Dalit Literature and Experience
A Journey towards Empathy
Character portrayals in short stories of
Jayprakash Kardam and Ajay Navaria

Supervisor: Heinz Werner Wessler
Abstract

During the last decades, a Hindi Dalit literary movement has emerged in North India. This essay is a study and comparison on character portrayals in short stories by two authors from this movement, Jayprakash Kardam and Ajay Navaria. The aim of this essay is to explore the implications of these portrayals considering these authors’ views on social change, their literary affiliations and a theoretical discussion on Dalit literature. The methodological basis for this study is a detailed character analysis of these short stories’ protagonists, antagonists and other relevant characters, supported by narrative- and conceptual analyses. This essay argues that the theoretical abstraction of Dalit consciousness \( \text{cetn}\)ā) has a mainstreaming effect on the Dalit experience \( \text{anubhūt}\)ī) when it is portrayed in literature. These dynamics are visible in Kardam’s stories, in which his portrayals of the Dalit protagonist follow the conventional Dalit character template, a forthright and innocent archetype juxtaposed against an evil Brahmin. The pivoting moment in Kardam’s stories is when consciousness awakens in the Dalit protagonist and he joins the corporate resistance against a casteist society. In comparison, Navaria makes the individual the site for change in his stories—reflecting the Gandhian notion of \( \text{hṛday parivartan} \) (“change of heart”). Navaria foregrounds alternative perspectives to Dalit \( \text{cetn}\)ā in his stories and seeks to understand his characters from a broader human experience. I further argue that Navaria’s stories are suggestive of an expansion of the binary discussion on \( \text{anubhūt}\)ī (“experience”) and \( \text{sahānubhūt}\)ī (“sympathy”) by the term \( \text{samānubhūt}\)ī (“empathy”) since Navaria, by his more complex, nuanced and personalised characterisation of both Dalits and Brahmins, provides a common ground that invites to reconciliation. This study concludes that while Kardam could be designated as a conventional Dalit author, Navaria should rather be situated in the boundaries between the Dalit and the mainstream Hindi literary field. It further concludes that more research is needed on theoretical concepts used in the Dalit literary discourse.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Dalit Literature, Dalit Consciousness, change of heart, experience, empathy, sympathy, \( \text{Dalit cetn}\)ā, \( \text{hṛday parivartan} \), \( \text{anubhūt}\)ī, \( \text{samānubhūt}\)ī, \( \text{sahānubhūt}\)ī, caste-system in India, casteism, short story, character analysis, Jayprakash Kardam, Ajay Navaria, Hindi literature
A while ago my brother and I were travelling with train through Rajasthan in India. We were conversing with a fellow middle-aged European about our shared liking for India and our earlier journeys in the country. The man was a frequent traveler to India, who spends several months there every year doing business. He expressed that one thing he really liked about India was, “that everyone is free to be whom they want to be”. I tried to widen the perspective some, and asked him, “What about the caste system?” He then laughed and said that the caste-system is disappearing in India, and referred to the Indian law which forbids discrimination based on caste. I left the matter un-commented then, but later thought about the stark contrast between the man’s perspective and the one voiced by Dalit authors, Jayprakash Kardam and Ajay Navaria, whom I met in Delhi only a few days after the conversation on the train. This essay is about that other perspective. For while it, for an outside observer, could be very difficult to spot the presence of caste in India today, it is a very present reality for several hundred millions of Dalits all over the nation, although this is something even many Indians do not acknowledge themselves. In fact, the reference to Indian law, and to the constitution in particular, is a common trope that often appears among Indian intellectuals in their conversation with foreigners. The European traveler on the train had obviously attained it without much questioning. Through the writings of Kardam, Navaria and other Dalit authors another perspective is given. A perspective I first came in contact with when I more than ten years ago read an abstract from Omprakash Valmiki’s autobiography Jūthan (1997). It has since been my desire to study this topic more in depth and it has been a privilege to do so in this essay.

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I want to thank Jayprakash Kardam and Ajay Navaria for their hospitality, hosting me in their homes in Delhi earlier this spring and patiently and assiduously answering all my questions in the interviews with them. I also want to express my gratitude to Ramnika Gupta, who was a prolific activist, author and editor for Dalit and Adivasi literature. I received a warm welcome in her home in Defence Colony, New Delhi in July 2018, and she organised for me to meet with dozens of Dalit authors, among them Kardam and Navaria. She passed away on March 26 this year, 89 years old, after a life committed to the freedom and rights for Dalits, Adivasis, women and workers. I dedicate this essay in memory of her.
Notes on Diacritics, Transliteration and Translation

Hindi words in this essay will be written in transliteration following the convention used in R.S. McGregor’s *Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*, with some few exceptions. Names of authors and places will instead be written in their English forms. This also applies to terms in Hindi which are commonly used in academic English, such as ‘Dalit’ and ‘Brahmin’. Exceptions to this rule are made for authors’ names when they are listed together with a work in Hindi. These are then written in the diacritic form. The same convention will be applied for the names of literary characters in the short stories. Some alternative spellings appear in quotes from works by other authors, e.g., ‘Navariya’ instead of ‘Navaria,’ *chetna* instead of *cetnā*.

*Anusvār* is always represented with ‘ṃ’, irrespective of the kind of nasal. The same symbol, ‘ṃ’, is also used for *anunāsika*. Short –a when silent in Hindi words is omitted; –ā, demarcating in McGregor the short –a from Sanskrit loanwords still audible in Hindi, is replaced with –a. Vocalic ṛ in Hindi is represented with ṛ, instead of ṭ in McGregor, thus *ḥṛday* instead of *ḥydāy*.

Translations from primary Hindi sources are my own if nothing else is stated. As a rule, the translations will be provided within the text and the Hindi original in a footnote. When the original Hindi is of special interest, specific words or even full sentences in Hindi might be presented in the text as well.

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1 McGregor 1993.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction — The Dalit Perspective

In their writings, Jayprakash Kardam and Ajay Navaria give voice to the fact—and especially emphasise—that caste-based discrimination is not only a reality in the village setting, but it is also continually present even in the urban middle-class environment they themselves are part of. These two authors are part of a thriving Hindi Dalit literary movement that has emerged in north India only the last decades. Laura Brueck, one of the most distinguished scholars on Dalit literature today, points out that it is exactly attitudes, like the ones voiced by the traveler on the train and shared by many Indians, that these Dalit authors want to counter:

Dalits produce literature that discusses the reality of caste-based oppression, thereby disallowing comfortable, “modern” conceptions of the caste-free, class-free, secular nation of universal citizen-subjects in modern, independent, democratic India.²

In this literature, in Dalit short stories and novels, the character portrayal is central. It is through the literary character Dalit experience can be portrayed, and Dalit understanding of political, social and ethical issues can be communicated. It is further through the antagonist characters that upper-caste mentalities of domination and oppression can take literary shape. However, as this research will make clear, it is also through the portrayal of characters that the above binary categories can be blurred, problematised and re-defined, which in turn gives rise to new perspectives on the Dalit experience, on Dalit and upper-caste relations and on the possible paths for resolution of this deep-rooted societal problem that the caste-system is in India. This essay analyses and compares the different character portrayals in short stories by Kardam and Navaria. It further explores the implications of these portrayals on critical issues in Dalit literature today.

1.2 Material

The textual basis of this essay is a selection of eight short stories, four of respective author—two stories from two different collections by each author: two stories each from Jayprakash Kardam’s Talāś (“Search” 2005) and Kharome (“Scratch” 2014); and two stories each from Ajay Navaria’s Paṭkathā aur Anya Kahāniyāṁ (“Screenplay and other stories” 2006) and Yes Sir (“Yes Sir” 2012). In terms of genre choice, the short story suits a comparative analysis between two authors well, since the textual scope is limited, the character portrayal concentrated and the narrative patterns more easily detectable than in longer prose. I would argue that the choice of stories is

² Brueck 2014: 126
representative. I have first of all chosen the lead stories from each work, bearing the same names as the collections. The second story in Paṭkathā aur Anya Kahānīyāṃ, “Cīkh” is moreover the lead story in Laura Brueck’s work, Unclaimed Terrain (2013b), which is a translation of Navaria’s short stories into English. It contains stories from both of Navaria’s collections, including the short story “Yes Sir”. None of the other six short stories of my collection has been translated into English according to the best of my knowledge.

I have also conducted interviews with the authors in Hindi, in March 2019. In addition to the short stories, these interviews will rather be used as complementary- than primary sources (See 7. Appendix).

1.3 Aim of Research and Research Questions

This essay aims to understand what the character portrayals, in Kardam’s and Navaria’s short stories, imply in a comparison between the authors, in terms of their perspectives on societal change as well as on Dalit literary representation. In sum, the research questions this thesis aims to answer are as follows: (1) How do the authors differ in representing their literary characters, both Dalit and non-Dalit? and (2) what implications emerge from this comparison considering (a) the authors’ vision of societal change, (b) their relation to the mainstream Hindi and Dalit Hindi literary sphere and (c) a discussion on anubhūti, sahānubhūti and Dalit cetnā (see ch. 2)?

With the character analyses of these shorts stories, I address issues such as the typology of the characters, whether they are complexed or stereotyped, rounded or flat; the relationship between different characters, between protagonists and antagonists and between main- and supporting characters. I am especially interested in the processes of the characters: how the characters change or how they do not change and furthermore, what factors that are decisive in or contributing to this change.

1.4 Method

The analyses of these short stories were achieved through a narratological analysis, in the classical understanding of the term, i.e., as equivalent with “narrative technique” or “narrative style”. Important concepts have been narrative perspective—e.g., whether the story is narrated in the 1st or 3rd person?—and focalisation—i.e., from whose perspective are the different characters portrayed? These concepts have however mostly been important in the summary analysis in section

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3 Skalin 2002: 173-4
4 Skalin 2002: 181-6
4 of the essay. In the individual analyses of the short stories, the focus has been on the portrayal and development of the different characters.

These character analyses was done with the support of two analytical tools. Firstly, the character-analysis was contextualised within a general narrative analysis of the story. This is an important step since the characters are always situated, portrayed and personalised throughout a narrative. The narrative is further the context in which the characters’ process, development or lack thereof is unfolding. The identification of the main parts or sections of the story, its central events or turning points—or even key dialogues—are essential for the understanding of the narrative progression and the development of the characters. Secondly, a conceptual analysis was used as a tool through which certain central concepts, terms or words received a thoroughgoing dissection. Certain words are often used to intensify both the unfolding of the story’s plot and the portrayal of its characters. The identification and analysis of these terms will sometimes be crucial in order to understand the development of the protagonist and other characters. In sum, this essay is based on a close reading of these eight texts, with the focus on a deep analysis of their characters with the support of narrative- and conceptual analyses.

The objects of these character analyses were primarily the main characters of these stories who, with the exception of the one in “Yes Sir”, are all Dalits, and with the exception of the women protagonist in “Sāṅg” are all men. But the main protagonist aside, both the antagonists (often Brahmins) and side- or supporting characters also received, where relevant, a thorough analysis.

The method was first of all based on a deep- or close reading, which puts the text in focus in order to discover its “meaning”. The sociological and political nature of Dalit literature, however, makes it both interesting to discover and almost impossible to overlook the intentions of the authors and the ideologies they adhere to, which are figuring behind the text. But, while I took into consideration the authors’ intentions behind the text, I was especially interested in the instances when the underlying message in the narrative did not seem to be in agreement with the authors’ voiced opinion. In these instances, the logic of the text—what can be observed, deduced and above all argued for based on the text itself—were, for my conclusions, given priority over the intention of the author.

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5 See Gadamer 1975: 235-273
2. HINDI DALIT LITERATURE

2.1 History and Theory

2.1.1 Historical Background

It is often asserted that the modern Dalit literary movement began with Dr Ambedkar (1891-1956). Arjun Dangle, in the introduction to *Poisoned Bread: translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, argues that although there have been suggestions to ascribe the origins to thinkers before Ambedkar, such as Mahatma Phule (1828-90) or S. M. Mate (1886-1957)—or even as far back as Kabir, Gautam Buddha and many other exponents of *nirguna bhakti*—“it was Dr Ambedkar who was the enabling factor in Dalit literature because of his ideas, outlook towards life and his struggle to achieve what he felt just.” However, it should here be noted that Dangle’s argument could be nuanced, as the weight given to Ambedkar only holds up for modern times. Kabir, for example, who lived in the 15th century, could without difficulties be viewed as a Dalit writer. And even regarding modern times, there have been other important influences for what now constitutes Dalit literature in India.

Ambedkar inspired a whole generation of Dalits to write, to fight against the discriminatory nature of the caste-system with their pen. For many modern Dalit authors, Ambedkar formed the idea of writing as a form of agitation. Not surprisingly, it was in Maharashtra—the state in which Ambedkar was active—that Dalit literature first emerged. Although the decades after his death saw important literary figures, as well as Dalit literary conferences and magazines, it was not until the

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6 Gajarawala 2013: 25-26  
7 Quote from Dangle 1992a: xxiii. See also Satyanarayana and Tharu 2013: 12.  
8 See Beth 2014: 231-236  
9 Sarah Beth (2014), in her doctoral dissertation, *Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation*, has pointed out an alternative route of inspiration from the Dalit pamphlet field in North India, going back to its activities in the 1920s and its most famous proponent Swami Achutanand (1879-1933). Achutanand started the “Adi Hindu movement” (31), whose Adi Hindu ideology proclaimed that the Dalit were the original inhabitants of India (31-32). Beth writes that, although it declined some after the 1930s, there has still been a continuity of the movement throughout the 20th century up to today, where it has kept functioning alongside the Hindi Dalit autobiographic movement, although quite separately and differently from the latter. There have moreover been important relationships formed between these two fields as well as there have been important channels of inspiration from the pamphlet field to the autobiographic field. In fact, the Hindi Dalit autobiographer, Mohandas Naimisharay, mentioned in the text below, began his literary activity within the pamphlet movement in the 1970s (54-56). See also Gajarawala, 2013:26-27. For more information on Swami Achutanand, see Bellwinkel-Schenapp 2011: 104-110.  
10 See Brueck 2014: 79
1970s that a Dalit literary movement truly began to emerge. Inspired by the civil right movement, and particularly the “Black Panthers” in the U.S., the Dalit Panthers—a revolutionary Dalit organisation—was founded in Bombay in 1972 by the three Marathi writers, Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle and J.V. Pawar. In their Dalit Panther’s Manifesto (1973), they demanded major structural changes of the Indian society—not the least land-reforms—in order to end caste-oppression and to emancipate Dalits and the poor. The 1970s saw the publishing of poetry and short stories, but also critical works—in Marathi in particular—and from the end of the 1970s into the 1980s, Dalit autobiographies started to get published.

During the 1970s some of the later famous Hindi Dalit autobiographers either lived in or frequently visited Maharashtra. They were in close contact with the Dalit literary movement there, took part in conferences and seminars, and became inspired to write themselves. This gave rise to a movement of Hindi Dalit writers, which began to emerge from the mid-1980s and particularly gained momentum from the early 1990s. Among the writers inspired by the Marathi movement were Mohandas Naimisharay and Omprakash Valmiki, whose autobiographies—Apne Apne Pinjare (1995) and Jūthan (1997)—marks the defining point for the beginning of a modern Hindi Dalit literary movement. Hindi Dalit literature is today flourishing with novels, autobiographies, literary criticism, short stories and poetry collections. Dalit writers are being published in Delhi’s most prominent Hindi publishing houses and in its finest Hindi literary magazines.

Jayprakash Kardam and Ajay Navaria, whose works are treated in this thesis, are two important authors right at the centre of this movement. Both are based in Delhi, where the movement has its natural centre. Kardam is one of the senior leading figures in the inner network of Delhi-based Dalit writers and the editor of the journal Dalit Sāhitya. Ajay Navaria is part of a new generation of writers and an associate professor at Jami Milia Islamia in Delhi. The two of them can be said to represent two generations of Dalit writers—and even more—to be two illustrative examples of these two generations. This thesis will demonstrate how they both also are representative of two different directions within Hindi Dalit literature, in terms of genre classifications, narrative constructions and character portrayals. They will both receive a fuller presentation below.

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11 Satyanarayana and Tharu 2013: 13, 55-64. See also Omvedt 2011: 74-82.
12 Beth 2014: 205-6, n3.
13 Beth 2014: 176
14 Brueck 2010: 44
15 Beth 2014: 139
16 Gajarawala 2013: 222, n27.
2.1.2 Dalit Representation

Both Laura Brueck and Sarah Beth argue, that in addition to the term ‘Hindi Dalit literary field’, the term “public sphere”, or even a “counter-public sphere”, can be used. Based on a critique of how mainstream Hindi literature has both represented Dalit characters inaccurately and overlooked works written and published by Dalits, Dalits writers themselves, by setting up their own standards for literary criticism and aesthetics, have been able to demarcate their own literary sphere in which they can exercise control over their own publication of literature, and from which they, at the same time, can direct criticism at the mainstream Hindi literature. Beth further argues that these dynamics position Dalit writers in a place of ambivalence since they, on the one hand, have a predisposed criticism against mainstream Hindi literature, and have for this reason distanced themselves from it; but on the other hand, they entertain the ambition to join and be accepted within the mainstream Hindi literary field. This thesis also discusses how Navaria and Kardam can be situated in relation to both these literary fields.

Beth further addresses the problem of representation present within the Hindi Dalit literary field, i.e., how Dalit writers claim to speak for the whole Dalit community, even on behalf of the poor rural masses. They do so, however, from a middle-class urban position, most of them based in Delhi. Beth here builds on Gayatri Spivak’s theory on the subaltern, which asserts that as soon as representatives of the subaltern begin to have a voice in the public, they, Beth writes, “cease to be truly subaltern”, “as the act of speaking itself infers a power differential between themselves and the rest of their ‘silenced’ community.” In line with Spivak’s theory, Brueck points out that these Dalit authors face the criticism that they cannot be said to be representative of the poor from their middle-class position.

The issue of representation has also profound effects on the portrayal of Dalit characters in Dalit short stories, which is the focus of this study. This relates to the twofold question asked by Spivak: “who can speak and who can listen?” Not only, as shown above, does the validity of the “speaker” pose an issue, but also the “listener”, since this also signifies a position of privilege. Beth points out that this is certainly the case within the Dalit community where the majority still are illiterate. Thus, Beth takes what Spivak calls the “hegemonic listeners” also to apply to the privileged

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18 Beth 2014: 20, 233-34.
listeners within the Dalit community. Drawing on Spivak, and also on Ella Shohat, Beth shows how the fact that a marginalised group rarely receives representation in the public has the consequence that even the individual that has the chance to speak is expected to be “totally representative […] of the whole group”. In other words, “what this individual says must be true for all members of the group.” Beth concludes:

In the case of literary representations 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.

Beth does not demonstrate how Spivak’s theory, which refers to the “hegemonic listeners” of the dominant group in a society, also applies to “hegemonic listeners” within an already marginalised group, such as the Dalits. The pattern, however, fits well with the dynamics of representation in Dalit literature as well.

2.1.3 Dalit Cetnā

The Dalit consciousness in Dalit Literature is the revolutionary mentality connected with struggle. It is a belief in rebellion against the caste system, recognizing the human being as its focus. Ambedkarite thought is the inspiration for this consciousness. Dalit consciousness makes slaves conscious of their slavery.

In order to define and demarcate Dalit identity and Dalit literature, Dalit writers and critics deploy the concept of Dalit consciousness, “Dalit Cetnā”. It is a complex term and the understanding of it multifaceted. The quote above is taken from Sharankumar Limbale’s definition of the term in his work, Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature. First of all, according to Limbale, the origins of Dalit cetnā goes back to Dr. Ambedkar. Omprakash Valmiki asserts: “Dalit consciousness obtains its primary energy from Dr. Ambedkar’s life and vision. All Dalit writers are united with respect to this truth.” Secondly, and connected to its Ambedkarite origin, the idea of “struggle” and rebellion is indicative

23 Beth 2014: 12-13
24 Beth 2014: 13
25 Limbale 2004: 32
of Dalit cetnā. N. Singh describes how Ambedkar’s vigour to fight for freedom for the Dalits, came from his “explosive rebellious consciousness [visphoṭak vidrohī cetnā].”

Thirdly, the focus on “the human being”, on human dignity and value, is principally the centre of Ambedkarite thought. “Babasaheb’s [Ambedkar’s] literary thought is founded on this humanism.”

Fourthly, the language deployed to describe a conscious Dalit comes close to the concept of “enlightenment”. Sharatchandra Muktibodh uses the term “Dalit vision” virtually as an equivalent of Dalit consciousness.

The final sentence in the quote above by Limbale indeed points to such a realisation—of eyes being opened to see things as they really are. Mainejar Pāṃḍey uses the term, jāgruk – “aware, alert, awake” in connection to cetnā and stresses that the purpose of Dalit literature is to achieve “the awakening of a new consciousness [naī cetnā kā jāgran]” among its aimed readers, which are the ordinary Dalits.

Accordingly, a Dalit with cetnā is one who is awakened to the reality of the atrocities done to him. In other words, it is one that has realised that “I am human, I must receive all the rights of a human being.”

Brueck identifies the first-hand experience of casteism as central to Dalit cetnā. In an article on the subject, she offers her summary definition of the term:

This is the Dalit chetna, an experiential and political perspective made up of the first-hand knowledge of caste-based oppression and atrocity, along with the political goal of a liberating awakening that results from the exposure of this atrocity as central to the maintenance of caste hierarchies.

Thus, a Dalit possessing Dalit cetnā has, first of all, a personal experience of caste-oppression. He has reached an awareness that what he has experienced is atrocious as well as a political vision that this oppressive system can be rebelled against, resisted and finally overturned. In addition, there is also an ideal that a conscious Dalit is deeply concerned not only for his own freedom but for the liberation of his whole community. The awareness within the Dalit is further matched with the exposure of the evil done by the proponents of caste.

Brueck argues that Dalit cetnā is used as a demarcation tool, both to decide if a work is Dalit literature—“its Dalitness” so to speak—as well as its literary qualities. Thus, by constructing their
own standards and criteria for aesthetics, the Dalit literary field can shun some of the critique received from the mainstream Hindi literary sphere and also exert control over the ideology communicated in Dalit writing. As Limbale states: “By Dalit literature, I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness.”

2.1.4 Anubhūti or Sahānubhūti, or even Samānubhūti?

One feature of Dalit cētnā, often emphasised by Dalit writers and critics, is that Dalit literature is based on the author’s own experiences. It is only Dalits who have the experience of being Dalits, and therefore they only possess this necessary pre-requisite of writing Dalit literature. This discussion is entitled with the antonyms in Hindi of the two words, *anubhūti* (“experience, perception”) and *sahānubhūti* (“sympathy”). (Sometimes, in place of *anubhūti*, can the intensified form, with a *sva*-prefix (self), be used: *svānubhūti* (“self-experience, self-perception”)). When non-Dalits attempt to give voice to the pain and suppression of Dalits, they do not write out of their own experience (*svānubhūti*) but out of sympathy (*sahānubhūti*). The term *sahānubhūti*, constructed with the prefix *saha-*, which means “with”, gives the implication of a certain distance. The suffering of the other has not become one’s own, just like the equivalent “sympathy” is used in English. Above all, is the Hindi literary giant, Munshi Premchand, criticized by Dalit writers for portraying his Dalit literary characters out of sympathy, for not challenging the caste system as such and thus lacking a revolutionary perspective, which is central to Dalit cētnā. In contrast, only Dalits can write on the basis of *anubhūti* (“experience, perception”) or *svānubhūti* (“self-experience”). Beth argues that the term *svānubhūti* is a powerful tool for Dalit writers to maintain control over their own literary field. Thereby they can also say: “we also have the power to exclude”. An important question that arises from this debate, is whether you can have *anubhūti*—the experience of suffering as a Dalit—but still be lacking Dalit cētnā? I will return to this question in section 4.3 of this essay, where I will argue that the focus in the discussion on these two terms, *anubhūti* and *sahānubhūti*, is limiting. I would suggest a broadening of the discussion by the introduction of the term *samānubhūti*—the Hindi equivalent for the English term “empathy.”

34 Limbale 2004: 19
35 Wessler (forthcoming 2019)
36 See Trivedi 2003: 974
37 Brueck 2014: 43-45
38 Beth 2014: 211, 217-223; McGregor 1993.
39 Beth 2014: 204
40 This term have been used, but not commonly so, within the theoretical discussion on Dalit literature.
Regarding the origins of the term ‘empathy,’ Jay Winter describes how the German philosopher Theodor Lipps, active in the nineteenth-century, used the term as a verb that went beyond sympathy: “In a nutshell, Lipps’s usage suggests that empathy enters the other; sympathy remains apart.” (emphasis added).\(^\text{41}\) Winter concludes that in the early twentieth-century the meaning of the word empathy had been established in contrast to sympathy:

> [...] sympathy is a response to a condition from outside of it; empathy is a response to a condition, into which the observer enters emotionally. Empathy is a feeling, which changes the subject position of the person who feels it; sympathy (in this definition) leaves the subject position of the observer intact.\(^\text{42}\) (emphasis added)

In sum, empathy connotes the idea of entering the condition of the other emotionally, while sympathy implies to relate to the other from the outside. Along the same lines, Suzanne Keen explains, in her work *Empathy and the Novel*, that while sympathy connotes: “I feel a supportive emotion about your feelings,” empathy implies: “I feel what you feel.”\(^\text{43}\) I will in this essay argue that use of the term samānubhūti, and how it differs from sahānubhūti, could open up for a more nuanced evaluation of the possibility for non-Dalits—both writers and readers—to identify with the experience of Dalits.\(^\text{44}\)

### 2.1.5 The Dalit Literary Character

In her *Writing Resistance – The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*, Brueck identifies, as a major characteristic of Dalit stories, the moral polarisation between good and evil, “a principle expressed in hyperbolic situations and dialogues, moments of astonishment and ethical realization.”\(^\text{45}\) In these Dalit stories this moral polarisation is constructed through the “good Dalit” and the “bad Brahmin.” Brueck writes:

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\(^{41}\) Winter 2016: 101  
\(^{42}\) Winter 2016: 101-02  
\(^{43}\) Keen 2007: 5  
\(^{44}\) I already here want to underscore the limitation in this discussion to depart from a Western discourse and to base it on a Western understanding of terms and concepts, such as ‘empathy’. Further research on these issues should let the discussion be informed by perspectives and concepts from the Indian tradition. The matter is however complex due to Ambedkar’s strong influence from Western thought. Hence there is already an inherit conflation of thought traditions within the Dalit discourse. For the discussion in this essay, it suffices to say that the borrowing from Western etymology and conceptuality is at least a helpful point of departure.  
\(^{45}\) Brueck 2014: 86
The narrative logic of these [Dalit] stories revolves around the conflict between the moral pole of the bad, inhabited by the upper-caste proponents of caste inequality (“Bad Brahmins”), and the morale pole of the good, inhabited by the victimized, and always innocent, Dalit characters (“Good Dalits”). This moral opposition is continuously reinforced: in plot, dialogue, and description.46

Accordingly, as the “morale pole of the good,” the conventional Dalit literary character is always honest, forthright and very diligent in his work. He is innocent and unknowing about the evil of this world and reacts with astonishment and bewilderment when he suddenly encounters it. It is a common literary trope that the Dalit character thus functions as an archetype, the ideal Dalit, or in other words, the embodiment of Dalit cētnā. 47

2.1.6 Dalit Identity and Dalit Literature

‘Dalit’ is a political identity. The term means literally, ‘broken’48, but Ramnika Gupta defined it as, “one who resists.”49 Consequently, there have been suggestions, by for example Arjun Dangle, to include “all the untouchable communities living outside the boundary of the village, as well as Adivasis, landless farm-labourers, workers, the suffering masses, and nomadic and criminal tribes.”50 In all practicality, however, ‘Dalit’ is equated with the political category of S.C. (Scheduled Castes). Consequently, the most basic definition of ‘Dalit’ refers to the ones who historically have belonged to the untouchable castes.51

Similarly, Dalit literature is political in its nature and it is impossible to disconnect it from the social protest movement it is a part of. Generally, “art for art’s sake” is not a trope that has support among Dalit writers. Dangle writes: “Dalit literature is not simply literature […] Dalit literature is associated with a movement to bring about change […].”52

46 Brueck 2014: 86
47 These and similar general perspectives on the conventional Dalit character, here and below, have been retrieved from seminars in Hindi at Uppsala University and from personal communications with my supervisor, Prof. Heinz Werner Wessler, during spring 2019.
48 Zelliot 2008: 450. See also 452-53 for a further discussion on the term.
50 Limbale 2004: 30
2.2. Biography of the Authors

2.2.1 Jayprakash Kardam

Jayprakash Kardam was born July 5, 1958, in the village Indragarh in the district of Ghaziabad, in Uttar Pradesh close to the border of Delhi (NCR). He grew up in a family with seven brothers and sisters, an average family who lived on farming. When his grandfather, who had done the farming, passed away and his father due to sickness couldn’t continue that work, they quickly became the poorest family in the village. Because of this, Kardam had to work already from his teenage years. Since he was the oldest son, it also fell on him to support the family when his father passed away. This made it very difficult to uphold his studies. For some time he even worked all day and studied until late night, having borrowed the textbooks from his peers and returned them in the morning. Through different employments, some contribution from scholarship, limited sleep and a habit to always study and read, he managed to finish both his elementary education and eventually three different Masters in Philosophy, History and Hindi, and later also a doctorate. During his childhood, he and his Dalit peers experienced continuous caste discrimination both from teachers, who did not let them touch the water pump in school, and from other children who called them names and picked a fight with them since they knew the teachers would not scold them but the Dalit kids.

Through literally inspiration from Maxim Gorky and later Ambedkar, Kardam began to write himself. From 1978 and onwards he has been a frequent writer and speaker on Dalit issues. Beside two short story collections, Talāś (2005) and Kharomc (2014), he is also the author of the first Dalit novel in Hindi, Chappar (1994), the editor and founder of Dalit Sāhiya (established in 1999) and one of the founders of Dalit Lekhak Samgh (DLS, “Dalit Writers Forum”). In addition, he is the author of two poetry collections and has written extensively on Ambedkarism, Buddhism and other Dalit issues. He holds a first rang government employment at the Central Department of Official Languages. Kardam is one of the most prolific and respected senior Dalit writers today and has been a key figure in the development of the Hindi Dalit literary movement.

Kardam is also an active Buddhist. He lives with his wife and two children in Gautam Buddh Nagar, UP, which is part of Greater Delhi.

53 Sinh 2012a: 118-9
55 Interview, Kardam 2019. See full version online.
56 Sinh 2012a: 118-19; Beth 2014: 139-46; Brueck 2014: 32, 52; Gajarawala 2013: 222, n. 27.
2.2.2 Ajay Navaria

Ajay Navaria was born in Kotla Mubarakpur, Delhi on June 6, 1972. He grew up in Madangir, another area of Delhi, where he lives with his wife and two children today. Navaria’s grandfather moved from a village near Jaipur in Rajasthan to Delhi in 1942. This provided Navaria with very different circumstances than the typical village setting and he did not experience much caste-related discrimination during his upbringing. He expresses in the interview with me how his family was quite liberal and how he had friends from all kinds of backgrounds: upper-castes, Muslims, Christians.

He received an MA in Hindi from Delhi University and an M.Phil and Ph.D. from JNU. He is today an Associate Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia in Delhi where he teaches in the Hindi Department. Previously he has also taught journalism and Hindu ethics. He is the author of two short story collections, *Paṭkathā aur Anya Kahāniyāṃ* (2006) and *Yēs Sir* (2012), as well as one novel *Udhar Ke Log* (2008). He has on two occasions been the co-editor for the prominent Hindi literary magazine, *Hams*—one of them was for the very important special Dalit issue during 2004, together with Sheoraj Singh Bechain. He represented Dalit literature together with Omprakash Valmiki on the Jaipur Literature Festival 2010 and is the president of the Dalit Writers Association of India. In addition, he has written “several short stories and critical essays that have been published in a wide variety of literary, academic, and activist journals.”

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57 Brueck 2014, 123

58 Interview, Navaria (Sampath) 2018.

59 Interview with Navaria, Delhi, 2019-03-30. See Appendix 7.2, p. 86, line 1-14.

60 Interview, Navaria 2019. See full version online.

3. SHORT STORIES – Summary and Analysis

3.1 Jayprakash Kardam

3.1.1 Talāś

Summary

“Talāś” (“Search”) relates the young, middle-class, government employee Rāmvīr Simh’s search for a place to stay in, in the new city to which he has moved for work. This turns out to be quite a difficult task for the young man. When the short story begins, he has been staying in a guest house for a week and has already been looking on a number of houses. But among the criteria recounted by the, in most cases, Brahmin landlords, Rāmvīr has especially difficult to put up with the requirement of not eating meat, which is to be understood as an inclusive part of his Dalit identity. The inconvenience to stay in a guest house, however, makes him compromise this habit. He therefore moves into a suitable place. Rāmvīr is himself a Dalit. But since neither his name, nor his area of residence (in a bastī or slum-colony), gives information about his identity, and since he additionally is highly educated and has a ”refined” lifestyle, he has not been affected by any caste-discrimination yet in the city. Moreover, as soon as Mr Guptā, his new Brahmin landlord hears that Rāmvīr is a ”business-tax official”, he becomes very submissive and overly polite in his manner towards him. But when Mr Guptā and his wife soon become aware that Rāmvīr has hired a cūhrī62 (by the name Rāmbatī) to do the cleaning in his apartment, they become upset. When they are informed that Rāmvīr also has extended this to include cooking, this becomes the last straw for Mr Guptā and his wife. One day, Guptā confronts him face to face. In a lengthy discussion, which concludes this short story, Guptā makes clear that Rāmvīr has to get rid of Rāmbatī or move out himself, because—so his argument goes—society is run by old traditions which make a difference between people. Rāmvīr, being a progressive social activist and writer, has difficulty in understanding Guptā’s old way of thinking. He tries to persuade Guptā by referring to the constitution, in which all men are proclaimed equals, but to no avail. Guptā’s decision is firm. Rāmvīr, on the other hand, feels that he cannot give in to such casteism by firing Rāmbatī. He makes this clear to Mr Guptā and then, instead of going to work that day, he goes out to search for a new house.

62 cūhrī, female of the caste, cūhrā – the sweeper caste (McGregor 1993: 328).
Analysis

The dichotomy between the good Dalit and bad Brahmin (as described above under 2.5) is clearly present in “Talāś”. The protagonist, Rāmvīr Simh and the antagonist, Mr Guptā, are both portrayed as stereotyped and representative characters for their respective community. They are juxtaposed as polar opposites. This dichotomy between the “Good Dalit and Bad Brahmin” becomes all the more evident as the plot unfolds and finally climaxes in the story’s final conversation where the two different world-views of the characters clash.

Guptā is from the outset characterised by pride and arrogance. On their first encounter, when Rāmvīr looks at Guptā’s house, it is narrated how Guptā initially addressed Rāmvīr “with pride [daṃbh ke sāth] (21).” The word used here, daṃbh, can also be translated “arrogance” or with a slightly different meaning, “pretence, hypocrisy; deceit”.63 That the aspect of “hypocrisy” can be included in the understanding of the term in this context becomes clear in the development of the conversation, in which, as soon as Guptā hears that Rāmvīr works as an “income tax officer,” he changes his approach completely and begins to address Rāmvīr with deep politeness and humility. Guptā’s change of behaviour, Rāmvīr later understands, was simply out of business purposes, in the hope of gaining some tax-reduction. This further portrays the Brahmin as being hypocritical, cunning and greedy.

The protagonist, Rāmvīr, personifies the modern urban middle-class Dalit. He has a refined way of living and nice clothes, 21st-century metropolitan food habits and a fine position at a company. He spends his free-time writing against the corruption in society and, as will become clear later in the story, is deeply committed to Ambedkarite values of the equality and dignity of every human being. His habit of eating meat should not only be seen as a personal preference but is part of the forging of his identity as a Dalit, that he clearly opposes Brahmin restrictions and values.

But the first section of the story also reveals some of Rāmvīr’s weaknesses, even a contradiction in his character. For while he is, on the one hand, a progressive author and activist, he is also, on the other hand, very conscious of his colleagues’ opinions of what is appropriate to do for a man of his rank. He, therefore, avoids eating outside on the street corner since he is cautious that someone from work will see him. When he hears that a man of his rank ought to have someone cleaning his house, he quickly adheres and employs the Dalit woman Rāmbatī for this task. Moreover, he seems to view it as a welcomed convenience that neither his surname, nor his living conditions, reveals his Dalit identity. Thus, up to this point, he has been in a fairly safe position, in which he both can be part of the modern society and at the same time criticise it through his authorship, but still avoid to be confronted directly or personally with caste-issues.

63 McGregor 1993: 473
This will, however, soon change. When Rāmvīr adds to Rāmbatī’s tasks to also cook his food, Guptā is urged by his wife to confront Rāmvīr face to face about the matter and to ask him to fire Rāmbatī. This conversation, which concludes the story, first of all, exposes Guptā’s casteism. When Guptā makes it clear for Rāmvīr that the house belongs to him, and that no Čūṛī should defile his kitchen, the author’s voice comments that “[t]hrough these words of Guptā, his arrogance [dambh] of being a landlord became exposed” (27). This exposure of the Brahmin’s bad and prideful character is a critical element in the Dalit narrative, and central to the imaginary vision of “Talāś” and many other stories in the collection by the same name.

While this conversation, as far as Guptā is concerned, only exposes his actual thoughts and shows who he really is, for Rāmvīr, although it does accentuate his convictions, it also becomes an opportunity for personal change, to take these convictions to action. In this final conversation, Guptā and Rāmvīr are portrayed—through their respective language and vocabulary—as representatives of two worlds. While Rāmvīr refers to “the constitution” (saṃvidhān), that all people are “equal” (barābar), Guptā refers to “tradition” (parampara), that there is “a difference” (bhed) between people. Guptā says:

All are humans [iṃsān], Sir. But there is a difference [bhed] between a human and another. All humans are not equal [barābar]. This difference has been kept in society [saṃj] for thousands of years. (26)

Rāmvīr later in the discussion responds:

We should not think in this way. These things are very old and have already been left behind. In the view of our constitution [saṃvidhān], by which our country [deś] is run, all are equal [barābar]. No one is big or small, touchable or untouchable [chūt-achūt]. (27)

Guptā again replies:

The nation [deś] is run by the constitution [saṃvidhān] Sir, not the society [saṃj]. Society is run by traditions [parampara].

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64 Guptā ke in šabdoṃ men uskā mālik hone kā dambh ubhar āyā thā.
65 See for example, “Sāṃg” and “No Bar”.
66 iṃsān to sab hain sāhab! par iṃsān-iṃsān men bhed hotā hai. sab iṃsān barābar nahīṃ hote. hazāroṃ sāl se saṃj men yah bhed barā hui hai.
67 hamem is taraf ki bāteṃ nahīṃ sochni cahie, ye bāteṃ bābūt pārāni hain aur ḍiche chūṭ cūkī hain. hamārā saṃvidhān, jis se hamārā deś callā hai, uskī nazār men sab barābar hain. koi kisi se clotā-barā yā chūṭ-achūṭ nahīṃ hai.
68 saṃvidhān se deś callā hai sāhab, saṃj nahīṃ. saṃj paramparaṃ se calla hai.
Thus, we see how here their respective vocabulary are marked by polar opposites. “Constitution,” “nation” and “equality” stand against “traditions,” “society” and “difference”. These two characters represent two Indias, two forces or mindsets. Guptā represents oppressive traditions and Rāmvīr modern, egalitarian, democratic ideas. It is also significant that Rāmvīr emphasises the constitution [samvidhān], since Ambedkar is often called “the father of the Indian constitution”.69 Thus Kardam conveys a political message in this conversation: that Ambedkarite ideology is the force through which these traditions can be fought. According to Kardam, it is precisely by strengthening progressive forces, and weakening religious, traditional ones, that the Indian society will change.70

In this story, however, no such change takes place. Guptā’s mind is fixed. He is not ready to change or understand. Rāmvīr’s argument does not affect him. In the end, Rāmvīr once again has to go out to search for a new house. Similarly, the Dalit’s search for dignity has to go on.71 But just prior to that conclusion of the story, something takes place which could be viewed as a moment of change: Guptā’s rigid casteist behaviour forces Rāmvīr to take a stand. Up to this point, although the theoretical framework of Ambedkarite ideology has been clear before his mind, Rāmvīr has not yet been confronted with any caste-issue in this city, neither directly nor indirectly. Now, however, as he, completely unprepared, is confronted with this, he needs to process what his values mean to him. He argues with himself in his mind, that if “I obey Gupta’s request and dismiss Rāmbatī from making food, I will have to lay down my weapons before untouchability and casteism, which are the greatest evil of society and which I, up to this day, have been continuously opposing” (28).72 He does not, however, acts instantly or intuitively, but after a moment of thought he makes “a decision in his mind [man men niścay kiyā]…” (28, emphasis added). He then answers Guptā that he is ready to empty the house.73 The inner reasoning, preceding his answer to Guptā, suggests that this a moment of change, of maturing or growth of Dalit cetnā. The decision (niścay) becomes a point or a moment of resistance. It follows a didactic pattern often present in Dalit literature, that a Dalit should resist even if no change seems to be on the horizon.74 Although Guptā was not at all ready to understand [vah kuch bhī samajhne ke lie taiyār nahim thā [27]], Rāmvīr was ready to resist. The inconvenience in his search for a house described in the beginning of the story adds to the heroism in Rāmvīr’s personal sacrifice.

69 See Hardtmann 2009: 69-71
70 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 89, ll. 14-23.
71 See Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 90, ll. 3-6.
72 Guptā kī bāt mānkā Rāmbatī se khānā bācānā band kar denā to chuāchāt aur jāttīvād ke sāmne hathiyār dāl denā hogā jo samāj kā sabse bārā dusman hai aur jīskā vīrodh meñ āj tak kartā āyā hūṃ.
73 maṁ āphkā mākān khālti karne ke lie taiyār hūṃ.
74 See Brueck 2014: 96
It could be argued, however, that there is some inherent contradiction in Rāmvīr’s character in this story. Rāmvīr is clearly aware of the reality of caste-discrimination. In the beginning of the story, it is mentioned that he had clearly perceived casteism within his first week in this new city: “Just like other cities, this city was not free from casteism. Within this one week, he had already seen it very well” (20, emphasis added). Rāmvīr’s antennas are out. He is a politically aware Dalit and a social activist, he knows how to spot caste-discrimination. Still, in the final conversation with Guptā, Rāmvīr reacts as if he was someone who had never met it before, and not only in his outward behaviour, but also in his inner thoughts: “Rāmvīr Siṃh could not understand why Guptā said that Rāmbatī could not cook food” (26). And when Guptā says that it is wrong and put more force to his request, the matter is still not clear to him: “Rāmvīr Siṃh was not grasping the secret behind Guptā’s concerns. He emphatically asked, ‘but why?’” (26) In light of the portrayal of him earlier in the story (see p. 20), his apparent awareness of different expressions of casteism, his reactions here must be deemed as unrealistic.

His reaction to Guptā’s mindset is, however, part of a pre-decided good and unrealistic Dalit character, who is innocently and naïvely non-enlightened and free of suspicion in front of the evils of casteism. It could be argued, of course, that Rāmvīr had not met caste-discrimination before and therefore it surprised him. However, I hold it more likely that the consistency of the actual character in this story has had to give room for the already prototypical literary Dalit protagonist—as the personification of Dalit cētnā is supposed to be about personal innocence, general good will and a clear vision of society. Such a character, as Rāmvīr clearly represents, will meet resistance in the Indian society. Rāmvīr is thus portrayed as a role model or an archetype, who suffers personal loss for the higher cause of the community and for the resistance against caste-oppression. “Talāś” communicates that the expected and natural posture for a Dalit in society is talāś – “search”. The Dalit can neither desire nor expect to be emancipated or to find a home in a society which is dominated by Brahmanism—until this has changed, the search and resistance must continue.

75 disse śaharom kī tārah yah śahar bhī jātivād se mukt nahīṃ hai. jātī bheda bhāv aur chuāchūt ko vah is ek satpāh ke bhītar āchī tārah dekh cuke the.
76 Rāmvīr Siṃh kuch samajī nahīṃ tāre kī Guptā Rāmbatī se khānā nahīṃ banūne ke lie kyom kah rahā hai.
77 Guptā kī bāt kī rahasy Rāmvīr Siṃh kī samajī men nahīṃ ā rahā thā. unhoṁne zor dekar pāchā, ‘lekin kyom?’
78 See Mani 2005: 24-33 for the connection between Brahmanic religion and the caste system.
3.1.2 Sāṅg

**Summary**

The story begins with a vivid description of the village Sonpur. The village is enveloped in an almost singing atmosphere. The menial labours hurry home from the fields with their buffaloes; the children play and shoot; the women rise early to finish their work; all just to get ready to attend the sāṅg—a public drama, performed every evening in the centre of the village by a visiting drama group. Drums are played, beautiful rāgs are sung, all to the applauding crowd, men and women, young and old, the entire village sit crammed together spellbound by the performance.

But Campā does not want to go. As she discusses the matter with her friend Śīlā, she expresses how the entertainment of the sāṅg is only a momentary joy and a diversion for the mind, but still, all the pain, suffering and poverty of life remains. It appears, however, that there is a deeper layer to the story. As Śīlā leaves, memories from 8-years ago comes back to Campā and are played like a film before her eyes. Her husband Bhullan had then been sick in bed with fever for a week. He was not able to attend to the work which the landlord Mukhiyā forced him to do in the fields, neither had he the strength to go to the sāṅg which he was really fond of. But as he felt a little bit better, he finally went for a while to the sāṅg just to be relieved from the boredom of lying on the sick bed. The next day, Mukhiyā appears at his door, furious over Bhullan, since he had not come to his forced labour, but attended the sāṅg. Mukhiyā begins to beat Bhullan and only stops when he is too tired to continue. Bhullan lies trashed, beaten to pieces and unconscious on the ground. His wife Campā’s constant care cannot save him and he passes away three days later.

The images of these memories awake fury and determination in Campā. Even though she has no actual interest in the sāṅg she goes to the fare ground, registers her name and loudly partakes in the fare. As is to be expected, her behaviour—just as it happened with her husband—draws again Mukhiyā to her door, furious that she has not come to work in the field but has gone to the sāṅg instead, and he is ready to beat her too. But before his arms could reach her, the unthinkable happens. Campā draws a chopper out, hidden under her shroud, and splits Mukhiyā’s head into two cracks. And with this, the story ends.

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79 Sāṅg, according to Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary, refers to “a type of popular drama featuring singing, and dealing predominantly with legendary or fabulous subject-matter (as well as with some modern subjects)” (McGregor 1993: 962). Since the word or the concept is difficult to translate into English, I will mostly use the Hindi-term, Sāṅg, and only occasionally “village theatre” as a translation.

80 rāg – here: “a musical mode or sequence, harmony; melody” (McGregor 1993: 962) or “musical mode” (Jagannāthan 2009: 423).

81 Mukhiyā – is a noun which means “chief, leader” or “village headman” (McGregor 1993: 820). The latter, “village headman”, is the meaning in this context but since this title in this short story rather is used as proper name, I have left it untranslated and non-cursive just as names of other literary characters.
Analysis

The narrative of “Sāṃg” is divided into four distinct parts. The first part, a vivid and colourful rendering of the sāṃg, describes how life ought to be, as the whole village joyfully, in harmony and unity, are celebrating together. The following conversation, however, the story’s second part, gives voice to how things really are, as Campā states it: “there is suffering, pain, sorrow, poverty and cry, this is the very truth about our lives” (31). The discussion about the sāṃg awakens Campā’s memories from the past, which in turn is the subject of the story’s third part, the beating of Campā’s husband to death by the village-chief Mukhiyā. Here, at the third level of the story, it becomes evident how dark and evil things are in the village. This reality stands in stark contrast to the joyful beginning of the sāṃg. Forth and lastly, the memories awake a fire in Campā. Her joyful and purposeful attendance to the sāṃg once again draws a furious Mukhiyā to her house. This time she kills him.

In the conversation between Campā and Śīlā, the two women embody two different approaches. Śīlā just wants to enjoy the sāṃg. She is portrayed as one who finds herself in her predicament and the status quo, as she abdicates from real life as a place where action could be taken to cause change. Campā is the opposite, she personifies someone ready to resist, who is not ready to close her eyes. In addition, there is an ambivalence in the symbolic function of the sāṃg in the story. First, here in the second part, it functions as a symbol of ignorance. Amidst the cheerful village around the sāṃg, there is ignorance. They are all happy, ignoring the real state of things. But Campā refuses to give in to such a “delusion”. She confronts Śīlā:

I ask, what will you get from watching the sāṃg, is it not just only for a moment, a diversion for the mind? […] While we know this, that in our whole lives there is suffering, pain, sorrow, poverty, crying and grieving—this is the reality of our lives. So, why then such madness for a momentary joy? Is not this momentary joy a deception? Why should we keep ourselves in this misapprehension and delusion, why do not we accept the truth? (31)

Campā is enlightened. She sees things clearly, as they are (yahī hamāre jīvan kā sac hai — ”this is the very truth of our lives”). Amidst the short joy of the sāṃg, their lives are filled with pain and hardship. In the light of their true situation, she even calls the sāṃg for ”madness” (pāgalpan) or ”a momentary joy” (kṣaṇik sukh). This momentary joy is a ”deception” (bhulāvā) a
"misapprehension" (*bhram*), or even a "deceit" (*dhokhe*). She instead urges for them to accept the truth, what their state is really like (*kyom na sac ko hī svākā kareṃ ham*).

This conversation portrays Campā as the struggling, resistant Dalit, while Śīlā rather shows acceptance of their living conditions by giving into the deceit. Campā’s identity is even more reinforced by Śīlā’s counter-argument: “but we are not going alone, everyone [*sabhī log*] looks at the *sāṃg*-spectacle, everyone is going” (31). Everyone is going, but Campā is not like all the other people, she goes against the stream.

The following paragraphs, however, show a deeper layer of the story. The reason for Campā’s aversion against the *sāṃg* is the connection of the merriment to the painful memory of the death of her husband. But when she recounts these memories something changes inside of her.

Just as this film was displaying, something like a flame kindled inside Campā. Until the last scene, this transformed [*parivartit*] into a fire and Campā, who, up to just a moment before, had been virtually uninterested in the *sāṃg*, left everything as it was and went to watch the *sāṃg*. And she did not watch the *sāṃg* quietly. She gave two rupees and had also her name listed. The up-to-just-recently lifeless Campā was now watching the *sāṃg* with great laughter and joy.

And just as she had hoped, as the day passed, Mukhiyā came to Campā’s door. “Come out, bitch,” Mukhiyā called Campā in a domineering voice. (34)

Just as we saw in the end of “Talāś,” there is also here, towards the end of this story, a moment when Dalit consciousness is formed and resistance is awakened. It says, that it was like a flame that was kindled inside Campā, and that it transformed or changed into a “blaze” or “fire”. This is Dalit consciousness, the change Dalit writers want to see in their readers, that Dalits can resist. The recounting of her husband’s brutal death, shifts the position of the *sāṃg* in the story—from being the symbol of a superficial enjoyment or a mental diversion, to now become a means of resistance.

Campā’s loud laughter is thus a deliberate provocation against her oppressor. And just as she had hoped, it quickly draws Mukhiyā to her door, who scolds her and tries to grab her in order to beat her too. But, “before Mukhiyā’s hand had reached Campā, she grabbed a chopper under her shawl,
drew out her hand and, in the very next moment, Mukhiyā’s head was split in two” (35). This particular cruel description of Campā’s act leaves the reader in a shock. It is purposefully raw, brutal and graphic, just to achieve this very effect. It is however not only the “blood for blood” murder but also a gender issue and a social issue involved. The fact that it is a woman who carries out the revenge has great socio-cultural ramifications in this village context, since it affects the complete humiliation of the Ṭhakūr, much more so than had it been a brother or an uncle who had done it. The honour of the village headmen is scattered since he is killed by a woman and, beyond that, a Dalit. Although the revenge somehow satisfies the sense of justice, it is extremely brutal. But the murder is not perceived as a moral dilemma in the narrative, neither is the revenge viewed as a problem. I will return to these issues below in section 4.

86 lekin isse pahle ki Mukhiyā kā hāth Campā tak pahunctā, orhane meṃ se gaṇḍāsā ṭakarē Campā ke hāth bāhar nikle aur aṅge hi kṣan Mukhiyā kā sīr do ḫaṅk ho gayā.

87 Beth points out that these kinds of “graphic descriptions” are purposefully included in Dalit short stories in order to affect this shock in the reader (2014: 225).
3.1.3 Kharomc

Summary

The main character, Raṃglāl, in "Kharomc" ("Scratch") is an urban middle-class Dalit, a "class one officer" at a company in the city. Albeit his status he has no car, and has to struggle quite severely every morning to get to work with over-crowded buses or metro-cars in the rush hours, minding pickpockets and being shovelled by the crowd. The narrative speaks on the difficulty of his dependence on public transportation, which takes more energy than his actual work. The fact that he has no car, is also frowned upon by his colleagues since it is expected as a status symbol for an officer of Raṃglāl's rank. Raṃglāl is, however, innocently unaware of this status issue until he one day overhears a conversation between some peons in the office corridor, as they discuss the fact that he does not have a car. The conversation is filled with derogative comments, such as: “Whatever rank they reach, these people [Dalits] never change their way of life” (24). These words wound Raṃglāl at heart, and when he comes home that day he lets his family know that they will buy a car.

This comes as a surprise and joy for the family since, as it turns out, they had for some time been trying to persuade Raṃglāl to buy one. The reader here gets a long vista of prior family discussions about the topic. For example, the daughter expressed how her classmates were first impressed by her father being an officer but then thought she lied altogether when it appeared they did not have a car. Likewise, the son told of the shameful experience in walking from the bus stand while other kids are driven there by car. In other words, the car is a status symbol which the family wants to possess, perhaps not to impress people, but to avoid shame in face of neighbours and classmates.

They buy a car, a Honda Civic, a fairly big one. When Raṃglāl one morning parks the car at the office, the colleagues are both impressed and surprised. Raṃglāl offers sweets to everyone, but suddenly his PA returns from the parking lot and points out that there is “a scratch" (kharomc) on the new car. Shocked and bewildered, Raṃglāl goes out to check and concludes that this is done by some envious and ill-willing person at the office. When his colleagues hear about it, amid a few negative remarks, Raṃglāl mostly receives sympathetic comments from them, so that it is impossible to identify the one who did the scratch. At the end of the day, after the others have left, Raṃglāl sits in his car ready to go home. Instead of the joy and excitement he had felt that morning, his mind is now painfully centered on the scratch. But the scratch he feels in his heart is deeper and more serious than the scratch on the car.

88 cāhe kuch bhi ban jāeṁ in logom ko jīne kā dhang nāhīṁ āeṁā.
Analysis

“Kharomic” is a story on middle-class Dalit experience. In terms of narrative development and character presentation, it is a rather conventional story. The high-principled, resilient and innocent main Dalit character is unshaken in his resolve to not get a car. He is fighting every morning to get to work in the rush hour. The struggle is described, “as no less than winning a war” (23),90 which relates to his Dalit social identity as a whole. The language portrays the good Dalit, who fights against an evil world. Status questions are originally not important to him. Just as the typical Dalit character is naïvely and innocently unaware about the evils of this world but then suddenly is exposed to some atrocities, so also Ramglāl is naïvely unknowing (bekhabar) and innocent regarding the gossip about him in the office, until he suddenly and startlingly becomes aware of these facts through the discussion between colleagues in the corridor. Ramglāl’s reaction to this incident is also typical. First emotionally: “these words pricked him deep into his heart”90 (24), and then physically, as he, “wounded” draws back into his room, as a space for lonely consolation. Here, the concept of ‘space’ becomes important. The public space—both the road to work and the office hallway, which he has to pass to come to work—implies an area of struggle and battle for the Dalit. Especially the narrow hallway illustrates this and suggests that, just as Ramglāl can’t avoid passing the corridor and so overhearing the colleagues’ conversation, so, in general terms, the Dalit cannot avoid caste-discrimination in the public space.

The conversation in the corridor reveals typical prejudices against Dalits. The peons point out that although Ramglāl has a respected job, due to reservation, he has not changed his mentality: “Whatever rank they reach, these people never change their way of life” (24).91 These words reflect how this mentality is perceived to be collectively possessed; i.e., a Dalit will always be a Dalit, a fact that any reservation or promotion cannot change.

The upper-caste colleagues are here doing what Beth identifies as a pattern in upper-castes-Dalit relations. She points out that upper-caste people “have habitually portrayed Dalits as a singular, illiterate, impure and uncultured mass.”92 This is precisely what is taking place here when the colleagues talk about him by referring to “these people.”

So, Ramglāl is not endowed with any individuality by them. Neither is that matched by any individuality portrayed by Kardam. He is not portrayed as a personified or rounded character. His actions, or reactions, are already pre-conditioned along an archetypal character template. Further, the reader does not get access to this inner world, or a more complex inner monologue where he

89...kisi jang jîtna se kam nahîm hai.
90...ye šabd uske kaleje ko bhûtta tak bûndh gae.
91câhe kuch bhi ban jåën in logom ko jîne kâ dhâng nahîm âegã.
92Beth 2014: 193-194
would balance and weigh arguments and emotions. Instead, without thought or reflection, at least not any of which the reader is informed, Raṅglāḷ goes straight home and informs his family that they are going to buy a car.

In Raṅglāḷ’s inner reflection about not having a car, prior to the overhearing of this conversation, this interesting concept of hīntābodh—“inferiority complex”—appears. Raṅglāḷ did not see it in any way as hīntābodh, that he did not have a car. This concept of hīntābodh is used to describe, very succinctly, the inward posture among Dalits who are lacking in Dalit cetnā, in whom the casteist narrative of reality have been internalised, so that they always have a feeling of submissiveness and inferiority before upper-castes.93 Raṅglāḷ perhaps thought he was free from any hīntābodh—“inferiority complex” (22), but the incident in the corridor, it seems, opens up a wound. There is no reflection that he encounters an oppressive system, which he can choose to continue to fight against. He is instead shocked and wounded, and based on these strong emotions he acts. He actually ends up just following the convention instead of questioning it. It will be clear that this is one of the didactic points of the story, that to simply follow the conventions of a capitalistic casteist system will not break the root cause of the issue.

Due to Raṅglāḷ’s individual preferences it would be fine for him to go by public transport, a car would only be an extra burden to take care of. In the end it is neither his family’s request to buy a car that seals the matter for him. Instead, it is his own experience at work that becomes the crucial factor and his desire to smooth the unevenness in relation to the convention—enforced upon him in the shape of casteist prejudices voiced by his colleagues. There is thus no thought about changing the convention or questioning the status thinking as such. The lengthy family discussion exposes this convention of possessing a car, as a status symbol associated with a certain position in society. This Dalit family reveals rather awareness and sensitivity to this convention than criticism of it. Finally, the father agrees that the status symbol is essential for a person of his stature.

The focus is furthermore on individual emancipation and not on collective responsibility. Raṅglāḷ does not develop a cetnā that public transportation has to be improved, neither does he reflect on the environmental aspects of the already over trafficked Indian cosmopolitans, nor the thousands of poor people struggling every day to get to work. We could ask if a single middle-class officer’s struggle to get work, apart from which he otherwise enjoys a very decent life, when juxtaposed to the million others in India in much worse conditions, should awake our sympathies?

The final section of the story drives home the whole point. When Raṅglāḷ goes out to the parking-space and sees the scratch for himself, there is an interesting wording of his analysis of the

93 According to Kardam and so also portrayed in Dalit literature, this complex psychological or ideological oppression can at many occasions be an even stronger issue to handle, realise and release oneself from, than the outward, physical oppression. See Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 85, l. 22.
motive behind the act: “this is surely the work of a person of an envious and jealous mindset [mānsiktā]” (28). The term mānsiktā means “mentality”, “mindset” or psychology.” It is an abstract noun formed with the suffix –tā. The term suggests that it is not only a person behind this act but a whole “mentality”, “mindset” or broad attitude, from a casteist society. This mentality is voiced through various comments from colleagues, such as: “he does not know how to drive properly” and another, in agreeing to this comment “sarcastically” says: “You said it right. To buy a car is not everything. One also needs to know the concept [samskār] of driving. From where will that concept [samskār] come among those people?” (29). Thus, according to this mentality, the real issue was not that Ramgūlā did not have a car, but the fact that he is a Dalit. The term samskār used above addresses here a more generic meaning of “method,” “idea” or “concept”. But, another meaning of the term refers to the essential rites and manner of life of Hinduism. The term samskār relates the narrative to the deep level of discrimination in the Hindu tradition. It suggests a preconditioned, deeper critique or judgement against Dalits, on a cultural-religious level, which intensifies the comment made in the first conversation in the hallway, “these people will never change their way of life” (24). The upper-caste colleagues not only voice prejudices against the Dalits’ way of life but even question whether a Dalit can be a Hindu or part of the Hindu society at all. Thus, the term samskār, its connection to Hindu religion and the way it is used in this context, sediments the idea of Dalit as an “outsider”—outside the varṇ.

In the interview, Kardam states that “we cannot say that your emancipation will come from money or education. This is a thing that sits in the mind of people in society. Until this thinking is removed from people’s minds, this thing will not be brought to an end.” The subtlety of this deeper mentality—that it is not a concrete issue that straightforwardly and easily can be addressed—is portrayed in the summary description of the collective reaction from the colleagues:

Having seen their sympathetic behaviour no one could say that these are the people who looked on him with contempt because he was a Dalit, who had feelings of aversion against him, and

94 … yah zarūr daftar ke hi kisi īryālu aur kutsī mānsiktā ke vyaktī kā kām hai.
95 McGregor 1993: 806
96 McGregor 1995: 214
97 Interview, Kardam 2019. See below, note 84.
98 tum thīk kahte ho. kār kharīd lenā hī sab kuch nahīṁ hotā. kār calāne kā samskār bhī ānā cāhī. kāhāṁ se aēgā in logon mem vah samskār.
99 McGregor 1993: 970
100 varṇ – ‘caste-system’.
101 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 87, ll. 10-11.
who was the person among them who in fact, by the means of the scratch on the car, had spit out the poison of the aversion and hatred of his mind.\textsuperscript{102} (29)

The urban middle-class caste-discrimination which Ramglāl meets are subtle. Among the sympathy and the aversion expressed by the colleagues, you cannot single out the one who did the scratch. Everyone is still part of the same systematic and structural discrimination, this same casteist "mentality". According to Kardam, this discrimination is, in one sense, more dangerous than the rural one, since its source is so much more difficult to identify. While "the enemy" in the village is at least easily recognisable, it is not so in the city.\textsuperscript{103} Although there is the possibility in the city to report caste-discrimination to the authorities (as we will see in the following short story), the discrimination present in "Kharomc" is of such kind that such action is not possible. It is like Kardam wants to say: "how can you prosecute a mentality?"

Among the reactions at the office Ramglāl also receives a lot of solidarity (\textit{hamdardī}) or sympathetic behaviour (\textit{sahānubhūtīpūrn vyavahār}). At the end of the office day, he stands at the parking lot for a long time staring at the scratch with sorrowful eyes. It then says that he "experienced" (\textit{anubhav kīyā}) the pain of the scratch of the car in his heart. At the same time, some office employees passing by gave him "sympathetic looks" (\textit{sahānubhūtīpūrn dhvṛṇā) and some "cunning looks". Interestingly, it seems like both these kinds of looks "[were] teasing the pain of the scratch" (29).\textsuperscript{104} This juxtaposition of "experience" (\textit{anubhav}) and "sympathy" (\textit{sahānubhūti}) relates to the bigger discussion within Dalit literature about these two terms, which states that non-Dalits have not experienced what Dalits experience but when they write, speak or remark on Dalit-issues they do so from a position of sympathy (see above, 2.1.4). It is a luxury to be able from a privileged position to sympathise with the down-trodden, it does not demand any sacrifice. Although this sympathy is in one sense better than scorn and contempt, it does not help Dalits, but rather victimises them. So is also the case with Ramglāl. Somehow, even sympathy scratches the wound. What he needs is not sympathy but justice, someone who speaks up against this evil system and mentality. But no one does. The sympathy and the scorn Ramglāl meet are, in one sense, two sides of the same coin, where one accuses and the other victimises the Dalit. Both are hiding in the crowd of colleagues. Both accept the status-quo of casteism.

The hindrance for Ramglāl’s acceptance was never that he did not have a car, but that he is a Dalit. By giving into the superficial solution of buying a car—i.e., by seeking emancipation on the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} \textit{unke sahānubhūtīpūrn vyavahār ko dekkhkar koī nahīm kah saktā thā kī ye ve hī log the, jo dalit hone ke kāraṇ Ramglāl ko hikārat ki nazār se dekhī the, uske pratī dīves bhāv rakhtī the, aur innmen se hī kisī ek vyaktī ne kār men kharomc ke jāri apne man ke jātī dyes aur ghrīnā kā jahūr ugli thā.}
\item \textsuperscript{103} Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 89, l. 24 – p. 90, l. 2.
\item \textsuperscript{104} \textit{vah kharomc ke ārd ko sahalā rahā thā.}
\end{itemize}
upper-castes’ terms, Raṅglāl only becomes more vulnerable to their discrimination. Kardam here gives an implied message to his reader, that this is not a path guided by Dalit cetnā.

Without depicting any change taking place in this story, Kardam still, through the story, points to the fact, that although a Dalit can reach high positions in the society and the cooperate world, there is still a deeper mentality that needs to change, and that needs to be challenged by Dalits through resistance. This underlying mentality—the subtle discrimination, aversion and hatred hidden behind sympathetic gestures—is a deeper problem to solve than the open discrimination, just like the scratch on the heart goes deeper and hurts more serious than the scratch on the car.

I will conclude this analysis with concluding remarks on this story. Firstly, a generous interpretation of the story is that Kardam here provides a double message; on the one hand, he criticises a casteist society, structured to prevent Dalits from moving upwards; on the other hand, he admonishes Dalits not to yield to the system but to show resistance. Secondly, the story could also, on a more critical reading, be interpreted in the way that Kardam—as he himself belongs to the same gentry as Raṅglāl—does not question the mentality of thinking in terms of status. The narrative somehow leaves no alternative for the middle-class Dalit but to adapt, even though this adaption means constant struggling and leaves “a scratch” in him. Thirdly, from a post-colonial perspective, Raṅglāl’s behaviour can even be viewed as an attempt of mimicry. This is the term that Homi K. Bhabha has used to describe the subaltern’s imitation of the colonial authorities’ behaviour, language and customs, through which the former can begin to re-take power of the latter since the colonial master feels ambivalence when he sees his own image in the colonial subject.105

On the basis of this theory, it could be argued that by this conduct, in which the Dalits are mainstreaming their lifestyle to the social convention, could eventually break the stereotyped image these upper-castes entertain about them. However, Paul Tenngart, when he discusses Frantz Fanon’s work Black Skin, White Masks (1952)—which Bhabha’s theory on mimicry builds on, points out, that the black colonised in relation to colonialist white, even though he tries hard, can never completely succeed in hiding his black skin: “According to the racist colonial discourse you are essentially black: the blackness defines you as a person.”106 Moreover, even in the postcolonial era, when the colonial subject has received “the same democratic rights” as the former coloniser, the same mindset of Orientalism—the white’s expectation for the black to adapt—is still prevalent.107

The same dynamics are present in this story: through reservations and constitutional rights, the Dalits of India

105 Tenngart 2008: 139-141
107 Tenngart 2008: 139
have been able to join the urban middle class, but the mentality of the upper-caste, as Kardam clearly wants to portray, has not changed.

I find it difficult to interpret Kardam’s clear emphasis on resistance in the direction that imitation or adaption should be understood as a form of resistance. I would argue, that Kardam is more following Fanon’s forecast about the impossibility or futility for the Black, or in this case, the Dalit, to fully be able to adapt, not as long casteist mentalities are prevailing. Perhaps we should understand the underlying message of this story like this: that the middle-class Dalits are facing a difficult issue in the urban setting, the tension or mediation between resisting and adapting, which is impossible to avoid since just being a middle-class urban Dalit already implies adaption. This tension can clearly be seen in the protagonist of this story.

3.1.4 Housing Society

Summary

“Housing Society” shares the same basic narrative as “Kharoṃc”. Vijay Mahato, the main character, is a government employee. One morning, he sees an ad in the newspaper for a housing society, in which people are invited to become members in the society and book a flat in their newly-built complex. Then the story goes directly into a quite long excursion, where the reader is informed that although Vijay is fifty years old and only has 10 years left to retirement from his government job, he has not yet built his own house. This has, in fact, been a long-debated issue in his family. His wife has tried to persuade him to buy a house, and so has also a colleague at work, but Vijay has pointed to the financial burden it would mean for the family. So, his wife becomes very happy when he decides to call the number given in the ad.

When he calls, however, the officer on the other end becomes hesitant when he hears of Vijay’s surname, Mahato. He says he will call back later since he needs to check up something on the matter at the office. But the hours run away and the officer does not call back. Since there were only a few apartments left, Vijay and his wife become restless and perplexed. Finally, Vijay decides to go to the office himself. When he there meets Es. Ke. Šarmā, the same person he spoke to on the phone, the man first tries to explain that it has become difficult to get a membership. When Vijay presses the matter, however, it becomes clear that it is his caste that is the actual issue. Not for the housing society itself, as Šarmā explains, but because of other people who live in the house or for potential new residents. What would they think? Vijay then argues that this should not be going on in a governmental housing society. But Mr Šarmā does not give in and does neither conceal the reason for declining Vijay’s request. Vijay becomes angry over this injustice, and when he later tells his wife, he declares to her that he will send an application anyway to the society by post, courier
and e-mail. If they still will not accept, then he will take legal action and take the matter to court. This time he will not be silent.

**Analysis**

“Housing Society” shares the middle-class Dalit environment with “Kharomč”, as well as the main narrative elements. In both stories there has been, since quite some time, a demand from the family/the wife, as well as pressure from colleagues at the office, to buy a car/a house; and in both stories the protagonist, when he finally tries to fulfil these expectations, is hindered by, or meets resistance based on caste-discrimination. But while sharing this basic narrative, the two stories are almost opposite stories or perhaps mirror-stories, as the two main characters are each other’s opposites. For while Vijay in “Housing Society” wants to buy a house but is finally hindered, Raṅglāl in “Kharomč” originally does not want to buy a car but gives in to the pressure to do so from colleagues and family.

In other words, while Vijay is active, takes action, and finally goes to the office himself when the housing society does not call back, Raṅglāl is passive, and actually gives in to the convention of status symbols in society, that an officer should have a car. Their reactions are also different. While Raṅglāl ends up just being wounded by the scratch, Vijay’s determination is only strengthened by the rejection and he decides to fight, if needed, by taking the matter to court. His attitude is also suggested in that his name, Vijay, means “victory” or “triumph”.

Writing about the Dalit Hindi autobiographic field, Sara Beth argues that these autobiographers “mobilise personal pain as a means of asserting a new powerful social critique”. Moreover, they foreground “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” (emphasis added). These literary tropes can also be identified in Kardam’s stories. His characters are clearly meant to be representative of “the entire Dalit community,”—both protagonists in these stories are forged in a way that the Dalit reader can recognise himself in them. But Raṅglāl has not achieved such a journey which Brueck describes, he is stuck in “passive victimhood”. Vijay, on the other hand, clearly arrives. He is an expression of “assertive political consciousness.” He knows his rights and is ready to fight for them. In contrast to Raṅglāl, but similar to Rāmvīr (“Talāś”) and Campā (“Sāṅg”), he becomes a role model of Dalit cētnā.

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108 Beth 2014: 178
109 Beth 2014: 178
110 See Brueck, for the laid down value often communicated in Dalit literature, that Dalits should “reject victimisation, even when circumstances make the goal of freedom from oppression seem impossible” (2014: 96).
3.2 Ajay Navaria

3.2.1 Cīkh

**Summary**

In the short story “Cīkh” (“Scream”) the protagonist is a young Dalit boy who grows up in a village in the south-eastern corner of Maharashtra, where it borders—or then borded—Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. His mother passed away long ago, and he hardly remembers her face. His father does some casual jobs and also works in the fields for the village chief Bājirāv Paṭel. The boy himself is one of the few children in the village who goes to school. One day, on the way home on the deserted road from school, he gets stopped by Paṭel’s son Vināyak and his companions—some other village kids—who begin to bully him, snatch his school-bag and tore his pants. The boy gets dashed to the ground, beaten by these village boys and even raped by Vināyak, all to the sound of the beating drums from an ongoing ceremony in the village. He screams but the scream gets suffocated by the jungle. After this traumatic incident, the boy only wants to escape the village, and after persistently nagging the Father in the village convent school on this matter, he is sent to a boarding school in Nagpur. His greatest goal, constantly before his eyes, is to get educated, and he continues his post-graduate education in Mumbai. The big city, however, in the beginning promising with its free and anonymous atmosphere, proves to fail the young man’s dreams. He moves in to live with three Brahmin girls who introduce him to a work at a massage parlour. The desire to earn more money, and in that way revenge Vināyak, drives him into prostitution. He meets Ms Velā Deśmukh, a middle age, upper class, manipulative lady, married to a much older, disabled man. She becomes his standing customer until he even moves into her place and stays there permanently. Through this steady income, he can continue his education but the path he now has entered does not seem to have any return. On a party held by Ms Deśmukh, he meets Šucitā, a young woman, unhappily married to the police-officer Varuṇ. The two of them enter into a romance, to Velā’s resentment and envy. This relationship with Šucitā leads to a disaster since Šucitā’s jealous husband follows them up. In the end scene of the short story, the boy is shot by an unknown hand in a hotel room, where he and Šucitā have spent the night. The novel concludes with a broken inner monologue where he asks the questions: “But our people,[…] where shall we go? what shall we do?…” (88).111

111 hamāre log […] ham kahāṃ āten? kyā karen?
Analysis

“Cīkh” (“Scream”) is a dark story. Just like its name indicates, it is a story where a ‘scream’ is hovering just beneath the surface throughout the narrative. It is a suffocated scream, just like the scream of the woman in the village when she is raped by the village priest (and village chief) Paṭel. No one hears except the little boy, the story’s protagonist, who he himself a little later becomes the victim of the same abuse by Paṭel’s son, Vināyak. Also the boy’s scream “is suffocated” by the jungle and by the drums from the village. Or, just like the scream of the three Brahmin girls he later shares flat with in Mumbai—the protagonist self describes, that “[i]t was just like someone who tries to scream while she is being strangled” (76). It is only let out in one of the girl’s, Revatī’s, nightly nightmarish shrieks— “like an animal being slaughtered”—ventilating her trauma from being raped as a young teen by her relative. Navaria textures his narrative with this mood of anguish, gloom and pain: a suffocated scream.

Trauma and Revenge

In comparison to the other stories of Navaria analysed in this essay, in which there often takes place some inner change in the main character, the lack of such change in this story is striking. This, I would argue, could be explained by unpacking two overarching themes in the story: trauma and revenge.

Trauma

The theme of trauma circumvents the narrative of this short story. The whole narrative is determined by the great childhood-trauma the boy experiences, the rape-incident in the forest. After this incident, there is really no return.

“Cīkh” strongly interrupts the Ambedkarite Dalit narrative, in which the Dalit can reach emancipation by moving to the city—away from the cast-oppression of the village—and by obtaining an education, financial improvement and Dalit consciousness. This whole picture Navaria complicates in “Cīkh”. Early on, in childhood, the boy is impressed by the father of the convent, of his high value of education—values, he points out, he would later find in Ambedkar’s writings. He evidences his commitment to these values by making education his highest goal. He later states: “[Education] was my purpose, my goal, it was like the breath in my life, for which I was enduring everything…” (85-86). But the journey, or ‘flight,’ to the city, education, money—

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112 This is Brueck’s translation (2013b: 169).
113 See Gajarawala 2013: 97
114 … parhāi […] jo merā maksad thā, jo merī māmzil thī, jo merī zinda gī men sāms kī tarah thū, jiske lie maiṣme sab kuch sahā thā…
although promising—do not help the boy but only deepen his inner trauma, which in the end speaks stronger than any Dalit consciousness.

Many of both Navaria’s and Kardam’s stories address the more discrete forms of casteism which the modern middle-class Dalit faces in the city. In “Cīkh” this is taken to another level, even rhetorically exaggerated to drive home the point: no matter the level of education, financial improvement or Dalit consciousness, there is often an un-dealt trauma underneath the surface, which for the protagonist in this story, again and again, interrupts his attempts to build a new life. In the interview Navaria says about “Cīkh”:

The point is not that the protagonist has been raped. The point is that the whole Dalit community has suffered rape—it is a metaphor actually—and for this reason, their whole lives are disturbed. The Dalits can never enjoy a normal life, as the upper-castes can do. So this is actually a metaphor for the whole society.115

In the narrative of “Cīkh,” this collective connotation to the trauma is suggested by the drums from the village that silence his scream during the abuse in the forest. The sound of the drums is an indication of Dalit presence since drum players are normally Dalits, which is also the case here. The boy—from whose 1st person perspective the story is told—as he relates the jungle incident, comments: “Over there, our people were playing the drums” (72).116 The Dalits are many times forced to do so, with no choice. Thus, the boy’s abuse takes place to the very sound of his people’s oppression, all of them helpless before the casteism in the village.

In the theory of trauma, it has been shown that trauma is connected to repetition, as the victim uncontrollably is drawn back to the point of trauma, for the incident to be repeated, through which the trauma is processed by reliving the event once again.117 In ”Cīkh” this pattern is visible when the boy visits his first customer as a prostitute. The boy is only there to do massage but the customer, a male feminine dance teacher, offers him a great deal of money—an amount he only had seen in movies. So he concurs. Throughout the act, the boy mentally re-lives the incident in the forest, as he, in his mind, runs through the jungle at the sound of the beating drums. Throughout the story, these jungle drums are hunting him as he tries to escape the trauma. But the effect is the opposite, he ends up going deeper into it.

115 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 96, ll. 5-8.
116 udhar hamāre log dhapli bajā rahe the.
117 Mishra 2007: 106-132
Revenge

Closely connected to the motive of trauma is the motive of revenge, which just like the former is a major theme throughout the story. The story opens with the Father’s (of the church) cautious remark about revenge: “Sin [gunāh] is very seductive, and revenge [badlā] very disguising (a dissembler) [bahurūpiyā] [sic]” (70). The placement of these words, the same phrasing in the very beginning and at the very end of the story, makes them clearly function as an inclusio, and suggests that revenge, as a motive, is crucial to understand the deeper meaning of the narrative. Indeed, the revenge of his childhood antagonist Vināyak, Paţel’s son, becomes the dominating purpose for the boy. It soon also overtakes his great and foremost life-purpose of studying: “I wanted to see Vināyak completely crushed. […] God knows when studies become secondary” (79). It is an interesting specific term, bahurūpiyā (in the first quote above) which Navaria uses to describe revenge. Although it is used here as an adjective, it is technically a noun and means “actor, mimic, dissembler” or literally, “someone who has many forms” (bahu- “many; multi-”; rūpī “having the form, appearance […]”). This is similar to the term Laura Brueck uses in her translation: “revenge [is] a trickster”. A trickster is “a person who cheats or deceives people”. This is also exactly the psychological function the desire for revenge has in the boy’s life. It deceives him. It dulls his consciousness, disguises his true life values and miss-directs his anger.

In the beginning of the story, following the introducing cautious remarks, there is a scene where the boy, just in the culmination of a sex-act with Velā, wants to harm her and kick her hard. Navaria comments that “the sin” (gunāh) in the father’s remark, is the boy’s ventilation of his anger on all women who have done him no harm.

The sin has the effect that he revenges all women, who have not done him any wrong. He punishes them for the fault of others. Therefore, in the first scene, he kicks the woman, because he has a hatred on the inside, an aggression on the inside.

The hatred or aggression that comes from the trauma expresses itself in a desire and attempt for revenge. But the longing for revenge, in fact, hinders true change and development in the boy’s life.

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119 gunāh bahut lubhāvā hotā hai. aur badlā bahut bahurūpiyā [sic].
120 maiṁ Vināyak ko bilkul hārā huā dekhā cāhta thā. jānne kab parhāī dviṭīyak ho gaī thī.
121 McGregor 1993: 716
122 McGregor 716, 868-9
123 Brueck 2013, 156
125 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 96, ll. 13-16. I do not, however, agree with Navaria here. The women, as the boy’s customers, morally and physically exploit his body.
Trauma and Revenge mirrored in other characters

Throughout the story, there is an interesting mirroring of the boy’s life and inner process in other characters of the story. The tall, incredibly fair Brahmin high-caste girls, which the boy moves in to stay with in Mumbai, seem outwardly to be very different from this Dalit boy, on the surface being on different sides of the caste-divide. The boy perceives them as from afar, as from a different world. But underneath, their worlds meet, as they share the same pain. The boy also follows them in their solution: prostitution, evidenced in Revīṭā’s visible mark on her chest from a customer’s cigarette. The boy’s mirroring of himself in these Brahmin girls reflects a shared humanity; this reconciliatory motive is reoccurring in Navaria’s stories. Perhaps we are not that different after all. In the case of the boy and these girls, they all have traumas that seem to speak louder than caste.

Furthermore, the theme of revenge receives an interesting reflection in the incident where Ms Deśmukh uses the boy to revenge her husband. She grabs his penis—“like a lifted spear before one throws it” (79)—right in front of Mr Deśmukh. She then throws abuses on the completely defenceless impaired man, like a conniver before its prey. Before the boy leaves that day, he receives more wages than usual, since, Ms Deśmukh states, “you were sharing in my revenge” (80). But during the incident, the pitiable Mr Deśmukh meets the boy’s eyes, and there is not anger or hatred in the old man’s eyes, but affinity. I would argue that the boy’s own image is reflected in both these two characters, the revengeful, Ms Deśmukh and the pitiable, Mr Deśmukh. There is an affinity with both and he is torn between these two images, especially in his relation to Vināyak. On the one hand, in his memory of the trauma, when he was completely defenceless before him as child; on the other hand, in reverse, in his deep longing for revenge, to completely crush Vināyak. Neither of them is a good image. So where shall he go? Or what shall he do? He receives his revenge in the end. Paṭel’s son is eventually killed by the boy’s people and his body is found in the forest—information which tellingly enough the reader receives in the same scene the main character is shot. But what have any of them won? And what use did he himself had of his revenge?

On a further note, it is interesting that the perpetrator in the story is always the Brahmin male (Mr Deśmukh [also a Brahmin name], Paṭel, Vināyak, Revīṭā’s relative). The boy thus shares the suffering with all these different females who are all victims of Brahmin male violence. The story is, however, continuously from the boy’s perspective, from the Dalit perspective; the female perspective remains in the background and rather functions as a mirror to the boy’s experience.

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126 See interview, Navaria 2019, p. 92, ll. 4-10.
127 ...jaise bhālā utāte hain, phemāne se pahle.
128 tum mere pratishodh mem sahayogi bane īṣīre.
The story does, however, open up for a path to resolution of the boy’s plight. A path he himself sees to some degree but hesitates before. When he is back in the village over the Christmas-break—just when his financial break has become a reality—his father takes him up to the temple at the mountain where a Hindu saint, Bābā dwells. In the scene and conversation that follows with Bābā one of the most interesting lines in the story is expressed, as Bābā tells the boy: “bhūkh meṁ jīv ko zahr nahīṁ khānā cāhīe” — “When hungry, a being shouldn’t eat poison” (78). In the interview, Navaria unpacks this sentence, which he identifies as “a very good line to understand the story.”

Navaria explains that a human’s hunger should not lead to eating without discerning whether the food is poison or not. The revengefulness of the boy, his aim for revenge, is “like he is eating poison” Navaria explains. At the meeting on the mountaintop, as Bābā is trying to catch a goat that is running away, he calls out to the goat “laut ā beta” – “come back, son”, but his eyes are fixed on the boy (78). Before he leaves, he asks the boy to come back to him the next day, but although the boy clearly realises that it was not to the goat but to him that Bābā spoke—and that this was the voice of goodness speaking to him—he does not dare to return to Bābā the next day. “Sometimes even love is frightening”, the boy subsequently thinks as he reflects on the situation (78)

Navaria explains that the boy fears Bābā because Bābā sees and knows everything, but at the same time loves him. Navaria further argues that Bābā represents “humanity” and that the exhortation “laut ā betā” – “come back, son”, means that he should “come back to his culture, in which there is love for everyone, come back to the tradition where there is no hatred for anyone.”

Navaria continues:

[…] In the end he realises this, when he is on his deathbed when he has been shot, that if he doesn’t change, he cannot love Śucitā. […] If money was everything, Velā is giving him that […] He doesn’t need money. He wants love.

Thus, the deep trauma the boy has experienced and his deep commitment to revenge blocks him from all inner change or transformation and holds him back from the thing he really wants, love. Although the call from Bābā to return comes just in the beginning of his career as a prostitute, the fear of love or “humanity” the trauma has caused in him, prevents him to heed the call. Instead, he flees and runs like a “violent animal” and only when he has reached the absolute bottom of the crisis there can be some realisation or change. The meeting with Bābā and the mirroring of his own trauma in the Brahmin girls call him to sympathy and love; the mirroring of revenge in Ms

130 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 96, ll. 18-26, quote: ll. 21-22.
131 kabhi-kabhi prem bhī dārātā hai.
132 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 97, ll. 1-4.
133 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 96, ll. 9-11.
Deśmukh, warns him to continue his current path. But Navaria’s message is here that the trauma of the Dalits, their experience of casteism, is sometimes so deep, that no matter the opportunities given it keeps being a hindrance for them to find their place in society, as the faith in humanity is difficult to restore. I believe this is an interesting topic that needs more study and attention within the Dalit literary field and within the Dalit community in general.

The narrative of “Cīkh” can also be read as a search for identity, for a space, a home in this world. The boy’s childhood-trauma finalises that the village would ever inhabit such a place for him. He starts running. When the father wants him to convert to Christianity, as others had done to escape the stigma of their caste, he declines: “It is better to remain unnamed ground [unclaimed terrain] than to be recognised by the name of some foreigner” (74). This is especially interesting since we never get to know the boy’s real name, only that he takes a new given name in Mumbai, “Tyson,” because of his profession. The city seems like a world of freedom to him. He feels that he can breathe openly and “how new fresh air fills his lungs” (75). Not the least, the city is a space of completely new and fascinating unconventional forms of social interactions, particularly concerning gender and inter-caste relationships. “Here, no one asks someone else for his caste” (75) the boy thinks. Here, he can be whoever he wants to be—he is attracted to this space of fluid identity. He is thinking of taking on another surname as well, but he never does, instead, he gets mentally prepared to say his caste to the Brahmin girls, but they never ask. He stays in his anonymity, in the unnamed terrain. In light of this perspective Bābā’s call, “come back son,” could be viewed as a call to come back to his caste, his Dalit identity. The boy does not find his freedom in the “unclaimed terrain,” neither will the Dalit reader do—we could perhaps hear the authorial message. Hence, Navaria gives traces of Dalit cetnā also in this story, but the languishing spark of the boy’s cetnā is not strong enough before the coldness of his trauma. It gets suffocated, just like his scream.

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134 Laura Brueck uses this term, “unclaimed terrain” which also is the name she has given her whole collection of Navaria’s short stories (Brueck 2013b).

135 किसी परेदे के नाम से पहचाने जाने से बहुत बेहामी बांधने बांधनी रहनी थी।

136 अपने पेघण के नाम नाइ ताजी भारी थी।
3.2.2 Paṭkathā

Summary

The short story “Paṭkathā” (“Screenplay”) is, as its name suggests, structured like a screenplay with three very distinct acts, spanning over three generations. It is a family story where every act represents one generation: grandfather, father and son.

The first act’s setting is in a Rajasthani village where Kalyārām lives with his wife Suganī in a small hut, just at the time of India’s independence 1947. Kalyārām is illiterate and poor. He is from the Khaṭīk–caste and works with buying and selling skin. However, these conditions do not hinder him to express his artistic nature. Every night he looks at the starlit sky and tells beautiful poetry to his wife whom he—when they are alone—calls nothing but Candā (“moon”). On a trip to Jaipur, Kalyārām buys a lägrī (‘a colourful sari’) to Suganī which she wears publicly on the tīj-festival.137 This, however, awakes the rage of he sarpmc138, Harnām Tamvar, who supported by the village priest, Trilokināth, lets Kalyārām suffer a severe beating by one of his subordinates. But Suganī does not stop wearing her lägrī at tīj, and the next year all the Khaṭīk women join her and wear their lägrī as well. Seven months after the beating takes place, their son Mohanārām is born.

In the next act, the time has moved forward to 1971, indicated by the breaking out of the war between India and Pakistan, the news of which Mohanārām, by now a grown-up man, angrily listens to on the radio. By this time his father Kalyārām has passed away since 12–13 years and Mohanārām honours his memory by bowing before his framed picture in the hallway every day. Mohanārām still lives in the village but now in a newly built house together with his mother, his wife Misrī and their small children: the son Bhāskar and the daughter Māyā. Mohanārām works as a school teacher in the city and is addressed māṭsāb (“Mr. teacher”) in the village. One day, at school, a new student, a Brahmin boy, begins to stop addressing Mohanārām with this honorific title and he incites the other children to do the same. At home, Mohanārām breaks down crying in his wife’s lap and decides to quit the job. After this incident, the new sarpmc, Īsurī Siṃh Jāṭ, accuses Mohanārām of inciting the village against him, since he has suggested the Camārs to vote for their own candidate instead of voting for Īsurī Siṃh. The discussion ends with Īsurī Siṃh knocking Mohanārām down to the ground, but Mohanārām stands up and gives Īsurī Siṃh some blows in the face, whereupon the village men severely beats Mohanārām unconscious. Mohanārām recovers, and a few days later he moves to the city.

137 tīj – “a festival held on the third day of a lunar fortnight, esp. in the month of Sāvan.” (McGregor 1993: 455).

In the third and last act, the time has moved forward to the early 1990s, and the Ayodhya incident in December 1992 is now the national background event which indicates the time. Bhāskar lives in the city and has just graduated from college with top grades. At his first employment at an office, he is doing a great job and is highly praised by his chief. But when his caste-identity is revealed, his boss turns against him and dismisses him from the job. The remainder of the story takes place at Bhāskar’s apartment, where his close (Brahmin and meat-eating) friend Praṇav comes to share his company. They talk about the job they both together have applied for at a company in California. After Praṇav has left, Bhāskar’s girlfriend Sujātā arrives. While they speak, Bhāskar opens the two-day-old, untouched post and one letter informs that he has been accepted to the job in California. In the very emotional and tear-filled conversation that follows, Sujātā even expresses that she will take her life if he leaves. They speak at length about death and life, society and their struggle, and Sujātā promises to never do such a thing. In the morning, after a sleepless night, Bhāskar decides that he will not leave his country but stay and fight.

Analysis

“Paṭkathā” covers three generations and a time-span from time of independence up to the 1990s. Toral Jatin Gajarawala, as she analyses “Paṭkathā” in her doctoral dissertation, Untouchable Fictions: Literary Realism and the Crisis of Caste, points out, that this is different from the ordinary Dalit short story, which only offers a snapshot of a Dalit’s life. With such a long time-frame in this story, it becomes particularly interesting to explore the concept of change. Navaria is dubious in this matter. In one sense no change has taken place. In the three acts of the story, all the three generations share the same caste-struggle. There is, of course, a difference in the kind of casteism they experience—the psychical violence in the village is substituted with social discrimination in the city. There is, moreover, a difference between the generations in the possibilities open for them in terms of choice. The poor, illiterate, Kalyārām has no choice, no possibilities to remove himself and his family from the caste-oppression. His and his wife’s only option is to stay. His son, Mohanārām has at least the opportunity to leave the physical abuse in the village, an opportunity he also takes advantage of, as he moves with his family to the city. But he has already experienced the caste-related dishonour at the school, located in the city, and the city he cannot escape even if he resigns from that job. Thus, the casteism is already there in the city waiting for him. This anticipates the struggle his son Bhāskar faces in the next generation. Bhāskar, however, has the opportunity to leave the city and India altogether, but he decides to stay.

The focus of the story is in the present, in the third part, which also makes up half the story in terms of content, and Bhāskar appears as the story’s real protagonist. Bhāskar’s decision to stay is

139 Gajarawala 2013: 162, see pp. 159-166 for Gajarawala’s analysis of “Paṭkathā”.
the defining moment of the story—the moment of realisation of Dalit cētnī. Although Bhāskar’s father and grandfather show some resistance, the narrative does not relate such a moment of realisation in their lives. It is, however, clear in the narrative, that this consciousness is something which Bhāskar has inherited from his father. In an earlier conversation with Sujātā, he tells her how her father used to sing songs to him and tell him about the egalitarian poets in the Indian tradition, such as Raidās and Kabīr. The heritage of resistance is thus shared throughout these three generations.

Consequently, individuality plays an important part, since this consciousness plays out or forms itself differently in each of these three characters. Navaria has portrayed three quite different personalities. Kalyārām is artistic and romantic. Although he is illiterate and poor, he has a great sense for poetry which he not only recites but also explains at length for his wife Suganī. It is also he who buys the sari to his wife even though he must have known what the consequences would have been in the village context.

Bhāskar’s father, Mohanārām, is an introvert teacher, who quickly withdraws to his personal library when he comes home. It is clear that the protection of his private sphere is very important to him. Many times it is related how he clearly spots or understands what is going on in terms of caste-issues in the village, but Mohanārām is not the person who speaks up. A reoccurring phrase in this second part of the story is: “but he just remained quiet [par ve cup hī rahte the]” (129-130). Thus Mohanārām is more of a theorist than an activist. He rather seems to seek the quickest way out of the struggle. When he encounters discrimination at work, he wants to resign from his job; when he encounters physical violence in the village, he moves to the city.

Bhāskar is different, he is a visionary. In contrast to his father, he has a greater vision for his community and nation, which expresses itself in an earlier conversation with Sujātā, where Bhāskar recites Kabīr: “O ascetic, my sorrowless land. King-poor–beggar–emperor, I cry to you all. You who desire. To the highest abode. Come my land” (135).

In contrast to his illiterate grandfather, Bhāskar also has the ability to study and to develop his thought in the less restricted and more intellectual environment in the city and at the university. It is within these “Ambedkarite” conditions his consciousness can take form.

The imagery of light is paramount throughout this story. The first act narrates how Kalyārām has the habit of going up every night to watch the stars and recites a poetic phrase, a phrase which he keeps saying to his wife Suganī, in the Rajasthani-language: ibhī rāt chai candā, bhor konī huit – “It is still night my moon, morning has not come yet” (124). He does so even the night after he has been beaten and tells here the same stanza. Then follows a reflection from the narrative voice:

140 avdhū begām des hamārā. rājā-rank-phakīr-bādsā, sabse kahām pukārā. jo tum cāho ṭarampa ko, āvo des hamārā. (avdhū is a variant of avdhūt – “one who has renounced the world, an ascetic, a yogi.” [McGregor 1993: 1])

46 of 97
These words which came out from Kalyārām’s mouth spread like sharp pieces of glass in the whole hut. Four years after their wedding it was like Suganī for the first time understood those words.141 (128)

“It is still night” summaries the first act of the story. But even in the night, stars are lighting up the heavens (as it almost always is in the desert land of Rajasthan) just as Suganī’s lugrī is filled with attached stars, which she keeps wearing every year at the tij-festival—an act of protest all the Khaṭīk—women join in. Suganī is the moon, a reflection of foreshadowing of a greater light or resistance that will come with “the morning.”

In the next generation not much has changed. The setting is the same village. Apart from the fact that both the village head and the village priest have been replaced with as casteist represents, Mohanārām receives almost the same treatment as his father at the village council. There is a difference though, in that Mohanārām does not accept to be pushed to the ground, but hits back and then leaves the village. But this is not the morning his father Kalyārām was looking for. Mohanārām’s part of the story is the intermediate section and functions as the connector between the first and the last part, which is also suggested from the line that introduces the second part: “The intermediate part comes after the first part and before the final part. Without the intermediate part, the final part would not be connected to the first part” (128).142 In other words, Mohanārām occupies the role of an ideological conservator, who receives a vision of resistance from his father and passes it on to his son. Perhaps he did not have the personality to enact his resistance in a more broadly but his role is still paramount. He plants the seed from his father’s tradition in his son and, in addition, his move to the city also sets the right circumstances for the next generation.

The real light of the story comes in its third part. Most tellingly, the name Bhāskar means “shining” or “radiant.” It could also be taken as a noun, with the meaning, “the sun; fire”.143 It is in Bhāskar the narrative’s moment of realisation of Dalit cetnā takes place, when he decides to stay and fight. This imagery of “light” or “the sun” connects Bhāskar realisation back to his grandfather’s vision and his prophetic anticipation for the morning, a connection which is emphasised by the introducing line of this final part: “The last part can also be connected to the first, only that can complete a screenplay. A modern screenplay depends on the first part” (133).144 Here, in the third part, the morning his grandfather Kalyārām were looking for begins to dawn. It is a light that goes

141 Kalyārām ke mumh se nikale ye šabd kānc ke pāine turom kē taraḥ sārī jhonprī mem phail gae the. śādī ke cēr sāl bād Sugani jaise pahalī bār is bāt kē sāhi matlāb samāghī bīhī.

142 madhyāntar pūrvārddh ke bād aur utarārddh se pahle itā hai. madhyāntar ke binā utarārddh pūrvārddh se juṛā nahīṃ hai.

143 McGregor 1993: 767

144 utarārddh pūrvārddh se jūṛ bīhī saktā hai, vahi pāṭkathā kā ant bīhī kar saktā hai. nayī pāṭkathā pūrvārddh par nirbhar kartī hai.
up in Bhāskar’s mind, a realisation of his place in the greater story. His grandmother was the moon, he is the sun. Tellingly, in the narrative, this moment of realisation also comes in the morning after a long sleepless night of mental struggle over the decision. When Bhāskar looks out beyond the curtain, he sees how the dawn has broken and a stream of light reaches through the nīm tree outside and falls upon his balcony. Then he says to himself:

I will not go anywhere…for grandfather and grandmother, for father and mother, and for you all…I have to stay only here and fight, because here are you, you all…how can one even think about fleeing and leave this scorched/burning nation.145 (143)

Bhāskar here acknowledges the connection to earlier generations, that he stands in the tradition of his parents’ and grandparents’ struggle. They have provided him with possibilities they themselves did not have, and this also means a responsibility to stay and fight. Thus, we see here a Dalit consciousness maturing throughout generations and then erupt into bloom in the third generation. It is a combination of personality; time and opportunity; the availability in the city for education and free thought; the maturing of this egalitarian tradition throughout three generations, that all comes together and forms this consciousness in Bhāskar, an Ambedkarite vision.

His Dalit consciousness also expresses itself in that he minds his community and his nation. He says, “for you all [tum sab ke lie]” (143). The Dalit cetnā expands his heart to concern not only his immediate family and convenience but the nation. As the final words of the story go: avdhū begam des hamārā – “O ascetic, my sorrowless land” (143).

145 main kahīm na kīm jāūngā…bābā-amnā ke lie, pitājī aur mām ke lie, aur tum sabke lie…mujhe yāhīm rāhan ā aur laṁā hai kyoṁki yahīm tum ho, tum sab…is jāle hue deś ko chōṛkar bhūṅge ke bāre mēn kaise socā jā saktā hai…
3.2.3 Ek Der Śām

**Summary**

The sun is about to set when Dinkar, the story’s main character, is looking over the fields close to his village of origin, where he this afternoon has returned, escaping the big city. His mind is engaged in deep thoughts. He reflects over the fact that not much has changed after all for his people. He ventures out his frustration over losing his job that day. His mind goes back to the incidents at the office that led up to his expulsion: his boss multiple times accused him heavily of just minor typing errors just to affect his degradation or removal, all due to caste discrimination. He thinks of childhood memories when he did well at a school exam but still, his father faced discrimination and mockery when he would collect the son’s result. The hours pass and Dinkar suddenly remembers that he had appointed to meet his friend Śaśi Śarmā in the city. Śarmā is an upper-caste Brahmin but is a very progressive and open-minded person. This evening, as many times before, he offers great support to his down-cast friend. They buy some booze and go to drink in a dark area of the city where other small groups of people have gathered for the same purpose. The police come and they all have to run. After this, the two friends take an auto-rickshaw to a nice restaurant to eat. But when they are about to enter the place, suddenly Dinkar invites the rickshaw driver to share the meal with them. The driver is a bit uncomfortable but clearly appreciate the gesture. As the driver departs, and Dinkar and his friend stand and talk and joke together, the story ends on a brighter note.

**Analysis**

In “Ek Der Śām”, Navaria uses the inner monologues of the protagonist with great effect. The whole first half of the short story consists of the protagonist’s, Dinkar’s reflection over life, nature and society, his reminiscing of memories from childhood as well as from earlier the same day, when he lost his job. Without this inner monologue, Dinkar would perhaps simply appear as an ordinary middle-class man, who has lost his job and goes out to booze with his friend in order to forget about it. But through this inner monologue, Navaria portrays a reflective, philosophical and even poetic-minded character with a political consciousness.

The story begins with a philosophical reflection about the sunset, how the sun although is going down here and now, from Dinkar’s perspective, it must right now be midday somewhere else in the world, from someone else’s perspective. The word, “perspective [dṛṣṭikona],” is introduced here, which, I would argue, is a defining key-term for this story—a story that to a considerable extent takes place in the mind of the protagonist. As we will see, the term will also be central to its resolution. Dinkar is in search of perspectives, dṛṣṭikona: how shall he understand and interpret these
experiences he is reminiscing? He looks out over the village and concludes that there has been no change:

These are all our people indeed. There is no change at all, we are all the same, the village is the same, the city is the same. [...] There is by no means any change, or what change? only Bābā Ji’s [temple] clock has changed.146 (64)

Dinkar then looks back over his life. He is discouraged. He remembers his childhood and the years in school. He burst out in tears and cries out for his father: "pitāṭi". His father, himself a peon at the university, had a dream that his son should be I.A.S officer147 or “education director”. From his father perspective, he could not imagine a better position than this: “A better position than this was outside his thoughts” (65).148 The dream is somewhat superficial since it basically translates ‘status’. The father probably did not know what an education director does, only that he wanted his son to be in the position of his own superiors, and instead of—like himself—being the one running errands, his son should be the one ringing the bell, for others to do the errands for him. The meaning of the name Dinkar is interesting to note here. It is a metonymy for “sun,” and literally means “day-maker,”149 which stands in contrast to the sunset Dinkar is watching. The father envisioned that his son, Dinkar – the “day maker,” would be able to create a new and better future, a vision even reflected in the name he gave him.

But Dinkar could not even come so far as his father, from his limited horizon, had envisioned for him. As Dinkar looks back, it seems to him like nothing has changed over a generation. He himself has met the same discrimination at his office (losing his job because of some minor errors) as his father met in his school. That was the village, this is the city. But even the city, with all its reservations and promises to Dalits, has it brought any change? Dinkar is despondent. The only beam of light seems to be the thought of his colleague and Brahmin friend, Śaśi Śarmā, who had tapped him on the shoulder that day and said: “One day will be ours, comrade.” Dinkar reminisces how “[t]hese words gave him consolation rather than confidence” (70).150 Śaśi Śarmā, is introduced as left-leaning, progressive and sympathetic character. Although born in a backward village in Bihar, he has come to greatly possess modern democratic values. In his mind Dinkar concludes the thought

146 ye sab hamāre hī log hain, kuch badlā hai kahīm, ham ab bhi vaisē hī haiṁ, gāṅv vaisā hī hai, sāhr vaisā hī hai. [...] kahīm kuch badlā hai, kya badlā hai, ghaṁṭā badlā hai bābāji kā.
147 I.A.S – “Indian Administrative Service”
148 isse barā pad unkū soc se bāhar thā.
149 McGregor 1993: 495
150 ‘ek din hamārā hogā kāmre’ [...] in šabdom menşt bharose se zyādā dilāsā thi.
about his friend: “Śaśi’s behaviour had broken a lot of his misapprehensions.” (70). When Dinkar blamed himself for doing the mistakes that cost him his job, it was Śaśi who insisted that this was not due to some proof-reading mistake, but that it had happened because Dinkar earlier had published a matter on caste-oppression.

It is Dinkar’s sudden thought of Śaśi that breaks off the monologue. They had appointed to meet at seven o’clock in the city. Although he feels dispirited and does not want to go, he nonetheless takes the metro into the city.

Here an interesting reflection on modernity is expressed by the author when Dinkar reflects what modernity and technology have achieved for the village, as the metro has meant much faster communication as well as increased opportunities for work. Already here is somewhat a new perspective. “Nothing has changed” was Dinkar’s perspective some hours earlier, but some things have actually changed. “Is it technology that will achieve our deliverance?” (71), Dinkar asks himself.

There is however an ambivalence over the city in this story. Some things have changed but at the same time some things are still just the same. As Dinkar thinks back on the incident in the afternoon when he got fired, he reminisces how he, just before he was entering the office to his boss, looked around at all the faces occupied in work at their computers and thought: “In square-shaped plastic cabins, the faces where constantly looking into the open computers screens. In these faces, in these eyes, constantly staring, there was violence, misdemeanour, laughter…” (68). While modernity and technology bring a lot of opportunities, will it actually change people’s mindset? Or is it just a deceptive veil disguising very real caste prejudices, just as there were violence and laughter in the eyes which constantly were staring into and hiding behind computer-screens (i.e., technology)?

The vast metropolitan is also starkly contrasted to nature in this story. In the beginning of the story when Dinkar looks out over the fields he also contemplates over nature and its lushness. It is like nature, with its color and tranquility, its stability and balance, the sun’s setting and rising, the coming and going of seasons, in all its natural order shines in on Dinkar’s soul. It stands in sharp contrast to and illuminates the unnaturalness of a casteist society. When asked about the role of nature (prakṛiti), Navaria explains, that if such a change could take place in nature during one single evening, what change could not take place in society?

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151 Śaśi ke vyavahār ne uske kai bhramon ko torā thā.
152 kyā teknolāji hi hamārā uddhār karegī.
153 plastīk ke vargākār kebinom men, kampyūtar khole zvādār cehare usī ki taraph dekh rahe the, in ceharom men ūnki zvādār ānkhoṁ men ūnsā thī, harkat thī, ūnsī thī…
154 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 97, ll. 5-10.
In the city on the other hand, when the two friends, later on, drink together, the space is described as a dark, gloomy area, where people recklessly are littering: Dinkar just throws the liquor bottle into the ditch. This stands in contrast to sunlit, beautiful nature Dinkar contemplated earlier the same evening. Although the expansion of the metro-network makes life easier, it is also part of a development that sooner or later will swallow up that beautiful scenery of nature.

As the two friends later meet in the city, the story’s mood turns from an inner monologue to a dialogue between two friends. Or—since the dialogue is quite sparse during their circuitous in the city—it rather turns from loneliness to company. The presence and words of Dinkar’s friend “give strength to his dejected mind” (71).155

The defining moment of this story comes when Dinkar interrupts Śaśi’s lengthy argument with the rickshaw-driver about the fare, tells him to stop and adds: “… this one should eat with us today” (75).156 Somehow a sudden, unexpected change takes place in Dinkar. He does not find the solution to the big questions he asked in the story’s first half, in the monologue-section—or to the lack of outward change he identified both in the village and the city—but there is a change that takes place inside of him, in his own mind and perspective on a fellow human being. He feels empathy.

It is not the bad Brahmin and the good Dalit in this story. It is two complex human beings that are trying to come to terms with society’s injustices together. It is finally not Dinkar’s long ruminating thought-process that leads him to a new perspective (dṛṣṭikāṇ) —a different way to see things—it is the presence and the words of a friend, a Brahmin friend, significantly enough. The story ends on a positive note, with the hope that values of humanity and dignity will bring change to society, even if they are here only expressed in a kind action to a fellow human being or in the cordiality between friends. It also ends with the hope, that if such a change could take place during one late evening, what change cannot then take place in the coming weeks, months, years or decades? It is further significant that the name Dinkar (“day maker”), suggests that it is the individual that has the active part in the change or even is the source of it, as “the one who makes the day”. The name Dinkar is also interesting in light of his reflections over the sun’s movement. Just because the sun sets here and night is coming—a fitting description of Dinkar’s gloomy perspective at that point—it does not mean that it has to be night everywhere or from all perspectives. “Day maker” means that it is possible to reach a new perspective, where it only seems to be night. And this is the change that takes place in Dinkar. In the end, the change did not come from outside but somehow from within himself, and, perhaps above all, through the support from a Brahmin friend.

155...uske hāre hue man ko tākat de rahe hain.  
156...ye āj hamāre sāth khāna khāegā.
Summary

In the short story, ‘Yes Sir,’ Ajay Navaria switches the roles and perspectives. Here, the Brahmin protagonist, Rāmanārāyaṇ Tivārī works as an office-clerk for his Dalit boss, Narottam Saroj. The narrative comprises a normal work day from Tivārī’s perspective. Here, Navaria in detail portrays Tivārī’s inner life, thoughts and monologues, his conflicting emotions, and even abhorrence towards his working situation. When the story begins, Tivārī is called into the office by Narottam’s screaming voice and an unpleasant shrill goes through his body. Throughout the day he serves Narottam coffee, cleans his utensils and runs errands with files to other parts of the office. He always does so in a very reverential and polite manner, addressing Narottam with a soft and humble voice. Meanwhile, a simultaneous constant inner monologue goes on in Tivārī’s mind, where he shovels abuses over his boss (“scum, lowborn,” etc), curses his work-position and even himself, that he almost compulsory behave so submissively to his boss. He laments the state of the world and the current times when a Brahmin can serve a Dalit.

Later that day he receives a letter of his own promotion from Narottam. Tivārī becomes exceedingly happy, announces the news to everyone in the office and calls everyone he can think of. At this point, he suddenly sees Narottam in a new light and concludes that he is, in fact, a quite splendid character.

In the end of the story, the toilet in Narottam’s office is broken. After Tivārī in vain has been trying to find some Bhangī colleague to fix it, he cheerfully tells Narottam that he himself can do it. The story ends with Tivārī’s statement that “there is no shame in that work,” as he himself fixes the toilet.

Analysis

Tivārī’s character split

This first part of ‘Yes Sir’ is made up of a lengthy dialogue between the peon Tivārī and his boss Narottam. More correctly, their verbal interchange, which is mostly sparse and brief, is sandwiched in between extended inner monologues in Tivārī’s mind, in which he mumbles and curses Narottam. Navaria also inserts descriptions here of how Tivārī mentally reflects over his “precarious” situation or how he fantasies over putting poison in Narottam’s coffee or, at least, spitting in it. But in his outward behaviour towards Narottam, Tivārī shows nothing of this. On the contrary, he is extremely polite and deferential, even submissive.

157 Bhangī – “name of a community of sweepers” (McGregor 1993: 754).
This stark contrast between Tivārī’s inner feelings and his outward behaviour towards Narottam is very clear from the very outset of the story’s introducing scene. As Narottam, with a loud voice, calls Tivārī into the office, Tivārī’s is mumbling and complaining simultaneously as he quickly and most dutifully enters the office, and says: “Yes Sir…” Then, immediately, his inward feeling is described: “…but as he said it, it was as if his tongue got stuck in his mouth” (182). This contrast appears almost as a personality split in Tivārī, who not only curses Narottam but also himself, for his almost involuntary or even compulsive subservience before his boss. When Tivārī finally is allowed to leave the room, with the command to deliver a file without delay to another office, he is himself surprised over how his response to his boss:

‘Yes Sir, no no, I mean, no Sir.’ He became distressed. ‘Please tell me, Sir, have I ever been late in any work?’ Tivārī said this in a flattering voice beyond what was necessary. Tivārī was himself surprised what this was that came from his inside. Who was this speaking from inside? (184)

“Who was this speaking from inside?” Tivārī is stretched to the breaking-point, between his inner and his outbound self, to such an extent that he cannot even comprehend his own behaviour. Moreover, in addition to this psychological split in Tivārī’s character there is also a clear geographical, physical split to his existence: between the city—where he works and is a simple peon bossed around—and the village—where he lives and is a very respected priest or paṇḍit, stopped every ten meters to receive the blessings from his people. The deep delight Tivārī feels in earning this respect in the village is equally matched by the deep frustration he feels at work in the city.

I think it is brilliant, how Navaria here narrates the negotiation that goes on in Tivārī’s mind, in order to hold these two worlds together, or rendered differently, in order to cope with the cognitive dissonance he experiences, as his safe traditional world—where he by birth has privileged position—virtually collapses before modernity. In the village, no one, except his wife, knows of his working situation. Tivārī reasons with himself and lists three reasons why he does not need or does not ought to tell his village people about his work in the city. First, they have no dealings with whatever he is doing in the city. Second, he has himself no right to tell it and so defile the honour of his father, the heavenly Paṃḍit Śivnāraṇya. Third, if the people of the village knew, it would break their “innocent faith [bhale viśvās]” (183).

158 ‘yas sar’ kah to gayā Tivārī, par kahle hue uski jaise jībh chil gaī.

159 ‘yas sar, nahīṃ-nahīṃ matlab no sar.’ vah jhumjhalā gayā. ‘āp batāie sar maiṁ kyā kabhī kāṁ mem deri karī hūṁ.’ Tivārī kā yah zariārat se zyādā khusāmādi svar thā. Tivārī khud bhi havrān huā ki yah uske bhitar se kyā nikal rahā hai? yah kaun uske bhitar se bol rahā hai? vah is nic ke āge kyōṁ ghīghiyā rahā hai?
Narottam

It has been shown how the inner monologue of the protagonist Tivārī, becomes the main tool through which the reader gets acquainted with his characters. But Tivārī’s inner monologue is also the medium through which the reader gets to know the antagonist of the story, Narottam. Navaria thus incorporates “subjectivity” as a very important psychological element in this story. The perspective through which the reader gets to see the world is completely Tivārī’s. Narottam is thus also judged and introduced through these lenses and might, therefore, appear in a quite unfavourable light, since every act made by him, is interpreted through Tivārī’s strongly biased judgement and deeply averse feelings towards him. These dynamics set the stage of the story. Even before the reader “meets” Narottam for the first time, he only hears his voice from inside the office, crying out, “Tivārī, water!” (181) followed by a description of Tivārī’s strongly emotional, anxiety-ridden and distressful reaction, and his mumbling and complaining over his boss.

The judgment of Narrotam is thus highly coloured by Tivārī’s caste-biased, pre-decided prejudices against him. But on a more detailed reading, Narrotam is actually not that bad. He is a bit blunt or disengaged in his behaviour towards Tivārī, but, as Ajay Navaria comments in the interview, this is quite typical in the boss-peon relationship in India. It is rather Tivārī’s strong negative predisposition that makes him reacts so strongly to Narottam’s behaviour. This becomes clear as their dialogue at the office continues, and Narrotam tells Tivārī: “why are you standing there, fill [bhar] this up with water” (182). This is again simply along the ordinary boss-peon manners, but the use of the ṭū-command makes Tivārī react strongly. The narrator’s voice comments: “There was no bitterness in this order, but Tivārī became badly hurt” (182).

Through this focalisation, Navaria blurs the vision of reality in the story, so that Tivārī’s “subjectivity” naturally appears as the objective description of the world. With this narrative tool, Navaria effectively communicates how our behaviour towards and feelings about others are dispositioned by our world-view and that it is our mindset that needs to change. It is his caste-prejudices that diffuse Tivārī’s inner eyes and prevent him from seeing Narottam as a fellow human.

160 Tivārī, pānī dāl!
161 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 95, ll. 17-25.
162 ab vahīṃ kharā rahegā, is mem pānī bhar.
163 In Hindi there are three levels of formality in addressing people with the 2nd person pronoun, ṭū, tum and āp. ṭū implies informality, intimacy or even bluntness; tum is also used in an informal context, especially between friends and āp is the honorific form (McGregor 1993: 87, 459, 461). In connection to these forms are also different forms of imperatives used, in correspondence to each of these forms for ‘you’. For example bol - ‘speak’ (ṭū), bolo (tum) and bolie (āp) – ‘please speak’. See Snell and Weightmann 1989: 4, 53.
164 is hukm men koī talkhī nahīṃ thī par Tivārī burī tarah āhat ho gayā.
being. He is extremely frustrated with his situation, and constantly prays to God for Narottam’s transfer, but what he needs is an inner change. A change that comes in the story’s last part.

**The Change**

The defining moment of the whole story comes when Tivārī goes to Narottam’s office to serve him coffee at noon. Just after Tivārī has been cursing Narottam in his mind with all the curses he knows of, Narottam casually gives him a paper on which, although written in English, Tivārī clearly can read the recommendation of his own promotion, together with a “strong commendation of [his] industriousness and character” (188).165

Tivārī becomes extremely happy and want to shout out loud, but simply showers blessings over his chief that he “may live through successive ages.”166 “Are you [tū] happy?”167 Narottam answers as he turns with his moving chair in Tivārī’s direction. In that moment a defining point of change is evidenced in Tivārī. It says: “Even when he heard tū, Tivārī’s eyes sparkled with gratefulness. For the first time, Narottam’s character appeared before Tivārī’s eyes” (189).168 This is followed by a detailed description of Narottam’s features, “…his dense and dark hair, his big south-coloured eyes…” etc., concluded with the words, “…Narratom seemed to him to have a splendid personality.” (189).169

Here Tivārī’s perspective, or even his inner vision of things, changes. The scene evidences a moment of *hrday parivartan* – “change of heart”170 The detailed description of Narrotam’s features, in fact, resembles the very warm and affectionate description of the features of Tivārī’s son when Tivārī thought of him during the story’s opening dialogue. But that description of his son was then a contrasting positive image he visualised as a reaction to his then almost repulsive feeling for Narottam (see p. 184).

Some of his caste-bias breaks here, which is evidenced a bit later in the story, when Tivārī even defends Narottam before a colleague, or even more in the story’s final scene, when Tivārī happily concurs to clean Narottam’s toilet. This change of perspective is evidenced, not only in his actions but also in his words, as he utters a new judgment on what he up to that point had viewed as

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165 ...*Tivārī kī karmaṭhatā aur svabhāv kī puror praśānsā…*
166 ...āp jug-jug jio sar…
167 *khu hai tū?*
168 *Tivārī kī ānhkhoṅ mem ‘tū’ sunkar bhi kṛtyagatā jhilmilā rahī thi. Tivārī kī ānhkhoṅ mem Narottam kā rāp pahlī bār utārā.*
169 ...ghane kāle bāl, bāry-bāry kajarārī ānhkhoṅ… ek bhavy vyaktītī layā use Narottam kā.
170 *Hrday parivartan* – “change of heart,” is the term Gandhi used to describe the inward change he identified to be central both to personal spirituality and societal change. See below under section 4.2.3.
a task below his dignity: “‘What shame is there in work, Sir?’”(192) Moreover, when Tivārī tells Narrotam that he can do it and adds “why should you make any unnecessary trouble?“(192), the narratorial voice comments: “The words fell out from Tivārī’s mouth. Tivārī was amazed and perplexed who this wretched lowborn was who was crying out from inside” (192). Thus, Navaria here portrays a deeper change that takes place in Tivārī, almost on an unconscious level. Who was this crying out from the inside? The human voice, which began to come forth as soon as the block of caste-prejudice had been removed? As Tivārī’s joyful voice comes from the toilet when it has been fixed, his words conclude the story: “it is coming out Sir, slowly-slowly.” Perhaps we shall read some significance in these words, that old casteist ideas, which have blocked the Indian society for so long, are slowly being flushed out.

171 kāṃ men kyā śarm sar.
172 āp nāhak pareśān homge
173 Tivārī ke munī se gir pare alpahā. Tivārī hairān-pareśān ki kambakāt kaun hai yeh nīc, jo bhītar se cillā paṭā hai.
174 utar rahā hai sar dhīre-dhīre.
4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

4.1 Narrative and Character Analysis

4.1.1 Narrative Patterns and Character Portrayals

In all of Kardam’s four short stories analysed in this thesis, a narrative pattern can be discerned in which four stages or events are present. I call them four “C:s”: Condition, Complication, Confrontation and Conclusion. The first stage consists of an everyday issue, a condition, which the protagonist faces: the search for a house (“Talāś”), the village theatre (“Sāṃg”), transportation to work (“Kharomc”) and membership in a housing society (“Housing Society”). In the second stage, the matter is problematised or the protagonist encounters some difficulty. In other words, a complication enters the narrative: Rāmvīr hires Rāmbatī, which frustrates the house owner; Campā contrasts the joy of the sāṃg with the pain of everyday life; Ramglāl overhears the conversation in the corridor; Vijay does not receive any phone call back from the housing society. The real reason of casteism might or might not be evident to the protagonist at this point. In the third stage, there is an open confrontation with the caste-issue: Rāmvīr’s and Guptā’s conversation; Campā’s memories of the atrocity against her husband; the scratch on Ramglāl’s car; the rejection of Vijay’s membership. Forth, and lastly, there is a conclusion or a resolution, which might be of either positive or negative nature: Rāmvīr’s decision to continue his search; Campā’s revenge; “the scratch” on Ramglāl’s heart; Vijay’s resolution to fight.

The pattern described here is suggestive and indicative of Kardam’s understanding of caste-related issues, i.e., that every Dalit’s experience is in one sense all the same or univocal. It can take different shapes and the gravity or magnitude of it can be different, but all Dalits share the same experience. Further, Kardam shows through his portrayal of all these different life situations that no area of society or social life in India is free from casteism. His narrative pattern suggests that these issues operate on a structural level—casteism is a mindset that has permeated every level of society. The way forward for Dalits is to offer resistance, with whatever means they have at their disposal, be that intellectual, juridical or even physical means.

In Navaria’s short stories such clear patterns are difficult to identify. Instead, he—as he expresses in the interview—intentionally crafts his plots and settings to be very different from story to story. Navaria’s stories are more focused on individual development, more room is given to

175 See Limbale 2004: 35
176 Interview, Navaria 2019. See full version online.
individual choices and therefore the plot can often take unexpected turns. Gajarawala points out: “Navariya’s work is unusual in that it locates the question of casual supremacy within individual action.” In Navaria’s writings—in contrast to Kardam’s—casteism is to be found on a personal level, rather than on a structural. This opens up for the possibility that change can take place in the individual, both in Dalits and in Brahmins. Brueck argues that Navaria has “a narrative focus on the Dalit individual rather than on the community” and that his “characters are true, rounded characters, rather than archetypal stand-ins representing an entire community.” These quotes offer a succinct summary of the differences between Navaria’s and Kardam’s characters. While Kardam has to be situated within the paradigm Beth (see above) described as “the singularity of minority representation”—his characters are forged “to be representative[s] of the whole group”—Navaria fits into the opposite side of the spectrum—as he, through his characters, seeks “to encompass a variety of [identities], experiences and characteristics.”

While narrative patterns are difficult to identify in Navaria’s stories, a thematic pattern could clearly be perceived—especially in comparison with Kardam. While Kardam points to the singularity of the Dalit experience, Navaria seeks to understand it from various perspectives. All four of his stories studied in this essay provide such alternative perspectives—perspectives that problematise and often are set over and above the singular lens of Dalit cēmā: trauma in “Cīkh,” individuality in “Paṭkatha,” friendship and reconciliation in “Ek Der Śām” and the perspective of ‘the other’ in “Yes Sir.”

4.1.2 Focalisation

Looking at the issue of ‘focalisation,’ Kardam’s and Navaria’s stories differ quite drastically in terms of their respective narrative techniques. In Kardam’s stories there is always a distance kept to the characters, the narrative voice relates the events they experience somewhat from afar. The reader almost never—if not for brief moments—sees the world through the eyes of the characters and does only to a limited extent get access to their mind and thoughts. The reactions, feelings or inner processes of the characters are rather described from the outside—through external focalisation—than seen or felt from the inside. While the inner monologues are mostly brief, succinct and to the

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177 Gajarawala 2013: 158
178 Brueck 2014: 123
179 Beth 2014: 12
180 ‘Focalisation’ addresses the question from whose perspective the story is told and perceived. I follow Mieke Bal’s reduction of Gerard Genette’s three types of focalisation to only two, i.e.: internal and external focalisation. (See Skalin 2002: 181-6).
point, we get access to the characters’ thoughts and feelings about things rather through lengthy dialogues. For example, the reader is informed about Campā’s feeling towards the sāng only through the conversation with Śīlā.

Navaria, on the other hand, brings his reader close to his characters by his frequent use of inner monologues as a narrative tool. Just as the dialogues advance the plot in Kardam’s “Kharome” and “Housing Society” so the inner monologues carry the whole narratives of Navaria’s “Ek Der Sām” and “Yes Sir”. These dynamics become most intimate in “Cīkh,” where Navaria deploys an internal focalisation and tells the story in the first person, from the boy’s perspective. The reader gets to follow the whole register of his mental inner thought-process; his judgments, perceptions and reflections; his inner feelings, emotions and desires; his attraction to Revitā, revulsion for Velā, and love for Sucītā. Not the least is his strong emotional traumatic reaction after the abuse portrayed with realism and strong emotions. In sum, the focalising lens in Navaria shifts between internal and external perspectives, while in Kardam it is almost exclusively external.

### 4.2 Visions of Change

#### 4.2.1 Political Vision: Resistance and Reconciliation

When asked how change can and may take place in Indian society, both authors answer that they are optimistic. In their respective interviews, Kardam and Navaria both describe their vision of political change in Ambedkarite language. Kardam points to the democratic processes, how Dalits, through the power of voting, can strengthen progressive forces and weaken undemocratic ones. Navaria points to the necessity of changing “the world power structures,” especially in the field of religion and politics. He highlights the importance of unbiased and secular education, but also the importance of family: how the family is the site where people’s minds slowly can change from generation to generation—an idea clearly expressed in his generational short story, “Paṭkathā.” Both authors also emphasise that change is needed both at the personal level and on a greater structural and societal level, although the latter—in line with Ambedkarite ideology—seems to take precedence.

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182 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 89, ll. 14-23.
184 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 89, ll. 14-23; Interview, Navaria 2019: Part II, esp. p. 93, ll. 1-8, 16-22. See also Navaria’s full interview online.
But even though these authors are firmly rooted in the Ambedkarite vision of society, two quite different visions of change emerge from the reading and analyses of their short stories. In these, their shared Ambedkarite vision takes two different directions. These two visions, I will argue, can be summarised with two epithets or paradigms, Resistance and Reconciliation, where Kardam’s short stories illustrate the former and Navaria’s the latter.

Commenting on Kardam’s writings, Simh points out: “Jayprakash Kardam’s stories are not only stories, but rather ideological documents of the Dalit movement.” This ideological focus is evidenced in the way Kardam centers his stories around Dalit cētnā. The defining moments of his narratives are when the Dalit protagonist reaches Dalit cētnā and decides to resist. Kardam’s stories are framed in this context of struggle. The way society can change, as well as the minds of the upper-castes, is through the persistent resistance of Dalits. The resistance of the individual Dalit, as evident in the typical literary Dalit character in Kardam’s stories, sets an example for other Dalits: that it is possible to resist. It also sends a warning to Brahmins and other upper-caste people that Dalit resistance should be expected. Kardam states in the interview, that it communicates to Brahmins that “we also can resist, we also can oppress […] If the Brahmins do not stop their behaviour there might be a revolution.” Kardam, however, still expresses that also non-Dalits are among his target-readers, and “even if there is a change taking place in one single Brahmin mind among a hundred or a thousand, still, a joyful change has taken place.” However, the process of that change is not so much through some consolation, but it is rather based on the re-adjustment of the power balance. The Brahmins will ‘lower their weapons’ only when they realise that the Dalits also are powerful and that Dalit resistance is a real threat to their position in society. This point will be even more clear in the following section (4.2.2).

In comparison, Navaria’s stories are rather dominated by a motive of reconciliation. Even though Navaria clearly portrays casteism, the way he represents society is not in a black and white binary between good and evil. In Navaria’s stories, Brahmins can be the Dalits’ friends (“Paṭkathā”), or sometimes, like the bābā in “Cīkh” or Śaśi in “Ek Der Śām,” they are the only clear light in the Dalit protagonist’s life. A Brahmin can even be the protagonist himself (“Yes Sir”). Navaria’s stories thus reach out for the humanity in the other, just like the boy finds affinity when he meets the eyes of the Brahmin male in “Cīkh.” Navaria’s works suggest that it is possible to find common ground

185 Jayprakāś Kardam kĩ kahāniyāṁ keval kahāniyāṁ kĩ nahin hain, balki dalit āndolan ke voicērik dastāvej bhī hain (Simh 2012a: 159).
since we all are humans. In his introduction to *Paṭkathā aur Anya Kahāniyām*, he suggests that his stories also can be viewed as “dreams [ṣapné]”—dreams of how India could be.\(^{188}\)

However, although Navaria acknowledges the importance of inner change in the interview, he puts more emphasis on the necessity of structural change in society.\(^{189}\) I would, however, suggest that the former is more central in his stories. I will return to this issue below, in section 4.3.3.

### 4.2.2 Violence and Revenge

A topic that cannot be overlooked in Kardam’s short story “Saṃg” is violence. Campā’s revenge is brutal and graphic. But Kardam explains in the interview that her actions should not be viewed or defined as violence, but rather as an act of self-defence. He re-defines “violence” as implying violence done to others for the sake of your own interest: “In my view, a response to violence is not violence.”\(^{190}\) In the light of the fierce oppression many times exerted by these *ṭhakūr*, Kardam designates this kind of violence as “social resistance [*social pratikār*].”\(^{191}\) I ask him whether this approach may be understood by Dalit readers as an instigation to violence? He answers:

> If some Dalits will be inspired by Campā or this story and act like her against some *ṭhakūr*, this is social resistance. If some *Ṭhakūr* enacts violence against them, then they should make retribution to that violence. And if they, in their retribution, even need to lift weapons: let them lift them up.\(^{193}\)

Kardam also explains that sometimes mental violence is worse than physical violence. The authority a village chief—like the *mukhiyā* in “Sāṃg”—holds over the Dalits’ lives as well as the labour he forces them to do are examples of such mental violence. But since Campā has no means to answer such violence intellectually, and since the *ṭhakūr* will not listen to any argument or request anyway, she needs to take up weapons. “So often you are forced to answer mental violence with physical. Campā was forced to [do like this].”\(^{194}\)

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188 Navaria 2006: 5

189 Interview, Navaria 2019. Part II, p. 92, l.12 – p. 94, l. 2. See also full version online.

190 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 90, ll. 7-27, quote l. 8.

191 *Ṭhakūr* is the caste-designation of the village chief, *mukhiyā*.

192 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 90, ll. 14-20, quote, l. 20.


194 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 90, ll. 22-27, quote l. 27.
In comparison with the short story “Talāś”—the plot of which is set in an urban middle-class environment—an interesting picture emerges. There the protagonist Rāmvīr is an intellectual, an activist and an author, well–versed in Ambedkarite ideology. Still, the same language of war or struggle is present. When Rāmvīr, in the end, ponders over how he should react to Guptā’s ultimatum, his inner reasoning is described:

If I obey Gupta’s request and dismiss Rāmbatī from making food, I will have to lay down [my] weapons [hathiyār] before untouchability [chuāchāt] and casteism [jātivād], which are the greatest enemy of society and which I, up to this day, have been continuously opposing.195 (28)

So, Rāmvīr is also opposing casteism, but unlike Campā, he has intellectual resources or weapons at his disposal. The city provides the intellectual environment that makes such an ideological opposition possible. Kardam’s underlying message is clear: there should be resistance on all fronts against casteism, and if the intellectual weapons have no effect, then there are several occasions [kaī bār] when physical weapons need to be taken up. This imagery and language of struggle reoccur as a dominating theme in Kardam’s stories. It is also present in “Kharomc” when Raṅglāl’s struggle against the traffic is described, “as no less than winning a war” (23).196 Kardam positions his Dalit characters in the context of war and gives the message to his Dalit readership that they too should fight. “Kharomc” thus functions as an example of what happens when you lay down your weapons: you will get hurt.

In the narrative of “Sāṃg,” the transformation that takes place in Campā is depicted in a positive language: “the fire in her [turns] into a blaze” and forges her to be the heroine of the story. But is this really a good energy that burns in her heart? Is it a constructive force that would bring a positive change in society? I find it difficult to reconcile Kardam’s clear emphasis on the democratic processes as the means of and the appropriate context for change with this unproblematic approval of violence.

On a comparison with “Sāṃg,” the discussion on the theme of revenge looks very different in Navaria’s “Cīkh,” in which it is deeply problematised and portrayed as something which disguises itself as a just and amendable force but, in reality, only hinders the boy in his life-quest. Thus, in “Cīkh”—in striking contrast to “Sāṃg”—the same “blaze” of revenge burning in the boy’s heart is a destructive force. Just as in “Sāṃg,” the violent antagonist in “Cīkh” is the male Brahmin. But while Kardam redefines “violence” to be “social resistance,” Navaria gives in “Cīkh” the underlying warning to the Dalit not to take on the same image of violence.

195 Guptā ki bāt mānkar Rāmbatī se khānā baneāna band kar denā to chuāchāt aur jātivād ke sāmne hathiyār dāl denā hogā jo samāj kā sahse bārā duśman hai aur jisā virodh meṃ aj tak karta āyā hāṃ.
196 …kisi jang jīte se kam nahiṃ.
This thesis has shown how Kardam often incorporates the typical Dalit literary trope of a specific moment when the protagonist has a realisation of Dalit cetnā. The vision of Navaria’s stories is however quite different. There are moments when Dalit cetnā awakes in the protagonist, as when Bhāskar in “Paṭkathā” determines to resist. But “Paṭkathā” is the only among these four stories of Navaria in which this concept is clear. I argue, that in most of his other stories, Dalit cetnā is present, but not in focus. Gajarawala writes about the lack of this characteristic in Navaria’s work:

[C]haracters in [Navaria’s] work give little indication of caste identity; they almost never experience the moment of caste consciousness or caste realization that is a standard feature of the most well-known and important Hindi Dalit writers, like Omprakash Valmiki and Mohandas Naimishraya.197

This is true for the boy, the protagonist in “Cīkh,” who leaves his Dalit identity back in the village and rather lives with the non-identity of being “unclaimed terrain”. But Brueck points out that Navaria’s “allegiance to the stylistics of Dalit consciousness” is evident in the way he addresses the atrocities against Dalits in the village setting and in the way he contrasts an egalitarian Dalit society with the inhumanity of the Brahmin patriarchy. Both these hallmarks are clearly evident in “Cīkh,” but the protagonist himself, the boy, must be said to be lacking Dalit cetnā, or at least he never reaches it. He is not really assertive in his Dalit identity and whatever effect his reading of Ambedkar had on him, it is overshadowed by his desire for revenge. Moreover, in “Ek Der Śām,” Dinkar’s moment of realisation is not a moment of caste consciousness per se. Although his realisation does reflect the focus on humanity in Ambedkarite thought, it is not Dalit issues or identity that are in focus in the immediate context. The narrative does not move towards Dalit cetnā, it rather moves away from it. Dalit cetnā is pre-supposed. It is something Dinkar already possess, as evidenced in his political activism and his intricate reflections over the Dalit support of the Mandal Commission. The narrative rather moves away from its departure in Dinkar’s philosophical and political reflection over Dalit issues and arrives at a more general humanitarian perspective. This is not to say that the story devalues Dalit consciousness, but Navaria seems to be saying here, that sometimes Dalit consciousness is not enough. Dinkar already has it, but nonetheless, he has lost his job because of his caste, he feels dispirited and is therefore in search of new perspectives on how to come to terms with his situation.

197 Gajarawala 2013: 156
I would argue that the Gandhian concept of *ḥṛday parivartan* (“change of heart”) almost has a more dominant place in Navaria’s stories than the concept of Dalit *cetnā*, at least when it comes to the development of his characters. The idea of having “a pure heart” or self-purification became very important for Gandhi. In his contact with the Christian tradition during his time in London, he found in the New Testament the idea of repentance or what he, translated into the Indian context, referred to as *ḥṛday parivartan* – “change (or transformation) of heart.”\(^{198}\) He furthermore became convinced that the virtue of non-possession which he encountered in *Gītā* pre-supposed the same process, a “complete change of heart.”\(^{199}\) In turn, many Indian progressive writers were inspired by Gandhi’s thought and vision of change, among whom Premchand had the chief place. The Gandhian concept of *ḥṛday parivartan* is very present in Premchand’s prose, in which the characters often go through a metamorphosis. This is not only true for the protagonist, often a peasant or poor, but also, particularly so, for the wicked oppressive antagonist, often a landlord or a village chief.\(^{200}\)

I would argue that this same Gandhian trope, central to Premchand, is apparent in Navaria’s work. In “Ek Der Śām” the change in the protagonist is modest but significant, in “Yes Sir” it is considerable or even paramount. The lack of change in the boy in “Cīkh” becomes an inverted message, that what he needs is not revenge but a change of heart, as Navaria himself comments on the story (see above). Furthermore, notwithstanding these main characters, on a broader level, Navaria’s whole character gallery opens up for the potential of every human being to express sympathy and humanity. As pointed out above, even the Brahmin can be the most benevolent, truthful, or progressive character in Navaria’s stories.

Gandhi heeded to *satyāgraha* (“non-violent resistance”) and saw in this a tool to reach out to and even change the heart of the opponents, in his case, the Brittish rulers. Diana L. Eck writes about Gandhi’s ideas on ‘real conversion’:

> The aim of *satyagraha* is indeed to ‘convert’ the opponent, not to defeat the opponent. In the win-lose ethos of victory and defeat, even the winner is still left with an enemy, albeit a defeated enemy. The purpose of *satyagraha* is to convert the enemy into a friend. In a situation of conflict, active non-violent resistance [sic] is aimed not at bringing the opponent to submission, but awakening in the opponent a glimpse of truth […].\(^{201}\)

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\(^{198}\) Wessler 2017: 1


\(^{200}\) Sharma 2018; Kumar Das 1995: 79; Suu Kyi 1991: 123.

\(^{201}\) Eck 1991: 87
This Gandhian vision is clearly visible in Navaria. First of all, the aim of “awakening in the opponent a glimpse of truth” could even be an emblematic statement for the message contained in his narratives. Second, the futility of a fight that still leaves you with “an enemy, albeit a defeated enemy,” could well serve as a summary for the story “Cīkh.” Third, “[t]o convert the enemy into a friend” would further be an encapsulating line for the vision of reconciliation in Navaria’s work. The change that takes place in his characters does not put them in a position of resistance against other people, but rather brings them closer to these. This is true for both Dalits and Brahmins.

Perhaps, there could even be evidence for a development between Navaria’s two short story collections, Paṭkathā aur Anya Kahāniyāṃ and Yēs Sir. From the perspective of this essay’s selection, the two stories from the first collection both address the journey from village to city. But while the boy in “Cīkh” does not have any use of Dalit cetnā, because of his trauma, Bhāskar in “Paṭkathā” does find a way to cope, to stay in the city, through his realisation of Dalit cetnā. While already “Cīkh” significantly problematises the conventional narrative of the Dalit’s journey towards cetnā, I would argue that Navaria, in “Ek Der Śām” and “Yes Sir,” have proceeded literary even further towards the Gandhian or Premchandian paradigms of hrday parivartan and satyagraha.

4.2.4 The Metropolitan: Possibilities or Pseudomorphosis?

As has been shown in the analysis above, Navaria is very conscious in creating an atmosphere of ambivalence around the middle-class Dalit who at length has emancipated into the urban environment. This is ‘almost’ a caste-free life, but at the same time, caste is somehow still constantly present. Gajarawala identifies an anxiousness in Navaria’s characters’ relationship to “the modern, technological, and urban,”202 which I have argued above is clearly discernible in “Cīkh” and “Ek Der Śām”. Brueck calls the same phenomenon “alienation” which refers to the sense of loss of identity in the Dalits’ transitional experience from village to city.203 In “Cīkh,” there is such a voyage to the city but no real arrival. Even in the city, the sound of the village drums—symbolic of caste-oppression and abuse—follows the boy. This concept of alienation finds a succinct comment in his words: “But our people… where shall we go?”

Gajarawala writes on this topic: “The trope of the abandonment of the village for the city […] is the narrative arc of […] much of Dalit literature.”204 This is in line with Dr Ambedkar’s thought. He envisioned the urban-secular-modern-space, accompanied by possibilities of education

202 Gajarawala 2013: 156
203 Brueck 2014: 122-131
204 Gajarawala 2013: 159
and political resistance, as the path to Dalit emancipation.²⁰⁵ Both Kardam and Navaria complicate this picture and illustrates the difficulties Dalits encounter even in the modern urban setting. This topic relates to their visions of change discussed above. Both authors voice optimism over the change that has taken place in modern India, but their stories seem to pose the question if anything, in reality, has changed at all? Is it not just the same village-caste-oppression in modern garb? Just like the violence and (mean) laughter in the eyes of Dinkar’s colleagues are hiding behind computer screens? Are the purported possibilities of the change modernity offers only a pseudo-morphosis – ‘a false image of transformation’?

This concept of pseudo-morphosis is clearly present in Kardam’s stories. In “Talāś,” “Kharomec” and “Housing Society,” the three Dalit protagonists are all firmly settled in the urban middle class. Their experiences of casteism are all marked with some kind of indirectness: it was not Rāmuvir but his domestic servant that was the issue; it was impossible to identify the one who had scratched Ramglāl’s car and it was, ostensibly, not the housing society per se that had issues with Vijay being a Dalit but its gentry. It is an interesting picture that Kardam gives. It suggests two things. First, that there is some distance to caste within modern Indian urbanity. Kardam holds that this kind of subtle discrimination is even more dangerous since many times its source cannot—as in the village—be clearly identified.²⁰⁶ Second, this indirectness is also a convenience for the Indian middle class to hide behind, since—they could argue—it is always someone else who is casteist, similarly as they, by reference to the constitution, can disregard casteism as a non-issue today. Kardam’s stories even suggest that behind the superficial screen of modernity the whole building is rotten. It is a mindset or mentality—Kardam strongly emphasis this in the interview²⁰⁷—which has permeated society. In “Talāś,” when Ramglāl finally understands Guptā’s issue, he reflects: “These people’s minds are completely filled with the bad smell [durgam] of discrimination” (27).²⁰⁸ In sum, Kardam seems to give the message that as long as this mindset prevails, Dalit emancipation will always come with a scratch or wound [kharomec].

In “Ek Der Śām,” Navaria asks the question, through the mind of Dinkar: “has anything changed at all for our people?” The narrative of this story, which in the end leads to a slight change of perspective in Dinkar’s heart, suggests that although there are great possibilities for change it will only come one step at a time. A perspective also Kardam ascribes to: “Change will come, but not fast, it will take several generations.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ Gajarawala 2013: 97
²⁰⁷ Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 87, ll. 10-11.
²⁰⁸ ...bheda ki itni durganhdh in logo ke man mem bharī hai hai...
²⁰⁹ Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 89, ll. 16-17.
4.3. **Anubhūti, Dalit Cetnā and Samānubhūti**

In this section, I will argue that the binary contrast between *anubhūti* (“experience”) and *sahānubhūti* (“sympathy”) is a simplification. While I believe this is a beneficial point of departure, as it highlights the contrast of writing from an inside or outside perspective, I would contend that the process of absolutising *anubhūti*, sets the experience of Dalits in an already pre-determined theoretical framework, through which it is understood and interpreted.

As noted in section 2 of this essay, I will further suggest the introduction of the term empathy into this discussion. Keen argues that human beings generally has the capacity to show empathy for others. It is a “basic human trait” and something which lies very close to the virtue of being humane.\(^{210}\) She further argues that empathy naturally extends to be felt for literary, fictional characters,\(^{211}\) that empathy has a pivotal role in the activity of reading\(^ {212}\) and that, in the process of writing, there is also a connection between empathy and an author’s ability of “role-taking”.\(^ {213}\) Thus, Keen’s work suggests that both writing and reading are activities that could be marked by empathy. It could here even be asked if it is possible to read literature in any meaningful way without empathy? We have seen how Premchand has been criticised by Dalits for writing on the basis of sympathy, that his Dalit characters were portrayed from a distance by an author who in real life had little integration with Dalits. Thus, this debate presumes that it is possible to write on the basis of sympathy. But what are then the possibilities of writing on the basis of empathy?

I will, in section 4.3.2, suggest that Navaria’s “Yes Sir” is an attempt to write out of empathy. In section 4.3.3, I will discuss the role of empathy especially in connection to the non-Dalit readers of Dalit literature. I will first, however, in 4.3.1, take a departure for this discussion in an in-depth examination of the terms *anubhūti* and Dalit *cetnā*.

### 4.3.1 *Anubhūti* and Dalit *Cetnā*

In their joint work, *The Cracked Mirror*, Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai discuss the relationship between theory and experience. Their basic argument is that experience does not come to us raw, but has to be mediated through the use of “concepts and theoretical language”.\(^{214}\) The authors write that “experiences are themselves mediated through concepts. One is not in a position

\(^{210}\) Keen 2007: 6  
\(^{211}\) Keen 2007: 4  
\(^{212}\) Keen 2007: 65-100  
\(^{213}\) Keen 2007:127  
\(^{214}\) Guru and Sarukkai 2012: 118
to access experience ‘innocently’. We are always in the midst of conceptual ordering at the experiential level.”

In light of Guru and Sarukkai’s theory, I want to return to the question posed in chapter 2, about the relationship between Dalit cetnā and anubhūti, between “consciousness” and “experience”. Is it possible to have anubhūti but still be lacking in Dalit cetnā? In light of Guru’s and Sarukkai’s theory on experience, the answer would presumably be ‘yes’. In fact, in Dalit literary discussions, Dalit cetnā has the very same relationship to anubhūti, as ‘theory’ has to ‘experience’ in Guru’s and Sarukkai’s framework above. Inherent in the very definition of Dalit cetnā is that the person who possesses it has come to understand and interpret his experience in a certain way. Thus, the theoretical discussion of Dalit literature itself opens up for Guru’s and Sarukkai’s distinction or distance between experience and theory. Placed in Guru’s and Sarukkai’s model, the Dalit literary discursive idea of anubhūti would thus be the ‘raw’ experience (translated to Hindi: ‘kaccā’ anubhav) and Dalit cetnā the theoretical framework, through which the raw experience is mediated.

I will here illuminate the discussion with two quotes by Limbale: “Because of the commonalities in Dalit writers’ thoughts, experiences and emotions, Dalit literature appears to be univocal.” Limbale also states: “By Dalit literature, I mean writing about Dalits by Dalit writers with a Dalit consciousness.” These two quotes, if re-examined in the light of Guru’s and Sarukkai’s experience-theory-distinction, could be understood to imply that Dalit experience can only be transformed into Dalit literature after it has been “univocalised” or mediated through the conceptual framework of Dalit cetnā. Shohat’s point, discussed by Beth (see above)—that representation of minorities tends to be simplified into one singularly representation of a whole group—seems to fit well into this framework. Taken together with Limbale’s quotes, it suggests that Dalit cetnā has a mainstreaming effect on the interpretation of Dalit experience.

On a closer look at the etymology of the term anubhūti, this term itself might suggest a distance from the ‘raw’ experience. Its root is bhū – ‘to be’ and anu is a prefix which means ‘after’. Accordingly, the literal meaning is “to be after”. In connection to its lexical derivations, anubhūti could then be interpreted as a feeling one has after something happens: i.e., the feeling or perception that experience gives rise to in an individual. Kāmil Bulke defines anubhūti as an “emotional experience,” which also suggests that anubhūti specifically refers to experience situated inwardly, as an inward sensation, and not to the outside ‘reality’ of the experience.

215 Guru and Sarukkai 2012: 151
216 Limbale 2004: 35
217 Limbale 2004: 19
218 See McGregor 1993: 36
219 Bulke 1968: 306
Thus, in line with Guru’s and Sarkarri’s argument, the term anubhūti itself could suggest to imply a distinction between the experience itself and the feeling or sensation that comes after the experience. We could perhaps even call it, “the experience of the experience,” or using the Hindi terminology, the anubhūti of anubhav. The definition by Brhat Hindi Koś further strengthens this understanding of the term, according to which the two basic meanings listed first are, anubhav; samvedna – “experience, sensation”. Then a third more complex meaning is listed: pratyaks, anumiti, upmiti aur śabdodbh dvārā prāpt jñān. – “knowledge obtained by the means of visible reality/direct proof, deduction/inferring, analogy or argument.”

This explanation of the term further suggests its mediating nature. The idea is that anubhūti is the “perception” which a human reaches after an intellectual process, which could be immediate or extended in time, in which the experience is subjected to the process of argument and inferring, analogies and conclusions.

In the context of Dalit literary theory, this understanding would then shift the position of anubhūti from—as it is commonly and unproblematically used today—referring to a ‘raw’ experience, to instead designate the result after the experience—as an impression, memory or feeling—that has been processed through the theoretical lens of Dalit cetnā. The first experience has undergone a transformation and has so become anubhūti, a conceptualised experience. To clarify, I do not argue that anubhūti is viewed in this complex way within the discussion of Dalit literature, neither that the word has these implications in everyday language. But rather, I argue, that this etymology of the term is informative for its actual function within Dalit literary discourse. Thus, I would define the term accordingly in the context of Dalit literature: anubhūti is the remaining ‘experience’ after the ‘raw’ experience has been understood and conceptualised through the theoretical framework of Dalit cetnā. In short, anubhūti is what Dalit cetnā makes of ‘kaccā anubhav (“raw’ experience”).

Consequently, one cannot have anubhūti—as it is understood within Dalit literary discourse—without Dalit cetnā, since this “after-experience” or anubhūti, as I have argued, is constructed by Dalit cetnā. Thus, anubhūti, according to this interpretation, is suggestive of the distance between the “possessed” or meditated experience and the ‘raw’ experience. However, ‘experience’ is of course still possible without Dalit cetnā, but it will then be understood through a different, perhaps less complex, theoretical lens. The matter, however, gets even more complicated since anubhūti or svānubhūti are in themselves characteristics of Dalit cetnā. When a Dalit says, “I have experience [anubhūti],” it is already indicative of Dalit cetnā—the statement in itself witnesses of political consciousness.

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220 Prasād, Sahāy, & Śrīvāstav 1902: (n.d.). In my translation I have suggested different alternatives for some words.

221 Guru and Sarukkai 2012: 38-41
It has further been argued that this distance from the experience, or some kind of intervening process, is necessary for a person in order to write about a traumatic experience. Trauma in itself means chaos, chock and disorder since we lack categories to understand a traumatic experience, but also, since the trauma itself seems to shake or disorder the very categories we had. It has been said by Theodor W. Adorno that no-one can write poetry after Auschwitz, or at least that the conditions for writing poetry have changed since the world has changed after these events. In comparison, the traumatised boy in “Cīkh” would never write about his experience until he has found the means, the concepts and support needed to handle his trauma. Also Dalit authors do not write about their experience in the midst of village caste-oppression but have most often had time to process and mediate their experiences in an urban intellectual and/or academic setting with the help of categories that Dalit consciousness provides. Consequently, and in sum, it could be argued that Dalit cetnā has a pre-determining effect on Dalit literature, that it functions as the theoretical lens all experience needs to go through.

My aim here is not to devalue the anubhūti or anubhav of Dalit writers. On the opposite, the above discussion suggests to open up for a wider conceptual framework in order to understand Dalit experience. That the experiences between Dalits differ and so also their understanding or interpretation of those experiences, as well as the different courses they envision as the solution for their predicament.

A simple comparison, however, between Navaria’s and Kardam’s respective childhoods—just taken as an example here—witnesses of very different experiences even as both of them are Dalits. Limbale’s argument, that the univocality of Dalit literature is due to the commonality of Dalit experience, does not seem to hold in a comparison between these two authors. But what is often at work in Dalit literature is the phenomenon of a singularity of representation, as argued by Beth. And this singularity, as I have argued here, is effected through the mainstreaming or homogenising of Dalit cetnā. I would argue that Dalit cetnā embodies the expectations “the hegemonic listeners”—in this case, middle-class Dalits—have on minority representation. We have seen how these dynamics are at work in Kardam’s stories, how the Dalit literary convention, which is completely informed by Dalit cetnā, governs the narrative, plot and characters.

The determining literary trope of Dalit cetnā furthermore prevents Dalits from being represented as anything else than foremost Dalits. This poses the question: Are there parts of life that justify an emphasis on other identities than the Dalit one, for example, as a human individual, a man or woman, or some other identity? The singularity of representation in Dalit literature,

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223 Compare Wessler (forthcoming 2019)
however, does not give room for these or other identities. One of the main conclusions Beth presents in her doctoral thesis is the “very clear and powerful message” that a young generation of Dalits want to give to established Hindi Dalit writers: “you don’t represent me.”

4.3.2 ‘Empathy’ in “Yes Sir”

I will in this section argue that Navaria’s short story, “Yes Sir,” is, at least, an attempt of writing on the basis of empathy. Navaria’s portrayal of ‘the other’ in this story, the Brahmin protagonist Tivārī, is crafted with an empathetic touch. Amidst all Tivārī’s prejudices and his extremely bad attitude, he does not come across as a dislikeable character. On the contrary, he is somewhat likeable, his character is carefully nuanced and he is not an outrageously evil Brahmin. He is sternly brahminical religious, but it is his religion, his sanskar, that hinders him to pray for Narottam’s death. Navaria has not placed Tivārī on one side of the good-Dalit-bad-Brahmin divide, but rather has placed him in the middle, as a complex human being. He has the potential for both good and evil, and when the right circumstances appear, Tivārī’s humanity awakens. Navaria does not just relates Tivārī’s caste-prejudices—the conventional exposure of the bad Brahmin—but sets them in the context of Tivārī’s inner mental agony and struggle, as well as his deeply human emotions, longings and ambitions. Navaria invites the reader into Tivārī’s mental world and, although this does not for a moment compromises Navaria’s condemnation of caste-based prejudices, Navaria presents these prejudices in the context of Tivārī’s whole humanity. Thus, this is a portrayal of a human being, not the archetypal antagonist whose only function in the narrative is to represent an evil ideology. Tivārī is presented as a person trapped in his own tradition. In the end of the story, his true humanity begins to emerge. A central feature of Kardam’s perspective of Dalit cētnā is that “we, the Dalits, are also human beings”.

In light of this, it could even be argued that Tivārī’s enlightenment, corresponds to, or mirrors, the trope of the Dalit character’s moment of consciousness since Tivārī realises just this feature of Ambedkarite thought, that a Dalit, his boss, is also a human being. Keen identifies that it is possible, through writing or character portrayal, to “evoke empathy for characters that ordinary readers would usually find repellent” or even inspire to “changes of attitudes toward people regarded as fundamentally different Others.” I would argue that “Yes Sir,” at least, provides the possibility for Dalit readers to feel empathy for such “fundamentally different [Other],” the Brahmin.

224 Beth 2014: 242
225 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 87, ll. 7-9.
226 Keen 2007: xxiv
227 Keen 2007: xxiii
4.3.3 Empathy – “The Common Ground”

It has been argued above that the binary division between anubhūti and sahānubhūti gives Dalits and Dalit writers the authority over their experience since they can state: ‘Only we know what it is to be a Dalit and, therefore, only we can represent this experience correctly.’ In light of the discussion above, where empathy and sympathy have been compared, sympathy appears to be the suitable contrast to experience within the Dalit literary discourse, since sympathy, by definition and in contrast to empathy, does not make its subject enter into the experience of the other. Thus, the undisturbed possession of their own experience is guaranteed for Dalits. But it can also be stated that this binary contrast also has a prize, because it hinders access to the experience from others, who through empathy otherwise would be able—at least to some degree—to share in the experience of Dalits.

Kardam suggests in his interview, that he is not writing literature for entertainment but for a social purpose, “for the welfare of human beings.” The didactic agenda this suggests is noticeable in his short stories. For example, the end-conversation in “Talāś” is loaded with teaching about the constitution and Ambedkarite values. Rāmvrī is thus portrayed as a role model for a Dalit audience. But what is gained in didactic clarity is lost in character elaboration and complexity. I have pointed out the inconsistency between Rāmvrī’s political awareness and his failure to even grasp Guptā’s casteism. Another example is in “Kharomc,” where the reader is not informed of the reason for Raṅglāl’s emotional reaction, his sudden determination to buy a car. The story does not address questions such as: Why is he hurt? Why does he react in this way? I would contend that these limitations in Kardam’s character portrayals obstruct feelings of empathy with them. Furthermore, one of the hypotheses that Keen proposes on narrative empathy is that “spontaneous empathy for a fictional character’s feelings opens the way for character identification” (italics in original). Thus, since empathy is crucial for our ability to identify with literary characters—because it allows us to enter their experience emotionally—even the didactic purpose is hampered through these sparse character portraits.

I find it interesting to read Kardam’s stories, I like them and find these texts very interesting to study and analyse. They are rich in different motives and are carefully constructed narratives. I do not, however, fell griped by his characters. Just as Kardam’s focalisation lens is distanced from the characters, so am I, as a reader.

Navaria’s characters are different, more complex and can find other paths of development or transformation than Dalit cetnā; as Brueck points out, “[they] often undergo emotional and

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228 Interview, Kardam 2019, p. 88, ll. 3-13, quote, ll. 6-7.
229 Keen 2007: 70
psychological transformations in the course of the narrative.” These complexities in Navaria’s characters intrigue me. Navaria gives them depth, and portrays them in a way that invites the reader into the world of the characters. For example, his close portrait of the boy in “Cīkh” awakes empathy in me.

Keen however also suggests that “empathy for fictional characters may require only minimal elements of identity, situation, and feeling, not necessarily complex or realistic characterization” (italics in original). But, in the context in which she uses the term ‘realistic,’ it refers to “anthropomorphize[d] nonhuman characters” common in children literature. Moreover, Keen also refers to scholars who “emphasize foregrounding effects at the level of literary style that shake up conventions, slow the pace, and invite more active reading that opens the way for empathy.” In addition, Keen stresses that the “narrated monologue has a strong effect on readers’ response to characters,” and that a close internal focalisation has a similar effect. Keen also writes: “Most theorists agree that purely externalized narration tends not to invite readers’ empathy.” All these literary features, as shown above, are more strongly present in Navaria’s stories than in Kardam’s. I have, further, shown above that Navaria tends to favour internalised narration and Kardam externalised. Thus, while I do not argue that Kardam’s characters are portrayed in a way that could not awake empathy, I do argue that Navaria’s more detailed portraits have a greater ability to achieve this effect in the reader.

It should, however, be assumed that a Dalit reads Kardam’s stories differently. His portrayals of caste oppression would, of course, resonate in Dalit readers. Nonetheless, I would argue, that if Dalit writers want their literature to also resonate with non-Dalits—Kardam professes that non-Dalits, as well as Dalits, are part of his target readers—they need to find a way to democratise their experience and to open for others to emotionally enter into it. I would further argue, that this common ground is something Navaria’s stories create or open up for. Navaria does not portray his Dalit protagonists only as Dalits, singularly in relation to the Dalit struggle, but tries to encapsulate a whole human being, with a wide range of desires and longings, emotions and feelings, moods and perspectives.

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230 Brueck 2014: 123
231 Keen 2007: 69
233 Keen 2007: 96-97
234 Keen 2007: 97
4.4 Literary Affiliation

The strong focus on Dalit ā in Kardam’s short stories, the clear binary between the good Dalit and the bad Brahmin and the explicit didactic patterns place him clearly within the counter-public sphere of Hindi Dalit literature.

Navaria is more difficult to place. As Gajarawala points out: Navaria’s characters seldom experience moments of Dalit consciousness (see above), which she argues “stands out in stark contrast to the field of Hindi Dalit literature.” But she also argues that Navaria is clearly a Dalit writer. For when Navaria brings up the issue of a new urban generation who hide their caste, who possess almost a “postcaste consciousness,” he does so very purposefully. Gajarawala writes: “If [Navaria’s] fiction seems ‘casteless’ in its embrace of the modern, technological, and urban, then it is deliberately, strenuously, and anxiously so, rather than unconsciously.” Gajarawala adds that this is “a feature that distinguishes it from the non-Dalit literary field that surrounds it.” So Gajarawala argues that even when Navaria’s characters seem to have a “postcaste consciousness,” Navaria himself is very conscious of their caste and intentional and careful in the way he portraiture them as Dalit characters. I want to take Gajarawala’s point one step further and argue that Navaria threatens also Dalit ā in this way. He consciously lets it be in the background in order to foreground other perspectives. Thus, similarly, just because Dalit consciousness is not emphasised it does not mean it is absent. In fact, there is still a political consciousness, an Ambedkarite vision that circumvents and carries his stories. When he, in the interview, comments on the story “Yes Sir,” he stresses the importance of reservations, without which the Brahmin protagonist would not end up in a position with a Dalit boss and thus not have the external circumstances prerequisite for his inward change.

I would then argue that the differences that have been identified in this essay, between Navaria and Kardam, are more of gradual than substantial character. Both authors operate within a Dalit, Ambedkarite paradigm, and as Gajarawala argues, Navaria is conscious of caste. But Navaria’s literary postures himself ‘outwardly’ and places himself in communication with other literary fields. A major feature is Navaria’s resurgence of the Gandhian notion or the Premchand’s literary trope of ḫ or satyagraha. This, as I have argued, places Navaria, also with one foot in the Hindi mainstream literary field. Mohammed Hanif says of Navaria: “I am not sure if new India ever realized that it needed a new Premchand, but in Navaria India has got one.” Furthermore, in the interview, Navaria himself points out that his academic urban readers, Dalits and non-Dalits,

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236 Gajarawala 2013: 155
237 Gajarawala 2013: 156
238 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 90, ll. 21-23.
239 Hanif in Brueck 2013b: back cover material.
places him in the same tradition as many modern Indian writers in Hindi, such as Uday Prakash, Rajendra Yadav and Nirmal Verma. In this sense, Navaria stands in two traditions, clearly in the Dalit literary sphere but simultaneously situates himself in, or enters into, the mainstream Hindi literary sphere. Interestingly, while Brueck places Navaria’s fiction “at the forefront of contemporary [mainstream] Hindi literature”, Gajarawala, even though she points to the “stark contrast” which marks Navaria’s relation to contemporary Hindi Dalit literature, also suggests that his work “seems to be charting the direction in which that field [Dalit literature] is moving.”

The analyses of the essay have shown how Kardam and Navaria are indeed illustrative examples of first- and second-generation Dalit writers in Hindi. While Kardam’s stories are truly valuable for a wide readership, I think Navaria is the one who points the direction for a new generation of urban Dalits, who have difficulties to maintain a relationship with the mainstream Indian society from a position of resistance or from a counter-public stance; who are calling out for a broader representation of Dalit experience. Just like Dinkar in “Ek Der Śām,” they are searching for a wider framework or perspective by which they can interpret their lives and their situation in this world. In the introduction to Paṭkathā aṃr Anya Kahāniyāṃ, Navaria speaks of his stories as “bridges”. Brueck comments on this notion, that “[h]e suggests that his stories are like ‘bridges,’ passageways to new terrains of consciousness that he invites readers to cross with him.” I think Navaria’s bridge-building leads the way for contemporary Dalit literature. Perhaps the time has come to depart from the counter-public in order to find common ground within the Indian public and within the mainstream Hindi literary sphere. Based on the reception of Navaria’s work in the broader cultural sphere of India, I believe the time is ready for this, and that this would open up for new perspectives for Dalit literature and for more people to emotionally and empathetically ‘enter into’ the Dalit experience.

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240 Interview, Navaria 2019, p. 95, ll. 4-8.
242 Brueck 2014: 124
5. CONCLUSIONS

In this essay, I have analysed character portrayals in Kardam’s and Navaria’s short stories and have especially focused on how these characters change. In these analyses, I have found that Kardam’s character portrayals follow the conventional literary motif of the good Dalit and the bad Brahmin. His typical Dalit character is forthright, good-willed and innocent, contrasted to the greedy and evil Brahmin. His narratives are didactic and his characters are idealistic role models. On the contrary, Navaria has broken this binary division. His characters are more complex, more lively and less predictable. They are not idealistically portrayed and his Brahmin characters are realistically nuanced. Moreover, his narratives as a whole are less didactic. However, Navaria’s stories are still written from a Dalit perspective. His protagonists are almost always Dalits and even though there are good Brahmins among his characters, there is never a bad Dalit.

One of the questions of this essay (2a) addressed the relationship between the authors’ character portrayals and their views on political-societal change. When speaking directly on the matter, both authors aligned to a similar Ambedkarite political vision. But interestingly, through their respective short stories, this vision gets quite different expressions, which, in turn, are directly related to their narrative constructions and their character portrayals. The basic posture of Kardam’s characters are \textit{resistance} or they are on the path to find a resolution to resist. His narratives elucidates a struggle, or even a war, against the Brahmin enemy, mostly fought with intellectual and democratic resources, but if necessary, there is no hindrance to also use physical violence. Navaria’s narratives are, in contrast, rather directed towards reconciliation and are focused on finding, what I call, a common ground. This is not, the least, visible in the many Dalit-Brahmin close friendships depicted in his stories.

Regarding the other two questions addressing the implications of the authors’ character portrayals—on literary affiliation (2b) and the theoretical discussion within Dalit literary discourse (2c)—Kardam strongly operates within the Dalit literary discourse, as the defining moment in his stories are the characters’ realisation of Dalit \textit{cēnā}. I have argued that this feature is so strong in his stories that it prevents his characters from personification, since they, rather than being rounded characters, are ideological embodiments of Dalit \textit{cēnā}. I also have strengthened this argument by an analysis of the term \textit{anubhūti}, and showed that although it is understood in Dalit literary discourse as a ‘raw’ experience, it is, in reality, used an experience that has been understood and mediated through the theoretical lens of Dalit \textit{cēnā}. Kardam’s stories build upon his own or other Dalits’ real and lived experiences but these experiences have been inserted into narratives, which, together with their characters, are already pre-governed by Dalit \textit{cēnā}. 

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In Navaria’s stories, however, Dalit cetnā has a less prominent place, as Navaria explores new conceptual grounds. The Gandhian notion of hrday parivartan (“change of heart”) holds a central role in the development of his characters, to the extent that even Brahmins can reach this change similarly to the antagonists in Premchand’s stories. This places Navaria partly within the mainstream Hindi literary sphere.

I earlier suggested that the introduction of the term samānubhūti - “empathy” into the Dalit theoretical discussion could function as a bridge between its two current unbridgeable sides, anubhūti (‘experience’) and sahānubhūti (“sympathy”), since empathy would allow even non-Dalits—at least in some capacity—to enter emotionally into the Dalit experience. I have contended that Navaria’s stories, the way in which his narratives are crafted and his characters portrayed, introduce ‘empathy’ into this literary debate and thereby also break the binary juxtaposition of anubhūti and sahānubhūti. I have further suggested that the result of Navaria’s authorship, interpreted as informed by the theme of empathy, manifests in two different directions. First, his writings invite to a shared space, since his intimate, realistic and genuine portrayal of characters provides the possibility for empathy, for others to feel with them and enter into their experience. This opens for non-Dalits to share in the Dalit experience to a greater extent. Second, I have argued that Navaria, through his portrayal of Tivārī in “Yes Sir;” attempts to write an account that is purposed to awake empathy for ‘the other’ in his Dalit readers. In this way, Navaria creates a common ground.

My conclusions in this thesis suggest that more theoretical studies of the terms and concepts used by Dalit authors are in demand. Above all, the discussion on anubhūti (‘experience”) and sahānubhūti (“sympathy”)—and in addition samānubhūti (“empathy”)—is an interesting field open for further research. Such study should, to a greater extent, depart from and be situated within an Indian conceptual and philosophical framework. Moreover, I have argued that a pattern visible in Navaria’s stories is his continual search for new perspectives. Not the least, the perspective of trauma in relation to the Dalit experience is an interesting field that needs more research. On a broader level, however, I would argue that the dynamics of Navaria’s stories are suggestive of a widening of Dalit literature and discussion to incorporate further new perspectives and comparisons. One of the basic tenants of, or point of departure for, Dalit cetnā is that “I am human.” It is precisely this point that Navaria seeks to illustrate with his stories that the Dalit experience can be understood from various perspectives of the experience of being human. In turn, I have argued that this can provide common ground with non-Dalits in a shared humanistic perspective.

This essay has compared two authors belonging to two different literary generations. This comparison has presented Kardam as a conventional Dalit writer and Navaria as one who experiments, sets aside conventions and explores new literary terrains. A further study should
demonstrate whether these authors only represent a generalisation of these two generations or whether these patterns still apply on a broader comparison between first- and second-generation Hindi Dalit writers.

Suzanne Keen concludes her work on narrative empathy by arguing that it is to put too much burden on fictional novels to expect them to be tools for creating “world citizens”. 243 This is also this essay’s conclusion on Dalit literature. I believe Dalit literature achieves its proposed goal best when it is allowed to be literature primary as an aesthetic expression. For it is also then literature has the best chance to bring the effect of awakening empathy and inspire to action for social change.

243 Keen 2007: 167-68
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6.2 Secondary Sources


**Sources in Hindi**


**Online Resources**


7. APPENDIX: INTERVIEWS

7.1 Interview with Jayprakash Kardam
Gautam Buddh Nagar, Delhi, March 28, 2019.

Sab se pahle mein aapke jeevan ke bare mein pucharah hain. Main padha ki aapka jam aur bhashan uttar pradesh mein huaa. Aapke bhashan ke bare mein kuch bataiye.

Main uttar pradesh mein, diliti ke pas gauravjyabhaad ka hain. To gauravjyabhaad ke andar yeh gaawch dishata hain. Gauravjyabhaad ke bhum patas mein, irdaari mein aur ham rahate the. Aur mera parivar, jag mera jam huaa, to parivar thik tha, ek samayati parivar hota hain.

Tohdehi si khatni jamiin, woh karte the, lekin hamke tohdehi se badh, [...] dada ji, jo khatni karte the, unki mritu hui hain. Pitaa ji, yeh bhum karmjor the, sharir se aur bimar rahate the, to stubhuviiniscus ke peshh rahate the, to woh khatni karnah nahi paate the, to yeh khatni bikatii chali hain aur yeh sab cheej hain. Fir ham is sthithi mein gay, bhum jalti hain, ki harar parivar gaawch sab se parivar parivar ho gaya tha. Aur usm, is sthithi yah huui, ki ham saat bahan, bhai the. Ek bhadri bahan the mudassere, aur baaki mein the, aur sare mudha se chhote the. Aur is sthithi yah hain gay ki pitaa ji khatni bikwane ke badh majdoodi karte the. Fir [...] rahay ek thodhaa tooga hoota, [...] horse kartthe, to yeh chalayaa karte the. Aur us mein bhi jagh maha thodha sa badhaa hain, aakhirii nivier klasa mein, jagh me aaya gaya, to iskkool se aane ke baad mein yeh chalayaa karta the, horse kartthe. Aur us se chhur kar aapna chalata the, guzaraa. Aur maine shuddhiyon ke dinthe mein, saathw적이 kskha ke pas karte the, baad se hie, jo maij, jun ka shuddhi mahinna hota hain, main majdoodi karta jaayegaa [...] mein hoonuunam us samay kariib choidh saal the [...]]. Is usm nahi, halke hain majdoodi dena nahi the, [...]]. lekin mudhe shuddhi the to kum peshi milkatte the ki main yah the majdoodi karte. Aur us mein pesa milktha the [...] krtawve bhaardh lataa, kryptde banaa lataa, uniform, sab cheeze, yeh helpp laang jati the hamari. Aur hunsse mein padyeen mein bhum brilliant the to mudre scholarship milkta karte the. To kuch uss se helpp milkthi the. [...] baad mein yaha ney baad dawvi mein pas kya, tenth, to maine apane puro college top kya. [...] to maine eleventh class mein admission liya. Lekin hain is saal mein [...] pitaa ji ke mritu hui hain. To uske badh yeh hain ki main iskkool nahi jata the. Aur main majdoodi karte jaayaa karta the. Us mein paanch rupiyee ek din ka vente the. [...] construction labour ke rey mein main karm karta the. Aur main shaa ko aap karte the fir apane sabh ke students loonthe ke badh jata the. Ki aaj kho paadaa (yeha the) — main science ka student the — ki physics mein kho paadaa, chemistry mein kho, dynamics mein kho, aesthetics mein kho, hain, to un sab

244 The interview was conducted in Hindi and recorded at Jayprakash Kardam’s residence in Gautam Buddh Nagar, Delhi. What is transcribed here is a selection of the approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes long interview. I have transcribed words in in English in latin script. The full interview, which was recorded digitally, can be retrieved from: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/xutv5i0w0mn6v4/AABZ12IG6PYr4Y-dO4TdpQ9a?dl=0.
गाँव पढ़ने में बाहर िक से भी, उनके बाद, जब रात चलता है, उसके घर के बाहर, जो रास्ता चलता है, उसके घर के बाहर, तो छोटा-सा चढ़ता है था। तो उसके ऊपर जमीन पर बैठकर और एक, [..] बड़ा टोकरा होता है, [..] तो उसके जमीन के ऊपर उलटा रखता था। ऐसा करके, उसके ऊपर दिब्री रखके में रात को तब पड़ रहा था।[..] तो इसी तरह से, जिस दिन जब कि मुझे माज़दूर नहीं मिलती थी, तब में स्कूल जाता था। तो उस में भी कई बार स्कूल नहीं जाता था, क्योंकि कभी मेरे पास चप्पल नहीं होती थीं, कभी मेरे पास पनामा नहीं है, कुरता नहीं है, कपड़े नहीं हैं, कभी कुछ नहीं है, लेकिन फिर भी मई करता था इसी तरह से। और मैंने इस तरह करते करते और फिर मैंने twelth कर लिया, बाद में पास किया। तो उस में फिर मैंने twelth किया। मेरे मन में एक सपना था, मैं ईंटीनियर बनना।[..] तो मैंने ही एक form भर दिया ... admission के लिए और exam दे दिया। और, by chance, मैं जोint qualify कर लिया। लेकिन हुआ यह कि उस में admission के लिए पैसे कहीं से आए? तो आप अब में admission के लिए पैसे आने में इंस-उधर से लेना-पड़ता, तो फिर मेरे दिमाग में आया कि जब मैं admission हो तो लूंगा कठिन से पैसा खर्च ले करके और मैं पहुँचा जा करने लेकिन पिताजी का क्या होगा? तो जब मैंने मजदूर करके लाता हूँ तो पिताजी चलता है, कल यह सब क्या होगा। तो फिर मैंने admission नहीं लिया। फिर मैंने [...] उस साल इतना परिवार था, मैं बी में admission नहीं ले पाया क्योंकि में admission के लिए पैसा नहीं था। एक सो चलिस सपिया होता था, मेरे पास वह नहीं था। फिर मैंने एसी मजदूर करता था। तो उस में यह हुआ इस दौरान में कुछ समय के लिए एक steel factory में काम करते लगा हूँ। और उस में कभी रात का shift होता था, कभी दिन का shift होता था। फिर वहाँ से sentex में, incometax में, वह कम मुझे मिल गया। [...] लेकिन मैंने वह कम इसीलिए सोचा था कि मैं वह साथ साथ पढ़ते रहूँगा, लेकिन वह इतना काम लेता था, तो पढ़ने के लिए time नहीं मिलता था मुझको। तो वह भी कुछ महीनों तक मैंने काम किया फिर वह भी छुट गया। [...] तो उसके बाद spinning department, machine काम कर [दिया] [...] तो उस में कभी shift में duty होता था। [...] बाद मैंने BA admission ले लिया था। तो जब मेरे shift में night में duty है, अपने ओर, तो मैं गाजियाबाद आ करके अपने college में tenth कर लिया करता था। नौकरी, इस दौरान में अपने life को भूल गया, पिताजी को life को। मेरे सामने अंधेरा था, बिलकुल अंधेरा था। उस अंधेरे से निकलने मुझको बहुत [...] करता था [...]।

लेकिन साथ में दूसरी चीजें चलती रहीं। तो दूसरी चीजें को चलती रहीं मेरे समने, मैं primary school में जाती पड़ती थी, पाँच में। उसका यह स्कूल थी जो headmaster था, वह cateist था, ग्राहण था [...]। और वह बड़ा untouchability का व्यवहार करता था। [...] तो हम लोगों से पीली मिट्टी, cow-dung, गोबार वाग़ह मंगाता था। [...] जो अपने विनेवाला
पानी है, उसे हमारा हाथ लगाने नहीं देता था। अपने लोट में अपने गिलास में, वह सब चीजें बहुत ज्यादा ध्यान रखता था।

[...] तो ओम तीर पर, रोज, ये लड़के लोग, other caste के, वे हम लोग torture, mental torture करना, eve teasing होता है, उस तरह का, इस तरह का, tease करना, comments करना, गालियाँ देना और अपमान-जनक तरीके से बोलता, वे सब इस तरीके से करते थे। जब कभी एसा कुछ होता था, कभी हमारे लोग बोलते थे उनके, तो लड़ाई हो जाती थी। और लड़ाई में, स्कूल के teacher या mangement, उन लोग का favour करते थे। [...] तो एसा कई बार discrimination वह बहुत feel करता पड़ा। [...] आपकी सांस में, दलित चेतना क्या है?

मैं यह समझता हूँ, दलित समाज में इस चेतना का आना कि हम भी मनुष्य है, दूसरे मनुष्य की तरह। हम को भी उनके तरह समान के साथ, मान व गरीबी के साथ, स्वाभिमान के साथ, जिने का अधिकार है। [...] यह नहीं कह सकते हैं कि पैसे से आपका मुक्त हो जाएँ या शिक्षा से मुक्त हो जाएँ। यह जो समाज के जो mind में, दिमाग में एक चीज बनी हुई है। जब तक वहाँ से नहीं निकलते तब तक यह चीज खाम नहीं होती।

आपकी कहानियाँ, क्या ये आपके या दूसरे लोगों के किसी न किसी असली अनुभवों पर आधारित होती हैं?

यह होता अनुभव पर, यह हमारा जिज्ञासु हुआ, हमारा भोगा हुआ अनुभव कल्पना नहीं है, hypothetical नहीं है। यह जो हम face कर रहे हैं। शायद तो मैंने face किया है या किसी दूसरे दलित ने face किया है। जिसको मैं जानता हूँ, जिस के बारे में मैंने पढ़ा या सुना है या जाना है, न दिखाने से। जैसे इस तलाश कहानी में, कुछ तो मेरा अनुभव, खुद ही अपना। लेकिन जो घटना उसके साथ हुई है, उम्मीद खाने का, माँस खाने का, यह खाने का, जैसे वे करते हैं। वह उनके साथ, रवी सिंह के साथ हुई थी। तो उन्हें की घटना है तो हम दोनों को एक साथ जोड़ा, और जोड़ करके मैंने फिर यह कहानी लिखी।

लेकिन सांग, इस ओरत चंपा ने यह आदमी कहानी के अंत में उनको मारा दिया। [यह भी]?

सांग जिस तारिके होते थे। यह तो मेरी अपनी देखी हुई चीज है। मेरे गैंग में होता था, सारा कुछ होता था। लेकिन चंपावती चीज मैंने अयाउर में पड़ी थी कि एक ओरत ने एक ठाकूर को, उसके साथ कुछ जानती कर रहा था, उसने [उसको मार] दिया। तो मैंने उसको सांग के साथ उस तरह से जोड़ा, उस कहानी को। [...] घटना सच है, सांग अपने [...] सच है, चंपा, यह घटना lady का अपना सच है, दोनों को मिलाकर कहानी बनाएँ। इस तरह से।

यह आप के लिए एक जश्न का बात, एक केंद्रित बात है कि आपके या दूसरे असली घटनों पर आधारित होना चाहिए, एक कहानी। सिर्फ़ कल्पना से नहीं?

नहीं, देखिए, आप कुछ न कुछ तो हमें अपनी कल्पना का सहारा लेना पड़ता है। चाहे हमें पत्रों का नाम बदलाने पड़ते हो। [...] चाहे हमें स्थान का नाम कुछ change करना पड़ता हो। कुछ न कुछ तो होता है। लेकिन जो उसका मूल, जो उसका element होता है, यह सच होता है। [...] चाहे मेरे साथ घटना है, या दूसरे साथ घटना है। [...]
चीजों उनसे मतलब समाज नहीं लिखते मेरी सभी और कुछ हूँ।

किन लोगों के लिए आप लिखते हैं?

मतलब, मेरे target लक्ष्यपाठक कौन है? पाठक इस में दोनों हैं, सब, दलित भी हैं और गर-दलित भी हैं। दलित इसिलिए, कि दलित पढ़ करके वह सोचें कि अच्छा, हमारा साथ कब तक ऐसा होगा? क्यों होगा? और माने चंपा, जैसा character है, उनसे प्रेम एवं... कि हमें प्रतिकार करना चाहिए, हमें social का एक कर्ता चाहिए। वह इस तरीका। और गर-दलितों के लिए उन पाठकों के लिए कि वह अपने-आप में सोचें कि जो कुछ हो रहे हैं [...] सही रहे हो, जो हमें discrimination कर रहे हैं, क्या यह अच्छा है? क्या यह सही है? उनका भी आत्मांत का एक मोक्का मिले। और उनका हमें सोचने का मोक्का मिले कि यदि हम ऐसी करते रहे तो यह समाज में एक revolt हो सकता है। कल को हमारे लिए चीजें खत्म नहीं हो सकती हैं कि जिन चीजों आदम न्याय नहीं कर रहे हैं जिनको हमारे दबाव कर रहे हैं, जिन के साथ ... इस तरह हम मेद-भाव कर रहे हैं उनको मनुष्य नहीं मान रहे हैं कल की उनके अंदर चेतावनी की, प्रभाव होगा, तो वह भी हमारे साथ उस तरह discrimination कर सकते हैं. [...] वह भी हमारे साथ हिंसा/violence कर सकते हैं। वह भी इस तरीके exploitation or torture इस तरह का सब कुछ कर सकते हैं। हम उनको depress कर सकते हैं। इसीलिए हमें वह भी सोच लेकर कि पाठक दोनों हैं, कोई एक target पाठक नहीं है। जाने की दो पाठक पढ़ें। एक को, इन चीजों को प्रतिकार करने के लिए तैयार करना, एक को, उसके जो मानसिक चेतना है, उस संवेदना है, उनको डाकडाक ना कि वह मनुष्य के धरातल ऊपर उत्तर की चीजों को सोचने की कोशिश करें।
तो यह नहीं है कि दलितों में चेतन जगाना, लेकिन गर-दलित भी, ब्राह्मण लोग भी?
ब्राह्मण लोग सोच भी हैं, आखिर ब्राह्मण भी मुन्य है न? [...] यदि सो में, हजार में एक ब्राह्मण के मन में भी बदलव आगा तो खुश तो बदलव है। यदि दलित में, मेरे target-पाठक दलित हो, और दलित ही मेरी कहानी पढ़े और दलित में चेतना आई, और ब्राह्मण में चेतना नहीं आई, तो समाज बदलने नहीं।

तो दोनों बदले?
बदलना दोनों, कि यह अपने-आप को अपने हितार्थों देखते सुकत होगा, inferior-पाठक, दलित मुक्त होगा, यह अपने superiority-पाठक मुक्त होगा, तब समाज बनेगा। और हम जब कहते हैं एक समतामूलक समाज, एक equality का समाज। equality नहीं आएगा वह ऊपर नीचे आएगा, यह नीचे ऊपर आएगा। समाज को बदलने का मतलब यही है, कि बदलव, इसने चेतना नहीं बदलव आना, न कि यह उसको उलट देना। उलट देने में जो नीचे है ऊपर चाले जाए, जो ऊपरवाला नीचे हो जाएगा, तो समाज फिर भी inequality बने होगें, फिर भी असमता बने होगें। तो मनुष्यता तब भी नहीं आई।जबकी समाज को मानवीय बनाना है, हमें मुन्य पैदा करता है, मुन्य बनाना है। तो मनुष्य तब बनेगा तो समाज में समानता आएगा। और समानता आने के लिए दोनों को बदलने चाहेगा। इसको अपने-आप ऊपर के ऊपर आना है, उसको नीचे आना चाहेगा।

ऐसा परिवर्तन, मन का परिवर्तन, कैसे होगा? क्या आपको लगता है कि इसको बाहर या अंदर से आना चाहिए, या दोनों?
देखिए, मैं बहुत आशावादी, optimistic हूँ, परिवर्तन आएगा, लेकिन [...] परिवर्तन [पाँच या दस साल में] नहीं बदलनी, इस बदलने में सैकड़ों साल लगेगा। यह परिवर्तन एक प्रक्रिया होती, process होता है, धीरे धीरे धीरे change आएगा।
क्योंकि हमें एक democratic समाज है, एक लोकतंत्रिक राष्ट्र है, तो यहाँ जो भी परिवर्तन आएगे लोकतंत्रिक तरीके से जाएगे [...]। क्योंको आप हम उस तरीके से समझते रहते देखा कि वह हमें हिंसा करेगा, तलवार से खाम कर देगा सब को, हम अपने आप को राजा बन जाएगे। यह तो चीज़ खाम हो गई।अब तो जो democratic framework है, उसके अंदर बदलना। तो [...] democratic values कैसे मजबूत करें, लोकतंत्रिक मूल्य को, लोकतंत्रिक संस्थाओं को हम कैसे मजबूत करते जाएँ। यह जितनी मजबूत चली जाएँ, उतनी ही यह जो आतिवादी है, जो धर्मिकवादी है [...] जो चित्रें हैं, यह थकने हैं, और संस्थाओं कमनोर दिये जाएँ।

आपको लगता है कि गांव का जाति-मेधावी या महानगर का जाति-मेधावी कौनसा सब से बुरा है?
तुलना करते में, देखने में तो जो गांव का है वह ज्यादा बुरा लगता है, लेकिन सब से ज्यादा खतरनाक है उस सहरों का है, क्योंकि [...] शिक्षित वर्ग जो करता है, वह ज्यादा खतरनाक है। [...] इसका मतलब है कि जो जाति-मेठावी ऐसा खराब लगता है वह और भी मुस्किल है।
कहानी का नाम तलाश है, और यह पूरा कहानी-संग्रह का नाम भी है, आपके लिए, इस नाम का मतलब क्या है?

इस कहानी का संदेश या शिक्षा यह symboly है कि दलित को तलाश है। तलाश किसी है अगरी identity की तलाश है। अपनी human dignity, मनव गरीबा की तलाश है, उसे एक समाजिक प्रेरण की तलाश है, उसे मनुष्यता की तलाश है। एक मनुष्य होने की, एक मानवी समाज की तलाश है इसलिए सरी कहानियों में किसी या किसी तलाश आ रही है।

जब मैं [संग] पढ़ता हूँ, मुझे लगता है कि यह हिंसा—एक दृष्टिकोण से—गलत नहीं है।

मैं समझ सकता हूँ कि हिंसा का जवाब हिंसा नहीं होता […] कभी कभी आपके रक्षा के लिए, हिंसा किया जाना, [तो] हिंसा नहीं होता। हिंसा तब होता है जब हम अपने किसी स्वयं के लिए किसी interest के लिए, किसी दूसरे पर हिंसा करते हैं।

[...] यदि कोई मुझे पर attack कर रहा है, मेरे साथ जाति कर रहा है, तो मुझे अपनी सुरक्षा करनी है। यदि मेरे लिए उसकी बचत होती है कि यदि मैं अपना बचत नहीं करता कि यह मुझे बचाए जा सकता है। यदि मैं उसके मार देता हूँ तो, वह हिंसा नहीं है। वह उस हिंसा के प्रतिकार है … वह हिंसा नहीं है। चंपा जो करती है, वह हिंसा नहीं है। ठाकूर जो करता है, वह हिंसा है। […]

लेकिन दलित लोग पढ़ते पढ़ते शायद कुछ सोच सकते हैं कि शायद यह रास्ता है कि हम हाथियार पकड़ कर और हिंसा करः लेकिन यह आपके मतलब नहीं है। […] क्यों नहीं आपको लगता है कि और बार ऐसा नहीं हो सकता कि दलित बदला करता है?

हो सकता है, तो होता है तो कुछ गलत नहीं है क्योंकि ठाकूरों ने जितने लोग torture किया है […] हिंसा इतने दलित के साथ ठाकूरों ने की है […] हिंसा के जवाब में यदि दलित लोग ऐसा करते हैं तो कुछ गलत नहीं करते हैं, तभी तो मार रहे हैं। […] मुझे कोई अपसोस नहीं है। […] यदि कोई चंपा या इस कहानी से प्रेरणा ले करके कुछ दलित लोग ठाकू के साथ ऐसा कर देते हैं, [तो] social के प्रतिकार है।[...] यदि कोई ठाकू उनके साथ जाति करता है, उनके साथ हिंसा करता है, तो वह उस हिंसा से प्रतिकार करना चाहिए और हिंसा के प्रतिकार में यदि उनको भी हतियार उठाना है। तो उठाएं।

तो कभी कभी मानसिक हिंसा शारिरिक हिंसा से ज्यादा खतरनाक होती है। और कई बार यह होता है कि एक मानसिक हिंसा के जवाब कई बार अदीपी मानसिक रूप से नहीं दे पता उसके प्रतिकार, और मानसिक हिंसा के जवाब कई बार सार्थिक हिंसा के रूप में दिया जाता है। क्योंकि समझ में नहीं आती क्या दे। चंपा […] क्या जवाब दे उसके हिंसा का? हिंसा मानसिक है, लेकिन उस मानसिक हिंसा का जवाब मानसिक रूप से नैसर्गिक नहीं होता, request करेंगी, ठाकूर सुनेगा नहीं, उसको हिंसा करेगा, […] तो मानसिक हिंसा के जवाब कई बार सार्थिक हिंसा के रूप में देना मजबूरी हो जाती है। चंपा की भी मजबूरी थी।
7.2 Interview with Ajay Navaria
Madangir, New Delhi, March 30, 2019.

Part I: सामान्य पुछे (General Questions)

लगता है कि आम तौर पर दलित कहानियों में मुख्यतः एक दलित है जो बहुत भाला है, बहुत इमानदार है और एक प्रासंगिक जो बूढ़ा है। लेकिन आपकी कहानियों में ऐसा नहीं है। चैनल तो अभी तक काम नहीं करता है। किस तरह आप ऐसी कहानियाँ लिखना शुरू किया?

मैं समझता हूँ कि इस में बहुत सारी चीजें काम करती है। एक जो चीज़ काम करता है, वह होता है कि हमारा atmosphere, हमारा परिवेश। यानी उस colony का माहौल। [...] यहाँ अलग–अलग caste के लोग, अलग–अलग religion के लोग [...]। मेरे दोस्त संपन्न भी थे, दलित भी थे, पिछड़े भी थे, मुस्लिम भी थे। [...] दूसरी वजह यह है कि मेरे family जो है, वह बुढ़त हड़क तक, ज्यादा तो नहीं, मगर बहुत liberal है। यह कोई मुस्लिम है या कोई christian है या कोई सिख है, या कोई other caste, दलित है, वे हमारे घर सब आते हैं, मिलते हैं, खाते हैं। [...] तीसरी चीज़, मेरा जन्म एक metropolitan में हुआ है। [...] If you are born and brought up in [a] metropolitan you have a different mind to approach and understand the circumstances and incidents. [...] जब मैं देखा कि दलित लोग अच्छे भी हैं, बुढ़े भी हैं, मुस्लिम अच्छे भी हैं, मुस्लिम बुढ़े भी हैं। मैंने देखा संवर्खण अच्छे भी हैं, संवर्खण बुढ़े भी हैं, OBC, पिछड़े जातियों के लोग अच्छे भी हैं, बुढ़े भी हैं। तो मैंने नहीं किया उपवास है कि हमेशा दलितों कहानियों में दिखाई जाती है कि संवर्खण बुढ़े हैं और दलित लोग अच्छे हैं। मैंने कहा ऐसा नहीं होता है।

इस सिलसिले में मेरा कोई सवाल है, क्योंकि मुझे लगता है कि आप हिंदू धर्म सकारात्मक [तरह] से देखते हैं। [...] जैसे 'चीक' में लड़के के हिंदू धर्म के वर्णन वह काफ़ी पोसिटिव है, एक दृढ़कोण से। चूत्व में कुछ उल्लास नहीं है, लेकिन मंदिर में सकृत्तु देनेवाली संति और संस्कार हैं। [...] फिर, 'यह सीमा' में, चार बार तिरिय विष्णु जी से नरोतम मार्गण का सोचता था कि संस्कार उसे रोकता है। तो लगता है कि कुछ अच्छी बात हिन्दुईस्म में?

मैं यहाँ एक बात कहूँगा कि मुझे हर धर्म की कुछ चीजें अच्छी लगती है। [...] तो जो हिन्दुईस्म का भी मुझे बहुत चीजें अच्छी लगती है। तो इसका मतलब यह नहीं है कि मैं हिन्दुईस्म पसंद करता हूँ, इसका मतलब यह भी नहीं है कि मैं हिन्दुईस्म पसंद करता हूँ। [...] मैंने उस character का मायने से बताने की कोशश की है कि जो भारत का सभ्यता आदर्श है, उसको festivity चाहिए, [...] कोई नई activity चाहिए। [...] यह जो involvement है यह मंदिर देता है, यह चर्च नहीं दे...
Part II: परिवर्तन (Change)

'पतकथा और अन्य कहानियाँ' के भूमिका में आप लिखते हैं कि मेरी कहानियाँ 'सपना' हैं, [...] आपका मतलब क्या है?

मेरा मतलब यह है कि कोई चीजें तो real हैं, जो हैं society में। मगर कोई चीजें real नहीं, जिन्हें होता है। पुरा सपना नहीं है, क्योंकि सपना भी थोड़ा real होता है। तो उसका real और imagination का mix हो जाता है। मैं एक एक society चहाता हूँ जैसे [...] कविता ने कहा। "अवधू बेग़म देस हमारा। राजा-रंक-फकीर-बादसा, सबसे कठौं पुकारा, जो तुम चाहो परम्परा को, आयो देस हमारा। अवधू बेग़म देस हमारा।" हमारा देश, यानी, मेरे सपनों का देश, बेग़म है, गम नहीं है, सिर्फ खुशीयार है, no garm, no sorrow, no discrimination [...] सब बराबर है।

किस तरह ऐसा परिवर्तन हो जाएगा?

दो तरहों से इसका, मैं समझता हूँ, परिवर्तन हो सकता है। बड़ी चीज है, जो हमारे power structures हैं। ये जो world के power structures हैं। तीन चीजें होती हैं। वह होता है, Politics, दूसरा religion, तीसरा cooperate. [...] आप religion अपने root, अपने etichs में, origins में, equality वह करता है, तो वहाँ पर discrimination भी चाहे किसी तौर पर जाता है। [...] यानी जो आस्था या श्रद्धा की जगह है logic आ जाता है, science आ जाता है। तो हम हर चीजें question कर सकते हैं। जो politics है, हमारी बड़ी population educate ठीक से करते हैं, value-system ठीक से करते हैं, और उस में secular, education-system है, biased नहीं है, caste-biased नहीं है [...] तो [...] जो हमारे नए बच्चे आएंगे, वह दूसरी चीजें सिखेंगे। दूसरी चीज family, जैसे family बनेगी वैसे ही बच्चे बनता है।
तो आपके ख्याल में, तो सब से जरूरत है जिस बड़े समाज का परिवर्तन, बड़ी structures में, इस परिवर्तन को होना चाहिए?

हाँ, में समझता हूँ कि structure change नहीं होगा, संचरणों में बदलाव नहीं आएगा, तब तक, कोई बहुत बड़ा बलदाव नहीं संभव है। और structure change जो होता है, वह politics करते हैं, वह bureaucracy करती हो। अगर वह दोनों में बदलाव आएगा, अगर दोनों में honesty और corruption नहीं हो।

[…] तो यह जो एक mentality है, mindset, जो change [होना है]। उनको लगता है, जो बड़े population है, वह समझते हैं कि हमारे नौकर है […]। यह लोग [दलित] नहीं accept कर रहे हैं […]। जब तक यह mind-set change नहीं होगा, तब तक changes आना बड़ा मुश्किल है।

क्योंकि यह बहुत मन का परिवर्तन… आपकी कहानी पढ़ते हुए में जिसके बारे में सोचता रहता हूँ, 'जैसे 'यस सीर' में या 'एक देर शाम' में, कुछ [यह] बदला हुआ है, हदय में, मन में।

कुछ लोगों में हुआ है। […] में असल में ऐसा लिखता हूँ, क्योंकि मैं pesimistic नहीं हूँ, optimistic हूँ। में मानता हूँ कि जो बात 1927 में जब डा. अम्बेडकर महार तत्काल के लिए पानी के लिए लड़ रहे थे और आज […]], सी साल नहीं हुआ और देश का राष्ट्रपति दलित है। अगर नब्बे साल में इतना change आज तक सकता है, तो आगे नब्बे साल कितना सोचो?

Basic चीज में यह है, economics है। जब यह बदलाव आएगा नीचे से तो यह structure change पैदा करेगा। From the base to the super-structures!

तो दोनों जरूरत हैं, मन का और [समाज] का परिवर्तन?

हाँ, बिना दोनों कि नहीं होगा, इस के लिए में आपको अच्छा उपाधरण देता हूँ। डा. आम्बेडकर के और गांधी जी के बीच में एक dialogue है जिस में गांधी जी से डा. आम्बेडकर बोलते हैं कि क्रानून बनाना होगा लोगों को, अन्तराचार को रोकने के लिए, संवर्ण लोग जो अन्तराचार करते हैं, उनको रोकने के लिए, क्रानून की जरूरत है। तो गांधी जी ने कहा, अगर क्रानून implement करने में लोगों [का] मन नहीं बदलेगा तो क्रानून तो होगा पर काम नहीं करेगा। गांधी जी गलत नहीं थे, आम्बेडकर भी गलत नहीं थे। दोनों सही हैं। क्रानून तो होना चाहिए मगर क्रानून फिर डा से मन बदलेगा, और मन बदलने से क्रानून implement hoga. एक दूसरे को कोमिटमेंट है।

यह एक बहुत महत्वपूर्ण या दिलचस्प सवाल है कि मन का बदला कहाँ से आता? आपकी लगता है कि हमारे सोच से, हमारी इच्छा से या बाहर से आता है?

दोनों तरह से। देखिए, यह जो सवाल है एक बड़ा संबंध है, psychology से। psychology में एक section होता है, जैसा “individuality” है, individual psychology. उस में कहा जाता है कि एक आदमी दूसरे आदमी से अलग है। […] में
तारीख़ीकरण

आय तौर पर दलित कहानियों में दलित लेखक यथार्थवाद से लिखते हैं, और इस में एक सोच है कि कहानी को यथार्थवादी होना चाहिए, और अपने आप अनुभव पर आधारित होना चाहिए। लेकिन यह है कि आपकी कहानियाँ हमेशा ऐसी नहीं हैं। आप कल्पना से लिखते हैं। क्या यह आपकी कहानियाँ मामूली दलित कहानियों से एक फर्क होता है?

लेकिन दलित सहित्य अक्सर कहा जाता है कि लिखना entertainment के लिए नहीं है, लेकिन एक गेहरे उद्देश्य के लिए, समाज का परिवर्तन के लिए है।

मैं इसको इस तरह से कहूँगा कि पहले मैं entertainment हो समझना चाहिए। हिंदी में, इस के लिए, शब्द है मानोरंजन। मानोरंजन का मतलब अनुभव होता है, जब मन को रंगने वाला है। जब मन को रंगना मतलब मन को बदलना। आप मन को बदलनावली चीज़ न हो, तो कहानी क्या है? आपने कहानी लिखी जिसका बहुत आच्छा उद्देश्य है बहुत आच्छे change करने society को, मगर उससे पढ़ने को माना नहीं करता? [...] तो कहानी में मानोरंजन एक element होना चाहिए [...] आप सिधे message देना चाहते हो तो कहानी क्या? Speech लीजिए, लेख लिखिए। [...] आपको कहानी लिखनी है, message देना through entertainment.

एक तारह आपकी कहानी “यस सिर” यथार्थवादी है, पर आप जादूई यथार्थवाद से नहीं लिखते हैं?

मैं समझता हूँ कि अगर जो हमारे reader है जो दलित सहित्य के reader है वे भी धीरे धीरे writer के साथ साथ mature होते हैं। जो पहली पीढ़ी थी, उनके सामने यह तारह वैसी कहानी लिखते थे ताकि उनको समझ में आ जाए। क्योंकि अगर एक middle-class, दलित community में, emerge हुआ है, उसके जो needs है, demands है, requirements है वही है, उसको महसूस करता हूँ, उसको मैं fulfill करने को काश्यकरता हूँ। तो वह पहली जो generation वह गालत नहीं थी, क्योंकि reader भी वहीं थी [...] जैसे jaise generations change होती है, वैसे वैसे ही requirements change होते है।

आफतका पाठक कौन है? यह middle class है या दूसरे लोग भी है?
मेरे पाठक middle-class दलित और middle-class urban, जो भी वह है, लोग है रहते हैं। सभी लोग पढ़ते हैं, संवर्ण भी पढ़ते हैं, पिछड़े भी पढ़ते हैं, और मुसलिम भी पढ़ते हैं, क्योंकि मेरे अनुदान बहुध सारा हुआ है। [...] मैं शयाद ऐसा समझा हूँ कि कैसे writer हूँ, जिसको गर-दलितों में भी, एक अच्छा reception, welcome लिया। [...] अगर जो urban middle class है जो हिंदी पढ़ रहा है यहाँ भी, शायद जो किसी भी कास्ट का हो, अगर 1970s या 1980s या 2000 की story पढ़ता है अगर वह उदय प्रकाश [...] या राजेंद्र यादव की [...] या निर्मल वर्मा की कहानी पढ़ता है [...] तो उसके पास एक पूरे tradition है कहानी के समझने के लिए। तो मुझे से फहले कि जो दलित story writer है वह वहाँ नहीं stand कर रहे हैं। शायद उनको लगता है कि अन्य नावरिया के पास जो है हमें वह मिलता है जो हमें उस tradition का extension दिखता है।

Part IV: कहानियाँ (Stories)

यह सिर

क्या आप भी लिखते हैं पढ़ने के लिए, शिक्षा देने के लिए, नए values देने के लिए?

 [...] मैं लिखा इसमेंलिये नहीं कि मैं चाहता था कि मैं इसे लोग पढ़ा है, मैं चाहता था कि इसे लोग पढ़ें और खुद को बदले और जो बदल गया है उनको accept करें। जो बदल गए जो सर्वरण लोग बदल गए। You accept them. [...] वह भी human हैं, उनके अंदर भी एक power struggle चलता है। उनको भी बुरा लगता है कि यह कल तक हमारे सामने इस तरह नीचे बैठा था, या हमारे बराबर बैठा है बुरा लग रहा है। Try to understand his or her problem.

Paradigm-shift यह सिर में:

यह सिर कहानी में हम देखेंगे कि जो उसका officer है तिवारी का, नरोत्तम सरोज वह दलित है, मगर वह नहीं show करता है कि वह दलित है, और कहीं वह अपने office होने की power को इसिलाई, excercise नहीं करता कि वह ब्राह्मण को नीचे दिखाना चाहता है। [...] जब आर.ओ. सिक्कार है, तो वह उसको कुछ गर्व शब्द कहने देता है, गधे हो, मुर्द हो। तो उस [तिवारी] को बहुत बुरा लगता है, तो उसको object भी करता है। [...] वह इसिलाई नहीं कहता नरोत्तम कि तुम ब्राह्मण हो और मैं गाली दे रहा हूँ। नहीं, वह साधारण officer को आम तौर पर India में [...] अपने sub-ordinate से बोल देते हैं। [...] पहले ब्राह्मण बैठा रहता था और दलित toilet साफ करते थे। अभी ब्राह्मण toilet साफ कर रहा है और दलित बैठा रहा है। यह paradigmshift है, due to the reservation, due to constitution. इसिलाई, मे reservation बहुत महत्वपूर्ण, बहुत important tool मानता हूँ, to change the society of India.
चीख

तो आपकी कहानी 'चीख' में, "यादावः" एक महत्वपूर्ण मामला है। तो इस लड़के के बचपन में एक बल्लाकार हुआ और इसकी पूरी जिंदानी यह trauma असर पड़ता रहता है। क्या आपको लगता कि दलित सहित्रा में यह एक मामला, trauma जिसको लेखक अक्सर नहीं ध्यान रखते हैं?

वह ममला यह नहीं है कि इस protagonist के साथ एक rape हुआ। ममला यह है कि पूरी दलित community के साथ एक rape हुआ है। It’s a metaphor actually. और इसे लिए उसकी पूरी life जो है वह disturbed है। वह कभी एक जो normal life एक संवेदन उसको enjoy करता है, वह दलित नहीं कर पाता है। तो यह एक metaphor दूर सोसीटी के, actually. यह सही है कि कहानी में एक आदमी का rape होता है, और उसकी life. मैं उसकी वजह से, तबनिविद्याओं, पैरासाइलिज़ और दिक्कतें, trauma पैदा होता है। वह आखिर में इसको realize करता है, जब वह deathbed पर है, जब उसे गोली मारी गई है, अगर उसके अंदर change नहीं आता, तो शुचिता से नहीं प्यार करता। [...] अगर पैसा सब कुछ होता तो वेला सब कुछ दे रही है। [...] उसको पैसा नहीं चाहिए। He wants love. और उसको love मिलता है, शुचिता से।

वह यह अख़री पाठ पर, शब्द कहता है जो पहला word है कहानी का, क्योंकि बहुत महत्वपूर्ण भौगोलिक नजर में वह कहानी है। मैं समझता हूँ इसके पहले line है कि – हिंदी में लिखा गया – 'गुनह बहुत लुभावना होता है। और मरता बहुत बहुत है।' यह गुनह कर रहा था कि वह सब औरतों से बदला ले रहा था जिन्होंने नहीं की गलती, दूसरी की गलती के सजह उनको दे रहा था।इसलिए जब वह first scene में वह जो lady है सुनेगा उसकी यह लात मरता है। वह लात मरता क्योंकि उसके अंदर एक राजा है, उसके अंदर एक हिंसा। मार जब वह शुचिता से मिलता है, उसे प्यार हो जाता है।और वह इस introspection मिल जाता है, और उसी का process है आगे जाता है।

चीख में मेरे एक और सवाल है, कि यह घटना जब लड़का Christmas break पर गाँव चला आया और बाबा के साथ [एक मुलुककात हुई]. और उन्होंने ऐसा शब्द कहा कि, ‘भूख में जीव को जहर नहीं खाना चाहिए‘. लगता कि यह एक बहुत कंद्रित, नसीरी घटना है?

अगर किसी वक्ती को भूख लगती है, तो भूख लगने पर अगर जहर खाने का तो भूख नहीं मिलेगी। तो जो वह कर रहा है, प्रतिशोध में जो बदले के ... से, revengful होकर, वह जहर खाने जाए। यह जो बाबा है actually, यह सम के […] सोचनेवाला है। यह किसी bribe का नहीं, यह किसी caste का नहीं, यह एक humanity का है। तो इसलिए यह कहता है कि वह इंज लगता है बाबा के पास जाने को। क्यों इंज लगता है? प्रेम के इंज है, वह प्रेम करता है। यह बाबा] सब समझ जाएँगे, इसलिए यह इंज है। [यह] सब देख लेंगे, [...] सब समझ जाएँगे, इसलिए यह इंज है। यह एक अच्छी line इस में जिससे हम कहानी समझ सकते हैं।
तो उन्होंने [बाबा ने] भी कहा कि “चापस आओ, चापस आओ” [“लौट आ बेटा”]। लेकिन अंत में [...] लड़के ने कहा कि हम कहा जाएँ, क्या करें? तो लेकिन यह बात, “चापस आना”, इसका मतलब क्या है। गाँव तक?

नहीं, अपने culture को, जिस में सब के लिए प्रेम, उस tradition में आओ जहाँ किसी के लिए नफरत नहीं है। और वह है बुद ने कहा इस सब के लिए मंगलकाम रहे रहो।

एक देर शाम

तो “एक देर शाम” में, कहानी के शुरुआत में, ‘प्रक्रिति’ एक अच्छी तरह वर्णन किया जाता है।

असल में [प्रक्रिति] एक tool की तरह है actually, एक देर शाम कहानी में। वह tool के तौर पर इसलिए कि जो nature दिखाना रहा है कि सब को बराबर किया है, उस में लोग हैं fresh हो रहा है, ये गरीब लोग।[...] उसके अंदर विसंगति। और वह विसंगति दिखाना चाहता है कि एक देर शाम में कितने changes हो रहा है। वह बहुध अच्छा nature हुआ करते थे, उसको हम मुस्त करना जाते हैं.