

Casting Casteism as Inherited Indignity: A Reading of Githa Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide*

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Abstract-- “Casting Casteism as Inherited Indignity: A Reading of Githa Hariharan’s *I Have Become the Tide*” attempts to view the menace of casteism as presented in Githa Hariharan’s *I Have Become the Tide*. An Indian writer and editor aiming at excellence, Hariharan perfectly balances herself as a writer of social concern and a narrative artist to drive home her ideas in an effective way. Hariharan’s fiction *I Have Become the Tide* (2019) substantiates her narrative expertise. The twin objectives of literature, namely delight and instruction, go hand in hand by blending harmoniously both the aesthetic considerations and the social concerns. It poignantly elucidates the anomaly behind the functioning of casteism and the torments faced by outcastes. The novel serves as a reservoir of narrative techniques such as plot-structure, characterization, setting, narrative situations and language chosen by Hariharan. These narrative techniques are employed in a specific manner that it helps to further substantiate casteism as a bane. This research paper is divided into four chapters. Chapter I introduces the author Githa Hariharan and discerns the theme of casteism as discussed in various works by different authors. It also provides a brief summary of *I Have Become the Tide*. Chapter II, “Caste- A Bane,” addresses casteism as a bane through the lens of *I Have Become the Tide*. Chapter III, “Progression vs Regression,” continues in the same vein to depict constant regressions faced by dissenters of casteism on their march towards progression. It also describes the various narrative techniques employed in *I Have Become the Tide* that elucidates the baneful nature of casteism. Chapter IV optimistically expresses a possibility for bridging the chasm between different castes.

Index Terms—Casteism, Casting, Caste, Inherited, Indignity, Bane, Progression, Regression.

Chapter I Introduction

Teetering between triumphs and tragedies, the 21st century marks a mosaic of varied inquisitiveness. Grappling with social injustices, consequent movements of dissenters, and an aim for development, India is notable for her incredulous attempts to critically examine the revolutionary efforts of past centuries. India is a criticism-surplus society. Literature acts as a didactic tool for unravelling various dimensions of a society in its existing form. Literary fiction is a delicate medium to mirror the issues and conflicts persisting within a society, by avoiding a direct revelation of facts. It helps to observe life without participating in it.

Majority of the Indian English fictionists, through their works lamenting over the predicaments of society, defy the then existing currents. During post-independence period (1945-1960), the trio among Indian novelists- Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan- dealt with issues of freedom, struggle, and the socio-political problems of the then India. The most noticeable characteristic feature of the contemporary Indian English fiction has been the appearance of feminist literature. The main focus of these writers has been to establish self-identity. Through their writings, Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Githa Hariharan, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy and Manju Kapur have captured the Indian ethos very effectively and competently. In addition to their insight into human nature, their artistic skill in dealing with present-day complications brings out their concern for modern themes like tradition versus modernity, identity crisis of their protagonists, Indian women’s quest for independence and the East- West conflict.

Even a sketchy understanding of India’s socio-political narrative or its economic and human development is incomplete without the comprehension of what is referred to as “world’s longest surviving social hierarchy” (“The Context of Caste Violence”) i.e., caste system. Caste system has been criticized for decades. Jyotirao Phule, a social reformer in Maharashtra, was one of the first voices to criticize the caste system in India. His *Gulamgiri*, published in 1873, explores Brahminical supremacy and pin-points the rampant discrimination in the social structure that allows the upper caste Hindus to deny basic rights of the poor, lower caste communities. Phule argues that “a superior, foreign race invaded this land, and they became known as Brahmins today and the lowly, indigenous people who were conquered... became the Shudras” (qtd. in Amir).

In 1936, Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, a Dalit social activist and the guiding force in drafting the Indian Constitution, self-published his undelivered speech, *Annihilation of Caste*. This work delves into the age-old practice which has oppressed low-caste communities, pushing them to the margins and caging them in everyday humiliation by stripping them of their dignity. Talking about why casteism is an impediment to development, Dr. Ambedkar says, “You cannot build anything on the foundations of caste. You cannot build up a nation, you cannot build up a morality. Anything that you will build on the foundations of caste will crack, and will never be a whole” (*Annihilation*). In 1935, Mulk Raj Anand produced his work *Untouchable*. Narrated through the fine analysis of a day’s activity of a sweeper boy, *Untouchable* exposes the dehumanizing role of caste. In 1936, he produced *Coolie*, which focused on the stigmatized untouchable mentality of the colonizers that prevailed then. In 1938, Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* was published. It represented how Gandhi’s struggle for Independence was carried onto a casteist South Indian village.

As casteism plays a pertinent role in India's social fabric, it still continues to be criticized. The first two decades of 21st century witnessed a continuing trail of dissenters' movements which had its initiation centuries ago. The social evils prevalent in the society and the attempts to eradicate those were of a pivotal concern to majority of the writers. Published in 2017, the Indian-American writer, Sujatha Gidla's memoir, *Ants Among Elephants: An Untouchable Family and the Making of Modern India*, charts her first-hand struggle with caste and identity. It is an anecdotal account of growing up in a society that constantly reminded her of being less human than most. Sujatha Gidla delineates the mistreatment of untouchables, how they were termed as polluted and how their segregation was normalized and forced to be their reality.

Amidst the gallery of Indian English women writers, the name 'Githa Hariharan' shines tenaciously for her works imbued with contemporaneity. Githa Hariharan, born in Coimbatore, India, in the year 1954, is from a Tamil Brahmin family of Palakkad, Kerala. Her father was a journalist. He was the founder of *The Economic Times* and so Hariharan knew that she "would do something with words" ("Githa Hariharan speaks"). She received a liberal education in leading public institutions in Bombay, Manila and the United States; she is a postgraduate in Communication from Fairfield University, Connecticut. Hariharan worked briefly as a television scriptwriter in New York. She worked as an editor at a publishing house for ten years and then followed it with a stint as a freelancer. Finally realizing her vocation, she took the major decision of abandoning this profession to become a fulltime writer. Githa Hariharan is fiercely protective of her privacy but is nonetheless anxious to involve herself in public as well as political issues.

Hariharan has written novels, short fictions and essays over the last three decades. Her highly acclaimed works include her debut novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) which won her the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Best First Book in 1993; the short story collection *The Art of Dying* (1993); the novels *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009); and a collection of essays entitled *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* (2014). She has also written children's stories and edited a collection of translated short fiction, *A Southern Harvest* (1993); the essay collection *From India to Palestine: Essays in Solidarity* (2014) and co-edited *Battling for India: A Citizen's Reader* (2019). Her most recent novel, *I Have Become the Tide* (2019) was shortlisted in the English fiction category of the PFC-VoW Book Awards 2020.

Hariharan, being brought up in a traditional Brahmin family, is well acquainted with the myths; and in her works, she perfectly blends the myth and reality in the modern Indian life. Her *The Thousand Faces of Night* questions patriarchy and brings to light the struggle of three generations of women for survival. It creates a new paradigm for the recreation of a woman's identity. Hariharan, in *The Art of Dying*, has taken the initiative to introduce death as something natural. She dives deep into the problem of the meaning of life and death. She brings into focus the attitude of the dying and the reactions of the living towards the dying. Her art of telling stories is subtle and natural. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is an extraordinarily moving tale of a small-town retired schoolteacher, his memories, his recollections and his ailments that are the ghosts. The novel, *When Dreams Travel* draws on *The Arabian Nights Entertainments* or *The Thousand and One Nights*. It addresses power politics with relation to gender. *In Times of Siege* deals with how one handles one's cultural past. *Fugitive Histories* exposes the legacy of prejudice that continues to erupt into hatred and violence in present-day India. *Almost Home* questions and comprehends the complexity underlying the term 'Home' and its connotations. *I Have Become the Tide* explicitly unleashes the cruelties of caste, the resilience of the downtrodden and the demonic attempts to extinguish dissents.

A voracious reader in her sixties, Githa Hariharan exemplifies the dire need for the budding authors to read widely, examine the works critically, "ask questions sternly, practice and think broadly" ("In conversation with Githa Hariharan"). Hariharan contemplates the rhetorical strategies operating within different domains of a society and finds contentment when it is released from her pen onto the paper. She is always curious to acquaint with the lived experiences of the socially subjugated minority groups. This knowledge gets manifested in her works- both fiction and non-fiction. In most of her works, readers seem to realize an inner thirst for an egalitarian, impartial, equalitarian, classless, casteless, harmonious and fair society. This remains her response to all the atrocities and injustices meted out to the oppressed subjects. Writers like Hariharan work as agents to report the mishaps in a society and to shed light on the sufferings of the unprivileged. Hariharan takes up a holistic approach to deal with the nuances of a typical Indian society. She writes with anguish, pain and anger about atrocities, especially caste discriminations, in India.

Hariharan's role as a social activist is commendable. Despite being mainly a fictionist, her works draw readers to delve into an ocean of politics as seen in real life. She says, "All my work looks at power politics in some way or the other" ("Githa Hariharan"). Her works were written during the last three decades (1992-present). She is a writer bridging the dusk of a century and the dawn of the next. Hariharan entices the themes of mundane life situations. She employs an easy fusion of past with present to comment on the present by contrasting it with the past.

Hariharan has, over the years, been a cultural commentator through her essays, lectures and activism. She rose to fame with a legal case which prompted the Supreme Court to pass a landmark judgment. In 1995, Hariharan challenged the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act as discriminatory against women. The case, Githa Hariharan and Another versus Reserve Bank of India and Another, led to a judgment in 1999 on guardianship. The apex court ruled that both father and mother have equal rights to be the guardian of a Hindu minor. The legal rights of mothers were promoted. This was supposed to be a milestone in the struggle for women's rights. Apart from being a renowned writer, Hariharan was brought to spotlight in the Indian face of social activism. Among the contemporary Indian English women writers, Githa Hariharan won a significant place by carving an alcove for herself. Her popularity as a feminist becomes evident with the Guardianship Act of 1999. Her works further declare her role as a social activist as those encompass themes foreseeing social reformations. Hariharan's contemporary writers and readers adore her works for its tone of unending protest, which usually runs inside every commoner who opposes oppressive ideologies. Her works appear to be the voice of many voices in unison. This makes her works lively and thought-provoking. One of the most critically acclaimed South-African novelists, J.M. Coetzee takes privilege to call her "An outstanding writer" ("Githa Hariharan").

A beautifully written and evocative novel, *I Have Become the Tide* was published in 2019. The time period in which the work is produced accounts for its significance in the literary canon. At a time when the ruling nationalist party entitled anybody questioning its principles and ideologies as an anti-nationalist, Githa Hariharan mustered the courage to pen a fiction which emphasized on victimhood under such a ruling authority. *I Have Become the Tide* deftly weaves the political events into private lives. Hariharan excavates the rich layers of Indian history. She writes with an infectious concern for her characters.

I Have Become the Tide deals with both the past and present scenarios of casteism. It comprises three narrative strands- one is that of a boy, Chikka, who lived between 9th and 12th century; another is a contemporary narrative strand of three Dalit students and

their life experiences; and a third one which bridges these two strands- the narrative of a college professor. Chikka's story constitutes the past and the other two strands constitute the present. The three strands open as three separate stories with different characters in each story. These separate threads are eventually strung together to compose a complete narrative with connections.

Through her narrative of Chikka, his father, their settlement colony and Anandagrama, Hariharan delineates the caste injustices that prevailed hundreds of years ago. Chikka, son of a cattle skinner is estranged from his settlement after his father's death. He finds his home in Anandagrama where people could choose the profession they wanted. Professions were not inherited. Chikka becomes Chikkiah, the washer-man on the bank of a flowing river. Anandagrama starkly contrasts to Chikka's settlement colony. It is portrayed as a utopian abode of living where people from all castes lived together, in harmony, like brothers and sisters. Chikkiah revels in his new abode which embraces 'equality' as its watchword. Chikka learns to live with dignity. He makes a family of his own with a wife and two children. Unfortunately, unforeseen events shatter his happy life. The Anandagrama movement receives threats to be torn apart. The rebellion of its inhabitants loses the battle against the Hindu militant forces. Muthuraja, hired by these militants, brutally kills Chikkiah in order to rise to fame. The movement against casteism was, thus, dissipated. The militants win. Anandagrama is lost; equality is forgotten; Hindu fundamentalism flourishes victimizing the lower castes. Inequalities and injustices are invited.

Through her narrative of three Dalit students- Satya, Asha and Ravi, Hariharan depicts the cruelties of caste in the present day. These students are seen dreaming countless casteless dreams. The trio aspires for the professional course of medicine after their schooling, as that may help them to have better dignified lives in the society like other upper caste people. Only Satya gets through the medical entrance test whereas Asha gets admitted to a nursing college and Ravi takes up Zoology for his degree course. Despite being diverted into different streams, each of them is always accompanied by their mutual intimate friend- the caste. Satya's caste brings him horrific experiences. Being a Dalit, he is mistreated by his professor, Dr. Sharma. Satya expresses his distress and despair for life in his diary. He becomes emotionally unstable when he is deprived of his rightful scholarship. He commits suicide. To his immense surprise, Ravi's college facilitated a platform for outcastes- Bhim Shakti organization- which included Dr. Senthil, the Dalit lecturer of Physics. Asha was not exempt from humiliations invited by her caste title. Satya's suicide was read as an institutional murder but the institutional authorities suspended the allegation. They conveniently framed Satya's death as a suicide due to high academic stress. Both Ravi and Asha were deeply affected by Satya's suicide. Their emotions grew fervent with anger and rage against caste discriminations.

In another narrative strand depicting the present scenario, Prof Krishna carries out his research on Kannadeva, who lived during twelfth century and was currently hailed as a casteless Hindu saint-poet. This narrative depicts a different manifestation of casteism. Hariharan elucidates the consequences of having a variant opinion in a society through her depiction of Prof Krishna and his research. His research yielded an astonishing finding that Kannadeva was none other than Kannappa, the son of Chikkiah and Mahadevi. From the manuscript he could collect, Prof Krishna learns that Chikkiah was the son of an erstwhile cattle skinner and Mahadevi was the daughter of a fisherman and a field labourer. The pedigree of the saint-poet was traced to a weaker caste which infuriated the Hindu fundamentalists. A hardcore follower of Hinduism, Guru Santhosh chooses his disciple Srikumar to kill the 'Rakshasa Kavi' (Sanskrit- demonic poet) as a step towards making a Hindu nation. Much obliged, Srikumar executes his auspicious mission with utmost perfection. Therefore, Prof Krishna goes to the hit list and is killed by extremists armed with bullets. It spurs protests among many people including Dr. Senthil, Ravi, Asha and other students who organize a rally. Their voices ring in unison and can metaphorically be represented as the roaring tides. The upsurge of these voices instills hope and trust among the other targeted people who hears them. Hence, Hariharan situates an institutional murder and a political murder, both of which pave way to a general protest, thus striking an optimistic note.

Thus, the narrative of Chikka is connected with that of Prof Krishna's as Prof Krishna researches on the 12th century poet, Kannadeva, who happens to be Chikka's son. Prof Krishna, in the 21st century, digs out the manuscript that brings home Chikkiah and his earthbound songs via Kannappa (Kannadeva) to Krishna's own times. The narrative of Prof Krishna is connected with that of the three Dalit students (Satya, Ravi and Asha) as the former's book about the poets of Anandagrama is read by the latter. The book inspires these students. The narrative of the three Dalit students is connected with that of Chikka's as the former reads about him from the book by Prof Krishna. In this way, the three narratives are interconnected.

In spite of being separated by hundreds of years, Chikka's life as a washer-man finds resemblance with Satya's life as a medical student. It is this resemblance that interests Githa Hariharan. This unchanging aspect accounts for the dynamics of caste. Chikka and his likes had many restrictions in their settlement. They were not allowed to step into the nearby village unless they were called in for menial jobs like cattle skinning, carrying buckets of shit and clearing garbage. Chikka never voiced his complaint even though he was uninterested in his destined job of cattle skinning. His hunger was to be satiated and this need demanded him to carry out the job. Rolling on to the present, despite being a medical student, Satya is not free from the clutches of casteism. He was not allowed to befriend his classmates from upper caste. From Chikka's story in the past to the present era, surprisingly, Hariharan finds more resemblances than the generally expected changes. Just as Chikka is astonished that Elder Brother, a teacher, and Puttanna, a rat-catcher, are friends, Prof Krishna is astonished that some of the poems allegedly by a Hindu saint-poet are by a rat-catcher. The locales and time periods have changed but the discrimination remains unchanged. However, a period of a few centuries demands far better progressions than these.

In short, *I Have Become the Tide* juxtaposes the caste based injustices that prevailed hundreds of years ago with the horrors of caste that is at stake in the current scenario. Travelling constantly between two distinct time spaces, the author holds a tinge of tenderness in her narrative. Despite innumerable protests and fights of untouchables against the societal prejudices oppressing them, they are still segregated from the mainstream society. Hariharan attempts to facilitate a platform for these minorities to expose their subaltern positions. At the heart of her novel, is the theme of sufferings of the lower rungs of a society, especially Dalits, and the destructive forces that crush dissents. It revolves around the hostilities and humiliations of the unprivileged sections of society. Hariharan takes the perspective of outcastes and dissenters to elucidate the torments faced by outcastes. Her characters yearn for a life with basic human dignity under circumstances of dire repression. At large, this emphasizes her wish for a change in the caste inequalities.

During the latter half of the second decade of 21st century, India was at a tremendous shock with a few incidents that she witnessed when the ruling Government was of the right-wing. Githa Hariharan's narrative strands in *I Have Become the Tide* resonate with real life events that brought about widespread frictional currents in the country. Hariharan draws on the stories of the

suicide of Rohith Vemula in 2016, the murder of M.M. Kalburgi in 2015 and the 12th century Bhakti movement. Satya's death resonates with the Dalit student, Rohith Vemula's institutional murder that has spurred various protests. The political murder of Prof Krishna resonates with the political assassination of M.M. Kalburgi. Hariharan evokes Bhakti movement in her narrative of Chikka and Anandagrama.

Rohith Chakravarty Vemula was a student from the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. Pursuing his PhD course at Hyderabad Central University, his identity as a Dalit student brought about issues in his academics. He was accused of speaking for the rights of students under the banner of Ambedkar Students' Association (ASA). The University withheld his rightful stipend and one of the university officials claimed that the reason for curtailing the stipend was his delay in paper-works. An investigation team was launched; Vemula and his friends were condemned accused. Vemula commits suicide. The whole case is considered as a state-driven, government-supported murder of a Dalit student. He was driven to despair by discrimination. Vemula's suicide sparked widespread outrage and student protests. Vemula cried out his heart in his suicide note in 2016, "My birth is my fatal accident" ("My birth"). Githa Hariharan, with her keen interest in portraying the adversities faced by Dalit communities, was touched with this incident. Her Satya, alludes to Rohith Vemula. She dedicates Satya's story to all such Rohith Vemulas who are denied right to live because of their caste title.

Mallesappa Madivalappa Kalburgi was a well renowned Kannada writer and a literary scholar who was murdered at his doorstep in 2015. He received several death threats before being murdered. It was his views and preaches that brought him the wrath of his assassins. He turned his voice against the Hindu superstitious beliefs but a few Hindu devotees took it as his preaching against Hindu idolatry. This probably emanated the vengeance among his unidentified murderers. The murder of M.M. Kalburgi initiated riots in the country as that was considered as a murder by Hindu fundamentalists. Other writers and humanists realized the case as the one suggesting that people who stood against the ruling (party's) ideology will be killed.

The Bhakti movement (800-1700) originated in South India and spread across the subcontinent. Alternately called a reform or revival movement, the Bhakti movement witnessed a surge in Hindu literature in regional languages, particularly in the form of devotional poems and music. It comprised diverse philosophical positions and included people from all communities. The movement's major achievement was its abolition of idol worship. Bhakti poets emphasized the surrender to God. Many of the Bhakti saints were rebels who chose to defy the currents of their time through their writings. "As a social movement, the Bhakti movement in Karnataka, and indeed everywhere in India, challenged caste hierarchy, emphasized the individual's direct connection to god and the possibility of salvation for all through good deeds and simple living" ("Medieval History"). The Bhakti tradition continues in a modified version even in the present day.

Even after dissents for hundreds of decades, caste remains a giant force wielding power on humankind. The power it possesses is invariably capable of sweeping a nation off its ground and causing a tumultuous fuss, thus disturbing its social integrity. Horrors of caste are articulated in literary works as a method of dissenting it. In this study, one such work of the sensational Indian English writer, Githa Hariharan, is being discussed. The project emphasizes the dynamics of caste and its dissent as poignant themes in Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide* (2019). In this fiction, Hariharan depicts the difficulties of people discriminated on the basis of their caste, their constant dissents and dissipation of those dissents by dominant powers; the associated social stigma, prejudices and oppressive ideologies are also explored. The core chapter, "Caste- A Bane," addresses casteism as a bane through the lens of *I Have Become the Tide*. The third chapter, "Progression vs Regression," depicts constant regressions faced by dissenters of casteism on their march towards progression. It also describes various narrative techniques employed in *I Have Become the Tide* that elucidates the baneful nature of casteism.

Chapter II Caste: A Bane

Githa Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide* neatly braids together three narrative strands to produce a coherent narrative addressing the stringent practices of caste inequalities. The fundamental concern in *I Have Become the Tide* is that casteism has been persisting, for centuries, to standardize itself as a mythical norm. It functions dynamically with its widespread thorny tentacles reaching out for the outcastes. Despite constant struggles, little changes are traceable in the atrocities. The roots of casteism hold to the ground sternly that it is high time to uproot it. Hariharan makes an attempt to at least shake the systemic giant plant so that the readers would join her in the mission to uproot it completely. The heart of the novel genuinely palpitates giving life to the voices of dissent against casteism. The few legible voices of dissent instill hope among the sufferers. Victimhood, dissent and dissipation of dissent are depicted in the novel.

The word caste is derived from the Spanish and Portuguese 'casta', which means "race, lineage, or breed" ("Caste"). Portuguese employed casta in the modern sense when they applied it to hereditary Indian social groups called as 'jati' in India. 'Jati' originates from the root word 'Jana' which implies taking birth. According to Anderson and Parker, "Caste is that extreme form of social class organization in which the position of individuals in the status hierarchy is determined by descent and birth" (qtd. in Shah).

A probe into the caste system in India knocks at various theories in order to explain the origin of the notion of casteism. The traditional theory suggests that caste emerged as a divine principle. It holds that caste system is a consequence of the four Varnas (Sanskrit- colours) originated from Lord Brahma's body- Brahmins (teachers and intellectuals) from Brahma's head; Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers) from Brahma's arms; Vaishyas (traders) from his thighs and Shudras from his feet. The head signified authority to preach (mouth) and teach (brain); arms connoted valour and protection; thighs stood for cultivation or business and feet served the whole body. The political theory propounds that caste system is a well-crafted political tactic of Brahmins to set themselves as the indomitable supreme authority in the hierarchical stratification. This placed them as the highest in the social ladder. The racial theory accounts for the origin of caste system as an influence of the Chaturvarna (Sanskrit- 'four colours') system- Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

Varna system, prevalent during the Vedic period, was based on division of labour and occupation. Occupational theory suggests a functional relation between occupation and caste. Highly respectable occupations conferred its occupants with a superior status than those engaged in menial jobs. Evolution theory proclaims that caste system was an outcome of certain

collective colonial, geographical and political factors and so has taken ample time to evolve. In his book *The Truth About Us* (2019), Sanjoy Chakravorty argues that “the structure of caste was largely forged by British colonial rulers in the 18th and 19th centuries as a way of simplifying it for censuses of the Indian population, which were then used to make the country easier to govern” (qtd. in Withnall). Thus, caste system yields segmentation within a society.

Caste based stratifications are common in other countries like Nepal, Japan, Sri Lanka, Korea and several countries of Africa and Europe. But the Indian caste system is unique because of its association with the religions. The crux of caste system in India centres on purity and pollution. The higher castes claimed to possess ritual, spiritual and racial purity which they maintained by keeping the lower castes at bay through the notion of pollution. The idea of pollution implies that a touch of a lower caste man could pollute or defile a man of higher caste. This notion has relegated the status of people engaged in menial jobs (like drainage cleaners, garbage collectors, sweepers of streets) to the ‘Untouchables.’ These people formed the lowest rung of the social ladder and they are categorized under the title ‘Dalit.’

Dalit is the political term employed to refer to the Scheduled Caste which has facilitated a more positive self-construal among its group members. The word Dalit literally means to be trampled or oppressed. Dalit community is excluded from the four-fold hierarchical Varna system in Hinduism. According to the preachers of Karma and Dharma, “people who failed to abide by the Dharma of an allotted caste in a previous incarnation are attacked by Karma to give them the lives of Dalits in their reincarnation” (“Caste System in India”). Several myths and taboos are associated with Dalits.

Casteism serves as a great stumbling block in the way of social reforms because of the lack of equal job opportunities among different castes. Each caste demands its people to abide by its specific caste norms which forbid change and modernization. It undermines perfect mobility of labour and productive efforts. It hinders mobility of trade and wealth across diverse groups. This, in turn, decelerates economic progress of the nation. It further diminishes the nation’s development. These pave way to the nation’s disintegration rather than integration. Thus, caste system accompanies several dysfunctions. It perpetuates the exploitation of the economically weaker and socially inferior castes, especially the untouchables. Caste discriminations entrenched in society may violate people’s equal rights to education, health, housing, property, freedom of religion, free choice of employment, and equal treatment before the law. “Dalits also suffer routine violations of their right to life and security of person through state-sponsored or state-sanctioned acts of violence, including torture” (“Hidden Apartheid”).

Githa Hariharan’s *I Have Become the Tide* explicitly portrays the humiliating life experiences burdened on the outcastes. A very poignant line in the novel that sums up the condition of an outcaste is “Life can be left behind without dying” (Hariharan 170). Hariharan flaunts the idea that life of an outcaste is more miserable than that of a dying person. In the novel, Ravi’s compiled newspaper headlines highlight the atrocities faced by Dalits across India. The list ranges from humiliation to injustice to brutality, and it’s far from complete. Githa Hariharan generously devotes more than two pages to enumerate these dreaded headlines (195-197). Among those, the news about attacking a “seventeen-year-old Dalit young man for sporting his moustache” (197) enrages Ravi the most. It probably infuriates readers as well.

Githa Hariharan, in her fiction, delineates events of two distant temporal settings to facilitate her readers with a possible comparison between the different scenarios of casteism. For instance, Chikka’s father, who lived centuries ago, can be compared to Ravi’s grandfather, who died lately. Chikka’s father, a cattle skinner, says, “They (upper castes) hate us, the miserable cunts. They love their cows. But can they love a cow like we do, use every bit of it once it’s dead, eat it so it lets us live another day?” (120) He beats his drum harshly as if the drum is an embodiment of his hunger and humiliation. Ravi’s great grandfather would go whenever he was called to beat his drum for the funeral procession. He held a complaining attitude:

They (upper castes) need us for all the degrading jobs. Carrying carcasses of dead cows, shoveling shit and carrying basketfuls of it. Burying dead bodies. Death is as important as birth. I know that, but there’s something I don’t understand. Why should your father’s body become something polluting? (Hariharan 107)

Geographical and cultural barriers keep the outcastes at bay. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Chikka’s settlement colony was divisive in terms of caste. The outcastes were prohibited entry into the village as that could pollute the land. Hunger, starvation, thirst, helplessness and haplessness marked their living. Ravi’s home in a little colony consisted of only Dalits. Dr. Senthil’s residential area was in a congested part of the city. Being confined to dingy, narrow, dark, congested living areas, the outcastes appear as blots on a supposedly wide and fresh city. They are deliberately barred from the main city. This barrier indicates the demarcation between the mainstream and the marginal. Confined within specified boundaries, the outcastes are insulated from the vanity of upper castes. They are deemed as inessential, useless and unworthy beings. Their tapered residential areas forbid cultural exchanges. Their deeds are unseen, voices are unheard and their presence is unrecognized.

Social exclusion revolves around the societal institutions that discriminate, isolate and deprive some groups on the basis of their group identity like caste, ethnicity and religion. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Asha, Ravi and Satya compose an SC trio because they were excluded by the other “Forward Caste” (Hariharan 90) students in their class. Asha’s teacher, Mrs. Kumari; her roommate’s aunt and aunt’s father-in-law; Satya’s professor, Dr. Sharma; his classmates; his hostel-mates; Ravi’s classmates are all but only a few characters blinded by the conventional social exclusions. They adhere to the myth of an upper-caste dominant society to exclude outcastes. For them, upper caste connotes to holiness, sacredness and cleanliness. Granting the outcastes an equal access to rights may cease the authorial powers of elites. The upper caste people rule and wield power to suppress the other castes. Thus, a power politics is at play.

I Have Become the Tide unveils the power politics playing an upper hand in social institutions. In Githa Hariharan’s own words, “As for writing and politics: the ‘political’ may be overt or implicit in a work of fiction. But I don’t see how you can either write or live, without grappling with the political – the numerous power struggles we witness in our day-to-day lives” (Sharma). Casteism clings to power structure in a society. The outcastes are deliberately relegated to underprivileged lives and often used as tools to reinforce the authority of the dominant castes. Dr. Sharma’s grudge towards Satya and Mrs. Kumari’s attitude towards Asha elucidates their indomitable power. It is not only the dominance of a teacher over a student but also an authority of an upper-caste towards an outcaste. It characterizes a default mindset of the upper-castes. The power structure yields segmentation and power rests with the apical stratum in hierarchy. Likewise, Prof Krishna was assassinated for speaking truth. This shows the power exercised by the Hindu fundamentalists aiming at a Hindu nation. Power of a person amplifies when s/he is unquestioned. Those who question the powerful are often condemned as a threat to the latter’s potential. The powerful ones fear a loss of their power. It is their obsession with power that brings out the evil force in them. Hariharan, in *I Have Become the Tide*, criticizes casteism by expounding

that outcastes are “regular people with regular lives, not people with name tags that set them apart- below or behind everyone else” (33).

In *I Have Become the Tide*, the severity of torments faced by the outcastes is represented. They are believed to pollute their surroundings with their mere presence. The pollution attributed to them was considered hereditary:

Their (outcastes’) work polluted forever, the pollution was handed down from mother to child, father to child, like an inescapable legacy. They had to work, but they had to be invisible. If one of them came out of their untouchable colony, he had to ring a bell, to warn anyone who might see him or pass him on the road and get polluted. (Hariharan 179)

In her fiction, Hariharan shows that relegating outcastes to a low status is often taken for granted as a rule. For instance, when the white stranger approaches Chikka while he is mourning the death of his father, Chikka reflects, “My god, the man is coming closer. Soon they will break all caste rules” (11). That is for the first time that Chikka tastes politeness. Similarly, Dr. Sharma tampers with Satya’s attendance and warns him of a denial of his scholarship. He says, “There are rules, you know. You can’t escape the rules” (200). Most often, the outcastes are reminded of their unprivileged status by the upper castes. They are, thus, made to accept their disrespected lives as their inescapable fates. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Asha, Ravi and Satya were tamed to live with their demerits of births. Asha’s answering a question in the class simply reminds her of her poor English language because the other students laugh at her. Satya’s raised hands to answer a question asked in the class go unseen. He is soon reminded by the other students that his being a “quota student” (93) is the reason why he is denied the right to answer. His hostel reinforced his low status as he was given a dingy room next to the washroom. Ravi’s classmates also remind him of his unprivileged caste as he is left to befriend only the students from his own caste.

I Have Become the Tide strikes at the fact that outcastes were deemed to their respective statuses and occupations as part of conventionality and hereditary factors. Chikka was expected to be a cattle-skinner like his father. Satya, being a Dalit, was never expected to become a doctor. Asha, Ravi and Satya were all looked down by other students in their class since they were ‘quota’ students. They were supposed to serve others by taking up menial jobs. Any attempt to transcend the expectations of the society rendered them contempt from the expectants. They were viewed as being arrogant when they tried to excel in academics or career. Any attempt by them to reach the status of the upper caste is nipped by the latter. This keeps them trapped within the cobweb of humiliations. This is evident from Dr. Sharma’s words for Satya: “All this trouble for what? Suppose you get your MBBS- just in case you do manage to get your degree from here, how many people would agree to be treated by you?” (185)

As exemplified in the novel, exploitation of labour and burden of bonded labour are at the very heart of the caste system. Chikka in *I Have Become the Tide* disliked cattle-skinning because of the humiliations and shame that occupation brought to his father and grandfather. He was hesitant to become yet another object of humiliation. Chikka’s father also expressed his dissatisfaction with the occupation. He insists on Chikka’s breaking the lineage. He tells Chikka, “You’re right. Don’t do it. Do something else. Find a river, go to the sea. Become a fisherman” (121). Being subjected to exploitations, the outcastes wish to deviate from their parental lineage as that would help them escape scornful lives that their ancestors had. They seem exhausted with their own lives. Asha wanted to belong to a better section:

“What it would be like to wake up one morning and find that I too was General. Part of the general public. Not someone who was ‘weaker section’ or ‘backward’ or ‘depressed’ or ‘harijan’ or ‘Scheduled Caste’ or even ‘Dalit’” (Hariharan 39).

In the novel, Satya’s eagerness to get rid of the entitlements of his Dalit identity becomes evident from his diary. His poignant narrative brings forth repugnance among the readers. All his attempts to surpass the default caste injustices go unrecognized and unrewarded. His death is also disregarded since the institution deems it as a mere suicide due to academic stress. Satya’s diary is a manifesto of the torments he faced. His contempt for caste divisions is also notable in his diary. He writes:

Did I, and others like me, invent the word caste? I too hate the word caste. I too want to be free of it. The word has become part of my skin, my blood. But when can I stop using it, or even thinking about it? When can I say I am just me, Satya, not a Dalit? That’s the cruelty of it: it’s not up to me. (190)

The fiction traces the outcastes’ quest for identity. Hariharan portrays Dalit students in their journey to establish their own identity. Being placed at stake, their individuality is to be claimed by themselves. In this process, they are confronted by hurdles. Despite being a Professor of Physics, Dr. Senthil is heaped with abuses on social media platforms due to his caste title. His identity as an educated individual worthy of respect in society is forgotten because of his belonging to the Dalit community. His reputation is not sanctioned by the elites. Identity becomes valid only when others get ready to accept it. Unless a person’s identity is sanctioned by others as he/she wishes, the identity remains unattainable and hence impossible. Thus, the outcastes’ race for equality can be seen as their movement to claim their own identities.

I Have Become the Tide shows how casteism in 12th century is modified into a different manifestation by 21st century. The cruelties faced by Chikka’s settlement colony and Anandagrama deciphered visible atrocities of casteism in 12th century whereas Kannappa’s transformation into the saint poet, Kannadeva, by 21st century manifests a new version of casteism. Kannappa managed to attain wisdom and knowledge from his monastery. When his compilation of his ancestors’ songs reaches the 21st century readers, they readily accept him as the Hindu saint-poet, Kannadeva. His caste title was taken for granted as an upper-caste because majestic poetry was entitled to Hindu saint-poets. Prof Krishna, who attempted to foreground Kannadeva’s true belonging to a low caste, is brutally murdered. This enunciates the horrific manifestations of casteism in contemporary scenario. Prof Krishna’s self-reflection was that, “Caste lived then: it still flourishes. But it has been whitewashed so Kannadeva can be a ‘saint’, a ‘Hindu saint’” (Hariharan 89).

Hariharan observes prejudice and stereotypes as scars or wounds in a society. These are not only being reinforced in every new generation but are seen to occur in new forms with the passage of time. The old scars are always scars which do not attract much concern whereas the new wounds are fresh enough to catch one’s sight. New wounds like caste divisions act as swords rubbing salt on an old scar and they rediscover the old scar to hurt it bitterly. In spite of the occasional frights for repercussions, people are urged to speak out so that no new wounds or future scars would be tolerated. Hariharan invites her readers to think of the solid disparity between rationalists and the obscurantists. She says that “the obscurantists are to be laughed at and shamed for their foolishness, without being encouraged” (“Deliberation”) Caste is, thus, treated as a stigma attached to human minds in *I Have Become the Tide*.

I Have Become the Tide is pertinent with prejudice and social stigma associated with caste divisions. These prejudices normalize the myth of inherent indignities. Once deemed to the status of untouchables, they still carry the epistemological attributes of their ancestors despite various laws and orders abolishing untouchability. Statements like “They were dark and poorly dressed. They had trouble with English. They could get away with lower pass marks and scholarships. All SCs come from the same dirty place” (Hariharan 45) substantiate the prejudice. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Asha’s experience with her roommate’s guardian seems all the more humiliating. The elderly in the family, who is stigmatized to casteist notions, targets her with his eyes fixed on her skin:

He suddenly stopped chewing to ask, ‘What caste?’ Everyone fell silent.
‘Your friend, this black girl. What caste?’ (Hariharan 41)

Hariharan’s Satya was also an object of social stigmatization in his school days. Being a Dalit, he was targeted by the other students in his class. Those students who were extremely prejudiced against Dalit community constantly bullied Satya:

‘Satya Jayate! Satya Jayate!’ . . .
Once one of them said, ‘It seems your people clean toilets? They lug buckets of shit every day?’
‘Did you see the truth in shit today?’ . . .
‘Satya in shit. What is Satya’s motto? Truth in shit.’ (45)

Githa Hariharan highlights the caste discrimination against Dalit students on campuses through her depiction of Asha, Ravi and Satya. These Dalit students face discriminations that vary from physical exclusion to a more subtle denial of entitlements. In a session at college, Asha was shot a question by one of the women- “And why do you think you would make a good nurse?” (39). Another woman immediately intervened with a reply, “But you people are used to serving others, isn’t it? Nursing will come naturally to you” (39). Asha was humiliated with the incident. This accounts for the academic discrimination. In another instance, she couldn’t miss the disgust framed solely for her by her teacher who singled out her to clean the sanitary annex. Satya’s seems to be the most sympathetic case of caste discrimination. Hariharan enlists different instances from Satya’s college life in order to express the humiliations he faced. Divided into eight scenes, the lengthy list of humiliating experiences of Satya is detailed in about three pages (91-94). His terrible loneliness as an audacious Dalit distorts his academic focus. Despite winning a seat in a reputed medical college, Satya couldn’t prove himself. His caliber was neglected by the institution, just because he belonged to a Dalit community. While clearing the admission processes in the college, he was made to wait for hours at the office counter. For the Orientation Programme, while the other students were accompanied by their guardians, Satya was all by himself. In his class, he placed himself in a secluded corner. His teachers and classmates deliberately neglected his presence around them. At the library, students were reluctant to refer the book he touched. Satya’s professor, Dr. Sharma accuses him for attaining good marks by copying whereas Satya’s merit was the result of his true hard work. He never indulged in malpractices. But his honesty was put at check. Dr. Sharma never missed a chance to demote Satya. He, soon, plunges into Satya’s worst nightmares. Dr. Sharma purposely tampers with Satya’s attendance. Despite being a regular student, Satya was framed for an attendance shortage and so his scholarship became a forbidden fruit. He couldn’t help his mother with money. Poverty strikes him down haplessly. He couldn’t manage to rise himself from the crisis. He falls into the vicious trap of casteism. He gives up his life by first poisoning himself and then drowning in his favourite pond. The rigmarole on campus - meeting new people, immersing themselves in books and writing, and checking on each other - are told through their interactions with caste. Asha quietly reconciles to college life, Ravi begins to understand the tenacity of caste oppression through activism, and Satya spirals into a lonely depression.

Hariharan emphasizes on the all-pervasiveness of caste discrimination. She observes how difficult it is to peel the layers of oppression across generations- from 12th century to the 21st century. Casteism is represented as an all-pervasive system that affects academic, social, professional, domestic and economic lives of outcastes. She invokes Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to describe caste as a monster: “A monster. The monster that walls in Ravi, Satya, Asha, thousands and thousands of people like them, in settlements, colonies, quotas, ‘traditional’ occupations; the monster that walls them out of their own lives” (Hariharan 139). Through her fictionally constructed characters, Githa Hariharan enunciates atrocities faced by outcastes both during 12th century and 21st century. Thus, casteism is shown not as a new and spontaneous phenomenon but as an oldest system of hierarchy. Satya reflects that a change in casteism is not very easy, through a fictional conversation:

We have gone beyond caste, says one.

Another says: we have to stop looking backward, caste is history.

The good man among them says: Yes, I agree all people are the same and we must not say these are high, those are low. But caste has been there for so many years. It can’t change overnight, can it? (Hariharan 190)

Education is seen as instrumental in the emancipation of outcastes. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Chikka and Mahadevi decide to impart proper education in their son as they believe that education could wipe out every twinge of humiliation associated with their caste. Mahadevi says, “Kannappa, my son. Go, learn as much as you can. Learn everything we can’t teach you” (168). Little has changed in the present scenario as can be seen in the lives of Asha, Satya and Ravi. Their parents also believe that education and white collar jobs could provide them with lives of dignity and respect:

A college education, especially a professional course, would help Asha, Ravi and Satya find some sort of key. A key that would open doors so they too- child and family, family and community- could go into the big world and be part of it, studying, working, earning, loving, marrying, making families. Living like anyone else. (Hariharan 26)

It is considered a miracle when children from weaker community pursue higher education. Satya’s mother recalls the education system during her childhood when only a few from their community were allowed to go to school at least for a few years. She compares it with the present situation wherein Dalit students could finish at least tenth grade. She is immensely proud of her son’s journey to an efficient doctor. The admission chart at Asha’s college specifies that nearly half of the class belonged to the General category. In the descending order, number of General category students was followed by Other Backward Castes which was followed by Scheduled Castes; and “the tiny Scheduled Tribes list, ST, was below SCs” (39). Despite being comparatively lesser in number, this indicates a vicissitude when compared to the past access to education.

Equality forms the core objective of Hariharan’s *I Have Become the Tide*. Githa Hariharan, in her fiction, resorts to a humanistic approach by her undertone fighting for equality. She carves an egalitarian society by the portrayal of Anandagrama. It is a place where equality is not a privilege but a human right. Elder Brother of Anandagrama complacently says, “We have dreamt of a better life and made it. A life in which we work, pray and live with dignity. We will not let it go. No king or soldier or priest

can tear apart the dream we are making real” (217). Puttanna’s question, “You think that’s strange? That we should be brothers, a teacher and a rat catcher?” (68) seems too crucial in the novel. People of Anandagrama epitomize an unusual human spirit. Their collective song of resistance was their weapon to fight for equality. Essentiality of unity and solidarity are, thus, highlighted.

I Have Become the Tide embraces beautifully written lyrical poetry that run parallel with the prose. In using devotional poetry as a contentious issue in the novel, Hariharan destabilizes the notion that poetry and devotion is a domain of the powerful alone. Voices, and thereby poetry, are effective strategies of articulation and pride- something the outcastes are largely been denied by the dominant upper castes. The song by Chikka’s father refrains throughout the novel, which clearly articulates the collective interest of the subjugated outcastes. The song emphasizes dire need for a movement that protests the injustices they face. It exemplifies the hope for a caste-free social space:

Where is the land where water flows free? Tell me. Tell me.

Where is my land

where water flows free? (Hariharan 9)

Water flow, here, metaphorically signifies the unhindered movement of people belonging to all castes; it denotes the upward mobility of the outcastes in the hierarchy. Their urge for equality and freedom are manifested. Such a caste-free, class-free, equal and egalitarian society is the common dream of the oppressed subjects.

I Have Become the Tide portrays collective efforts organized in order to challenge casteism. Bhim Shakti Organization at Ravi’s college seeks to combat caste discrimination. It embraced the ideology of socialism and anti-casteism. It seeks to emancipate the lives of downtrodden people. The meetings held by the organization facilitated a platform for its student members to speak boldly. This helped them develop confidence. Such organizations yield fruitful products as it shapes citizens with pride in their voice and eloquence in their tasks. Dr. Senthil states, “We are not here because of someone’s kindness, or some god, or some quota. We are here because we have the right to be here” (132). Ravi responds to Satya’s suicide saying, “We are neither weak nor humble. Why don’t they name us, Why do they hide behind these lies? and merit. Satya not have merit? What merit does his college have if it drove him to death?” (267). Also, Hariharan constructs Anandagrama on the lines of equality and anti-casteism:

Why did Anandagrama have to happen? There had to be a place where fishermen, cattle skimmers, rat catchers, shit carriers, all those who were considered low, lower, lowest, had to come together. Why was Anandagrama killed? The people’s combined strength had to be met with force, crushed. Their self-respect, their insistence that they too be real people, was a threat to those who have always held power in their closed fists. (Hariharan 111)

Hariharan illustrates the present scenario wherein the outcastes overtly challenge casteism. They believe that a shift in their lives is possible only by holding on to their identity with pride. Instead of desisting, they cling to their identities firmly. This is evident from an episode of Hariharan’s Ravi:

‘What caste?’ asks the man.

Ravi is astonished, but he says, puffing out his chest,

‘I am Dalit. And proud of it.’ (192)

Dissents are obvious in any unjust society. When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty. Unsurprisingly, casteism also attracts dissents. Right to free speech necessarily includes the right to criticize and dissent. In *I Have Become the Tide*, Dr. Senthil, Satya, Mahadevi, Kannadeva, Ravi and Asha are a few among the many dissents. They aim at the emancipation of outcastes by appreciating and reckoning the battles fought by brave warriors like Chikkiah, Puttanna, Prof Krishna and others. Dr. Senthil, the Dalit Professor of Physics, voices his dissent distinctly by encouraging outcastes through Bhim Shakti Organization. Satya dissents his allocated underprivileged status by attaining a medical seat and aspiring to become a doctor. Inhabitants of Anandagrama express their dissent by living like others. On being targeted by Hindu fundamentalists, they dissent with their heartfelt songs. Being a Dalit woman, Mahadevi of Anandagrama was doubly marginalized than the male Dalits. She dissents by being the first copyist of the songs of Anandagrama. Kannadeva takes up the baton of dissent by compiling a manuscript of these songs with credits assigned to respective poets. Centuries later, this manuscript attracts Prof Krishna to explore the actual pedigree of Kannadeva. He expresses dissent by publishing his research faithfully. The bright boy at Kannadeva’s monastery dissents the teaching system in his school. Ravi and Asha express their dissent by joining the protestor’s rally seeking to condemn Prof Krishna’s murder. Caste, being a social monster, is to be dissented for its dysfunctions. This remains the most significant message of Hariharan’s fiction.

I Have Become the Tide also shows that the attempts to challenge caste inequalities are not always encouraged. In addition to the cruel and humiliating circumstances the Dalits have been put in, their efforts to improve their condition have often been thwarted through assault and murder by upper castes threatened by the Dalits’ search for equality. Githa Hariharan, in *I Have Become the Tide*, draws on the fates of a few dissents. As is the case with most of the attempts to ostracize casteism, Hariharan’s fictional casteless village of Anandagrama too was demolished by the Hindu fundamentalists. The dissents of its inhabitants were coercively dissipated by the upper-caste militants. A battlefield with bloodsheds was the outcome. The bright boy at Kannadeva’s monastery was expelled from the school for his independent way of thinking and his dissent against rote learning. The school authority insisted this expulsion as a warning to all those who dare to question them. Rolling on to the current scenario, Satya’s attempt to excel in his academics and win reputation as a doctor is not entertained by his institution. He was warned by his professor, Dr. Sharma, “See this fist? Take a good look at it because that’s where your future is” (Hariharan 186). Since Satya was a Dalit, his passing out with bright colours couldn’t be spared by the institution. Asha was targeted on social media for expressing her stance against caste injustices. Dr. Senthil was also abused on social media for his support for outcastes.

Prof Krishna’s fate is determined by his dissenting casteism. On publishing the hagiography, *Kannadeva’s family: Poets of Anandagrama*, Prof Krishna had a solemn resolution to unravel the unheard struggles of people who fought against casteism centuries ago. He turns Hindu high-caste privilege and history on its ear by theorizing that Kannadeva, a rarely discussed Bhakti (or devotional) saint-poet, may have come from the lower castes. This stirs anger among the hardcore Hindu believers, for whom Kannadeva was a Hindu saint-poet. They revered the poet as a personality from an upper caste and so couldn’t imagine of his true caste identity. The pedigree seemed foolish. They condemn Prof Krishna as an anti-Hindu, who betrays his own religion. They accuse him of not holding on to the privileges he is granted as an upper caste Hindu. Prof Krishna is assassinated by the Hindu fundamentalists for his faithful publication of research about Kannadeva. His murder was a warning to all the anti-Hindu activists. Prof Krishna’s seminar presentation about the topic, ‘Fighting to Remember: Kannadeva’s Real Voices,’ is yet another instance of his dissent. This episode further delineates the fate of those who dare speak freely. Prof Krishna speaks of Kannadeva’s belonging

to a lower caste. He is, soon, disrupted by two young men who question his authority to lay such false claims about a reverend saint-poet.

Sufferers are deemed as the only reliable agencies. When a member outside of the outcaste group speaks for the outcastes, s/he is not always accepted as a potent agency. The main problem of *I Have Become the Tide* is captured in a small but significant scene where a young woman accuses Krishna of cultural appropriation. She asks, "I mean you're talking of a cow skinner. Can you ever understand his life?" (244) He wants to tell her that these characters – Kannadeva's family – don't leave him alone, asking him to speak on their behalf. But instead, he tells her "with great kindness" (244) that she is right: "I can never directly understand - in the sense of experience - the day-to-day life of a cattle skinner, his suffering, his fears and his dreams. But I can listen to his voice. I can read what is written about him. I can translate those words, study them. In fact, I must" (244). It is an accepted notion that one who is not targeted need not know the exact pain endured by the outcastes. It is only the words of the experienced ones that count. For similar reasons, while addressing one of the most ruthless demonic powers i.e. casteism, Githa Hariharan takes caution by placing a disclaimer in her Acknowledgment section of *I Have Become the Tide*. She writes:

No privileged person in terms of caste or class can, despite choices made as an adult, really 'know' the lived experience of those who have been historically oppressed. *I Have Become the Tide* has been written with this awareness. But it was also born out of the conviction that no writer can engage with life in India today without taking a stand, in some modest way, in the terrible inequalities that continue to ravage the lives of so many of our fellow citizens. (Hariharan 321)

The relevance of such a disclaimer proves the power of an experienced agency. A victim will have stronger agency to speak of the atrocity caused to him/her rather than a witness.

Fearlessness is seen as a threat to the powerful because fear is the tool that facilitates an easy hold of power. In *I Have Become the Tide*, the inhabitants of Githa Hariharan's casteless Anandagrama pose a threat to the nearby villages ruled by the upper castes. People of Anandagrama lacked any special reverence for a particular caste. The Hindu militants in the adjoining village, Jayapura, feared waves of similar anti-casteism reaching their subjects as that would debase their authority. They feared Anandagrama's inspiring their subjects. Therefore, the fearlessness of the subjects instills fear in the powerful. Hariharan's Prof Krishna provides deliberations of his views fearlessly. He publishes his researched content truly. He prefers to stay unadulterated from the trappings of religious institutions. He is scrupulous of providing claims without evidences. His fearlessness in publishing his work earns him the wrath of Hindu fundamentalists. These fundamentalists fear a possibility of further fearless revelations by Prof Krishna. So, they view Prof Krishna as a threat to their ideology because of which they kill him. The boy in Kannadeva's monastery fearlessly raises his voice against the system of education in his school. This deed threatens the school authorities because further allegations from other students may affect their institution's reputation. Dissipation of dissents never discouraged new protestors in *I Have Become the Tide*. Perseverance pervades the novel. Despite being aware of the hurdles, dissenters keep going with their strong aim for emancipation of outcastes. Dr. Senthil's speech at the Bhim Shakti organization strengthens the outcastes. In her fiction, Githa Hariharan shines a light of hope through Dr. Senthil's words: "Caste and other inequalities remained. But the experience of dissent, individual or collective, small and unrecorded or otherwise, remained in bits and pieces to give ordinary people comfort and hope. Hope that their lives could change for the better" (315). Asha's parents name her Asha and her younger sister is Usha. Her father had a pure intension behind this naming. It simply meant 'Asha for Usha' i.e., "a hope for dawn" (47). He hopes the dawn to lighten up their dark lives entangled amidst caste injustices. The novel itself ends on an optimistic note- "I Have Become the Tide" (320).

Very little has changed over the centuries that abridge Chikka and Satya, in *I Have Become the Tide*. The fundamental difference in the two narratives lies in the fact that Satya lived in a country with a properly drafted Constitution that is built with a prime focus on equality. Chikka's progress in life when compared to his father is understood with the former's last words, "I die a better death than my father" (Hariharan 230). Chikka dies as he dissents casteist ideologies while his father surrendered to death without executing any such dissents. This also shows a change. Chikka's grandfather desists his menial job as it lacks any dignity whereas Ravi's grandfather reassures about the dignity associated with any job one does. He says, "But remember, my boy, the drum doesn't make us who we are... But now I can tell you: there's nothing wrong with the drum. It's not something to be ashamed of" (Hariharan 140). This subtle difference marks a significant transition over centuries. In the past, outcastes hated their profane jobs because it denied their right to live like other normal human beings. Gradually, outcastes tend to embrace and love their jobs, no matter how menial others consider it. *I Have Become the Tide* takes a look at two histories of casteism set apart by centuries:

Hundreds of years later, how much has changed? Krishna lives in a time when there is a Constitution; he lives in a country where there is a promise of equality, rights for all its citizens. But how often does he hear of cattle skimmers and manual scavengers, forced to do what they do, despised for what to do? Krishna feels a dull anger grow in him at the thought of this unchanging eternal India. (Hariharan 112)

A few things may have changed in years but too much has remained the same. Githa Hariharan's novel seamlessly slips back and forth between two timeframes- the past and the present- to persuade her readers to question if nothing has changed over centuries. The readers are made to feel disgusted with the futile bloodsheds in the name of religion and caste. The author, thus, explicitly foregrounds an important message that rational thinking is to be hailed over sectarian interests in order to avoid some of the latter's catastrophic consequences.

Casteism, if unchecked, takes on violent forms that transcend the rational domain of human minds, which is quite catastrophic to humanity. Irrespective of nationality and brotherhood, people endorsed with casteist ideologies look upon fellow beings only in the name of their caste titles. The menace results in brutal fratricides. The novel seems harrowing with its inexorable events where all demands for equality are condemned to violent regressions.

Chapter III

Progression vs Regression

I Have Become the Tide serves as a protest novel as it condemns casteism as an evil spirit to be eradicated completely without much delay. The necessity of protest and its scope are expressed through Hariharan's Ravi. He seems delighted with the new words he reads at his college: "A protest against caste oppression and the excessive ritualism of the Brahmin priesthood. Universal equality in the eyes of God. Medieval mysticism independent of sectarian or orthodox practice. Disavowed caste customs and their tyranny" (Hariharan 180).

Protests signal optimism and promise a better future for outcastes. Progressions are in the near sight when such protests are expressed. Most often, these progressions are threatened by the powerful upper castes. Githa Hariharan foregrounds possibilities of such regressions for outcastes while aiming at progression. The novel serves as a reservoir of narrative techniques such as plot-structure, characterization, setting, narrative situations and language chosen by Hariharan. These narrative techniques are employed in a specific manner that it helps to further substantiate casteism as a bane. A few narrative techniques connote to the ongoing battle between regressions and progressions as well.

I Have Become the Tide is a powerful work that depicts the social and political predicament of contemporary India. Casteism is discussed as an insane creature to be shackled strongly before it makes any further leap. Hariharan, being anthropologically concerned, holds a strong disgust for the deeply flawed social system based on caste divisions. Sobriquets like Rakshasa Kavi, Elder Brother, Fearsome Five and even the names of the characters seem deliberate. Hariharan ironically hints at the changes brought about in casteism across centuries. The changes are largely insignificant. *I Have Become the Tide* is deeply political. In Hariharan's own words, "The right-wing has, in effect, pushed us all toward the stagnant pond I describe in the novel" (Mitra).

Hariharan's fictional characters- Muthuraja in Jayapura and Srikumar in Devapura- are separated by centuries but their motif remains the same. They are both instrumental in causing regressions in the progress of anti- casteism. Muthuraja recklessly killed people who protested against Hindu fundamentalism while Srikumar shot Prof Krishna for the latter's findings about the Hindu-saint, Kannadeva. Both were undertaking a cleansing project with an aim at a Hindu state. Dissenters had to fear of such regressive methods. The tides they form might get silenced by evil forces. Similar tides like that of Anandagrama's would end in disasters. Nevertheless, the regressions didn't prevent further dissents. Asha, Ravi and other dissenters continue protesting. The novel ends with a rally by these young protestors which signal an undying hope and spirit in them.

Dissents may not always seek much media coverage. Satya's suicide in *I Have Become the Tide* was framed just one among the many deaths. Meanwhile, the catchy news about a movie actress's getting visa to Pakistan to immerse her grandfather's ashes in a river caught a wider attention among public. It contained a better news value. In other words, popularity controlled the reverence associated with one's death. Those who wield power filter through the relevant facts and assert them from their vantage points. Thus, a regression is faced by the dissenters aiming at progressive lives. If given enough media attention, Satya's suicide would have affected his institution's reputation. The humiliations he faced in his college would have been brought to light. That would bring shame to the concerned authorities. Dissents and protests that harm the powerful are deliberately stifled or thwarted. Such dissipations cause intolerance of diversified sectors within a society.

I Have Become the Tide inspires the outcastes to dream for their betterment, work for it and turn the tides to accomplish their dreams. The hardships in their path are to be surmounted with confidence. Political murder of Prof Krishna, institutional murder of Satya, expulsion of a bright student from the monastery and demolition of Anandagrama are regressions in the path towards a casteless and harmonious society. In spite of the regressions faced, the outcastes never stop dreaming.

Githa Hariharan portrays Dr. Senthil as an accomplished Dalit professor of Physics. He is in a reputed profession and is the guiding force of the Bhim Shakti Organization for outcastes at his college. This marks a progression in the lives of Dalits. He is supposedly believed to be a role model for the Dalit students on the campus. Despite being in a good position, he was targeted by the upper castes. His progressive life was not entertained by a few. He is heaped with online abuses for his activities to encourage outcastes. The Bhim Shakti students feel enraged by the abuses. Githa Hariharan ponders about the condition of the Dalit students striving for better statuses "if it becomes acceptable to speak hatred for someone (Dr. Senthil) who has struggled to reach where he is?" (176)

The image pattern at the heart of Githa Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide*, the various water bodies, paces with the idea of stagnation on the one hand, and movement on the other. So the novel begins with an untouchable pond, the stagnant pool of persisting inequality in a settlement colony where people are excluded from the mainstream because of caste. When people raise their voices in Anandagrama, through poetry or song or action, they take the novel from the apparently never-changing pond to a free-flowing river of change. It's the resistance, whether to caste or to the crushing of dissent, that makes this moving river powerful. The diverse people themselves become like the many faces of the river. Their voices soar as they insist, in many ways, that their lives must move and change. This is how the river – and the people – becomes the tide.

I Have Become the Tide is rich with symbolic elements. These symbols serve as vindication to the inherent indignities of the outcastes, their need to dissent and the ruthless dissipations of their dissents. Peepal tree, visible from Satya's hostel room, symbolizes his own life. The tree appears in lush green in his initial days. With the advent of autumn, the tree sheds leaves to flaunt its fragile branches and the nest of birds sheltered on the tree gets exposed. The exposure seems vulnerable for the birds. Similarly, Satya's exposure at his college proves to be a threat to his life. His experience at college and his newly chosen life brings distress to him that he decides to give up his life. Thus, the peepal tree predicts an expected regression in Satya's journey towards success. The beach and sea symbolizes tranquility which Asha, Satya and Ravi yearn for. They hanker after liberty and equality. The horizon explicates their hope for a distant future where equality pervades the air. They hear the sea speak to them about the possible vastness of the world. Their experience at the beachside prophesies an expected progression in the lives of those Dalit students. The drum which Chikka inherits from his father becomes a symbol of liberation, by the end of the book. It becomes an instrument of change, resistance, voice and agency for Kannadeva (Chikka's son) who visits his village long after his parents have died and is even mistaken for someone from the upper-caste by a family of farmers. He is treated with respect. The drum is the mute spectator of how an untouchable (Kannappa) evolves from being a cattle-skinner to a Hindu saint and reformer (Kannadeva). Thus, this symbol

of drum hints at a progressive strategy for the outcastes' protests.

As pointed out by Freud, dreams are never concerned with trivialities. It takes wisdom to learn how to interpret and respond to one's dreams, since this is part and parcel of the whole of reality. Dreams reflect feelings, emotions, beliefs, habits and sometimes repressed feelings. Psychologists admit that at some deep unconscious level, any dream fans out into the infinite horizon of emotion and thought that constitute the individual's psyche. Githa Hariharan uses dreams saturated with symbolic import. In *I Have Become the Tide*, the nest of three perfect grey eggs that Ravi dreams floating on the water body's surface alludes to the three friends- Ravi, Asha and Satya- who struggle to combat with the atrocities in their life. In the dream, the canal holding the nest transforms into a fast running river which resembles Ravi's own longing for a fast shift to a real, general citizen. This dream serves as a portent signifying a regression in the trio's way to progression. Chikka's dream of a blood stained spear arising out of the roaring river of Anandagrama was an ill-portend prophesying the loss of peace. So, it marks a regression.

Sea functions as a vital source of spirit in Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide*. "And this sea is never quiet; it doesn't know what it means to stand still, remain the same, or grow stagnant. The waves whoosh and roar as they roll forward, they slap the sand gently as they recede. Always they do something, say something" (Hariharan 32). The movement of the sea waves, the fierce tides and the roaring noises inculcate fervent motivation to question caste hegemony. It encourages optimism in the outcastes and so is progressive in nature. Sea's relentless activity demands the outcastes and their supporters to dissent the unjust governing systems. Questioning, complaining, dissenting and demanding are all capable of bringing about conspicuous changes. Hariharan beautifully imagines and illustrates the discontent voices of the unprivileged castes. Her comparison of these voices with the tides of a sea proves to be highly emphatic.

When Satya drowns himself in his favourite pond, the pond was stagnant with no hidden words. But Hariharan anticipates this pond to finally flow freely and question humankind about her child who was killed in her womb. Satya's suicide seems to be a regressive step. But, the pond serves as a metaphor. She takes in Satya and caresses him in her bosom like his loving mother. She is all set to question the death of her son. She may turn into a vigorously flowing river to hurl out her questions and thus demand justice for Satya. This anticipation of Hariharan adds to the optimism in the novel. It suggests a possible progression of the outcastes in their lives.

Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide* employs pluralities to emphasize possibilities of different thoughts, dreams and existences. A progression in thoughts is signified through such multiplicities. Unlike the stagnant pond in Chikka's settlement which barely possessed a face, the river in Anandagrama had an unruly movement with various noises; it is "a river of thousand faces" (Hariharan 122). The river teems with lives in and around it. It manifests polyvalent moods and effects, connoting the multiplicities of lives, jobs, perspectives and human beings. The stagnant pond is symbolic of the stagnant lives of the unprivileged Dalit community whereas the moving river symbolizes a stirring hope for the betterment of the outcastes.

Hariharan personifies caste as an invisible creature haunting outcastes by commenting on the hypocrisy of casteist mindsets. In *I Have Become the Tide*, the first page of her text book drives Asha skeptic: "Untouchability is a sin. Untouchability is a crime. Untouchability is inhuman" (42). Githa Hariharan substantiates the irony in these statements through Ravi's plaintive voice. She attributes a satirical song to the personified caste. Ravi would sing to bring out the hypocrisy behind the words in textbook, "Where are you, where are you? Show us your face, Mr Caste, I know you like to follow us wherever we go..." (42). Here, Hariharan views caste as a regressive strategy in the betterment of Dalits. But, she presents caste in a comic light by personifying it so that it is challenged. She provides a hope for progression when the demonic caste is laughed at by outcastes.

The title *I Have Become the Tide* is self-expressive. It carries various interpretations. The author proudly exclaims herself as being turned into a tide by writing such a fiction in a controversial period wherein the public are terrified to question the ruling Government. The image of tide connotes a violent and apprehensive motion which signifies the powerful resistance placed by the author. The title sounds like a dream fulfillment. It is seemingly an outcome of courageous strives that a tide was finally produced. A collective voice of dissent becomes part of a rising tide. It signals the progressive lives of outcastes. Hariharan hints at the fear instilled in dissenters when their predecessors' dissents are thwarted by fierce forces. Her title is inspired from the poet, J.V. Pawar's poem of the same title. The novel opens with the lines from the poem. Pawar's poem exemplifies the courageous dissents of victims.

The role of youth in shaping an egalitarian country is manifested through Asha. Asha's words in the novel show an undying youthful spirit. She holds reminiscences of Chikkiah, Satya, Prof Krishna, Mahadevi and Kannadeva while she finally becomes the tide by being a part of the rally of dissenters. Asha, being inspired by the stories of Chikkiah, Mahadevi and other poets of Anandagrama whom she read about in the book by Prof Krishna, remembers them when she gets a chance to protest. She invokes their early attempts to eradicate casteism. Being in her youthful spirit, she finds pride in her being part of the procession condemning the political murder of Prof Krishna. That was when she could protest freely among other dissenters and raise her voice against her lifetime's bitter experiences brought by her caste. The novel's ending in the rally of dissenters suggests a general hope for an egalitarian society. Thus, a progression is much awaited.

Chapter IV Conclusion

Githa Hariharan's fiction *I Have Become the Tide* is a plea for an inclusive, progressive society where caste oppression is condemned, dissenting voices are not suppressed and forms of resistance are celebrated. Hariharan, in the novel, examines how social exclusion devastates individual lives. Caste as a system of social stratification has eventually grown into a system of ardent discriminations and injustices. Rather than being a mere output of customs and beliefs passed down by generations, caste divisions pose a grave threat to the integrity of a nation. Honour killing, institutional murders and political murders are increasingly rising on account of casteism. Casteism has grown into a myth embraced by many. Most of the upper castes revel in their caste titles as those bring them privilege in society. This chain of unending obsession for power often makes people blind to humaneness. People are entitled to their castes by birth- the ones born to outcastes become outcastes and the ones born to upper castes belong to upper caste. This implies the stigmatized contempt often attributed to inter-caste marriages and relations.

Githa Hariharan sketches a fictitious movement but based on real life history. The readers may ponder over what has

changed and what has not in all those thousand years between Chikka's time and the contemporary period of the three Dalit students. Hariharan stresses on the narrative of resistors. She addresses the value of failed actions. Before an actual battle for equality leading to victory, there ought to be certain small scale movements and struggles voicing the need for equality. These movements of dissent build a significant momentum and give strength to integrate into a mass resistance in spite of its initial regressions. "Those who win the battle against caste injustices stand on the shoulders of those who had been fighting prior to them, whether they were known or unknown" ("Deliberation").

Hariharan states, "Of the three novels that look at contemporary India- *In Times of Siege*, *Fugitive Histories* and *I Have Become the Tide*, I think the new one comes closest to what I wanted to say, and how I wanted to say it – through prose, poetry and song" (Sharma). Deploying characters from past and present, Hariharan shows how caste divisions quiver social integrity and how its shadier, behind-the-scenes elements mirror and encapsulate the injustices endemic to Indian society. Githa Hariharan is a member of Indian Writers' Forum along with other cultural practitioners, academics, and activists who actively reflect on contemporary social conflicts. She says, "Question mark is the philosophy of my life" ("Deliberation"). The author dares to imagine another India. She exemplifies the predicaments of outcastes through her narratives in *I Have Become the Tide*. Besides being a novel of victimhood, *I Have Become the Tide* portrays the repugnant destinies of the dissenters of victimhood. The novel establishes itself as a discourse of unending dissent. Altogether, it stirs among readers a dire need to revise the unjust casteist norms prevalent in the society.

A tale for the times, *I Have Become the Tide* serves as an uncompromising mirror of current India. Hariharan's fiction is never one of despair; it emphasizes a bleak outlook. The readers find optimism in the novel. As a contemporary writer, Githa Hariharan extends modern ideas; nevertheless, she amplifies traditional ways. To be more exact, she uses traditional subject matter and in a distinct manner shows both the pros and cons of following tradition. She offers essence of thoughts on which the hungry readers are asked to feed. She discusses various themes which can be categorized under heads like – psychology, human relationships, and social conflicts. Githa Hariharan's novels delineate the obscurity of a society which is severely stratified and lives under constant menace of communal, religious and ethnic violence. Simplicity and modernity mark her forte. Nonetheless, powerfulness of her ideas is infectious and is conveyed through her writing. The reviewers and literary scholars have explored her works and discovered many underlying ideas and aspects. Her mastery in relating traditional literature to her fictional scaffold is awe-inspiring.

Githa Hariharan's anthropological concern is evident from her emphasis placed on lives of human beings. Her narratives revolve around the insistence for essential humane values- mutual respect, solidarity, empathy, compassion, love, discipline, and above all, equality. She implicates the importance of these values by choosing to write on certain ruthless discriminations exercised in the name of caste divisions in a society. Caste system is relegated to a mere mythical norm which gives authority to the upper castes and oppresses the outcastes. This mythical norm is subverted using counterpoints like that of the narratives employed in Hariharan's novel *I Have Become the Tide*. Highlighting the prejudices and social stigma attributed to outcastes helps to nip the problem in the bud since it paves way to a possible rethinking to alter the mindsets of at least a few.

India has taken various measures to protect the downtrodden sections and eradicate social evils that target outcastes. *I Have Become the Tide* hints at some of these measures in order to manifest its optimism:

The Constitution abolished untouchability. It also provided measures to protect and develop these communities. One of these measures was the policy of reservation for SCs and STs- a fixed percentage of openings for them in government-funded educational institutions and state employment. (Hariharan 138)

However, such measures are not fully capable of bringing about much change in the prejudiced and stigmatized people. Hariharan presents the cruelty of discrimination, bigotry and violence as real and existing through her fiction.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. *I Have Become the Tide* conveys the same message, but with a burning rage. "Hariharan astutely conveys the many burdens that Dalit students face in universities—the social ostracization and the sheer pressure of always having to be an embodiment of defiance against caste strictures..." (Shankar). Githa Hariharan's *I Have Become the Tide* has been called "Powerful, no holds barred . . . A heart-stirring story of what happens to those who dare to dream of equality" (Sahgal). It is also called "Altogether captivating" (Murugan).

Inequality, caste discrimination and humiliation are altogether a bane to any society. The outcastes have been protesting for centuries to live with equal dignity like that of the other castes. However, their problems of life are not yet resolved. Hariharan places her hope in the voice of the youth who are capable of bringing about conspicuous fruitful changes.

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