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Volume 16 2023
Journal of the Department of English
Vidyasagar University Midnapore-721102 WB

Historicizing Gandhi-Ambedkar Conflict through Dalit Perceptions: A Reading of Premanand Gajvee's *Gandhi-Ambedkar*

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Abstract

Mahatma Gandhi and Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar stand as two colossal figures in the history of India's freedom movement. The duo contributed enormously in their own ways towards the social and political independence of the people of India. Both fought for the same cause which was the emancipation of their fellow Indians. However, their conflicting ways made their relationships complicated. As a result, the conflict between Gandhi and Ambedkar has always been a subject of contention that seems to be never-ending. Suffice it to say that the most grievous discord that arose between Gandhi and Ambedkar was due to the cause of the Dalits. While Gandhi preferred to designate the untouchables as 'Harijan' voting in favour of the caste system, Ambedkar directly opposed Gandhi's idea by raising his voice for the liberation of these people from social slavery and tried to make the Dalits visible in the formation of the nation, a new India after its independence. These two characters have been delineated in many Indian texts, yet the delineations differed from time to time at the hands of the writers presenting them. It is also obvious that Ambedkar has not been given an adequate place in mainstream literature. However, since Dalit literature is imbued with the thoughts and ideologies of Ambedkar, he has been given a passable room in many Dalit texts. My paper will interpret and analyze a text by Premand Gajvee - *Gandhi-Ambedkar* where both of these legends have been given almost equal shares and where Gajvee looks at their relationship with alternate historiography till the assassination of Gandhi. Through my reading of this text, I will try to shed light on the various nuances of historical facts regarding these two stalwarts.

Keywords: Gandhi, Ambedkar, Dalit, caste, nation, independence

> For I am of the opinion that the most vital need of the day is to create among the mass of the people the sense of a common nationality, the feeling not that they are Indians first and Hindus, Mohammedans or Sindhis and Kanarese afterwards, but that they are Indians first and Indians last. If that be the ideal then it follows that nothing should be done which will harden local patriotism and group consciousness."- Dr. B. R. Ambedkar[i]

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Based on Ambedkar's epoch-making essay *Annihilation of Caste*[ii] and Gandhi's succeeding reply in "A Vindication of Caste"[iii], the noted experimental playwright Premanand Gajvee through his play *Gandhi-Ambedkar*[iv] brilliantly portrays the two intellectuals with vivid depictions of some significant historical events that occurred before and after our country's independence up until Mahatma Gandhi's assassination. As a result of the Dalits' traumatic and humiliating experiences that they have experienced for millennia in the name of India's Hindu Caste system, Dalit writing has a very distinct aesthetic from that of so-called mainstream literature. Since it is a natural extension of Dalit literature, Dalit theatre is distinctly different from traditional theatre in both approach and subject matter. Hence, it is clearly perceived that being a Dalit dramatist Gajvee would attempt to describe these events using different historiography from his Dalit point of view to explore the truths. There are chiefly two protagonists as the title of the play specifies, however, the playwright adopts an innovative dramatic technique to explore the minds of these two thinkers and their thoughts on nation-building by introducing a third character, a Clown. Throughout the play, we find this Clown in conversation with these shining personalities to explore their inner thoughts, conflicts, and tensions. And by that method, to some extent, the Clown sometimes appears to be the two selves of these two great theorists.

Taking the liberty of being "a clown from a circus or a Sanskrit play, or a Sutradhar in different dress, the narrator, the chorus", (Gajvee 93) the Clown sets the ground for this play with reference to the history of this nation, which has been torn apart by the existence of different castes, creeds, and faiths. By pointing out the history of our country he claims it to be a lie- "You have nothing to do with history. What a lie that is. Not a day passes without your playing a trick on history." (Gajvee 94) So, Gajvee, through the character of Clown, seems to be here challenging the existing history and aims at scripting a new history through this literary text *Gandhi Ambedkar* from a different viewpoint.

The drama chronicles India's political and social history beginning in 1931 when the country was experiencing political and social unrest in the wake of the Simon Commission's arrival. The commission consisted of seven members of the British Parliament but did not include any Indians; as a result, Nehru, Gandhi, Jinnah, the Muslim League, and the Indian National Congress vehemently opposed it. On the other hand, it was supported by people like Periyar E. V. Ramasamy and Babasaheb Bhim Rao Ambedkar who were the champions of the Dalit, marginalised people. The report it gave had a significant socio-political impact on both the post-independence development of India and the lives of the people of undivided India. In May 1930, the Commission released its two-volume report where it suggested ending the monarchy and giving regions more authority by instituting representative governance. The report also advocated that separate electorates should be maintained as long as inter-communal conflicts between Hindus and Muslims exist. The year is extremely significant from the viewpoint of the First Round Table Conference after which Ambedkar was branded as anti-national as he was accused of prioritizing the emancipation of the untouchables and their social salvation over the political independence of India. The truth, the playwright presents, is that Ambedkar tried to demonstrate the miserable condition of the Dalits at the hands of the upper castes in front of the Simon Commission. He believed that the suffering majority of poor low-caste Indians were not going to benefit from the autonomy of India. He tried to ensure the liberation of the untouchables as well as of

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India[v]. The Congress along with the Communists in India joined hands to vitiate the image of Ambedkar. Anupama Rao in her edited book *Memoirs of A Dalit Communist: The Many Worlds of R.B.More* has rightly pointed out, "On the national level, Ambedkar's representation to the Simon Commission (1928), followed by the historic Poona Pact (1932) would see him branded as an imperialist stooge, and castigated as anti-national." (Rao 43). This particular issue has been raised at the very beginning of the play when Ambedkar comes to meet Gandhi after the First Round Table Conference. It is true that Ambedkar, who had to go through numerous instances of humiliating experiences since his childhood days, raised his voice for the emancipation of the untouchables along with the question of India's freedom in that First Round Table Conference. He claimed a separate electorate for the untouchables, asserting that the "Untouchables are, without doubt, a separate and independent community like the Sikhs and the Muslims" (Gajvee 96-97), thus turning down Gandhi's claim that "Untouchables are an integral part of the Hindu community. Politically they cannot be separated from Hindus." (Gajvee 97) Although he was concerned about both the interests of the untouchables and the country as a whole, Ambedkar claims that the land has done so many wrongs to the untouchables that they are unable to think of their motherland, their own land. Though Gandhiji gave his preliminary approval to his claim by saying "True you have suffered much pain, you have endured torture, humiliation everywhere. But your heart is filled with love for your country" (Gajvee 95), it is absolutely shocking and pathetic to see that the same person (Gandhi) critically accuses Ambedkar when he prefers to stick to his decision of demanding separate electorate for the untouchables-

> Gandhi: … I have to admit that you proved to the British during the First Round Table Conference that the untouchables were a group independent of the Hindus. In fact, the aim of that conference was to discuss the future constitution of Hindustan. By raising the question of untouchables you managed to obstruct the main agenda of the conference. Had I been present there, I would never have allowed this to happen… I am also against giving special concessions and reservation quotas to untouchables. Doing so is not the way to end untouchability and caste discrimination. (Gajvee 97)

This demonstrates unequivocally that Gandhi, in Gajvee's opinion, was little more than an untouchables' sympathiser who had sympathy for them and it is certain that the untouchables would no longer benefit from this gesture of pity or sympathy in terms of rescuing them from their appalling conditions. Here, the aesthetic of Dalit writing can also be applied to support this claim which rightly holds that there is no room for speculation in Dalit literature because it is undeniably experience-based. And it is clear that Gandhiji did not undergo the same humiliations that Ambedkar was made to endure. As a result, we may also comprehend the gap between Gandhiji and Ambedkar's practical experiences and realisation of the evil of caste discrimination because it is believed that no one can truly grasp the suffering of the Dalits until they have similar experiences. In fact, Gandhi was seen by Ambedkar as a sympathiser, and he cited Gandhi's own statement[vi] that God should let him to be born into an untouchable household so that he might understand the heinous treatment of the Dalits as evidence, Ambedkar sarcastically comments, "Seeing how your heart is wrenched by untouchability, I really think you should have been born an untouchable" (Gajvee 98).

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Ambedkar's empathy for the dreary situation of his Dalit counterparts as well as his indomitable spirit which is the hallmark of Dalit identity are seen in his comment-

> This country never accepted those hands as its own. These hands which guarded the borders of villages were always forced to live abjectly outside those borders. They were not free to even walk through the village. They had to tie brooms to their feet so the footsteps they left behind were swept clean. They had to were spittoons around their necks to spit in. (Gajvee 100-101)

However, in Dalit literature, oppression and resistance are practically synonymous. As a result, Ambedkar illustrates the Dalits' bravery in addition to their horrible condition. It is in this context he describes valiant individuals like Shidnak and Rainak, who were accused of treachery, to refer to the illustrious legacy of the Mahars. He reminds the oppressors that "The hands that beg also have the strength to carry a cane" (Gajvee, 100). The Dalit heroes Rainak and Sidnak have received the same anti-national label as Ambedkar as they are accused of betraying their nation throughout history. This is what Wikipedia says about Sidnak when we search for information on him.: "Sidhnak Mahar formed a Mahar battalion. He asked Peshwas to join hands with him but the Peshwas rejected so Sidhnak Mahar joined the British Army. Sidhnak Mahar with his army of 500 defeated the large Peshwa army within twelve hours and created a pathway for British win and this British won the battle." (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidhnak_Mahar_Inamdar)

However, Gajvee in his play offers another history through Ambedkar to show how the Dalits are always represented as villains in mainstream history. Ambedkar through his interaction with the Clown offers an alternative perspective on this history:

> Clown: Even then, the question remains. What about their (Rainak and Sidnak) treachery against the country?
>
> Ambedkar: Did they have a country? And what about the treachery of those who did? The British settlement in the north became secure because of the Bengal Army that destroyed Sikh power. Who were the people in this army? Men of the upper castes, brahmins and Rajputs. In the First World War, Gandhi himself sided with the British. And yet they are patriots, and we…? Don't you think these hands that fought for the British would have fought for the country? But nobody considered these hands as theirs. (Gajvee 101)

From this assertion, it is obvious that the untouchables are always put under guilt, no matter whether they are to be blamed or not.

However, Ambedkar was adamant about the separate electorate for the Dalits that he believed might open a path to their salvation since it was his firm conviction that to gain justice it is inevitable to acquire political power first. He strongly pronounces, "I cannot live on somebody's pity" (Gajvee 101) rather he tried to unite the Dalits to snatch away their freedom. He even managed to convince the British authority to offer them a separate electorate but it was Gandhi who stood as the greatest barrier to achieving their demands. In 1932 it was Gandhi who started fast unto death from the Yerawada Jail in Pune to compel the British authority to revoke their decision of granting the fifth varna a separate electorate and to induce Ambedkar simultaneously to withdraw his claim for a separate electorate. The conversation that follows between Gandhi and Clown

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meanwhile brings out some specific questions about Gandhi's integrity and love for the Dalit cause. When Gandhi was questioned about the reason for his fast unto death, he responded that it was to cleanse his soul to which the Clown plainly replies, "Is it for inner cleansing or a cover-up for political failure?... You have started this fast out of your fear that Dr. Ambedkar will bring your social prestige down into dust." (Gajvee 102-103) The playwright through the Clown further accuses Gandhi of not having pure love for the Dalits, if he would have that love he could have never opposed the granting of the separate electorate to them. However, Ambedkar finally had to withdraw his demand for separate electorate under certain pressure. The reconciliation came in the form of Poona Pact (1932) which denied separate electorate for the untouchables but ensured increased representation of Dalits within the Hindu electorate for a period of ten years. The mainstream history writes that Ambedkar had to succumb to the political pressures when Gandhi was near death for his fast unto death but Premanand Gajvee's Ambedkar tells us that he was compelled to do so on some humanitarian grounds:

> Ambedkar: And the reason why I lost in the crucial battle for a separate electorate was Kasturba. If a woman spreads her pallu before me and says the Kumkum on her forehead is in my hands… well I'm human, am I not? I too have a heart. (In a trembling voice) My hardened heart melted with pity for that mother-like woman. There were political rights of my people on one side and on the other Gandhi's life. (Gajvee 109)

There is no denying the fact that Gandhi was in favour of the caste system. He wanted to protect the system by hook or by crook which is evident in Kancha Ilaiah's claim, "While Gandhi and Nehru represented the interest of Indian upper caste, feudal and bourgeois forces, Ambedkar and Periyar represented the poor, oppressed and suppressed masses". (Mohanty 228) The conversation that Gajvee introduced in his play between Gandhi and Ambedkar shows Gandhi's attitude towards the caste system which he tried to protect vigorously, giving equal merits to the duties of the Brahmins and the scavengers, the untouchables. To get rid of the stigmatized identity and duties of the untouchables Ambedkar wanted to convert himself along with his followers to Buddhism. Here again, we notice Gandhi's interference to restrict them from conversion. He was afraid of the fact that if all the Dalits convert themselves to Buddhism, then automatically the Hindu society will become a minority. So, when Gandhi tried to resist Ambedkar from the conversion, Ambedkar comes forward with a second proposal - the abolition of the caste system that too was turned down by Gandhiji. He sternly replies to Ambedkar, "I will never destroy brahmins and allow non-brahmins to take their place. The Brahmin must always be our Guru". (Gajvee 119) We are able to detect that this mindset makes it impossible to improve society or bring about any social change. When Gajvee's Gandhi declares that "Caste is a custom" and it "has nothing to do with religion," (Gajvee 119) the readers become perplexed since we are aware that it is the Hindu religion that gave rise to the caste system and that has divided society into various groups based on their births and also dictates their professions. The holy Hindu texts like *Rig-Veda* instruct that the Hindu society comprises of four varnas, the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras. It is presumed that the brahmins have taken birth from the mouth of Brahma, the Kshatriyas from the shoulder of Brahma, Vaishyas from the thighs of Brahma, and the Shudras are from the feet of Brahma. Consequently, their professions and works are accordingly bound to their births. The brahmins are supposed to engage themselves with the worshipping, the Kshatriyas should act as

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warriors and rulers, the Vaishyas should look after the trades, and the last of them the Shudras should engage themselves with all forms of menial jobs. Therefore, we are very mystified when Gandhiji asserts that caste and religion are unrelated. Furthermore, he believes that there is no distinction between the Brahmins' given task of worshipping and the untouchables' task of scavenging. He opines that since these tasks are all equally deserving, no one should defy social convention and should instead stick to the vocation that was given to them at birth.

> Gandhi: The varna system has worked for the welfare of human beings in binding them to an ancestral trade and establishing that no work is low or high. There is no difference between the brahmin who gives spiritual knowledge and the bhangi who scavenges. It is the duty of the brahmin to look after the cleansing of human souls, and of the bhangi to look after the cleansing of human bodies. Both stand to gain equal merit if they perform their duty in the right way. (Gajvee 119)

To which Ambedkar instantly makes a query that produces no answers at all.

> Ambedkar: Gandhiji, sir, do not take offence if I mention your caste since I am out to break the system itself. You are a Vaishya by birth, ancestrally a grocer. When it came to choosing your profession you set aside the weighing scales, and picked up your law books and became a barrister. You never practiced your ancestors' business. If you insist that people should practice the trades of their forefathers, you are suggesting that the sons of pimps should be pimps and the daughters of prostitutes, prostitutes. (Gajvee 119)

Automatically, the purpose and motif of Gandhi is dragged under scanner when he considers that the work of a brahmin and a scavenger are equally meritorious. Doubts are cast on his ideas naturally. It is he who told, during the untouchables' agitation to move into the temples, that solution must be attained through discussion and it is the duty of the touchable to open the gates of temples to the untouchables, but what really happened was quite shocking. The untouchables believed in his words but the reality is that the Congress and Gandhiji opened old dilapidated temples to the untouchables where even the dogs do not enter. And what is more surprising, Gandhi's home state, Gujarat did not open a single temple for the untouchables. Certainly enough, Dr. Ambedkar recognized that temple access would not address the untouchables' concerns, he actually began the temple entry movement in order to rally untouchables for their rights. "We don't want to go to temples, but we should have rights", Ambedkar remarked at the launch of Satyagraha. He told,

> Our real problem is not going to be solved by the entry into the Ram Temple. It will not bring about any radical change in our life. But this is a test to judge the high caste Hindu mind. Whether the Hindu mind is willing to accept the elevated aspirations of the new era that "man must be treated as man; he must be given humanitarian rights; human dignity should be established is going to be tested. In order to achieve this goal, we have launched this Satyagraha. The main question is whether the high caste Hindus are going to consider these aspects and act accordingly.[vii]

And as it was apprehended by Ambedkar, that the movement itself exposed the hypocrisy and double standards of Gandhi and the Congress in eradicating the caste system and the upliftment of the Dalits because all their actions clarified that they were

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not ready to improve the status of the Dalits. The surprising discovery made by Gajvee's Ambedkar is that Gandhi, who is battling the British to free the country, is actually terrified of the higher caste brahmins and lacks the confidence to reject their ideas and attitudes. Hence Ambedkar comments that despite being a Vaishya, the Brahmins have only respected and obeyed him because he upholds their ideas and looks out for their interests. He will invite disastrous repercussions the moment he quits supporting them.

We are aware of how divisive Ambedkar's political beliefs and attitude toward India's creation are. He again goes against Gandhi's philosophy in this aspect. The followers of Gandhi hold the opinion that all of Ambedkar's actions were originally tinted with the motif of his personal gain tied to the cause of the Dalits, and as a result, he was harshly criticized for his stance. It is to be noted that almost all of his views were misinterpreted by the Congress, Gandhi and even the Indian Marxists joined their hands in criticising Ambedkar and in vitiating his image. However, Gajvee gives his Ambedkar plenty of room to defend his positions when the Clown interrogates him. Through their interaction, Gajvee tried to present different historiography in reframing Ambedkar and his role in the emancipation of Indians, precisely in Indian independence. Gandhi's call of "Do or die"[viii], while the British government was at stake during the Second World War, was highly criticised by Ambedkar who called this act "irresponsible"[ix]. This statement shocked all the supporters of Gandhi and the Congress; and the Clown was also not an exception so he goes on questioning and thrashing Ambedkar's opinions. It was generally believed that while a World War was going on in which the British were being routed, it was high time to hit the enemy. But since Ambedkar went against Gandhi's call and criticised him for weakening the stability of the government, the general populace readily accepted the argument that as the British Government had awarded him the position of Labour Minister, criticising Gandhi's nationalist movement was an expression of appreciation to our adversary. The Clown's viewpoint reflects that of the majority of people, and Ambedkar has been portrayed in a similar light in the general history books we have studied where Ambedkar consequently acquired the reputation of being a British stooge. But through Gajvee's presentation of Ambedkar, we peruse an alternate version of reality and the real cause that had driven him to criticise Gandhi on that occasion. The first thing he mentions is that he was a part of the government with some specific intentions. He tells, "I wanted an employment exchange to be started for recruitment, maternity leave to be sanctioned for working mothers, the number of hours in a shift to be regulated, wages to match hours of work… I had to get so many things done for the welfare of workers." (Gajvee 123) Moreover, he declares that "I will quit my post without a second thought" (Gajvee 123) if these specific goals are not fulfilled. He had no desire to cling to his post. And we know how successful he was in his venture and how much it contributed, apart from framing the constitution, to the formation of our nation, a new India. He also points out that although some other individuals, such as Madhavrao Aney, Homi Modi, and J.P. Srivastav, held positions in the British government's cabinet, no one spoke out against them; only Ambedkar had come under fire because of his caste identity. We clearly speculate here how Ambedkar was labelled a national traitor by caste politics. Another misconception was also cleared out by Ambedkar when the Clown mentioned that the 'entire country' is supporting Gandhi's "Do or Die" movement; only it is he who is not on the list being a 'stooge' of the British. Ambedkar says, "The entire country? The Muslims oppose Gandhi's Quit India Movement. Even the Hindu Mahasabha has distanced itself from it" (Gajvee 124). This

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history we are not aware of, and eventually, that less known or unknown history projects Ambedkar as a traitor to the entire nation. Then, he points out the real reason why he didn't support Gandhi's call to fight against the British in the wake of the Second World War. He gauges it as the war between fascism and democracy and he believes that fascism does not stand on any moral foundation but is triggered by racial pride and as a result, Nazism was a great threat to mankind. If we are reminded of the holocaust led by Hitler's Nazi troops, we would be able to justify Ambedkar's prediction. It was Ambedkar's opinion that fighting against England at that crucial time might have been vulnerable to the integrity of our country because we cannot accept a Germany led by Hitler as our friend that killed the Jews mercilessly during WWII out of their racial pride. But we have simply overlooked Ambedkar's views that "We must devote all effort to ensure that democracy, which is at pains to forge links between human beings across the world, should not be destroyed. We should think of the welfare of our country within that context" (Gajvee 124-125) and simply branded him as an anti-national only because he opposed Gandhi's "Quit India Movement".

Ambedkar's stance with regard to the partition of India is equally debated since he stood in favour of creating Pakistan. The formation of Pakistan was actually Jinnah's dream and most of the Congress supporters wanted to make Gandhiji's hand stronger eliminating the idea of the partition of India. Since Ambedkar supported the creation of Pakistan, his opponents had yet another excellent opportunity to tarnish his reputation and paint him as a traitor to his country. These individuals believed that Ambedkar's support for Pakistan's formation was a shady political ploy as they suspected that the creation of Pakistan will eventually help him create Dalitasthan. The same tone is echoed in the voice of the Clown who accused him of playing a dirty game, "Once Pakistan is given to the Muslims, your path is clear… An independent state for untouchables. Dalitasthan… Your evil game is to help the formation of Pakistan and gain Dalitasthan." (Gajvee 126). Gajvee's Ambedkar justified his act of supporting the foundation of Pakistan by mentioning that he believed that Muslims are less concerned about democracy and they are more concerned about their religion. They are contemptuous of the non-Muslims and obey the dictates of a state led by the Muslims.[x] He thought that in order to maintain the integrity of the country and to avoid future terrible internal political complications the land should be divided. Hence, he voted in favour of creating Pakistan in order to see India as a strong nation after the independence which has no connection with the formation of Dalitasthan. Rather he emphasizes that the abolition of the caste system will make India stronger as a nation. It has its strong evidence in his own words, "I confess I have many quarrels with caste Hindus over some points but, I take my vow that I shall lay down my life in defence of our land."[xi]. And ultimately if we look at the past times immediately after India's independence and at the context of this play, we feel how efficient a prognosticator he was.

It is also equally true that the way Gandhi tried to deal with Ambedkar regarding the status of the fifth varna as a separate entity, he did not do that with Jinnah. In this situation, we speculate the Clown bringing up that specific point and expressing his surprise at Gandhi's contradictory view on it. Gandhi makes it clear to the Clown, "Dr. Ambedkar must give up thinking of the fifth varna as a separate entity" (Gajvee 130) but he does not take that strict stance for Jinnah who was shouting for a separate Muslim country. It has been rightly pointed out by the Clown when he found an exultant Gandhi, celebrating the defeat of Ambedkar in the election,

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> Ambedkar's defeat made you happy. But Jinnah's Muslim League is still alive. Dr. Ambedkar would have been useful when the time came to set up the committee for drafting the Constitution and for maintaining the integrity of the nation. Unlike Jinnah who wants an independent nation, Ambedkar isn't asking for one. All he wants is equal rights. (Gajvee 131)

Moreover, the Clown accuses Gandhi of appeasing Jinnah, to which Gandhi replied that the appeasement started with the Lucknow Pact[xii] where Gokhale, whom Gandhi acknowledges as his political mentor, didn't oppose the provisions mentioned in the pact, not even Lokamanya Tilak. Gandhi responds to this charge by asserting that he is only following in the footsteps of his forebears.

There is no conflict in accepting that Ambedkar was an acclaimed erudite personality who was even referred to as "Scotch American"[xiii] by his teacher for his attitude. The Clown wonders how it would have been feasible for him to hold one of the top positions in any other field, yet he still chose to stick with Dalit issues; his politics is entirely centred around caste politics. Ambedkar makes an effort to explain how caste and religious issues are entwined with politics as a whole. He points out that even Gandhiji is not bereft of caste politics and tries to make the brahmins happy by shouting "I will never allow the destruction of Brahmins to allow non-brahmins to climb to the top" (Gajvee 136). Ambedkar believes that "if we want a politics without caste, clean and progressive, the caste-based Hindu religion has to be destroyed" (Gajvee 136). According to him, religion is an inseparable part of politics, they are integrally knotted. That's why Ambedkar firmly believed that political power is essential and for getting true emancipation he asserts, "My community must become political" (Gajvee 127) otherwise they will remain side-lined and marginalized even if the nation achieves its freedom from the British. They won't be able to contribute to the formation of the nation if they don't achieve their liberation from the quagmire of Hindu doctrines. It is the firm conviction of Ambedkar that political power can only ensure their freedom from poverty and hunger. As a result, they will be able to live decent lives with sufficient food, clothes, and shelter to sustain their lives. Ambedkar makes an attempt to link caste and class in this instance. He held that caste is the foundation of class and that economic discrimination in society based on caste can be eliminated through political power, ensuring the recent goals of the United Nations Development Programme—namely, the elimination of poverty, the eradication of hunger, and the reduction of inequalities. In that way, he believes that the political uplift of the Dalits will help them in contributing to the nation's formation. He emphasizes, "If the country's political goal is to be achieved, a solution must be found for the question of untouchability along with one for the Hindu-Muslim problem" (Gajvee 130).

Ambedkar's conviction proved true immediately after the partition as well as the independence of India as communal riots between Hindus and Muslims infiltrated the two new, post-partition countries. Before the partition took place Ambedkar spoke in favour of sending the Muslims to Pakistan and bringing the Hindus from Pakistan in order to avoid further communal conflict since undivided India got divided based on religion. But here again, Gandhiji opposed the idea emphasizing that India should establish itself as a secular country. We all know what transpired then, Pakistan sent a train filled with the corpses of the Hindus intoxicated by Jinnah's speech. Gajvee's Ambedkar believes that this massacre could have been avoided if "Every single Muslim

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from here should have been sent off to Pakistan and every single Hindu in Pakistan should have been brought here" (Gajvee 139). Not only in this specific instance, but Ambedkar also has shown his prophetic abilities by foreseeing the partition and its inevitability. At the play's conclusion, Gandhiji is seen lamenting his isolation and calling everyone else—including Nehru and Patel—power-hungry and to blame for India's divide. However, there is a distinction between Ambedkar and the others because Ambedkar advocated for separation solely to create a strong, united India free from inter-communal violence, whereas the others sought power, as Gandhi noted. Gandhi also regrets that despite being hailed as the "Father of the Nation," people do not place much value on his teachings or existence. His position gets more difficult when he maintains his steadfast stance on a few particular concerns arising from the partition accord. He goes on to fast and claims, "… the fifty-five crore rupees that we promised Pakistan at the time of partition must be returned to them. The Masjids which were captured during the riots must be returned to them. The boycott against Muslims must be lifted and their safety must be guaranteed." (Gajvee 142) And in doing so, Gandhi made the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh his fiercest adversaries, presenting himself as a pro-Muslim figure who had spent his entire life battling for the Hindus. When all of the parties and organisations complied with the Father of the Nation's requests, the entire country was celebrating his influence, at that moment, the entire country is stunned to learn that Gandhi was assassinated—not by a Muslim, but by Nathuram Godse, a Hindu Brahmin who had previously supported Gandhi's non-cooperation movement before joining the Hindu Mahasabha and eventually the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha. We are reminded of what Ambedkar told on an earlier occasion and the validity of that claim, "The brahmins are fully aware that a Vaishya is leading the people, including brahmins. For as long as you look after the interests of the brahmins with all your spirit, no harm will come to your Mahatmahood. The day you dare harm the interests of brahmins…" (Gajvee 121)

Therefore, it is evident from all of these incidents that Ambedkar was accurate when he said that politics and religion go hand in hand. Despite their disagreements over ideas and concepts, Gandhiji had great respect for Ambedkar's knowledge which is why he strongly suggested Ambedkar's name to draft the Constitution of independent India. Ambedkar also acknowledged Gandhi's immense service to the nation but he found that "He (Gandhi) had stifled freedom of thought. People had become enslaved to one great man" (Gajvee 145). With his departure, Ambedkar believes that people will be able to think freely and will be able to stand on their own feet and comprehend the connection between politics and religion. He opines that people need to understand that there is no way out of this predicament. He continues that the caste system must be eliminated if democracy is to thrive and caste politics must be eliminated because they contaminate society. Our hearts must be filled with love for the nation, not love for our caste, group, or philosophy if we want this country to face the world with strength and dignity. Every citizen of this country must swear that his primary identity is that of an Indian, surrendering caste, community, language, and geographic location in the process. And by doing this, everyone will be able to contribute to the formation of the nation in their own unique way. And the playwright Premanand Gajvee through the Clown conveys that we must remember and record all of these genuine historical truths as he urges "those who remember history make history. Only those remember history…wake up. Let history live. Let the Nation live. Let man live". (Gajvee 147)

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Notes

[i] *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar : Writings and Speeches* Vol. 17 (Part-1) pp- 66

[ii] *Annihilation of Caste* is an undelivered speech written in 1936 by B. R. Ambedkar. As a book it was published in 1936. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annihilation_of_Caste

[iii] In July 1936, Gandhi wrote articles under the title "A Vindication of Caste" in his weekly journal *Harijans* in which he made comments on Ambedkar's address. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Annihilation_of_Caste

[iv] The play, originally written in Marathi and translated by Shanta Gokhale, appears in the book *The Strength of Our Wrists* published from Navayana: New Delhi in 2013. pp-91-147.

[v] Raju Das in his play *Bhimrao Ambedkar: A Pioneer Extraordinaire (*unpublished)shows a conversation in between one of the representatives of Simon Commission and Ambedkar where he tells,

Ambedkar: Well Mr. Representative, who doesn't want an autonomous government? We would like to thank you for considering an autonomous government for colonized India. But whom do you consider as Indians? Whose purpose will be served by this proposal of yours? Who will benefit from this, the suffered majority of poor low-caste Indians or the minority of upper-caste rich Indians?... If India gets freedom today, will that bring any difference to these ever suffering Dalits? Can you free them from these social bondages? So we need to think about these things first before thinking about an autonomous government.

[vi] In the novel *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand published from Penguin Books (2001) Gandhi told "But if I have to reborn, I should wish to be reborn as an Untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings and the affronts levelled at them…" pp-138

[vii] Quoted in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* Vol. 17 Part One: Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution Part One: Struggle for Human Rights, pp. 83

[viii] *The Quit India Movement*, also known as the *Bharat Chodo Andolan*, was a watershed moment in India's independence struggle led by Mahatma Gandhi to overthrow British imperialism. In a speech delivered in Mumbai in 1942, Mahatma Gandhi urged the people of India to "do or die" in order to force the British to leave the country.

[ix] In the play *Gandhi-Ambedkar* by Premanand Gajvee, Ambedkar is found to claim, "Gandhiji's call of 'Do or Die' is irresponsible and stupid. It is a sign of his political bankrupt. It is an attempt to restore the position that the Congress has lost since the Second World War began. It is madness to weaken the law and order of the country when the enemy is at the door waiting to enter and rule India". pp-122-123

[x] "Democracy Does not inspire Muslims. Their only concern is for their religion… They have contempt for non Muslims and have faith only in nations run by Muslims." In Gajvee's "Gandhi- Ambedkar", pp-125.

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[xi] *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches* Vol. 17 Part One: "Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and His Egalitarian Revolution" Part One: "Struggle for Human Rights", pp. XX

[xii] The Lucknow Pact was a combined conference of the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League (AIML) conducted in Lucknow in December 1916 that resulted in an agreement between the two organisations. The two parties agreed to provide religious minorities participation in provincial legislatures as part of the agreement.

[xiii] Professor Cannon wrote: "I don't know anything about Ambedkar except that he came to do a thesis and attacked it and me in a way which showed he had quite extraordinary practical ability.... I rather wonder if he is a pure Indian; his character is rather Scotch-American." In "Dr. Ambedkar and America" By Prof. Eleanor Zelliot A talk at the Columbia University Ambedkar Centenary, 1991.

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