Ambedkar was an organic intellectual. He spent his entire life fighting for the rights of his people the Dalits. His single minded dedication for their cause is unparalleled by any other. Apart form being highly intelligent and perceptive, he was also a very sensitive person with an unalloyed sense of integrity. Moreover, he was one of the most highly educated people that Dalit community has ever produced. Therefore, it is imperative for us to understand his thought on the Dalits and their predicament. Right from the beginning of his political career with his participation in the Southborough commission at the age of 28 to his resignation as the Law Minister in Independent India, he held steadfastly to the claim that Dalits were distinct from Hindus, and are a minority in Indian society. To understand this claim and its implications has been one of the primary focuses of this work. In the process of elucidating the Dalit condition, Ambedkar develops his own unique critique and argument of the way the minority problem needs to be understood. Further, in order to expose the minority problem, he takes on the task of interpreting the basic categories in political theory. Therefore, this work has been an attempt to understand not just his theory on the minority problem, but also to understand his general political philosophy. Ambedkar, being a very insightful person, captures some of the most intricate issues involved in the problem of minorities. Most of these issues continue to remain relevant to the modern day concerns of the minorities. Therefore, an attempt to locate his thought within the contemporary debates related to minorities and their problems has been made. But, what are these modern problems of minorities?

The problem of minorities is a very significant issue for Democracy and Political theory. From the time Tocqueville first made his observation about the “tyranny of the majority” down to the present, this problem has engaged the attention of many scholars and been hotly debated. The debate in the earlier stages, largely concentrated on the securing of social, political and economic rights of a minority. But particularly in the last two decades, the cultural rights of minorities have become a serious concern to academics. Culture, these modern scholars argue, is very important for both individuals and groups.
Hence, the idea of cultural rights comes into vogue, in our times. Political theory is particularly concerned on this issue because of the serious critique made by some scholars like Charles Taylor. In his piece "Politics of Recognition," Taylor criticized existing political theory, and especially liberal theory, for ignoring cultural differences. Ignoring cultural differences, he argues, can cause serious damage to the identity and dignity of the individuals or a group. This started a debate among political theorists, and liberal theorists responded by acknowledging cultural rights but altogether on different grounds. We discussed this debate in the first chapter. We also discussed multicultural and communitarian positions and criticized them using a Marxist perspective. To reiterate, we argued that these liberal theories, in contrast to Marxist ones, have recognized the importance of culture but have not been very sensitive to the relation between culture and power. Culture, becomes not just a means to discriminate against – the other – cultural minorities can also be used to maintain domination within a group. From a Gramscian standpoint, we noted that domination cannot be exercised for a long time, without cultural means. Based on this understanding, we moved on to our principal concern about the Dalits, of the kind of cultural domination they go through. After criticizing liberal theories for their inadequacy in addressing the Dalit problematique we observe Ambedkar's claims that a Marxist viewpoint is more appropriate to understanding certain aspects of their predicament. But, he also believes that cultural rights are important for Dalits which the liberals too acknowledge. We noted that issues of difference matter to Dalits too, as we discussed the uniqueness of Dalits in India; and came to the conclusion that their condition as minorities is a product of majority culture, i.e., Hindu culture.

Ambedkar is like Gramsci, sensitive to culture as a means of domination and like liberals, to the right of Dalits as a minority. Ambedkar commitment to Democracy extends from beyond mere form to the content. Being at the same time strongly committed to social justice, Ambedkar challenges the existing understanding of democracy and suggest a more radical conception of democracy. Ambedkar's radical democracy, as Noberto Bobbio argues, combines both liberal democratic values with a Marxist analysis of social
change. For democracy to be true to its philosophy, it must be a regime of rights, but more importantly it must move beyond formal recognition of equal rights. It must take into account socioeconomic and cultural factors; and recognize that these factors provide differential access to these rights. And Ambedkar believed that the State can be used as means to provide social justice and social change.

Talking of means, it is important to remind ourselves of the debate over means and ends that Ambedkar had with Gandhi. For Ambedkar, means in themselves are neither good nor bad, but the purposes or ends to which there are employed make them either good or bad. In this sense, the State can be both a means to perpetuate injustice, or as means for bringing about social justice; but it is not a necessary evil as both Marxists and liberals believed. Ambedkar gave great importance to the State as an instrument for social change and saw constitutionalism as the best means to define the character and purpose of the state. Based on this understanding, Ambedkar demanded from constitutional lawyers that they make special efforts to ensure that State did not become an instrument of the ruling classes. Instead, the State must ensure the protection of the interests of the marginalized groups in society or in Ambedkar’s terminology, the minorities.

Ambedkar argues that in a democracy a majority does not have a moral priority over the minority. Both have to be given equal moral status in a democracy. The problem becomes more acute when the majority is a permanent majority. This creates a permanent minority. Mostly, cultural groups who are small in numbers turn out to be cultural minorities. Democracy can turn out to be sham or dictatorial if there is a permanent majority; and through electoral process makes claim to being the political majority. Ambedkar categorically accepts the rule of majority, but only a majority which is a political majority. Where the permanent majority also claims to be a political majority, special measures are needed to protect the permanent minority. It is not just the cultural differences but also the socio-economic status of the group that must be considered in determining a minority. The social and economic status in turn determines the political weight of a group in society. Therefore, the actual political weight of a group is the criteria that should be taken into consideration in determining a minority; not just the
numerical strength. Moreover, the lower the political status of a group the more its need for special protection. Once this criterion is accepted, it is seen that Dalits constitute the real minority in India. At the same time, Ambedkar claims that Dalits are not just socially and economically the lowest groups they are also cultural minorities. They are cultural minorities because they do not participate in any of the cultural aspects of the Hindu majority. This argument can be defended based on the discussion we had in the first chapter, that cultural minority is not necessarily a group that claims a different culture from that of the majority culture. The term Cultural Minority is used to designate a group that is a minority because of the culture of a majority but in itself does not posses a unique or a separate culture. Here, the obvious example is that of the Dalits.

Ambedkar conception of the kind of measures that are needed to protect the interests of minorities, like the Dalits is constant and well-grounded. He argues that separate electorates are the only means to ensure the minimum representation of Dalits against a communal majority like the Hindus.

In order to understand the significance of Ambedkar’s theoretical arguments in relation to the minority issue, we need to understand the context in which these arguments are addressed to. Here, we encounter a distinctive theoretical understanding of Ambedkar, particularly in relation to the ideas of nation, nationality and nationalism. Importantly, Ambedkar locates the minority problem in relation to these political ideas and the politics that ensues therefrom. Ambedkar’s important work on this subject Pakistan or Partition of India throws some light on these issues. Ambedkar makes a distinction between a minority which needs safeguards and a minority which claims to be a nation itself. Based on this understanding, Ambedkar argues that the Muslims, after the proclamation that they are not a minority but a nationality, have a right to be a have a separate nation if they choose to. At the same time, he argues that the interests of those minorities who seek safeguards and do not claim to be a nationality are not less important. Their claims are just as important as those of a minority that seeks a separate nation status. Though, Ambedkar agrees to the demand that Muslims have the right to separate national existence, he also feels that a separate existence is not the only solution for a minority,
which claims to be a nation. He does not believe that all encompassing groups deserve to be called a Nation. Even if they feel they are a Nation, separate territorial existence is not the only solution. Other means of securing representation within nation can be explored. For example, he urged the Muslims to find alternate means of securing representation through separate electorates within the Indian nation, instead of demanding for a Pakistan. While discussing this issue we touched upon many issues and relations that Ambedkar comments upon. For example, Ambedkar's opinions on the debate that existed in his time: whether Indian was a nation or not. Ambedkar argues (in 1940) that India was not a nation but had the potential of becoming a nation. In putting forward his own arguments regarding the prerequisites of becoming a nation, Ambedkar finds Earnest Renan's concept of nation very helpful to as a heuristic tool to investigate and explain the problem of nation and its minorities.

This study has dealt in detail with Ambedkar's critique of both Hindu nationalism and Congress nationalism. He finds Hindu nationalism overtly communal and majoritarian, and criticizes it by engaging with the writings of Sarvarkar. On the other hand, Ambedkar finds Congress-led nationalism, covertly communal and detrimental to the interests of all minorities and lower classes of the country. What clearly comes out of the discussion we had in this chapter is that Ambedkar, while strongly opposed to British colonialism, was just as opposed to internal colonization of some groups in the name of Nationalism. Dalits, particularly, would be the primary victims of this kind of colonization. Nationalism, thus, can be an ideology that can serve the interests of the ruling groups or the dominant majority. However, Ambedkar does not believe that nationalism is in itself morally objectionable. Recall that from Ambedkar's pragmatist understanding 'means' are not by themselves value neutral; only when used for wrong ends do they become morally objectionable. In the same manner, Nationalism, can provide the necessary solidarity; or in Ambedkar's terms a sense of belonging to a common identity, which can further social justice and social change. In this regard, Ambedkar comes very close to the communitarians.
Ambedkar argues that one of the greatest hindrances for calling India a nation is its lack of social solidarity between its members. He identifies the Caste system as the principle reason for the same. Without going into details of his critique of the caste system, we can conclude by saying that Caste system creates a sense of high and low between groups, a tendency which is fundamentally opposed to a sense of community. Therefore, as long as there is caste in Indian society, India cannot be truly called a nation. Even if it becomes a nation, it will be an unjust and undemocratic order because it is opposed to self-rule principle of democracy and a nation. Ambedkar argues that the rule of one group over another is as bad as one nation over another.

Ambedkar criticizes the British for their paternalistic attitude towards the minority problem. Under the British, the group which made the loudest noise got the major share of benefits. The Muslims benefited from such an unprincipled approach in solving the minority problem. Dalits have been the major sufferers of such an approach. Ambedkar repeatedly argues that a minority must not be determined just by its numerical strength but by the socio-political strength of the community. He also reminds the British, how Dalits were used in their initial military conquests, and how once they had established themselves, they betrayed Dalits by banning them from joining the army. The Dalits, of course, did not have access to the civil services because of lack of adequate qualifications. Moreover, the British completely ignored the two major evils of untouchability and caste. After criticizing the British for ignoring Dalits under its Raj, he criticizes the British, particularly the Labour government, for its complete bias towards the Congress. Ambedkar made a serious effort after his major setback in the electoral politics to procure separate electorates to Dalits. He criticizes the inadequacy of the reservation policy for its inability to ensure effective representation to the legislative assembly. He also complains about the tactics employed by the Congress to rig the Dalit constituency. But the British turned a deaf ear to Ambedkar’s grievances. The major portion of the third chapter went into discussing the disadvantages that emerge due to reservations in legislatures. We also dealt with Ambedkar’s firm rejoinders to the critique that separate electorates cause schisms in the Indian society. He argues that separate electorates have no bearing on the schisms in society, but, in fact they can help in
removing them by giving the underrepresented a level playing field along with the powerful groups. He finds the charge that separate electorates were anti-national, ridiculous and argues that it is the ploy of the Congress to deny the rights of the minority.

The issue of reservation in government services and Ambedkar's arguments in this regard are an important consideration in this study. Unlike the case of reservation in the legislature, Ambedkar completely endorses reservation in the executive services. The reason being the Hindus (upper caste) have a complete monopoly over the Administration. They have rigged the whole structure to their advantage. Their domination in the administration has been one of the major impediments for Dalits in getting their legitimate rights. The upper castes due to certain advantages got into the higher positions in the British administration, and with this advantage they started accruing benefits for their own community. At the same time, they use this administrative leverage for maintaining their caste domination and hatred for the Dalits. Based on this understanding, Ambedkar demands reservations as the only method for scuttling the power of the dominant castes in administration. More, importantly reservation will provide the minimum space for Dalits, whereby they can make their presence felt in the administration.

The politics of presence, hence, becomes one of the important elements in Ambedkar's thought. This lack of Dalit presence is one of the major concerns in Ambedkar's writing. He finds this lack in the press, the judiciary, the administration, the private business and various other spheres of public life in India. Therefore, there is a need for the state to take special measures to ensure that there is some kind of Dalit presence in these spheres. To this argument of Ambedkar the upper caste intelligentsia reacted by saying that reservations undermine the efficiency of the system and only merit should be used as the criteria of selection in these important spheres. Ambedkar counters such charges by saying that efficiency should not be the sole criteria and that it can be overridden by other important values like right to representation or to have the presence of the minority. Since, Dalits are a distinct group excluded from the rest of the society no one from the Hindu society can represent them except someone from them. And only from within this
group should the best representatives be selected. In this sense, he does not wholly give
in to the argument of efficiency. He also feels that the upper castes distort the message by
making a caricature of the Dalit argument.

Ambedkar's most crucial years were spent in acting as the chairman of the Drafting
Committee of the Indian Constitution, and here he played a critical role in securing and
fighting for some of the basic rights of all marginalized sections. Fighting not just for
Dalits, Ambedkar's effort has been to advance a basic framework so that a democratic
form of government becomes a vehicle for social change or social progress. Ambedkar
acted as a guardian angel for all underprivileged sections of society. At the same time he
played the role of a great statesman. Apart from ensuring to making a law against
untouchability, important achievements of Ambedkar in this period have been to secure
the minority status for Dalits and reservations in both legislature and executive for a
period of ten years. It is important for us to know that Ambedkar was not satisfied with
these ten years, and wished for a longer period. He would argue that there was a need for
these safeguards until such time that the Dalits felt secure without them. At the same time
Ambedkar believed that reservations both in legislature and executive were not sufficient
to protect and promote the interests of Dalits or for that matter, of other minorities too. A
much more comprehensive method needs to be adopted.

Ambedkar makes the important observation that no amount of reservation can adequately
protect the interests of minorities if there is no respect for minorities and their rights in
the society. Only in a society that has respect for the rights of its citizens and has the
feelings of moral indignation against violation of their rights can the minorities be secure.
From Ambedkar's point of view, Indian society is not such a society. It is a society that
not only does not respect the just rights of its people but is party to much of the social
humiliation perpetrated by the dominant groups. It is a society which is full of contempt
and hatred for the lower groups, particularly Dalits. This contempt and hatred are
generated due to the social hierarchy that exists in the name of caste. Therefore, in simple
terms, as long as there is caste in Indian society no law can protect Dalits against
oppression and tyranny perpetrated against them by the Caste Hindus. Hence, removing
caste is intrinsically linked to securing the rights of Dalits as a minority. As we have seen, the existence of caste is the reason that India cannot properly constitute a nation. It does allow a sense of community to grow in the minds of Indians.

To answer the question of how Caste, with its long history and influence over the masses, might be destroyed, we need to ask the question: what is it that legitimizes and sanctions caste? Ambedkar is quick to reply that Hinduism and its ideologues, the upper caste Brahmins, are solely responsible for propagating and sanctifying caste. Hence, in order to annihilate caste we need to annihilate Hinduism and those who sanctify it. For this purpose, Ambedkar spent a lot of time ruminating about how to oust Hinduism from its pivotal place in Indian society. After a careful study of its basic texts along with a set of moral criteria he finds it morally objectionable. The basic moral criteria he chooses to judge Hinduism is whether it conforms to the modern principle of justice or social justice. When evaluated with this criterion, Hinduism fails to be a religion which can promote justice in society. More importantly, it scuttles the sense of justice that is natural to human beings. Also of the two basic natural and moral sentiments of resentment and indignation, Hinduism succeeds in subverting the latter. By sanctifying caste within the scriptures it has got caste entrenched in the mind of every Hindu. Therefore, any injustice suffered by one caste does not have an effect on another caste. This is the prime reason that Hindus lack social indignation, according to Ambedkar. However, he is quick to point out that most caste groups carry resentment that great injustices have happened to them. According to Ambedkar, one of the important but obvious instances of this lack of social indignation is the practice of Untouchability. Ambedkar also points out that the Brahmins need to be challenged for using religion to legitimize caste and they do this because they benefit from it immensely. Hence, as long as there is Hinduism the Brahmins will keep benefiting from the institution of caste. Therefore, there is a need to altogether remove Hinduism and replace it with Buddhism.

Ambedkar finds Buddhism an excellent alternative to Hinduism as it unequivocally denounces inequality and injustice; it appeals to rationality and morality. Moreover, it propagates compassion towards all living beings. This last feature of Buddhism can be a
great source for inducing a sense of justice and, at the same time work as an antidote to social humiliation. Broadly speaking, Buddhism can help bring about a democratic and a decent society. Ambedkar has some more interesting claims regarding Buddhism. He says that it was the Buddhists that developed the some of earliest democratic societies in ancient world. They threw up developed electoral systems too. But a much more controversial claim by Ambedkar is that it was once the religion of all Dalits; and Dalits experienced untouchability not because of their so called uncleanliness, but the contempt the Hindus had for Buddhists. Based on this understanding, he converted himself to Buddhism along with his Mahar followers. His conversion thus had two major purposes, one to transform Indian society into a more democratic society, and two, to take Dalits back to their former creed. It also serves another purpose of giving them a distinct religious identity. Ambedkar wished Buddhism to work as an umbrella identity for all Dalit groups in India. Its inherent values of equality and compassion would be a great source for democratizing Dalits who otherwise faced the same contradictions that existed within the rest of society. Last, but not the least, it would work as a great source for spiritual development for the otherwise spiritually-starved community.

In examining, the modern-day Dalit situation from an Ambedkarian standpoint, we observed that, despite the so-called efforts of the government, Dalits are caught up in the same situation as existed fifty years ago. This gets reflected in the number of atrocities committed on them; the denial and delaying of justice; the indifference and apathy of administration; their social and economic status; and, lastly, a lack of Dalit presence in the broad cultural life of India. We then moved on to examine the reasons why Dalits have seen little progress in their overall situation. Firstly, the reservations that were granted them by the Constitution in legislatures, pose a serious limitation on their right to effective representation. This also makes their presence in assemblies merely a facade. Moreover, their status in these assemblies is both marginal and fractured. In other words, they are minorities in these assemblies. Their ability to put forth new policies and to influence policy decisions is minimal. The reasons for this state of affairs is because of their inability to unite on issues that are of general concern to Dalits, and, more importantly, lack of a proper mandate from the Dalit constituency itself. This reminds us
of Ambedkar's criticism of reservation in the legislature, where he argues that the upper caste dominated parties have rigged the system for their own benefit. We realize once more the absolute imperativeness of separate electorates. We also saw that efforts by some Dalit members of the Constitutional Assembly like S. Nagappa, to introduce a minimum 35 percent requirement of the Dalit vote to ensure authentic representation from the Dalit community were futile because of the apathy toward separate electorates shown by the upper castes leaders. Their reasons for rejecting his proposals were completely unacceptable showed their complete lack of concern for Dalits and their welfare. The fifth chapter argues that members of the Constituent Assembly made fundamental compromises when it came to respecting Dalits rights. It was in this context, that we considered the role of reservations in government services and education.

Reservations in services and education have played an important role in creating a Dalit middle class. That a sizeable number of Dalits have benefited from these policies is of course true, but it also needs to be said that large sections of the Dalit community are still untouched by these policies. From 1991 onwards, due to the liberalization and privatization policies pursued by the government, opportunities in the public sector have been shrinking at an alarming rate, narrowing the scope of reservation policies. This forces Dalits to demand reservations in the private sector too. The lack of reservation is felt clearly in the judiciary, and we suggest that measures need to be taken to introduce them in this branch of government as well. We also dealt with the issue of making reservations more effective. An important part of this process is to ensure that the message that goes behind reservations is not obscured by adverse and ill-informed propaganda.

Coming to the problem of diversity within the Dalit community, Dalits remain fragmented along various cultural lines and there is a need to find a common ground on which they all can unite. Ambedkar argues that all the Dalits are united if we take their suffering into account. We argue that cultural diversity among Dalits need not be a disadvantage. The problem to be addressed on a priority basis is that of internal antagonism and hierarchy among Dalits. How to eliminate internal hierarchy among Dalits themselves? To this question, a standard Ambedkarian answer is that we cannot
fight this internal hierarchy without annihilating caste in the rest of the society. Therefore, Dalits have no option except fighting to eliminate caste in Indian society. One of the important options that Ambedkar suggests in this regard is conversion to Buddhism and developing an inclusive identity on that basis.

If the condition of Dalits was examined using I M Young's categories of oppression, it is seen that Dalits suffer from all the five kinds of oppression that she talks about. In the process, we noted that oppression of Dalits has taken new forms as they begin to assert their rights more forcefully. This work has argued that there is now a need to study the kinds of oppression that Dalits face in new urban settings, without neglecting their troubles in the rural areas.

In the last fifty years, Dalits have gone from being excluded minorities to becoming internal minorities. This means that the struggle for Dalit rights that Ambedkar started is far from over. Ambedkar - his struggles and his thought - will continue to be the guiding force for future endeavors for social justice in India; perhaps in the rest of the world as well. For this purpose, understanding Ambedkar's idea of minority is especially relevant. This work has been an attempt in this direction.