periyar Lalai Singh in Kanpur, Sundarlal Sagar in Mainpuri and Buddh Sharan Hans in Bihar.

This literature built off of earlier networks and institutions in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature including the model of the small, privately owned Dalit presses, the pamphlet genre and community-based distribution methods. However the new generation of Dalit literary figures also responded to changes in the pamphlet field due to the impact of the BSP, then a new Dalit party in UP, and the increasing force of right-wing Hindutva politics across north India.

The Contemporary Field of Hindi Dalit Pamphlets

Today, north India is dotted with a vibrant network of small Dalit printing presses. Many of the institutional structures of the Dalit pamphlet field endure — structures such as the dependence on private publication, alternative methods of distribution through community gatherings and, above all, the continuing dominance of the 'pamphlet' genre. Amidst the festivities of annual Dalit melas, the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature continues to thrive. Yet, the literary practices and sensibilities of the Hindi Dalit writers of this pamphlet field are now informed by the new realities of

independent India, SC/ST reservations, the widespread recognition of 'Dalit' identity and loyalty to Dr Ambedkar. This section examines the literary practices and social background of contemporary Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers. It argues that these new writers have adapted the older institutions of the Dalit pamphlet field to fit contemporary aspirations and have developed their own literary economy of the field, which values specific kinds of social, cultural and symbolic capital over economic profit and continues to maintain its position as a Dalit counter-public sphere.

Today, the counter-public sphere of Dalit pamphlets stands outside the mainstream Hindi literary field. Yet, the Dalit pamphlet field remains intimately engaged with several fields of discourse, which have greatly affected the Dalit community in recent years. Contemporary Dalit pamphlets in Hindi have, for instance, revealed an increasing concern with the discourses of Hindutva. This is not only due to the ideological clash between the staunchly orthodox Hindu philosophy of the Sangh Parivar and the Dalit political sensibilities, which have been so greatly shaped by Ambedkar's Buddhism, but is also a direct reaction to the success the Sangh Parivar has experienced in recruiting members of the SC castes, particularly among members of SC jatis who resent Chamar dominance of the BSP and reservation facilities in north India.[58] Thus, we will see how the journals of the Dalit pamphlet field are filled with articles speaking out against the Sangh Parivar and Hindutva politics. In addition to journal articles, pamphlets such as *Hindu Videshi Hain* (Hindus are Foreigners) and *Hindu Mansikta* (Hindu Mentality) by S. L. Sagar, or the series by K. M. Sant, which includes titles such as *Bharatiya Sanvidhan banam Manusmriti* (The Indian Constitution versus the Manusmriti) and *Ramayan ke Mahapatra* (The Great Characters of the Ramayana) are written as direct attacks against the rise of Hindutva among some members of the Dalit community (see Chapter Two).

The contemporary field of Dalit pamphlet literature has also responded to the politics of the BSP. In general, BSP dominance in UP from the late 1990s has facilitated the distribution of Dalit literature. Several decades of BSP activism across both urban and rural north India has had a major impact on the way individuals from SC jatis now view their identity as 'Dalits', and the proliferation of Dalit identity and a political consciousness of protesting caste oppression has, in turn, led to a growing group of interested readers

for Dalit pamphlets (Narayan 2011). Additionally, the increasing number of Dalit melas and BSP rallies has provided numerous forums for Dalit literary distribution.

With the rise of a new autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, the field of Dalit pamphlets has also come into dialogue with a new group of Hindi Dalit writers, who have very different literary sensibilities from their own.[59] While these two fields of Dalit literature in Hindi function separately, journals in the pamphlet field have become an important bridge between the two Dalit literary fields as Hindi Dalit writers of the autobiographic field have contributed articles to Dalit journals circulating in the pamphlet field, including debates on the meaning of 'Dalit literature' and excerpts of Dalit autobiographies (see Chapters Four and Five). Likewise, historical discourses which have dominated narratives in the Dalit pamphlet field have begun to influence the historical perspectives of the Dalit writers in the autobiographic field. While there is a general adherence to the general Adi Hindu narrative, there is also an increasing interest among Dalit writers in the autobiographic field to add to this history, or to render it in new literary forms. Leading this venture is the well-known Dalit writer Mohandas Naimisharay, who has begun writing a 'Dalit history' because he claims that there are very few books on the subject. Naimisharay's decision not to include the vast number of Dalit pamphlets as 'Dalit histories' highlights his perception of what constitutes legitimate literature or history.[60] Similar to most writers of the autobiographic field, Naimisharay takes Marathi Dalit literature as the historical legacy of Hindi Dalit literature (see Chapter Four) and largely discounts the field of Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets. However, his early engagement with the pamphlet field through journals in the 1970s and again in recent years has influenced his literary work, as he based his recent novel on the Dalit heroine Jhalkari Bai on research from Hindi Dalit pamphlets (Naimisharay 2003b).

Contemporary Dalit pamphlet writers

The majority of contemporary Dalit pamphlet writers are now members of a new class of educated Dalit activists, who have taken advantage of reservation facilities in educational institutions, government employment and/or in the legislature. Materially, they have joined the Indian middle class, and as government officers, have been

more mobile than any previous generation. This has meant a solidification of their 'Dalit' identity, as they formed networks among politically conscious 'Ambedkarites' of various SC jatis across regional affiliations.

However, the position of many Dalits as government bureaucrats also means that they are unable to participate in institutional politics (in accordance with an Indian government directive). Thus, the literary field becomes intensely important to these writers as a means of activism and seva to their oppressed community. The Dalit writer K. M. Sant of Lucknow is an important example of how literature was used as an 'acceptable' means of activism by Dalit bureaucrats.[61] Sant was born to a Jatav *kisan* family in Aligarh district. He completed a BA from Agra College in 1964 and worked for the UP government for 23 years as an IAS officer before recently retiring. In an interview, Sant explains how he was able to subvert the state's law forbidding government servants to participate in political activities. According to Sant, when his first book entitled *Bharatiya Sanvidhan banam Manusmriti* (The Indian Constitution versus the Manusmriti; 2001) was published by Bahujan Sahitya Sansthan in Lucknow, the UP government tried to take action against him. However, he explains,

> I justified it and replied to the government [that] … it is a literature book. I have every right to write literature books. It is sahitya [literature] which I have written. I have not committed any offence. So the government could not take any action after that, and I went on writing all these books without asking the government.[62]

Other Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers have not been so fortunate, and several have been targeted by the UP state government, their writings confiscated and, in the case of author R. B. Trisharan, even been arrested (Narayan 2011: 93). Because Trisharan, like K. M. Sant, was a government employee, he was suspended from his post for over two years in spite of widespread support from Dalit writers, activists and several UP MLAs (ibid.).

Living in towns and cities across the Hindi region, especially in the states of UP and Bihar, Dalits interested in participating in literary activities have been able to tap into the longer tradition of Dalit pamphlet writing in Hindi, which began in the early 20th century. This has certainly informed their choice of the pamphlet genre as well as their general literary practice regarding the publication

and distribution of their literary works. As we shall see in Chapter Two, their regional location and the Dalit literary field they have been able to access in Hindi has also influenced the thematic preoccupations of contemporary Dalit pamphlet writing, as historical narratives and texts on Buddhism and the life of Ambedkar continue to be the most popular subjects.

Overall, contemporary Dalit pamphlet writers have benefited from an environment where Ambedkar remains a widely acknowledged All-India Dalit leader and where constitutional dictates against the practice of 'untouchability' and caste discrimination, as well as protections such as reservation, have provided new possibilities for social advancement. However, this generation of Dalit pamphlet writers have also continued to experience many forms of traditional caste oppression and have faced new challenges, the most significant being the complex position of the Dalit community in the post-Independence Indian nation. The fact that many Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers now work for the Indian government but have had difficulty 'breaking into' the mainstream Hindi public sphere is just one example of the ambivalent relationship Dalit writers continue to experience vis-à-vis the nation. These writers continue to actively participate in the Dalit pamphlet counter-public, and we shall see in Chapter Two how these writers have used historical pamphlet literature as a forum to negotiate this ambiguous relationship between themselves, their community and Indian society as a whole.

Contemporary Dalit presses

Continuities in the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature are most noticeable in the enduring institutional structure of the field. While older Dalit presses such as Jigyasu's Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan in Lucknow and Periyar Lalai Singh's press in Kanpur continue to publish Dalit pamphlets, there has also been a rise in new privately owned Dalit presses from the late 1970s. The main centres of Dalit publishing in this literary arena now include: Lucknow, Allahabad, Aligarh, Kanpur, Mainpuri, Bahraich, Meerut, Dehradun, Mathura, and Patna.[63] Through these local Hindi Dalit presses, the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature continues to thrive. Dalit literary pamphlets are distributed at an extremely low cost (averaging Rs 5–20 per pamphlet) at various Dalit melas, political rallies and

community gatherings throughout north India, making them accessible to a wide audience of lower- and middle-class Dalits living in both urban and rural areas. The fact that these pamphlets are cheap to publish and relatively easy to distribute by mail (particularly in bulk to other Dalit publishers and Chetna Mandaps across the Hindi region, who in turn sell them at local festivals and meetings) makes them a valuable genre for Dalit publishers in this field, who often personally fund their publication and distribution. In addition, the low cost and grass-roots distribution methods have also provided easy access for the Dalit rural poor who are not barred by the expense or by their physical distance from urban bookstalls. While literacy remains a problem in the Dalit community, a growing number of Dalits have gained at least a basic education, and reservation has further facilitated higher education among SCs. As we shall see, many of these educated Dalits return to their villages as activists to discuss the contents of these pamphlets, and public readings of these at Dalit melas such as Ambedkar Jayanti provide further links between illiterate Dalits and these written texts. For all these reasons, the pamphlet genre has remained the dominant form of Dalit literary production in this field.

In Lucknow, Jigyasu's Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan was in the charge of Jigyasu's son, Brahmanand, now in his 70s, and is currently managed by one of Jigyasu's grandsons, Avanish Kumar.[64] Despite admitting that there have been some complaints about the decline of the press since Jigyasu's death, Brahmanand was adamant about his aspirations to revive the press to its former state. He claimed that a large number of people continue to buy pamphlets through postal correspondence (i.e., sending letters to request certain pamphlets either for personal use or to sell at their own bookstalls in other Hindi regions), bookstalls set up at Dalit melas and through some personal visits to the family home. According to Avanish Kumar,

> [i]ndividuals write and tell which titles they want. Not only friends but people all over India — anyone who is interested in reading this literature. They hear about it through references, seminars, booksellers . . . they send a postcard, their name and order books.

Furthermore, he claimed that orders requesting books come from all over India, even from very small places where Hindi isn't actually spoken. Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan also continues to distribute

pamphlets at Dalit melas. 'Around the 14th of April [on Ambedkar Jayanti] we will sell a lot. Near Hazaratganj we will have a book-stall. There are many booksellers who come there and many people buy booklets.'[65] Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan still runs on personal funds and makes little profit. Yet, the shelves of its office are surprisingly well-stocked with many titles neatly arranged on shelves.[66] Pamphlets cost between Rs 1–40 but average at about Rs 2–6 per copy, and pamphlets of Ambedkar's writings and those by Jigyasu have run into anywhere from four to 16 editions at 1,000 copies per edition. For instance, Jigyasu's *Adi-Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata* was in its ninth edition in 1993 (first printed in 1937), and his *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangharsh* had run through 16 editions between 1961 and 1995.

Since the 1980s, numerous local Hindi Dalit publishers have arisen across north India and joined together in a network of booksellers in order to distribute their literature beyond the local area.[67] Scholar Badri Narayan confirms the importance of this network among Hindi Dalit publishers in providing an alternative means of distribution and support. He notes that,

> in the cities like Balia, Bahraich, Eta, Etawa, Unnao, Urai, Allahabad, Lucknow, and Patna (sic), Arrah, Hazipur, and Muzaffarpur, such a network of booksellers has become popular [by] the name of 'Chetna Mandap' … These 'Chetna Mandaps' at the local level get support from the readership developed from Dalit literary magazines published at the same level (Narayan 2001: 113).

The strong link between the small Dalit press and its journal as a means of attracting new Dalit readers and advertising its various pamphlet titles has been undeniably important, and many local Dalit presses now seem to bring out a journal as part of their regular publishing activities. The renewed energy in Dalit pamphlet publishing also beginning in 1980 suggests the growing influence of the increasingly politicised 'Dalit' identity in north India, especially in the political arena where BAMCEF and later, the BSP, provided new forums for Dalits to assert their identity and protest against their social oppression.[68]

On the corner of the busiest intersection in Hazaratganj, in the centre of Lucknow, a small Dalit bookshop called Bahujan Chetna Mandap is filled with Hindi Dalit pamphlets, as well as glossy poster-size pictures of many Dalit leaders.[69] It is not by chance that

Bahujan Chetna Mandap has established the seemingly impossible reality of a centrally located, permanent Dalit bookshop in the capital city of Uttar Pradesh. In fact, the Bahujan Chetna Mandap's direct connection to the BSP, which has had increasing political power in the state of UP from the late 1990s, and particularly in the capital of Lucknow, has translated into a well-stocked Dalit bookshop and part-time Dalit press. The close relationship with the BSP was evident in March 2004 as workers at the bookshop printed, stored and organised buttons, banners and flags for the upcoming BSP rally in Ambedkar Maidan on the outskirts of the city. The proprietor, Yadkaran 'Yad', has also published several pamphlets under the name Bahujan Sahitya Sansthan Publications. These pamphlets also have an overt pro-BSP stance and include titles such as Vivek Kumar's *Dalit Assertion and BSP: perspective from below* (English), *Bahujan Swarnim Yug ki Aur* … (Towards the Bahujan Golden Age), *Samajik Parivartan ke Mahanayak Maniyar Kanshi Ram* (Kanshi Ram, the Great Hero of Social Change) and *Samta Mulak Samaj ki Adhan Stambh 'Kumari Mayawati'* (Kumari Mayawati, the Pillar of an Equal Society).[70] Still, the many pamphlets available for purchase at the shop also cover a variety of non-political subjects including Buddhist themes, life histories of Ambedkar and several of K. M. Sant's books against Hindu religious texts (see Chapter Two).

The complex connections between the contemporary field of Dalit pamphlet literature and the politics of the BSP are further illustrated by Kushwaha Publishers in Allahabad. The proprietor C. L. Kushwaha is an activist for the BSP's intellectual cell in Allahabad and the owner of a local Dalit press, which was located in his family home on the outskirts of Allahabad. He supplemented his political and literary activism with income from a small grocery store owned and run by his family.[71] While his personal affiliations with the BSP, then, are clear, the relationship between the BSP and Kushwaha Publishers is not quite as straightforward. It is the intellectual affiliation of C. L. Kushwaha to the BSP, rather than any direct funding (or election support by printing campaign banners), that provides the link between these two institutions. And although BSP rallies have become a new occasion to distribute Dalit pamphlets, many of the books printed by Kushwaha Publishers are unrelated to the BSP's agenda — for example, Suresh Chandra Kushwaha, an advocate in Allahabad's High Court, published his pamphlet on

reservation entitled *Arakshan ke Hatyare* (The Killers of Reservation) and Umesh Kumar, a writer from Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh (MP), published his pamphlet on Dalit history entitled *Bhartiya Achambha* (The Wonder of India) in 1996 (see Chapter Two).[72]

Many other Dalit presses have distanced themselves from Dalit institutional politics, as they are run by Dalit government bureaucrats who are not permitted to have any direct political affiliations. In these instances, literary production becomes the primary means of their activism, as we have seen with K. M. Sant. For example, in Bihar, the Ambedkar Mission Prakashan is run by Buddh Sharan Hans, an officer in the Bihar government who has been prolific in the publication of Dalit literary pamphlets in Hindi since 1978. Buddh Sharan Hans himself has written several pamphlets including *Kash! Ham Hindu na Hote* (If only we were not Hindu; 1996), *Achutoddhar* (Untouchable Uplift; 1989) on the thoughts of Ambedkar, *Shoshiton ki Sakshi Hai* (The Exploited Bear Witness) which ran through three editions from 1977 to 1996, and *Bahujan Shakti* (The Power of the Majority; 1995). Similarly, Dalit Today Prakashan has been run from the outskirts of Lucknow by Darapuri, a government bureaucrat of many years.[73] This press has published several pamphlets including the controversial series by K. M. Sant, which speaks out against various Hindi religious texts (see Chapter Two) and numerous books by Bhagwan Das including a small pamphlet about the RPI, a historical-autobiographical booklet entitled *Mai Bhangi Hun* (I am Bhangi) and several English language books by Das including *Revival of Buddhism in India* and *The Role of Baba Saheb Ambedkar,* and the series of Ambedkar's speeches and articles entitled 'Thus Spoke Ambedkar' (volumes 1–4).

Another publisher in Lucknow is V. P. Varun, a retired IAS officer who, for the past 22 years, has helped run a small weekly Hindi newspaper called *Garima Bharati,* which continues to print 5,000 copies per run. He also founded his own press, the Human Service Charitable Trust Prakashan, which has published approximately two dozen booklets on subjects such as the life sketch of Dr Ambedkar, reservation and Buddhism (including a book by Agni Lal on how to worship Buddha, how to perform a Buddhist ceremony, a list of Buddhist children's names, etc.). According to V. P. Varun, he prints booklets in runs of 1,000, 2,000 or 5,000 copies 'depending on the need'.[74] Many of the books printed by the Charitable Trust Prakashan are Varun's own. V. P. Varun manages

every aspect of the printing process himself, and owns all the printing, binding and photo-printing equipment in a large room next to his office. He sells some of these booklets at bookstalls, at Parsi and Buddhist conferences. He also receives orders for booklets by post. Alongside this Charitable Trust Prakashan, Varun also prints a small English newspaper called *Voice of Dignity*, which he founded as a monthly paper in 1982. In 2001 he began to bring out the paper weekly or bi-weekly.

There are several other Dalit 'living-room presses' in Lucknow alone. These include Cultural Prakashan, founded in the late 1980s and publisher of G. P. Prashant's popular pamphlet on Dalit history *Mul Vansha Katha* (1994), which has, according to Badri Narayan, sold 50,000 copies in the past five years and has run into its seventh edition (see Chapter Two). Shruti Prakashan has published various pamphlets, including a caste history of the Pasi community called *Pasi Samrajya* (1997) by R. K. Chawdhry (see Chapter Two), and Sunita Prakashan's list of pamphlet publications including a book by Baliram on Ambedkar (2001).[75]

Other Dalit 'living-room presses' include Sagar Publications in Mainpuri, which continues be run by Sundar Lal Sagar and publishes his vast number of booklets on topics ranging from reservation, Hinduism and Ambedkar's life since the late 1970s. Anand Sahitya Sadan, run by A. R. Akela, publishes pamphlets in Aligarh, and a press called Periyar Lalai Singh Charitable Trust, now called Ashok Pustakalay, is run by Sushil Kumar and has been publishing pamphlets from the 1960s. Ambedkar Pustak Kendra and Lakshya Sandhan Prakashan are located in Bahraich; Bharti Prakashan and Ambedkar Press in Mathura were both set up around 1980. Dalit Sahitya aur Sanskritik Akademi (Dalit Literature and Cultural Academy) is located in Dehradun, and Anand Sahitya Sadan in Aligarh. In Meerut, the writer Shivprasad Dhusiya Bagi publishes his own works under the name Shivprasad Dhusiya Bagi Publications. In Bihar, Ambedkar Mission Prakashan is run by pamphlet writer Buddh Sharan Hans.[76]

In addition to publishing literary pamphlets, local Dalit presses provide a literary space for monthly debate, as well as advertisements for their pamphlet publications by printing journals and/or newspapers, which are easily accessible due to their format of small articles and which reach a wide Dalit audience across the Hindi region. The topics covered in these journals focus on contemporary

political issues while the pamphlets, as we shall see, consist of a deeper exploration of historical and political themes. These journals and newspapers support the Hindi Dalit presses through advertisements which give the press's name, contact details and lists of pamphlet titles which can be ordered by post. Furthermore, the contents of each journal reveal the political and ideological position of its related Dalit press. For instance, Buddh Sharan Hans' press Ambedkar Mission Prakashan began to bring out a small monthly newspaper called *Ambedkar Mission Patrika* from 1992. While its direct connection to the image of Dr Ambedkar gives both the journal and the press important cultural legitimacy among Dalit audiences, articles in the journal raise various subjects of debate, including anxieties over the growth of BJP and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) activities among the lower castes, criticisms of the Hindu religion as a system of oppression, the political mobilisation of the BSP and the important role of the lower castes in electoral politics. This positions the journal and press definitively against the rise of Hindutva politics and in opposition to the Hindu religion, although sentiments towards the BSP remain a subject of debate. As a literary forum, then, *Ambedkar Mission Patrika* constitutes an important literary space where Dalit writers from the surrounding areas can debate political issues (without an affiliation to the BSP, which may be a necessary prerequisite for other journals linked to BSP-affiliated presses), and at Rs 10 per copy, it remains affordable to most interested Hindi Dalit readers. Furthermore, it provides an important support to the Ambedkar Mission Prakashan by advertising the press and its address in Patna on the front cover and providing a list of 33 pamphlet titles available from the press on the second page along with their prices (ranging from Rs 3 to 40).

Journals in the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature also function as a bridge, linking this field to the more recent autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. A case in point is the influential Hindi Dalit journal, *Dalit Liberation Today*, published by Dalit Today Prakashan and edited by Ved Kumar (while the press's editor, S. R. Darapuri, acts as sub-editor).[77] While the monthly journal costs only Rs 10 per copy, it is larger than the *Ambedkar Mission Patrika,* with a colourful front cover and an average of 35 full-size pages. Articles range from political debates, such as those against the rise of Hindutva, to the debates in the late 1990s over the controversial

BSP–BJP alliance. Several articles by Kanval Bharti, a well-known Hindi Dalit writer from Rampur, also active in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, are deeply critical of BSP 'opportunism' and of its leaders Kanshi Ram and Mayawati.[78] *Dalit Liberation Today* includes articles on Buddhism and numerous recountings of the life history of pan-Indian Dalit heroes, such as Periyar, Phule, Achutanand, Kabir and, of course, Ambedkar.[79] Like *Ambedkar Mission Patrika*, *Dalit Liberation Today* expresses clear antagonism towards Hindutva politics and their ambivalent attitude towards the BSP. This is further reflected in the journal's sub-editor (and owner of Dalit Today Prakashan) Darapuri's decision to contest elections in UP in 2004 for the RPI rather than the BSP. Importantly, within this politically-oriented Dalit journal, there are also several articles in each issue devoted to the topic of 'Dalit literature', which includes reprinting portions of Dalit autobiographies, debates on the place of Premchand in Dalit literature and articles on the meaning and importance of Dalit literature. As we shall see, it is in this way that debates from the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature have recently entered this pamphlet field. However, their impact on the literary sensibilities and practices of pamphlet writers is yet to be seen.

A third journal, *Ambedkar Today,* has made a significant impact on Hindi Dalit audiences and was readily available for purchase in Bahujan Chetna Mandap in central Lucknow.[80] Edited by the young Dalit activist Rajiv Ratna, the journal is relatively recent, having only begun publication in 2002. However, a quick glance over the section 'Letters of the Editor' reveals how widespread the journal's Dalit readership has already become. Within the first few issues, readers were writing in from areas as far-reaching as Jaunpur, Lucknow, Mirajapur, Muradabad, the village of Dundi near Rae Bareilly,[81] Gaijapur, Aligarh, Janshi, Rae Bareilly, Lalitpur, Gorakhpur, Amaravati (Maharashtra), Chatarpur (MP), and Jharkhand.[82] The journal's direct affiliation with the BSP is obvious, as it displays colour pictures of Mayawati and Kanshi Ram on various covers, while quotes by Mayawati litter the inner pages. Its rapid acquisition of such a regionally widespread Dalit readership suggests that it is distributed along established party networks. Furthermore, the journal provides a creative forum for BSP campaigning, and readers will find advertisements for BSP candidates

in each issue. However, a large portion of the subject matter is not overtly political. Instead, many monthly editions focus on certain 'great' figures in the newly constructed historical narrative of Dalit resistance. These include articles on Periyar, Phule, Gandhi and Ambedkar's conflict over the Poona Pact and Ambedkar's impact on the 'Bahujan' movement. The prevalent use of the term 'Bahujan' rather than 'Dalit' throughout the journal is also an important tool used to construct a link between less overtly political articles and the BSP. The journal's explicit affiliation with the symbol of Ambedkar also provides invaluable cultural legitimacy and allows the journal (as well as the BSP) to claim the historical legacy of Dalit assertion that Ambedkar now symbolises.

Overall, the vast number of small papers and journals brought out by local, privately-funded Hindi Dalit presses has had a significant impact on the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field.[83] The journals described earlier, such as *Ambedkar Mission Patrika*, *Dalit Liberation Today* and *Ambedkar Today* demonstrate the various political positions and literary practices (or *samskara*s, literary tastes) of Dalit readers in the contemporary field of Dalit pamphlet literature. The majority of Dalit contributors position themselves staunchly against the politics of Hindutva and the BJP, and even ardent BSP supporters justify the BSP–BJP alliances of the late 1990s as an unfortunate but necessary compromise in the struggle for political power. Perhaps most important, however, is the fact that all three journals reveal the readers' simultaneous interests in politics, religion, history and Dalit literature, which characterise the literary practices and sensibilities of the contemporary Dalit audience in this pamphlet field. As we shall see, this is quite different from the segregated reading 'tastes' of the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, which draw a sharper distinction between literature and politics, or rather, what kind of political writing can be included as 'Dalit literature'.

The Dalit mela and contemporary pamphlet distribution

At the Ambedkar Jayanti mela in Delhi in 2004, the numerous stalls and ground-sheets covered with stacks of Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets confirmed the reality that the Dalit mela remains, even

in the centre of urban Delhi, a virtually uncontested space of Dalit pamphlet literature. This is particularly striking, considering the rise of a vibrant new autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, which has set the city of Delhi at the heart of its organisational networks (see Chapters Three, Four and Five). However, only one stall, Gautam Book Centre, sold Hindi Dalit literature originating from this new field, while Delhi's Ambedkar Jayanti mela displayed its continuing fidelity to Dalit literary pamphlets.[84]

The Hindi Dalit pamphlet sellers themselves displayed the important *literary habitus* of viewing Dalit literary production and distribution as seva, characteristic of this pamphlet field. Ranging in occupation from Rajpal Singh who was currently unemployed, to Manohar Lal who did lamination work, Dharmvir Gautam who worked in electronics, Mrs Pragati Dhawnkar who was a physiotherapist in a government hospital and her husband, Praveen Kumar, a medical officer in a dispensary hospital in Delhi, these individ-uals had all put aside their usual occupations to become part-time pamphlet distributors for the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti. Their earnest desire to participate in the mela celebrations by displaying pamphlets across makeshift tables or on pieces of cloth revealed the extent to which literary activities are considered a means of political activism among members of the Dalit community. This is also the case during Ambedkar Jayanti melas in other regions. For example, in Dehradun, Dalit writer Omprakash Valmiki claims that:

> We try to organise a programme near our community where programmes by children and women are performed. We also have bookstalls for people … I have received some booklets for private distribution on Ambedkar Jayanti … in order to create awareness. We sometimes distribute these booklets for free so that more people can read them.[85]

This perception of literary distribution as activism is facilitated by the context of the mela itself, which links the sale of Dalit pamphlet literature to more explicit forms of Dalit identity performance (including speeches and dramas) and visual icons displayed by the countless portraits of Ambedkar on pins, banners and posters (Beth 2005). From the Dalit mela or from the small Dalit presses, pamphlets travel from Dalit reader to reader, passed between friends but

also distributed by activists who travel to various villages with these pamphlets as an act of seva to their community. Badri Narayan notes these same alternative methods of distribution in his study of the village of Shahabpur in eastern UP, where people bring pamphlets to sell in the village and Dalits from the village buy booklets to read and then pass on to friends when they attend BSP rallies and Dalit melas in bigger cities (Narayan 2011: 86).

Finding alternative means of distribution for Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature such as the Dalit mela remains vital to the survival of this marginalised literary field, and the mela continues to provide an important space where large crowds find easy access to Dalit pamphlet literature in Hindi. Dalit publishers also attest to the significance of these melas, where they are able to sell record numbers of pamphlets.[86] The sheer number of these local melas also means that publishers do not have to rely on sales from a single yearly festival to tide them over for the entire year. While the mela on Ambedkar Jayanti, held annually on 14 April, is the most widely celebrated and well attended Dalit mela, festivals also occur in the name of the Bhakti sants Kabir and Ravidas, on the birth and death anniversaries of the Buddha and are increasingly organised to celebrate the established pantheon of Dalit heroes including Periyar and Shahuji Maharaj (Ciotti 2003). In addition, small regional festivals such as the Chuharmal mela in Bihar, detailed in a study by Badri Narayan, provide additional opportunities to distribute pamphlets in rural areas of north India.[87]

In the past decade, historical folk melas, such as the Chuharmal mela, as well as more recent pan-India Dalit celebrations, such as Ambedkar Jayanti, have been exploited for newer political purposes. There has been an increasing intervention in these Dalit melas by political parties such as the BSP, the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Janata Dal (JD) and other political organisations such as the Dalit Sena, which attempt to use the space of the Dalit mela as an opportunity to deliver political speeches and distribute party literature. Badri Narayan's study in 2001, for instance, records the increase in pamphlets directly affiliated with the BSP and Dalit Sena at the Chuharmal mela in Bihar (Narayan 2001: 95–99). The BSP has been particularly persistent in its attempt to use the Dalit mela as a means of celebrating its constructed pantheon of pan-Indian Dalit heroes. Implicit in this attempt to consolidate a broad sense

of Dalit identity useful in electoral mobilisation is the transformation of the myths associated with these Dalit leaders, specifically the solidification of a particular reading of the mythic narratives of their lives (see Chapter Two). More recently, Hindutva forces have attempted to appropriate Ambedkar Jayanti as a means of capturing the Dalit vote bank. In 2004, for example, the BJP celebrated Ambedkar Jayanti in 24 locations throughout the state of Punjab, and *The Times of India* reported BJP celebrations of Ambedkar Jayanti at the Kankerbagh Community Hall in Patna, Bihar, as well.[88] Today, many Dalit melas continue to be dominated by the speeches of politicians such as Mayawati in UP or Laloo Prasad Yadav and Ram Vilas Paswan in Bihar.

Conclusions: Pamphlets, Literary Economy and Other Discursive Fields

In his autobiography *Juthan,* Omprakash Valmiki describes this political awakening, which occurs outside the formal education system. 'One day . . . Hemlal put a small book in my hand. As I was flipping its pages, Hemlal said, "You must read this book." The name of the book was *Dr. Ambedkar: A Biography*. Its author was Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu [1961].' After emphasising that 'Ambedkar was an unknown entity to me then,' he continues

> The further I went into the book, I felt as though a new chapter about life was being unfurled before me. A chapter about which I had known nothing. Dr. Ambedkar's life-long struggle had shaken me up. I spent many days and nights in great turmoil. The restlessness inside me had increased . . . I proceeded to read all of Ambedkar's books that I found in the library . . . My reading of these books had awakened my consciousness. These books had given voice to my muteness. It was during this time in my life when an anti-establishment consciousness become strong in me (Valmiki 2003: 71).

As this example shows, Dalit pamphlet literature has provided an alternative political education for Dalits regarding their community's position in Indian society, and has inspired a new kind of political consciousness and urge to activism among their Dalit audiences. Writing, reading and publishing in this Dalit counter-public sphere has come to be viewed as an act of service and an important

way of participating in the newly conceived Dalit community, of marking oneself as 'Dalit'.

This chapter has shown how early Adi Hindu-associated pamphlet writing by members of the so-called 'untouchable' castes in the Hindi region developed into a field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature, characterised by specific institutions, genres and literary practices and sensibilities. It has also demonstrated how these institutions and literary practices shifted in response to the changing social and political environment. Over time, this field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature also developed its own 'economy', where certain kinds of social, cultural and symbolic capital took precedence over economic profit to determine 'success' in the field. For participants in this Dalit pamphlet field, including both writers and publishers, financial gains remain largely irrelevant and are overshadowed by the important status literary activities hold as seva to the community and as acts of political assertion. Many Dalit writers now living in urban areas return to their natal villages during Ambedkar Jayanti as acts of seva through literary activism. Tejpal Singh 'Tej', a Hindi Dalit writer now living in Delhi, discusses his trips to rural areas outside of Delhi:

> I had a very good experience. People in those areas were unaware of Dalit literature, Dalit politics and Dalit movements. I tried to make them aware about these issues. When I feel that they have become aware about these things, then I move to the next area.[89]

While it is difficult to imagine that individuals in rural Dalit communities around Delhi have not become intimately engaged with the caste politics of the BSP and other parties trying to garner Dalit votes, the important point here is that Tejpal Singh 'Tej' perceives his own role in bringing information to the village as an act of voluntary service, which will instigate Dalit social uplift.[90] Similarly, V. P. Varun describes in an interview his annual return to the village on Ambedkar Jayanti, where a band plays music, people dance, distribute sweets and many give speeches on Dr Ambedkar's life achievements. Varun himself claims to give a yearly speech and distribute Dalit pamphlets on this occasion.[91]

Dalit writers and publishers who had contact with Dr Ambedkar in the 1940s and 1950s (such as Bhagwan Das and Cheddi Lal Sathi) now possess important cultural authority (or cultural capital) in this pamphlet field as arbiters of legitimate knowledge of Ambedkar's life history and ideology, and hence of 'legitimate

political consciousness', among activists of the younger generation.[92] Dalit literary figures with connections to Hindi Dalit press owners or to the BSP also profit from these important social connections, and are often able to transform these forms of social capital into increased support and publication of their written works. Finally, with the rise of another field of Hindi Dalit literature in the early 1980s, associations made between writers in the pamphlet field and writers in this new autobiographic Dalit literary field have also led to important forms of social and symbolic capital, as we shall see (in Chapter Three).

Another aspect of the literary economy, which remains crucial to the Dalit pamphlet field, is the important interface between textuality and orality. The process whereby members of the Dalit community leave their villages for higher education and, once in the urban centres, encounter a wide variety of Dalit political and literary mobilisations, has established another indirect social link between discourses circulating in cities and the villages in the surrounding hinterland. This is illustrated by Omprakash Valmiki's organisation called Asmita Gyan Kendra:

> We have opened a library and we encourage people to read and discuss Dalit literature. Oftentimes we also call intellectuals from various parts of the country to come and talk about these issues. This organisation also organises small bookstalls in villages.[93]

While this is anecdotal evidence, I believe it is not presumptive to suggest that when Dalits who have been educated in urban areas return to their villages, they bring with them the ideology and discourses they encountered in Dalit pamphlet literature found across cities in north India; in other words, they tell Dalits in the village what they read in the city. Narayan has observed a similar link between literate Dalit readers in the village, who meet at tea stalls to discuss the contents of the pamphlets they have read with other illiterate Dalit villagers. Thus he asserts, '[e]ven the illiterate Dalit become aware of the contents of the booklets merely by listening to the conversation of their educated brethren' (Narayan 2011: 71). This 'post-textual orality' expands the reach of the Dalit pamphlet audience to include broad sections of the illiterate Dalit community and constitutes an important characteristic of the flow of literary narratives in this pamphlet field.

Finally, the contemporary field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature has maintained its position as a counter-public sphere, functioning

alongside but quite separately from the mainstream Hindi public as well as from the more recent autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. Its character as a Dalit counter-public is maintained by its institutional base, since literary publication by private Dalit-owned presses and distribution at Dalit melas, political rallies and community gatherings has meant that the audience of this pamphlet field remains distinctly Dalit. As we will see in Chapter Two, the thematic preoccupations of this pamphlet field, for instance on Dalit history, also emphasise the aims of this literature to be consciousness-raising, specifically among members of the Dalit community rather than Indian society as a whole. It should be noted here that while the pamphlets are aimed at a Dalit audience, this audience does not include all Dalits. The majority of Dalit activists in UP and Bihar continue to be from the Chamar/Jatav community, whereas many members of other SC jatis such as the Bhangis/Valmikis, who have been marginalised from Dalit mobilisations, have come under the influence of Hindutva and consequently participate in other discursive fields. Thus, while the Dalit pamphlet field continues to function as a counter-public sphere for a Dalit audience, it is in intimate dialogue with various other literary and discursive fields including Hindutva, the BSP and increasingly, the new autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature.

Notes

1. 'Jigyasu' was Chandrikaprasad's pen-name meaning 'one who is curious' or 'one who enquires'.
2. Interview with Brahmanand, Lucknow, 20 March 2004.
3. This approximation is based on the following information: each pamphlet is usually published in print runs of 1,000 copies; while the most popular pamphlets have run into 15 editions, others average two to three editions. Furthermore, I have identified up to 20 small Hindi Dalit presses in north India, suggesting that at least 50,000 Hindi Dalit pamphlets have been published.
4. In the early 20th century, 'Adi-' lower-caste movements sprung up in other regions of India. Most important were the Ad Dharm movement in the Punjab and the Adi Dravida movement in Tamil Nadu. While in later decades, a few tracts written by members of the anti-Brahmin movement in south India were translated into Hindi and distributed alongside other literary pamphlets, at this early stage I would agree with Nandini Gooptu's assertion (2001: 158) that it is more probable that the

pervasiveness of the Orientalist discourse of the Aryan race, implying the separate racial origins of 'untouchable' castes, led to similar counter-interpretations as protests by lower-caste groups in these areas.

5. Like the caste histories written by the Kayasthas or Yadavs, for instance, Jatav caste histories often relied heavily on colonial ethnographies of specific jatis which circulated in the public sphere in the early 20th century. Furthermore, they fed into contemporary notions of cultural authenticity by quoting as sources such texts as the Vedas, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata (Pinch 1996; Rawat 2011). For Kurmi Kshatriya movements, see Verma (1979). For Yadavs, see Rao (1987, especially Chapter Four). For these histories among the Chamars of Chhattisgarh called Satnamis, see Dube (1998, particularly Chapter Seven). For upper-caste efforts to write jati histories, see C. Gupta (1996); Leonard (1978); Khare (1970). For a discussion of the theoretical importance of genealogies in the history of north Indian communities, see Thapar (2000a).
6. On contemporary Dalit 'myths of origin', see Deliege (1999: 73).
7. Narada is the teller of many Puranas.
8. From Agra, the Jatav Veer Mahasabha spread to Aligarh by 1928 and then to Lucknow. Owen Lynch notes, however, that the Jatav Veer Mahasabha did not include all Chamars, but rather rejected another sub-section of Chamars known as 'Guliya' who were considered 'lower'. By positioning themselves against these 'true Chamars' who couldn't lay claim to Kshatriya status, the Jatav Veer Mahasabha attempted to strengthen its argument for its members true Kshatriyahood (Lynch 1969: 68–72). For more on the Jatav Veer Mahasabha of Agra, see Brass (1985: 219); Duncan (1979); S. Pai (2002: 45); Rawat (2011).
9. William Gould notes the prevalence of jati association-based journals during the 1910s–1930s, including the *Kshatriya* published by the Jats of Meerut, the Kashbala Kshatriya Mitra published by the Kori community and the Jatava published by the Chamars of Agra (Gould 2005: 31).
10. William Pinch claims that Kshatriya reform movements were much more successful among lower-caste communities that stood above the ritual line of pollution, such as the Yadavs, Kurmis or Pasis (Pinch 1996).
11. For a recent history on the Adi Hindu movement, see Rawat (2011: 144–72).
12. Achutanand consciously appealed to members of all lower-caste communities, and his success is demonstrated by the fact that by 1930, participants in Adi Hindu conferences included individuals from the Chamar, Dhobi, Paasee, Bhangi/Valmiki, Kureel, Dhusia and Kori castes (Gooptu 2001: 159).

13. Achutanand first launched the All India Achhut Caste Reform Sabha in 1919. In 1922, the movement gained widespread popularity when it took a stand against the Non-Cooperation Movement, labelled the Congress a Brahmanical organisation, and supported the controversial visit from the Prince of Wales. According to Gooptu, by 1924, Adi Hindu *sabha*s (associations) were set up in Kanpur, Lucknow, Banaras and Allahabad. However, she argues, 'the emphasis of the Adi Hindu movement was not . . . on formal organisation, but on a shared religious and ideological perspective between the Adi Hindu preachers and local untouchable groups who practised bhakti. Various panchayats and caste groups in their neighbourhoods were informally associated with the Adi Hindu Sabhas of the towns or with individual Adi Hindu leaders' (Gooptu 2001: 114).
14. Although propounded first by European Orientalists, the 'Aryan' category was later taken up by upper-caste Indian nationalists in an effort to show their racial equality with the British (and hence their equal ability to govern India). For more on the theory of Aryan race, see Trautmann (1997, especially Chapter Two).
15. One should also mention here the famously-quoted poem entitled 'Achut kī Shikāyat' (Complaint of the Untouchable) supposedly written by a Dalit writer called Heera Dom and published in Mahavir Prasad Dvivedi's influential Hindi journal Saraswati as early as 1914. While there is little evidence to either confirm or disprove this poem's true author, the highly Sanskritised register and its publication in a elite Hindi journal such as Saraswati makes it relatively unlikely that it was authored by a member of the SCs. What is more probable is that this poem falls into a genre of early 20th century reform literature, which used the first person as an effective narrative strategy to emphasise the reformist message. This was, for example, a commonly used genre to discuss the plight of widows, in which a 'widow' would write the story of her sad life and how she came to be in such a bad state. I owe this insight to Francesca Orsini. See also Orsini (2002: 279–81).
16. Interview with Jigyasu's son Brahmanand, 20 March 2004, Lucknow.
17. 'Shri Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu "Prakash" Lakhanavi ka Sankshipta Parichay' (Introduction to the Life of Shri Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu Lakhanvi), Anon. (1972). Collected from Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan on 20 March 2004, Lucknow.
18. The Arya Samaj was established as an organisation in Bombay in 1875 by Dayanand Saraswati. It called for a return to Hinduism based on the Vedas and the revitalisation of society based on the golden age of the Vedic Aryans. Dayanand himself argued that in order to 'save' Hinduism, the religion needed new religious leaders who were

'Brahman by merit, not birth'. He also emphasised the need for literacy to enable Hindus to read the Vedas and accompanying Arya literature (Jones 1976; Jordens 1978; Van der Veer 1994).

19. Many Arya Samajists in the early 20th century were influenced by a growing 'census mentality' which suggested a declining strength of the Hindu community based on population statistics. Shuddhi or 'purification' campaigns were originally used as a defensive tool by the Arya Samaj against the conversion of Indians to other 'foreign' religions, namely Christianity and Islam and were performed on upper-caste religious converts. After 1900, shuddhi ceremonies were used to 'purify' members of the lower castes in order to bring them back into the Hindu fold. According to Jones, shuddhi campaigns drastically altered the internal social composition of the Arya Samaj by increasing the numbers of untouchable Samajists. Shuddhi campaigns also instigated increasing tensions within both the Arya Samaj and within the larger Hindu community, since none could agree on how to position 'purified' untouchables within caste society, particularly since Arya Samajist untouchability uplift activities directly threatened upper-caste domination at the local level (Jones 1976: 202–15, 303–12; S. Pai 2002: 40–41; Rawat 2011: 136–44).
20. Ram Charan (1888–1938) was born in a slum in Gwaltoli in Kanpur; although his parents were casual labourers, he was sent to the local municipal school. As an adult, he moved to Lucknow where he worked in the Railway Audit Office to earn a living, while at night, he continued to attend classes to further his education. After earning a degree in law, Ram Charan became widely known for using these legal skills to defend members of the lower castes. In the 1920s, he joined Achutanand in promoting Adi Hindu ideology and organising local Adi Hindu Sabhas across the state of UP (Gooptu 2001). However, as Rawat has shown, Ram Charan and Achutanand parted ways over the issue of whether all lower-caste groups should join together or whether, as the Adi Hindus maintained, the focus should be exclusively on 'untouchable' castes (Rawat 2011: 161–62).
21. Titles include: *Nasha-Dosh-Darshan* (Exposing the Vice of Intoxication), *Naye Kangresi Gana* (New Congress Songs); *Rashtrapati Motilal Nehru* (National Leader Motilal Nehru); *Bhagvan Gandhi aur unka Dharmarajya* (Lord Gandhi and his divine leadership); *Svadeshi Gayan-ratna* (Passionately Singing Swadeshi). These titles are taken from the Hindu Samaj Sudhar Karyalay's list of publications from 1931 collected at Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan through the kind help of Brahmanand on 20 March 2004, Lucknow.
22. The exact date of this name change is unknown. Interview with Brahmanand, 20 March 2004, Lucknow.

23. The term 'bahujan' refers to the belief that the lower castes constitute the majority of the Indian population and yet are oppressed by the 'minority' of upper castes. The term was first used by Jyotiba Phule and has been recently popularised by the BSP in north India.
24. These titles are given without dates in a list of the current titles published by Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan, provided by Brahmanand during an interview, 20 March 2004, Lucknow.
25. While these Dalit literary pamphlets were aimed first and foremost at Dalit audiences, they were also actively contested by Hindu reformers who struggled to keep Dalits within the Hindu fold. One such example is the Hindu reformer Ami Chand, who worked among the Chuhra (Bhangi/Balmiki) community in the early 1930s under an organisation called the Dalituddhar Mandal. Chand wrote his own pamphlet in Hindi entitled Valmiki Prakash which was published in 1936 and which, according to Vijay Prashad 'became the staple tract of the Balmiki community.' The tract, written as a conversation between a Hindu reformer and a Balmiki sweeper, promoted reverence for Valmiki as the proper guru of the Chuhra community and virulently attacked the Adi Hindu movement, accusing Achutanand of being either a Christian or a Muslim (V. Prasad 2000: 92–93).
26. Rawat's study of Chamar activism shows that Adi Hindu leaders were present at the inauguration of the SCF in Nagpur in 1942 and saw it as 'a worthy successor to the Adi Hindu Mahasabha' (Rawat 2011: 174).
27. Although the UPSCF did not win any seats in this election, Ramnarayan Rawat argues that its success at the primaries, which were the only part of the election process to offer separate electorates for Dalit voters, reveals the real success of the UPSCF (Jaffrelot 2003: 106; Rawat 2003: 587).
28. William Gould argues that by the 1930s, jati sabhas such as the Jatav Veer Mahasabha had transformed from local organisations into associations acting like political associations to which members paid a subscription, and which had representative assemblies, working committees and trans-regional ties (Gould 2005). See also Brass (1985: 219); S. Pai (2002: 55); Rawat (2001: 132; 2003: 610).
29. Jagjivan Ram was born to a Chamar family in Bihar in 1908. Inspired by Gandhi, he became a member of the Harijan Sevak Sangh in Bihar and joined the Congress party in 1930. He remained an important and influential figure of the Congress party and among its lower-caste constituency throughout his long political career (Ram 1980; Sharma 1974). However, Ram remained an aberration in Congress politics. According to Paul Brass, 'Ram was a useful exception who gave his caste brothers the illusion that such a rise to power was possible,' when

in fact, 'the SC leaders who have been given Congress tickets in the reserved constituencies are non-militant and have no power in the local or state Congress organisations' (Brass 1965: 101–5).

30. The Poona Pact in 1932 rejected the notion of separate electorates for SCs and STs requested by Ambedkar. For more on the implications of the Poona Pact on Dalit electorates, see Rawat (2003: 606–10).
31. The RPI was formed on the initiative of Dr Ambedkar, although its actual establishment in both Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh occurred several months after his death in December 1956. For more on the RPI, see Brass (1985); Hasan (1989); Lynch (1969); S. Pai (2002). For a description of the RPI as a party of Jatavs and the political affiliations of other Dalits jatis such as the Bhangis/Valmikis, see Prashad (2000).
32. Tilak Chand Kureel was president of the RPI in UP from 1958–60.
33. Cheddi Lal Sathi was president of the RPI in UP from 1960–64.
34. B. P. Maurya, son of a Jatav cultivator, was educated at Aligarh Muslim University and taught in the Faculty of Law there before becoming involved with the UPSCF in Agra in the late 1940s. He was perhaps the most popular Member of Parliament of the RPI and was famous for never contesting elections in an SC reserved seat (Hasan 1989: 116–17; Jaffrelot 2003: 109).
35. Thus, while the Congress won all the reserved seats in the 1952 and 1957 elections, in 1962 the RPI defeated Congress candidates in two important constituencies and several other rebel leaders supported by the RPI defeated the Congress in four additional constituencies (Hasan 1989: 114).
36. In Agra, attempts to expand the party membership were hindered by internal opposition within the local RPI branch which remained unwilling to give party offices to non-Jatavs (Prashad 2000: 122). In her study of these elections, Zoya Hasan also comments, '[the RPI's] activities came to be restricted because of its identification with the Jatavs, a fact which helped Congress wean away other Scheduled Castes from the RPI's influence' (Hasan 1989: 119). Thus, the RPI's reputation as a party of Jatavs 'instil[ed] in the hearts of other Scheduled Castes in Agra a fear of Jatav domination in the Republican Party' (Prashad 2000: 126).
37. From the records of Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan it seems that some pamphlets from the earlier period continued to be published during the 1940s and 1950s. For example, Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's Adi-Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata was in its third edition in 1941 and was reprinted in 1956, 1965, 1969 and 1975.
38. For more on Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism as the religion for Dalits and details of the first conversion ceremony in Nagpur, Maharashtra, see Omvedt (2004, Chapter Eight).

39. Interview with Agni Lal, 23 March 2004, Lucknow.
40. Interview with Bhagwan Das, 30 January 2004, Delhi.
41. Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp, for instance, notes the revival of the Ravidasis panth as a number of Ravidas temples were built, not by rich tannery owners, which would have been the case in the early 20th century, but by Dalits who were now clerks and government officers (Bellwinkel-Schempp 2002: 227).
42. Interview with Dr Cheddi Lal Sathi, 18 March 2004, Lucknow.
43. Both booklets were published from Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan without dates.
44. All information on Bhagwan Das's life derives from two interviews with Das on 30 January 2004 and a second in April 2004 at his home in Delhi. See also his short biographical data in *Dalit Sahitya* (1999: 23).
45. Badri Narayan has identified what he calls the 'cantonment phenomenon' among many Dalit writers who first were able to gain an education due to the fact that one or both of their parents worked in a British cantonment and thus they were able to attend school on the cantonment as well (2011: 79).
46. I was unable to personally read this article since Das' own copy was burned in a house fire and he has been unable to find another copy since then.
47. While Das' own education in Urdu and his location in Shimla, western UP and Punjab probably influenced his perception of the amount of Dalit writing in both languages, these comments illuminate the variety of Dalit literary efforts which were in dialogue with each other during the nationalist period across north India. Later, Das explained the decline in Urdu Dalit writing in terms of the language's increasing association with the Muslim community. 'The Urdu papers [where Dalits were publishing articles] gradually discontinued publication, and it was only the Muslims who were editing the [Urdu] papers. They were more concerned with issues affecting Muslims; they were not interested in Buddhism. That is the situation even today' (Interview in English with Bhagwan Das, 30 January 2004, Delhi). This comment reflects the reality of a decline in Urdu literary publications in north India throughout the early 20th century in favour of Hindi. As a result of mobilisations such as the Hindi movement in the late nineteenth century and Hindu reformers who increasingly made the now familiar association 'Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan', Urdu became increasingly identified with the Muslim community (King 1995: 37–41; Orsini 2002: 68–72). I have been unable to substantiate this claim of widespread Dalit literary production in Urdu. Das' comments highlight the need for more academic studies of Dalit literature in Urdu, which is a largely unexplored area of research.

48. For information on Dalit mass conversions to Buddhism in 1957, see Das (1998); Omvedt (2004); Prashad (2000: 146).
49. Dalit Buddhists were finally given access to state reservation facilities in 1990 under V. P. Singh's government at the same time that the Mandal Commission extended reservation to the OBCs (Das 1998: 67–70).
50. Interview with Bhagwan Das, 30 January 2004, Delhi.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid.
55. According to one issue seen during an interview at the home of Bhagwan Das, 30 January 2004, Delhi, the year 2000 was its 25th year of publication, and it was in its 97th issue.
56. Badri Narayan's study of Dalit pamphlets post-1950 also confirms that currently most Dalit pamphlets 'are rooted in the lives and teachings of Buddha, Ambedkar, Ravidas, Kabir, Phule, and Periyar. Many of them also deal with caste histories, social criticism, Dalit politics, and political struggles of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati' (Narayan 2011: 72).
57. For more on Periyar Lalai Singh, see Chapter Two.
58 The dominance of the Chamars has become even more prominent with the favouritism displayed by the BSP governments in the late 1990s in distributing facilities and government appointments, as both Mayawati and Kanshi Ram are from the Chamar jati.
59. Badri Narayan perceived this difference in literary sensibilities from the consumer-side of the Dalit pamphlet field. He writes: 'The attractive covers or glossy print of books from big Hindi publishing houses like Vani Prakashan, Pravin Prakashan, Rajkamal Prakashan, Natraj Prakashan, and so on do not attract the crowd in these fairs, who prefer small booklets printed on coarse newsprint. Their sense of aesthetics, which have an element of austerity, is different from that of the middle class, which prefers attractive layouts' (Narayan 2011: 88).
60. Similarly, in an interview, the Dalit writer Ish Kumar Ganganiya, who has gained prominence in the autobiographic field, related to me the general Adi Hindu historical narrative. Yet, when asked where he had heard about this history, he would only reply 'some books'. This was quite a change from the usual tendency these Dalit writers had to eagerly provide exact references for all the books they mentioned. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
61. Other Dalit pamphlet writers include Gama Ram, a retired Central Intelligence Officer of the Indian Government who lives in Lucknow and writes articles on Buddhism in both Hindi and English; V. P. Varun, writer and editor of 'Human Service Charitable Trust Foundation' in Lucknow, joined the IAS in 1958. Buddh Sharan Hans is a government officer in Bihar as well as a Dalit writer and editor of *Ambedkar Mission Prakashan* in Patna. Interview with Gama Ram,

24 March 2004, Lucknow. Interview with V. P. Varun, 25 March 2004, Lucknow. See also Narayan (2001: 106–11; 2011: 75–76).

62. Interview with K. M. Sant, 15 March 2004, Lucknow.
63. Fieldwork, March 2004, Lucknow. See also Narayan (2001; 2011).
64. As of my fieldwork in 2004.
65. Interview with Brahmanand and Avish Kumar, 20 March 2004, Lucknow.
66. These included a wide range of publications by Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan as well as by Periyar Lalai Singh's press in Kanpur. Fieldwork in Lucknow on 20 March 2004.
67. These include: Ambedkar Mission Prakashan founded in Bihar in 1978, Sagar Prakashan founded in Mainpuri in approximately 1977, Bharti Prakashan in Mathura in approximately 1980, Anand Sahitya Sadan in Aligarh in 1982, Cultural Prakashan in Lucknow in 1990, and Kushwaha Publishers in Allahabad in approximately 1990, among others (Narayan 2001: 107).
68. For more on the BSP including its grass-roots mobilisation efforts, see S. Pai (2002, Chapter Two).
69. These included posters of Ambedkar, Periyar, the Buddha, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati.
70. Interview with Yadkaran 'Yad', 17 March 2004, Hazaratganj, Lucknow.
71. For Badri Narayan's interview with C. L. Kushwaha, see Narayan (2001: 107).
72. Part II of Vichitra Parivartan by Umesh Kumar entitled 'Bharatiya Achambha' has been translated from the original Hindi into English in Narayan and Misra (2004).
73. Darapuri has since retired from government service and was recently contesting elections for the RPI. Fieldwork, March 2004, Lucknow.
74. Interview with V. P. Varun, 25 March 2004, Lucknow.
75. Fieldwork, March 2004, Lucknow.
76. Fieldwork, March 2004, Lucknow. Narayan (2001).
77. Also involved in the management of this journal are Bhagwan Das and Prabhu Lal who act as 'advisors'.
78. Kanval Bharti's 'Baspā aur Dalit Andhānukaraṇ' (The BSP and Blind Imitation of Dalit) *Dalit Liberation Today*, 2 (4) (August 1996); 'Kanśirām ke Atmaghātī Kadam', 1 (12) (May 1996); 'Dalit Mudde aur Vartmān Dalīya Rājnīti', 3 (10) (February 1998); 'Uttar Bhārat Mem Baspā ke Vikalpa kī Taiyārī', 3 (11) (March 1998). For Bharti's literary criticism, see Chapter Five.
79. The common recognition of certain pan-Indian 'Dalit heroes' is a direct consequence of BSP political activism in north India, which has consciously worked to develop a 'pantheon' of recognisable Dalit

leaders. This cultural-political work is most clearly embodied in 'Pari varthan Chowk' in Lucknow, which was installed by the BSP in 2002 and displays the statues of these chosen 'Dalit leaders' including Ambedkar, Phule, Chatrapati Shahuji Maharaj, Narayana Guru and Periyar. A booklet displaying colour photos of all the BSP-installed statues across north India is 'Samajik Parivartan ka Safar' (The Journey of Social Change), Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh Government, April 2003.

80. This journal is not directly linked to a Dalit press. Fieldwork at the Bahujan Chetna Mandap in March 2004.
81. From *Ambedkar Today* 1, 4 (September 2002).
82. From *Ambedkar Today* 1, 7 (December 2002).
83. Other journals include *Janta* from Kanpur edited by Raninath, *Dalit Hataishi* a monthly edited by Manju Maurya from Delhi, and *Shoshit* edited by Jayram from Patna, *Bhim Patrika* was first started in Urdu in the 1960s, edited by Mr Bali from Buddhamandi in Punjab. Bhagwan Das edited an English edition of this paper for two or three years in the early 1980s. Several other journals include *Ambedkar India* edited by Dayanath Nigam from Lucknow since 1998, *Bauddh Dharm Pracharak* edited since 2002 by Ramesh Siddhu in Hoshiyarpur, and *Lokshakti*, a quarterly edited by Deepak Bharti from Madhubani, Bihar since 1993. These journals are simply a sample of the wide range of Dalit journals circulating in Hindi and were collected from Bhagwan Das during an interview 30 January 2004, Delhi.
84. This information on Ambedkar Jayanti was collected during my fieldwork there on 14 April 2004.
85. Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.
86. Based on interviews with Brahmanand, the current proprietor of Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan, Yadkaran 'Yad' of Bahujan Chetna Mandap, V. P. Varun of Human Service Charitable Trust Prakashan, K. M. Sant in Lucknow, March 2004, as well as my own fieldwork at Ambedkar Jayanti in Delhi, 14 April 2004 where many pamphlets from various regions of UP and Bihar were being sold. For more on the continuities and discontinuities of Dalit melas see also my article Beth 2005.
87. A 1976 account confirms the popularity of this rural Dalit mela among members of the Dusadh jati (one of the most numerous SC jatis in Bihar after the Chamars), with a recorded attendance of eight to nine thousand at the Chuharmal celebrations in the village of Mor. Badri Narayan's study shows its continual growth in popularity as it reached one lakh participants in 1981 and three lakh attendants by 1998. Badri Narayan (2001), see especially Chapter Two.
88. See both *The Tribune*, 15 April 2004, and *The Times of India*, 15 April 2004.

89. Interview with Tejpal Singh 'Tej', 12 January 2004, Delhi.
90. Ibid.
91. Interview with V. P. Varun, 25 March 2004, Lucknow.
92. An article which demonstrates how writers assert this cultural authority is Bhagwan Das' article 'Baba Saheb Ambedkar kuch yaden' ('Some memories of Baba Saheb Ambedkar') in *Dalit Liberation Today*, June 1995.
93. Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.

2

Writing Dalit History

> The history of our forefathers was distorted … in such a way that we forgot the glory of our ancestors … Times have changed, we now need education and organization … Then, we shall find that this rotten social organization will vanish with the storm. For bringing you from darkness to light, your own true story is being put before you.[1]

Since its formation as part of the Adi Hindu movement, the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature has relied on the idiom of 'Dalit history' as a means of discussing Dalit identity and the Dalit community's relationship to the Indian nation. Themes of 'Dalit history' in this pamphlet field range from expansive narratives carrying the Adi Hindu message of Dalits as the ancient inhabitants of India to reinterpretations of Indian society during the mythic time of Ramrajya (the Rule of Ram); from stories of the lives of Dalit heroes and heroines who participated in the nationalist movement to life histories of Dr Ambedkar, the most celebrated all-Indian Dalit leader.

The above quote from Dalit pamphlet writer G. P. Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* reflects the immense charge placed on 'history' as an idiom to explain not only the Dalit community's fall from glory and subjugation by the upper castes but also to express the new phase of Dalit political awakening, which will lead the community to freedom from caste oppression. Prashant's pamphlet embodies many of the themes of Dalit history: it begins with 'The Story of Satyug', which describes the golden age when all members of the Dalit community, as the indigenous inhabitants of ancient India, lived in harmony, prosperity and social equality, before the invasion of Aryan tribes destroyed the golden civilisation and oppressed the original inhabitants through the imposition of the caste system. Next, 'The Story of Shambuk' reveals Indian society's decline into Kaliyug ('the dark age') due to misrule by the Aryans. Oppression

of the Dalit community is epitomised during the period of Ramrajya by the wrongful murder of the low-caste ascetic Shambuk by King Ram under the influence of corrupt Brahman advisors. Section Three of *Mul Vansha Katha* positions the Buddha as an early opponent of the caste system, and the final section of the pamphlet narrates the life history of Dr Ambedkar as representative of the history of the contemporary Dalit movement.

The first chapter of this book demonstrated how the formation of this field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature in the context of the Adi Hindu movement established history as a foundational discourse of Hindi Dalit pamphlets.[2] This second chapter looks more closely at this pervasive theme of 'Dalit history' within the field of Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets, and argues that in the attempt to write 'Dalit history', Dalit pamphlet literature has continually intervened on symbolic moments in the mainstream Indian historical narrative. These include histories of ancient India, which position Dalits as the indigenous inhabitants of India, reinterpretations of the time of Ramrajya, narratives of the Dalit heroes of the 1857 rebellion, and life histories of Ambedkar. Dalit pamphlet writers reinterpret these historical moments according to a 'Dalit perspective' and struggle to capture the symbolic capital they hold in the Indian imagination. Dalit historical pamphlets also reveal the extent to which Dalit historical narratives reflect the tension between Dalit activists' desire to position themselves as a separate socio-cultural community and, at the same time, to join mainstream Indian society as equal citizens of the nation.

The Importance of History: Historical Discourse in the Dalit Pamphlet Field

An important comparison can be made between the contemporary Dalit community's urge to rediscover their 'true' history and the significance the subject of history held for early Bengali nationalists. Sudipta Kaviraj, for instance, argues that 19th-century Bengali nationalists

> invested history … with a very different function within their cultural discourse from what it had in European rationalism … The past was an image created in the interest of the present. History was, in major respects, the myth of a people, its construction of its self. It was necessary in this

> urgent sense. What actually happened, what was, so to speak, 'empirically true' was another matter, much less significant' (1995: 108).[3]

For Hindi Dalit writers, too, the struggle to 'remember' the community's true past is a practice which not only attempts to explain Dalits' current oppression and low social position, but creates hope for the community's resurrection and return to their former glory. As Kaviraj has also argued,

> history means so much because it shows a world in the making, in its contingency, in its open probabilistic form. It shows not only how the social world became the way it is, but also how close at times it was to being quite different (ibid.: 109).

It is this 'potential' of history, the way history exposes possibilities, which makes it such an effective forum to discuss the contemporary aspirations of a community.

For Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, myth and history are used as narrative strategies to shift the meanings of well-known historical events of the ancient Indian past. Romila Thapar has argued that myths are often used by communities to articulate contemporary aspirations and assumptions. However, she also notes that any myth 'remains socially important as long as it is a charter of belief, but becomes ineffective when seen as a myth' (Thapar 2000c: 754–55). This observation highlights the significance of the Adi Hindu historical narrative — which positions Dalits as the indigenous inhabitants of ancient India and the Aryans as invaders — as a pervasive charter of belief among the Dalit community, even in the face of continuing opposition from dominant historiography, as well as right-wing Hindutva discourse. In this way, even when Dalit writers employ mythic narrative strategies to relay stories of the Dalit past, they must maintain the legitimacy of these stories by portraying these narratives as factually based 'history'.

Thus, for Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, the necessity of history as a process of self-construction and representation often overrides the need to be factually accurate. However, this does not mean that Dalit writers do not seek legitimacy for their version of history, according to the terms of scientific rationalism. As we shall see, all Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers attempt to provide evidence in support of their historical narratives, although what 'evidence' entails differs even among Hindi Dalit authors. Since the recipients

of this pamphlet literature are Dalit, Dalit pamphlet writers take full advantage of speaking to a sympathetic audience, one which wants to believe in a glorious Dalit history. They must also respond, however, to the audience's desire to hear a good story, which will capture their interest while filling them with a sense of pride, self-respect and a feeling of belonging both to the Dalit community and to the Indian nation. Thus, unlike the academic arena, which has strict methodological expectations for what is considered legitimate history, Dalit pamphlet writers have experimented with a wide variety of genres for history-telling. To bridge the gap between the largely illiterate Dalit population and his historical narrative, Swami Achutanand relied on poetry and drama to describe the golden age of indigenous 'Adi Hindu' rule and the destruction of this ideal society by the Aryan invasion (see Chapter One). Since then, some Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, including Periyar Lalai Singh, have followed Achutanand's penchant for historical dramas while others, such as S. L. Sagar, have relied on Jigyasu's adherence to a more 'scientific' methodological approach, which portrays its narrative as an authoritative history based on certain kinds of evidence. This evidence most often includes references to scholarly names, quoting from other textual sources and emphasising the archaeological findings of the Indic civilisation at Harrapa and Mohanjaro, which the Dalit pamphlet writers believe supports their claims to a pre-Aryan civilisation in the subcontinent.[4] Still others, such as G. P. Prashant, write Dalit histories which lie somewhere in between a bardic-style tale and a history based on such 'facts'.

What we find then, in the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature, is an array of generic possibilities employed in the telling of Dalit history, as Dalit writers attempt to retain the authority of their version of history while simultaneously attracting the Dalit reader through a language of self-respect and belonging. Dalit historical narratives are invested with aspirations, which stretch far beyond the desire to know what happened in the past. Instead, history is a process of reconstructing the community's identity, both as a separate group of indigenous peoples and as the first citizens of the Indian nation. In writing these pamphlet histories, Dalit writers pointedly target the most symbolically potent moments in Indian historical memory. Subverting the dominant interpretations of these time periods, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers have created a series of historical counter-narratives which are, I would argue, even more

radical and provocative than any attempt to work outside established paradigms. In this process, Dalit writers are engaged in a deep power struggle over the ability to assign meaning to these prominent historical events.

The Beginning of Dalit History: The Aryan Invasion in Dalit Pamphlet Histories

The formation of the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature in the context of the Adi Hindu movement of the 1920s and 1930s established the Adi Hindu reinterpretation of ancient Indian history as a discursive foundation of this Dalit literary field. Positioning members of all SC jatis as descendants of the original inhabitants of India, the historical narrative, first set out in Hindi in the poetry and drama of Achutanand in the 1920s and in Jigyasu's history *Adi-Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata* in 1937, has endured in contemporary pamphlets, such as S. L. Sagar's *Hindu Videshi Hain* (1991), G. P. Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* (1994) and Umesh Kumar's *Bhartiya Achambha* (1996). The power of this historical narrative lies in its subversion of the categories of 'foreign invader' and 'indigenous inhabitant', which already held significant symbolic authority by the early 20th century as part of the dominant history of ancient India and the prevalent theory of Aryan race. By pushing the 'beginning' of Indian history back in time to a pre-Aryan civilisation, Hindi Dalit writers attempt to replace the Aryans (supposed ancestors of the upper castes) with the Dalit community as the original inhabitants of India and thus make claims to the cultural authority of 'indigeneity'. Importantly, the idiom of 'indigeneity' is employed both as the Dalit community's attempt to claim a separate social and ethnic identity, as well as a new language used by Dalits to express a sense of belonging to the nation.

The narrative of the Aryan race has a long and complex political history in India. The basic concept of an Aryan race was first imagined in 18th-century Europe, and was transported to the Indian context via British and German Sanskritists. As Thomas Trautmann asserts, these Sanskritists were forced to address the paradox between contemporary theories of anthropology, which classified the 'fair-skinned civilised European' in opposition to the 'dark-skinned savage', and their own discovery of a sophisticated Vedic culture (represented by philosophical texts such as the Vedas and

the Upanishads) which flouted such a distinction (Trautmann 1997: 15). The theory of the Aryan race was supported by Orientalist discourse professing the interrelation between language, culture and race, and thus the conquest of the dark-skinned *dasa*s by the *arya*s, described in Sanskritic texts, was taken to symbolise the Aryan race's invasion and domination over India and its indigenous inhabitants, a theory most famously propagated by Max Muller based on his study of the *Rig Veda* (Thapar 1992).

Yet Romila Thapar emphasises, '[f]ar from being limited to interpreting historical origins, the racial theory has provided the base for a range of political ideologies' (Thapar 1997: xvi). For instance, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Indian historians in both Bengal and north India used the Aryan race theory to explain how the Mughals and the British came to rule over a nation with a Hindu majority. According to this version, ancient Indian history began with a golden age of Aryan–Hindu rule. Through a decline in religious observance and an increase in social decadence, this great society became vulnerable to Muslim invasions from central Asia. The narrative positions upper-caste Indians as the descendants of the Aryan race, while the existence of the caste system is simplistically explained as a form of racial segregation of early Aryan society from other local races. The fact that the concept of the Aryan race traced both upper-caste Indians (the descendants of the Aryans) and the British back to the same original ancestry also meant that early Indian nationalists could use the theory to claim the same social status as their colonisers.[5] Romila Thapar argues,

> [p]rojected onto this [basic theory] was an intrinsic link between race, language and nation. Given the emergence of nation-states in the 19th century, this was to be a catalytic idea where language and race came to be seen as ingredients of national identity. The question of identity came to the forefront in the form of differentiating between those claiming to be indigenous and those treated as foreign, and this in turn led to confrontations over who could be regarded as the rightful inheritors of the land (ibid.: xii).

Thus, the notion of indigeneity was fundamental to the Aryan race narrative, and each successive group to engage with the Aryan race theory grappled with the fundamental notions of indigenous belonging, nationhood and citizenship.

While the Adi Hindu re-articulation of the Aryan invasion was first set out in Dalit pamphlet literature by Achutanand through drama and poetry from the 1920s, it was narrated again by Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu in 1937 in the form of a history titled *Adi-Nivasiyon ki Sabhyata*, which was consistently published once or twice every decade until its ninth edition in 1993. While Jigyasu's pamphlet is clearly grounded in Adi Hindu discourse, the reinterpretation of the Aryan invasion and the notion that Dalits were descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of India has since become dislocated from the Adi Hindu movement itself. In fact, it has become widely influential as a common way politically conscious members of the Dalit community remember their past. While this discourse took a back seat during the height of Dalit institutional politics of the 1940s–1960s, it re-emerged in the context of the increasing polarisation of Hindu communal politics in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The Babri Masjid riots were in part fuelled by a Hindu re-engagement with the notion of 'origins' and 'indigeneity' (Basu 1993). Dalits were implicated in this process, since a significant number of SCs had affiliated themselves with Hindutva politics in the postcolonial period (Balagopal 2002; Prashad 2000). In this context, Dalits who associated themselves with Ambedkar, Buddhism and 'Dalit' identity mounted a response to this division of the Dalit community. As we shall see, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers in the 1990s used the history of the Aryan invasion to frame contemporary SC participation in Hindutva politics, as a result of a devious Hindu strategy to mislead members of the Dalit community by falsely claiming that Dalits are Hindu. The Dalit assertion of a pre-Hindu presence on the subcontinent was thus a two-pronged strategy: first, it contested the Hindu Right's claim over Dalit identity. Second, it challenged the bipolarisation of Indian politics into Hindu and Muslim camps and instead fought to reinsert the dimension of caste back into the political arena.

For Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, the fundamental power of reinterpreting the theory of Aryan race lay in the cultural authority categories such as 'indigenous' and 'foreign' as well as the imaginations of the 'golden age' (Satyug) and the 'dark age' (Kaliyug) already held in Indian society. As a community whose history was both excluded from mainstream historical narratives and left largely unrecorded, Dalit history writing in the pamphlet field focused on re-inscribing existing historical categories with new meaning.

Hence, when examining ancient Indian history, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers took advantage of the cyclical categories of time stretching from Satyug to Kaliyug. However, according to a Dalit reckoning, Satyug was not the golden age of the Aryans before the Muslim invasions, but an idealised pre-Aryan civilisation of the true indigenous inhabitants of India. In his historical pamphlet *Mul Vansha Katha* (The Story of the Original Descendants), Hindi Dalit writer Dr G. P. Prashant writes:

> O friends, this city of ancient *Satyug* which has come out of the womb of the mother earth was once a beautiful place covered with marvellous buildings, broad roads, big shops, rest houses and gardens, decorated with [a] variety of arts. The entire population of this city was happy and prosperous, leading a blissful life. People were honest, punctual and self-controlled. There was no incident of theft, dacoity, murder, rape or corruption of any kind . . . The entire population of the city used to collect at a single place everyday and enquire about the well-being of each other, and then they used to disperse after wishing good for all members of society (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 74–75).

According to these Dalit narratives, the ruler of this great original civilisation was King Bali, and the fall of this ruler represented the decline of the golden age of Dalit rule. In Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha,* for instance, it was the very prosperity of King Bali's kingdom that provoked the jealousy of the *deva*s (gods), who connived with the Aryan Brahmans against the king. Through a series of devious acts — including one in which the Brahmans tricked King Bali into performing a forbidden sacrificial ritual and another in which the god Vishnu tricked King Bali into giving up a powerful Buddhist mantra — King Bali lost his kingdom.

Another Dalit interpretation of ancient history can be found in Umesh Kumar's *Bhartiya Achambha* (The Wonder of India), a Hindi Dalit pamphlet first published in 1996, which claims to document Dalit history from 6000 BCE to 1995 CE. Each historical period in *Bhartiya Achambha* is assessed according to society's mode of living, food, social, economic and political conditions, special customs, great men, deities and inventions. The idioms of 'development' and 'progress' underlie the historical narrative as Indian society moves steadily from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society, from tribal social patterns to settled agriculture, and then to industrial economies. According to Kumar, the golden age of rule by the indigenous

inhabitants of India was not a single idealised period of time, but is portrayed as a progressive society moving slowly but steadily towards modernity. To Kumar, the invading Aryans are linked with social regression. After indigenous society (which had moved from a nomadic lifestyle to settled villages, had begun animal husbandry and agriculture, and had also started making copper weapons) was decimated by the Aryan invasion, Kumar claims that 'the condition of the non-Aryans was deplorable. Leading the life of animals, they were helpless and attributed the tyranny committed by neo-Aryans to divine curse' (U. Kumar in Narayan and Misra 2004: 48). In *Bhartiya Achambha*, Aryan oppression of the indigenous population is perceived in terms of both physical and mental enslavement, where Dalits were not only forced into menial occupations but lost their sense of political consciousness and began to attribute their enslavement to the gods rather than their real oppressors, the upper-caste Aryans. In *Bhartiya Achambha*, 'untouchability' and the varna system are both listed as 'inventions' and are recorded as evidence of the social backwardness of the Aryans. In this way, Kumar reinforces his claim that the caste system of social hierarchy as not a 'natural' system but was invented by the Aryans specifically to maintain their own superiority and to define the indigenous people as ritually inferior.

The narrative of the invasion and ultimate defeat of the indigenous inhabitants by the Aryans raised the same problems for Dalits that the Indian nationalists faced in contemplating their defeat by supposed Muslim invaders: how could such a 'perfect' society be defeated by such savage invaders? For early Indian nationalists, the inner decadence of Hindu society became the ready explanation (Orsini 2002). However, Dalit narratives instead pointed to the dishonesty and deceit of the Aryan invaders. For example, Kumar's narrative explains,

> [i]n the battle between the Aryans and non-Aryans, the Aryans emerged victorious due to their meticulously designed strategy … The Aryans were dishonest, capricious and treacherous, but experts in horse-riding whereas the original inhabitants were honest, loyal, tolerant and forgiving by nature … [but] were also weak in horse-riding (U. Kumar in Narayan and Misra 2004: 47).

Portrayals of a morally-righteous Dalit masculinity are placed in opposition to Aryan–Hindu masculinity as a means of reinforcing

this reinterpretation of ancient history. For example, in Kumar's *Bhartiya Achambha*, Dalit masculinity is expressed in terms of a man's moral character, including honesty and unwillingness to engage in violence, rather than his physical prowess, and this new ideal is positioned in opposition to the violent and aggressive 'Aryan–Hindu' masculinity. The portrayal of Dalit masculine strength based on individual integrity and commitment to moral principles even in the face of physical defeat and subjugation makes a powerful statement against social injustice and imbues the Dalit community with an interior life which can never be subjugated.[6]

The subsequent 'dark age' (Kaliyug) is also re-inscribed by Dalit pamphlet writers with new meaning. Kaliyug is, in fact, most commonly invoked by upper castes when referring to recent Dalit assertion; according to this perspective, the 'dark age' represents a time when the lower castes have forgotten their dharmic duty to serve the upper castes and begun to transgress the established social hierarchy of caste by fighting for an 'unnatural' system of social equality. For Dalit pamphlet writers, struggling against this mentality has made it necessary to reinterpret this conception of Kaliyug, describing it instead as an age which is witness to the collapse of the 'natural' system of social equality and the subsequent oppression of innocent communities such as the Dalits. Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers emphasise the basic power implicit in the process of 'renaming' groups or events by claiming that Aryan invaders oppressed the ancient inhabitants of India by associating the names of these groups with bands of mythic demons. For instance, Prashant proclaims:

> Disciples! Take your old inheritance and deposits. Your history has been demolished in order to belittle you. Your *asuras*, *rakshasas* and *daityas* are now names synonymous with hatred. Who [today] knows that *asuras* were vehement opponents of liquor consumption, that *rakshasas* were those who were opposed to sacrifices in the *yajna* and who guarded the rights of the people, and that *daityas* were the children of Diti' (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 74).

Dalit writers of Aryan invasion histories have used different literary tools to provide evidence for their historical claims while also presenting a story which is engaging to the Dalit reader. Kumar, for instance, attempts to lend credibility to his historical claims in *Bhartiya Achambha* by listing events and measuring social progress

according to fixed categories such as 'mode of living' or 'inventions'. Kumar's linear tracing of time is also useful in portraying the Aryan invasion as a rupture in the natural progress of human development and thus against modern national notions of social progress, while at the same time inserting the Dalit community into a linear narrative of national history. Furthermore, Kumar consistently tags his version of the Aryan invasion narrative and subsequent misrule of India with known historical figures ranging from Akbar and the Buddha to Motilal Nehru, Subhas Chandra Bose, Bhagat Singh, Jagjivan Ram, Gandhi and Ambedkar to garner further legitimacy for his narrative.

S. L. Sagar's *Hindu Videshi Hain* attempts to provide his narrative with factual support by including textual references and quotes from various scholars. For example, Sagar writes, 'Dr. Giles's view is that Aryas were cattle herders … [and came into western India through Iran]. This is a universally accepted doctrine' (Sagar 1991: 17). In addition to archaeological evidence and linguistic studies, which claim that the Sanskrit language is foreign to India, Sagar also relies on biological theories of race, including theories of blood types as 'scientific evidence' to prove that Hindus are foreigners. For instance, he refers to the biological study conducted by a Dr N. Majumadar, who claims Dalits are a separate indigenous community on the basis that 'it is evident that the blood of the Aryans is not mixed with non-Aryans' (ibid.: 20). While he is aware of the competing upper-caste discourse attempting to discredit his interpretation of ancient Indian history, Sagar uses this as simply another opportunity to assert his Dalit political consciousness. He writes in the preface to *Hindu Videshi Hain*,

> [t]he Hindu people will curse me, make me a vessel of their rage for exposing reality and I have considered this. Yet in order to fulfil the sacred duty of the pen, I understand my own liability and I believe it is essential and right to carry on (ibid.: 6).

With this statement, Sagar employs the idiom of seva, which increases a Dalit writer's symbolic capital in this pamphlet field, as we have discussed in Chapter One. Literary activism is named as part of the Dalit political struggle in which courage and sacrifice are necessary for the greater service to the Dalit community.

While some Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers such as Sagar attempt to gain cultural authority by trying to conform to mainstream

standards of historiography, others such as Prashant contest the very basis of this cultural authority by embracing a new, equally authentic means of 'remembering' the past. This is reflected in the title of Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* — it is not *itihas* (history) Prashant is writing, but a *katha* (story), and his intended audience is the 'common man'. In his preface, Prashant writes, 'The objective of this book is that the common man may understand this reality and become aware of his glorious past and proceed towards progress' (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 73). Prashant also employs a mythic conception of cyclical time as defined by four ages, from Satyug to Kaliyug, to promote an imagination of the return to the ancient Dalit golden age of equality and prosperity at some point in the future. Mythic conceptions of time also allow Prashant to jump unproblematically from one age to the next, enabling him to focus on specific poignant moments in Dalit history without having to 'fill in the blanks' as to how these moments developed. However, though Prashant begins with a bardic-style address, his mythic-style narrative is combined with references to the archaeological discoveries of the civilisations at Harrapa and Mohanjaro:

> In the valley of Sindhu, in the ruins of Harappa is located Mohenjo-Daro … From the unique ruins of this city of the period of *Satyug*, a melodious voice can be heard Disciples! … O friends, this city of ancient *Satyug* which has come out of the womb of the mother earth was once a beautiful place (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 74).

In other words, even with a mythic-style narrative, Prashant seems to find it helpful to weave in factual evidence to support his version of the Dalit past.

At their core, Dalit historical pamphlets express the contemporary aspirations of the Dalit community to acquire social respect for their Dalit identity and to benefit from opportunities in mainstream Indian society. For instance, Prashant's description of Satyug in *Mul Vansha Katha* represents Dalits' contemporary desire to participate in the material benefits of modernity (including 'marvellous buildings', 'broad roads' and material prosperity), but it also reflects a social critique of modern Indian society by claiming that during Satyug there was no corruption, rape, dishonesty or even chronic tardiness. *Mul Vansha Katha*'s re-imagining of Satyug

also notes that, 'The four pillars of justice, freedom, equality and fraternity were rooted strongly' (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 74–75). The anachronistic references to notions of justice as defined by the triad of 'liberté, egalité, fraternité' transposes the desire for these in the present on to ancient history. The historical narrative in Kumar's *Bhartiya Achambha,* in turn, attempts to explain the contemporary divisions among the lower castes (i.e., between the SCs, STs and OBCs) by claiming that when the Aryan invaders came to India, 'Some people ran to the forest and started leading the life of primitive man and some accepted the slavery of the Aryans. Only a few were engaged in fighting with the Aryans' (U. Kumar in Narayan and Misra 2004: 48). Those who ran to the forest became the tribals (STs), those who acquiesced to Aryan rule and acted as their henchmen became the OBCs, and those who stayed to fight the Aryans and were consequently the most brutally suppressed were the Dalits. This explanation is useful in giving Dalits alone an ancient heritage of political assertion, while also confirming the original unity of all lower castes as non-Aryans who were artificially divided by the Aryan invaders.[7] Furthermore, S. L. Sagar's narrative in *Hindu Videshi Hain* must be read in the light of Sagar's own anxiety about the appropriation of members of the Dalit community by Hindutva forces. In his Introduction, he writes,

> [t]oday, Hindus are joining together with great power under the banner of 'Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan'. They proclaim that India is the nation of Hindus, a deception that forces Sikhs and Muslims to leave the country and makes Shudras (non-Aryan Original Inhabitants) slaves. History is also being changed to misrepresent the truth, claiming that Hindus themselves are the original Indians. This book has been written in order to get rid of this hypocrisy and deception (Sagar 1991: 5).

By emphasising the different historical origins of Dalits and Hindus and by naming Buddhism as the original Dalit religion, Sagar's narrative is directly engaged in contesting the contemporary Hindutva claim that Dalits and Adivasis are Hindus.

Most importantly, the Aryan invasion provides an invaluable thematic way of asserting Dalits' simultaneous claims to a separate socio-ethnic identity, as well as to belong to the nation as the 'first Indians', while also excluding the upper castes (as descendants of the Aryan invaders) from claims to indigenous citizenship. In *Hindu*

Videshi Hain, Sagar argues, 'since the Hindu is not an original citizen of India, [he has] no attachment to its land and its people' (1991: 5). This is why, Sagar explains, India remains an impoverished and underdeveloped country. Sagar goes on to argue that Dalits' ancient claims to indigenous ancestry translate into contemporary actions, including care for the land and for its people, which in turn produce beneficial results for India. Upper-caste Hindus, on the other hand, are blamed for all the weaknesses and failings of the nation. Sagar writes,

> Hindus invited treacherous foreigners [i.e., Muslims] to attack the country, sent the wealth of the country outside and . . . made the country a slave. Such a sin is treachery towards a country to which they have no attachment. Since Hindus are foreigners, they are never sympathetic to India (ibid.).

Kumar's *Bhartiya Achambha* also makes an implicit comparison between the oppression of Dalits by the Aryan invaders and the oppression of Indians by British colonialists. For example, Kumar writes of 'the policy of the Aryans to divide and rule through the varna system' (U. Kumar in Narayan and Misra 2004: 50). Through this language of indigeneity, the original inhabitants in these Dalit narratives become the original Indians, reflecting Dalits' contemporary struggle to be considered equal citizens of the nation. In this way also, the equal and just society of the original Indian society (represented by King Bali) becomes a national legacy which Dalits aspire to re-establish today. Thus, Dalit historical pamphlets make a direct link between ancient claims to indigeneity and contemporary claims to national citizenship, revealing how history may tell us more about contemporary imaginations than about the past.

Injustice in Ramrajya: Dalit Narratives of Shambuk

Ramrajya, an age which is remembered as the high point of Hindu rule under the ideal King Ram, has remained a symbolically potent time period in Indian historical memory.[8] In opposition to its portrayal by the dominant Hindu tradition as an ideal age which should be resurrected in contemporary India, Dalits have characterised

Ramrajya as a time of injustice and misrule, an age of severe oppression of Dalits.[9] The injustice of Ramrajya is epitomised in Hindi Dalit narratives by the story of Shambuk, a member of the lower castes whom Ram wrongfully condemned to death for practicing asceticism against the dictates of the Vedas. By subverting the historical narrative of Ramrajya, symbolic of an upper-caste Hindu-dominated state, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers assert their own contemporary ideal of the state as the enforcer of social justice and protector of the downtrodden sections of society. In these Dalit narratives, the character of Shambuk, who speaks out against the injustice of Ramrajya, serves to further highlight the importance of individual political assertion in the creation of a just society.

The historical period of Ramrajya in Dalit narratives highlights the ideological differences between Dalits and upper-caste Hindus, colouring both the period of Ramrajya and contemporary supporters of this ideal in feudalist and regressive hues, while the Dalit community merges with the modern Indian nation as the historical defenders of social justice and democratic principles. In 'Dalit history', then, Ramrajya is portrayed as an interruption to the just society established under the golden age of the indigenous inhabitants; Dalits, like Shambuk, carry these ideological principles through the 'dark age' of Ramrajya and emerge with them again, as we shall see, with Ambedkar's constitution and the founding of the democratic Indian nation.

In north India, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers have contested the idealised conception of Ramrajya by focusing on the character of Shambuk (rather than Ravana, the hero of many south Indian Dalit counter-narratives) to reveal the immorality of King Ram and the corruption of his rule. Swami Achutanand's drama *Ram-rajya Nyaya* (The Justice of Ram's Rule), published in Hindi in the late 1920s or early 1930s, provides one example of a popular Dalit revision of the *Ramkatha*.[10] Although written in the form of a drama, this pamphlet seems to have been widely read in the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field as is evident from its numerous print runs.[11] According to Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu, who served as both editor and publisher of the pamphlet, the play became quite popular and was performed many times. He writes,

> [a]t present, the play *Ram-rajya nyaya* is very popular. It was out of print for 14 years but in 1964 it came out in a second edition. It was

> performed on stage in many places. Its performance had a deep influence on the spectators, a naked picture of Ram-Rajya was dancing before their eyes. The drama is very easy to perform. The short narrative is easy to remember and the songs are clear. It can be played start to finish in 2 hours. It is generally performed at night, at the end of a meeting (Achutanand n.d.).

The play itself is quite simple and straightforward; there are less than 10 characters whose lines are all short and to the point with easy grammatical constructions and common un-Sanskritised vocabulary. Clearly written for the stage, *Ram-rajya Nyaya* begins with the *sutradhar* (master of ceremonies), who speaks directly to the audience and introduces the play by saying,

> [t]oday it is wonderful to see that so many gentlemen are taking their seats to watch. I will quickly relate to you gentlemen [what will happen] in the play … I will perform on the stage that drama which has been told in the last part of Maharishi Valmiki's *Ramayana* and in the *Ramcharitmanas* [by Tulsidas]. Swami Achutanand, founder of the Adi-Hindu movement, wrote this ancient story in the form of a drama and it has been revised by his great friend Sri Chandrika [Prasad] Jigyasu who added songs and published it. Today, showing this historical drama will present the audience with a naked picture of the reality of Ramrajya of the *Treta* age (ibid.: 6).

Like most Hindi Dalit reinterpretations of the *Ramkatha*, *Ramrajya nyaya* portrays Ram as a good king who aspires to 'do the right thing' and fulfil his dharmic duty as king, but is fundamentally unhappy and easily manipulated by his Brahman counsellors. The first act of the drama begins with King Ram lamenting the terrible plight of his famine-plagued kingdom. On this occasion, a Brahman enters the palace, and when he receives an audience with the king, he claims that his only son has died from the famine because people in the kingdom are not adhering to the Dharmashastra (the law of the Dharma as set out in the Vedas). He asks Ram,

> King, if you cannot stop the deadly famine, then why are you sitting on the throne of the kshatriya? … Don't you know how much greatness is accomplished by ruling as king according to the Dharm? Yet your rule is plagued with terrible misfortune. Brahmans are poor and there is sinning in your kingdom (ibid.: 4–5).

Played before a Dalit audience, the Brahman is automatically assumed to be an 'evil' and devious character who should not be trusted. The audience's expectation is fulfilled when the Brahman eventually convinces Ram that he is to blame for the death of his son and that the only way to set things right is for Ram to punish the low-caste ascetic Shambuk, whose yogic achievements and ascetic practices, as well as his preaching of Adi-Dharm to the original inhabitants (Adi Hindus), is against the Vedas and is causing the Shudras to revolt against the Brahmanical caste system.

In Act 3, the audience is introduced to the Achutanand's Adi Hindu ideology via a conversation between Shambuk and his wife Tungabhadra. Correcting Tungabhadra when she calls him *Aryaputra*,[12] Shambuk asserts,

> I am not [an] aryaputra! I am an original inhabitant of India. Do you not know me? The twice-borns robbed my father and gave him poverty. And doing without any possessions, he worked [as a servant] for a Brahman household. After 12 years of slavery that Brahman badly insulted him by not even touching his dishes (Achutanand n.d.: 16).

Here, Tungabhadra's role as a woman, ignorant of the fact that she is actually a descendant of the original inhabitants of India, provides an important way for Shambuk to speak to the audience through his wife, imparting Adi Hindu ideology and political consciousness. However, as the only female character in the play, Tungabhadra's role also portrays Dalit women as ignorant and apolitical, women who must learn how to be politically assertive in the 'correct way' from their husbands. Ironically, even after hearing the Adi Hindu ideology from Shambuk, Tungabhadra's assertion remains confined to a traditional woman's role. She does not contribute to the intellectual debate between Shambuk and Ram and after failing to save her husband's life, rather than take up his work (a common nationalist trope in Hindi literature of the 1920s and 1930s), she becomes a sati on her husband's funeral pyre.

During the conversation between Shambuk and Tungabhadra in Act 3, one of Shambuk's disciples enters to inform him of Ram's impending arrival at the ashram and the judgment which has been meted on Shambuk. However, instead of showing anger, Shambuk reassures the disciple and says that it will be a joy to have King Ram come to his ashram, even if it is to kill him. Readers might take

this as symbolic of the low-caste Shambuk's internalisation of caste hierarchy and a sign of the author's own acquiescence to the prevalent Hindu worship of Ram as the ideal ruler who can do no wrong. Quite the opposite, on Ram's arrival in Act 4, the author Achutanand uses the opportunity to show the Dalit Shambuk chastising King Ram for allowing himself to be manipulated by the Brahmans, when it is clear that Shambuk has not committed any crime. To emphasise the injustice of Ram's rule, Shambuk proclaims, 'I have committed no crime. I have not done violence or murder, neither have I stolen or committed adultery or arson or plunder or robbed or oppressed anyone'.[13] Comparing this injustice to the injustice Ram committed against Sita becomes an another important discursive tactic, as many Hindus view Sita as the ultimate example of purity and self-sacrifice even in the face of Ram's wrongful accusations. Through this comparison, Ram is portrayed as unjust and Shambuk is associated with Sita's innocence and maintains the moral high ground. However, Ram is unmoved by Shambuk's argument and, after one valiant effort by Tungbhadra to save her husband by leaping in front of him, Shambuk is slain by Ram's sword.

Similar to the Dalit masculinity portrayed by Dalit reinterpretations of the Aryan invasion, here, Dalit masculinity is embodied in a low-caste ascetic whose strength lies in his moral character, his inner commitment to stand up against injustice and his refusal to commit violence even in the face of death. By refusing to mimic the 'Hindu' masculinity embodied by King Ram, a masculinity which uses violence and physical force to take advantage of the weak and uphold injustice, the Dalit masculinity of Shambuk, reminiscent of Gandhi, further exposes the cruelty of Ram's rule. Ram himself is, in fact, emasculated in Dalit narratives, exposed as a puppet ruler who is continually manipulated by his Brahman counsellors and lacks a strong internal character of his own.

The drama ends with a *lavani* (popular song) reminding the audience that despite the greatness of Shambuk and his fundamental innocence, Ram is a 'slave of the twice-born' and thus the justice of Ramrajya (i.e., *Ram-rajya Nyaya*) ultimately protects the upper castes and is against the original inhabitants of India. Dalits are called to remember their old historical inheritance and to struggle for their rights themselves.

While *Ram-rajya Nyaya* is purposefully simplistic in style so that it could easily be performed, the play remains a powerful form of

transmitting Achutanand's Adi Hindu ideology, as it allows for the physical re-enactment of the injustice of Brahmanical society. Collapsing past and present in the performance of historical memory, the dramatic performance of Ram's killing of Shambuk creates the present experience for the Dalit audience of Dalit heroism and sacrifice. Portraying the character of Ram as weak and mentally enslaved by the Brahmans also serves to question the fundamental meaning of strength and weakness, freedom and enslavement. Is Ram, perhaps, more of a slave than the low-caste Shambuk? This is a question the audience is forced to ask as Shambuk remains free of the deceptions of the Brahmanical texts (the Vedas and *Manusmriti* are both mentioned), while Ram is forced to give up the joys of his earlier life in the forest with Sita to fulfil his duty as king and submit to the will of the Brahmans. Shifting the basic meaning of slavery and freedom to refer to an individual's mental or ideological state emphasises the thrust of Achutanand's ideology — that freedom for Dalits lies in the ideological rejection of Hindu philosophy and the 'remembering' of one's glorious past as the indigenous inhabitants of India. The reinterpretation of dominant meta-narratives through such a dramatic performance also represents the reversal of the internal aesthetic structure of the dominant narrative, where worldly events reflect a greater moral order, i.e., where the good and morally righteous hero wins. From the perspective of an oppressed community, real-world circumstances do not uphold a greater moral justice as the natural order, and in fact, reality represents the moral order in reverse — the good are defeated, albeit only temporarily, by the wicked.

Dalit writers across India have written counter-narratives reinterpreting the basic story of King Ram, including glorifying Ram's traditional enemy Ravana as the authentic indigenous ruler of ancient India who was invaded and overthrown by the Aryan ruler. Most famous among these renditions is the Tamil Dalit writer Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker's *Characters of the Ramayana*.[14] Periyar's version condemns Ram, Lakshman and Sita as immoral, power-hungry characters, while describing Ravana as a wise ruler and defender of social justice. According to Paula Richman, Periyar's pamphlet was 'intended to awaken South Indians to their oppression by North Indians and to their true identity as Dravidians'.[15] In *Characters of the Ramayana*, Periyar accuses Ram of fighting for the throne of Ayodhya due to an obsession with power. He condemns

Ram's treatment of Sita and Shudras, including Shambuk. On the other hand, he praises Ravana's great knowledge, his loyal protection of his family and subjects and his courageous acts in battle. First published in Tamil in 1930, the pamphlet was taken up by a writer and publisher of the Yadav jati called Periyar Lalai Singh who had been influenced by Dalit assertion efforts in north India, and acquired Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy's permission to republish the pamphlet in Hindi, retitled *Sacchi Ramayana* (The True Ramayana), from his Ashok Pustakalay press in 1968 (P. L. Singh 1968). According to Singh's biographer, the pamphlet created an uproar in north India and was banned by the UP government within a year of its publication. Singh filed a case with the Allahabad High Court to defend his right to continue publishing the pamphlet, and the Allahabad High Court eventually ruled in Singh's favour, withdrawing the confiscation order and compensating Singh Rs 300 (Aditya 1993: 44–45). Another case was lodged against Singh in 1973 for his pamphlet entitled *Sacchi Ramayan ki chabhi tatha Aryon ka naitikpol,* which was not resolved in his lifetime, but that did not prevent him from continuing to publish this work. Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu also published a 'toned-down' version of Periyar's work in Hindi, entitled *Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Nayakar: vyaktitva, vichar evan samajik kranti* (Periyar E.V. Ramaswamy Nayakar: personality, thought and social revolution) in 1973 (Jain 1973). The important influence of this translated text among Hindi Dalit writers is apparent even today, as Umesh Kumar, in his introduction to *Bhartiya Achambha* lists it among 'the books which have been of great contribution in writing the present text' (U. Kumar in Narayan and Misra 2004: 41).

A second Dalit drama on Ramrajya, entitled *Shambuk Vadh,* was written by Periyar Lalai Singh and Ram Avtar Pal in 1962 and had run into seven editions by 1991. While it is not entirely clear whether this drama was ever performed on stage, its continual scene changes and numerous characters would certainly have made the performance more complicated than Achutanand's play. *Shambuk Vadh* also allows for a greater development of individual characters. Ram himself is portrayed as a loving father who has simply overlooked the misdeeds of his children. Unlike in Achutanand's narrative, Ram is also much more assertive in the face of Brahman pressure to condemn Shambuk to death, protesting that, 'according to the theory of human rights, everyone has the right to perform

worship, feasts, rituals and ascetic exercises whether he is an Aryan or non-Aryan' (Singh and Pal in Narayan and Misra 2004: 183). Furthermore, Ram is given a complex interiority — he questions the validity of the Brahmans' accusations against Shambuk and wonders about his own legitimacy in meting out punishment. Even when faced with a potential Shudra revolt, Ram is only convinced to take action against Shambuk when he is commanded by his Brahman guru, Vashistha, a turn of events which ultimately emphasises the power of guru–shishya.

In *Shambuk Vadh,* the audience is also witness to the actual scheming of the Brahmans (which occur largely behind the scenes in Achutanand's drama) as a way to reinforce the dishonest character of Brahmans. The Brahman ascetic Narad orchestrates a plot to trick King Ram into believing that the only son of a Brahman has died due to Ram's disregard for the Dharmashastra. By persuading the Brahman Shivkanth to give his only son Shailendra medicine which will make him unconscious, Narad then goes to Ram, claiming that Ram himself was to blame for Shailendra's death and will be cursed unless he punishes the ascetic Shambuk for the crimes which have been committed in his kingdom. If Ram puts Shambuk to death, Narad assures him, the Brahman's son's life will be restored. As witness to this complex and murderous deception of the Brahmans, the audience of *Shambuk Vadh* is called to place the blame for Shambuk's death on the Brahmans, while King Ram remains guilty only in his misplaced trust of his Brahman counsellors.

Singh and Pal make several other important additions to the basic story of Ram and Shambuk in *Shambuk Vadh*. For instance, descriptions of Shambuk's activities are reminiscent of a Marxist revolutionary. While he remains a religious ascetic, Shambuk has also established an Adivasi Mahavidyalaya (College for Original Inhabitants) as well as a Social Uplift Committee, which has a military wing. The interaction between the group of Shambuk's Shudra disciples and the Aryan–Brahmans plays out as militia attacks, for example, when the Aryans attack the Social Uplift Committee office. In another instance, a disciple, Setu, reports to Shambuk,

> [t]he Aryans have come to know of our plans through their spies. We have come to know this through one of our highly trusted agents. Just when he was informing us of this, many Aryan soldiers attacked the Adivasi Dandkarnya School. The office of the Social Upliftment

> Committee has been plundered and destroyed … And in this riot, our comrade and Chairman of the Committee, Mundar, lost his life (Singh and Pal in Narayan and Misra 2004: 162).

Later, when Shambuk and his disciples discover the Brahman's plot to turn Ram against them, Shambuk advises,

> at the initial stage of the revolution, our opponents had no fears and anxieties but now the name Shambuk is haunting them day and night … But then why should you all worry about their anxieties? I have given you the orders … We need not delay anymore (ibid.: 178).

Written in 1962, the early years of what would soon become a decade of radical Marxist agitations with the Naxalite revolts in the late 1960s, this historical context clearly had an effect on the new interpretation of Shambuk as an ascetic, educator and revolutionary.

The radical nature of *Shambuk Vadh* also reaffirms the central place of education in Dalit writers' imagination of the struggle for freedom from caste oppression. Certainly, this attitude was largely influenced by Ambedkar's call to 'organise, educate and agitate', a slogan which named education as the vehicle, which could transform individual political consciousness. By focusing the majority of the narrative on the College for the Original Inhabitants, rather than on the confrontation between Ram and Shambuk, Singh and Pal emphasise the uselessness of engaging in dialogue with upper castes and, instead, focus on the importance of fighting along with one's own community against upper-caste domination and injustice.

During the course of the play, as a side-plot, a symbolic friendship also develops between Kundan, a Shudra follower of Shambuk, and the Brahman youth Shailendra (ironically, the very Brahman's son who is later implicated in the plot against Shambuk). The audience watches as Kundan grows from a dejected, uneducated youth into the most educated scholar in the kingdom and the chairman of the Social Upliftment Committee, all possible through his education and experience in Shambuk's college. Through conversations between Kundan and Shailendra, the audience is reminded of the fundamental casteism which exists even within the most open-minded members of the upper castes, and consequently Kundan's friendship with Shailendra ends with Kundan asserting his rights as an indigenous inhabitant of India by saying, 'You are insulting

me in my own house'. This proclamation represents the culmination of Kundan's studies and his achievement of true political consciousness.

The final confrontation between Shambuk and Ram in *Shambuk Vadh* is relatively short. In the last three short scenes, Ram is hardened in his resolve to kill Shambuk, and Shambuk accepts his fate without much protest as 'my duty to work for the rights of humanity and freedom of my brothers' (Singh and Pal in Narayan and Misra 2004: 185–86). On hearing of Shambuk's death, the Brahman Shivkanth administers a second medicine and his son Shailendra 'comes back to life', convincing Ram that his actions were justified. The final scene of the drama takes place at the cremation ground, where Shambuk's disciples Setu and Kundan discuss the future of the movement. Setu voices the potential fears of the Dalit audience regarding what happens to such a revolutionary Dalit movement once the leader dies. Kundan responded confidently, 'Those who are true, honest, dedicated, and are prepared to sacrifice, always [find] someone who is able to lead them with competence and confidence' (ibid.: 189). The fact that his drama was published in 1962, six years after Ambedkar's death, speaks volumes about the intended message of this last scene. In the face of the Dalit community's growing concerns about the lack of a new leader to unite them and the difficulties of the RPI to establish itself as a prominent political force in North India, particularly in rural areas, Kundan's final monologue calls upon the audience to continue Ambedkar's movement through individual dedication and activism. Ultimately, *Shambuk Vadh* relays the same fundamental message as Achutanand's narrative — that Ramrajya, or any state in the hands of the upper castes, protects the interests of the Brahmans and consequently, will always act against the rights of the lower castes.

More recent Dalit renditions of the story of Shambuk continue to incorporate contemporary concerns into re-imaginations of the Dalit past. S. L. Sagar's pamphlet entitled *Ramrajya Kaisa Tha?* (What was the nature of Ramrajya?) attempts to conform to the structural standards of mainstream historiography by assessing society during Ramrajya in terms of religion, social conduct, education, society and culture. According to Sagar's pamphlet, Ramrajya represented the antithesis of an ideal society as it saw the spread of superstition, senseless worship and belief in rebirth and karma.

Sagar positions Ramrajya as the historical context for the creation of the caste system and practice of untouchability, as well as increasing hierarchies within families (i.e., between older and younger members) and between genders. The time of Ram's reign was also a time of great oppression for women, according to Sagar, with the institution of *satipratha*,[16] as well as a lack of proper educational facilities, since there was only guru–shishya and even a lack of basic social infrastructure such as pukka roads, wells, and buildings. On top of this, Ram is criticised for eating meat and drinking wine. We see in this description not only a blatant attempt to be provocative towards upper-caste Hindu discourse, which idealises Ram as an *avatar* of Vishnu, but that Ramrajya comes to symbolise social decline, an antithesis of modernity as it is currently defined in terms of secular education, women's rights, modern infrastructure, social equality and religious rationalism. The importance of this assessment to its Dalit author is made clear in the introduction where Sagar writes, '[t]his book addresses the nature of Ramrajya and why savarn [upper-caste] Hindus continue to raise this slogan . . . I hope that the entire Shudra class becomes acquainted with the hypocrisy of the slogan of Ramrajya' (Sagar 1991: 3–4). The explicit aim of this reinterpretation of the past is to contest contemporary Hindutva discourse. Thus, discrediting the symbolic Hindutva ideal of Ramrajya becomes a provocative discursive strategy for Dalit writers such as Sagar to paint Hindutva as a feudal order, contrary to all notions of national modernity. As in his pamphlet *Hindu Videshi Hain* (Hindus are Foreigners), S. L. Sagar's *Ramrajya Kaisa Tha?* collapses the meanings of Hindu and Hindutva, labelling all upper-caste Hindus as supporters of the fundamentalist politics of the Hindu Right. In this way, Sagar draws black-and-white distinctions between the 'good' Dalits who uphold the democratic principles enshrined in the Indian nation and the 'bad' Hindus who act in their own self-interest and against the interests of the nation.

Furthermore, we have seen at the beginning of this chapter how Dr G. P. Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* (1994) moves from an account of the Dalit golden age and subsequent Aryan invasion to a second section, which describes society's subsequent deterioration, symbolised by the misrule of Ram and his crime against Shambuk. Prashant aligns his narrative with Ambedkar's ideology by portraying Shambuk as a Buddhist ascetic who 'had

established a school near his ashram in which he used to impart free education to Buddhists and Shudras' (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 81). Prashant shifts the meaning of the oppression from a struggle between the original inhabitants and the Aryans to one between Hindus and Buddhists. He employs the language of science to further legitimise his claims by writing,

> [c]ertainly they have succeeded in burning the Lanka of Ravana but there is a great difference between science and concoction. Every fact related to us is logical and scientific. Their imaginative writing will remain influential only [while] the people are illiterate and unscientific. Our knowledge of the Lord Buddha is based on discretion and science. [Hindus] can succeed in destroying our literature, *stupas* and monasteries. They can also destroy the Buddhists. But the message of Buddha can never be destroyed from the earth (ibid.).

Prashant's story proceeds along the lines of the typical Dalit narrative of Shambuk, where a devious group of Brahmans trick Ram into sentencing Shambuk to death by claiming that Shambuk's actions against Vedic strictures has led to the death of a young Brahman boy.[17] In Prashant's narrative, Shambuk's ultimate crime is described by Ram as

> against the rules of the scriptures you have started working against the Brahmans. You have opened a school. You organise meetings and advise people to revolt against the varna system. Instead of serving the Brahmans, you desire them to serve you (ibid.: 85).

The widespread recognition of Buddhism as the religion of politically conscious Dalits who follow Ambedkar has led to a proliferation of Buddhist thought in Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets, and the fact that Prashant was able to make such an easy comparison between the Adi Hindus or original inhabitants and Buddhists, and between the Aryans and Hindus, without altering the fundamental meaning of the narrative reveals the legitimacy that Buddhism has gained as an accepted Dalit trope within the field of Dalit literary pamphlets.

Prashant's narrative gives readers a new image of the Dalit woman. No longer a passive observer as in Achutanand's and Lalai Singh's dramas, Tungabhadra emerges in Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* as

an assertive equal in the Dalit community's fight for social equality. Thus, when several 'representatives of Shudras' come to seek Shambuk's advice regarding their severe social oppression, it is Tungbhadra who first asserts the ultimate authority of the lower castes over the land: 'Lord! What is happening? The earth, which was once ruled by our ancestors, is being snatched from us' (ibid.: 81). In other words, Tungabhadra has moved from the role of disciple to the position of teacher of Dalit ideology. She has become the exponent of Adi Hindu philosophy. While this transformation of Dalit women's gender role within Dalit pamphlet discourse cannot be directly linked to the efforts any single women's organisation or political party (such as the BSP, with its spokeswoman, Mayawati, directly in the public spotlight), the cumulative effect of such groups has certainly played a role in transforming the portrayal of Dalit women in such Dalit authored pamphlets.

Perhaps the most controversial Dalit author to rewrite the story of Ramrajya in the north Indian context is K. M. Sant, who has written a ten-booklet series which deconstructs the most important Hindu texts, also including the *Manusmriti,* Bhagavad Gita, *Ramcharitamanas* and Mahabharata. Originally from Aligarh district, Sant is the son of a Jatav kisan family, who completed a BA from Agra College in 1964 and worked for the UP government for twenty-three years as an IAS officer before recently retiring. He claims, 'I am trying to change the ideological thinking of people which is against society, the country and against the Constitution . . . by analysing the thinking of the Hindus'.[18] By speaking from the position of a citizen whose primary commitment is to the democratic interests of the nation, Sant's series of literary pamphlets, like Sagar's, positions Dalits as defenders of the nation. His first book, *Bharatiya Sanvidhan Banam Manusmriti* (The Indian Constitution versus the *Manusmriti*) was self-published in 1998 and was in its third edition in 2001. In it, he emphasises the vast influence the *Manusmriti* has had over Indian society for 2,000 years, particularly in its ideological support of the caste system. According to Sant, the *Manusmriti* was written with the underlying intention of upholding upper-caste rule and consequently gives the ability to gain knowledge, wealth and skills only to upper castes. Sant asserts,

> Manu's social system is obviously contrary to national unity . . . When Manu, in the *Manusmriti*, encourages things which are contrary to the

> existing laws of our country's social system, it produces instability in national unity and [threatens] the integrity of the country (Sant 1990: 46–48).

Since the success of *Bhartiya Sanvidhan Banam Manusmriti* in 1998, Sant's booklets have all been published by small Dalit presses, including Dalit Today Prakashan and Jetavan Prakashan in Lucknow, and sell for between Rs 15–80 per booklet. More than 12,000 copies of his booklets have currently been sold throughout North India, including Nagpur, Patna, Delhi, Lucknow, and Haryana.[19] While they were immediately popular with their Dalit audience, it seems that the wider controversy over K. M. Sant's series didn't start until the publication of *Ramayana ke Mahapatra* (The Great Characters of the Ramayana) in 2002, which Sant distributed at the International Conference of Buddhists in Bhopal, MP, that same year. This 135-page booklet argues that Hindu texts (especially those which came after the Vedas and Upanishads) perpetuate belief in the caste system, as well as the oppression of women, and are therefore acting against the basic principles of the Indian Constitution. In this booklet, Sant particularly targets Valmiki's *Ramayana* as a text which idealises a character most Hindus believe to be an *avatar* (reincarnation) of the god Vishnu. Sant, instead, claims that Ram is undeserving of such respect and spends the majority of *Ramayana ke Mahapatra* examining Ram's character by quoting from the *Ramayana* and placing these references under headings such as: 'Was Ram brave or not?'; 'Sri Ram was selfish'; 'King Ram was guilty of great crimes'; 'Sri Ram was an imperialist'; and 'Sri Ram was unrighteous' (Sant 2002: 46–63).

Sant attempts to create discursive connections between the Dalit movement and the women's movement by repeatedly pairing belief in the caste system and disrespect of women as two feudal practices which Hindu texts support. Sant writes,

> [o]n this all agree, that the related ideology of women's oppression and the caste system has been extremely harmful to Hindu society and to India, and if the characters of Hindu literature support the slavery of women and the caste system, then the inner character of these figures is undeserving [of praise] (ibid.: 6).

Sant further emphasises his point by comparing Ram's unjust banishment of Sita (an act which many Hindus also believe is unjust)

to Ram's murder of Shambuk. This is an astute narrative strategy in the contemporary Indian context, where the women's movement has made decisive strides and has created a pervasive awareness that the oppression of women is wrong. Such a comparison between Sita and Shambuk, and between the contemporary oppression of Dalits and the oppression of women, means that the social legitimacy of the women's movement can be transferred to the Dalit cause — and that both can be used by Sant to emphasise Ram's 'bad' character. Still, as we shall discuss further in chapters Three and Five, the lack of a real working relationship between Dalit and women activists complicates the comparison Sant proposes on the page. In fact, Sant's insinuations of sexual relations between Sita and Ravana in *Ramayana ke Mahapatra*, as a way of emphasising the low moral character of upper-caste figures in Hindu texts, reveals a continuation of patriarchal attitudes within Dalit discourse.

The Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh in 2002, Digvijay Singh, immediately banned the sale of *Ramayana ke Mahapatra* in the state and registered a case against both the author and publisher due to the work's 'inflammatory' contents and its 'derogatory references to Ram'.[20] The police were even sent to Lucknow to arrest the author. The reaction against this book by the state surprised Sant, who was quoted in an article in *The Telegraph* claiming, 'During 1998–2002, eight books were published and each time I informed the state governments headed by Kalyan Singh, Ram Prakash Gupta and Rajnath Singh in accordance with the code of conduct for civil servants'.[21] However, in an interview, Sant explained how he was able to subvert the state's law, which forbids government servants to participate in political activities, by writing literature (see Chapter One). Sant positioned himself as the ideal Indian citizen fighting for the modern principles of freedom of speech and constitutional democracy and against the feudal caste system, remarking that, 'In my book I am giving the choice, either you follow the principle of the Indian Constitution, or you follow the principles of the Hindu society which is anti-human and anti-national'.[22]

Dalit Heroes and Heroines of the First War of Indian Independence 1857

Stories of Dalit heroes and heroines who took part in the revolt of 1857, now popularly known as the First War of Indian Independence,

make up an important part of Dalit history-writing within the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature. By replacing established heroes and heroines of the nationalist movement with Dalit ones, biographies of Dalit heroes and heroines of 1857 proclaim the invaluable role the Dalit community played in the national freedom movement. Portraying Dalits as integral to the making of the modern Indian nation, Hindi Dalit pamphlets depict Dalits as the most patriotic, courageous and self-sacrificing freedom fighters and thus, the most devoted citizens in contemporary India.[23] As Badri Narayan has argued, inserting Dalit heroes and heroines into the mainstream Indian nationalist narrative is an extremely significant political statement, in which Dalit writers assert their authority to narrate the story of the nation's birth and claim an important role in its creation (Narayan 2004). Additionally, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers contend with the tension in these heroic tales between desires to mark the Dalit community as unique and the desire to belong to the nation by linking the Dalit hero/heroine's local and jati identities to broader Dalit and Indian identities.

Badri Narayan has astutely noted that Dalit versions of the nationalist movement attempt to 'dethrone established heroes' and replace them with even more courageous Dalit heroes and heroines (ibid.: 3537). An excellent example of this trend is Hindi Dalit pamphlet writer D. C. Dinkar's *Svatantrata Sangram Main Achuton Ka Yogdan, do shabd* (Some Words on the Contribution of 'Untouchables' to the Independence Struggle), published by Bodhisatva Prakashan in Lucknow in 1990, which argues that Dalits are more willing to sacrifice for their country than other communities and this is why more Dalits died in the freedom struggle than anyone else. In a description of how the 1857 rebellion began, Dinkar claims that one day Matadin Bhangi, a Dalit worker at the Barrackpore military cantonment where rifle cartridges were manufactured, asked for a drink of water. When he was refused by an upper-caste man because he was an 'untouchable', Matadin Bhangi retorted that the cartridges the high and mighty upper-caste soldiers bit every day were made of the fat of cows and pigs, so how pure could they be? (ibid.). Thus ensued the well-known narrative of the soldier Mangal Pandey, who began the revolt of 1857 by refusing to load his Enfield rifle because of the rumour that its cartridges were made of the fat of cows and pigs (Bose and Jalal 1998). Dinkar writes, 'That untouchable was none other than

Matadin Bhangi who opened the eyes of the Indian soldier and ignited the first spark of revolt' (Narayan 2004: 3537). The historical narrative by D. C. Dinkar ends by acknowledging the martyrdom of both Mangal Pandey and Matadin Bhangi. However, the heroism of Mangal Pandey is replaced in this Dalit narrative by the heroism of Matadin Bhangi, who is invested with superior knowledge of the true materials of the cartridges and a greater understanding of the nature of British oppression.[24]

Stories of Dalit women who became courageous freedom fighters during the 1857 revolt also abound in the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field. These stories were revived by Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers from the 1960s as Dalit history became ever more important in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature. Since then, and particularly from the 1990s, these stories of Dalit heroines have been used by the BSP to enhance and popularise the image of Mayawati as a leader of the BSP (Narayan 2006). Mahaviri Bhangi, for instance, is described as an uneducated but intelligent and brave Dalit woman from Mundbhar village in Muzaffarnagar district. Despite her deprived circumstances, Mahaviri Bhangi formed an association of Dalit women who protested their low-status by refusing to continue in their traditional occupations. When the British attacked Muzaffarnagar district, these women defended their village with their lives and all died heroically. Thus, Mahaviri Bhangi is praised in Hindi Dalit pamphlets for her dual fight for her nation and for the rights of her caste community.[25]

One of the most well-known Dalit heroine is Jhalkaribai, the courageous woman who risked her own life to help the Rani of Jhansi escape from the British during the 1857–58 siege of the Jhansi fort by British troops. Her story is told in many Hindi Dalit pamphlets including *Virangana Jhalkaribai* by Bhavani Shankar Visharad published by Anand Sahitya Sadan from Aligarh in 1964 (Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004). The story of the Rani of Jhansi's bravery in defending the city of Jhansi from the British in the name of *swaraj* (independence) has become the stuff of national legend and has been famously recounted in Vrindavanlal Varma's Hindi novel *Jhansi ki Rani Lakshmibai*.[26] In fact, Dalit pamphlet writer Bhavani Shankar Visharad's account of the story of Jhalkaribai in his *Virangana Jhalkaribai* has an important intertextual relationship with Varma's novel as a source of inspiration

and verification, as well as a basis of the thematic structure for his own narrative (Narayan 2006: 120). In Dalit narratives, the traditional heroine, the Rani of Jhansi, is not demonised — in fact, she is favourably compared to Jhalkaribai — but she is replaced by the Dalit Jhalkaribai, as the 'true' heroine of Jhansi. The striking physical resemblance between the Rani and Jhalkaribai is mirrored not only in a similar interiority (i.e., morality, bravery) but also in a parallel transformation of two ordinary women into national heroines. Like the Rani, Jhalkaribai is described as a brave and impetuous child who grew up listening to stories of chivalry and heroism. Upon her marriage, Jhalkaribai adopted the traditional wifely role of *pativrata*, rising early to grind flour, fetch water and working late into the night when her husband began to neglect his work to practise wrestling (Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004: 136). In *Virangana Jhalkaribai*, Visharad makes a direct comparison between Jhalkaribai's sacrifice and the Rani's, who was similarly 'grief-stricken as her husband [the Maharajah] had given himself to worldly pleasures, [spending] most of his time enjoying dances and song [while] the Maharani was absorbed in the question of the future of Jhansi' (ibid.).

Visharad's narrative relates that after their first meeting at the palace during the celebration of the festival *Basant Panchami*, a deep friendship grew between the Rani and Jhalkaribai. The Rani taught Jhalkaribai archery, hunting and shooting and, in return, Jhalkaribai proved an excellent advisor to the queen. Jhalkaribai had to face several trials on the path to true heroism. First, she was almost excommunicated from her community and forced to leave Jhansi when a stray bullet injured a cow during her shooting practice. When the Rani investigated on her behalf, however, it was discovered that the cow was still alive and well, and the community was forced to revoke its punishment. Then, when the British led by General Rose besieged Jhansi, Jhalkaribai joined the women's army, recruited her husband Puran, and together they courageously defended the fort. Like Varma's novel, Visharad's *Virangana Jhalkaribai* emphasises the development of Jhalkaribai's character as Jhalkaribai grows from an ordinary Dalit woman concerned with wifely duties to a courageous Dalit heroine who recognises her duty to the nation (Orsini 2002: 219; Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004).

The heroic culmination of Visharad's *Virangana Jhalkaribai* comes when Jhansi falls to the British due to a traitor among the ranks. Jhalkaribai takes it upon herself to save the Rani of Jhansi. Aided by her striking resemblance to the Rani, she disguises herself as the queen and proceeds on horseback to the cantonment of General Rose, proclaiming herself to be the Rani of Jhansi. By diverting attention, the Rani is able to escape from the fort with the intention of collecting more troops to return and retake Jhansi. When Jhalkaribai is discovered to be an impostor, the British general threaten to execute her. However, she replies that she is not afraid of death and, impressed by her honour and bravery, General Rose decides to release Jhalkaribai. The tale ends with the celebration of Dalit heroine as Jhalkaribai lives a long life in Naya Purva in Jhansi where she is revered by all who knew her, fulfilling a *baba*'s prophecy that her name would be remembered throughout history. Even though the rani did not succeed in justifying Jhalkaribai's sacrifice by retaking Jhansi and was instead killed in battle, Visharad mentions these events as a side note after the final culmination of the narrative, a narrative strategy which maintains Jhalkaribai's heroism as the focal point of the narrative.

Although *Virangana Jhalkaribai* introduces a new character to the field of Dalit pamphlet literature, that of the Dalit heroine, the narrative remains bound by a continuation of gender stereotypes. For instance, even in the midst of her heroism, Jhalkaribai remained first and foremost a wife who conformed to traditional notions of *stridharma*. Thus, on the occasion of Basant Panchami, Jhalkaribai went to the palace to see the statue of the goddess Gauri 'with her face veiled' (Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004: 137). Visharad takes pains to show that Jhalkaribai's devotion to the Rani did not impinge on her loyalty to her husband, Puran. Thus, while Jhalkaribai learned many of her military skills from the Rani, it was her husband Puran who completed her training by teaching her sword-fighting (ibid.: 139). On the eve of battle with the British, although the Rani wanted Jhalkaribai to help her lead the troops, Jhalkaribai remained with her husband to guard the northern gate (ibid.: 143). In this sense, Visharad's Dalit heroine is limited by the message that a lower-caste woman can only be a true heroine of the nation if she accepts that her first duty is to her husband, that her character as a Dalit heroine is largely determined by her sexual modesty and

that the most heroic actions for Dalit women are those done for the benefit of others.

In addition, Visharad's *Virangana Jhalkaribai* sets itself apart from many other Dalit pamphlets in its portrayal of Jhalkaribai's identity, not as Dalit, but as a Kori (her jati community) and an Indian. For instance, when the Rani of Jhansi first asks Jhalkaribai to introduce herself, Jhalkaribai replies 'I am a Korin' and only later reveals her name (Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004: 138). The importance of her local identity is also emphasised in Jhalkaribai's confrontation with General Rose where her bravery is attributed to 'the identity of the soil of Bundelkhand' (ibid.: 147). Neither is Visharad politically assertive about Jhalkaribai's caste identity. In fact, his narrative plays into several caste stereotypes, including the belief that Dalits have darker skin than the upper castes when he writes, 'Her features were such that resembled the Rani. The only conspicuous difference was between the complexion of the two. Unlike Jhalkaribai, [the] Rani had a highly fair complexion' (ibid.: 135). *Virangana Jhalkaribai* also includes a strange commentary over the issue of access for lower-caste women to the Rani's palace during the festival of Basant Panchami. Although women of all castes were allowed to enter the Ganesh and Shiva temple, only two lower-caste communities were allowed into the Rani's chambers — the Koris and the Kumhars, since Visharad explains, 'Koris and Kumhars were never considered untouchables in the Bundelkhand region' (ibid.: 137). There is no further commentary on the fact that members of the Bhangi, Chamar and Basaur jatis were excluded from the Rani's celebrations, making the narrative seem highly unpolitical in terms of wider notions of Dalit rights.

Myriad pamphlets recounting the lives of Dalit heroes and heroines from various regions and various jatis circulate within the field Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature. On Jhalkaribai, these also include D. C. Dinker's *Svatantrata Sangram Main Achuton Ka Yogdan, do shabd* (1990), Chokhe Lal Verma's *Jhalkaribai Natak* (1990), Mata Prasad's *Virangana Jhalkaribai Kavya* (1993) and Bihari Lal Harit's *Virangana Jhalkari* (1995) (Narayan 2006: 126). Purchasing one pamphlet on Jhalkaribai at a local Dalit mela, a Dalit reader also encounters pamphlets of various other local Dalit heroes. Thus, while individual pamphlets on Dalit heroes and heroines of 1857 emphasise local jati identity, the pamphlet field as a whole exerts an influence on Dalit readers to connect these individual stories to

broader conceptions of Dalit identity, and thus creates sense of a wider 'Dalit' contribution to the national freedom movement. In this way, the Dalit community, through its representative heroes and heroines, are reconceptualised as the most heroic community through their sacrifices during the nationalist movement. Each local Dalit hero and heroine is simultaneously held up as a 'national' hero. Again taking the example of Jhalkaribai, Visharad's Hindi Dalit pamphlet depicts this Dalit heroine calling on the women in her military battalion to enter battle with the slogan 'Bharat Mata ki Jai' (Victory to Mother India) on their lips (Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004: 144). Visharad explains the true heroism of Jhalkaribai when he writes,

> [s]he set an example by moving from the confines of the four walls and *purdah* for women and taught them the lessons of their larger role in history and society. Not only this, she also set an example of national unity by rising above her caste and revealing . . . the futility of discrimination on this basis (ibid.: 147).

The sacrifices of Dalit heroes and heroines are simultaneously aimed at freeing the Dalit community from oppression under the caste system and freeing the nation from oppression under British colonial rule.

Pamphlets on Dalit heroes and heroines of 1857 also create valuable links for their low-caste audience between local and the national identities. While they highlight each hero and heroine's jati identity and ground that hero in the specific region of his/her birthplace, they also emphasise the important role even a single individual can play in the movement against untouchability, as well as in the history of the nation. In this sense, they differ from Hindi Dalit pamphlets on ancient India (i.e., on the Aryan invasion or Ramrajya), which emphasise a broad and inclusive Dalit identity based on non-Hindu indigeneity. Narayan has also shown how these Dalit heroes and heroines were initially used by the BSP 'to mobilise the specific caste groups to which they belonged, but gradually they were transformed into icons for the entire Dalit community' (Narayan 2006: 86). As we shall see, this emphasis on local identity in no way devalues the importance of the wider and more inclusive 'Dalit' identity in these pamphlets. In fact, the vast number of pamphlets describing Dalit heroes and heroines in national

struggles across north India paint a picture of a wider 'Dalit' assertion effort integral to the Indian nationalist movement. In other words, while remaining unmistakably local, these narratives connect individual and jati identities to larger Dalit and Indian ones, providing their audiences with an understanding that jati identity, Dalit identity and Indian identity are interconnected rather than mutually exclusive. In this way, they create for the individual reader a powerful language of belonging both to the Dalit community as a separate and courageous community and to the modern Indian nation. This encourages members of the audience to imagine themselves as part of larger communities (i.e., Dalits and Indians) even as they continue to 'feel local'.

The birthplace of Dalit freedom fighters remains a carefully recorded part of their story in Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets, and thus, each hero and heroine from 1857 is connected to a particular village. For example, Banke Chamar, who participated in the 1857 revolt, was from the village of Kuarpur near Jaunpur; Amar Shahid Vira Pasi was born in the village of Datia Khera of Rae Bareli district; and Mahaviri Bhangi, a Dalit woman who fought the British at Muzaffarnagar, was from the village of Mundbhar in Tehsil Karano of Muzaffarnagar district (Narayan 2004). Dalit pamphlet writers also emphasise the local origins of their tales, describing how research for these stories was conducted in the local regions themselves. For example, Bhavani Shankar Visharad, author of the Hindi Dalit pamphlet on Dalit heroine Jhalkaribai, describes how he wandered through Naya Purva, the locality where Jhalkaribai supposedly lived, on numerous occasions, collecting people's stories. In an introduction, he writes,

> I again went to Nayapurva when, fortunately, we met a very old woman named Manno Bai who belonged to the same *gotra* [subcaste] to which Jhalkari belonged. She narrated to me all that she had heard from her mother-in-law. Through Manno Bai we met Jugatri Bai, the oldest lady in the area. She told in detail the problems which Puran [Jhalkari's husband] had to face during the mutiny (Visharad in Narayan and Misra 2004: 133).

Like many oral narratives, older Dalit women seem to be the keepers of this heroic history, and the audience of the Dalit pamphlets is thus given an image of Dalit history being exhumed from the recesses of north India, marginalised from the mainstream historical

narrative, but not lost.[27] Thus, the stories of the local Dalit heroes originate in a local and oral context, and the audience of these pamphlets are thus left with an important sense of the revival of Dalit history, of local Dalit heroes and heroines taking up their proper place in the mainstream historical narrative, of Dalits becoming part of the nation.

A New 'Father of the Nation': The Life History of Babasaheb Ambedkar

While Dalit history begins by locating the Dalit community as the indigenous inhabitants of ancient India it ends with the life story of Dr Ambedkar. In the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature, the repeated writings and rewritings of the story of Ambedkar's life continue to be among the most popular. To give only one example, Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's pamphlet entitled *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangharsh* first published in 1961, has been consistently republished in print runs of 1,000 copies through its sixteenth edition in 1995.[28] While each narrative account certainly has its own style and nuanced interpretation, the continual retelling (or rereading) of what is essentially the same narrative of Ambedkar's life story has an important function in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature. On the one hand, Hindi Dalit narratives invite Dalit readers to associate with Ambedkar's early childhood as representative of the experiences of all Dalits. In this way, Dalit narratives on Ambedkar's life serve as a means of explaining what it means to be a Dalit in contemporary India, where Dalit life is marked by the experience of caste discrimination. The path to overcome this oppression, as exemplified by Ambedkar, is Dalit political consciousness which empowers the individual to fight against the oppressive caste system. On the other hand, Ambedkar's role as law minister in Nehru's first Indian government and his position as head of the Constitutional Draft Committee solicit a reverence among Dalit readers for Ambedkar as the most celebrated Dalit leader and reinforce Dalits' contribution to the creation of the Indian nation. Thus, Dalit pamphlet writers use the story of Ambedkar's life both to document the history of the 20th-century Dalit assertion movement, as well as to place Ambedkar as the true 'Father of the Nation'. These Dalit accounts of Ambedkar's life history make a powerful collective statement

regarding Ambedkar's central importance in Indian national history and insist that his legacy will not be forgotten.

Within the Dalit pamphlet field, histories of Ambedkar's early life provide Dalit audiences with a means of understanding their own experiences as 'Dalits' in contemporary India, as Dalit authors and audiences of these pamphlets are invited to associate their own life experiences with Ambedkar's early life history as a marginalised individual who must struggle for basic human rights. Narratives on Ambedkar's early life, including Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangarsh*, G. P. Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* (The Story of the Original Descendants; 1994), and Shanti Swarup Bauddh's *Sachitra Bhim Jivani* (The Illustrated Life of Ambedkar; 2002) as well as the mainstream comic book on Ambedkar's life, Amar Chitra Katha's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* (1994), are all punctuated by several key moments where Ambedkar faces caste discrimination. As a child, the audiences are told, Ambedkar's father encouraged him to follow his desire for an education, but because he was a Dalit, Ambedkar was forced to sit on the floor at school and was not allowed to touch the chalk used to write on the blackboard. On one occasion, Ambedkar tried to drink from a communal water jug but was told he could only drink if his hands were cupped and the water was poured from high above, so it would not become polluted by his touch. On another occasion, Ambedkar and his older brother were waiting for their father at a train station and when he did not arrive, they tried to ride into town on an oxen-cart; however, when the driver discovered that they were Mahars, he angrily refused to let them ride (or in other versions, the two brothers had to drive the cart themselves while the driver walked behind them). Thus, as a child, Ambedkar is shown to have faced the caste discrimination typically experienced by Dalits across India.

By portraying Ambedkar as a young boy who must face the trials and hardships of every Dalit, Dalit audiences are invited to identify their own experiences of caste discrimination with those of Ambedkar thus, giving Dalit readers a way of understanding their own lives as Dalits. In this way, Hindi Dalit pamphlets on Ambedkar's life story function in the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature in much the same way that Dalit autobiographies function in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature (see Chapter Four). However, unlike Dalit autobiographies, pamphlets

on Ambedkar rely on the individual experiences of a famous Dalit hero rather than an 'anonymous Dalit' to make a political statement against the caste system. Thus, while Dalit autobiographies speak to middle-class audiences and Dalit readers are called only to identify with the narrative's protagonist, Dalit pamphlets on Ambedkar implicate their Dalit audiences in a complex process of simultaneous identification and distancing.

What made Ambedkar different from his Dalit contemporaries, these narratives explain, is that he transformed instances of discrimination from experiences of oppression into a new path of growing political consciousness. At each point, Ambedkar questioned these discriminatory actions on the basis of his childish naivety and instinctive sense of human rights — why were others allowed to sit at desks in school, drink water from the communal jug, ride on the oxen-cart and he was not? Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangarsh*, for example, frames the incidents where Ambedkar faced caste discrimination at school, at the well, and on the oxen-cart as poignant life-altering moments on Ambedkar's path to political consciousness. Political consciousness, for Dalit narratives, means realising the inescapability of one's caste identity and this is portrayed in Ambedkar's life story as an individual process of discovering not only how caste discrimination affects every aspect of Dalits' lives, but also how to fight against this social injustice. Although the emphasis remains on caste discrimination, Jigyasu's narrative also makes an effort to show how economic oppression has been implicated in supporting caste hierarchy, as Ambedkar's family's poor financial situation meant that he could not attend high school or university without financial assistance.[29] Another example is Shanti Swarup Bauddh's pamphlet *Sachitra Bhim Jivani,* which also uses the naivety expected of early childhood as a narrative strategy to denaturalise untouchability.[30] In Bauddh's pamphlet, Ambedkar realises that although he is a human being, he is not treated equally because of his caste identity as a Mahar. For example, after being thrown from a bullock cart when the driver realised that Ambedkar was of 'untouchable' caste, Ambedkar is depicted thinking to himself, 'Why can't I ride like everyone else. Am I not also human? Will being a Mahar always stand in my way?' (Bauddh 2002: 10). Bauddh's pamphlet also relies on visual imagery to convey the story of Ambedkar's life, positioning each page of text next to a pictorial representation of the scene. Visual drawings and textual narratives

work together in this pamphlet as the image immediately hits the audience with the main message of the page, while the complimentary text provides explanation, nuance, interiority to the characters and increased emotionality of the scene.

Bauddh's pamphlet is particularly interesting when read alongside the mainstream comic series' Amar Chitra Katha's version of Ambedkar's life story entitled *Babasaheb Ambedkar*. Amar Chitra Katha comics were founded in the 1960s by Anant Pai in Bombay. They were first targeted at an upper-middle-class audience, and thus the comics are first written in English and then translated into Indian vernaculars, depending on the demand (Pritchett 1998). In their work on Amar Chitra Katha, both Frances W. Pritchett and John Stratton Hawley also note the pro-Hindu tone of the comic series (Hawley 1998; Pritchett 1998). Amar Chitra Katha's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* is also largely reliant on pictorial representations to tell the history of Ambedkar's life, since comics as a genre allow for only a small amount of text to clarify the picture's meaning. However, unlike the Dalit 'comic' by Bauddh, which uses the text to nuance the image on the opposite page and increases the emotionality of the story, Amar Chitra Katha's comic on Ambedkar distances its audience from the story, creating a largely unemotional representation of caste discrimination. Depicting the various scenes where Ambedkar faces discrimination as a child in rural settings helps to further distance the mainstream urban reader from feeling implicated in the continuation of untouchability by positioning it 'far away' in the village.

In addition, the story of Ambedkar's life in the Amar Chitra Katha comic remains historically bound in pre-Independence India and makes no attempt to link Ambedkar's experiences of caste discrimination to the present (as we have seen in Dalit narratives). This allows for a reading of caste discrimination as something which was pervasive in the past but is no longer present in contemporary Indian society. In other words, the mainstream Hindi comic on Ambedkar's life dissociates Ambedkar's experiences of untouchability from the present, a stark contrast to the Dalit pamphlets on Ambedkar's life, which encourage readers to associate their contemporary experiences of discrimination with those of Ambedkar.

While lower and middle-class Dalit readers are invited to identify with Ambedkar's early life, as the narrative moves into Ambedkar's adulthood, Dalit audiences are called to distance themselves from

Ambedkar's life in their worship of him as an unparalleled Dalit leader who earned a PhD abroad, became the first law minister in the newly independent Indian government and served as head of the Draft Committee for the Indian Constitution.[31] This is particularly apparent in the fourth section of G. P. Prashant's *Mul Vansha Katha* entitled 'Boddhisattva Bharat Ratna Baba Saheb Dr Bhim Raoji Ambedkar' where Ambedkar is portrayed as a godlike saviour of the Dalit community (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 92–98). Although other Dalit narratives show less religious devotionalism, the portrayal of Ambedkar as an unparalleled Dalit leader remains the consistent reading.

In this way, Dalit histories of Ambedkar's life portray a character who transforms from an 'average' Dalit into the most revered Dalit leader and national hero, emphasising that a certain kind of political consciousness can be a means of moving beyond the 'average' Dalit life of oppression. In other words, just as Ambedkar's life story begins with a sense of identification as a member of a marginalised community, it also reveals how to overcome this oppression. Thus, with the help of his liberal Brahman teacher, Ambedkar gains a scholarship from a local maharaja and travels to the United States and then to London for higher education, where he experiences a life 'without caste'. However, upon his return to India, Ambedkar discovers that neither his PhD nor his high government post matter as much as his low-caste identity. It is at this point, the Dalit narratives reveal, that Ambedkar realises the deep social injustice of the caste system embarks on a new path of social and political assertion.

The history of Ambedkar's life also functions in the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature as representative of the history of the contemporary Dalit movement in general, as Ambedkar's adult life is charted less by personal episodes than by the social and political campaigns of the Dalit movement in west India. This is exemplified by Jigyasu's pamphlet, *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangarsh,* which begins with a timeline of Ambedkar's life. While the timeline begins with Ambedkar's personal academic achievements, it quickly shifts to listing events such as the September 1927 burning of the *Manusmriti*, the March 1929 Kaliram Temple protest, the Round Table Conferences, the Poona Pact, the establishment of the Independent Labour Party and the conversion to Buddhism in Nagpur on 14 October 1956 — events which mark the major

achievements of the Dalit movement as a whole (Jigyasu 1961: 4). Three events in particular are used to exemplify Ambedkar's social activism and leadership of the Dalit movement: the burning of the Manusmriti, the Mahad well *satyagraha* and the Kaliram temple entry campaign. While Hindi Dalit narratives describe each event in detail, Amar Chitra Katha's mainstream comic carefully avoids derogatory references to Hinduism and thus only shows the Mahad well satyagraha, where Ambedkar and a crowd of Dalit activists symbolically drink from a communal village well. Although the comic acknowledges the violent response of the local community against this act with a picture of a crowd hurling rocks at Ambedkar's followers, this scene is also used in a subtle way to position Ambedkar along the same ideological lines as Gandhi, as the next illustration shows Ambedkar convincing his angry and injured followers to remain peaceful and non-violent (A. Pai 1994: 22).

Amar Chitra Katha's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* continues throughout the rest of the comic to down-play Ambedkar's anti-Hindu sentiments as well as his antagonism with Gandhi.[32] In contrast, Dalit pamphlets on Ambedkar's life emphasise Ambedkar's anti-Hindu stance as a major part of achieving political consciousness. Ambedkar's conflict with Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference over the issue of separate electorates for Dalits is also examined in detail, portraying Gandhi as a supporter of upper-caste Hindus while Ambedkar is depicted as the true protector of Dalit rights. In much the same way, while Ambedkar's public conversion to Buddhism is downplayed in the mainstream comic, in Dalit narratives, it is depicted as the final achievement of freedom from Hindu oppression.

Although Ambedkar's assertion efforts were largely confined to western India, Ambedkar is portrayed in Hindi Dalit pamphlets as an all-India Dalit leader. Eleanor Zelliot has written, 'outside of Maharashtra, [Ambedkar] has no specific caste . . . He belongs to all Dalits, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians. Neither is he considered Maharashtrian; he is all Indian' (Zelliot 2001: 138). Ambedkar's status as a pan-Dalit, pan-Indian political leader makes him an essential part of the attempt to unite all SC jatis under one Dalit identity, and narrating the life story of Ambedkar becomes a way for Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers to construct a Dalit identity out of various jati and regional affiliations. However, not all members of SC jati communities consider Ambedkar to be their leader, or for

his early life history to be representative of their own. For instance, while their dissenting voices do not enter the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlets, a Hindi Dalit writer publishing in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature addresses this issue in his fictional writing. Surajpal Chauhan's short story 'Baharupiya' (The Buffoon) recounts an occasion in which Chauhan gave a speech in a Valmiki (i.e. Bhangi) neighbourhood in Delhi on the occasion of Ambedkar Jayanti. Being from the Bhangi jati himself, Chauhan believed he was helping his community by spreading Ambedkar's views on education and political consciousness. However, he recalls that one man stood up from the crowd and shattered his perception by proclaiming, '[y]ou have the perspective of a Chamar and are speaking from the Chamar point of view. *Arre*, you fool, our guru and god is Maharishi Valmiki Swami. What do we want from Dr. Ambedkar? Stop this stupid babble' (Chauhan 2001: 125). In this short story, the oral contestation of Ambedkar as the leader of all Dalits by members of another SC jati community is clear. Pamphlets expressing such a negative viewpoint of Dr Ambedkar do not circulate within this particular field of Dalit pamphlet literature, since the field is supported by Ambedkar loyalists. Instead, Chauhan's short story suggests that such textual contestations of Ambedkar as a leader of all SC jatis circulate among a different audience in separate spaces (such as at the Valmiki Mandir in Delhi) and take the form of textual support for alternative heroes such as Maharishi Valmiki. Chauhan recalls his shock when he finally saw the edition of the journal *Valmiki Jyoti* produced by members of the Bhangi community. He writes, '[i]n the name of Dalit literature, there were articles on Valmiki, Swami Dayanand, Saraswati Vivekanand, Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Hedgewar [founder of the RSS]. I had given one article on Dr. Ambedkar for the magazine which was not there' (Chauhan 2001: 128). The editor of the journal, Dr Ramsevak, responded to Chauhan's disappointment by explaining,

> [i]n Valmiki society, talking about Dr. Ambedkar is foolish. What has he done for Valmikis? Whatever he has done, he has done for Chamars . . . You should know that the facilities which Dalits are getting in the name of reservation are going only to Chamars' (ibid.: 128–29).

Chauhan's short story, which he maintains is based on a real-life experience, reveals the limitations of the purportedly inclusive Dalit identity and of Ambedkar as an all-Indian Dalit leader.[33]

Finally, Hindi Dalit pamphlets emphasise Ambedkar's role as law minister in Nehru's first government and, most importantly, his position as head of the Draft Committee of the Indian Constitution as emblematic of the Dalit community's contribution to the creation of the Indian nation. Dethroning Nehru and Gandhi, Ambedkar's role as 'Father of the Indian Constitution' positions him as the 'Father of the Nation'. In this sense, Dalits are portrayed as central to the birth of democracy in India, and the true moment of freedom shifts from 15 August 1947 to 26 January 1950, when the Constitution came into effect and legally institutionalised national social equality. Thus, within the broader narrative of Dalit history, Ambedkar's Constitution signifies the realisation of the ancient Dalit golden age of social equality in contemporary India.

While the story of Ambedkar's life continues to circulate widely in oral forms at occasions such as Ambedkar Jayanti or BSP rallies,[34] within the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature, retelling and rereading the story of Ambedkar's life are political acts, which mark an individual as 'Dalit' and confirm his/her 'legitimate' Dalit political consciousness. The continual repetition of the same narrative constitutes a refusal on the part of the Dalit community to forget Ambedkar or to allow him to be marginalised from national history, and thus writing and reading the life history of Ambedkar acts as a means of performing solidarity with Ambedkar's ideology and with the larger Dalit assertion movement.

Interventions in Indian History: Conclusions on Dalit Literary Pamphlets

Scholar Badri Narayan argues that Dalit writers have inserted Dalit heroes and heroines into the nationalist historical narrative as a means of inserting themselves into the nation. He writes, 'Dalits are compelled to claim their own role in the nationalist struggle . . . and prove themselves more nationalistic than others . . . Nationalism becomes in this view, a modern ideological expression of their quest for social recognition' (Narayan 2004: 353–54). Taking a step back to survey the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature as a whole, it becomes clear that Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers have done much more than simply insert a few Dalit heroes and heroines into Indian history.

Beyond incorporating Dalit heroes and heroines into mainstream Indian history, this chapter has argued that the field of Dalit pamphlet literature has collaboratively rewritten the entire Indian historical narrative. This has been accomplished, first, by pushing 'the beginnings of Indian history' back in time to an age of Adi Hindus before the Aryan invasion. Second, by intervening on the symbolic moment of Ramrajya, which is reinterpreted not as the ideal Hindu rule, but as an age of misrule which leads India into famine and where the state remains under the thumb of the Brahmans rather than reflecting justice for the people. Third, as Badri Narayan points out, Dalit pamphlets have symbolically captured the moment of 1857 by replacing traditional heroes and heroines with Dalit ones and portraying this marginalised community as the most ardent and nationalistic freedom fighters. Finally, the innumerable pamphlets on the life history of Dr Ambedkar redefine the 'Father of the Nation' as the Dalit who fathered the Indian Constitution. Displacing both Gandhi and Nehru, it is Ambedkar who brought the nation into modernity, established social justice and equality and gave protection to the socially oppressed. This radical collaborative move within the Dalit pamphlet field positions Dalits not at the periphery, but at the centre of the Indian nation as its original indigenous inhabitants, as its most loyal freedom fighters, and as its source of the nation's Constitution.

The ability to reconceptualise the Indian historical narrative in the Hindi Dalit counter-public is mediated by a combination of both economic and cultural factors, as we have seen with the mainstream Hindi public sphere. In Chapter One, we saw that Dalit pamphlet writers in the early decades of the 20th century were engaged with the mainstream Hindi public as regional consumers. However, these writers were excluded from contributing to debate in the Hindi public sphere because their experiences were not seen to represent those of the majority of the population. Just as these writers were excluded from the Hindi public sphere based largely on social and cultural factors associated with the emerging Indian middle class, so too participation in the contemporary Hindi Dalit pamphlet field was restricted to those with adequate amounts of social and cultural capital. Thus, the fact that members of the Dalit poor have physical and economic access to both Hindi national dailies and to Hindi Dalit pamphlets, since they are sold on street corners and at community festivals, does not mean these same

Dalits have the power to contest the content of either of these texts, at least not in written form. Rather, the act of discursive intervention itself is an important way Dalit writers attempt to participate in the middle-class project (S. Joshi 2001). For Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, the ability to intervene on key moments of the mainstream Indian historical narrative comes only when these writers have penetrated the margins of the middle class and thus have acquired the necessary amount of economic and cultural capital. In other words, it was and continues to be those Dalits at the margins of the Indian middle class rather than the most oppressed or downtrodden members of the Dalit community, who have been able to use literature to contest the meanings of these prevalent historical categories.

In this sense, the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature represents a space of important cultural negotiation as lower-middle-class Dalits compete for entry into new social groups defined less by caste than by class. The tension between their lower-caste and desired middle-class identities necessitates a complex process of simultaneous separation and inclusion, expressed in Dalit historical pamphlets. By claiming ancient indigenous status and the role of bringing modernity to Indian in the form of the democratic nation, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers have used the idiom of history as a single 'language' to express both distinctiveness and belonging, uniqueness and integration. Thus, the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlets also provides an alternative space in which Hindi Dalit writers and their Dalit audiences attempt to 'work out' questions of 'difference' and 'belonging'.

This, in turn, forces us to take a more nuanced view of the Hindi public sphere. The fact that a discourse exists in the public does not mean that everyone has the ability to actively engage and contest the symbolic world of that discourse. Intervening upon and reinterpreting the meaning of prevalent and powerful symbols reflects two radical impulses: first, by subverting aspects of the mainstream historical narrative Dalit writers compete for control over the most culturally and socially resonant moments of Indian history, which allows them to re-determine what these moments mean. Second, by recasting Dalits as central to the making of these moments integral to Indian middle-class history, Dalit pamphlet writers are assuming the authority of the middle-class arbiters of national identity. In other words, this act of writing 'Dalit history' displays their cultural

authority to intervene on these historical categories in the first place. Thus, for Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, the act of contesting mainstream readings of Indian history and subverting these interpretations with new 'Dalit history' is itself a way of performing their middle-class identity, even as they remain social marginalised by their lower-caste identity.

Notes

1. S. Murti's editorial to Dr G. P. Prashant. *Mul Vansha Katha* (Prashant in Narayan and Misra 2004: 72)
2. While Dalit pamphlets on historical themes constitute an overwhelming majority of literature in the pamphlet field, I have specifically selected several pamphlets from each of the four larger themes I identified. These include several pamphlets by Achutanand and Jigyasu due to their influential role in the early pamphlet field (see Chapter One). Pamphlets by later writers were chosen either according to the abundance as identified by print runs or by the reputation of the Dalit pamphlet writer as in the cases of S. L. Sagar and K. M. Sant.
3. The same seems true of Hindi nationalists of north India whose historiography, while it did not always live up to the expectations of British orientalists, was written as a way to understand Hindus' loss of sovereignty in India, first to the Muslims and then to the British, as a result of social decadence and a loss of their history (Orsini 2002: 13).
4. For more on the way archaeological findings at Harrapa and Mohanjaro have been used in the re-imagining of Indian history, see S. Guha (2005).
5. For more on early nationalists' engagement with the theory of Aryan race, see Orsini (2002).
6. This value placed on individual interiority was similarly expressed by Achutanand through his notions of *amavad* (self-realisation), atma-anubhav (introspection), and atmagyan (self-knowledge). See Chapter One.
7. This contemporary association of SCs, STs and OBCs reflects the political propaganda of the BSP in the early 1990s, which promoted the notion of the 'bahujan' or majority as inclusive of all three groups (S. Pai 2002).
8. Originally, the narrative of Ramrajya, known as *Ramkatha*, was understood neither as a sacred text nor as history (itihas) but as *kavya*, a poetic composition. It was only later, in the context of the 19th-century Indian intellectuals' sudden urge to know India's ancient history through textual sources that the Ramayana itself came to be viewed as a source

of history rather than myth. Parallel to this trend of interpreting an epic narrative as history was the narrowing down of the multiplicity of versions of the *Ramkatha*, including both textual and folk-oral versions, in favour of a dominant (textual) version, a role currently filled by Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Tulsidas' *Ramcharitamanas,* now viewed as sacred literature (Thapar 2000b: 1056).

9. The notion of Ramrajya was prevalent within Hindi public discourse and social imagination from the 1920s and 1930s. Although associated with Gandhi and the Hindu tradition, William Gould argues that such imagery was promoted even by supposedly secular organisations such as the Indian National Congress (Gould 2005).
10. For a full translation from the original Hindi, see Beth (2010).
11. Although the pamphlet does not list earlier print dates, the pamphlet was in its seventh print run by 1974 and in its eleventh by 1992.
12. An appellation used by upper-caste women as a sign of respect for their husbands.
13. For full translation of Achutanand's drama, see Beth (2010: 21).
14. Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Nayaker wrote two books in Tamil on the subject of the Ramayana, a scholarly work entitled *Points about the Ramayana* and the more popular *Characters of the Ramayana*. A social activist, Periyar may be best remembered for his symbolic burning of pictures of Ram to counter the usual Hindu tradition of burning an effigy of Ravana at the end of the Ramlila (Richman 1992).
15. According to Paula Richman's article on Periyar E. V. Ramaswamy Nayaker, 'The extensive publication and translation history of *Characters in the Ramayana* indicates both its centrality in EVR's writings on the *Ramayana* and the enthusiastic reception it has continued to receive from readers. First published in 1930, the work was in its tenth printing in 1972. The first English translation appeared in 1959, a second edition came out in 1972, and a third in 1980. With the appearance of this translation as well as a Hindi translation, the text's audience was no longer limited to Tamil readers.' Later she describes how the book was banned (both its English and Hindi versions) by the UP government and it took an intervention by the High Court to lift the ban (Richman 1992: 176).
16. The practice of widow self-immolation on her husband's funeral pyre.
17. This is in fact a lie, as the Brahmans have administered a special medicine to the boy which makes him fall unconscious and appear dead. When Ram ultimately kills Shambuk, the Brahmans have planned to perform a fake miracle to raise the boy from the dead by administering another drug to wake him up.
18. Interview with K. M. Sant, 15 March 2004, Lucknow.
19. Ibid.

20. Several other articles on the controversy against K. M. Sant include: 'Gandhi Virodhi Sahitya Bika' (Literature Opposing Gandhi is sold) in *Dainik Bhaskar*. 6 February 2004; 'Dalit ke am par chunavon ki rananiti' (Suppression of the choices of a common Dalit) in *Jagharan Uday*. 10 December 2002.
21. 'Ram references pit BJP against BJP' in *The Telegraph* (Calcutta), 29 November 2002.
22. Interview with K. M. Sant, 15 March 2004, Lucknow.
23. Dinker also claims that the development of the Indian nation is based on the labour of Dalits who built the railroads and bridges (Narayan 2004: 3535).
24. Badri Narayan's article includes a long list of Dalit heroes and heroines who are believed to have participated in the 1857 revolt such as Balluram Mehtar and Chetram Jatav of Eta district, Banke Chamar of Jaunpur district, or Amar Shaid Vira Pasi of Rae Bareli district (Narayan 2004: 3537–38).
25. Other Dalit heroines include Avantibai Lodhi, and Udadevi (Narayan 2004: 3536).
26. For a detailed discussion of this novel, see Orsini 2002: 215–24.
27. Badri Narayan's work further emphasises the importance of oral tradition in the construction of these histories. Narayan claims that the increasing authority of textual narratives have led to a process of standardising the various oral versions of these tales (Narayan 2004: 353).
28. Chandrikaprasad Jigyasu's *Baba Saheb ka Jivan Sangharsh* first published in 1961 by Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan in Lucknow was reprinted in 1963, 1965, 1968, 1969, 1971, 1973, 1977, 1979, 1981, 1982, 1985, 1986, 1989, 1991, and the 16th edition in 1995.
29. Jigyasu refers on several occasions to the fact that Ambedkar's father Ramji received a monthly pension of only Rs 50 (Jigyasu 1961: 21, 24).
30. We can see this same usage of childhood naivety as a narrative strategy commonly employed by Hindi Dalit autobiographers in Chapter Four.
31. Sara Dickey has noticed a similar process of simultaneous identification and distancing among lower-class members of film star fan clubs in Tamil Nadu. While members of these fan clubs may dress and even adopts ways of speaking which are similar to their favourite film star, they also deify the film star in such a way that 'devotion' rather than association becomes the defining feature of their relationship to the star (Dickey 2001).
32. Two scenes in Amar Chitra Katha's *Babasaheb Ambedkar* depict Ambedkar and Gandhi discussing the issue of separate electorates for Dalits. In the first, Ambedkar faces Gandhi and proclaims that Hinduism

oppresses the backward castes in India. However, in the second scene two pages later, this 'disagreement' is apparently resolved as Gandhi is shown explaining to Ambedkar that dividing the Hindu community in two is not the answer, while Ambedkar concedes 'to think about it', and then, in the next panel, is depicted unproblematically overseeing the signing the Poona Pact (A. Pai 1994: 24, 26).

33. Interview with Surajpal Chauhan, 8 March 2003, Delhi.
34. In 1980, Kanshi Ram initiated a bicycle tour called 'Ambedkar on Wheels', which travelled across nine northern states and, according to Sudha Pai, included an 'oral and pictorial account of Ambedkar's life and views, together with contemporary material on oppression and atrocities' (S. Pai 2002: 90).

3

The Rise of the Autobiographic Field of Hindi Dalit Literature

In 2004, the most well-respected and widely read Hindi literary journal, *Hans*, released a special issue *Satta-Vimarsh aur Dalit* or 'Dalits and Power Discourse'. This issue was particularly momentous, as it not only set out the importance of Dalit literature and situated Hindi Dalit writers as the majority of the contributors to this mainstream Hindi literary journal, but positioned two Hindi Dalit writers, the established Shyauraj Singh Bechain and up-and-coming Ajay Navaria, as guest editors of the special issue. It was filled with articles on Dalit literature, Dalit short stories and poetry, Dalit intellectual debates and Dalit literary criticism, written by approximately thirty Hindi Dalit writers, many of whom are recognised names within the mainstream Hindi literary world. In a final section of the special issue, established Hindi (non-Dalit) scholars responded with their analysis of Hindi Dalit literature and its contribution to Hindi literature as a whole.

Ten, perhaps even five years previously, a Dalit-edited issue of such a well-regarded mainstream Hindi literary journal would have been unthinkable. Hindi Dalit writers in the 'autobiographic field' have been forced to struggle for decades to gain even small amounts of credibility and acceptance by the Hindi literary world. Yet, by 2004, even the interviews with senior Hindi scholars in *Hans* reflected an unprecedented level of acceptance of Dalit literature. Professor Manager Pandey's interview, for instance, is published under the title 'Dalit Sahitya Hindi Sahitya ka Lokatantrikaran kar raha hai' (Dalit literature is Democratising Hindi Literature), and an interview with Professor Namvar Singh, one of the most highly respected scholars in the Hindi literary world, is entitled 'Hindi sahitya mem Dalit asmita ko dabaya nahin ja sakta' (Dalit identity

cannot be suppressed in Hindi Literature) (Pandey 2004; N. Singh 2004). How have Dalit writers moved from a position of extreme marginalisation in the Hindi literary world to a place on the Hindi centrestage? What does this move mean for the Dalit community's relationship with wider Indian society?

This chapter shows how, from the early 1980s, a new field of Hindi Dalit literature has emerged, initiated by middle-class Dalit writers who were inspired by Marathi Dalit literature and whose aim was to gain access and legitimacy for their own writing in the Hindi literary mainstream. It argues that Hindi Dalit writers first gained recognition for their work by publishing their autobiographies, and over time they have moved from a position of extreme marginalisation to a central place within the mainstream Hindi literary field. This struggle to gain entry and acceptance in the mainstream Hindi literary world has been marked by several important periods in Hindi Dalit writing, including, first, the translations of Marathi Dalit autobiographies into Hindi by mainstream literary presses in the early 1980s. This provided middle-class Hindi Dalit writers with new genres and imaginations of Dalit literature. This was followed by the formation of a network of Hindi Dalit writers in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the beginnings of Hindi Dalit writers publishing their own autobiographical stories in *Hans,* as well as publishing their full autobiographies in the mid-1990s. Then came the launch of the first Hindi Dalit literary journal of this field, *Dalit Sahitya,* in 1999. Over time and after much struggle we have seen Hindi Dalit writers gain a certain degree of acceptance within the Hindi literary world, evidenced in the special Dalit issue of the mainstream Hindi literary journal *Hans* discussed earlier.

Thus, the gradual entry into the mainstream Hindi literary field was accomplished through the formation of a strong and supportive Dalit literary network, which could then be used to share important literary contacts, or social capital, with Dalit writers of a similar ideological stance. Through this network, Hindi Dalit writers also pooled economic and organisational resources to set up their own literary journals and institutions. Protected within this Dalit counter-public from the antagonism they faced in the Hindi mainstream, Dalit writers consolidated their diverse writings under a unified literary movement known as 'Dalit literature' and improved their mastery of the literary practices and sensibilities of the Hindi literary world. This is a very different use of the counter-public from

what we have seen regarding the Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, who constructed a counter-public as an alternative space for political mobilisation and social activism, in reaction to their complete exclusion from the mainstream Hindi public sphere. For Hindi Dalit writers in the new 'autobiographic field', the construction of a counter-public sphere was much more a strategic means of gaining increased access and prestige within the mainstream Hindi field, as we shall see. Thus, by using the space of their Dalit counter-public to increase their corpus of Hindi Dalit literature and improve their mastery over the literary skills valued by the mainstream (writing Dalit literary criticism being just one example), Hindi Dalit writers positioned themselves to challenge the authority of the established Hindi literary world to determine literary value on its own terms. As we shall see in Chapter Five, Hindi Dalit writers have used their entry into the Hindi literary mainstream to contest the cultural representations of Indian society presented by the upper-caste, middle-class dominated mainstream Hindi literary world.

Hindi Dalit Writers and the Struggle to Join the Middle Classes

Although all Hindi Dalit writers participating in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature are today securely part of the middle classes, the vast majority of them began their lives as members of poor, rural Dalit communities. Through much struggle and against many obstacles, these individuals availed of the reservation facilities provided by the Indian Constitution, acquired high levels of education and government jobs, and joined the Delhi middle classes. This period of the 1970s and early 1980s was also a time of increasing politicisation of Dalit identity within the Hindi public sphere, which led to the establishment of the Dalit labour organisation BAMCEF in Delhi in 1976 (S. Pai 2002: 90), the political mobilisations of the BSP across north India from 1984 (ibid.: 80–111) and the controversy over the implementation of the Mandal Commission report in 1990 (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998). Entering the urban middle classes opened up a new range of possibilities for these Dalit writers, including access to middle-class habitus, or cultural practices and values, as well as the ability to both consume and produce middle-class cultural commodities, particularly literature circulating in the mainstream Hindi public sphere. For example, while almost all the

Hindi Dalit writers I interviewed in Delhi grew up in poor rural Dalit communities, they now live in middle-class neighbourhoods. They own televisions, their children wear jeans and go to McDonald's and some, such as Dr Shyauraj Singh Bechain's children, even attend private English-medium schools.[1]

Hindi Dalit writers also display a middle-class Indian habitus in the literary genres they chose to employ, as their conception of Dalit literature is dominated by fiction, autobiographies and literary criticism. This shows an important contrast to the literary genres used by Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers, who are still on the lower margins of the middle classes in regional cities (i.e., not Delhi) and write pamphlets on Dalit history, distributing them at festivals rather than selling them in bookstores. As they gained a place in the Delhi middle class, for the first time, these Hindi Dalit writers found themselves in a position to both question and actively contest dominant cultural representations of what it means to be an Indian citizen — representations generated almost exclusively by the upper-caste dominated middle classes — within the mainstream Hindi public sphere itself.[2] This would have been unimaginable had these writers remained part of the Dalit poor, as even Dalits in the lower middle classes in regional cities in north India remain confined to pamphlet writing within a Dalit counter-public sphere (see Chapters One and Two).

In their struggle to project their voice into the mainstream Hindi literary world, Hindi Dalit writers emphasise their low-caste identity, arguing quite convincingly that members of the lower castes have been excluded from the mainstream Hindi public sphere and, consequently, have not formed part of the dominant cultural representations of Indian society and the Indian nation. In other words, they have been represented but have never been allowed to represent. These Dalit writers thus aspire not only to join the middle classes but to be a part of its definition, to contribute to and thereby broaden the public notion of what it means to be a middle-class Indian. In this sense, Hindi Dalit writers are attempting to redefine what it means to be middle class in north India by incorporating the element of caste identity, an act which directly counters the middle-class claim to a 'casteless' modernity since the time of Nehru. Furthermore, because the middle-class individual constitutes the normative public image of the contemporary Indian citizen, these Hindi Dalit writers are also able to contribute to new

representations of Indian society in the Hindi public through their literature.

By making claims to speak as 'Dalits' in the Hindi public, Hindi Dalit writers are compelled to portray themselves as 'representative' voices of the Dalit community as a whole, in an act which blurs the distinction between Spivak's *vertretung* and *darstellung* and brings their 'representative' lower-caste and 'unrepresentative' middle-class identities into direct conflict (see Chapter Four). Through this act, Hindi Dalit writers reveal the pressure they feel not only to provide the Hindi public sphere with 'representative portrayals' of the Dalit community through their writing, but to act as public figures representing and working in the interest of the greater Dalit community. Emphasising their impoverished upbringing, their struggles to gain even a basic education and the continual obstacles they face in the form of caste discrimination, all become important strategies for Hindi Dalit writers to highlight their 'representative' Dalit identity while downplaying their 'unrepresentative' middle-class one. In an interview, Dr Bechain, now a well-established Dalit writer and guest editor of the special 'Dalit' edition of *Hans* in 2004, related his experiences as a child growing up in a village in Unnau district, UP:

> In 1975 or '76, I was working as a [child] labourer. I was handing bricks to others. I had a hobby of writing poetry in those days, but no one knew … Even I didn't know that this poetry would change my life.[3]

Bechain's father passed away when Bechain was five years old and when his mother remarried, he was left to fend for himself as a child labourer. After a brief stay with his uncle in Delhi, where Bechain sold limes in the mornings and first began to attend school on a part-time basis, he returned to the village. It was only by chance that one day a teacher heard him singing his poems on the way to the fields and offered him admission to school as well as his living expenses in exchange for working as a field labourer in his free time. After much struggle (even against his own family) to further his education, Bechain received his BA from Meerut University and became increasingly active in the Communist Party in Meerut and Muradabad districts. He claims,

> for a long time, Ambedkar was unknown to me. In the beginning I met with Marxists … It took a long time to understand Ambedkar. I used

> to go to Ambedkar Jayantis. I went wherever Ambedkar was being discussed . . . It was during my MA, that I realised that I should do research on Ambedkar.[4]

(Several other Hindi Dalit writers first became politically active through Marxist organisations, although all have since denounced Marxists as unwilling to address issues of caste oppression in the Indian context. On the other hand, the growing knowledge of Ambedkar marks the most important moment of these writers' journey to Dalit political consciousness, which now constitutes the basis of their literary works [see Chapters Four and Five]). Bechain completed his PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), Delhi. He now works in the Ambedkar College, University of Delhi (DU) and, since 2000, has established a name for himself as a Dalit journalist in mainstream Hindi newspapers through his articles on Dalit social issues and Dalit politics.

Bechain's oral narration of his early life includes several common threads which are habitually repeated by contemporary Hindi Dalit writers in this autobiographic field, when speaking in interviews as 'Dalit writers'. They emphasise their early childhood years in the village and their parents' struggle to provide basic life necessities, including food, shelter and money for books, which a parent's untimely death in their early childhood often exacerbated.[5] Jayprakash Kardam, for instance, recalled in an interview how his family of seven children struggled to survive after the death of his father when Kardam was a teenager.

> My family was very poor. We were living hand to mouth. My father was a labourer. He was a *tonga* driver. After the death of my father, I also sometimes did this work. I used to work as a labourer for five rupees a day in house construction, road construction and factories.[6]

Childish anecdotes are almost non-existent in their narratives, and the focus rests instead on their battle for an education, constantly interrupted, as many of the Dalit writers were forced to leave school again and again to seek employment and support their families. Their journey to adulthood is marked as a growing political consciousness of their 'Dalit' identity beyond the individual's local jati associations, through increasing awareness of Ambedkar's ideology, as is also thematised in Dalit autobiographies (see Chapter Four). As we have seen for Bechain and for several other Hindi Dalit

writers including Dr Tej Singh, this political consciousness was initially raised by Marxist groups, which offered a political vocabulary to protest the economic deprivations these writers had suffered as children.[7] Like Tej Singh, most contemporary Hindi Dalit writers make a direct link between their literary careers as Dalit writers and their initial encounter with the ideology of Dr Ambedkar, which marks their ultimate acquisition of Dalit consciousness.

By emphasising their childhood, a time when these writers suffered as part of the mass of poor Dalits in north Indian villages, and by rushing over their adulthood successes, which are marked by exceptionally high levels of education (most have master's degrees and some have PhDs), Hindi Dalit writers present themselves as representative voices of the entire Dalit community.[8] Towards the end of one interview, Bechain described his participation in the annual Dalit festival celebrating Ambedkar's birthday, when he travelled to various localities to give speeches, remarking, 'But I should not say that I am going *to* Dalits. I should say I am coming *from* Dalits'.[9] With this brief statement, Bechain collapses the space between himself as a middle-class person (who must leave his suburban Delhi flat in order to give a speech to the Dalit community residing in poorer neighbourhoods) and the poor Dalit community by bringing his oral narrative back to his childhood in the village. We will further see in Chapter Four why writing the story of one's life in the form of an autobio-graphy is such a symbolically potent act as a Dalit writer, since in many ways the Dalit autobiography 'proves' a writer's 'representative' background experiences.

In fact, contemporary Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi narrate their life stories in oral interviews in much the same way as is done in Hindi Dalit autobiographies, suggesting a certain influence of these texts on the writers' perceptions of their own lives (see Chapter Four). This became particularly obvious when I initially asked Bechain to tell me the story of his early life, and he immediately responded, 'I am writing my autobiography named *Bachpan mere Kandhe par* (Childhood on my Shoulders). I have given it to the press for publishing'.[10] There thus remains a constant and unresolved tension between Hindi Dalit writers' middle-class and lower-caste identities. We shall see how these writers highlight their caste identity to claim narrative authority within the mainstream Hindi literary field as representative voices of the Dalit community, yet rely on their middle-class habitus to do so.

Dalit Literary Networks

Although their middle-class position made it possible for Hindi Dalit writers to contemplate contributing their own perspective to the wider Hindi public sphere, they faced intense opposition to their entry into the mainstream Hindi literary field. Those Hindi Dalit writers who began their literary careers in the 1970s did so either in connection with the already vibrant stream of Marathi Dalit literature initiated by the Dalit Panthers, or as part of the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature. Omprakash Valmiki, who is perhaps the most renowned Hindi Dalit writer today, began writing Dalit literature in Hindi around 1975 through his increasing involvement in Dalit literary activities in Maharashtra, where he was posted at an ordnance factory and where Dalit literary activities were then thriving (see Chapter Four). He claims that while some of his poems and stories on general themes were published in non-Dalit journals before the 1980s, he was compelled to publish most of his work on Dalit issues in small Dalit-edited journals.[11] Two other well-known Hindi Dalit writers, Mohandas Naimisharay and Kanval Bharti, began their literary careers by publishing in small Hindi Dalit journals which circulated in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature in north India (see Chapters One and Two). By the 1980s, Valmiki, Naimisharay and Bharti had already made a name for themselves as Dalit writers, either through their associations with Marathi Dalit authors or through their high status within the field of Dalit pamphlet literature, but in the late 1970s and early 1980s, even they remained unable to break into the mainstream Hindi literary world.

The majority of Hindi Dalit writers based in Delhi relied on a Dalit literary network constructed over the course of a decade to support their publishing ventures in the face of strong opposition from the mainstream Hindi literary field. Dalit writers formed this network after first reading each other's work in small Hindi Dalit journals, such as the Delhi-based Dalit journal *Bahujan Sangharsh* (Struggle of the Majority), a journal founded by Kanshi Ram and associated with his Dalit labour organisation BAMCEF, which Mohandas Naimisharay edited from the late 1970s.[12] These Hindi Dalit writers gradually came into contact with each other over the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s at Dalit seminars and conferences in Delhi. Jayprakash Kardam, now editor of one of the most important Hindi

Dalit journals, *Dalit Sahitya* (Dalit Literature), illustrates how he first came into contact with other Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi:

> I knew [other Hindi Dalit writers] from the magazines which I used to read … We met each other in meetings, literary functions, seminars, [and so] we became close to each other. We were thinking that we should all meet together and do something in common, so we identified writers [and thought], 'yes, he's in the right direction, yes, he's in the right direction … he could be my friend, he could be my friend'. [Through this interaction] our approach became increasingly similar.[13]

Kardam's statement alludes to a complex process of network formation whereby a small group of Hindi Dalit writers began selecting and incorporating, other like-minded individuals into this Dalit literary network. This involved an ideological alignment among the first members of the group who formed the 'inner circle' of the network as well as an initiation process for newer Dalit writers into the ideological standpoint of the group.

The regional location and class position of an individual Dalit writer had great impact on an individual Dalit writer's relationship to this growing Dalit literary network. Living either in Delhi or its surrounding suburbs (especially Ghaziabad and Shahdara) as well as having access to middle-class spaces (either homes in middle-class neighbourhoods where one could invite the other writers for informal discussions, or access to spaces in central Delhi where seminars and conferences were held on Dalit issues) determined a Dalit writer's access to the network just as much as the writer's ideological position or literary style. Thus, many Hindi Dalit writers who were actively publishing in the field of Dalit pamphlet literature in regional cities such as Lucknow, Kanpur or Allahabad, did not have access to this network and, therefore, were not able to participate in this new Hindi Dalit literary field. Dalit writer Raghuvir Singh, who has now published several books on Ambedkar and Dalit Buddhism, demonstrates the importance of living in the Delhi suburbs by his own participation in the Dalit literary network when he claims,

> as far as my writing is concerned, my friends … Dr J. P. Kardam, Purushottam Satya[premi] were an inspiration to me … When I was posted in Mohan Nagar, close to Ghaziabad, I came in contact with J. P. Kardam … J. P. Kardam was posted in my own Department [of Education].[14]

Jayprakash Kardam, in particular, became a key figure in this network of Delhi-based Hindi Dalit writers and, as we shall see in the next section, used this network to set up the first Hindi Dalit journal entitled *Dalit Sahitya* from 1999. While he is certainly not the only one of such personalities in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, Kardam's example is instructive in showing how a few key individuals have had a powerful impact on the direction and tone of Hindi Dalit literature. They exercise this power by policing the boundaries of the Dalit literary network in order to bring certain writers into the group or exclude others.[15] Ish Kumar Ganganiya and Tej Singh, both now influential in this field of Dalit literature in their roles as editor and sub-editor of the Hindi Dalit journal *Apeksha* (Expectation), first began writing articles on Dalit issues through their friendship with Kardam. Ganganiya, for instance, claims,

> I was teaching in a school and he [Kardam] is one of my best friends. He has been to my house, his wife and my wife were working in the same school . . . Then there was a pamphlet that was created by the RSS, and I had a strong reaction to that paper.

When Kardam suggested that Ganganiya write an article on his perspective of Hindutva, Ganganiya agreed. He recalls, 'I gave the first article to J. P. Kardam and he accepted it…and that was published in the magazine [*Dalit Sahitya* 1999]'.[16] Tej Singh describes in similar terms how he first entered the Dalit literary sphere through this network of Dalit writers. In an interview, he comments,

> I was a Marxist and I wanted to read and write about Dalit literature, so I went to [the Dalit publisher] Samata Prakashan and they told me that at six pm Kusum Viyogi [the editor of the press] would come, so please wait. So I waited and at six pm, I met Kusum Viyogi. He was happy to meet me and said that it was a nice thing that an academic like me from Delhi University was interested in joining us [the group of Dalit writers]. The next time we all met at Kusum Viyogi's house with Jayprakash Kardam, Surajpal Chauhan and others. It was the first time I met them there. Kusum Viyogi invited all these Dalit writers to his house in Shahdara.[17]

Once the core group of Hindi Dalit writers formed this literary network in Delhi, younger Hindi Dalit writers could enter the

network only through a subtle process of initiation, in which the young writer learned the ideological stance of the group on key issues. One poignant demonstration of this process occurred on the occasion of Surajpal Chauhan's birthday party in early April 2004.[18] Many members of the core group of Hindi Dalit writers came to Chauhan's home that night for the celebration, and after eating and joking about personal matters, the conversation inevitably turned to the topic of common interest — the state of Hindi Dalit literature. Soon, a heated conversation developed between the writers over whether a particular non-Dalit Hindi academic was a supporter or an opponent of Dalit literature. After listening to the established Hindi Dalit writers speak, one young Dalit writer in particular, Ajay Navaria, became extremely agitated and echoed the common view among the 'inner circle' of Dalit writers that the academic in question was without a doubt an enemy of Dalit literature. The way Navaria referenced other prominent Hindi Dalit writers during his tirade suggested that this was not the first time he had witnessed and participated in a discussion on this topic. Navaria's argument demonstrated the invaluable role that these private meetings at Dalit writers' family homes provide as a space for the more established Dalit writers to both debate topics amongst themselves — a 'pre-textual' orality that influences the content of later publications — and to coach younger writers on what are considered appropriate and inappropriate opinions within this field of Dalit literature.

Bajrang Bihari Tiwari, a Hindi lecturer at University of Delhi, also refers to this phenomenon of cultivating common opinions within a social network in an article on Dalit autobiographies, when he writes, 'Every community has a clear list of its friends and enemies. It has a pre-decided bank of experiences, so that the types of reflections for specific situations are already decided' (Tiwari 2003). Private gatherings, therefore, provide an important forum for the cultivation of such a list (even if it is more ambiguous than Tiwari suggests here) as well as other 'boundaries' of debate. For instance, we will see that discussions of inter-jati conflict among Dalits or patriarchy within the Dalit community have both been deemed taboo topics in Hindi Dalit discourse (see Chapter Four). It is also a well-established belief among members of the autobiographic Dalit literary network that only Dalit writers can write Dalit literature and, for this reason, Premchand is not to be considered a Dalit

writer (see Chapter Five). Younger Dalit writers who have been initiated into the Dalit literary network then gain access to the wealth of literary contacts and publishing opportunities that the established members of the group have cultivated over the past several decades. In this way, new Hindi Dalit writers are able to rise quickly as literary figures, as is demonstrated by Navaria's prominent position as assistant guest editor of the special edition of *Hans*.

Recently, several 'young challengers' such as Kavitendra Indu have rejected the authority of the 'inner circle' to determine the legitimate ideology for all Dalit writers. We shall see later how these new Hindi Dalit writers use their articles to strike at the very heart of the established Dalit writers' narrative authority by contesting their ability to represent all members of the Dalit community (see Chapter Five). Members of the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers respond to these young challengers by delegitimising their alternative interpretations of Dalit ideology and accusing them of being in a race to publish, insinuating that they are not serious writers. In an interview, for instance, Tej Singh attested, 'New Dalit writers are coming in large numbers, but … they are not ideologically strong or clear. We should prepare them in Dalit ideology.' Later in the interview, he continued,

> [t]hey think they should publish as soon as possible. Instead of doing a deep study, they want to publish quickly. We studied more and we progressed bit by bit, but they want to do this quickly. We are trying to give them the right direction … but mostly they are going in the wrong direction.[19]

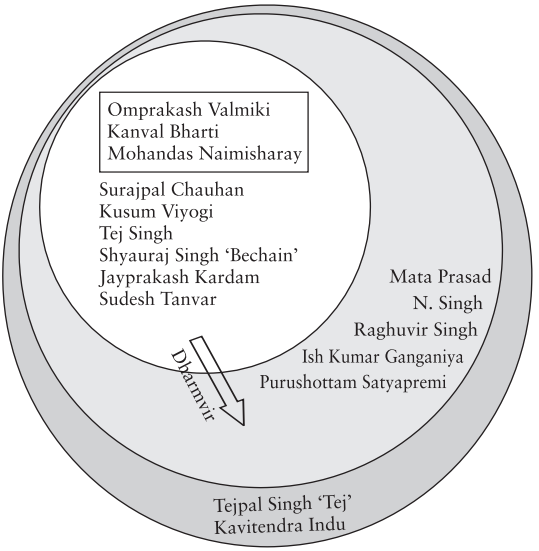
Mohandas Naimisharay also claimed, 'This coming generation has a craze for publishing'.[20] While there are currently more opportunities for Hindi Dalit writers to publish than in the 1980s and early 1990s, these small contestations become a trope to downplay ideological diversity between the established writers and young challengers. This accusation of having a 'craze for publishing' thus should be seen in light of the power struggle between the established 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers, who want to maintain their authority over the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, and the young challengers, who are contesting that authority. Other Dalit writers close to the 'inner circle' also react to this power struggle by distinguishing themselves from the young challengers.

Ganganiya, for instance, emphasised, 'I am not in the race to get myself published'.[21]

Finally, Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi who do not conform to either the ideological foundations of the 'inner circle' or fail to recognise their authority over the field of Hindi Dalit literature are kept at the margins of the autobiographic Dalit literary network and thus are excluded from the literary contacts, publication opportunities and status the group now holds. Tejpal Singh 'Tej'[22] is one such Hindi Dalit writer who claims he has often been excluded from the Dalit literary network and its associated publications: 'I am a very outspoken person and . . . my perspective is often times not in accordance with the others'.[23] For instance, Tej attests that when Jayprakash Kardam brought out *Dalit Sahitya*, on two successive occasions Kardam rejected Tej's articles.[24] Because of his somewhat contentious relationship with members of the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi, Tej also has trouble publishing in the mainstream Hindi literary journal *Hans*, whose editor, Rajendra Yadav, has a close working relationship with most members of the Dalit literary 'inner circle'. In reaction, Tej attempts to discredit the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers by claiming that they are not trying to reach out to their own Dalit community but are only interested in self-promotion. In an interview, he claims,

> [t]he Dalit writers based in Delhi have a habit of organising all the meetings in central Delhi, and therefore, very few people come for these meetings when they are organised in these areas. I suggested that instead of organising meetings in central Delhi, we should have meetings in different areas such as villages near Delhi, in Dalit *bastis* (localities), on streets, so that people living near those areas can see and participate in these meetings. However, they are organised in central Delhi only, so the same people continue to participate.[25]

This diagram is a pictorial representation of the relationships among Hindi Dalit writers within the larger network of Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field in 2004. It shows the positions of Bechain, Chauhan, Singh, Kardam and Viyogi, who are all part of the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers. These writers have acquired significant amounts of social, cultural and symbolic capital within the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, which now translates into positions of status within this field. For instance, Tej Singh and Jayprakash Kardam serve as editors of the two most



Network of Hindi Dalit writers in 2004

Source: Prepared by the Author.

influential Hindi Dalit journals in this literary field, and both Tej Singh and Surajpal Chauhan have served as presidents of the Dalit Lekhak Sangh (Dalit Writers' Association). Shyauraj Singh Bechain has published extensively in mainstream Hindi national newspapers and worked with Rajendra Yadav as guest editor of the special 'Dalit' issue of the journal *Hans*. Valmiki and Naimisharay, the first two Hindi Dalit writers to publish their autobiographies, and Kanval Bharti, who had been actively publishing from the 1970s in Hindi Dalit journals in the pamphlet field and was one of the first Dalit writers to publish short stories in Hindi, all remain close to this circle in terms of authority (cultural capital) and distinction (symbolic capital), but remain slightly separate since they are not as dependent on the network for publishing and not as active in their participation in the Delhi-based network (for instance, they do not always attend the events organised by the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers).[26] Dr Dharmvir, once at the centre of the Delhi network of Dalit writers in the 1990s and early years of the 2000s, has recently lost favour with the other members of the 'inner circle' and has been increasingly excluded from decision-making processes.[27] Outside the 'inner circle' are writers such as Ish Kumar Ganganiya,

Purushottam Satyapremi, Raghuvir Singh and Ajay Navaria, who are all close to the 'inner circle' but either do not aspire to increase their status within this Dalit literary field or do not have enough cultural capital (i.e., authority within the field), due to a lack of prestigious publication, to be included in the 'inner circle'. Finally, Dalit writers outside the network, such as Mata Prasad and N. Singh, remain on the outskirts due to their location outside of Delhi, while Tejpal Singh 'Tej' and Kavitendra Indu participate in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature but are kept at arm's length because they are not in ideological agreement with the 'inner circle'. Practically speaking, this means that articles Indu and Tej submit to Hindi Dalit journals (all edited by members of the 'inner circle') are meticulously scrutinised during the editing process and, both Indu and Tej claim they are censored according to the ideological viewpoints of the network.[28] Furthermore, the concentric circles of the Venn diagram show the extent to which the power of the 'inner circle', as Dalit journal editors and leaders of Dalit literary organisations, extends even over those in the autobiographic field who do not agree with its members' ideological positions. Although the list of names in the chart above is far from exhaustive, it introduces, in a general sense, the way this network of Hindi Dalit writers has formed and, as we shall see throughout the rest of this chapter, the impact this network has had on this new autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature.

Dalits and the Mainstream Hindi Literary Field

The social network that developed among Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi has provided an important way for many Dalit writers to first enter the literary world — including both the field of Hindi Dalit literature as well as the mainstream Hindi literary field — by allowing successful and established Dalit writers to share their valuable contacts (social capital) with editors and publishers in the Hindi mainstream. There were two mainstream literary figures who have proved most valuable for Hindi Dalit writers: Rajendra Yadav, editor of the most popular and widely distributed Hindi literary journal *Hans*, and Ramanika Gupta, a social activist and editor of the small progressive Hindi journal *Am Admi* (Common Man). Both became great supporters of Hindi Dalit literature and published Dalit writers works extensively in their literary journals.

Appearing regularly in *Hans* and *Am Admi* conferred significant symbolic capital in the form of prestige and distinction on to those Hindi Dalit writers whose work appeared in these journals. This, in turn, further strengthened the Dalit literary network as the literary distinction acquired through these publications earned certain Hindi Dalit writers a place in the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi. However, Hindi Dalit writers continued to experience an antagonistic relationship with the Hindi literary academy, who act as guardians of the 'official' Hindi literary canon and ultimate arbiter of legitimacy in the Hindi literary field (i.e., over what constitutes 'good' Hindi literature). This antagonism was most directly expressed in the discursive exchange between Hindi Dalit writers and Hindi scholars at JNU and DU (see Chapter Five).

The aim of Hindi Dalit writers in this new autobiographic field to gain recognition by the Hindi literary mainstream is clear from their early efforts to publish in mainstream Hindi literary journals such as *Hans* and *Am Admi*. As the most widely read and well-respected mainstream Hindi literary journal, *Hans,* in particular, has been an important literary space for Dalit writers to penetrate. *Hans'* precedent for publishing writers of marginalised groups, including women and Muslim writers, facilitated Dalits' entry into this literary journal.[29] Hindi Dalit writers such as Dr Tej Singh emphasised that, '*Hans* and [its editor] Rajendra Yadav have made a very important contribution to strengthening Dalit literature',[30] while Rajendra Yadav himself maintains a modest tone regarding his own role in promoting Dalit literature. In an interview, he claimed, '[i]n this new political and social scenario, these forces [i.e., the lower castes, women and minorities] are unstoppable . . . So if we want to survive in the Hindi world, we have to identify ourselves with the rising forces.'[31]

As editor of *Hans*, one of the first forums in the mainstream Hindi public sphere to welcome Dalit literature, Rajendra Yadav has had a major impact on the autobiographic field of Dalit literature, particularly through his editorial power to determine which Hindi Dalit writers would become well-known and respected through their publications in his journal and, subsequently, which Dalit writers would acquire enough symbolic capital to join the core network of Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi. An overview of the issues of *Hans* from 1995–2002 reflects the rise of certain Hindi Dalit writers within the Dalit literary network in Delhi. While Omprakash Valmiki, Surajpal Chauhan, Mohandas Naimisharay, Dharmvir

and Shyauraj Singh Bechain consistently published articles in *Hans* from 1995 onwards, by 2000, *Hans* issues also included publications by Jayprakash Kardam and Tej Singh, reflecting the rise of these two figures in this field of Hindi Dalit literature, and the way Dalit writers at the core of the network began to share the social capital associated with their relationship to Rajendra Yadav to help other Hindi Dalit writers in the network get published.[32] The special edition of *Hans* on 'Dalits and Power Discourse' in 2004 reaffirmed Rajendra Yadav's influence on the field of Hindi Dalit literature through his ability to confer or deny legitimacy and symbolic status to certain Hindi Dalit writers by allowing them to guest-edit the issue.

From the mid-1990s, Ramanika Gupta's progressive and leftist-leaning Hindi journal, *Am Admi,* also provided an important space for writers of various marginalised groups, including Dalits, tribals, minority women and poor labourers, to publish their written works. The importance of Dalit writers' literary connections to Rajendra Yadav is, in fact, exemplified as Gupta first met the autobiographic Hindi Dalit writers in 1995 during a meeting organised by Rajendra Yadav, although she had previously encountered Hindi Dalit literature through the Marxist-affiliated writer's association, the Janwadi Lekhak Sangh. Gupta claims that she was inspired by Omprakash Valmiki at that meeting and, thus, when another (unnamed) Dalit writer suggested that she bring out a special issue of her journal *Am Admi* on Dalit literature, she enthusiastically agreed, publishing the issue later in 1995.[33] Despite the fact that *Am Admi* does not have near the circulation or the prestige of *Hans*, this Hindi journal has remained influential as an alternative site in which Dalit writers could publish their work in the Hindi public sphere.[34] Gupta justifies the importance of *Am Admi's* contribution to Dalit literature by explaining that in the mid-1990s, even the most well-known Hindi Dalit writers struggled to publish their written work. She recalls one incident in which,

> Mohandas Naimishray [came to] me and he said, 'My story has been returned.' I asked why. He said, 'I don't know. They say it is too crude.' I read the story and I liked it, so I said that I would publish it in my journal.

Gupta then organised a second special issue of *Am Admi* on Dalit short stories, which was published in 1996.[35] Since that time, each

issue of *Am Admi* has been filled with articles on Dalit social issues, Dalit literary criticism, Dalit short stories and Dalit poetry. The journal also includes articles on Dalit literature translated into Hindi from other regional languages, including Telugu or Punjabi, strengthening the perception that these disparate pieces by Hindi Dalit writers were part of a larger all-India Dalit literary movement.[36] Another important contribution that *Am Admi* made to the growing autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature was its advertisements and reports on Dalit literary conferences and seminars in Hindi-speaking regions beyond Delhi. In this way, *Am Admi* disseminated information about Dalit literary seminars (for instance, where and when they would take place) to a broad readership far beyond those associated with the autobiographic network of Hindi Dalit writers. This shifted access to information on Dalit writers' conferences from a system based on word-of-mouth and social networks to a textual dissemination of information. One no longer had to be 'in the know' in order to attend these Dalit literary gatherings.[37] Through these advertisements as well as articles on Dalit literature in other regional languages, *Am Admi* linked the Hindi Dalit literary field in Delhi to Dalit literary fields which were developing across the Indian subcontinent, adding symbolic strength and legitimacy to Hindi Dalit literature by portraying it as part of an all-India literary movement.

Throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, *Hans* and *Am Admi* have remained important as two Hindi literary journals which provide space for Hindi Dalit writers to publish short stories and literary criticism, as well as for a textual dialogue to develop between Dalit writers and mainstream Hindi literary figures. Still, they have remained exceptions to the rule as far as the mainstream Hindi literary field (including both Hindi publishing and the Hindi academic institutions) was concerned.[38] During an interview in 2004, Jayprakash Kardam still protested,

> [o]nly five to seven are getting published very widely . . . in mainstream journals. Because we have our name. Dr. Dharmvir, he is a name in [literary] criticism. Dr. Bechain is a name in journalism. Surajpal Chauhan and Omprakash Valmiki have names in fiction and autobiographies . . . These are the saleable names. Therefore there is a demand for these people, but for the rest of Dalit writers there is no use and no demand for them. So discrimination affects them.[39]

Even Shyauraj Singh Bechain, who had published approximately 20 articles in mainstream Hindi newspapers such as *Rashtriya Sahara, Hindustan* and *Amar Ujala* by 2004, claims that he continues to face discrimination by the mainstream Hindi literary world. In an interview, Bechain relates that during the late 1990s, he wrote a regular column for the national newspaper *Rashtriya Sahara,* called 'Dalitwad' (Dalitism) under the editorship of Shri Vibhashu Divyal. This national daily circulates approximately 2.4 million copies,[40] and thus Bechain's column reached an all-India Hindi readership. However, in 2000 there was a change in editor and Divyal was replaced by Govind Dikshit. Bechain continues,

> I asked Govind Dikshit whether I should give a report [for this column] since I've just come back from a [Dalit conference in London]. Not only did he end my column, he said on the phone, 'Dalit — I don't want to hear this word at all!' Though he was compelled to publish the Dalit report, until this day he has not allowed any Dalit literature to be published in his newspaper.[41]

In an interview, Govind Dikshit denied these allegations and emphasised his support of Dalit writers in his newspaper. He specifically named the Delhi-based Dalit writer Chandrabhan Prasad, best known for his English journalism on Dalit issues, who has published a column in Hindi entitled 'Daliton ke samasyaen' (The Problems of Dalits) for the past two years in *Rashtriya Sahara*.[42] This example highlights the difficulty in distinguishing caste discrimination from the usually discerning practice of editorship in a competitive arena such as publishing. Omprakash Valmiki, for instance, confirms the persistence of caste discrimination against Dalit writers, but he attests that discrimination by the mainstream is largely based on the subject rather than the identity of the author.[43]

The Hindi literary academy in Delhi, embodied in institutions such as the Hindi departments at JNU and DU have most actively engaged with Hindi Dalit writers' attempts to enter the mainstream Hindi literary field. Because the Hindi literary academy in Delhi is both the most progressive and the most prestigious, Hindi Dalit writers have focused much of their efforts on 'breaking into' this hallowed literary space. Several left-leaning Hindi professors at JNU, including Manager Pandey and Purushottam Aggrawal, as well as the Dalit literary scholar Vimal Thorat, have engaged in

a lively debate with Hindi Dalit writers from the late 1990s over the meaning and importance of Dalit literature and its position in relation to the Hindi literary canon. By 2000, other Hindi scholars, including Vir Bharat Talvar at JNU and the young Hindi lecturer Bajrang Bihari Tiwari at DU, joined in. Recognition by these Hindi academic figures, facilitated by the respect held in the Hindi academy for Rajendra Yadav and *Hans*, was an important first step for Hindi Dalit writers. Yet, it did not constitute entry into the Hindi canon nor acceptance of its literature as a 'mature' literary movement, and as we shall see, Hindi Dalit writers have continued to face severe criticism from these Hindi scholars regarding the crudeness of their language, their lack of creativity and literary 'style', and their acquiescence to using 'identity politics' (see Chapter Five).[44]

Thus, despite the opportunities Hindi Dalit writers in this field have found in the arms of progressive journals such as *Hans* and *Am Admi,* they continued to feel a sense of insecurity in their dependence on 'non-Dalit' journals to publish their work. Without editorial control, Dalit writers have felt a lack of control over the boundaries of debate, as well as over which Dalit writers were given space and which continued to be excluded from the Hindi literary field. *Hans* and *Am Admi* thus provided a springboard for Hindi Dalit writers to subsequently establish Dalit-run literary journals in Hindi, which they used to strengthen their legitimacy and prestige vis-à-vis the Hindi literary mainstream by increasing the corpus of Dalit literary works and symbolically associating these works with an All-India Dalit literary movement.

Hindi Dalit Journals and Dalit Literary Associations: A New Dalit Counter-public

In the face of continuing opposition to their writing by the Hindi literary mainstream and the desire for greater control over the meaning and value of Dalit literature, Hindi Dalit writers became convinced of the need for their own literary space, removed from the influence and jurisdiction of non-Dalit literary figures. Dalit writer Jayprakash Kardam explained,

> [w]e [Dalit writers] don't have any platform. We have to talk on other people's platforms. And when we talk on their platforms, we only get five minutes to say what we have to say. We don't have sufficient time

> or opportunity to express ourselves. So we felt we must have our own platform where we can speak about our own matters unhindered.[45]

Ganganiya echoed this sentiment in an interview when he proclaimed,

> [i]n our magazines, we can write and we can express ourselves more proudly, more realistically. There is no one to cut a particular portion [of an article] or not. It is our magazine and no one else has the right.[46]

As we have seen, this did not mean complete freedom for all Hindi Dalit writers, but represents the reassertion of control over an area of the Hindi literary field by members of an 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers.

Fuelled by the symbolic capital they had acquired during their years publishing in *Hans* and *Am Admi*, a core group of Hindi Dalit writers pooled their financial and organisational resources to form a Dalit counter-public sphere. As we have seen in the case of the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field, Dalit counter-publics are, in Nancy Fraser's terms (1992), wilfully created in response to the dissatisfaction with mainstream institutions. This Dalit counter-public was institutionally based on Dalit-edited journals, Dalit publishing presses and Dalit literary organisations. The aspiration to establish their own 'platform', however, has not decreased the symbolic importance of publishing in the Hindi mainstream. In fact, gaining editorial control over the growing field of Hindi Dalit literature in Delhi has been only one aim of this Dalit counter-public. New Dalit journals and literary organisations also act as a space for Dalit writers to build up the corpus of Hindi Dalit literature and gain mastery over the literary practices most valued by the mainstream Hindi literary field. In this way, the newly-formed Hindi Dalit counter-public positioned itself in direct opposition to the mainstream Hindi literary field and prepared to launch its attack simultaneously to gain entry to the established Hindi literary world and to challenge the established Hindi literary figures' authority to represent Indian society and the Indian nation.

The establishment of *Dalit Sahitya*, a Hindi Dalit-edited journal, marked a new point in the development of this autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. Its editor, Jayprakash Kardam, emphasised the role this Dalit journal played, first, by giving Dalit writers a larger platform on which to publish their work, and second, by

focusing the debate entirely on 'Dalit issues'. In an interview, Kardam claimed,

> [previously] these issues were dispersed all around. There was no centralised place to debate 'Dalit' as such. There was nothing to unite [these various discussions]. My friends and I both thought that we should do this work through a publication.[47]

As a literary institution, *Dalit Sahitya* was influential in bringing new Dalit writers into the field of Dalit literature. Dr Tej Singh, now a well-known Dalit writer and editor of the latest Dalit-run journal, *Apeksha*, noted in an interview that his first article on Dalit issues was published in the first edition of *Dalit Sahitya*,[48] and Ish Kumar Ganganiya, writer and now sub-editor of the Dalit journal *Apeksha,* also declares, 'I joined Dalit literature in 1999. It was in the Dalit annual edited by Dr J. P. Kardam'.[49]

A collaborative effort both financially and artistically, the first edition of *Dalit Sahitya* physically embodied the social network Hindi Dalit writers had developed over the course of the decade and represented a concerted attempt to gain editorial control over the growing field of Hindi Dalit literature. Dr Kardam describes the founding of this journal among Dalit writers as follows:

> Eight to ten writers contributed to bring this [journal] out. [Shyauraj Singh] Bechain, [Surajpal] Chauhan, [Kusum] Viogi, [Rajni] Tilak, Shatrughan Kumar, Karmashil Bharti, Lakshman Narayan Sudharkar, Rajpal Singh 'Raj', as well as the concepts and ideas of Dr. Dharmvir, Ish Kumar Ganganiya, and Tej Singh. All the prominent Dalits writers in Delhi contributed to this. I am not the only publisher. My duty was to edit, but from the beginning everyone contributed a little. Some gave Rs. 200, 400, 100, 1000. I managed everything, printing, editing.[50]

Here, we can see how Kardam's position among the 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers was already high enough in 1999 to justify his editorship of *Dalit Sahitya*. In addition, this editorial position further increased his prestige and cultural authority within the field, as he attests that after this first publication, he took over full management and editorship of the journal.[51] In this way, Kardam became the sole authority figure over this Dalit journal. This provided further impetus for other prominent Hindi Dalit writers in this field to establish their own Hindi Dalit journals, as we shall see.

The first annual issue of *Dalit Sahitya* in 1999 included an array of articles discussing the benefits, historical development and current importance of Hindi Dalit literature. It included an entire section of Hindi Dalit short stories, reflecting and further promoting the rising importance of this fictional literary genre within the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature and provided, in a final section, space for Hindi Dalit writers to review each others' works. Articles on Ambedkar's leadership and his role in the creation of the Indian Constitution explicitly linked *Dalit Sahitya* with the ideology of Ambedkar, which has become an important aspect of a politically-oriented Dalit literary aesthetics (see Chapter Five). In the annual issues in 2000 and 2001, *Dalit Sahitya* continued to devote an entire section to Hindi Dalit short stories and another to Hindi Dalit literary criticism. However, it expanded the scope of Dalit intellectual debate to cover a wide variety of topics under the auspices of *sahitya* (literature). These include articles on economic liberalisation/privatisation/globalisation and their effects on the Dalit community, articles on the system of reservation and articles on Dalits and on the education system, including one on the role of Dalit teachers. Still other articles discuss the relationship between Dalits and other minority communities, particularly the OBCs and the STs. Hence, as I argue later, Dalit literature has become an umbrella-like term used to encompass all Dalit-authored writings on Dalit issues (see Chapter Five).

As one of the first spaces within this new Hindi Dalit counter-public sphere, *Dalit Sahitya* helped Hindi Dalit writers increase their legitimacy and symbolic capital by associating their written works with an India-wide Dalit literary movement. *Dalit Sahitya* constructed these associations by publishing translations of Dalit literature from other regional Indian languages into Hindi, including Dalit short stories and poetry from Marathi, Bangla, Telugu, Punjabi and Assamese. These translations are complemented in each annual issue by articles analysing the progress and successes of Dalit literary movements in these regions. In addition, *Dalit Sahitya* has acted as a bridge between the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature and some Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers such as Buddh Sharan Hans, whose Dalit pamphlets and small quarterly journal *Ambedkar Mission Patrika* circulate in the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field (see Chapter One). This has allowed a few Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers to gain access to the more widely recognised

field of Hindi Dalit literature. However, it also required these Dalit pamphlet writers to display new literary sensibilities, which characterise the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. For example, compared to Dalit pamphlets on the life history of Sant Ravidas, which typically document the life of Ravidas as a Dalit social reformer, an article on the saint published in *Dalit Sahitya* instead positions Ravidas as part of a new Dalit literary canon (discussed further in Chapter Five) (Jaleniya 2001).

The journal *Dalit Sahitya* further demonstrated its authority within the autobiographic field of Dalit literature in 2002 by printing advertisements for *Am Admi*. This advertisement suggests the emergence of a growing Dalit readership, which constituted a new group of consumers of progressive mainstream Hindi literature. It also constitutes an important symbolic statement by demonstrating the growing authority the core group of Hindi Dalit writers attempts to project over the entire field of Hindi Dalit literature, even when it is published in a mainstream journal, since they are now in the position of patronising *Am Admi* rather than depending on upper-caste patronage themselves.

In September 2002, a Dalit-run quarterly, *Apeksha*, emerged from the core group of Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi as both an addition to this Hindi Dalit counter-public sphere and an alternative to the annual *Dalit Sahitya*. According to its editor, Tej Singh, 500 copies were printed for the first issue, but the journal received such a good response that its circulation immediately jumped to 1,000 copies per quarterly issue, a significant achievement for a self-funded journal. Working with Ish Kumar Ganganiya as the journal's sub-editor, Tej Singh describes the financial beginnings of this journal in much the same way that Jayprakash Kardam characterised the beginnings of *Dalit Sahitya*:

> It is team work and we are all friends self-funding it. Sudesh Tanvar, Ish Kumar Ganganiya, [Surajpal] Chauhan, and others. Sometimes we get money from advertisements, but generally it is self-funded and we don't get money from other sources. There are some members of the magazine, about 150-200, with fifteen or sixteen life-members. We are trying to make it grow. We have agencies in Bengal and Mumbai. Things are going well.[52]

Overall, *Apeksha* highlights the central role these few Hindi Dalit writers of the 'inner circle' including Tej Singh, Ish Kumar Ganganiya,

Sudesh Tanvar and Surajpal Chauhan have played in directing the subject and tone of Hindi Dalit discourse. For instance, after the first issue, *Apeksha* published a series of special issues, first on Kabir, then on Ravidas, and finally on Dalit autobiographies. However, rather than discussing Kabir and Ravidas in a spiritual sense, as the Adi Hindu leaders in the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field would have done,[53] articles in *Apeksha* responded to these two Bhakti poet-saints as they are positioned in the Hindi literary canon. The special issue on Kabir, in particular, should be seen as a direct response to Hindi Dalit writer Dharmvir's widely controversial book of literary criticism entitled *Kabir ke Alochak* (Literary Criticism of Kabir) (1997) which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. The focus of *Apeksha* on Dalit literary criticism was made explicit by the journal's editor, Tej Singh, who claims, 'We felt that there should be a stage for Dalits because there is no platform for Dalits in literature and literary criticism . . . There was not any Dalit literary criticism and *Apeksha* specialises in this.'[54] This cultivation of the specific genre of Dalit literary criticism constitutes Hindi Dalit writers' effort to train themselves in those literary genres most valued by the mainstream Hindi literary field. The opportunity to 'practise' writing literary criticism from a Dalit perspective was an important act, which Hindi Dalit writers would later employ to their advantage when challenging the established Hindi literary academy's authority in areas such as literary aesthetics (see Chapter Five).

Apeksha drew upon an existing Dalit readership cultivated by both the Hindi Dalit pamphlet field as well as *Dalit Sahitya*, and expanded that readership further in the Hindi region. According to Singh, 1,000 copies of each quarterly issue are distributed across the Hindi region of north India.[55] In order to accomplish this feat, Singh sends a number of copies to friends and Dalit literary colleagues outside of Delhi by post. A consideration of the locations of distribution, particularly in the smaller towns and villages, reveal the extent to which *Apeksha* relied on the Dalit literary networks solidified by *Dalit Sahitya* between autobiographic Hindi Dalit writers and Hindi Dalit writers living outside of Delhi. *Apeksha* is currently distributed in towns where previous contributors to *Dalit Sahitya* current reside.

The section of readers' responses located at the beginning of each issue also shows *Apeksha* further expanding the readership of Hindi Dalit literature. In the first few issues of *Apeksha*, readers'

responses closely correspond to the Dalit readership developed by *Dalit Sahitya*, including Omprakash Valmiki and Surajpal Chauhan, who both write in praise of the new journal, in addition to Ratnakumar Sanbhariya from Jaipur (*Dalit Sahitya* 2001), Purushottam Satyapremi from Ujjain (*Dalit Sahitya* 1999, 2001, 2002), Raj Valmiki from Delhi (*Dalit Sahitya* 2001) and Parasenath from Patna (*Dalit Sahitya* 1999, 2001) among others. However, each new issue of *Apeksha* transforms more and more Dalit readers into writers by giving them access to this autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. Thus, by the sixth issue (January–March 2004), readers who had never previously contributed to *Dalit Sahitya* wrote into *Apeksha* from a variety of areas throughout the Hindi belt including Jodhpur, Agra, Patna, Kolhapur, and Chhattisgarh, as well as within the wider Delhi region. This again demonstrates the importance of journals in providing bridges between the two fields of Hindi Dalit literature (see Chapter One).

Furthermore, *Apeksha* transformed the power dynamic between the most well-established Hindi Dalit writers of the 'inner circle' and the Hindi mainstream by including articles on Dalit literature by certain Hindi literary academics. While discursive exchange between figures in the mainstream Hindi literary field and Hindi Dalit writers had previously taken place on the pages of *Hans* and *Am Admi*, this time Dalits were in control. Sitting in the editorial position, Hindi Dalit writers now had the power to decide which Hindi literary academics would be allowed to participate in their debate and what they could write about. As we shall see in Chapter Five, mainstream Hindi literary scholars from JNU in Delhi responded to this shift in power by conceding a certain amount of cultural authority (cultural capital) over the field of Hindi Dalit literature, most importantly, by proclaiming that only Dalit writers could write Dalit literature (see Chapter Five).

However, the power shift brought on by the establishment of the Dalit counter-public through the journals *Dalit Sahitya* and *Apeksha* also had its limitations, since the mainstream Hindi literary field still holds the most symbolic and cultural capital over Hindi literary sensibilities — in other words, what is considered 'good' literature and 'good' literary practice. Consequently, Dalit writers have continued to express anxieties over how Dalit literary journals compare to mainstream Hindi journals in terms of quality of

articles, aesthetic appearance, circulation and readership. Ganganiya expressed,

> [w]e encourage the Dalit writer to please give some more, to give some material for the magazine so that the Dalit magazine may not be in any manner inferior to the non-Dalit magazine. We should establish a standard for our magazines. That is why within one year's time we have [received] a remarkable response. Our magazine is an established one these days. Our magazine is better than the magazines which have been running for 10-15 years.[56]

As part of the effort to further institutionalise its own Dalit platform, or Dalit counter-public, the 'inner circle' of Dalit writers founded two Dalit literary organisations, the Dalit Lekhak Sangh and the Dalit Sahitya Akademi (Dalit Literary Academy). The establishment of these literary organisations represented Hindi Dalit writers' attempt to cultivate legitimacy in the mainstream Hindi literary world by conforming to its valued literary practices of holding literary conferences and conferring status through literary awards. In this way, both the Dalit Lekhak Sangh and the Dalit Sahitya Akademi were set up largely to display Hindi Dalit writers' mastery over these mainstream Hindi literary sensibilities and practices.[57] Tej Singh recalls that it was during an informal meeting at Kusum Viogi's house attended by Jayprakash Kardam, Surajpal Chauhan and other well-established Hindi Dalit writers that they first contemplated establishing the Dalit Lekhak Sangh and discussed its policy. Soon after, another meeting was called to organise the Dalit Lekhak Sangh, formally constituted in 1999, with Surajpal Chauhan as its first president.[58] Due to Chauhan's busy work schedule, he was shortly replaced by Dr Tej Singh, who had more time to devote to the organisation's activities. Monthly meetings took place in Tej Singh's office in DU — a space of symbolic significance — and it was decided that there should be a conference in which Dalit writers could come and formally express their views. Ish Kumar Ganganiya, currently treasurer of this association, highlights the symbolic importance of the organisation when he claims, 'It was organised to provide Dalits, especially the Dalits of Delhi first, and then others, a proper space in the heart of the country'.[59] Ganganiya's statement shows how the Dalit Lekhak Sangh, although constituted by the same members of the informal network of Hindi

Dalit writers, could provide a level of legitimacy that the informal network could not.

The Dalit Lekhak Sangh formalised many of the previously informal oral discussions among Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi. At the same time, the Dalit Lekhak Sangh highlighted the important role oral discussion had always played in both the solidification of the Dalit literary network as well as in the construction of textual Dalit discourse. The monthly meetings of the members of the Dalit Lekhak Sangh included, as Ganganiya's statement mentioned earlier demonstrates, the same established Hindi Dalit writers who had been meeting informally for the past decade. Dalit Lekhak Sangh meetings institutionalised this pre-textual orality as a basis for clarifying each individual writer's own perspectives. However, it was also an important space for constructing group stances on certain key issues, such as the aims of Dalit literature, the affiliation with Ambedkar, the belief that only Dalits can write Dalit literature and the Dalit writers' own importance as representative voices for the wider Dalit community. Furthermore, it provided an additional context in which established Hindi Dalit writers could police the boundaries of Hindi Dalit debate, for instance by creating a culture of taboo surrounding any discussion of inter-jati conflict within the Dalit community.

The Dalit Lekhak Sangh also has also added a performative element to the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature through biannual conferences, which have provided a physical platform 'in the nation's capital' for Dalit writers to speak their views on Dalit issues. The first Dalit Lekhak Sangh Conference took place in 2001 in central Delhi. Financial concerns were extremely important for both conferences due to the high cost of renting a hall, providing lunch and tea, as well as the personal cost for many writers of travelling to Delhi. In describing the process of organising the event, Hindi Dalit writers such as Ganganiya and Tej Singh highlight the economic and cultural discrimination they continue to face in the mainstream Hindi public sphere despite their position within the middle classes. Ganganiya, for example, was convinced that there was no media coverage of the Dalit Lekhak Sangh Conference in 2001,

> because we had no money to entertain and entice them … We were already short of funds … This kind of thing works against the Dalit movement. If you give a lot to the media people, you will get good coverage in the media.[60]

In April 2004, Hindi Dalit writers came together again at the University Centre, near Mandi House in central Delhi, for the Second Annual Conference of the Dalit Lekhak Sangh. The conference was chaired by Surajpal Chauhan, Tej Singh and Kusum Viogi.[61] A few non-Dalit Hindi figures were also allowed to speak on the 'Dalit stage', including Rajendra Yadav of *Hans*, Ramanika Gupta of *Am Admi* and Bajrang Bihari Tiwari, a young Hindi academic of DU who has written sympathetically on Dalit literature. The topics of the four conference sessions, in fact, included very little discussion of Dalit literature per se, but rather highlighted widely-felt concern over the place of Dalits in the mainstream media, the effects of globalisation and privatisation on the Dalit community and the position of Dalit women in the Dalit community. The Dalit Lekhak Sangh Conference's preoccupation with such topical Dalit social issues reflects the broad range of subjects that have come to be included under the 'umbrella' of Dalit literature, as we shall see further in Chapter Five.

Over time, the network of Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field has laid the foundation for a supportive group that can pool resources and contribute towards larger projects, including the creation of a Dalit counter-public sphere formed by Dalit journals such as *Dalit Sahitya* and *Apeksha* and Dalit literary organisations such as the Dalit Lekhak Sangh and the Dalit Sahitya Akademi. Although many Dalit writers emphasise the importance of having Dalit editors of Dalit-run journals, a development which signifies freedom from discrimination in publishing and a new level of control over the boundaries of debate, Jayprakash Kardam's earlier description of the formation of these networks among Hindi Dalit writers of a similar frame of mind reminds us that the journals and organisations formed through these networks do not represent complete freedom of expression for all Hindi Dalit writers. Rather, they signify a process by which certain Hindi Dalit writers have developed normative opinions and redefined rather than dissolved discursive boundaries. Furthermore, while *Dalit Sahitya* and *Apeksha* have provided an important link between the established Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi and Dalit writers from other urban centres in the Hindi belt, it remains the Hindi Dalit writers in Delhi who hold the key positions of power within this Dalit literary field. They are the editors of the Hindi Dalit journals and maintain the most social capital through their relationships with Delhi-based mainstream

Hindi literary figures such as Rajendra Yadav, Raminika Gupta, and now even with the editors of mainstream Hindi national dailies based in Delhi.[62] Thus, while many Dalit writers from across the Hindi belt have published articles in issues of *Dalit Sahitya* and *Apeksha*, most Dalit writers living outside of Delhi, and even writers living in Delhi but not a part of the 'inner circle' of established Hindi Dalit writers, are kept at a distance. As this literary network of Dalit writers solidifies and as the writers themselves become more established in the literary sphere, it is, increasingly, the established 'inner circle' of Hindi Dalit writers who have become the arbiters of 'correct Dalit thought'. They are now the legitimate authority on 'Dalit *chetna*' (Dalit consciousness) and police the boundaries of the Hindi Dalit literature by exercising their editorial powers over the Hindi Dalit counter-public (see Chapter Five).

Literary Practices in the Autobiographic Field

While he continues to actively publish in Dalit journals, Hindi Dalit writer Mohandas Naimisharay expresses pride in the fact that he also has the ability to publish in the mainstream Hindi literary field. He states:

> For one article, I take a minimum of one thousand rupees and generally between two and three thousand for one article. I work hard, and since these [mainstream] magazines and newspapers are widely circulated, they give as I demand. Today, not ten years ago. Ten years ago they were also not interested in publishing me.[63]

Hindi Dalit writers, like Mohandas Naimisharay, have spent decades struggling to gain access to the mainstream Hindi publishing world, and thus, for a Hindi Dalit writer to proclaim that the Hindi mainstream solicits and pays high rates for his articles is a sign of significant prestige. This section argues that Hindi Dalit writers' attempt to enter the mainstream Hindi literary world has resulted in the development of a hierarchy of Dalit literary practices, which distinguish the most successful Hindi Dalit writers from the less successful. In other words, where a particular Dalit writer publishes, the form of publication, methods of distribution and the literary genre in which s/he writes are all embedded in a hierarchy of literary practices, which holds certain symbolic values in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. Mastery of the

most valued literary forms and practices confers cultural and symbolic capital, which Hindi Dalit writers then use to exercise authority over the field of Hindi Dalit literature (i.e., by defining what is legitimate Dalit ideology or what is 'good' Dalit literature) as well as to begin challenging the authority of the mainstream Hindi literary field to determine what constitutes 'good' literature.

Since the primary aim of Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature is to gain recognition from the mainstream Hindi field, consequently, hierarchies of distinction in this field of Hindi Dalit literature are not exclusively established by the most dominant Hindi Dalit writers, rather, are largely determined by the sensibilities and hierarchies of distinction of the mainstream Hindi literary field. This reflects the relationship between the Hindi Dalit literary field with the larger field of power held in Indian society by the upper-caste middle classes. Thus, Dalit writers' preferences for book publishing, the value they place on genres such as literary criticism and fiction over, for instance, life histories of Ambedkar, and the prestige associated with publishing in respected mainstream literary journals over Dalit ones all reflect the way these Dalit writers participate in the hierarchies of literary value established by the mainstream Hindi literary field. However, far from simply mimicking upper-caste values, mastery over these literary practices and hierarchies of distinction is a strategy which provides Hindi Dalit writers with the literary tools necessary to eventually challenge the literary authority of the mainstream Hindi world over the Indian literary tradition (see Chapter Five).

Publishing in the mainstream demonstrates a particular Dalit writer's mastery over the literary practices most valued by the mainstream as well as the Dalit literary field, and therefore confers the highest levels of symbolic capital in the form of prestige. It also displays a writer's growing ability to challenge the authority of the mainstream through his/her mastery over its literary practices. This is in spite of the importance of the Dalit counter-public sphere in providing a space for Hindi Dalit writers to consolidate their relationships, discuss the meaning of Dalit ideology and build up the corpus of Hindi Dalit literature. However, conflicts often develop within the autobiographic Hindi Dalit literary field between those who have access to the Hindi mainstream and those who are excluded from it and must satisfy themselves with publishing in the Dalit counter-public.

In his discussions of the field of cultural production, Pierre Bourdieu has written that individual agents in the field acquire a 'sense of their place' within the social hierarchy and consequently move towards cultural products and practices 'appropriate' to their position while excluding themselves from goods, persons and practices from which they are excluded. Bourdieu writes,

> [d]ominated agents who assess the value of their position ... tend to attribute to themselves what the distribution attributes to them, refusing what they are refused, adjusting their expectations to their chances, defining themselves as the established order defines them (1993a: 241).

A similar negotiation is apparent among Hindi Dalit writers who express opinions regarding the mainstream Hindi publishing world depending on their relative access to it. Hindi Dalit writers who have the ability to publish in the Hindi mainstream emphasise the significance of having a wide readership, while Dalit writers who continue to be excluded from the Hindi mainstream and remain confined to the Hindi Dalit counter-public with a Dalit readership stress the importance of speaking to 'one's own community' through Dalit publications. For example, Tulsi Ram, a Hindi Dalit writer who has gained wide access to the Hindi literary mainstream through his position as an academic at JNU, reflects, 'There is a marked difference [between Dalit journals and mainstream ones]. Dalit journals reach a limited and small readership whereas newspapers go throughout the country. The question is how far an idea can go.'[64] Similarly, the most well-established Hindi Dalit writer, Omprakash Valmiki, also asserts,

> I get letters from various [mainstream] newspapers and magazines who want me to write something for them. I think it is a positive change. Perhaps they are only interested in business, but still I think it is a good development since at least people are getting to read works by Dalit writers. The circulation and network of these newspapers and magazines is much wider than Dalit journals and magazines.[65]

Hindi Dalit writers who habitually publish in the Hindi mainstream also emphasise the high standards of mainstream publications — thereby highlighting their own mastery in this challenging arena — while Dalit writers confined to the Dalit counter-public sphere emphasise their commitment to speaking to the Dalit community.

For example, Tulsi Ram states, '[a]ll writers don't get an opportunity to publish in newspapers because the quality standards are high . . . Dalit journals will publish anything'.[66] Similarly, Mohandas Naimisharay argues,

> most people from Dalits are published in magazines and papers which are run by their own people [i.e., Dalits] because they can easily publish their articles . . . [Even if] it is not a good article, Dalit magazines . . . are happy to publish it because they do not have that many articles.[67]

In contrast, Jayprakash Kardam, who is not widely published in the Hindi mainstream and who has much more cultural authority in the Dalit literary field as editor of *Dalit Sahitya,* asserts,

> [m]y first motive or aim is to publish in Dalit magazines. As I said earlier, it is our social commitment. It is my duty for my community . . . We give our articles to mainstream magazines, [but] we want to communicate our ideas to Dalit people first.[68]

Ish Kumar Ganganiya, whose writings are also largely confined to the Dalit literary field, comments,

> [t]hese bitter experiences [with the Hindi mainstream] forced me to get my articles published in Dalit magazines, so that their standards will get a little uplift. But there is a drawback in Dalit writers, that if someone gets popularity or publicity [in the mainstream], he keeps his distance from the Dalit magazines and he is proud to be published in the non-Dalit magazines.[69]

And Tejpal Singh Tej claims,

> *Hans* [mainstream Hindi literary journal] has reached fewer Dalits and other people interested in Dalit literature, while [the Dalit journal] *Apeksha* reaches mostly all Dalits and people interested in Dalit literature. So if you talk about strengthening a movement, then with *Hans*, only a couple of Dalit writers are associated while a large number of Dalits and Dalit writers are linked with *Apeksha*. Therefore *Apeksha* generates more awareness compared to other journals.[70]

As Bourdieu's model suggest, these perspectives are not merely a reflection of individual taste, but reveal the writers' positions within the larger cultural field. In this case, the examples show that Hindi

Dalit writers who have acquired access to the mainstream Hindi literary field emphasise the importance of reaching out to a mixed audience, while Dalit writers marginalised from the mainstream portray their literary activities as service to the Dalit community alone and criticise the former group of writers for not doing so. Thus, having a 'saleable' name, or name-recognition in the Hindi literary field, inscribes a Hindi Dalit author with significant symbolic capital, which they then use to further secure their cultural authority over the field of Hindi Dalit literature.

The form of Dalit literary publications, such as hardbound books, small booklets or articles in journals, is also a significant marker of distinction within the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. The truism that books are often judged by their cover is reflected in the fact that the quality and seriousness of Dalit literary publications are judged by the reader (both general and Dalit) according to their size, cover, and cost. Hardbound books, in particular, are imbued with a sense of authority and professionalism in both the mainstream Hindi and Dalit literary fields. Thus, despite the fact that they are expensive both for the publishers to print and for the consumer to buy at Rs 150–300 per copy, hardbound books have become a common form of publishing for Hindi Dalit writers due to the prestige associated with their publication. This is the case even for Hindi Dalit writers who profess to be writing to reach out to the Dalit community, most of whom could never afford the high cost of this sort of book.

Very few Hindi Dalit writers have been able to publish their books with a mainstream Hindi literary press. Omprakash Valmiki, Mohandas Naimisharay and Dharmvir are three exceptions. Naimishray's autobiography *Apne Apne Pinjare* was published by Vani Prakashan in 1995,[71] and Valmiki's autobiography *Juthan* was published in 1997 by Radhakrishna Prakashan, two of the top literary Hindi publishers in Delhi. As we will see in the next chapter, publishing one's own autobiography gives Hindi Dalit writers greater access to the Hindi literary publishing world. Valmiki, Naimisharay and Dharmvir have subsequently published their work through Vani, Radhakrishna and even Raj Kamal Prakashan, the most prestigious Hindi literary publisher (Dharmvir 1997, 1999, 2005; Naimisharay 2003b; Valmiki 2000, 2001b). Practical benefits to publishing through a Hindi commercial press not only include economic profits; these publishers also take responsibility for literary

distribution across the Hindi region through contracted bookstores and national libraries.[72] Furthermore, since the transaction is commercial, these publishers will only publish Dalit writers whose books they expect to make a profit. However, a recent increase in Hindi Dalit literature published by mainstream Hindi commercial presses suggests an expanding readership for Dalit literature, including a growing Dalit readership which is supporting this market. Naimisharay, for example, attests that mainstream Hindi commercial presses 'are earning crores of rupees from Dalit books',[73] and Jayprakash Kardam agrees, '[t]here is a market for Dalit literature … Every publisher now wants a book by a Dalit writer because of this market … and it is on the basis of this market that Dalit literature is selling.'[74]

Most Hindi Dalit writers, however, still have to depend on Dalit publishers, who help Dalit writers with the expense of book publishing and thus confer on these writers the symbolic capital associated with book publishing.[75] One such Dalit press is Samyak Prakashan, founded in Delhi by Shanti Svarup Bauddh, which now boasts 300 publications (at 1,000 copies each) from 1999–2004 in Hindi, English, Punjabi and Assamese. Hostility felt by Hindi Dalit writers in reaction to the perceived discrimination of the large Hindi commercial publishers transforms into an important strategy of rejecting these big commercial publishers in favour of publishing based on communal identity and shared ideology. It is in this context that Shanti Sharup Bauddh made the confrontational claim, '[h]aving our own publishers is important, because if we don't have them, we would have to borrow our ideology of our enemies through their literature. We should have our own literature to teach the ideology of Ambedkar.'[76] Yet, these small, individually-run Dalit publishers, like Kusum Viogi's Samata Prakashan, are plagued with difficulties as they are often run on personal funds and thus struggle against shortage of finances and a lack of distribution infrastructure. Samyak Prakashan, for example, depends on Shanti Sharup Bauddh's handicraft business to keep it running. He distributes books through social networks, Dalit or Buddhist seminars and conferences.

The issue of literary distribution of Hindi Dalit presses in this autobiographic field is significant in its deviation from usual distribution methods practised by Hindi commercial presses, where books are placed in a publicly located shop and sold for a fixed price.

For smaller Dalit publishers, distribution occurs along the lines of social networks, or in spaces such as Dalit conferences. Sultan Singh Gautam has risen to fill the need in the Dalit counter-public sphere for a Dalit literary distributor. Gautam runs the Gautam Book Centre out of his home in Shahdara on the outskirts of Delhi. Established in 1994, the Gautam Book Centre is an institution which aims to collect any and all Dalit publications, archiving Dalit literature in one central location.[77] Sultan Singh Gautam also sells all these books on Dalit literature at various festivals, including the World Book Fair, which takes place annually at Pragati Maidan, and the Ambedkar Jayanti celebrated on 14 April each year in central Delhi near the Parliament House.[78] The World Book Fair is attended by thousands of potential readers from in and around Delhi, who will become aware of this literature even if they don't purchase books for themselves. Financial profit is of secondary importance to the cultivation of symbolic capital gained from book publishing. When Dr Tej Singh published his first book on Dalit issues — a collection of his articles on Dalit literature called *Aj Ka Dalit Sahitya* (Today's Dalit Literature) — he claims,

> [t]his book is published from Apratim Prakashan. I didn't pay to publish it. I also received no royalties. This is our (*ham log*) publication of some Allahabadi friends, so royalty has no meaning. It is friendship, so I didn't get any money for selling it.[79]

In this way, Hindi Dalit presses enable Hindi Dalit writers to gain respect in the autobiographic Dalit literary field while not having to pay for their books to be published. Although not as symbolically prestigious as a publication by a mainstream Hindi commercial press, this is still important to an individual writer's status in the field. Dalit presses specifically target a Dalit audience as the primary consumers of this literature. However, the high price differentiates the Dalit audience of these hardbound books from the Dalit audience of the Dalit pamphlet field.

Those Dalit writers who are unable to find either a commercial publisher or Dalit publisher to fund the printing of their books often resort to self-publishing, using their personal funds to pay a company to print and bind their books. This private method of publishing also means the writer him/herself is responsible for distribution, and thus books are often passed out to friends and family or sold at

Dalit seminars and conferences. Hindi Dalit writer Raghuvir Singh provides a revealing example of this process. Singh self-published his first book on Ambedkar. Afterwards, he was able to find a Dalit press, Atish Prakashan, to publish his next two books on Buddhism and Ambedkarism, which he helps distribute to other Dalit writers and attempts to sell at Dalit conferences in Delhi (R. Singh 2000, 2001a, b). To Singh, the financial expense of publishing three hardbound books is worth the symbolic capital he receives from demonstrating that he is an authority figure on the life of Ambedkar and the history of Buddhism.[80] While these Hindi Dalit writers still gain a certain amount of symbolic capital by proving they have done an intensive study and are seriously committed to Dalit ideology, because their work has not been legitimised by a publisher investing economic capital in its publication, the symbolic capital they acquire from such publications is limited. Established writers such as Mohandas Naimisharay further reinforce their prestigious positions in the Dalit literary field by describing writers who self-publish their books as having a 'craze for publishing'[81] and in this sense, not having to pay to publish one's books becomes an important marker of distinction in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. However, even self-published Dalit literature in this autobiographic field is not distributed on ground cloths at local Dalit melas as we have seen with Dalit literary pamphlets, but ideally, is distributed at pukka (permanent) bookshops such as Mandi House, the Hindi Book Centre or bookshops on the campuses of DU and JNU, or if this is not possible, is distributed at middle-class venues such as literary conferences or seminars and along Dalit intellectual networks. This practice of literary distribution reveals the extent to which Hindi Dalit writers in this field attempt to master (and have the possibility of imitating) mainstream literary practices, over and above their desire for their literature to reach the wider Dalit community.

Finally, literary genres are also ranked in the autobiographic field of Dalit literature in a hierarchy of symbolic value. At the top rung are Dalit autobiographies and Dalit literary criticism. Below these literary genres are forms of fictions, especially short stories, and below these, articles on contemporary Dalit social issues or on histories of Ambedkar or the Buddha. Finally, at the lowest rung are poetry and drama (which are literary genres more common within the pamphlet field of Hindi Dalit literature).[82] Like other literary

practices, Dalit writers' mastery over these genres reflects their relative position in the autobiographic Dalit literary field. While this hierarchy of value conforms largely to the literary sensibilities of the contemporary mainstream Hindi literary field it also maps onto the other criteria such as where a literary work is published. For instance, Dalit autobiographies are associated with great prestige since they were the first genre to be published and publicly recognised by the Hindi mainstream (see Chapter Four). Dalit literary criticism also holds great symbolic value for Hindi Dalit writers, first, because it is a highly valued genre in the Hindi literary mainstream and associated with scholarly activity; and second, because it provides a way for Hindi Dalit writers to most seriously challenge the literary authority of the mainstream to judge 'good' literature (see Chapter Five). Short stories are also inscribed with relatively high symbolic value within the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, since this is a genre highly valued by the Hindi mainstream and thought to require great creative energy and aesthetic skill. Both short stories and, more recently, novels have been popular genres for Hindi Dalit writers as they both draw on and stretch beyond autobiographic impulses. In this way, Dalit novels, short stories and other pieces of fiction counteract a common perception in the Hindi mainstream that Dalits' experiences of the larger world are limited due to their oppressed social position and that therefore, they can only write autobiographical works (see Chapter Four). Finally, literary work that is perceived to be more 'political' in nature, including articles on Ambedkar, Dalit social issues or political dramas are consequently not imbued with much symbolic prestige.

Ultimately, Hindi Dalit writers employ strategies depending on the literary possibilities which are open to them based on their position in both the field of Dalit literature and the mainstream Hindi literary field. Those writers who can publish in the mainstream Hindi literary field, do so. Although this is an expensive endeavour, Hindi Dalit writers also continued to write and self-publish hardbound books for the prestige one receives for completing such a long and apparently serious work. Gaining mastery over literary practices and sensibilities held in esteem by the mainstream means that Hindi Dalit writers are better able to challenge the exclusionary practices of the Hindi literary world on its own terms. Hindi Dalit writers argue, as we will see in Chapter Five, that they are the

new light in contemporary Hindi literature, modernising literary aesthetics, democratising contributions to the Hindi literary canon and presenting a more accurate representation of the multiplicity of experiences of being Indian. This is a far cry from the literary practices and aims of the field of Hindi Dalit pamphlet literature, which continues to circulate in the separate world of Dalit melas. While the next chapter demonstrates how the autobiographies of Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field have taken great pains to portray themselves as representative Dalit voices, Hindi Dalit pamphlet writers have had no such concern, and as we have already seen, have been much more preoccupied with proving their commitment to community seva. Disparities between the literary practices of these two fields of Hindi Dalit literature thus range from genre to modes of distribution and audience. Underlying these differences are two alternative aims — the pamphlet writers' attempt to instil political consciousness in the Dalit community and the focus of Dalit writers in the autobiographic field on gaining recognition and respect by the literary mainstream.

Notes

1. Fieldwork in Delhi, December 2003–May 2004.
2. For a theorisation of the role of the middle class in the formation of the discursive 'public sphere' in north India, see S. Joshi (2001) and Orsini (2002).
3. Interview with Shyauraj Singh 'Bechain', 15 January 2004, Delhi.
4. Ibid.
5. Bechain's father, Das' father, J. P. Kardam's father, and both parents of Tejpal Singh Tej passed away while they were still children.
6. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
7. Interview with Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
8. This is particularly the case since they were all interviewed under the auspices of being a 'Dalit writer'.
9. Interview with Shyauraj Singh Bechain, 30 March 2003, Delhi.
10. Interview with Shyauraj Singh Bechain, 15 January 2004, Delhi.
11 Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.
12 Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
13 Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
14 Interview with Raghuvir Singh, 5 February 2004, Delhi.
15 While I use J. P. Kardam as an example of one Hindi Dalit writer who has been influential in the establishment of the Delhi network of Hindi Dalit writers, positions of authority within this autobiographic literary

field are under constant contestation and negotiation. As we shall see later in this chapter, as the popularity of the newer Hindi Dalit journal *Apeksha* grows, its editors Tej Singh and Ish Kumar Ganganiya have increased their cultural authority in the field. Similarly, the appointment of president of the Dalit Lekhak Sangh (Dalit Writers' Association) reflects these shifting positions of authority.

16. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
17. Interview with Dr Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
18. Fieldwork, April 2004, Delhi.
19. Interview with Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
20. Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
21. Interview in English and Hindi with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
22. Please note Tejpal Singh 'Tej' and Tej Singh are two different Hindi Dalit writers.
23. Interview with Tejpal Singh Tej, 4 January 2004, Delhi.
24. Tejpal Singh Tej was relegated to the 'reviews' section of the 1999 edition of *Dalit Sahitya*, where he contributed an article entitled, 'Varsh 1998 aur Hindi Dalit Kavita' (The Year 1998 and Hindi Dalit Poetry). His articles were not included in the 2001 or 2002 editions of *Dalit Sahitya*. His writings were also not included in the special Dalit issue of *Hans* in August 2004.
25. Interview with Tejpal Singh Tej, 4 January 2004, Delhi.
26. Kanval Bharti is not included in this group since he has been excluded from many of the literary events organised by the Dalit writers in Delhi; this is perhaps because his controversial pieces against the politics of the BSP make him a contentious 'partner' in the network.
27. Interview with Surajpal Chauhan, 3 March 2003, Delhi.
28. This perceived censorship, for instance, has led Indu to write a much more radical article for the mainstream Hindi journal *Kathadesh*, than he did for the Dalit journal *Apeksha* (Indu 2003a, b). Interview in Hindi with Tejpal Singh Tej, 4 January 2004, Delhi. Also based on conversations with Kavitendra Indu from December 2003–April 2004 at JNU.
29. The journal *Hans* was first established in the 1930s by Munshi Premchand, the most renowned Hindi literary figure now known as the 'Father of Modern Hindi'. After Premchand's death the journal passed through several hands including his son, Amrit Rai, until it ceased publication around 1951. Hindi Nayi Kahani writer Rajendra Yadav revived *Hans* in 1986. Explaining why he revived the journal, Yadav claims, 'I wanted to associate myself with some tradition to which I subscribed… When I went through the issues of *Hans*, I saw that it was not exclusively on issues of literature. It discusses so many other problems also, especially those problems which have prominence

for the intellectual class. So I thought it should be called a social literary magazine.' With the help of friends' financial contributions and donations from abroad, Rajendra Yadav re-launched the journal, which now prints 15,000 copies per month and has run continuously for almost twenty years. Interview with Rajendra Yadav, 24 January 2004, Delhi.

30. Interview with Dr Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
31. Rajendra Yadav made a similar statement during his talk at the Dalit Lekhak Sangh Conference on 24–25 April 2004, Delhi. Interview with Rajendra Yadav, 24 January 2004, Delhi.
32. *Hans* also regularly publishes two established Hindi writers from outside Delhi, Kanval Bharti from Rampur and N. Singh from Saharanpur in UP. It is unclear whether these two writers came into contact through their previous relationship to the Delhi-based network of Hindi Dalit writers, or whether they were included in the outer regions of the network through the symbolic capital they acquired by publishing in *Hans*.
33. Interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Defence Colony, Delhi.
34. *Am Admi* was started in 1984–1985 in Hazaribag, Bihar. At that time, it was publishing only three to four hundred copies per issue, but now it has moved to Delhi and prints up to one thousand copies of each issue which circulate among Hindi readers. This journal was originally a space for poor women, and labourers writing on working class and gender issues. Gupta mentions poems published by coal cutters, *biri* workers, gang men and labour union activists. Interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Delhi.
35. Interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Defence Colony, Delhi.
36. For instance, the October–December 1998 issue of *Am Admi* contains Dalit literature translated into Hindi from Telegu, including short stories, portions of a novel, poetry and articles on Dalit poets and on the Dalit community in Andra Pradesh. Similarly, several issues from 2001–2002 include various examples of Punjabi Dalit literature, as well as a serialised Marathi Dalit novel by Sharankumar Limbale translated into Hindi.
37. For example, *Am Admi*'s January–June issue of 1998 included articles reviewing the events of the Dalit Literary Writers' Conference in Bihar, the October–December issue of 1999 reported on the Dalit Literary Academy Conference in Madhya Pradesh, and the July–September issue of 2000 showed pictures of the Ramanika Foundation Seminar in Patna.
38. It is important to qualify what we mean by the 'mainstream' here, particularly since, *Hans* and *Am Admi* have a specific readership which is neither as broadly read nor even as accessible as Hindi national or

regional newspapers. *Hans*, for instance, distributes approximately 15,000 copies which cater to readers interested in contemporary developments in Hindi literature and intellectual debates. In this way, *Hans* has become a major institution in the Hindi literary field and participates with Hindi literary departments in conferring literary legitimacy, a fact which has greatly aided the Hindi Dalit writers' growing acceptability within the Hindi academy. *Am Admi*'s distribution is limited to 1,000 copies and thus influences a smaller Marxist-leaning readership interested in Dalit and tribal literature, women's literature and populist literature of the labour movement. Thus, while the readership of these two journals is not defined by any particular caste community and is read by various middle-class intellectuals, its 'public' character is much different than that of daily Hindi newspapers in terms of both number of readers as well as its claim to represent news of mainstream public interest.

39. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
40. Interview with Govind Dikshit (current editor of *Rashtriya Sahara*), 5 April 2004, Noida, UP.
41. Interview with Shyauraj Singh Bechain, 15 January 2004, Delhi.
42. Interview with Govind Dikshit, 5 April 2004, Noida, UP.
43. Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.
44. Figures such as Ramanika Gupta have since attempted to facilitate Dalit literature's entry into the university setting by holding Dalit literary conferences in both Chhattisgarh University and Naga University in Jharkhand. (Interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Delhi). More recently, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has included an entire paper on Dalit literature as part of their curriculum at both the bachelor's and master's level, organised by Dr Vimal Thorat of JNU. By 2004, Omprakash Valmiki added that Allahabad University is attempting to include Dalit literature in their syllabus, and a plethora of postgraduate dissertations have been or are in the process of being completed on Dalit literature, although few have been published in book form. Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.
45. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
46. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
47. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
48. Interview with Dr Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
49. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
50. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
51. Ibid.
52. Interview with Dr Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
53. We remember Achutanand's conception of atmavad, or self-realisation, which he gleaned from Bhakti philosophy (see Chapter One).

54. Interview in Hindi with Dr Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
55. The biggest number of issues of *Apeksha* are distributed in Delhi, 20 at JNU, 50 at DU, and 50 at Mandi House's Shri Ram Centre. In UP, there are distribution centers in Khareli (20 copies), Shayabareli (70–80 copies), Meerut (20 copies), Khasti (40), Shorakhapur (25), Lucknow (20), Rampur (20). In Punjab, Ludhiana (10). In Madhya Pradesh: Ujjain (10), Vilaspur near Chhattisgarh (10), Shehaul (20). In Patna, Bihar, two different shops sell 10 copies each, and in Mujapapharpur (also Bihar) the Shri Saraswati Agency sells 20. In Shimla, Himanchal Pradesh (20). In Jharkhand, Ajay Yatish and Vipin Bihari 5 copies each. In Rajasthan: Ramesh Nirmal Dausa sells 20, and Ratan Kumar Sawariya in Jaipur sells 20. Three stalls in Bombay sell 35 copies. And a stall in Hyderbad sells 10. These small numbers of copies have a wide geographical distribution and have thus had a significant impact on a group of political conscious Dalit readers.
56. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
57. It is important to note that unlike the mainstream Hindi literary institutions such as Hindi Sahitya Akademi or government libraries, these Dalit institutions receive no government funding.
58. Interview with Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
59. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
60. Ibid.
61. Fieldwork, 24–25 April 2004, University Centre, Delhi.
62. Despite his claims to facing discrimination from mainstream editors, Shyauraj Singh Bechain has established a name for himself as a 'Dalit journalist' through his publications in Hindi national and regional dailies including *Amar Ujala* and *Hindustan Times*.
63. Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
64. Interview with Dr Tulsi Ram, 26 April 2004, Delhi.
65. Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.
66. Interview with Dr Tulsi Ram, 26 April 2004, Delhi.
67. Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
68. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
69. Interview with Ish Kumar Ganganiya, 21 January 2004, Delhi.
70. Interview with Tejpal Singh Tej, 4 January 2004, Delhi.
71. Vani Prakashan also publishes Raj Kishor's *Aj ke Prashan* series including *Harijan Se Dalit*, where many Dalit writers including Omprakash Valmiki published, and published the well-known *Kabir ke Alochak* by Dharmvir in 1997.
72. One of the main issues regarding literary sales is the role of national and state libraries who are the largest single purchasers of hard-bound books from mainstream publishers. Thus, commercial presses will often only agree to publish a book they know the government libraries will buy. At the moment, there is no scholarly work which has examined

the role of government libraries in influencing literary production and publication. My limited understanding of this relationship comes from an interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Delhi.

73. Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
74. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
75. Ramanika Gupta of *Am Admi* has also been involved in helping Hindi Dalit writers publish their longer works through her press Navlekhan Prakashan in Hazaribag, Bihar. Now, she claims, 'The Sahitya Akademi is going to publish in collaboration with Ramanika Foundation. They [Sahitya Akademi] have asked me to edit one book on Dalit writers. So I collected twenty-seven stories of Dalit writers in six languages.' Gupta has, for example, helped Shyauraj Singh Bechain to publish an edited volume of Dalit literary criticism with a non-Dalit scholar from JNU, Devendra Chaube entitled *Chintan ki Parampara aur Dalit Sahitya* (The Tradition of Thought and Dalit Literature) in 2000–2001. Interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Delhi.
76. Interview with Shanti Sharup Bauddh, 24 April 2004, Delhi.
77. Interview with Sultan Singh Gautam, 12 February 2004, Delhi.
78. At the Ambedkar Jayanti in 2004, Gautam Book Center was not only the largest stall set up on the main street selling Dalit literature; it was also the only major stall selling hard-bound books and literature written by these Delhi-based Dalit writers.
79. Interview with Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
80. Interview with Raghuvir Singh, 4 February 2004, Delhi.
81. Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
82. While placing poetry on the lowest rung of distinction does not mirror the mainstream Hindi literary world's value for this genre, it does reflect the importance among Dalit writers of where one's work is published. Because poetry is a very difficult genre to publish in the literary mainstream, Hindi Dalit writers have only been able to publish Dalit poetry in their own Dalit journals, which confer much less prestige than mainstream publications. An analysis of the nuances of Dalit poetry is beyond the scope of this dissertation but remains an important area and deserves further scholarly attention.

4

Dalit Autobiography

Personal Pain as Political Assertion

> It was Tau Sarupa's daughter Romali's wedding day. There was a lot of hustle-bustle in the locality. They had a feast for the *baraat* [husband's family] and their own relatives for which they had killed a pig. I can still hear the painful shrieks of the pig until today … Everyone in the village and all the relatives were competing with each other to catch the pig. Catching a pig was also an art. Anyone could break their limbs … That pig at the wedding was not letting anyone catch it … Tau Sarupa was pleased with the effort of his pig. After some time, Tau said — "How can I marry my daughter to such weak people. All of you should be ashamed and drown yourself in a handful of water. That so many strong people are standing here and no one has caught the pig. Shame on you! And you call yourself Bhangis!" (Chauhan 2002: 21–22)[1]

By weaving into the Hindi cultural arena new imaginations of Indian life as experienced by members of the lower castes, Hindi Dalit autobiographies have attempted to shift the dominant cultural representations of what it means to be Indian today. This includes reaffirming caste identity as central to the Indian experience — a notion the upper-caste-dominated Indian middle classes have stringently denied in recent decades.

The above quote from Hindi Dalit writer Surajpal Chauhan's autobiography *Tiraskrit* reveals a conception of Dalit identity that lies in sharp opposition to the traditional notion of this community as 'untouchables'.[2] In an effort to redefine their caste community in positive and self-assertive terms, Hindi Dalit autobiographers have re-narrated Dalit characters, such as the character Tau Sarupa, who interprets what it means to be a Bhangi as both strong and skilful, challenging dominant ways Dalits are represented by mainstream Hindi literature in terms of their impurity, social inferiority,

helpless victimhood and exploited labour. Hindi Dalit autobiographers have rewritten the public image of the weak and powerless 'untouchable' as a politically assertive 'Dalit'.

The Dalit cultural identity expressed by Hindi Dalit writers, as we have seen from Surajpal Chauhan's quote above, contests traditional conceptions of the Dalit community as 'untouchables'. However, the description of catching the pig for the Dalit marriage feast is also significant for several other reasons. Functioning as a counter-symbol, the image of the pig is reinterpreted in Dalit autobiographical narratives, from an object of filth and uncultured practices to a symbol of prosperity, celebration and, most importantly, a separate and unique cultural tradition of the Dalit community. However, the symbol of the pig also reveals certain tensions and ambivalences implicit in the Dalit identity expressed by the middle-class Dalit writers. For example, how does the urban middle-class Dalit autobiographer feel about such events from his past, and how does he relate to the majority of the rural Dalit community, which continues to engage in such practices? As we shall see, it is not simply a process of straightforward identification, rather, one fraught with tensions as the autobiographer attempts to maintain links with the rural Dalit community while also distancing himself from practices which are perceived to be inappropriate to his urban middle-class social position.

As a genre, Dalit autobiography has held an important symbolic position within this new field of Hindi Dalit literature. While the first Dalit autobiographies in Hindi were translations from the vibrant stream of Marathi Dalit literature, Dalit writers in the Hindi belt began to write their own life narratives from the mid-1990s.[3] The most influential of these include Mohandas Naimisharay's *Apne Apne Pinjare* (1995), Omprakash Valmiki's *Juthan* (1997) and Surajpal Chauhan's *Tiraskrit* (2002). Dalit autobiography created an important literary space for the expression of Dalit social and cultural experiences by securing Hindi Dalit writers' narrative authority, since only a Dalit can write a Dalit autobiography. The incontestability of personal experience also meant that Hindi Dalit writers could employ their personal experiences of caste discrimination as a means of political assertion, namely, to challenge the prevalent public perception that untouchability is no longer practised in contemporary India. However, as we have seen in Chapter Three, it was also important that autobiography was considered a

serious literary genre by the mainstream Hindi literary field, even if it wasn't one of the most highly ranked. By putting a recognisable genre to use for new political purposes, Hindi Dalit writers were able to make their initial entry into the mainstream world of Hindi literary publishing.

This chapter argues that Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature used the genre of autobiography as a strategic means of entering the mainstream Hindi literary field and as a space to contribute new notions of both Dalit and Indian identity to the Hindi cultural arena and greater Hindi public sphere. It begins with a brief consideration of the Hindi Dalit autobiographical narrative and a theoretical comparison of the use of the autobiographical genre by other socially marginalised groups. The chapter goes on to examine the way Hindi Dalit autobiographers mobilise personal pain as a means of asserting a new powerful social critique. It then explores the construction of the Dalit subject as a representative face of the entire Dalit community and as an individual on a journey from passive victimhood to assertive political consciousness. Returning to the pig as a Dalit cultural symbol, this chapter not only shows how Dalit autobiographers attempt to re-inscribe Dalit identity with new positive meaning, but also how the pig as a symbol reveals the tension between the Dalit autobiographer's lower-caste and middle-class identities. Finally, this chapter looks at the role that Hindi Dalit autobiographies have played in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature by symbolically conferring narrative authority to Hindi Dalit writers and providing them with the means for entering the mainstream Hindi literary world.

The Dalit Autobiographical Narrative

Dalit autobiographies begin in the village, the location of the autobiographers' childhoods as well as a space of the most severe levels of traditional caste oppression and untouchability. From here, the narrative progresses through a series of painful experiences of caste discrimination punctuated by certain spatial shifts — from the childhood home in the Dalit basti to the village school, then to the college in a nearby town, and finally to an urban government office. The broader move from the village to the city depicts an unexpected continuation of untouchability as the protagonist continues to face

the 'ghost of caste'. It is this narration of continuing oppression that has inspired literary critics — both Dalit and non-Dalit alike — to define Dalit autobiographies as 'narratives of pain'.

Hindi Dalit autobiographies immediately establish the social position of the Dalit community in relation to the rest of Indian society through poignant metaphors. For instance, Omprakash Valmiki's *Juthan* begins by describing the Dalit basti, separated from the rest of the village by a filthy pond which the villagers used as a sewer. In *Tiraskrit,* Surajpal Chauhan invokes the memory of his mother labouring at her caste occupation of cleaning the upper-caste *mohalla* (neighbourhood) in exchange for a few *roti*s (bread). The rotis are of such poor quality that they are painful even to chew, and the delicious wheat rotis enjoyed by the upper castes become a startling and symbolic contrast to the *matar* (pea flour) rotis passed off to the lower castes in exchange for their hard labour.

The narrative continues with the Dalit protagonist's progression through school and is punctuated by incidences of caste discrimination and violence inflicted on the Dalit child by his teachers and classmates. The period of childhood is also interspersed with events of social significance for the Dalit community — Valmiki's narrative emphasises experiences of collecting *juthan* (leftovers) from the upper castes in the village and the rituals of *bhakt* (devotee) healers, while Chauhan's autobiography describes Dalit weddings and the experience of killing a pig for the marriage feast, as well as the laborious caste occupation of sweeping the upper-caste mohalla. Through these various reflections on Dalit socio-cultural life, the Dalit community is not only portrayed as an oppressed group, but is imbued with new favourable characteristics such as hardworking, industrious, economical, skilled, playful, even joyous and festive. As one of the key spaces in the Dalit autobiography, the school functions as a transitional space between childhood in the village, portrayed as a place of unchanging oppression and minimal opportunity, and adulthood in the town, where there is the possibility of a government job and the hope of moving beyond one's caste identity through urban anonymity and modernity. Hence, while the first part of the narrative is largely driven by the protagonist's arduous progress through school, the second half of the narrative tends to focus on the workplace, raising new issues of reservation and casteism in the hiring or transferring of employees.

Urban spaces, particularly the office, invoke the new experience of anonymity, placing the Dalit writer in a position of having to decide whether to hide or reveal his caste identity. Chauhan's narrative describes this experience thus:

> I gained the appreciation of the administration managers. They both often patted me on the back. It felt very good getting this praise … Everything was going well until one day a carpenter worker Bir Singh disclosed my secret in front of Mathur [the office manager] … S. S. Mathur was shocked to know my caste. His behaviour towards me now began to change. In the office work, he began to make obstacles in my path. Knowing that I was the son of a cleaner, he began to doubt my integrity. He began to watch me like a hawk to catch me doing something wrong (2002: 54–56).

Chauhan also relates an incident in which there was confusion over the ordering of a desk, and he was blamed through no fault of his own. On that occasion, Chauhan was further accused of seeking the support of another high-ranking Dalit officer. The incident ends with Chauhan's transfer from the office, and his discovery that the transfer order was signed by the very same high-ranking Dalit officer. This common urban experience of attempting to hide one's Dalit identity and 'pass' as upper-caste, as well as the consequences of being discovered, throws an interesting light on the process of self-assertion. Rather than proudly proclaiming one's Dalit identity, at times the individual is compelled to hide his/her caste identity. Autobiographical narrative, unlike political discourse or critical debate, is uniquely able to describe, for example, the tensions between the contemporary practice of caste discrimination at the office and the obstacles to forming relationships with other Dalit colleagues in modern secular spaces of the state. In this way, the narrative brings out the contradictions implicit in the claim that the secular state is blind to caste.

The Dalit protagonist's move from the village to the city, and from childhood into adulthood, is mirrored in his inner journey from a state of naïve and apolitical victimhood to one of political consciousness and assertion. Throughout the autobiography, the narrator's voice continually cuts into the narrative, interpreting past events in light of the author's present political consciousness. Obstacles in the narrative, such as difficulty in school or disagreements between friends, are reinterpreted in terms of the protagonists'

new Dalit consciousness as the result of unjust caste discrimination, while progress is conceived as struggling against this continuing practice of untouchability. For instance, as a child, Valmiki is thrown out of school and forced to sweep the courtyard instead of studying. When his father finds out, he takes the young Valmiki to powerful members of the upper-caste community in the village, pleading with them to allow his son to attend school. However, all turn their backs on him. As a young adult, Valmiki's consciousness is awakened by a pamphlet on Ambedkar's ideology, and he becomes increasingly active in Dalit assertion movements, including the political agitations to rename Marathawadi University after Ambedkar. Then, in January 1984, Valmiki is moved to make his first public speech after news breaks out of an upper-caste teacher instructing his class to tear out the history lesson on Ambedkar from their textbooks. He writes, '[t]his was a new experience for me . . . At this moment, I experienced my belonging to the Dalit movement intensely' (Valmiki 2003: 113). Later, he interprets his involvement in a Dalit organisation which was campaigning to support reservation for OBCs as something deeply linked to this individual worth, since 'to remain quiet at such times means to erase oneself' (ibid.: 108). Looking back at his childhood, Valmiki recalls, '[Pitaji] kept saying repeatedly, "At last you have escaped caste". But what he didn't know till the day he died is that caste follows one right up to one's death' (ibid.: 77–78).

Autobiography and Discourses of Oppression

There have been many efforts at comparison between Dalit autobiography and the autobiographies of other socially oppressed groups, such as African-Americans or women. This comparison is particularly relevant in light of the fact that the Dalit literary movement in Maharashtra, which was most active during the 1970s and early 1980s, took the American Black Panthers as their model, naming their movement the Dalit Panthers and adopting the autobiographical form from the vibrant African-American literary movement. Marathi Dalit writer Raosaheb Kasbe asserts,

> [f]ollowing the emergence of Dalit literature, we were introduced to the literature of the Blacks. It was Principal Waghmare and Dr. Wankhade who painstakingly acquainted us with this literature through the periodical

> *Asmitadarshan* (View of Identity). Black literature began to influence our short-stories and poetry and we began claiming relationship with the literature of the Blacks' (1992: 292).

Dalit writers have frequently compared their work to African-American literature and several articles have come out on the subject, including Janardan Waghmare's 'Black Literature and Dalit Literature', Raosaheb Kasbe 'Some Issues Before Dalit Literature' and Mohandas Naimisharay's English work *Caste and Race,* comparing Ambedkar and Martin Luther King. However, understanding the relationship between these two literary movements involves not only tracing the historical influence Black literature had on Dalit writers, but also illuminates the theoretical possibilities of considering Dalit literature in the context of other discourses of oppression.

Stephen Butterfield has written, 'In black autobiography, the unity of the personal and the mass voice remains a dominant tradition' (Butterfield 1974: 3). As we will see, the complex relationship between the individual protagonist and the larger community is a way both Dalits and American Blacks have used, with autobiography as a means of making a broader political statement by emphasising their marginalised identity position in relation to the dominant society (Mostern 1999: 51).[4] Valerie Smith has claimed, 'Black American writing, arising as it does from an experience alien to mainstream American culture, has tended by and large to articulate the writer's experience of *de jure* or *de facto* subordination' (V. Smith 1987: 6). Similarly, this chapter will show the ways in which the narrative strategies of Hindi Dalit autobiographies serve to expose continuing caste discrimination and Dalit oppression — in other words, how a marginalised group uses the story of an individual life for broader political purposes (Harlow 1987; Perkins 2000).

However, considering Dalit autobiography in relation to the autobiographical literature of other marginalised communities raises important questions regarding to what extent we can compare categories of caste and race. I would argue that in the context of wider discourses of oppression, the comparison is both valid and important in showing how many marginalised groups are first given access to the larger literary sphere and attain a certain narrative authority by writing their life stories. A comparison also shows how

autobiographies can serve as a powerful social critique and constitute an act of political resistance for marginalised communities in their own right. However, as far as the descriptive understanding of the texts goes, including aesthetics and narrative strategies, Dalit autobiographies are unique expressions of a particular kind of social oppression specifically located in the Indian caste system. For instance, autobiographies of African-Americans and Dalits vastly differ in their descriptions of the experience of 'passing' (as black or upper caste), which are liminal (although important) to the African-American experience but fundamental to the common Dalit experience of moving from the village to the city. Themes of physical violence, including the Black experience of 'lynching', the female experience of sexual exploitation and the Dalits' experience of being beaten at school or by the upper castes, must all be considered separately. Finally, the aesthetics of the body, which Leigh Gilmore rightly points out is often absent from textual analyses, is fundamental to the habitus of women, African-Americans and Dalits in their respective autobiographies (Rodriguez 1999: 17). For instance, the obsession with physicality in Black autobiographies — being 'too black' or having what is considered 'negroid' facial features — is quite distinct from Dalit life narratives, where the lack of distinctive physical features between Dalits and upper castes means that rather than an inferiority complex based on physical difference which dominates black autobiographies, Dalits are easily able to 'pass' as upper caste. Their tendencies towards an inferiority complex, too, are much more internalised and based on the sense of an abstract mental or even spiritual deficiency. In addition, whereas it is possible to re-inscribe 'blackness' or 'femininity' with new, positive characteristics outside of the normative identity based on fundamental physical differences, this becomes difficult for members of the Dalit community, who must highlight differences based on socio-cultural traditions or political stance.

The writers of the autobiographic Hindi Dalit literary field took inspiration from Marathi Dalit literature and thus, much of the literature between these two different fields retains important similarities. For instance, both Hindi and Marathi Dalit writers emphasise their commitment to the ideological principles of Ambedkar, which are displayed in their work. As previously mentioned, genres also remain a point of comparison, particularly regarding the use

of autobiography by both groups. However, Marathi Dalit literature grew out of activism by the Dalit Panthers, who were greatly influenced by the trade union protests of the late 1960s in Bombay, and this historical context has meant that Marathi Dalit autobiographies give much greater attention to economic mechanisms of oppression than we find in Hindi Dalit autobiographies. In contrast, Hindi Dalit literature has arisen under the very different circumstances of the BSP's political mobilisations and reservation controversies, which in turn have influenced the way Hindi Dalit literature has been received and interpreted by the literary mainstream. Furthermore, the wealth of Marathi Dalit autobiographies by both Dalit men and women writers is a phenomenon which remains to be seen in Hindi Dalit literature (Dangle 1992; Devy 2003; Punalekhar 2001).

Personal Pain as Social Critique

The genre of Dalit autobiography has provided a new space for Dalit social critique couched in the language of individual pain and personal suffering. Pain is used in the Dalit autobiographical narrative firstly as evidence that caste discrimination continues to be prevalent in Indian society. Dalit autobiographies reconstruct the notion of pain as unnatural and the caste discrimination associated with such pain as something wholly un-modern by mobilising 'modern' discourses of justice and human rights and depicting the nation as the guardian of the rights of its citizens. Hindi Dalit autobiographies also use the experience of pain as an opportunity to expose the underlying power structure and historical basis of caste discrimination, calling upon its readers to witness the protagonist's pain.

In *Tiraskrit*, Chauhan writes,

> [j]ust like this, I am bearing the bite of the pain of this life. In this country, only those who have experienced it can really know how much pain and insult comes with being born a Dalit. Today, in the whole country everyone is crying out that there is no racism and that things have changed in the towns and villages in these thirty-five years [since independence]. I would really like to discuss with these people an incident which took place in 1987 (2002: 30).

Here, Chauhan's pain is employed as evidence to prove the persistence of casteism in contemporary Indian society. Chauhan goes on

to describe an incident which occurred that summer when he and his family had left Delhi and returned to his natal village in order to attend his sister's wedding ceremony. From the local bus stop, it was a five-kilometre walk by dirt road to reach the village, and both Chauhan and his wife, Vimal, became very thirsty. Stopping at a *dharamshala* which had provisions for travellers, Chauhan approached the elderly landlord and asked for some water from the well. With a quick glance at their middle-class appearance, the landlord quickly agreed. However, upon the landlord's inquiring about the occasion of their visit to the village, Chauhan mentioned his grandfather's name. Realising the family was from the Bhangi jati, the landlord registered shock at the Dalit couple's blatant transgression of traditional caste practice, and immediately demanded that they stop — he would draw the water from the well. As the protagonist, Chauhan is portrayed as naïve to caste practice in the village, most obvious in his easy revelation of his grandfather's name, which in the village context would have certainly also revealed his own caste identity. Further insults followed when Vimal, Chauhan's wife, stood 'too close' to the *zamindar* while he poured water into her hands. The scene in the narrative ends with a demonstration of the couple's political consciousness, when instead of submitting to the zamindar's demands, Vimal yells — 'Let's go. This is not water, this is poison. We will drink at home. We don't want your sweet water!' (Chauhan 2002: 30–31).

Chauhan's recollection of the incident at the village well is symbolically significant, as the well is also a space linked in public memory with the practice of untouchability. Traditionally, Dalits were not (and often are still not) allowed to draw water from the public village well, but were either forced to wait until a member of the upper castes was willing to draw water for them, or were restricted to a separate and often poorer quality well in their own locality. Chauhan draws on this symbolic legacy of the well, connecting it to his personal pain as a means of providing evidence of continuing caste discrimination and raising a new social critique of caste hierarchy.

Tiraskrit also employs the new language of human rights to subvert the traditional power relationship between the Dalit and the landlord. The image of the old village landlord who continues the practice of untouchability by asserting authority over the

dispensation of water is portrayed almost as feudal in comparison with the image of the urban middle-class Dalit couple who are well-dressed, well-spoken and wholly modern, even in their (supposed) naïvety to caste practice — as Chauhan innocently reveals his local family affiliations and then expresses complete shock at the landlord's quite predictable reaction. Furthermore, Vimal's rejection of the landlord's actions as both feudal and invalid reveals the way the Hindi Dalit autobiographer has adopted the social authority derived from middle-class discourses of modernity and used them for new purposes.

Throughout the Dalit autobiographical narrative, the pain linked to the experience of caste discrimination serves to de-naturalise the practice of untouchability. In Valmiki's *Juthan,* for instance, the pain of physical violence is used to describe the unnatural and unjust relationship between Dalit students and upper-caste teachers. Valmiki gives a detailed description of the physical abuse that he and other Dalit children faced in successive classes in school. He writes:

> Sometimes [the upper-caste Tyagi boys] would beat me without any reason. This was an absurd tormented life that made me introverted and irritable. If I got thirsty in school, then I had to stand near the hand-pump. The boys would beat me in any case but the teachers also punished me (Valmiki 2003: 3).

The physicality of this pain is intimately connected to the protagonist's mental anguish and feelings of inferiority. He writes,

> [the teacher] had rapidly created an epic on my back with the swishes of his stick. That epic is still inscribed on my back. Reminding me of those hated days of hunger and hopelessness, this epic composed out of a feudalistic mentality is inscribed not just on my back but on each nerve of my brain (ibid.: 23).

In this way, the very conception of 'pain' is transformed from one of passive suffering to one of active assertion through its role in de-naturalising the practice of untouchability and reinterpreting it as a backward, feudal practice contrary to the values of modern society. Furthermore, the focus on physicality and pain of the body to describe the more abstract mental and emotional pain of caste

discrimination is also theoretically significant, in its portrayal of the body as a sacrificial form that protects the protagonist's interiority, his intellectual integrity and freedom.

The school functions as a transitional space in the Dalit protagonist's progression from the backward, 'feudal' attitudes of the village to the presumed progressiveness and modernity of the city, where one is anonymous and can leave the experience of caste discrimination behind. As both Chauhan's and Valmiki's autobiographical narratives begin in the village, the concept of the village as the site of the basest forms of caste discrimination is established almost immediately. It is here that Dalits are denied water from the communal well, where Dalit children are forced to sweep the school grounds rather than sit inside the classroom, and where Dalits are forced to beg for food scraps from the upper castes. The village is a place of little hope or progress. As Valmiki writes, 'The poem by Sumitranandan Pant that we had been taught at school, "Ah, how wonderful is this village life" ... each word of the poem had proved to be artificial and a lie' (Valmiki 2003: 39). Valmiki's inter-textual reference and his engagement with mainstream Hindi literature strips the dominant literary portrayal of the Indian village as a romanticised place of simple beauty and instead replaces it with visions of impoverished living conditions, violence suffered by Dalits in school, and the humiliating experience of collecting juthan. Similarly, Chauhan's descriptions of the village focus on the constant experience of hunger, superstitious beliefs (which he blames for his mother's early death), and *begari* (unpaid labour) which all Dalits were forced to perform for the upper castes.

The towns and cities, on the other hand, are first perceived in the narratives as places of progress through education, an escape from caste identity through anonymity, job opportunities beyond one's caste occupation and, thus, hope for a new and better life. Valmiki reflects this perception when he writes, 'One after the other [Dalits in the village] took off for the city where a new brightness was beckoning' (ibid.: 39). In Chauhan's *Tiraskrit*, a conversation between Chauhan's father and a Thakur man in the village echoes this perceived disparity between the village and the city. The Thakur calls, '*[a]rre*, Rohana, living in the town you have earned a lot of money, so is your boy educated too?' Chauhan's father replies, 'Yes, Thakur, you have spoken correctly. Living in the village, we

spend more than half our lives doing your slave work. Going to the town, our children get educated. Here in the village the conditions are still the same' (Chauhan 2002: 45). The interpretation of the town as a place of progress and opportunity thus establishes it as a new utopia where caste identity may be forgotten.

However, the idea of progress from the 'superstitious village' to the 'enlightened city' bursts apart towards the middle of Chauhan's narrative, since caste discrimination continues to be felt even in Delhi. While 'modern' spaces such as trains and other forms of public transportation remain prone to caste practice, particularly significant is the office as a space within the narrative, which invokes images of modernity but where the Dalit protagonist faces new, insidious forms of caste discrimination. For example, in *Tiraskrit*, Chauhan describes an incident in which an office manager discovers Chauhan is a Dalit. Although all the administrative managers had been happy with his work and had often praised him and given him significant responsibility in the office, once these managers discovered his caste identity, things changed. In this way, the school also becomes a space representing the failed transition of the Dalit child to the expected utopia of a casteless urban adulthood. Meaning previously inscribed on to the space of the village — feudalism and social backwardness — now invades the urban space in the narrative. Consequently 'the village', representing the baseness of caste discrimination practices becomes the 'metropole' in the mind of the Dalit autobiographer.[5] The city is also 'like the village' and through this reversal, the claim that untouchability continues to be practised throughout contemporary Indian society is even more forcefully asserted by the Dalit autobiographer.

For its Dalit readers, Dalit autobiographies use themes of pain to evoke a sense of identification. In this sense, pain becomes a uniting phenomenon, suggesting that all Dalits have experienced a similar pain due to the experience of caste discrimination, and therefore, all Dalits form part of one community. In the preface to his autobiography, Valmiki writes, 'Dalit readers had seen their own pain in those pages of mine'. Here the pain of one Dalit individual becomes a representative pain — one with which Dalit readers can easily identify and relate to. Thus, out of the individual experience of pain, Hindi Dalit autobiographies construct the collective. This is also expressed by the communal experience of pain in the

autobiographies, where the Dalit protagonist himself experiences the pain of another oppressed Dalit. In *Juthan*, Valmiki writes:

> Sukkhan Singh had developed a boil on his belly, just below his ribs . . . One day while thrashing Sukkhan Singh, the teacher's fist hit the boil. Sukkhan screamed with pain. The boil had burst. Seeing him flailing in pain, I too began to cry. While we cried, the teacher was showering abuse on us nonstop (2003: 4).

In another instance, the police beat members of the local Dalit community at the behest of the upper castes of the village and this physical violence left internal scars on Valmiki:

> Those who had been captured from the basti were being made to stand like a rooster, a very painful, crouched-up position. Moreover, they were being beaten with batons. The policeman who was beating them was getting tired. The one being beaten would scream after every blow . . . The women and children of the basti were standing in the lane and crying loudly . . . My mind was filled with a deep revulsion. Then an adolescent, a scratch had appeared on my mind like a line scratched on glass. It remains there still (ibid.: 38).

Yet the relationship between the individual and the Dalit community remains highly ambivalent, as Dalits of certain jatis also face casteism from members of other Dalit jatis, and as we shall see, some members of the Dalit community have called into question the middle-class Dalit autobiographer's ability to represent them (see below and Chapter Five).

The popularity of Dalit autobiographies within the wider Hindi literary field and their publication by mainstream Hindi literary presses suggest the presence of a significant non-Dalit audience for these texts. The Dalit autobiography calls upon its non-Dalit audience to witness Dalit pain. This call to recognise oppression has been theorised by Dipesh Chakrabarty who uses the image of the suffering widow to argue that such subjects become a focal point for the 'certain will to witness and document suffering' (Chakrabarty 2000: 118). According to Chakrabarty, the documentation of pain and suffering becomes newly important in modern times. He writes:

> The general figure of the suffering widow was produced in Bengali history by creating a collective, 'public' past out of many individual and

> familial memories of the experience of widowhood. This collective past was needed for the pursuit of justice under the conditions of a modern public life (2000: 27).

He argues that, in the modern context with pervasive discourses of human rights and notions of the state as the new guardian of those rights, a public witnessing of pain and suffering becomes important for 'eventual social intervention'. In order for social intervention to take place, however, Chakrabarty discusses the role of the 'sympathetic witness' who would 'recognise suffering' (ibid.: 119).

Thus, while a Dalit reader of a Dalit autobiography is invited to identify with the protagonist, for the non-Dalit reader, Dalit autobiography is aimed at documenting Dalit suffering in order to invoke a sense of shame. Arun Mukherjee expresses this well in her article 'The Emergence of Dalit Writing' where she confesses, 'When I read the Dalit texts . . . I felt overwhelmed by their power. And yet, they were also very uncomfortable to read since the dehumanising deprivations described in them confronted my complicity with the status quo' (Mukherjee 1998: 38). Similarly, Omprakash Valmiki recalls that during a seminar on *Juthan* at DU,

> [o]ne female student said that when she started to read this autobiography, she thought the characters were too rude. However, as she progressed, she said that she felt ashamed of her forefathers and thought how could they be this inhuman?[6]

Sara Ahmed's chapter on 'the contingency of pain' in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004) discusses how a return to painful emotions is habitually used as a means of seeking justice, and that pain often becomes political through claims for compensation. However, Ahmed also reminds us that the witness's feelings of shame, sadness or compassion does not necessarily renew social justice — and in fact, compassion can often serve to obscure the historical roots of the injury (ibid.). For Dalits then, the witnessing and recognition of the injustice of untouchability involves a similar rewriting of the present where the social privileges experienced by the upper castes are now seen not as the result of their inherent goodness, but as directly linked to the concurrent oppression of the Dalit community.

Reconstituting the Dalit Subject

Subjectivity in Hindi Dalit autobiographies is marked by a tension between the Dalit autobiographer's attempt both to portray his life as representative of the experiences of all members of the Dalit community, and at the same time to describe his unique efforts and extraordinary struggle to overcome caste oppression. This tension is not one which the autobiography aims to resolve, but it remains embedded in the very core of the autobiographic literary sphere, where members of the new Dalit middle class are at once attracted to discourses of a new modernity, which praise individuality and personal achievement, yet also take on the mantel as representatives of their larger caste community and strive to maintain the authority to speak on behalf of this community by portraying themselves as ordinary or representative members. This section looks at the complex relationship between the individual Dalit protagonist and the Dalit community in Hindi Dalit autobiographies. Senior Hindi scholar Manager Pandey goes as far as to claim that, 'if it is an autobiography, then it is not of an individual but of a community. Putting community in place of the individual . . . the past and present of the community itself becomes the plot of the story' (Pandey 1995: vii). Subjectivity is certainly complicated by this deep connection between the individual and communal self, and this relationship provides the Dalit individual with a sense of power and support in a group struggle against similarly experienced oppression. However, I would argue that Hindi Dalit autobiographies give a much more complex picture of Dalit subjectivity where the protagonist ('I') and the Dalit community ('We') are inextricably linked in a complex web of meaning, yet without the loss, as Manager Pandey would claim, of either the individual or the community.

The protagonist's perception of his own identity is closely bound to that of his caste community. He faces personal discrimination due to his caste identity and is also deeply sensitive to the pain of other oppressed Dalits, with whom he identifies to such a great extent that he seems to experience their pain himself, as we have seen. Further connection between the individual and community is revealed, for instance, when Valmiki's personal success at school is also interpreted as a success for the entire Dalit community.

> When the high school results were announced in the paper, I was very happy to see my name. Pitaji had invited the whole *basti* to a feast to

> celebrate my results. The *basti* (locality) wore a festive look that day. It was the first time someone from our *basti* had passed high school (Valmiki 2003: 59).

Valmiki's father repeats that it is Valmiki's *personal* responsibility to 'improve his caste' through his individual achievements. Furthermore, Valmiki's own progress as an individual — options that are open to him and obstacles that come in his way — is largely affected by the progress of the Dalit movement as a whole. Valmiki writes,

> Gandhiji's uplifting of the untouchables was resounding everywhere. Although the doors of the government school had begun to open for untouchables, the mentality of ordinary people had not changed much. I had to sit away from the others in the class, and that too on the floor (ibid.: 2).

Thus, Valmiki's entrance into the school system was both aided by steps made in an early Dalit assertion movement as well as restricted by the movement's own limited successes.

While Dalit writers continue to feel that they are defined almost solely by their caste identity, they also feel a strong sense of alienation from their caste community, which they left behind in the village. Valmiki, for instance, notes, 'As my studies advanced, I began to lose touch with those companions of my age group in the neighbourhood who did not go to school' (ibid.: 17). Valmiki also discusses his sense of alienation from his family as he moved farther and farther away from his natal home. When he was given the opportunity for more training at an ordnance factory in Madhya Pradesh, Valmiki describes his family's reaction. 'Ma was concerned about where was I going to live, what would I eat. What sort of language did the people of Jabalpur speak ... Jabalpur was a foreign country for all the members of my family' (ibid.: 81). Looking back on his parents' death, Valmiki writes,

> I hadn't been granted the privilege to carry Ma's and Pitaji's biers. He whom they had struggled so hard to make something of had become so distanced from them. It is a grief that I hide deep inside my heart (ibid.: 111).

The process of narrating one's life story in terms of caste identity perhaps also stems from the Dalit autobiographer's desire to repair

this feeling of alienation and allows him to the re-establish the link between himself and the rest of his Dalit community.

Although the individual subject of the Dalit autobiography is portrayed as inseparable from the Dalit community, his individuality is not wholly stifled. Valmiki, for instance, is still able to assert his own personal agency in opposition to the traditions of his community during his marriage by rejecting the community-chosen bride and marrying the girl of his own choice. He also refuses to conform to the community's traditions during the marriage ceremony at the expense of offending many members of his family (Valmiki 2003: 103). In *Juthan,* the protagonist's individuality is additionally de-valued in the face of the upper castes, who see him only as a faceless member of his community. Valmiki writes, 'They did not call us by our names. If a person were older, then he would be called "Oe Chuhre". If the person were younger or of the same age, "Abey Chuhre" was used' (ibid.: 2). A similar preoccupation with individuals' names can be seen in *Tiraskrit*. As Chauhan recalls,

> [i]t was the customary practice of the village savarns to call us by altered and spoiled names. My Bhupsingh Chacha was Bhopu, Svarup Singh Tau was Sarupa, my Chachi Radha Devi was Radhiya and Kiran was Kinno. And my father, Rohan Lal was called Rona. When these savarns didn't like our good names, well then why would they like us? (2002: 41).

The emphasis on the importance of one's individual 'good' name shows a continuation of individuality within Dalit subjectivity. When Valmiki writes, '[e]veryone called my mother *Khajooriwalli* ("seller of dates"). Perhaps she [Fauza Tyagi's mother] too had forgotten her real name' (2003: 58), he is asserting that his mother has a 'real name', an individual identity apart from both her caste and her daily occupation.

This element of individuality plays an important role in the formation of a new, self-assertive Dalit identity, as it contests the common upper-caste representations of Dalits which assume that, as members of a socially inferior community, Dalits are all the same in their illiteracy and their impure, uncultured social practices.[7] This assertion of the importance of one's name is symbolic of the deep value the autobiographers hold for a person's individuality. This is not only because they write from a new middle-class social position

achieved largely through personal struggle and individual achievement, but also because the assertion of individual interiority of the Dalit subject has important repercussions within the larger context of Dalit oppression. In other words, while upper castes have habitually portrayed Dalits as a singular illiterate, impure and uncultured mass — an image reinforced by denying them individual names — Dalit autobiographers reinforce their individuality, emotional interiority and intellectual life, thereby asserting their status as equal human beings, yet without threatening their simultaneous claims to a communal cultural identity.

There have been other members of the Dalit community, however, who have expressed dissatisfaction with the efforts to create a single, representative Dalit identity. Kavitendra Indu, a Dalit postgraduate student of Hindi at JNU writes,

> [t]he autobiographical form is the story of an individual, not a community. In it, the majority of situations may exist due to the individual's identity as Dalit, but if one only includes these situations it means that they have edited out many other situations which were not in their agenda. The word Dalit is used in a very powerful way and as a result its members become only Dalits, not individuals (2003a: 167).

Later, Indu continues,

> Omprakash Valmiki and Surajpal Chauhan are both members of the Bhangi community, but there is a big difference between the autobiographies of each. So we should recognise that only being Dalit, a person's experience is not the same. Feelings can be different, and they are (ibid.: 167–71).

Indu's comments raises questions regarding the inevitable normativisation in the process of identity formation. While Dalit autobiographies explore what it means to be Dalit in Indian society today, certain boundaries are also erected in the conceptualisation of that Dalit identity. Since all individuals hold multiple identities, including class, caste, gender, occupation, region, religion etc., no individual can represent the wide variety of identities held by every member of the community he claims to represent. Hence, while discussing the 'representative' nature of the subject in Dalit autobiographies, it becomes important to look closely at instances in which the subject 'I' has difficulty representing the 'We', either of another

Dalit individual or the Dalit community, particularly in terms of intersecting class, jati and gender identities.

The reality of jati identity, however, makes the process of imagining a unified Dalit identity and Dalit writers' claims to representation problematic. While many members of the Chamar community have been able to avail themselves of the economic and social benefits of reservation, for example, the Bhangi community remains a largely poor, marginalised group within Dalits. Thus, individuals from the Bhangi community often accuse Chamars of discriminating against them, as well as of monopolising the benefits reserved for SCs. The social tensions between the Bhangi and Chamar jatis in the Dalit community are an important focus of *Tiraskrit*, though they remain largely unaddressed in *Juthan*, despite the fact that both autobiographers are from the Bhangi community. In his autobiography, Chauhan makes the startling claim that Dalits, too, are divided along caste lines. In an important sequel to Chauhan's experience in 1987 when he faced severe discrimination by a zamindar at the village well, Chauhan returns again to the village in 1990 with his family to attend the wedding of his cousin Rakesh. Instead of taking the long journey from the bus stop to the village on foot, Chauhan decides to hire a tonga, and on the way, picks up a couple who, exhausted from the heat, are also travelling to the same village. Chauhan and his wife fall into easy conversation with the couple, but after the man discovers who Chauhan is going to visit (and thus discerns his caste identity) he angrily calls for the tonga driver to stop, and he and his wife quickly get off. For a while, Chauhan feels confused, but when the Muslim tonga driver reveals the caste identity of the man, Chauhan is even more shocked. The man was a Chamar. Chauhan relates,

> [h]earing the driver's words I was stunned. 'Brahmanism in Dalits too!' Six years ago we had faced the old Thakur and knowing my caste, he was shocked. Now I had faced insult by the son of Bhudeva of the same Dalit community (2002: 73).

Addressing the reality of these inter-jati divisions can be a highly contentious issue among Dalit writers in this autobiographic sphere, and Chauhan admits facing significant criticism from other Dalit writers for including this in *Tiraskrit*. He writes: 'The things in these articles have made some Hindi Dalit writers feel uncomfortable. Some have accused me of trying to spread casteism in

Dalits' (Chauhan 2002: 7).[8] Since Dalit autobiographies are understood to be a part of the larger movement of Dalit assertion, in this context, focusing on the divisions within the Dalit community is often perceived as counter-productive to the movement and thus often silenced within the autobiographical narrative. Consequently, many Hindi Dalit writers have avoided the issue altogether. For instance, the existence of jati-affiliations among Dalits in the village is downplayed in Valmiki's *Juthan* in favour of the promotion of the inclusive Dalit identity.

This avoidance of jati identity in much of Hindi Dalit literature does not mean jati affiliations have been altogether forgotten among the Dalit middle class. Ramanika Gupta, a well-respected activist and editor of a progressive Hindi literary journal *Am Admi*, which publishes Dalit literature in Hindi, has written against the casteism she perceives among the Hindi Dalit writers themselves. In an interview, she claimed,

> [i]n the Hindi belt, they have casteism amongst themselves, between a writer and a writer. This is very bad and I have written about it. About the fact that if [Omprakash] Valmiki writes, a Chamar writer will criticise and say very bad things. This is not proper. I have written that you are fighting amongst yourselves.[9]

Finally, if we are to understand Dalit autobiographies as representative life stories of the Dalit community, then the 'We' meaning 'all Dalits' appears a decidedly masculine identity. Dalit women are, in fact, almost entirely absent from these texts. When they do appear, they are often portrayed without personal agency. One example is the case of Valmiki's wife Chanda. Chanda only appears for brief moments in the narrative, once when she responds to Valmiki's marriage proposal by asking, 'You're not joking, are you?' and again when Valmiki condemns Chanda for attempting to hide her caste identity and refusing to embrace the caste-denotative surname 'Valmiki'. While interpreting this as an act of submission or weakness, he gives us no insight into his wife's own perspective or her struggles against caste discrimination, which are perhaps radically different to those faced by her husband. In other instances, women are portrayed in the autobiographies almost as an intrusion into the main narrative of the text. For example, in *Tiraskrit,* the incident where Chauhan and his wife face such shocking discrimination from the village zamindar becomes a significant instance

where Chauhan's wife powerfully asserts her own self-worth. Yet, in this instance her agency and more specifically, her emotionality, are portrayed as transgressive rather than politically assertive, and Chauhan's response is to quickly silence her outburst.

Thus, Hindi Dalit autobiographers' descriptions of the typical Dalit lived-experience and Dalit cultural symbols and traditions has contributed to a certain normativisation of Dalit identity. The Dalit cultural identity expressed in these narratives is, firstly, influenced by the middle-class perspectives and aims of the autobiographers. Because these are narratives written by Dalits who left the village, successfully pursued higher education and now work in urban offices, their portrayal of the meaning of progress and success is coloured by these experiences. For instance, the ability to bypass inter-jati tensions among Dalits is perhaps only possible for a Dalit of the urban middle-class. Furthermore, neither of the Dalit autobiographical narratives discussed in this chapter question the gender bias in their reformulation of Dalit identity.[10] The blatant silence of the Dalit woman's voice raises new questions about the experiences in being both a Dalit and a woman but gives the reader little with which to answer them. Thus, within the Dalit autobiographers' imagination of Dalit identity, there remain certain boundaries which challenge the autobiographer's ability to be wholly representative and thus to define the identity of all Dalits.

Dalit Cultural Symbols: Ambivalence in the Process of Renaming

The process of imagining a new Dalit cultural identity involves a move beyond the negative tones of pain and suffering reminiscent of the traditional 'untouchable' identity and towards an exploration of positive and assertive characteristics of Dalit identity. This involves a complex process of 'renaming' — imbuing old objects or even socio-cultural practices with new meaning. However, Dalit writers express a certain ambivalence with this process as they attempt to reconcile their low-caste identity with their current urban middle-class status. In his Hindi Dalit autobiography *Tiraskrit,* Surajpal Chauhan describes of the capturing and killing of a pig for a marriage celebration, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter. He relates the festive atmosphere of the mohalla, depicting the process of catching the pig as a game, with a cheering crowd.

Despite interruptions by the shrieks of the pig and the wailing of Chauhan's Aunt Chameli, who had raised the pig, celebrations resume as the children gather to watch the cutting of the meat, snack on pieces of pig's skin and catch the bladder, which could be blown up as a balloon and used as a toy. He writes,

> [w]hile cutting the meat into small pieces, the kids were given the fatty part of the pig's skin known as 'tika'. All the kids of the village used to chew those pieces. My uncle Guffan was an expert in this cutting process. He used to give me more 'tika' than the other kids whenever he got the chance, and I used to relish them (Chauhan 2002: 26–27).

Chauhan also emphasises the skill necessary to catch the pig and the expertise needed to carve the meat without puncturing the organs. Through these descriptions, Chauhan is able to take an event, which would ordinarily be interpreted as evidence of uncultured and vulgar activities, and reinterpret it as an act of celebration and prosperity.

Omprakash Valmiki also associates the pig with Dalit cultural life in his autobiography *Juthan*. He writes,

> [p]igs were a very important part of our lives. In sickness or in health, in life or in death, in wedding ceremonies, pigs played an important role in all of them. Even our religious ceremonies were incomplete without pigs. The pigs rooting in the compound were not the symbols of dirt to us but of prosperity and so they are today (Valmiki 2003: 13).

Here too, the pig is reinterpreted as a positive symbol, signifying celebration, a sense of tradition and a state of plenty in the midst of habitual poverty and want. Through the example of the pig, both Chauhan and Valmiki attempt to give alternative meanings to their community's social traditions. They assert that Dalit society is not inferior, as is claimed by the upper castes, but has its own traditions and customs which are full of joy, skilful play and inventiveness, in spite of the community's extreme exploitation and poverty.

The political significance of renaming an object and thus redefining its inherent meaning should not be underestimated. It is not simply a literary exercise, a play with words within the Dalit autobiography, but a real challenge to a dominant discourse which continues to define Dalits, like pigs, as polluting and socially inferior. Janice Morgan has argued that, 'to be marginalised by a dominant

culture is also to have had little or no say in the construction of one's socially acknowledged identity' (Perkins 2000: 30). The struggle against the socially dominant 'untouchable' identity is a fundamental battle for Dalit writers, as they attempt to undermine old definitions with new imaginations, a process Margo Perkins has called 'rewriting the self.' The process of renaming the pig 'prosperity' rather than 'filth' represents a renegotiation of power relations, which emphasises the right to name objects and culminates in the right to name and thus define the self. Therefore, through their life narratives, Dalit writers are able not only to describe the pain of caste discrimination, but also to reassert control over the right to conceptualise their own identity beyond the experience of common oppression and suffering.

However, while Dalit autobiographies invoke Dalit cultural symbols, such as the pig, in an attempt to conceptualise Dalit identity beyond the experience of pain and caste oppression, the autobiographers themselves express a certain ambivalence vis-à-vis these symbols. In *Tiraskrit*, even in the midst of his festive description of catching the pig for the marriage feast, Chauhan's narrative voice distances him from these past events. He writes,

> [t]oday, remembering those days fills me with hate. Eating raw pig's meat is such an uncivilised and repulsive thing. Our hands and mouths used to be covered with fat. A lot of flies used to swarm around my face and hands. Yuk! Thinking about it now makes me nauseous (Chauhan 2002: 27).

This second reinterpretation of the pig's meat from delicious food to a symbol of uncultured behaviour emphasises the oppressive conditions under which Dalits are forced to live (a meaning still very different from the upper-caste interpretation of inherent inferiority). Valmiki also extols the pig as a symbol of prosperity integral to Dalit cultural practices. Yet, he himself rejected worshipping the pig at his own marriage ceremony, much to his father's clear consternation. Later, in his description of the significance of the pig to Dalit cultural life, Valmiki writes, '[y]es, the educated among us, who are still very minute in percentage, have separated themselves from these conventions. It is not because of a reformist perspective but because of their inferiority complex that they have done so' (2003: 13). While Valmiki reinforces the important value the

pig holds for Dalit cultural traditions, this unusual statement raises several questions regarding the ambiguous relationship members of the Dalit middle-class experience vis-à-vis the majority of the rural and poor Dalit community. Is this the inevitable condition of Dalits who have left their village communities? Is Valmiki also speaking about himself? Or is it only certain 'educated' Dalits, lacking in a particular political consciousness, who separate themselves from these Dalit cultural traditions?

Not all so-called 'traditional' socio-cultural practices of the Dalit community are eagerly embraced by the Hindi Dalit autobiographers. Chauhan, for instance, is a severe critic of Dalit bhakt healers. He recalls,

> [w]hen my ma did not get better from the *bhakts,* then my father took her to Chara town to the rural doctors, but it was too late. Ma's illness became very dangerous. The Bhangi *bhakts* swallowed my mother's life with the meat of pigs and bottles of wine' [used as payment for their ineffective services] (Chauhan 2002: 10).

Valmiki similarly describes,

> [w]hen anybody got sick in the basti, instead of treating them with medicine, people tried things like getting rid of the evil spirit that was deemed to be the cause by tying threads, talismans, spells, and so on. All the ceremonies were performed at night. When the disease was prolonged or got serious, then *puchha* or exorcism would be performed by calling a *bhagat*, a kind of sorcerer, who would be accompanied by a drummer who played the *dholak*, and two or three singers (Valmiki 2003: 40).

After Valmiki's own experience with the bhakts, he writes,

> My opinion about all these things being a fraud had been further strengthened. Who knows how many people these *bhagats* had killed. Two of my brothers had died without any proper treatment or medication . . . Every year a couple of deaths occurred in the *basti* in this way. Even then people's faith in these gods and *bhagats* did not diminish (ibid.: 43).

This attitude towards the bhagats and bhakts again highlights the essential distinction between the middle-class Dalit autobiographer, who shuns such practices as superstitious, and the rest of the

Dalit poor who, without access to modern medical care, must cling to their faith in these practices, since it is all they have.

Work is an unavoidable commonality among Dalits due to the community's traditional association with menial caste occupations. Dalit autobiographers are also forced to grapple with the reality and meaning of hereditary caste occupations in relation to their own current position in the urban middle-classes.[11] Yet, Dalits continue to fight over reserved positions in these traditional and exploitative occupations, since it gives them a basic level of economic security.[12] Therefore, while Hindi Dalit writers condemn these caste-based jobs as a source of exploitation and oppression, they also extoll the arduousness, strength and creative productivity that characterises traditional forms of Dalit work. Chauhan, for example, writes,

> [i]n today's times would any Brahman agree to work as a cleaner? Never. Only if the wages are Rs. 1000 instead of Rs. 20–25, would the Brahmans and so-called savarns of this country perhaps be prepared to do this work of cleaning (2002: 52).

Chauhan claims that these reserved jobs give Dalits a false sense of security and thus are a curse, because they repress the urgent desire for struggle and the capacity for rising. He explains,

> [w]henever a bit of problem comes in education, Bhangis accept the work of sweeping. In childhood, it was set in their minds that if there is a lack of work, then they could always get work sweeping. For the people of my society, this work is their birth-right (ibid.: 52).

Hindi Dalit autobiographies tell the story of the Dalit protagonist who has previously engaged in these hereditary jobs but has since entered middle-class employment express important tensions with regards to these occupations. Yet, the fact that the majority of Dalits continue to work in their caste occupations means that Dalit autobiographers do not devalue the labour these occupations involve. In other words, they must balance a fine line between condemning exploitation and rejecting the idea of certain occupations being hereditary on the basis of caste, while at the same time continuing to show solidarity with the rest of the community involved in this work.

In the process of renaming Dalit cultural symbols and rejecting others, Hindi Dalit autobiographers must negotiate their own

complex position as members of the urban middle classes who claim to represent the experience of the rural Dalit poor. Incidents of self-criticism arise as ruptures in the text, due to the Dalit autobiographer's awareness of his non-Dalit audience and the resulting difficulties in engaging in self-criticism as a member of a socially oppressed group. Consequently, Hindi Dalit autobiographies retain various tensions in their expression of Dalit identity, revealing that Dalit writers themselves are still in the process of exploring what it means to be Dalit outside of the experience of caste discrimination, and acknowledging that it is not always easy to return to one's traditions.

Dalit Autobiographies and the Literary Field

The popularity and commercial success of Hindi Dalit autobiographies has been unmistakeably instrumental in disseminating Dalit cultural identity in the Hindi public sphere. For instance, Mohandas Naimisharay's *Apne Apne Pinjare* and Omprakash Valmiki's *Juthan* were published by two of the most respected mainstream Hindi literary publishers in Delhi and have run into several editions.[13] While the progressive Hindi literary journal *Hans* provided an important space for Hindi Dalit writers to publish their works in the mid-1990s, it was through the publication of Dalit autobiographies by mainstream Hindi literary presses that Hindi Dalit writers began to gain widespread acclaim in the mainstream Hindi literary field. It is significant, for instance, to note how much authority Dalit writers gain in the literary sphere once they have published their autobiography. Mohandas Naimisharay and Omprakash Valmiki, two of the most well-established Hindi Dalit writers, first interacted with mainstream Hindi commercial publishers through the publication of their autobiographies. Since then, mainstream publishers have brought out several collections of short stories and a book of literary criticism by Omprakash Valmiki, and Mohandas Naimisharay has published a historical novel through these mainstream Hindi commercial publishers.[14]

The development of the Dalit autobiography as a literary genre was not a straightforward adoption from Marathi with similar guarantees of success. Rather, a Hindi readership of Dalit autobiographies was explored and consciously cultivated by Hindi Dalit writers through shorter autobiographical articles in published

in journals and anthology collections. Omprakash Valmiki, for instance, published his first autobiographical narrative 'Ek Dalit ke Atmakatha' (Autobiography of a Dalit) as an article in 1995 in the book *Harijan se Dalit* (From Harijan to Dalit), part of a popular series called *Aj ke Prashan* (Questions of the Day) edited by Raj Kishor. He published *Juthan* in 1997. Surajpal Chauhan has similarly written several short stories based on his own life experiences, which were published in *Hans, Am Admi* and *Dalit Sahitya,* and later provided the basis for *Tiraskrit*. Interestingly, these autobiographies now provide a blueprint for what has become the standard way to talk about Dalit experience. The development of a generalised formula for a Dalit autobiographical narrative in Hindi has meant that Dalit writers have now begun describing their lives in a similar manner even in oral interviews, placing emphasis on the same events, and marking time in analogous ways.

Dalit autobiographers point to letters from readers to confirm that they write not for personal recognition, but in response to requests from the Dalit community for representation. Thus, the genre of autobiography gives Dalit writers access to the public sphere, and allows them to participate in public debate through narrating the story of their own life. Reader-responses have show how important these autobiographies have been to their Dalit audience as reflections of common Dalit life experiences. For instance, after Valmiki's short autobiographical essay was published in a 1995 journal, he attests that, 'responses came even from far-flung rural areas. The Dalit readers had seen their own pain in those pages of mine. They all desired that I write about my experiences in more detail' (Valmiki 2003: vii).

Dalit autobiographies are not written for the purpose of personal reflection but are overtly meant for public consumption. In an interview, Surajpal Chauhan spoke about writing a second autobiography. He explained,

> I had never in my life thought that I would write an autobiography. So I am collecting stories I now remember which I had missed before. I had to rush to write the first one since the movement needed it.[15]

Chauhan's claim that his autobiography was not written for personal but for public reasons — for the movement — is a significant political statement, placing his narrative as part of a greater

movement of resistance. Autobiography has also been important as a genre for establishing narrative authority since, as Dalit writer Shyauraj Singh Bechain points out that, unlike poetry or fictional narratives, Dalit autobiographies can only be written by a Dalit. However, Hindi Dalit writers have taken this claim a step further and have constructed a powerful counter-discourse emphasising the authority of *svanubhuti* (self-perception) and discrediting literature based on *sahanubhuti* (sympathy) as elitist and oppressive, concluding that only Dalits can write Dalit literature. There is also a heated debate taking currently taking place in progressive Hindi as well as Dalit-run journals regarding who can write Dalit literature. There is a general consensus among Hindi Dalit writers today that Dalit literature is based on 'svanubhuti' and thus can only be written by a Dalit. This strong stance is taken in the context of a greater antagonism between Dalit writers — who, as members of a socially marginalised community, have had to struggle to gain narrative authority within the literary public sphere — and the entrenched Hindi academic establishment, as well as the mainstream Hindi journal and newspaper editors and commercial publishers, who hold much of the power to give or withhold literary legitimacy. The argument that only Dalit writers can write 'Dalit literature' is an important strategy which Dalit writers use to reassert control over a certain sphere of literary production; it is an act which clearly says 'we also have the power to exclude'. In an article entitled 'The Concept of Dalit Literature', Dalit writer Kanval Bharti expresses a position typical of most Hindi Dalit writers on this issue. Bharti writes,

> [t]he purpose of Dalit literature is for Dalits to describe their own pain . . . For this reason, it could be said that, in reality, only literature written by Dalits comes into the category of Dalit literature. Taking this achievement, there is the objection from non-Dalit writers over why writing of non-Dalits on Dalit literature is not considered Dalit literature . . . There isn't any such restriction that only Dalits can write on Dalit problems. Of course [non-Dalits] can write. They have written and they are writing. But it is a question of experience and reflection. Being a Dalit, one has experienced the pain of Dalit life, just as one doesn't have the experience of being savarn (Bharti 2002a: 12–13).

Here, pain becomes an important tool which links narrative authority to svanubhuti, and thus emphasises the legitimacy (cultural capital) of Dalit writers alone. Finally, the genre of autobiography gives the

Dalit writer the authority to decide what is true even in realms of the state or Indian social life, and by raising the contradictions between the institutional discourse that caste no longer functions in the social sphere of modern India, or that the modern state is blind to caste and Dalits' lived experience of caste discrimination, allows Dalits to exploit this new opportunity to make a broad social critique using one's individual life experiences.

In conclusion, autobiography has been an influential genre, not only for Dalit writers, but for members of various marginalised or socially oppressed groups including, most notably, Black Americans and women. In fact, life narratives have been so popular among these groups that several writers among them have gone as far as to label autobiography an oppressive genre, as it is often perceived as the only legitimate way writers of oppressed communities can participate in the public sphere. For instance, the famous Black author Zora Neale Hurston has written about the unspoken expectation for Black writers to write only about the experience of being Black, a pressure she claims serves to further marginalise Black writers from engaging in other topics of social debate. Yet, as scholar Kenneth Mostern notes,

> [i]n spite of all Hurston's . . . claims that she is tired of writing about the race question, she is formed by the same paradox as everyone else: she has to write, incessantly, about the problem of being a Negro who does not care to write about being a Negro . . . [Her autobiography] *Dust Tracks* is simply another example of the phenomenon . . . [that] black people have to write political statements in the form of autobiographies (1999: 105–6).

In the case of Hindi Dalit writers, this is further illustrated by a statement made by Rajendra Yadav, a respected Hindi literary figure and editor of the progressive Hindi journal *Hans*, who explained in an interview, 'early Dalit writing has been in the form of autobiography because this is the only authentic experience they [Dalits] have since they have been separated from the experiences of the world'.[16] Statements such as this emphasise the reality that not all groups have equal access to all literary genres, and confirms for Dalits writers what Sidonie Smith has recognised in her study on women's autobiographies, that,

> the autobiographer's identity as a woman within the symbolic order of patriarchy affects her relationship to generic possibilities, to the

> autobiographical impulse, to the structuring of content, to the reading and the writing of the self, to the authority of the voice and to the situating of narrative perspective, to the problematic nature of representation itself (S. Smith 1987: 17).

Bechain expressed his frustration at this situation during an interview in which he described his experience approaching a commercial publisher in Delhi for one of his books. He recalls, '[t]his one publisher said, "First give me your autobiography, then I'll publish your other books. Otherwise your books will not sell." Then one has to do these things. We are not that independent from the publisher.'[17] There is a common assumption that members of a marginalised group will both *want* and *need* to write autobiographical literature in order to express their experiences of oppression. In the eyes of the mainstream literary field, this is their one (and only) legitimate life experience. In this sense, autobiography allows Dalits to participate in the literary field only in a limited and predetermined way.

Notes

1. All translations from Chauhan's *Tiraskrit* are my own. In the case of Omprakash Valmiki's *Juthan,* I have, for the sake of simplicity and cross-referencing, used the excellent English translation in Valmiki (2003).
2. For instance, Mulk Raj Anand's English novel *Untouchable* (1940), which was part of the Hindi Progressive writer's movement or Premchand's Hindi short stories 'Kafan' or 'Ṭhakur ka Kuan'. For Hindi Dalit criticism of Premchand, see Chapter Five.
3. The growth of Marathi Dalit literature through the autobiographical genre is evident from the popularity of Marathi Dalit autobiographies. Daya Pawar's *Balut*, translated into Hindi as *Achut,* was written in 1978, and within 15 years it was in its fourth edition. In fact, literary critic Ramesh Dhongde credits Daya Pawar's *Balut* for the growing respectability of Dalit autobiographies in Marathi literature, and the rapid expansion of autobiographies caused Arjun Dangle to refer to this period from 1978 to 1986 as the 'period of autobiographies'. These include: Daya Pawar's *Balut*, Shankarrao Kharat's *Taral-Antaral*, Sharankumar Limbale's *Akkarmashi*, Laxman Mane's *Upara*, Dadasaheb More's *Gabal*, P. E. Sonkamble's *Athvaninche Pakshi*; those by Dalit women include Babetai Kamble's *Jivan Hamara*, Shantabai Kamble's *Majya Jalmachi Chittarkatha* and Kumud Pawde's *Antasphot*. Daya Pawar's *Balut* was first translated into Hindi as *Achut* and published

by the mainstream Hindi literary press Radhakrishna Prakashan in 1980, with a second edition in 1982 and a third in 1996. In addition to translations, another influence of Marathi Dalit literature was its role as a centre of Dalit literary activities, which drew in Dalit writers from various regions across India to attend conferences and literary debates. During the 1970s, the height of Marathi Dalit literary assertion and creativity, several of the most well-known Dalit autobiographers of Hindi were either living in Maharashtra, such as Omprakash Valmiki, or were in close contact with the Dalit literary activities there. Mohandas Naimisharay, for instance, writes that there were conferences and seminars in Mumbai, Aurangabad and especially Nagpur where many Dalit activists and writers from Delhi, UP and Rajasthan were in attendance. In an interview, he claimed that he had visited Mumbai more than fifty times and had learned Marathi as a result of this strong Dalit literary movement. Through these conferences on Dalit literature, Hindi Dalit writers were able to participate and gain support from other Dalit writers in an area where Dalit literature already had a strong base. Omprakash Valmiki similarly describes the vibrant literary scene in Chandrapur, Maharashtra, where he was stationed at an ordnance factory for many years. Punalekhar (2001, 379–380); Naimisharay (2002); Valmiki (1997).

4. For more on autobiographies of marginalised groups see: Butterfield (1974); Folkenflik (1993); S. Smith (1991); V. Smith (1987)
5. Alok Mukerjee, in his introduction to Marathi Dalit writer Sharankumar Limbale's *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, writes, 'Limbale establishes the Dalits' subalternity not in a colonial structure but in the caste-based social, cultural and economic structure of Hindu society. Here the village becomes the metropolis, and the Dalits exist literally on the periphery' (2004: 2).
6. Interview with Omprakash Valmiki, 9 April 2004, Dehradun.
7. For example, Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1940) focuses on a single man, yet gives his 'untouchable' character little interiority.
8. This was confirmed by several other Hindi Dalit writers whom I interviewed from December–May 2004, but who desired to remain nameless.
9. Interview with Ramanika Gupta, February 2004, Delhi.
10. This is less true of Marathi Dalit autobiographies where writers have over time begun to directly address questions of gender.
11. In contrast to Hindi Dalit autobiographies, Kancha Ilaiah, a Dalit writer from south India, interprets Dalit work in a positive light. In *Why I am not a Hindu,* Ilaiah redefines Dalits' physical labour as creative, productive and life-enhancing — the agricultural labourer grows food, the leather worker makes shoes and bags — while he

deems upper-caste work as consuming, exploitative and unproductive (Ilaiah 1996).

12. Vijay Prashad's work on the Bhangi jati shows how this community became hereditary sweepers for the Delhi municipal government, and since a percentage of these positions as sweepers were reserved for SCs, members of the Bhangi community have fiercely competed with members of other Dalit communities to maintain a monopoly on these jobs (Prashad 2000).
13. Mohandas Naimisharay's autobiography was published by Vani Prakashan in 1995, and Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography was published by Radhakrishna Prakashan in 1997. Surajpal Chauhan's autobiography (2002) has received slightly less visibility.
14. Though both their autobiographies were published by the large Hindi publisher, Vani Prakashan, other literary works have been published by the other giant in Hindi commercial publishing, Radhakrishna Prakashan. Omprakash Valmiki's collections of short stories include: *Salam* (2000), *Ghuspaitiya* (2003) and *Ab aur Nahin* (Now or Never) (2005). His book of literary criticism is entitled *Dalit Sahitya ka Saundaryashastra* (Dalit Literary Aesthetics) (2001). Mohandas Naimisharay's historical novel is entitled *Virangna Jhalkari Bai* (The Heroine Jhalkaribai) (2003).
15. Interview with Surajpal Chauhan, 22 March 2003, Delhi.
16. Interview with Rajendra Yadav, 10 March 2003, Dariyaganj, Delhi.
17. Interview with Shyauraj Singh 'Bechain', 15 January 2004, Delhi.

5

The Meaning of Dalit Literature

> What are the weapons with which we should fight our enemies? Brahmanism is our greatest enemy … and literature is the greatest weapon. For thousands of years, Dalits had no social status and there was discrimination against them. Why? Because all written literature whether Vedas, Upanishads, Ramcharitmanas, Mahabharata or any other holy scripture kept Brahmanism alive. Brahmanism has been clearly identified in all kinds of written literature in India … So if you have the power to write and I don't have the power to write, they will listen to you. They will look at me, clap their hands and go away. This is why Dalit literature has the biggest and most important role in the movement.
>
> What we think about our country, our society, our nation, the concepts of nation, equality and fraternity, we learn all these things from childhood in school … Children are taught through stories and history … so if we want to change these conceptions about our society, religion etc. then our literature is the key to do this.
>
> — Jayprakash Kardam[1]

Through their autobiographies and fictional short stories, Hindi Dalit writers have projected new public images of Dalit life into the Hindi literary world, challenging previous literary depictions of Indian society and reinserting caste into the heart of the Indian experience. In the above excerpts from an interview, Hindi Dalit writer Jayprakash Kardam speaks on the role of literature in informing public understanding of society and the nation. While accusing mainstream Indian literature of perpetuating notions of caste discrimination in India, Kardam presents a perception of Hindi Dalit literature common among Dalit writers — as a weapon to fight oppression. For Hindi Dalit writers, Dalit literature represents a new

political consciousness, a firm belief that their experiences should also be included in the public representations of Indian society.

In conjunction with the formation of a Dalit counter-public, Hindi Dalit writers also attempt to assert control over the field of Hindi Dalit literature by directing the way it is interpreted by its readers and literary critics. They do so by positing themselves as the only legitimate producers and critics of Hindi Dalit literature, amassing a new corpus of Dalit-authored Dalit literary criticism. They are left, however, with an unresolved tension between aspirations to safeguard Hindi Dalit literature as a separate stream of literary creation, and their competing desire to be included in the Hindi literary mainstream. On the one hand, Hindi Dalit writers fear what will become of their literature if they lose control over the meaning Dalit literature holds in the public eye. Will it be distorted, diluted, misunderstood? (We are reminded here of Spivak's assertion that the marginalised subaltern will always be misunderstood by the privileged hegemonic listener [Spivak 1988, 1996].) On the other hand, Hindi Dalit writers want their perspectives and literary interpretations of Dalit life to contribute to public images of what it means to be Indian. In this sense, they want their literature to become part of the mainstream Hindi literary canon.

As we have seen in Chapter Three, it is precisely because these Hindi Dalit writers have entered the urban middle classes that they have become empowered to contest the authority and legitimacy of the upper-caste middle classes to represent Indian society. The desire to contribute to public imaginations of Indian society and the nation involves a complex process of negotiation for Hindi Dalit writers as they aim both to maintain aspects of their caste-ed 'Dalit' identity, while also attempting to join middle-class Indian society on equal terms. This process of negotiation is reflected in their writing, as Hindi Dalit writers express the desire to be included in the middle-class dominated mainstream Hindi literary canon, even while emphasising the inherent 'separateness' of Dalit literature based on Dalit literary aesthetics and Dalit literary canon.

Hindi Dalit writers' entrance into the mainstream Hindi literary field has, in turn, resulted in a transformation of the Hindi literary world. As Bourdieu reminds us,

> [a]nother property of fields, a less visible one, is that all agents that are involved in a field share a certain number of fundamental interests . . .

> This leads to an objective complicity which underlies all the antagonisms. It tends to be forgotten that a fight presupposes agreement between the antagonists about what it is that is worth fighting about (1993b).

As Hindi Dalit writers have gained increasing access to the mainstream Hindi literary field, they have contributed to another social metamorphosis — that of the cultural representations and public image of the Indian middle classes, but with a complicity in the values, both social and literary, that go along with middle-class identity.

This chapter shows how debates on the meaning and importance of Hindi Dalit literature reflect a power struggle between the autobiographic Hindi Dalit writers and actors in the mainstream Hindi literary field over the authority to judge the literary representations of Indian society. It considers the way Hindi Dalit writers have positioned themselves not only as the only producers of Dalit literature but also as its most legitimate critics, and thus explores how Dalit literary criticism portrays the symbolic meaning and value of Dalit literature. Hindi Dalit writers employ the concept of svanubhuti to enhance their own narrative authority as the only legitimate producers of this literature, thereby excluding non-Dalit writers from writing Dalit literature. As literary critics, Hindi Dalit writers have also created a new set of standards by which Dalit literature must be judged, thus rejecting traditional Hindi literary aesthetics in favour of a new 'Dalit' literary aesthetics based on the notion of Dalit *chetna* (consciousness).

The Hindi literary canon has a stronghold over the representation of India's cultural heritage and thus Hindi Dalit writers have engaged directly with the Hindi literary canon, targeting figures such as Premchand and Kabir to both critique the established Hindi literary canon as caste-biased and to display their authority to include or reject traditional canonised literary figures from their own 'Dalit' literary canon. In this way, Hindi Dalit writers aim to enter the mainstream field of Hindi literature, but on their own terms, keeping a tight rein on both the production as well as the interpretation of Dalit literature. Thus, Hindi Dalit writers' struggle to retain authority as the only legitimate critics of Dalit literature reveals the way these writers use both their caste and class identities to their advantage. On the one hand, they highlight their low-caste identity to assert their legitimacy over non-Dalit literary figures

to both write and judge Dalit literature. On the other hand, these writers exploit their class identity, which has given them access to middle-class literary practices and sensibilities, to exclude poor Dalits from writing 'Dalit literature', thus explaining the exclusion of Dalit pamphlet literature as well as the lack of any lower-class Dalit writers from this autobiographic field of Dalit literature.

Producing the Meaning of Hindi Dalit Literature

Hindi Dalit writers have used the genre of literary criticism to promote a specific interpretation of Hindi Dalit literature. In this sense, they have positioned themselves not only as the primary producers of Dalit literature but also as the 'producers of the meaning' of Dalit literature. Hindi Dalit writers have conceptualised Dalit literature as a document of pain, as a weapon of struggle and a force of democratisation in the cultural arena. In these three characterisations, Hindi Dalit writers produce a powerful meaning of Hindi Dalit literature as a new stream of cultural representations, which exposes caste as a fundamental part of the Indian experience — a belief the Indian middle classes have publicly repressed for several decades as 'un-modern'. Hindi Dalit literature is also depicted by Hindi Dalit literary critics as exposing the upper-caste hegemony over such cultural fields as Hindi literature, and thus, of upper-caste domination of the most influential public representations of Indian society and the Indian nation, which they claim are misleadingly presented as 'universal'. Finally, Hindi Dalit writers use their literary criticism to associate Dalit literature with democracy and national development, while simultaneously depicting the established Hindi literary tradition as narrow, feudalist and contrary to national progress.

In the context of Dalit literary criticism, Hindi Dalit writers emphasise Dalit literature's important role in revealing the pain and exclusion the Dalit community has suffered due to caste discrimination (as we have also seen with Hindi Dalit autobiographies in Chapter Four). In this way, Hindi Dalit writers cultivate an image of the Hindi Dalit literary field as one which recognises caste as an essential part of the Indian experience. This is in direct contrast to previous Hindi literary representations of Indian society

as casteless, which have been widely promoted by Marxist streams of Hindi literature (Pragativad), Hindi literary movements with an 'art for art's sake' approach (Chayavad) and, most recently, Nayi Kahani. For instance, Hindi Dalit writer and lecturer at JNU, Vimal Thorat, begins an article on Dalit literature published in the 1999 annual edition of *Dalit Sahitya*, '[w]hen Dalit writers give creative expression to the tragedy of Dalit life through the medium of their own life experiences, then they make the social, economic, cultural and political affairs of the entire community famous' (2001: 55). Thorat's description of Dalit literature as a documentation of the pain of Dalits is characteristically coupled with the notion of exposing Dalits' pain to the world. While Thorat's article is ostensibly on Dalit autobiographies, the article is largely preoccupied by a discussion of Dalit literature in general. It emphasises both the importance of Dalit autobiography as the most important literary genre in this field but also the transference of a certain 'Dalit autobiographical aesthetic' onto all Dalit literature, including its role as proof of Dalit oppression and the belief that it is based on true, real-life experience.

Hindi Dalit writers in this field also depict Dalit literature within the context of its adversarial relationship with the mainstream Hindi literary sphere. We saw this, for example, in Jayprakash Kardam's earlier depiction of Dalit literature as a 'weapon' to use against 'enemies'. It is also in this sense that Mohandas Naimisharay writes, 'Dalit literature is not the literature of pain, torment or freedom, but rather it is the power and identity of those who fight' (Naimisharay 2002: 19). Promoting this black-and-white perspective of Hindi Dalit literature versus the established Hindi literary field helps Hindi Dalit writers draw a direct relationship between upper-caste domination of the field of cultural production and Dalit social oppression within larger Indian society, thus linking the literary field to the field of power. In other words, Hindi Dalit writers claim that just as Indian society is socially and politically dominated by the upper-caste middle classes, so too Hindi literature remains under the influence of this dominant group. Thorat, for instance, remarks, '[f]or Hindi literature, whose vitality and influence dominates even today, it was only natural from their perspective to guard against giving entry in the particular field of literature to those established as outcastes on the margins' (Thorat 2001: 55). Hindi Dalit writer Kanval Bharti also emphasises that literature is

deeply entrenched in the power-relations of society in his article on 'The Concept of Dalit Literature' when he writes, '[t]he linguistics (bhashayi) of literature is based on human beings' (Bharti 2002a: 11). In this way, Hindi Dalit literary criticism interprets Dalit literature as a challenge to the 'universalist' claims of the mainstream Hindi literary field, which presents its cultural images as representative of Indian society as a whole. Omprakash Valmiki, for instance, writes that while Hindi literature portrays itself as 'natural' and 'universal', this is only a superficial perspective, and that, in fact, Hindi literature is internally divided according to an 'us-versus-them' power relation which has excluded Dalit literature (Valmiki 2001a: 73-4).

Several supportive non-Dalit literary figures reaffirm Hindi Dalit writers' portrayal of their literature in their contributions to Dalit literary criticism. For instance, Hindi professor Purushottam Agrawal emphasises the economic, social and cultural elements of Dalits' exploitation hidden behind notions of 'natural' unchanging social structures in his article on Hindi Dalit literary criticism published in the mainstream literary journal *Kathadesh* (Agrawal 2003: 31). Agrawal staunchly defends minorities, women and Dalits whose voices, he claims, have been lost in the meta-narratives of society, suppressed behind 'universalism' and 'nation'. Several other established Hindi literary figures including Rajendra Yadav, Ramanika Gupta and more recently, Hindi scholar Vir Bharat Talwar have supported this view of Hindi Dalit literature in opposition to the Hindi literary mainstream by proclaiming, 'Savarns (upper-castes) have a grip on the literary world. Dalit writers cannot rise under the banyan tree of the savarns' (Talwar 2000: 77). Rajendra Yadav agrees,

> It will take time for Dalit writing and the Dalit movement to stand on its own two feet. It is surrounded by the stale atmosphere. It has been ridiculed, undermined, and still people think that it is no literature at all. To them it doesn't come up to the standards of a new piece of literature . . . There is a group of academics . . . who care to recognise it. They think that there is something serious, more than meets the eye. Otherwise all those old generation of teachers, they don't care.[2]

However, outside the purview of Hindi Dalit editorial control, non-Dalit literary figures don't always simply agree with Hindi Dalit writers' interpretations of the meaning of Dalit literature.

This is true even for literary figures sympathetic to the Dalit cause. For instance, Rajendra Yadav has played an important role in giving Dalit writers a public space for literary expression, as well as a sense of legitimacy in the mainstream Hindi literary world, by publishing their work in his progressive literary journal *Hans*. However, Yadav's characterisation of Hindi Dalit literature's struggle against the hostile Hindi literary mainstream as typical of any new literary movement, in fact, disregards Hindi Dalit writers' strong claims that their adversarial position is based specifically on caste discrimination. In an interview, Yadav contends that in the first stage of *any* new literary movement, there is an effort by the mainstream to ignore the new literature, which he calls a 'conspiracy of silence'. If the new literary movement continues into the second stage, Yadav claims, the literary mainstream attempts to undermine and ridicule it. In the third stage, the established literary field attempts to appropriate the new stream of literature, claiming that it is actually nothing new and has all been seen before. Finally, the fourth stage is a state of conditional acceptance. Yadav explains,

> Marathi [Dalit literature] has passed all four stages and has come to the level of the mature, but Hindi [Dalit] writing is still going on, it has recently crossed into the third stage, or is vacillating between the second and the third.[3]

In depicting Hindi Dalit literature as simply another new literary movement struggling for legitimacy against the traditional and established Hindi literary world, Yadav removes the aspect of 'caste' so central to Hindi Dalit writers' portrayal of this struggle. This small distinction reveals the problematic position Hindi Dalit writers face as Hindi Dalit literary critics, who fight to maintain the dominancy of their own interpretations of Dalit literature, and who would characterise the aims of Hindi Dalit literature in terms of struggle and Dalit identity. As Hindi Dalit writer Dinesh Ram characterises the aims of Dalit literature, 'first, to struggle against the social system of caste hierarchy, and second, to create a new social system in its place' (D. Ram 2002: 1).

While contesting the mainstream Hindi literary field's claims to universalism, Hindi Dalit writers depict Dalit literature as a democratising force, which represents one of the multiplicity of minority voices needed to make Hindi literature truly representative

of Indian society. In this way, Hindi Dalit writers associate their literature with modern, national principles, while characterising the upper-caste dominated field of Hindi literature as outdated and against the national democratic ethos. For instance, Hindi Dalit writer Mahendra Pratap Rana writes,

> [o]ne finds correct information on Dalits' contribution to the formation of the nation only in Dalit literature. Dalit literature shows national unity. It gives the message of brotherhood. In contrast, savarna literature emphasises the break-up of society and the country (1999: 29).

Later, Rana continues,

> Indian literature is based on the varna system, while Dalit literature is a staunch opponent of the caste system. Dalit literature is necessary because generation after generation, one-fourth of the population of the country has engaged in national development and still today their descendents continue to be neglected (ibid.: 30).

Within the context of Hindi literary criticism, Hindi Dalit writers portray Hindi Dalit literature as a means of opening Indian society's eyes to the true social reality of caste, and of forcing a reluctant Indian society to acknowledge the unjust oppression of the Dalit community. In this sense, Hindi Dalit literature is also associated with the realisation of social justice for Dalits as they begin to contribute their own perspectives and interpretations of Indian society to the wider Hindi literary mainstream.[4] 'Dalit autobiographies have violently shaken the sleeping sensitivity of non-Dalit society', writes Hindi Dalit writer Rajesh Paswan, '[i]t has the feeling of a new world' (2003: 165). Hindi Dalit writers thus use literary criticism to argue that a major cause of Dalit oppression in India has been Dalit exclusion from arenas such as literature, history and art, all of which contribute to the public imagination of what it means to be Indian, what the Indian nation stands for, and what the 'modern' experience of Indian society should be. Mahendra Pratap Rana, for instance, uses his article on the 'Necessity of Dalit literature' to link the oppression Dalits have suffered in Indian society to upper-caste domination of Indian cultural representations when he writes, '[i]t is said that "if one is to destroy a society completely, one should first destroy its literature and history." Such a thing has happened with Dalit society' (Rana 1999: 28). Vimal Thorat

similarly reminds her reader that, 'The right to write was acquired and held by a certain group for hundreds of years' (Thorat 2001: 63). In this way, Hindi Dalit writers construct the meaning of Hindi Dalit literature as the symbolic struggle of the Dalit community to contribute their perspective of Indian society into the mainstream public sphere.

Who can Write Dalit Literature: Strengthening Dalit Narrative Authority

Contemporary Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field have sought to ensure their narrative authority over the entire field of Hindi Dalit literature by asserting that Dalit literature can only be legitimately produced by a Dalit writer. They are competing against the powerful voices of many established Hindi writers, publishers and academics, who argue that Hindi Dalit literature is too immature, too crude or too political, and cannot be considered 'good' literature until it complies with certain aesthetic standards laid out by the Hindi literary mainstream. Fighting back against these voices of authority, Hindi Dalit writers use Dalit literary criticism to argue that Dalit literature is fundamentally based on 'personal experience' or svanubhuti and thus only a Dalit can write Dalit literature. In this way, Hindi Dalit writers claim that their literature is the only legitimate representation of Dalit life and Dalit experience in contemporary India. Hindi Dalit writers and critics negatively contrast the notion of svanubhuti with sahanubhuti, a quality associated with literature written by non-Dalits on Dalit issues.[5]

Thus, Dalit literary criticism written by both Dalit writers and established Hindi literary figures has been frequently consumed in debates over the issue of authorship. Is Dalit literature defined by its subject matter or by the caste identity of its author? While fairly straightforward when a Hindi Dalit author writes on a Dalit-related subject, what about when a non-Dalit writer attempts to publish literature on Dalits? Is this Dalit literature? While many established Hindi literary figures argue that creative licence gives anyone the ability to write any kind of literature, Hindi Dalit literary critics strictly maintain that only with svanubhuti can one write Dalit literature. This reminds us of Bourdieu's assertion that

> the field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and

> therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer . . . In short, the fundamental stake in literary struggles is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, i.e. the monopoly of the power to say with authority who are authorised to call themselves writers (Bourdieu 1993: 42).

Thus, the argument over authorship is largely a struggle for control over the field of Hindi Dalit literature. This section argues that Hindi Dalit writers use the notion of svanubhuti as a narrative strategy to strengthen their narrative authority over the field of Hindi Dalit literature by claiming that only Dalits can write Dalit literature. In the face of an antagonistic mainstream Hindi literary field, the notion of sahanubhuti is likewise used by Hindi Dalit writers to de-legitimise the authority of the established Hindi literary world, including the Hindi academy, over the field of Hindi Dalit literature.

Only a Dalit can write Dalit literature. This strong and non-negotiable stance in Dalit literary criticism positions Hindi Dalit writers as the authority figures over the growing corpus of Hindi Dalit literature. It is a statement which clearly expresses not only the power to include certain pieces of literature into their literary corpus, but exhibits the equally important power to exclude. Kanval Bharti's article on 'The Concept of Dalit Literature' provides a typical example of Hindi Dalit writer's definition of Dalit literature on the basis of Dalit authorship. He writes:

> The purpose of Dalit literature is for Dalits to describe their own pain . . . For this reason, only literature written by Dalits is included in the category of Dalit literature. There is an objection to this from non-Dalit writers over why the writing of non-Dalits on Dalit literature is not considered Dalit literature . . . Of course, there isn't any restriction that says only Dalits can write on Dalit problems . . . it's a question of experience and reflection. Being a Dalit, one has experienced the pain of Dalit life (Bharti 2002a: 12–13).

Here, pain becomes an important tool which links narrative authority to svanubhuti, and thus emphasises the legitimacy of Dalit writers alone within the field of Hindi Dalit literature. This stance is repeated again and again by all Hindi Dalit writers participating in the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature. Hindi Dalit writer Mahendra Pratap Rana demonstrates this in his article on

Dalit literature in the annual *Dalit Sahitya*. He writes, 'Dalit literature written by non-Dalit writers cannot in any sense be accepted as Dalit literature … Only Dalit literature in the true sense of the word can express the pain of Dalits' (Rana 1999: 28–30). Making a statement in support of svanubhuti and against sahanubhuti as a defining feature of Dalit literature becomes both a means of consolidating narrative authority and an important act of solidarity for Hindi Dalit writers new to the autobiographic Dalit literary field.

Non-Dalit literary critics who engage with Hindi Dalit literature and strive to maintain a good relationship with Dalit writers inhabit an ambiguous position within this debate. They must negotiate the question of authorship very carefully if they want to participate in the most vibrant arena of contemporary Hindi Dalit literary criticism and debate — the Dalit counter-public sphere. Within the realms of Dalit-edited journals, non-Dalit literary critics are tolerated, provided they conform to the principle of svanubhuti and concede their inability to write Dalit literature themselves. The willingness of an increasing number of mainstream Hindi literary figures to acknowledge the legitimacy of svanubhuti as a defining feature of Dalit literature attests to the effectiveness of the Dalit counter-public sphere as a means of consolidating Hindi Dalit writers' authority over Hindi Dalit literature in general (see Chapter Three). Ramanika Gupta, a supporter of Hindi Dalit writers through her progressive Hindi literary journal *Am Admi,* has been one of the most adept at negotiating the complex position of a non-Dalit literary figure who contributes to the field of Hindi Dalit literature. In an interview, Gupta expressed her belief that the role of upper-caste writers is to support Dalit literature while allowing Dalit writers themselves to lead the literary movement. She claims, 'I believe that if you want them [Dalits] to really improve, it is they who should lead … We [upper-castes] should help them. Otherwise we start becoming leaders and they are left behind.' She added,

> I ask [opponents of Dalit literature], why don't you want them to develop? Why do you want to name yourself a Dalit writer? You are not a Dalit … Why should we interfere? I can be a progressive writer. I can be a democratic writer. Why do I want to brand myself as a Dalit writer?[6]

Ramanika Gupta's emphasis on Dalit writers as the legitimate arbiters of Dalit literature and her willingness to concede a significant

amount of cultural and symbolic capital to Dalit writers has earned Gupta a privileged place for a non-Dalit literary figure in the field of Hindi Dalit literature. By reaffirming that only Dalits can write Dalit literature, Gupta is then able to actively contribute to the field of Hindi literary debate as a critic. She demonstrates this privileged position by claiming,

> I have also written to them what are the mistakes that they are committing in the Dalit movement. I had written this. Because many Dalit writers, they accept me as part of them. I tell them, I am not a Dalit writer, but I am your supporter, so they accept my thoughts. They think I am doing the right thing.[7]

The contribution of Hindi academic scholars to Hindi Dalit literary criticism is an even more contentious issue, since this group has often been the greatest voice of opposition to Hindi Dalit literature. Recently, Vir Bharat Talwar, Hindi professor at the prestigious JNU, has begun to contribute his articles to the growing debate of Dalit literary criticism currently taking place largely in this Dalit counter-public sphere. His example demonstrates how a non-Dalit Hindi academic is compelled to make certain gestures in support of the principle of svanubhuti in Dalit literature in order to participate in debates in Dalit-edited journals. For instance, Talwar begins his article 'Dalit Sahitya ki Avadharana' (The Concept of Dalit Literature) published in a Dalit-edited volume, by immediately echoing Hindi Dalit writers' descriptions of Dalit literature as an expression of Dalit pain and struggle. Talwar also reaffirms the value of svanubhuti as a definitive criterion for Dalit literature. He writes,

> [d]ue to their sympathy for Dalits and their progressive ideology, many writers have claimed that they too have been writing Dalit literature. But it is remarkable that the voice of Dalit literature in the form of a movement in Hindi was first raised by Dalit writers. Today also, in this continuing struggle, everything is in their hands, and it should be too. For this reason, from a historical perspective, it is true that Dalit literature is the literature of the writers who came from Dalit castes (Talwar 2000: 75).

By conforming to this basic requirement of the autobiographic Hindi Dalit literary field, Talwar is able to access the world of Hindi

literary criticism, which exists primarily under the editorial authority of Hindi Dalit writers within the Dalit counter-public. In giving up his own authority to write Dalit literature, he acquires a greater authority to analyse it. Talwar then begins his critique of Hindi Dalit literature, which, he claims, falls short of the established literary aesthetic criteria — although he does not divulge what this implies about the actual quality of Dalit literature.

Talwar is able to retain an ambivalent position within Dalit literary criticism to his advantage. While he cannot outright condemn Dalit literature's aesthetic quality if he wants to participate in the debates within the Dalit counter-public, he also cannot afford to reject the traditional aesthetics which function as the basis of his ability to evaluate all other parts of the Hindi literary canon. Thus, while the beginning of Talwar's article 'Dalit Sahitya ki Avadharana' (The Concept of Dalit Literature) displays Talwar's acquiescence to the principle of svanubhuti and thus secures his access to the debate on Hindi Dalit literary criticism, Talwar spends the latter portion of the article critiquing Dalit literature and, on the point of svanubhuti, concludes that

> [t]oday, Dalit writers want to keep Dalit literature limited only to the literature written by Dalit writers, because it is the literature of personal experience . . . To limit literature in this way is necessary today to establish their own separate identity. But it is not necessary that they should emphasise such a distinction tomorrow also . . . Sympathetic literature of non-Dalit writers on Dalits and literature of today's Dalit writers can be two parts of a broad Dalit literature. The sympathetic imagination and deep human sensitivity of any writer — with which he feels the situation of oppressed people — should not be valued less (Talwar 2000: 76–77).

By beginning his article aligned with the position of Hindi Dalit writers, Talwar adeptly demonstrates how a non-Dalit Hindi scholar enters the Dalit counter-public sphere to participate in Dalit literature criticism. Immediately allying himself with Hindi Dalit writers, Talwar is then able to not only critique Hindi Dalit literature, but also revoke this static position of svanubhuti and re-emphasise the mainstream Hindi literary support for the importance of creativity and imagination rather than identity to literary production.

A further case in point is Purushottam Agrawal, also senior Hindi scholar at JNU, who has actively engaged with Dalit literature from

the mid-1990s but has taken a very critical stance against what he perceives as the influence of identity politics in this literary movement.[8] While Agrawal was one of the first to welcome the new stream of Dalit literature as part of Hindi literature, he has on numerous occasions disagreed that only those born of a Dalit caste can write Dalit literature. Instead, Agrawal places emphasis on the importance of imagination in the act of writing which, for example, gives the male writer the potential to write from a female character's point of view and gives the non-Dalit writer the prerogative to write from a Dalit's point of view, thus making it possible for anyone to write Dalit literature. Agrawal has gone on to actively criticised the writings of a particular Hindi Dalit writer, Dr Dharmvir, who has written several controversial and quite offensive articles on women. Consequently, most Dalit writers now view Purushottam Agrawal as an 'opponent' of Dalit literature, despite the fact that Agrawal himself does not consider this to be the case.[9]

More recently, several other Hindi academic scholars including the Hindi giant, Professor Namvar Singh, have also joined in the debate through the special issue of *Hans* in August 2004. These Hindi scholars were less compelled to conform to the requirements of the Hindi Dalit counter-public, since their contributions to Hindi Dalit literary criticism took place in a mainstream Hindi literary journal and most have long-standing friendships with Rajendra Yadav, the editor of *Hans*. However, even Professor Singh makes conciliatory gestures towards Dalit literature in his interview. For instance, when questioned on the svanubhuti/sahanubhuti debate, Singh kept his response vague while welcoming Dalits into Hindi literature. When asked to clarify whether he believed Dalit writing was more authentic due to svanubhuti, he replied, '[p]robably it is more authentic, but whether it is authentic or not will be decided after reading the creative piece' (N. Singh 2004: 194). Thus, Professor Singh was cleverly able to align himself with Hindi Dalit writers by acknowledging the importance of svanubhuti, while also highlighting his enduring right to judge the literary quality of the piece separate from the writer's identity.

Fundamentally, Hindi Dalit writers' claim that an individual's identity determines their ability to write a particular kind of literature strikes at the heart of an author's creative license, an essential value of the Hindi literary mainstream. The image of the writer as one detached from his own personal social position is promoted by

the established Hindi literary world as the ideal writer. In short, Hindi Dalit writers' assertion of svanubhuti as an essential characteristic of writing about oppressed groups challenges the literary field's perception of itself as separate from the field of power and politics. As we have seen, scholars such as Purushottam Agrawal have staunchly defended this idealised image of the writer who, in the act of writing, loses his various identities of caste, class, gender, etc. and becomes simply human. This view has incurred the wrath of the Hindi Dalit writers, who insist that the writer always remains part of the power structure from which he is writing, and reflects in literature the perception and views of society according to his social position. This debate over authorship is thus embedded in these Hindi Dalit writers' most radical assertion — that 'pure' literature does not exist and that all literature is deeply implicated in the power structure of society. This claim reflects the larger strategy to expose the universal as specific (here, that caste neutrality is preserving the power of the upper castes) and is a common critique used by disempowered groups in the 20th century as they have confronted dominant groups.[10]

Dalit Literary Aesthetics: Chetna and Politics in Dalit Literature

The debate between Dalit and established Hindi literary critics over literary aesthetics constitutes an important battleground between Hindi Dalit writers and the mainstream Hindi literary world for the authority to judge literary portrayals of Indian society and the experience of being Indian. In other words, it is a struggle between the mainstream Hindi world's compulsion to judge Dalit literature on the basis of established literary aesthetic standards and Hindi Dalit writers' recent declaration that Dalit literature could only be judged according to 'Dalit' literary aesthetics. While the mainstream Hindi literary field has severely criticised Hindi Dalit writers for their crude language and lack of 'literary style', Hindi Dalit writers respond by pointedly discrediting traditional Hindi literary aesthetics, claiming that they are archaic and ineffectual for assessing Dalit literature. Constructing their own 'Dalit' literary aesthetics based on Dalit chetna, Hindi Dalit writers transgress the boundaries of traditional Hindi literary aesthetics and challenge the authority of the mainstream Hindi literary field to determine the value of literary

representations of Indian society. While demonstrating their literary skills, honed in the safety of the Dalit counter-public sphere (see Chapter Three) as well as through their use of a highly Sanskritised Hindi, Hindi Dalit writers declare that the Hindi literary tradition has presented a narrow and biased portrayal of Indian society and that Dalit literature not only exposes underlying casteism but is modernising and democratising Hindi literature by contributing new representations of Indian society.

Omprakash Valmiki's book on Dalit literary aesthetics argues that Dalit writers must delineate their position on aesthetic principles because the literary aesthetics of mainstream Hindi literature has been so overpowering. While he agrees that mainstream critics have correctly analysed Dalit literature according to its portrayal of the Indian social system, caste system, caste discrimination, ideologies of equality and challenge to Brahmanist perspectives, Valmiki reiterates that Dalit writers must establish their own literary aesthetics separate from the standards of the Hindi mainstream (Valmiki 2001b: 48). In doing so, Valmiki stresses the important role Hindi Dalit writers must play in the definition of Dalit literature through the vehicle of literary criticism. He lists five intentions and characteristics of Hindi Dalit literary aesthetics: first, they are affiliated with notions of equality, freedom, justice, dignity and meaningful expression. Second, they deny methods of concealing reality in the name of culture and religion. Third, they challenge fictitious standards. Fourth, their evaluation is based on the value of life. Finally, Hindi Dalit literary aesthetics establish freedom of expression and truth of experience as its foundation (ibid.: 50). Valmiki concludes by clearly stating, 'Dalit literature struggles against the language of traditional literary aesthetics' (ibid.: 51). Sharankumar Limbale, a well-known Marathi Dalit writer who has also become vocal and widely published in Hindi, presents a similar perspective in his book *Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature*, first published in Marathi in 1996. In defence of the quality of Dalit literature, Limbale proclaims that traditional literary aesthetics are neither timeless nor universal standards and thus, 'new literary trends cannot be evaluated with traditional literary yardsticks'. Furthermore, Limbale calls upon the established literary world to acknowledge that previous literary representations of Indian society were dominated by an upper-caste perspective which did not take into account the wide variety of experiences of Indian citizens in the

subcontinent. He writes, '[t]o assert that someone's writing will be called literature only when "our" literary standards can be imposed on it is a sign of cultural dictatorship' (Limbale 2004: 107).

Hindi Dalit writers inscribe Dalit chetna based on the ideology of Dr Ambedkar as the foundation of Dalit literary aesthetics. In doing so, they legitimise the value of political consciousness at the very core of literary production and force the mainstream Hindi literary field to acknowledge its political underpinnings. As Hindi Dalit writer Kanval Bharti attests, 'It would be wrong to say that Dalit literature doesn't have political concern. Now, all Indian literature is full of political concern' (Bharti 2002a: 14). Demonstrating the incorporation of Ambedkar's ideology of resistance to Dalit literary aesthetics Kanval Bharti writes, 'Hindi Dalit literature is established on the main power and ideology of Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy' (ibid.: 12). Hindi Dalit writer Namvar Singh also asserts, 'The strength of Dalit literary aesthetics are in their powerful blow, not in their charm' (Valmiki 2001b: 48). Thus, in opposition to traditional standards, Dalit writers advocate separate Dalit literary aesthetics where pain, suffering and, most importantly, struggle for equality, rather than beauty, pleasure or entertainment, become the most valued aesthetic principles, while consciousness-raising and an adherence to the ideology of Dr Ambedkar also remain central. Dalit writer Tej Singh echoes an awareness of these new aesthetic standards in his role as editor of *Apeksha*. When asked what he looks for when selecting articles for publication, Singh replies, '[w]e select those articles which have Dalit vision and we try to explain Ambedkarism and Buddhism and its relevance in culture and literature and what it can do in Dalit society . . . We want articles which give a certain direction.'[11]

The mainstream Hindi literary field's opposition to Dalit literature has most often taken shape in their criticism of Dalit writers' crude language and lack of literary style.[12] Hindi Dalit writers responded to criticism by the mainstream Hindi literary field by rejecting traditional literary aesthetics as outdated and inappropriate to evaluate Dalit literature. Instead, they depicted Dalit literature as a stream of literature which both exposes caste discrimination and inspires Dalit radicalism and political consciousness. Hindi Dalit short stories and autobiographies purposefully include graphic descriptions and crude language to shock the reader, and consequently these are the images which remain most salient in the reader's memory

(see Chapter Four). We are reminded, for instance, of Surajpal Chauhan's description of the killing of the pig for the marriage feast or Omprakash Valmiki's traumatic experience of skinning the buffalo, of Surajpal Chauhan's short story 'Ahalya' about a Bhangi girl learning to clean the toilets of the mohalla for the first time, or even Mohandas Naimisharay's autobiographical narration of his first sexual experience with a prostitute. Yet, while Hindi Dalit writers have acknowledged their 'crude' use of language, they adamantly disagree that this is due to their lack of literary style, but in fact, place their use of language at the heart of their newly formed Dalit literary aesthetics.

Thus, while Hindi Dalit writers use a highly Sanskritised linguistic register of Hindi Dalit literature to prove their literary expertise, they employ harsh and often crude words in their narratives precisely to transgress the traditional boundaries of Hindi literary aesthetics. Thus, tension remains between Hindi Dalit writers' desire to be viewed as legitimate and skilled writers and the radical position they hold by using this shocking language. Therefore, we see on the one hand many Hindi Dalit writers cultivating the stereotype of Dalit literature as typified by crude language. For instance, Mohandas Naimisharay claims,

> [t]he publishers are always saying that 'you are using the abusive words' in the book. I explained to them that we are not knowingly using these things. We are not abusing you. But our characters and our colleagues and our community, they are using these words.[13]

On the other hand we have Dalit writers like Tejpal Singh 'Tej' who actively distances himself from this stereotype in order to maintain a general air of legitimacy in the literary field. In an interview he states,

> [t]he other [Dalit] writers use abusive language and words. They think that they are free as a Dalit writer to express their opinion because they feel they are writing for a certain group of people who also use abusive language and they could relate to it. But the way I express my views, I can express it in front of anyone.

Later he reaffirms,

> [m]y first book was on Dalit literature, but it was my attitude (*tevar*). My way of writing was such that I spoke of Dalit struggle and my fight

> with Dalit exploitation but I used a kind of language that will hit people but at the same time, will not make them feel offended . . . They say that I have the language of the Brahmans (brahmani bhasa).[14]

Tej's example demonstrates how Hindi Dalit writers have internalised many of the literary standards established by the mainstream Hindi literary world, even as they challenge the aesthetic basis of its authority (see Chapter Three).

As debate on literary aesthetics has progressed, Dalit writers have begun to imbue Dalit literature with another radical role, that of modernising Hindi literature. Mohandas Naimisharay, for instance, praises 'those autobiographies in the Dalit literature movement which show anger, not only towards Marathi literature, but rather give energy towards thinking and understanding and move all Indian literature in a new direction' (2002: 22). Hindi Dalit writer Mahendra Pratap Rana goes as far as to portray Dalit literature as the only legitimate Indian literary tradition when he writes,

> [l]iterature is the mirror of society. Human society uses this mirror to organise and improve itself, to avoid repeating its mistakes in the future. Thus, literature can be literature in the true sense of the word only when it has the determination to remove social discrimination, to fight against the prevailing inequalities, to eradicate caste and to establish an equal society (Rana 1999: 28).

Hindi literature is increasingly portrayed by Hindi Dalit literary critics as stagnant and out of touch with contemporary social realities (such as the social injustices of caste) as well as exclusive of many marginalised communities. Dalit literature, then, is charged with bringing Hindi literature back in touch with 'real' Indian society and modernising its aesthetic principles on the basis of social equality, progress and consciousness-raising.

The literary tools and expertise Hindi Dalit writers acquired in this Hindi Dalit counter-public have allowed Hindi Dalit writers to challenge the mainstream Hindi literary world on its own terms (for example, by employing a highly Sanskritised linguistic register alongside the use of crude words and descriptions of events such as the skinning of a pig or the cleaning of a toilet), and this has had a powerful effect on the Hindi literary world, apparent by the transformation of many of the senior Hindi literary figures from the most severe critics of Hindi Dalit literature into tacit supporters.

For instance, in an interview published in the Dalit journal *Apeksha,* Rajendra Yadav stated,

> [t]aking the example of literature, our particular knowledge of beauty is already developed. We have already created specific aesthetic touchstones and standards. But are these standards eternal and have they always existed? Do they never change? We judge Dalit and women's writing accepting these standards as ultimate and flawless. I accept that Dalits need to improve their language to another level. We must examine these standards of ours too (Yadav 2003: 72).

Ramanika Gupta has also supported Hindi Dalit writers in the formation of a new literary aesthetics:

> The higher caste writer community measures these creations [Dalit literature] by standards which are ages old, which have become illogical in this age especially in the context of racism, women's liberation and Dalit consciousness . . . The literature of Dalit consciousness must determine its own touchstone and standards along with its aims (R. Gupta 1996: 66–67).

Even Hindi scholar Vir Bharat Talwar acknowledges, 'Dr Ambedkar's ideology is the main theoretical touchstone with which to judge Dalit literature and Dalit consciousness' (Talwar 2000: 79). As previously mentioned, Talwar uses such alignments with the basic ideological positions of the Hindi Dalit writers as a strategy to gain access to the Hindi Dalit literary field as a literary critic. Finally, Rajendra Yadav has been particularly vocal in his claim that Hindi Dalit literature is modernising the mainstream Hindi literary field. In an article 'Hindi Mem Dalit Sahitya aur Uski Avashyakta' (Dalit Literature and its Necessity in Hindi) in the Dalit-edited volume *Chintan ki Parampara aur Dalit Sahitya* (The Tradition of Ideology and Dalit Literature), Yadav ponders why Dalits and women have become such an important topic of concern in Hindi literature only now — why had the leftist politics of the 1960s and 1970s not been enough to shake Hindi writers out of their focus on the experiences of the middle classes? As one of the most respected Hindi writers of the Nayi Kahani movement, whose focus was squarely on the middle-class Indian's experience of modernity, this question also represents a self-questioning on Yadav's part. Yet today, because Yadav's well-respected Hindi literary journal *Hans* has become so

intimately associated with Dalit writings, Yadav now has a personal interest in defending the importance and even necessity of Dalit literature in Hindi. He continues, in his article, to claim that Hindi literature requires Dalit literature to fill a 'hollowness'. Yadav further emphasises his point when he writes,

> [i]t seems to me that to bring Dalit literature amongst us is a result of both our strength and our weakness. It is the inevitability of the times. Perhaps we have squeezed our middle-class story possibilities to such an extent that there is nothing new left in them … We have nothing new to give literature; we need women and Dalit literature to fill this void, to provide something powerful and genuine (2000: 124).

Policing the Canon: Kabir, Premchand and Dalit Literature

As a bastion of the nation's cultural heritage, the traditional Hindi literary canon is one of the most closely guarded spaces within the mainstream Hindi literary field. Hindi Dalit writers have engaged in an intense struggle to enter this space. The centrality of the canon to contemporary north Indian identity has been ensured by the inclusion of canonised literary figures such as Premchand and Kabir, among others, into most high school and university literary curricula in north India (Orsini 2004). In other words, this is the literature Hindi speakers have learned at school, and it is the literature they best know and love. However, while Hindi Dalit writers have fought for the right of their own writing to be incorporated into the Hindi literary canon, they have also challenged which writers have been included in the revered Hindi canon and how they have been read and interpreted by previous Hindi literary criticism. At the heart of this challenge is an attempt to reassess the assumed universal relevance of this canon for all inhabitants of the Hindi region. This section shows how Dalit literary criticism reveals the unresolved tension between Hindi Dalit writers' simultaneous efforts to enter the mainstream Hindi literary canon and criticise many of its basic tenants by employing the notions of svanubhuti and Dalit literary aesthetics, or Dalit chetna, while at the same time struggling to maintain a separate identity for the Dalit literary field through these same principles.

In recent years, Hindi Dalit writers have engaged with the mainstream Hindi literary canon most directly by targeting two beloved and canonical literary figures, the 15th-century Bhakti poet Kabir and Premchand, the early 20th-century Progressive writer, often known as the 'Father of Modern Hindi'. As we shall see, Hindi Dalit writers use the figure of Kabir to argue that upper-caste Hindi literary critics have misinterpreted and misrepresented lower-caste Hindi writers and, therefore, can no longer retain their status as ultimate literary authorities in the Hindi field. Hindi Dalit writers instead usurp Kabir from what they view as the grip of the upper-caste dominated Hindi canon and proclaim him an early Dalit writer, thereby reasserting their own authority as the only legitimate interpreters of Dalit literature. Recent debate about Kabir began after the publication of a book of Dalit literary criticism, *Kabir Ke Alochak* (Literary Criticism of Kabir), by Hindi Dalit writer Dr Dharmvir. In *Kabir Ke Alochak,* Dharmvir examines traditional literary criticism on Kabir, accusing the traditional Hindi literary canon of being casteist, thereby contesting the assumed objectivity of the Hindi academy and instead arguing that, like all writers, literary critics have a political agenda that they impose upon the text based on their position in society.

Premchand, on the other hand, is used in quite a different way as a means of delineating who cannot be called a Dalit writer and, therefore, cannot be included as part of 'Dalit literature'. Since the emergence of Hindi Dalit literature in the late 1980s and 1990s, many Hindi scholars have pointed to Premchand as a precursor to this anti-caste literary movement. Premchand was an early 20th-century Gandhian reformer and leader of the Progressive Writers' Movement, who was one of the first literary figures in Hindi to use his protagonists to highlight the plight of lower castes and women. However, this notion of Premchand as a early writer of 'Dalit literature' has rankled with Hindi Dalit writers, who interpret this repositioning of Premchand to be simply another underhanded attempt by upper-caste authority figures in the Hindi literary mainstream to assert their sole authority over every aspect of Hindi literature, including the new stream of Dalit literature. Hindi Dalit writers, particularly Omprakash Valmiki and Kanval Bharti, have responded by attacking Premchand's work, particularly his famous short story 'Kafan', and have reasserted Dalits' exclusive rights over

the production of Hindi Dalit literature. As we shall see, the application of Dalit literary aesthetics to critique Premchand's work reveals the universalising aspirations of Hindi Dalit literary aesthetics as a means of 'democratising' all of Indian literature, while also suggesting the existence of a new Dalit readership, which can now stand in judgement of canonised Hindi literary figures.

Dharmvir's Kabir

A Bhakti poet of the 15th century, Kabir used vernacular Hindi to express his radical and often iconoclastic spiritual and social views. Although his parentage is uncertain — some claiming him to be from a poor Muslim family while others, especially Dalit writers, believing he was born of the lower castes — his poetry expresses very clear and strident opposition to casteism, as well as to orthodoxy within both Hinduism and Islam. In 1997, Dr Dharmvir published his own interpretation of this Hindi poet in *Kabir Ke Alochak*. Brought out by a major Hindi commercial press, this book, more than any other work of Dalit literary criticism up until this point, asserted the authority of Hindi Dalit writers to comment on and criticise core aspects of the Hindi literary canon (Dharmvir 1997). In it, Dharmvir contributes to Hindi Dalit writers' wider assertion that cultural representations of India embodied in Hindi literature are not universal, and that even the portrayal of historical Indian literary figures has been tainted by casteism. The heated debate that followed the publication of Dharmvir's work revealed the extent to which the mainstream Hindi literary world has been forced to acknowledge Hindi Dalit writers' contributions in the area of literary criticism.

Dharmvir uses *Kabir Ke Alochak* to embark on a lengthy and extensive critique of previous Hindi literary scholars of the Bhakti poet-sant Kabir, including Ayodhya Singh Upadhyaya 'Hariaudh', Shyam Sundar Das, Munshi Ram Sharma Shukla and Hariprasad Dwivedi. Dharmvir accuses these Hindi scholars of distorting the portrayal of Kabir by situating Kabir's poetry within the Hindu religious tradition, and thus silencing his anti-caste rhetoric and iconoclasm. Sudhish Pachauri, a Hindi literary scholar, describes Dharmvir's book as 'a genealogy of Kabir's critics, establishing a link between Hariaudh, Das, Shukla and Dwivedi as a kind of mafia against Kabir' (Pachauri 2000: 213). Dharmvir's most severe criticism, however, is reserved for Hariprasad Dwivedi, the most

famous scholar of Kabir within the established Hindi academy, whom he criticises for a 'devious' attempt to locate Kabir within the Puranic and Vaishnava Hindu tradition. Dharmvir, in contrast to Dwivedi, portrays Kabir as 'a dangerous explosive in the body of Indian society and philosophy. Kabir's thoughts burn like fire. In their heat, Brahmanism and Vedic thoughts turned to ashes' (Dharmvir 2000: 188). Dharmvir also opposes Dwivedi's claim that Kabir had a Brahman guru, Ramanand, who revealed to a disillusioned Kabir the true meaning of bhakti (devotion). Instead, Dharmvir asserts,

> In my opinion, even a fly or a mosquito, a cat or a dog, could have been Kabir's preceptor, but never, never Ramanand the Brahman. Terming the Brahman his preceptor is a conspiracy of long standing. It is an attempt by Brahmans to maintain ascendancy in literature [and] … If the Dalits don't watch out and fight this effort tooth and nail, the Hindu scholars will prove one day that Ambedkar was the chosen and anointed disciple of Gandhi (ibid.: 207).

Rejecting the portrayal of Kabir as a religious figure, Dharmvir emphasises Kabir's important role as a social reformer and anti-caste revolutionary. It is not only Kabir's low-caste identity, Dharmvir argues, but also the revolutionary tone (i.e., authentic Dalit chetna) in Kabir's poetry, which qualifies him as an early Dalit writer.

Dharmvir attempts to assert his own authority as a literary critic of this lower-caste Hindi poet based on his own identity as a Dalit, arguing that only a Dalit literary critic can give the 'true' interpretation of Kabir's poetry by virtue of a shared Dalit identity. According to Dharmvir, Dwivedi failed to understand Kabir, which

> means simply that not just Dwivedi but no Brahman egghead brought up in the arrogances bred by the Vedas and Sanskritic literature can ever regard with respect the intuitive wisdom and earthy language of Dalits. He can only see them with contempt. And when he does study them, he does so for reasons of his own, or as formal necessities (ibid.: 189).

Later, he reaffirms,

> to understand Kabir from the heart, Hazariprasad Dwivedi ought to have been born a weaver. If he had suffered the insults and humiliations that Kabir the weaver did, he would have known whether Kabir

> was an individualist or a collectivist . . . Actually, Dwivedi's attempts to understand Kabir's literature are the attempts of one not authorised. He cannot think like an untouchable (ibid.: 205).

Dharmvir's assertion of Kabir's Dalit identity is used as a means of negotiating his own legitimacy as a Dalit literary critic, a discursive strategy similar to that used by Hindi Dalit writers regarding Dalit literature and svanubhuti, as we have seen previously. Erasing Kabir's contentious Muslim identity, Dharmvir portrays Dwivedi's work as a Brahman critique of Dalit literature. Dharmvir writes, '[i]t is not a minor change that [Dwivedi] makes in the picture of Kabir he presents to the people. And this change is not the first of its kind to be made by writers of the establishment' (ibid.: 199).

Dharmvir's portrayal of Kabir as a Dalit writer in *Kabir Ke Alochak* was followed by a fury of heated debate among established Hindi literary scholars who did not hold back in their scathing criticism of Dharmvir's direct attack on the prominent scholars of the Hindi academy. Sudhish Pachauri claims, 'The impact of such deconstruction of Kabir in the Hindi world is palpable . . . The old textualists are running down Dharmvir by accusing him of playing politics in the name of Kabir' (Pachauri 2000: 208). The Hindi academy's criticism of Dharmvir's *Kabir ke Alochak* was not only a reaction to Dharmvir's attack on Dwivedi and other past Hindi literary scholars. Rather, it was Dharmvir's claim of authority over the canonised Hindi literary figure Kabir and his attempt to appropriate Kabir into the realm of 'Dalit literature' that was most threatening to scholars of Hindi literature.

Several Hindi academics reacted to the powerful discursive strategy of Dalit svanubhuti by attempting to delegitimise the reliance of Dharmvir's works on 'identity politics'. Most vocal in this debate has been Prof. Purushottam Agrawal, a long-time scholar of Kabir. Agrawal has engaged in a series of debates with Dharmvir where he has highlighted Kabir's iconoclasm, particularly regarding Kabir's opposition to the establishment of a *panth* (sect or group) of followers. Agrawal has also emphatically supported Kabir's individualism in order to demonstrate that Kabir is not the intellectual property of any single community. He has written that Kabir represents 'a caution against the erasure of the agency of the individual, which has already become a hallmark of much of communitarian and identity

discourse' (Agrawal 2000: 224). The focus on the individual — including individual preference, beliefs and imagination — becomes an important way Hindi scholars have contested what they refer to as 'identity politics' in Dalit literature. We have seen this effort in the resurrection of the role of the individual imagination in literary creation, which would allow non-Dalits to write Dalit literature. In the case of Kabir, Hindi academics express anxiety over intellectual exclusion that comes from engaging with any Hindi literary figure on the sole basis of their caste identity. This is true even for Hindi scholars outside the Indian Hindi Academy. For instance, Monika Horstmann expresses reservations that, 'the recent-most appropriation of Kabir as the property of one allegedly unified community may go to set up new group boundaries in the attempt to make Kabir the syndicate property of one particular group' (ibid.: 186). In the same way, Agrawal claims that Dharmvir commits a certain kind of violence against Kabir by trying to turn this poet into a political symbol of Dalit cultural identity.[15] While admitting that Hariprasad Dwivedi's portrayal misrepresents Kabir as an advocate of Hindu solidarity, Agrawal also reminds us that Kabir was born a Muslim *juhala* (weaver), an aspect of Kabir's identity largely underplayed by Dharmvir as well.[16]

Recently, however, several established Hindi scholars have voiced their acceptance of Dharmvir's critique, indicating a new shift in the relationship between Hindi Dalit writers and the mainstream Hindi literary field. Professor Namvar Singh, in his interview in the special 'Dalit' edition of *Hans* in 2004, was asked whether one could call Dr Dharmvir's Kabir-related criticism a new platform of Dalit literary criticism. In response, Singh gives an emphatic, '[y]es, most certainly. It is important because it shows the limitations of previous writers that no one has paid attention to before, not even me' (N. Singh 2004: 195). Rather than criticising Dharmvir, Namvar Singh publicly supports Dharmvir's constructive role as a Dalit literary critic in revealing the previous faults of Hindi literary academics and, furthermore, aligns himself with the Hindi Dalit writers by admitting that he has also faced criticism from his student, Purushottam Agrawal, who he claims is angry because, 'I won't criticise Dharmvir to make the Brahmans happy' (ibid.).[17]

Dharmvir's *Kabir Ke Alochak* also instigated an intense debate among Hindi Dalit writers, who were torn between the appeal of

Dharmvir's re-conception of Kabir as a Hindi Dalit writer, the contradictions between Dharmvir's depiction of Kabir as the head of a new Dalit religion and their own loyalty to Ambedkar's Buddhism as the legitimate Dalit religion. Dharmvir's articles on Kabir and Ravidas, and especially his book *Kabir Ke Alochak,* was thus problematic for most Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field as it propelled Hindi Dalit discourse on the question of Dalit religion outside the boundaries of Ambedkar's chosen Buddhism. Dharmvir was compelled to justify the need for a new Dalit religion while continuing to maintain his loyalties to Ambedkar. Towards this aim, Dharmvir situates himself in line with Ambedkar, praising him as a great man and reaffirming that,

> if any religious scripture has been created in this century, it has been done by Dr Ambedkar. Its title is *The Buddha and His Dhamma* … Nor can anyone find fault with his choosing Buddhism and writing this book. He was the emperor among the well-wishers of Dalits (1995: 146).

However, after repeating his support of Dr Ambedkar and Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism, Dharmvir makes a dramatic ideological shift by claiming that Buddhism is not wholly adequate as the religion of the Dalit community. He writes,

> In reality, if he [Ambedkar] had had the literature of all the Dalit sants at that time, instead of going to Buddha he would have sought the shelter of his own [i.e. Dalit] sants … What could Buddhism give to Dalits? In fact, it has come to Dalits to bear the burden of the historical accusations against Buddhism. The ultimate solution to the Dalit problems that were raised by Babasaheb by means of Buddhism and which cannot be abandoned or forgotten lies in the Dalit sants (ibid.: 147–48).

By presenting Ambedkar's choice of Buddhism as not *wrong*, per se, but simply not the best or only option for Dalits, Dharmvir sets the stage for his radical proposal of a new 'Dalit' religion, outlined in his book *Kabir Ke Kuch Aur Alochak,* which was published two years later (Dharmvir 1999).

However, while many Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic Dalit literary field praised Dharmvir's achievement as a Dalit literary critic, for other Hindi Dalit writers, Dharmvir's disregard

for the basic tenant of Dalit literary aesthetics based on an ideological affiliation with Ambedkar's ideology seems to have overshadowed the value of his attempt to provide the Dalit literary canon with a longer historical legacy in the form of Kabir. One example is Tej Singh, a well-known Hindi Dalit writer who responded to Dharmvir's *Kabir Ke Alochak* in an article entitled 'Dalit Dharm aur Darshan' (Religion and Philosophy of Dalits) published in *Hans* in 2002. He writes that, after long consideration, Ambedkar converted to Buddhism with lakhs of Dalits,

> but today some over-excited Dalit intellectuals are questioning this decision of Dr. Ambedkar … Dr Dharmvir is prime among such writers who had been singing the name of Dr. Ambedkar until now, but today they have begun to see discrepancies in Dr Ambedkar's thoughts and views. They believe that Dr. Ambedkar committed a 'historical wrong' by adopting Buddhism.

He concludes,

> we can agree with Jayprakash [Kardam] that Dr Dharmvir's Dalit religion is nothing but an opposition to Dr. Ambedkar and Buddhism which simply misleads a section of Dalits and becomes an instrument of strength for Brahmanism and Hindutva. This will not only be harmful for Dalits but will further push them into the mire of exploitation (T. Singh 2002: 43–44).

What is most significant about Tej Singh's rejection of Dharmvir's portrayal of Kabir is its divergence from the critiques of *Kabir Ke Alochak* by the mainstream Hindi literary world. Instead of reacting to Dharmvir's appropriation of Kabir into the Hindi Dalit literary canon, Tej Singh reacts to Dharmvir's claim that Kabir's ideology represents a new Dalit religion and to the implications of this statement for Dalit chetna.

And yet, despite all the controversy, Dharmvir's reclaiming of Kabir as a Dalit writer and situating his poetry within the separate stream of Dalit literature represents a wider effort by Hindi Dalit writers to construct a canon of Dalit literature and to assert their own authority as literary critics. In addition, by 'caste-ing' Kabir within the mainstream Hindi literary canon, Hindi Dalit writers insert the notion of caste back into the public arena and back into the heart of what it means to be Indian after it has been excluded for decades for denoting cultural backwardness.

Premchand

Hindi Dalit writers have also used their increasing legitimacy in the Hindi mainstream to police the boundaries of what can be considered 'Dalit literature'. This negotiation is most clearly demonstrated by Dalit literary criticism of Premchand. Much of Hindi Dalit criticism has targeted Premchand's famous short story 'Kafan' and its depiction of the two main Dalit characters. Premchand's story begins in the home of a Chamar family. As the father Ghisu and son Madhav fight over the last remnants of a meagre supper, their argument is continually interrupted by the screams of Madhav's wife, who is dying in childbirth in the backroom. However, Ghisu and Madhav both appear to be more concerned about which one of them will get the last piece of potato than they are over the fate of Madhav's wife. Their unfeeling behaviour is further emphasised after Madhav's wife dies and Ghisu and Madhav spend the money for her shroud on an extravagant meal of meat and alcohol.

Since Omprakash Valmiki's initial critique in an article in *Samkalin Janmat* (1–15 September 1994), a storm of debate has pitched Hindi Dalit writers against the Hindi Academy's prize figure. This debate often resurfaces annually during the summer celebration of 'Premchand Jayanti' in a flurry of newspaper and journal articles praising or condemning Premchand's portrayal of Dalit characters. Many Hindi scholars have interpreted Premchand's story 'Kafan' as revealing the moral depravity which results from such severe poverty and social oppression and have appreciated the story's tragic irony that members of the upper-caste community gave money to the Chamar family only after the woman's death, rather than giving it to pay for the medicine to save her life. For example, according to Kanval Bharti, Hindi literary critic Raj Kishor has written that '[d]elineating the characters of Ghisu and Madhav does not produce hatred for this class; it was done to explain the social and economic reasons behind their mentality. Premchand wanted to show that in our society' (Bharti 1996: 28). Dr Anamika Srivastav also expressed his admiration for what he considers Premchand's sensitive way of writing about Dalits in an article in a mainstream Hindi newspaper, *Hindustan*. He writes that Premchand should be praised for addressing Dalit concerns long before Dalit writers began writing themselves. Premchand, he claims, was opposed to hierarchy and untouchability, focusing instead on human progress

and expressing concern over the situation of marginalised groups such as Dalits, women, and the poor. Premchand's stories, according to Srivastav (1998), are not simply about Dalit oppression, but also about Dalits' power and rights.

However, Hindi Dalit writers such as Omprakash Valmiki and Kanval Bharti have criticised Premchand's failure to portray Dalit characters who were radicalised by the oppressed circumstances in which they lived and fought back against their oppressors. Kanval Bharti has written numerous articles further expounding the relationship between Premchand and Dalit literature from the perspective of Dalit literary criticism. He argues that while it is true that Premchand was the first Hindi writer to write about Dalit characters, Premchand was limited by his Gandhian perspective and was not a follower of Dr Ambedkar. Bharti writes,

> [w]e [Dalit writers] don't accept [Premchand's] perspective because he is a Gandhian and also he didn't have the ideology of struggle. Premchand was not Dalit. He had seen Dalit life from far away. For this reason, his literature . . . could be called literature of sympathy (Bharti 1997).

In another article entitled 'Dalit Sahitya aur Premchand', Kanval Bharti writes that while Premchand wrote several important stories on Dalits including 'Sadagati', 'Thakur ka Kuan' and 'Dudh ka Dam', the story 'Kafan' reveals him to be a supporter of caste hierarchy and Gandhism (Bharti 1996: 27). While asserting that 'Kafan' is not a story about Dalit consciousness but about the social effects of poverty, implying that this story would be an accurate portrayal of anyone in such desperate circumstances, he continues his article by claiming that no member of the Dalit community would have acted so inhumanly. He writes,

> [t]he story cannot provide an example of Dalit life, which proves the saying that being outside the home, one remains ignorant of the pain of the wife or mother inside the home. Similarly, Premchand, with his stomach full of puris and alcohol, is ignorant. Dalits could not have done such inhuman behaviour from poverty and ignorance which Premchand says about Madhav and Ghisu . . . 'Kafan' is not only an inferior story, it is also against Dalits (ibid.: 28).

Bharti employs both the notion of svanubhuti through the image of being 'inside' versus 'outside' the home, as well as the concept of

the Dalit aesthetic principle of Dalit chetna to exclude Premchand's writing from inclusion in the realm of Hindi Dalit literature. In other words, because Premchand was not Dalit, Bharti argues, he was ignorant of the truth of Dalit life and thus could only write sympathetic literature, but not authentic Dalit literature. Furthermore, Premchand's depiction of the Dalit characters Ghisu and Madhav in 'Kafan' reveal none of Ambedkar's philosophy of struggle, the true criterion of Dalit literary aesthetics. Thus, Bharti concludes, Premchand's writing cannot be considered Dalit literature, which 'is based on Dalit consciousness (*chetna*) [and] a struggle for social transformation' (1996: 31). Bharti concludes by asserting,

> I am not saying that Premchand was against Dalits or that I am against Premchand. Only that when doing an evaluation of Premchand as part of Dalit literature, it should be according to Dalit consciousness and thus, Dalit writers' remarks on Premchand are based on and show respect for the authority of Dalit consciousness (ibid.).

Hindi Dalit writers' authority over the boundaries of the Hindi Dalit literary field have made a significant impact on the language some mainstream Hindi literary figures use to discuss Premchand's depiction of Dalit characters. For instance, when asked to give his perspective on Premchand's relationship with Dalit literature, senior Hindi professor Namvar Singh responded, '[l]ook at the time they were writing. At the time, Dalits were not struggling. They couldn't foresee this fight. Thus, they write in the style of sympathy.' Thus, while placing Premchand in his historical context, Namvar Singh significantly characterises Premchand's writings on Dalits in terms of sympathy, thus conforming to Hindi Dalit writers' own characterisation of Premchand's literature. Other Hindi literary critics, including Hindi scholar Vir Bharat Talwar and Ramanika Gupta, have attempted to demonstrate how Premchand's Dalit characters also showed evidence of radicalism and struggle. Both point to the incident in Premchand's classic novel *Godan* when a gang of Chamar men shove a cow's bone into the mouth of Matadin Pandit after he impregnated a Dalit girl. Talwar concludes, '[w]hatever the influence of Gandhiji on Premchand, in "Godan" the aggressive act of putting the bone into Matadin's mouth … shows the influence not of Gandhi but of Ambedkar' (Gupta 1996: 65; Talwar 2000: 78). While this seems to contest Hindi Dalit writers' claim that

Premchand was a Gandhian whose characters showed no revolutionary consciousness and therefore should not be considered Dalit literature, in fact, it is far more revealing to see Talwar and Gupta's acknowledgement of Ambedkar's ideology as a central tenant of Dalit literary aesthetics, as a result of the impact Hindi Dalit writers have had in shaping the way Hindi Dalit literature is interpreted by the mainstream Hindi literary field.

A conference on Premchand sponsored by the Sahitya Akademi and held at the prestigious Indian International Centre (IIC) from 26 to 28 October 2005 revealed just how far Hindi Dalit writers have come in their efforts to enter the mainstream Hindi literary world as both writers and as literary critics. The very first session of the conference was devoted to Premchand and Dalit literature, and included several Hindi Dalit writers, such as Mohandas Naimisharay and Surajpal Chauhan, as speakers. Senior Hindi scholars and literary critics, including Alok Rai and Purushottam Agrawal among others, were spatially relegated to the second day of the conference, symbolically superseded by Hindi Dalit writers. These senior scholars argued against what they perceived to be an increasing presence of 'identity politics' in Hindi literature, a claim that reflects the emphasis mainstream Hindi scholars place on separating literature and politics. However, there is no doubt that this conference revealed a shift in levels of authority for Hindi Dalit writers in relation to the Hindi literary world.[18]

Conclusions: Casteism in Literature?

Hindi Dalit writers emphasise their caste identity in order to consolidate their authority as both writers and literary critics. However, a more subtle form of exclusion also takes place by virtue of the literary practices and sensibilities which form the heart of the autobiographic Hindi Dalit literary field. We have seen in Chapter Three how many Hindi Dalit writers gained access to the mainstream Hindi literary world and its practices largely through the cultural access their middle-class identity provided and, in this way, the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature was constituted on the basis of mainstream middle-class literary practices. While this has been a successful strategy for these Hindi Dalit writers who have made names for themselves in the Hindi literary world and even internationally, as their autobiographies have begun to appear

in English translations, it also serves to exclude the majority of the Dalit poor from entering this field as Dalit writers (S. Anand 2003). In other words, while proclaiming themselves to be the voice of the Dalit community in the mainstream Hindi public sphere, representing those who cannot yet speak for themselves, Hindi Dalit writers rely on their middle-class status to make this statement and thus ironically become part of the exclusionary system which they claim to fight against.

As a result of their position within both the Dalit and mainstream literary fields, as well as due to the tension between their caste and class identities, Hindi Dalit writers find themselves caught between two debates. On the one hand, established Hindi scholars, still fighting to maintain their authority over all streams of Hindi literature, have claimed that Hindi Dalit writers' use of svanubhuti and Dalit literary aesthetics are creating casteism in Hindi literature (i.e. delineating who can and cannot write a certain kind of literature based on the author's caste identity). On the other hand, a new group of young Hindi Dalit writers have begun to challenge the more established Hindi Dalit writers in this field on their ability to represent the entire Dalit community.

Reacting to the growing criticism of Hindi Dalit writers by members of the mainstream Hindi literary field, Hindi Dalit writer Kanval Bharti defends the legitimate separateness of Hindi Dalit literature at length. He writes:

> It is not easily accepted by people that a caste community can also be the basis of literature and that literature can be divided between Dalits and non-Dalits. But the reality is that literature is not only divided on the basis of language; it is also divided by many perspectives and persuasions … Those people who are not in favour of the division of literature on the basis of caste constantly forget the social divisions based on caste. They continually forget what an important introduction caste accomplishes in life-occupation. In inter-caste love relationships, the panchayats' [local village councils] cruel decisions confirm the intervention of caste. When the social arrangement of caste is so harsh, then why can this not be realised in literature? (Bharti 2002a: 11).

In this way, Bharti turns the accusations of upper-caste Hindi scholars on its head by accusing the Hindi mainstream of cloaking upper-caste exclusionary representation of Indian society as 'universal' and 'inclusive'.

A new criticism has recently been launched against Hindi Dalit writers by several 'young challengers', writers of Dalit identity who vehemently proclaim that the established Hindi Dalit writers do not represent them. One such writer, Ratnakumar Sanbhariya, expresses a view similar to members of the Hindi mainstream when he writes in his article published in the special Dalit issue of *Hans*, '[f]rom the perspective of svanubhuti a law has developed in Dalit literature that Dalit writers can only be those writers born in a Dalit jati. This rule seems to create caste reservation in literature' (Sambhariya 2004: 84). However, as a member of the Dalit community, his critique is not aimed to preserve some innate artistic purity of Hindi literature as it attempts to rescue his own individualism from erasure by the Hindi Dalit writers who claim to represent him. Thus, Sanbhariya uses his article to resurrect the many different 'personal experiences' (*svanubhutiyan*) within the Dalit community. A similar critique was presented in an article by a young writer of Dalit identity in the mainstream intellectual journal *Kathadesh* entitled 'Bat Nikalegi to Phir Dur Talak Jayegi' (If You Raise it, it will Go Far . . .). Beginning the article in an ironic tone, Indu writes, 'I start with the question: who am I? I am a Dalit. Didn't you recognise me? Is my introduction not complete? Or did it make you feel a bit uneasy? I want you to feel this uneasiness' (Indu 2003b: 79). Forcing his reader to confront the philosophical implications of representation based solely on caste identity, Indu expresses his clear opposition to what he perceives to be a monolithic and oppressive Dalit identity. Indu emphasises the importance of individuality and criticises Hindi Dalit writers' use of 'identity politics'. He argues that Dalit identity is itself tyrannical in its negation of the multiplicity of a person's identities (i.e., gender, class, occupation, location, religion, family, race, etc.) as well as a person's individuality. He ends his article, 'I would like to end with this hope, that you feel that the meaning I may hold of "myself" is not only Dalit!'[19] In a conversation regarding this controversial piece, Indu re-emphasised, 'I am not a Dalit writer, and I don't want to be!'[20]

Upper-caste literary figures who want to be Dalit writers and Dalits who refuse to be labelled a Dalit writer — this paradoxical dilemma exposes the triangular power-struggle between the established Hindi scholars, the established Hindi Dalit writers in the newly emerged autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature,

and the next generation of Dalit writers. While the struggle to proclaim oneself a Dalit writer and a legitimate 'Dalit voice' has led to a battle for authority over the autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, a younger generation of Dalits have sent a very clear and powerful message to the established Hindi Dalit writers — you don't represent me! Still, these young writers are part of the next generation of Dalit intelligentsia and although they have challenged the actual 'representative-ness' of Hindi Dalit writers, they continue to work within the basic genres, literary practices and sensibilities of the autobiographic Dalit and mainstream literary field which are unquestionably culturally middle class.

Notes

1. Interview with Jayprakash Kardam, 26 January 2004, Delhi.
2. Interview with Rajendra Yadav, 24 January 2004, Delhi.
3. Ibid.
4. This faith in literature as a vehicle of social reform was also a common perception of writers during the period of nationalism and social reform in early 20th century India. For instance, Francesca Orsini argues that language and literature provided the space for nationalists to promote their new agenda for the nation and that the strength of literature was seen to reflect the strength of the nation (Orsini 2002: 5). This emphasis on literature as a vehicle for change is also not a recent phenomenon in Dalit writing, but was expressed by Dalit writers as early as 1958 at the first 'Maharashtrian Dalit Sahitya Sangh' (Maharashtrian Dalit Literature Association). Marathi Dalit intellectual Bandu Madhav wrote an article in an edition of *Prabuddha Bharat* (Awakening India) to clarify the goals of the conference: 'Just as the Russian writers helped the revolution by the spreading of Lenin's revolutionary ideology through their works, our writers should spread Dr. Ambedkar's philosophy to the villages … Politics is just one way of attacking opposition. Unless we attack from all sides, we cannot defeat those who have inflicted injustice on us for the last thousands of years' (Basu 2002: 184).
5. Amrit Rai has argued that there is a direct relationship between emotions of sympathy and elitism (2002).
6. Interview with Ramanika Gupta, 17 February 2004, Delhi.
7. Ibid.
8. This information on Purushottam Agrawal's position vis-à-vis Hindi Dalit literature was gathered over many informal conversations over the course of my fieldwork in February 2003 and December 2003–May 2004, Delhi.

9. For the debate between Dr Purushottam Agrawal and Dr Dharmvir see Agrawal (2003: 31–38); Dharmvir (2003: 73–82).
10. For example, this is a common argument made by feminists (Scott 1988: 1–15).
11. Interview with Tej Singh, 14 January 2004, Delhi.
12. In addition to Hindi Dalit writers, this is confirmed by Rajendra Yadav who writes, 'When savarn writers criticise Dalit creations they discuss properness of language or style' (Yadav 2003: 73).
13. Interview with Mohandas Naimisharay, 30 March 2004, Delhi.
14. Interview with Tejpal Singh 'Tej', January 2004, Delhi.
15. Agrawal notes that others have attempted a similar claim over Kabir — the Kabirpanthis who make Kabir part of Hinduism and a teacher of Ram, and the Indian nationalists who used Kabir as a symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity — both deny Kabir's clear iconoclasm, his rejection of both Hinduism and Islam and his firm opposition to the caste system.
16. Purushottam Agrawal, lecture series on Kabir, Cambridge University, 4 October 2002.
17. From my numerous discussions with Dr Agrawal, I feel he would contest this characterisation of his views as incorrect. Rather than viewing Namvar Singh's statement as an accurate portrayal of both his and Prof. Agrawal's perspectives, we should view them instead as a discursive strategy employed by Singh to gain access to all areas of Hindi Dalit literary criticism (often under the editorship of Hindi Dalit writers) and thus to position himself as a senior critic of both the established Hindi literary canon as well as Hindi Dalit literature.
18. I owe this insight and information to Francesca Orsini who attended the conference.
19. The article titled 'Bat nikalegi to phir dur talak jayegi' (If you raise it, it will go far) appeared in *Kathadesh* (Indu 2003b: 81).
20. We are reminded here of the irony with which the Black American writer Zora Neale Hurston emphatically proclaimed that she didn't want to write about being black. See Chapter Four.

Conclusion

In the context of caste politics, reservation controversy and the multiplicity of voices entering the Hindi public sphere, the growing stream of Hindi Dalit literature has gained notoriety for bringing identity politics into the 'sacred' sphere of Hindi literature. This book has argued that it is only through a consideration of the social conditions of Dalit literature — the 'politics' of its production and even definition — that we can understand its content and character. It has also argued that Dalit literature provides insight into the subtle process by which Dalits have negotiated their caste, class and regional identities in contemporary Indian society.

This study subverts existing perceptions of Hindi Dalit literature, which have seen it as a sudden phenomenon stemming from the Dalit political assertion of the 1980s, largely derivative of Marathi Dalit models. As I have argued, Hindi Dalit literature has a much longer history in north India. It shows that, in fact, two fields of Hindi Dalit literature have emerged over the course of the twentieth century, a field of Hindi Dalit literary pamphlets beginning in the 1920s and a second autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature, which emerged in the 1980s. Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production has allowed me to discern the important distinctions between these two fields of Hindi Dalit literature in terms of their authors, literary practices, sensibilities and audiences.

The autobiographic field of Hindi Dalit literature has gained the most public and international attention, largely due to its conformity to the literary practices and sensibilities of the mainstream Hindi as well as international literary fields. By working within the recognised and highly respected literary code of the Hindi mainstream — for instance, by writing in genres such as fiction and literary criticism — Hindi Dalit literature has been able to launch an effective challenge to the basic underlying assumption of the Hindi literary world, namely, that literature is an arena separated from the field of power. Thus, this field of Hindi Dalit literature has been one of the most important challenges to Hindi literary discourse and its value of 'art for art's sake' since it was institutionalised in the 1920s.

In terms of reaching a large Dalit audience, however, it is the less recognised field of Hindi Dalit pamphlets that has made the greatest impact. Hindi Dalit pamphlets have, for instance, supported the proliferation of an all-encompassing Dalit identity through historical narratives of a common descent from the indigenous inhabitants of India. More recently, these Dalit historical narratives have also presented a strong counterpoint to the forces of Hindutva that have continually attempted to situate Dalits inside the Hindu fold.

Hindi Dalit literature in both fields functions as a space in which Dalits can express their aspirations to participate in the public sphere. By contributing new representations of Dalit identity and experience to the mainstream Hindi literary world, Hindi Dalit writers in the autobiographic field have contested traditional images of the 'untouchable' as a helpless victim and instead replaced them with new images of the politically conscious and assertive Dalit. Literature, in particular, provides a space in which to articulate these identities, but not in a linear or simple way. As I have argued, Hindi Dalit literature reveals the variety of ways in which Dalits attempt to participate in the project of middle-class belonging. Yet it also shows that their very participation challenges established notions of middle-class modernity. For instance, the post-colonial Indian middle classes have promoted an image of themselves as having abandoned caste identity in favour of more 'modern' cosmopolitan identities. However, Dalits have argued that this image of castelessness simply obscures existing power relations and favours the upper castes. Through the lens of Hindi Dalit literature, we can see how individuals negotiate these ambivalent relationships. It has allowed us to consider both the inclusive discourse of Dalit identity, while at the same time, examining its fissures in terms of jati, gender and class.

Finally, the existence of two fields of Hindi Dalit literature suggests that the multiplicity of voices will continue to increase as Dalits enter new and disparate social groupings. Thus, while Dalit children who are second-generation middle class may feel less of a need to associate with a political Dalit identity, this study's consideration of the broad range of Hindi Dalit literary production also suggests that many others will continue to employ new imaginations of Dalit identity in the cultural and political arenas.

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