

## Discourses of Identification and Cultural Distinction: An Overview of “Adi-Movements” In Colonial India

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**ABSTRACT:** *Adi-movements emerged as a radicalized attempt by Scheduled Castes or Dalit (earlier known as untouchables) in 20<sup>th</sup> century aiming towards removal of social evil practices of Indian society which were discriminatory and exploitative in nature. During 1920-30s a new kind of ideology emerged known as ‘Adi’, where Adi means original and it became common usage for those who were earlier known as untouchables or Dalit. Through this term they identify them as original inhabitant or indigenous population of India. This was spread across the southern and northern parts of pre-independent India and the areas affected by it were Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Emergence of Adi-movements was significant as they were one of the earliest forms of socio-political consciousness put forward by the section of society who never had organized such long struggle; traces of which can be found in Dalit Panther movement of 1972 in contemporary times. This was the first form of struggle for making and defining their identity by their own which does not solely focused on bringing socioeconomic change in their status but construction of an identity that provides them cultural distinction.*

*The aim of this research is to study the importance of Adi-movements in revival of identity, redefining the position of untouchables or Dalit and remaking of a new social order based on social equality and justice in contrast to hierarchical Hindu social order. The concepts of ‘Constructivism’ and ‘Mythico-Symbolic discourses’ are central towards understanding the processes of cultural distinction and identity formation. The study will take the historical and documentary method as a basic methodological tool to validate our argument. To understand the position of Scheduled Castes from their view point the study will also make use of biographies and life histories sometimes documented by Dalit themselves or are translated by others mostly in English language. The end result of the paper is to show the historical trajectory of emergence of a new cultural identity of Scheduled Castes as ‘Adi-Hindu’ and the implication of Adi movements in formulation of the discourses of assertion and identity formation.*

**KEY WORDS:** *Movement, Identity, Social Justice, Discrimination and Dalit*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The question of caste identity is an implement for existence of an individual in Indian society. Several attempts of mobilization have been made by Dalit to self-identify and reinstating the history of their origin which is lost in making of India and account of its people. Their socio-political consciousness aimed towards structural transformation of Hindu social order which was hierarchical and discriminatory in nature. It placed them at bottom of society corresponding to their engagement with defiling occupations and polluted social status. Moreover it was then validated through indological textual sources written by Brahmins and then used by Colonists to understand and gather information about Indian society as well as functioning of caste system in maintenance of social order. The Census reports of 1872, 1901, 1911 and 1931 make use of different terminologies and characteristics to substantiate the lowest position of Dalit while establishing one common terminology to designate them officially as “Scheduled Castes”. Indian society was hierarchically divided among four groups: Brahmin, Khstariya, Vaishyas and Shudras. According to Varna model, Brahmins held superior position in society and reserved rights for reading and writing, Kshatriya’s were the martial race, Vaishyas the traders and the Shudras originated from the feet of Brahma so they became slaves to all three other groups situated above them. The work of (Ambedkar (1948), Ghurye (1969), Mahar (1972), Kamble (1982), Charsley and Karanath (1998). Deilege (1999), Micheal (1999) and Kumar (2005)) observed the presence of the fifth category of people who were known as ‘Panchamas’, ‘untouchable’ or ‘avarnas’ because they were placed outside the Hindu Varna system. They occupy the lowest position due to their engagement with polluted occupations such as sweeping, skinning the dead animals, leather works, weaving, removing night soil etc. But Shudras and untouchables both were denied from practicing the ritual of Upanayana, the sacred thread ceremony which gave the other three castes situated above them the status of Dwija or twice born. Therefore Shudras and untouchables both the terms were used simultaneously to denote the lowest section of society and

both were included into the administrative classificatory term of 'Scheduled Castes'. Brahmins were the one who became the first hand informant of the origin and classification of social groups in Indian society and they were the one who provide early written records on Indian society. The information provided by these textual sources remained unchallenged for several decades until the opportunities for bringing social change reach to Dalit. These were the rare moments in the history where transforming social status for them was feasible and was supported by some external factors present in the society.

According to Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) the term 'untouchable' is twentieth century construction which became the central concept in understanding Dalit. In India they were known through various names in different space and time such as 'outcaste', 'chandala', 'panchama', 'shudras and ati-shudras', 'avarnas, antyajas, Harijan, pariahs, Unseeables and namshudras. The origin of terms such as 'Adi-Hindu', 'Dravida and Karnataka were well used for the first time by Untouchables to self-describe them and claims of original inhabitancy were made by them. British in late 20<sup>th</sup> century termed them 'depressed classes' that was most commonly used among Colonists and Census officials until in 1935 Simon commission under section 304 coined the term 'Scheduled Castes' which then became the administrative and official definition to designate untouchable groups of people. Afterwards, the term 'Dalit' become the self-militant and radical expression of their autonomous identity. In this paper I will be using the term 'Dalit' to denote these groups of people as in contemporary India it is the most widely used term and while talking about their self-representation and self-definition of identity this term is more authentic and apt to describe their struggle.

Within this background of the evidence of history of origin of numerous terminologies to substantiate their subordinated status, Adi-ideology is significant as it bear testament to the earliest assertion of equal rights, humanity and citizenship. Where Indian history pointing towards Aryans (a migrant race) during excavation of Harappa and Mohenjadaro, it was at this time on the other hand where Dalit were becoming conscious of their rights and identity and recognize them as indigenous/original inhabitant of India. The movement stands for acceptance of a new social order based on equality, liberty and social justice as well as rationalized principles of socioeconomic, political and cultural development of Dalit. It is the movement to regain self-respect and equal human status in society. One of the main cause of its emergence was to fight against the evil practice of 'untouchability' where Dalit were not allowed to enter into the temples, public premises, making use of common property resources and denied any kind of social, political, economic and cultural freedom or equality. 'Untouchability' was the main social evil of Indian society that discriminates and exploits these lower rungs of society. Long efforts had been made by social reformers such as Nanak, Kabir, Ramanuja, Ramananda, Chitanya and Tukaram to eradicate it as far as possible. The advent of Brahma and Arya Samaj as other social organizations associated with eradication of social evil practices in India and securing social, political and religious and cultural equality among each section of society.

However, if we look at identity based movements carried out by Dalit in India they all differ in their strategy, ideology and approaches whether place to place or time to time or leader to leader. Thus the Dalit consciousness and their movement came to fore in different shades and forms. Sometimes they imitated or adopted the customs and beliefs of upper castes in order to achieve higher position in caste hierarchy and sometimes using their cultural practices as backdrop to substantiate their distinctiveness and differentiation from other groups of people. But even after adopting high caste manners and asserting their right to equality the treatment of upper caste towards them does not change at all. They still consider them as 'outcastes' which gave rise to conflict in form of 'Adi-movement'. This movement then became the alternative move in the path of their assertion and identity formation. They believed that if Hinduism was discarded, untouchability would automatically come to an end. Dalit began to call themselves as Adi- Andhras in Andhra, Adi-Karnataka in Karnataka, Adi- Dravidas in Tamil Nadu, Adi-Hindus in U.P and Ad-dharmis in Punjab.

This paper is divided into three main sub-sections: first section will describe the history of emergence of Adi-movements in Colonial India, second section will deal with the formation of their self-defined identity and the third section will deal with the oral life histories and narratives of Dalit biographies by their own in regional language and translated in different language by others.

### **Emergence of Adi-Movements: A Historical Account**

The character of the systematic Dalit movement what we observe today in 21<sup>st</sup> century taking place in social context of urbanization is political in its outlook. However, the religious and cultural aspect to this movement is provided by the pre-independent Dalit movement acting as a base for assertion of ascertaining equal rights and construction of culturally distinct identity. There are three distinct phases in which Dalit movement emerged: the first phase of movement was to fight against inequality and injustice follows the path of social reformation, the second phase of Dalit movements aimed at constructing their self-identity which is culturally and socially distinct from what upper castes imposed on them and the third phase of movement broadly categorizes as the militant and radicalized protest for assertion of their equal rights and social justice. This phase is more organized in its form under the autonomous leadership of political parties such as BSP

(Bahujan Samajwadi Party) and the entry of Dalit masses in public sphere claiming space for raising their voices. If we look at the history of emergence of Dalit consciousness and rise of an autonomous Dalit movement by their leaders and ad joined by masses; there is no sign of a homogeneous unified movement taking place under one leadership or one ideological strand. From the very beginning the movement was divided between different leaders and their ideology, on the other hand time and location in which it surfaced were other factors further intensifying differences.

According to Pai (2002 and 2013) the three major ideological strands of Dalit movement which can be discerned from colonial to post-independent India are Dravidian, Ambedkarite and Gandhian. The first step for socio-political consciousness was initiated in parts of South India influencing groups of Scheduled Castes such as Holeyas of Karnataka, Pulayas of Kerala, Adi- Dravidas of Tamil Nadu, Adi- Andhras of Andhra Pradesh. Mahars of Maharashtra were one of the groups of Scheduled Castes highly influenced by Ambedkar ideology and lastly those influenced by Gandhian ideology were less in number. The evidence of independent Dalit movement in South India can be traced during the origin of Non-Brahmin movement in Madras during 1900-1910 when intermediate castes of India demanded their share in educational institutions and administrative jobs under the reign of British through mass protest. Dalit took active participation in this movement but this movement did not address their issues and problems as it should be and they did not gain the central place which gave rise to their own struggle or movement of their own.

The movement based on Adi-ideology spread with different names in regions of Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. In Punjab, it named as Ad-Dharam, Adi-Hindu in UP, Adi-Andhra, Dravida and Karnataka in parts of south India all indicating claim to nativity and original inhabitant of India. In UP it emerged under the leadership of Acchutanand, in Punjab led by Mangoo Ram and in south India by Bhagyaswamy Reddy and Arigyay Ramaswamy. According to Hardtmann (2009) the origin of contemporary Dalit movement in an organizational structure is to be found in the Adi-movements of 1920s. These movements were the first major attempts within Dalit for generating an alternative paradigm to Hinduism. The conditions in which Adi-ideology spread across parts of India was during the advent of external forces such as Christian missionaries, Social reformist organizations such as Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj were taking the cause of fighting against social evils such as child marriage, untouchability etc. But the way in which they were approaching especially the cause of 'untouchability' was not to fight against the main evil within Hinduism treating inhumanly lower section of society through its rules and principles. Adi-movements take the cause of untouchability from below perspective while fighting directly against the evils of Hinduism and making of separate religion of 'untouchables'.

In 1922, Swami Acchutanand launched the Adi Hindu movement to bring awareness among Hindus. According to him Aryans defeated the indigenous Kings of India and deceitfully branded indigenous inhabitants of India as Dalit and destroyed their culture and established Hindu social order based on their principles. He also organized various public events to take the movement forward. From 1922 to 1930, he organized eight national conventions, three special conventions, 15 provincial conventions and hundreds of district level conventions of the Adi-Hindu movement. The first national convention was held in Delhi (1923) followed by Nagpur (1924), Hyderabad (1925), Madras (1926), Allahabad (1927), Bombay (1928), Amrawati (1929) and Allahabad (1930). Thousands of Dalit at that time participated in these events and walked for a longer distance in order to take this movement from north to south India. Swami Acchutanand was against the reformation works of Arya and Brahma Samaj because according to him both of these social organizations were not dealing directly with the cause of 'untouchability' and were containing the elements of Brahmanism which again was discriminating Dalit in gaining full equality and justice. This was the time when Congress and upper caste Hindus found Acchutanand views unpalatable and indigestible and started a campaign against him. Soon after his death, the organized struggle of Dalit in form of Adi-movements was collapsed due to lack of his leadership (Bahadur, 2016). Rao (2003) argues that 'Adi-movement' in Uttar Pradesh culminated a kind of Adi ideology among Scheduled Castes. Later in 1931 Census 'Adi-Hindus' were categorized as one of the group in state SC (Scheduled Castes) list. In Uttar Pradesh, Chamars (whose traditional occupation was tanning of leather, skinning dead animals, manufacturing of leather and removing night soil) were one of the groups among Scheduled Castes influenced by the leadership of Acchutanand and claim Adi-Hindu status.

In Punjab, according to Juergensmeyer (1982) Ad-Dharm was an organization founded in 1925 under the leadership of Mangoo Ram among Chamars who traditionally work as leather workers and termed as 'untouchables'. A sixteenth century poet Ravidas became the foremost Guru and his disciples/followers later known as Ravidasis. Ravidas fall under the Bhakti tradition poet and was seen as sant. Within Ad-Dharm as religious and social way of life of untouchables the poetry of Ravidas gained significance and was spread across regions of Punjab. Thus gradually Ad-Dharm became the religion of those who claim they were the original inhabitants of India and distinguish themselves from Aryan race. This was a break from Hinduism where Dalit were establishing an altogether separate model of their own self and distinct way of their socio-cultural life.

According to Jodhka (2015:152),

The leadership of the Ad-Dharm movement saw their struggles as a religious movement. They advocated that untouchables were a separate quam, a distinct religious community similar to Muslims....Invoking the then popular 'racial origin' theories of caste, they argued that Ad-Dharm has always been the religion of Dalit and the quam had existed from time immemorial. Despite stiff opposition from the local Hindu leadership the colonial leaders conceded their claim and the Census of 1931 listed the Ad-Dharmi as a separate religious community. By getting them recognized as a separate religious community the Ad-Dharmi leadership was successful in formally breaking away with Hinduism. This shift from zaat to quam meant that in terms of social status they were no longer positioned in the system of caste hierarchy and had acquired a status parallel to Hindus like Sikhs and Muslims.

Similarly Adi-movement in Andhra instigated in coastal regions and Rayalaseema region of Telangana and Telugu speaking areas of Nizam state. These two regions provided diverse trends in the movement as a whole. While coastal Andhra left with the choice of autonomy versus integration of Dalit with the rest of society, Hyderabad witnessed a radicalized autonomous Dalit movement. Coastal Andhra regions provide a rural base to the movement and in Hyderabad it was limited to urban areas. Bhagya Reddy Verma was the first person who laid the foundation for Dalit movement. He led the movement in Hyderabad during early 20<sup>th</sup> century and also founded an organization named as jagan mitra mandali. The main aim of this organization was to encourage and awaken the social consciousness among Dalit . In 1911 Bhagya Reddy Varma founded Manya Sangam for removal of social evils like intemperance and sacrifice of animals. The main aim of such organization was to disallow non-vegetarian food and intoxicant in marriages (Rao 2003).

Adi-movements in India have a short life span in the regions in which it emerged and was not forwarded by other leaders with that passion after death of their main leader. However, they were successful in generating a sense of consciousness among Dalit and prepare a platform for the grass root assertion and formation of a new 'identity' of their own. Adi-movements also pointed towards the religious diversity practiced among them and an alternative paradigm to establish a religion of their own other than Hinduism. Ambedkar conversion to Buddhism in his last years, mass conversion of Dalit to other religions such as Buddhism, Christianity and sometimes Islam are other examples of religious diversity being practiced and adopted by Dalit in current times. Secondly, Adi-movements provide Dalit different identity of their own that solely defined and represent them as a social and cultural distinct part of Indian society where they are free from following any norms and principles dictated by Hindu Varna system.

Adi-movements raise an important question of inclusion or exclusion of Dalit in Hindu society. The issue of untouchables as Hindus or Non-Hindus remains the sensitive issue which also gain public and official significance in pre-independent India during first and second round conference in London in 1931 and 1932 where Ambedkar demanded for separate electorates for untouchables/depressed classes in legislature and this demand was temporary in nature because after 10 years it will get replaced by general electorates with provision of reserved seats for them. However Gandhiji on the other hand strongly opposed this idea of Ambedkar as it will further divide untouchables and Hindus. On the other hand Communal Award of August 16, 1932 under the Presidentship of Ramsay Macdonald announced separate electorates for Scheduled Castes (here Dalit in the conference were addressed by the newly developed official term) and also reserved rights for voting in General electorates. Gandhiji further opposed it by going on hunger strike and forced Ambedkar to take back his decision of separate electorates for Scheduled Castes and agreement was settled between them on provision of guaranteeing 178 seats to Scheduled Castes in joint electorates. This pact was profoundly known as 'Poona Pact' in 1932.

### **Subjective understanding of Identity of Dalit**

The process of "identity" and "identity-formation" is one of the significant process through which Dalit were and is capable of re-structuring their subjugated and subordinated position in Indian social structure. It has symbolic significance in mobilization of Dalit where they are competent of establishing or re-formulating cultural and symbolic attribute of their own representation in society.

Jenkins (1996:4) pointed out that identity is not just there, it must be always established. The process of identification is establishment or construction by any individual or group to express who they are and what they wanted to be seen by others? He further understands identity as something which is immutable and unstable as it originates within a specific socio-cultural context. In modernist and post-modernist, the phenomena of 'identity' and 'identity formation' gained importance due to the pace of change in surrounding social contexts. For him understanding of 'identity' in constructionist framework is located in criteria of similarity and difference through which one attaches oneself to someone or something else. Castells (2009) argues that identity in any dominant institution can be formulated only when the social actors internalize the process of 'identification' and construct their own meaning towards it in the course of action to self-define and self-represent them. From sociological point of view all identities are constructed.

Therefore it can be said that 'identity' and 'identity formation' is a historical and interactional process. Identity Formation is something which is social and self-reflexive in its character. The process of identifying oneself is based on shared experiences of individuals with others who are different and at other point similar to them. It takes place within a specific socio-cultural and political milieu. Therefore in this paper process of identity formation and identification among Dalit can be comprehended well through understanding it as a constructed course of action. It further pointed towards that a new identity is possible and can be constructed in the way one desire.

The other important component integral to the process of construction of one's identity is 'symbolic' aspect of it. The theoretical sociological tradition of 'symbolic interaction' as suggested by Blumer (1986) stresses the fact that human beings came into the interaction with the environment and its object in which they are living in and attribute the meaning to it. The meaning does not emanates from the object itself to which individuals are attributing some meaning; instead it is the manifestation of one's mind how they relate to the object. The meaning which produced through social interaction gives any individual or group an identity. 'Mythico-symbolic discourses' inherent in the process of identification are the constructed ways of seeing, knowing, understanding self and society and ways of understanding them and their identity in similarity and differentiation index (Arun, 2007). These can be used as symbols of one's identification i.e. newly constructed identity while using the same object/attributes which earlier used to pollute them but now they are using it by attributing new and dignified meaning to it.

After understanding the underpinnings of concepts of 'identity formation' and 'symbolic discourses' one can raise a question why 'identification' or 'identity formation' of Dalit can be effectively understand while using these two social processes? The reason is when we talk about their identity there are two social reality about them: 1) One is the objective reality of their identity where it is an imposed identity of them designating them as polluted, subordinated and locating them at the bottom of society by upper castes and 2) a new and subjective truth of their identity which is constructed by their own efforts to gain a respectful place in society. For attainment of this identity in contemporary time they make use of those symbols that can differentiate them from other parts of society. According to Arun (2007) there are three phases of identity formation: Conflict, Symbolic Reversal and Identification. Conflict refers to a process by which group of people compete with other group/s to achieve their objective either through violent and non-violent means. Conflict is the starting point for Dalit providing them consciousness about reimagining and re-defining their life in their own terms. Now the process of symbolic reversal is the use of symbols that were earlier used by upper castes to designate them 'polluted' for e.g. drum beating, beef eating, alcohol drinking, their traditional occupation, dressing and eating habits, customs and beliefs. In this process they deconstruct the polluted meanings of their customs, beliefs and habits and treat them as their cultural and social way of life without imitating upper caste manners or identifying them according to which upper castes wants to describe them. They define these 'symbols of pollution' as 'symbols of their identification' what makes them different from other parts of society especially upper castes. For upper castes these symbols and customs are polluting but for Dalit it is the way how they define them? In the third process through their newly constructed identity they gain their own social, cultural and political space in mainstream.

However, there are other works of social theorists from India and abroad who stressed on the separation model of identification of Dalit. The works of Berreman (1972, 1979), Mencher (1974), Lynch (1974), Khare (1984), Charsley and Karanth (1998), Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) and Kumar (2002) discussed the opposition of caste system and its norms for maintaining consensus in society and accepting the fate of their lowest position in Indian society. These works understands caste system and its reality from below perspective while taking account of the lives of those situated at the bottom and how do they experience social life from their location.

### **Stories of their Own**

The narratives i.e. oral tradition of telling stories of their origin invented by Dalit constitute an alternative history and language in their own terms. These stories are elaboration of Dalit aspirations, dreams and ambitions and a move to create and write history of their origin, their culture, customs, belief and the way of their life by their own. According to Narayan (2008), the 'story' of the katha is a form of liberation for marginalized groups of Indian society that enables them to enter the domain of knowing, inventing, creating and telling the past (including their own past) as a constant dialogue with the present. The 'story' as narrated by the communities is not just fiction, but is an existential act that reflects living cultural contexts. Taking this argument forward this section will explore how Dalit represents their past through stating their own life stories and these stories are present in written versions of their oral tradition. One of the main reason of emergence of verbal narratives by Dalit themselves is due to the ignorance of a particular community from indological textual sources. The production of ritual texts by upper caste Brahmins described their downtrodden position and

polluted past in historical formation of social groups of Indian society. Through narration of their life histories they take a stand point epistemological path where they attempt to tell their past in their own language.

These oral histories take note of origin, status, position and location of Scheduled Castes and their reaction to caste system. According to Basu (2016) the writings of social reformers and Dalit leaders such as Jyotibha Phule, Ambedkar and M.C. Rajah had its roots in anti-Brahmanical ideology adopted by Lokayats, Buddhism and later on Bhakti movements. "The Brahmanical texts define the concept of Dharma and also provide the framework for varna-jati framework of social organization....The central focus of the Brahmanical religious tradition was to represent the division of society as naturally ordained and it was the duty of individual to respect and practice the virtues of dharma". This Brahmanical authority has been questioned by Dalit at different point of times in history who do not accept their plight as divinely ordained.

The work of Rawat (2011) tries to look into the history of Indian society and its social groups through the lens of Scheduled Castes outside the Colonialism-Nationalism discourse. He questions the occupational stereotyping of Chamars of north India in dominant historical narrative and argues for the need of understanding history of Dalit through their view point. Ilaiah (1996) and Mani (2005) works demonstrated about the history of subjugation and domination of Dalit by upper castes and argues that they can have history and culture of their own and independent identity of their own.

What was the main need for Dalit literary movement or writing of the histories of their own?

The centre of this Dalit literary movement was Miland College in Marathawada in Aurangabad in Maharashtra. The college became the site for Dalit and non-Dalit members to associate with this movement and sharing of the common experiences of their life by Dalit students and comparing their situation with Blacks in USA. 1967 became the important year for the movement. The principal of the college M.N. Wankhade organized one conference in 1967 and raised some fundamental questions where he pointed towards the neglect of a dignified history of untouchables from the important ritual and academic literature of time. He urged Dalit writers to revolt and producing their own literature and presenting their problem (Dangle, 2009).

The main auto-biographies of Dalit men and women are:

- 1) Untouchable: The Autobiography of an Indian Outcaste by Hazaari in 1970
- 2) Things I never Imagined by N.S. Suryavanshi in 1975
- 3) Baluta by Daya Pawar in 1978.
- 4) Poisoned Bread: Translation from Modern Marathi Marathi Dalit Literature by Arjun Dangle in 1994
- 5) Karukku translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmstrom in 2000
- 6) Vasti translated into English by Vasant Moon
- 7) Growing Up as Untouchable in India by Gail Omvedt in 2001
- 8) The Outcaste translated from Marathi by Santosh Bhoomkar in 2003
- 9) Joothan: A Dalit's Life by Omprakash Valmiki translated from Hindi by Arun Prabha Mukerjee in 2003
- 10) The Prison we Broke by Baby Kamble in 2008.

These autobiographies and biographies on Dalit and their social life trace the narratives of their pain and a story of collective struggle waged over centuries on them. Interestingly some of them include the series of events in transforming their status from untouchable to Dalit as well as transformation of the stigmatized identity to the self-chosen identity as Dalit. By identifying themselves as Dalit writers such as Valmiki (2003) and Dangle (1994) stated that this has born as a historic struggle for dismantling of discriminating caste attitudes and rebuilding of society of their own which is free from any inequality and injustice. The Dalit literature in form of their biographies of life and struggle provides an alternative paradigm to the indological texts or past written records on their origin and social status. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who was the eminent leader of Dalit movement argued that Hinduism and its teachings are meant to be discriminatory and exploitative towards untouchables. He opposed Gandhian and social reformist ideology; rather he stressed on breaking the shackles of evils within Hinduism as a religion because their ideology was not to fight against this system of inequality rather accepting the social position and occupational duties of one's caste. Throughout his lifetime, Gandhiji's ideology was based on the notion that religion in India should be the way of life and the system of Varna is there to maintain the balance and consensus of society and for maintenance of this Hindu social order it is necessary for all Indians to follow the path of Varna Ashram Dharma. In his last years Ambedkar came to the conclusion after researching on 'Caste' as a defining subject of social and religious life of Indians that until the untouchables will remain the part of Hindu religion they will never be able to gain equality and dignity in society.

According to Dangle (2009) though Dalit literature flourished during Dr. Ambedkar's movement but it originated in 1920s where there was attempt by some Dalit writers to represent the miseries of their life to British. Among them were Gopalbaba Walangkar, Pandit Kongiram and Kisan Phagoji Bansod. After 1950s the first batch of Dalit youth in Maharashtra graduated from college named Ghanashyam Talwatkar and others set up a literary body. The major questions faced during this time were about their life, its problems and causes for

such problems. The decade of 1960s was an important period for Marathi Dalit literature. Baburao Bagul writings about Dalit and their life gained momentum because his writings jolted against the social system and gave it a jolt which was the need of an hour during this time.

Dalit literature or writings expanded and acknowledged in mainstream in post-independent India. They have been published in various regional languages such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Tamilian, Oriya and some got translated by other authors in English. They show how there was the need for Dalit to come to the forefront and write about the stories of their origin, status, their work, their social life and the history of pain and agony they have suffered at every point of life. The inequality and injustices they had faced for the foremost reason due to their 'location' in which they are born, the idea which we got while reading about their past and present in academia. Their location and the putatively lowly work they were/are engaged are the prime objectives for them to assert for their rights.

Dalit autobiographies are later development in Dalit literature which had their beginning in 1960s in Maratha language. Maratha was the regional language of Maharashtra and the early accounts of narration of life histories of Mahars (one of the Scheduled Castes) can be seen under the leadership of Ambedkar. These life narratives grounded the literature specific to Dalit experiences and created an ontological and epistemological difference from other literary currents in contemporary times. They also created a space where experiences and responses could be shared but not universalized. Dalit literature is marked by its protest against tradition and its quest for modernity. However in U.P the similar kind of move was traced by Rawat (2011) in his work where Chamars of U.P rewrites history of their origin through contesting the dominant colonial and Hindu narratives of their polluted identity. They composed new histories of their castes while claiming that their status become impure due to historical wrongs and reclaimed their identity as Kshatriya. They held meetings and demonstrations to mobilize their members and sustain their ideas. Series of Chamar histories were written and published in Uttar Pradesh during first half of century. U.B.S. Raghuvanshi book Shree Chamar Purana and Jaiswar Mahasabha book Suryavansh Kshatriya Jaiswar Sabha are some of the book written on Chamars history of their origin and claims of Yadav-Kshatriya status. These were some of the early moves of re-claiming of their identities to prove their respected and dignified status in society.

In post-independent India, due to introduction of reservation policy and other processes of development such as urbanization and industrialization some of the numerically preponderant groups of Scheduled Castes are able to secure a higher position in economic and political spheres. Their entry into educational institutions, highly paid administrative jobs as well as affiliation to major political parties and some were able to become MP, MLA have transformed their economic and political status but unable to transform their social and cultural status. In contemporary India, you will found no one from the Scheduled Castes doing priestly duties in temples. The reason for this is the location of their caste in which they born is significant and lived reality of caste in India. The economic, educational and political mobility they attained failed to transform their social or ritual status in society. The presence of discrimination on Dalit at University, Government job office and other sectors is prime evidence of inequality and injustice on them.

Therefore, Dalit autobiographies become a medium for every group of Scheduled Castes to write about their social experiences of life. It acts as a common platform for sharing of their views and can also be seen as a collective effort for fighting against disparity and a need for a new point of their life. The autobiography or memoir is a mode of self-expression and vehicle for Dalit to assert their identity and challenge the social order. Dalit writings thus turned as a compelling socio-political tool for marginalized section of society. What was not there in the dominant past takes rightful place through Dalit autobiographies. They gave importance to self, society and their community rather seeking individual path. The depiction of narratives in Dalit autobiographies does not make use of 'I' rather they use 'We' denoting the pain, agony and struggle of whole community as whole. Self-recognition is the main motto of Dalit autobiographies. Through writing about their life histories they try to engage with the larger audience while telling the tales of their social reality experienced by them.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

The main aim of this paper was to locate the earliest attempt of Dalit in India for formation of their self-defined identity in form of 'Adi-movements'. These movements were always ignored as a part to be discussed thoroughly and gaining central place in Indian academia or in sociological literature. It is true that these movements which originated in colonial India was a small scale struggle by Dalit in comparison to the Dalit movement of contemporary times post 1970s addressing Dalit issues with much stability and spreading it globally. But still the significance of 'Adi-movements' staging the base and accurate platform for such a big and long struggle of identity of Dalit cannot be denied. This paper gave ample space for careful description of historical foundation of Adi-movements and their significant contribution in making space for Dalit for raising their voices and engaging with the mainstream. The paper also looked into the question of 'identity formation' taking subjective view of Dalit either through the processes for formulating culturally and socially distinct identity as well as how narratives of their social reality is helpful in creation of better engagement of their life

world with the outside world. Through this they can themselves locate their position in society. Though the aim of Adi-ideology was not successful in absolute separation of Dalit from Hinduism and its ideological principles but it sowed the seeds for the possibility that Dalit can have a culturally distinct identity of their own traces of which can be seen in recent works of Kancha Illiah (*Why I am not a Hindu?*) critiquing Hinduism and its philosophy how it is discriminatory towards Dalit and Kumar (2002,2006 and 2005) who constantly argue that for better understanding of Dalit and their world it must be from their view point and how do they look at them and their identity in Indian society.

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