A line of psycho-historical inquiry maintains that human psyche to a great extent is shaped by its historical conditions. Historical contexts serve to give cultural contents and conditions to human expressions. In this regard it is open argued that ‘the historical is the origin of the mental’. The very specific manifestations of the mind are considered to be the byproducts of antecedent historical conditions. Scholars in this line of thought look to the socio-cultural conditions as the primary formative agents of psychological being of a person. A Russian cognitive psychologist, L.S. Vygotsky proposed that “there is nothing in mind that is not first of all in society” (Vygotsky, 1978:142). Going further, for Vygotsky even memory is not there in nature prior to culture. This line of study regarding the construction of human mind challenges the essentialist, unified concept of self, based on the belief that all individuals are group of individuals possess certain fundamental, innate traits that make their identity to be fixed, permanent and stable.

Scholars from such diverse critic cultural movements as post structuralism, feminism and Postcolonialism and Postmodernism etc. tend to converge in their concern on the construction of human identity through language and within community. In their view the historical and the cultural circumstances give rise to particular vocabularies of mental life and these vocabularies play part in the ordering of our social conducts. Even :o Lacan, a twentieth century Postfreudian French psychoanalyst.

The human being is an organism – in- culture .... we are born organism (of course) and we become subjects. How? By internalizing our culture, which inscribed in the signifying practices that surround us from the moment we come into the world. We turn into subjects in the process of learning language, which means that we become capable of signifying. (Belsey, 2006: 57-58)

In Lacanian psychoanalytic discourse the subject in itself is nothing. The subject becomes subject only by virtue of its subjection to the field of the Other, the symbolic order which exists outside us and is the condition of becoming a subject. Thus it can be said that without the other (the very order of culture and language), there can be no human subject and the very
existence of culture acquires its significance in the human world by virtue of its capacity to give and make sense of human actions.

It is not difficult to see a concern for history as a force which constitute the human subject in the writings of Michael Foucault. Almost all his writings display a pressing urgency for history and its role in the formation of human self.

The guiding concern of his writings is that there exists, at any given time, an order of things that makes the social functioning of the time possible. This order operates within the fundamental quotes of a culture: those governing its language, its schemes of perceptions, its techniques, exchanges and values etc. … for Foucault this order is historical apriori: neither transcendental nor universal, the order Foucault describes is a historical specific constellation that exists prior to experience…this order also establishes the basis on which knowledge and theory becomes possible….and based on this order, certain ideas appear, certain perceptions, values and distinctions become possible. (Schrift 2006 : 57).

Thus for Michael Foucault, human existence and experience is through and through historicized: our experience is constructed from apriori roles that govern social practices at a particular point in history. At other times there are other apriori values that governed social practices and people’s experiences were, as a consequence, constructed differently. (Schrift, 2006 : 57-58).

This underlying order of things which is historical apriori, Foucault terms it as an ‘episteme’. This episteme operates beneath the consciousness of individual subjects. In Foucault’s perspective the source of meaning for any given object or event is not some transcendental individual subject. Rather, the discursive conditions of human existence constitute and determine the meanings of human conduct. This posture allows him to denounce apriori concepts of the nature of the human subject. His thrust is on the role of discursive practices in constituting human subjectivity. In this way Foucault rejected what he saw as Jean Paul Sartre’s centralization of the subject in his existential phenomenology wherein emphasis is placed on the premise of the consciousness of individual subjects. To highlight Foucault’s treatment of the human subject in his historic philosophical oeuvre, Prof. Catherine Belsey remarks:
Michael Foucault as historian of ideas, devoted in analyzing the effects of culture in permitting us to given an account of ourselves....the categories we all recognize not only make this account possible, but also call us to account and by doing so bring us into the line with the norms and proprieties that culture itself constructs. Societies recruit us as subjects, subjects us to their values and incite us to become accountable, responsible citizens, eager, indeed, to give an account of ourselves in terms we have learned from the signifying practices of those societies themselves. (Belsey, 2006: 53).

The foregoing account of the different ‘culture’ theorists should make it clear that human identity and human subjectivity cannot be autonomous and independent of their historic cultural forces. There is nothing or no content in our consciousness which originate outside the domain of history. Kiran Nagarkar in his first English novel Ravan & Eddie portrays very vividly the growth and development of the two central characters – Ravan & Eddie – and their psyche, growing in relation to the socio-cultural contexts.

Tensions and conflicts, coldness and hostility, between the two religious communities – the Hindus and Catholics – are the underlying concern of the present novel, Ravan & Eddie. The text deals primarily with the adventures of the two characters – Ravan, a Maratha Hindu and Eddie, a Roman Catholic and recounts their birth, childhood schooling and their growth up to the age of adolescence and their descent into evils. The novelist has portrayed the parallel lines of two boys in a very funny, hilarious and satirical manner. The major events of the novel take place in dwelling apartments (the CWD Chawles in Mumbai) of the low working class. Parvati, the mother of Ravan makes her and family members’ ends meet by cooking and selling food, while Violet, the mother of Eddie, earns her livelihood by stitching clothes. The author, having an unerring eye, displays the follies, foibles and even cultural chauvinism of the two communities. Ravan and Eddie living together on different floors of the Chawl number seventeen in Mumbai, are brought together in their different unusual circumstances. In addition to Ravan, Eddie and their parents whose lives are the central concern of the novel, the novelist has also depicted the lives of the people who have their bearings on the central characters such as teachers, religious preachers and migrant labourers etc. The novel also depicts the tragedy of urban life, its communalism, injustices, narrow divisions and other circumstances and conditions that lead to the degradations and decline of human concerns. It gives a glimpse of poverty, class and caste violence and struggle for survival of the Chawl residents. The text in essence is primarily about the struggle and survival of the working class people. Nagarkar has done his best in displaying the impact of low income houses and scare
resources on the two different Indian communities, which coexist and conflict with each other.

Thus, the immediate historic-cultural situations that not only inform but also to a great extent, shape the central characters’ subjectivities. The text is an expression and exploration of the collective selves. The narrative of the text is deeply steeped into the cultural set of principals, beliefs and values that determine the perceptions, attitudes, expectations and the very pattern of existence of the text’s characters. The children – Ravan and Eddie – begin growing into history by assuming their roles in the readymade stories of which they are subjects; they are interpellated into the myths, superstitions, which reflect the ideologies of the two given communities and their cultural concerns.

Belief and Rituals

The current novel can be seen as fictionalization of Nagarkar’s experiences of growing into Mumbai. The first chapter of the work may be taken as a prologue to the text and the following chapters establish the context and setting in which the novel operates. The major incidents of this chapter are: the death of Mr. Victor Coutinho, Eddie’s father, falling from the balcony of the fifth floor of the chawl, the birth of Eddie following his father’s death and change in the name of the hindu protagonist, i.e. Parvati’s son from Ram to Ravan*. Mrs. Violet Coutinho, the mother of Eddie being a superstitious lady, blames Parvati’s son Ravan to have killed her husband. She points her finger at him saying, “Murderer, murderer” (6). On this occasion Violet is consoled by the father Agnello D’Souza, when he says:

Nobody’s fault, Mrs. Coutinho. You can’t blame anyone for Victor’s death, not even that child. Who can stop you when your time’s up? You have no choice but to go. And those who are gone, go straight to our Lord.’ … ‘Gone to Jesus forever. Remembered on earth every day. ‘Snatched from us. Folded in God’s bosom now’. The Lord giveth. And the Lord taketh. (6-7).

The above quote underlines the Christian belief/faith into the divine order that everything happens as per the will of the Lord Christ. A person’s soul is the property of God and it goes to Him forever after his or her death.
Parvati, on the other hand, invites Brahmin priest to perform Satyanarayan Katha to express her sense of gratitude to the Almighty as she thinks that her son, Ravan is saved miraculously, whereas in the same incident of the ‘fall’, Victor dies.

Loudspeakers placed in Parvatibai’s windows were blasting the entire neighbourhood with the Satyanarayana rituals. Parvatibai had hired a Brahmin priest to offer thanks to God for the miracle that had saved her son from certain death, and he was giving her her money’s worth. (8)

As if this observance of the ritual Satyanarayan Katha is not sufficient, Parvati even changes her son’s name from Ram to Ravan.

‘Did I hear you wrong? You didn’t call him Ravan, did you?’ Parvati’s husband Shankar-rao asked above the din in his home.

‘I did too’. Parvati turned to face her husband while her son was still hanging on for dear life outside the window.

‘From today his name’s Ravan’, Parvati said with a flatness that made Shankar-rao realize that they had come to some kind of turning point in their child’s life.

‘He nearly died yesterday, isn’t that enough for you? Such a beautiful baby, such a sweet and innocent look in his eyes and a name like Ram. No wonder someone put nazar on him, No. the only way we can ward off the evil eye is to call him Ravan’.

‘Over my dead body. Have you lost your mind, can’t you tell the difference between the gods and demons any longer.

‘I would rather wish that he was alive devil than a dead god’. (10-11)

As per the norms of Hinduism, namakaran (naming a child) is one of the most fundamental Hindus sanskaras. Act of naming is a social convention that signifies one’s social identity and community. A common practice among Hindus is to name a child after the names of sages, saints, deities, holy persons that inspire the child to follow the path of righteousness. As per the Hindu mythology and holy texts such as the Ramayana, Ram is depicted as maryadapurushottam and Ravan is depicted negatively as a brute, notorious, having kidnapped Ram’s wife Sita. Parvati, being in the grip of superstition of evil eye (nazar), changes her son's name from Ram to Ravan, ignoring completely the social implications of her act.

**Hindutva/Hinduism**

One of the many social structures into which our subjectivity is inserted in the course of life history is that of religion and religious institutions. Religion/faith has been there with us since
time immemorial. It plays a pivotal role in our subject formation through its injunctions, commandments, and taboos. It has also even acted as an instrument and a driving force of human civilization and that of civilizing mission. However, along with their civilizing and humanizing missions or objectives, religions with their institutions have also acted as negative forces leading to the degeneration and deformation of human selves. Certain evil practices such as fanaticism, communal violence, sectarianism etc., have done irreparable damage to the mankind. Religious institutions have also acted as breeding grounds of terrorism and genocides.

Kiran Nagarkar has treated the Hindu religious and political organization, RSS (Rashtriya Sewak Sangh) in the text with a tongue-in-cheek attitude. His stance towards the organization and its religious values seem to be very satirizing and caricaturing one. Parvati, the mother of Ravan, having ‘no idea of the political sympathies of the Sabha’ (17), ‘a volunteer organization of Hindu revivalist, of white shirts and flared khakhi half-pants fame’ (17) and Lele Guruji as the head of the Mazagao branch of Sabha, decided to enroll Ravan in the brigade. In this Sabha, there is no room for Muslim and women. Lele Guruji, as head of the Mazagao branch of the Sabha, with its bare seventeen members, undertakes the task of training and preparing “each child soldier for Hindutva” (19). He releases an instruction saying

‘Everyday you reiterate your loyalty to our cause. You swear that you have faith in our religion. But faith is a torch. Unless you light torches in the hearts and souls of others. our flame will waste and die.

‘Our Sabha desperately needs new blood’. This was puzzling. Why was the Sabha bloodthirsty? ‘Hindutva is an infinite ocean. But in the last few years, especially after the death of the great martyr Godse, the ocean is retreating’. Ravan got the picture now. Hinduism was an ocean of blood but there was a hole at the bottom, so you had to keep filling it. ‘It is your bounden duty, it is your dharma to enroll at least once new member in the next ten day. Anyone who does so will get a magnificent calendar with a picture of the goddess Bhavani presenting her sword to his royal highness, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj. (19-20)

Referring to the issue of Dharam parivartan (change of religion) specially conversion of Hindus to which Christians and Muslims organizations have resorted for centuries, Lele Guruji draws attention saying

For centuries, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants have converted Hindus. It is time we turned the tide. What we need is a wild bushfire that spreads across the country and brings back the lost souls to Hinduism. Anyone who enrolls a non-Hindu in our Sabha will get a Wilson fountain-pen. And the new member will be given not only a
Wilson fountain-pen and ball-point set but also a beautifully illustrated and abridged copy of the Stories from the Mahabharata and Shri Krishna’s Life in Hindi, English or Marathi. Go into the world and light fires, the fires of Hinduism.’ Jai Hind. (20)

As we have seen above, Parvati is completely unaware of the politico-ideological motives of the Sabha. She has not enrolled her son Ravan to the Sabha ‘to save India from non-Hindus’. (17). Rather her objective is quite pragmatic and practical one i.e., ‘to keep the boy out of her hair and out of trouble’ (17). Ravan has become a complete spoilt brat. “He had taken a best of four annas with a boy twice his age that he could break three panes from his own kitchen window with three successive throws of the tennis ball with which they played cricket” (17).

As a consequence of receiving training and orientation at the Sabha, and having been induced with an idea of protecting the nation and being worried about its future, Ravan engages himself in a conversation with his good for nothing father, Shankar-rao, to know his father’s stand on the issue. Shankar-rao being in an annoyed mood and considering his son’s question quite irrelevant and insignificant, he reacts very brutally and angrily. “Well, you know where you can shove the future of the Hindu nation?” But before Shankar-rao could reply, Parvati comes out of the kitchen enraged: ‘Don’t you dare, don’t you say a word against our Hindu religion.” (22)

As per the injunctions and instructions of the Sabha, it is every member’s duty to increase the number of members of the organization by associating new members to it. In this concern Ravan goes to one of his friends Chandrakant to convince him to join the body and work for it. He says to Chandrakant: “Chandrakant, the Hindu nation is in danger. Only you can save it” ... ‘Not just you. You and your entire family. The infinite ocean of Hinduism is drying up because Muslims. Christians, and,’ the word Protestant was too difficult and new for him, ‘Parsees are converting Hindus to their religion. We need to light a fire to convert … ’ (23-24).

But contrary to his expectations, the treatment with which Ravan is meted out, is not only bewildering and confounding to him but appalling also. Chandrakant’s father Mr. Dixit, a staunch supporter and practitioner of Gandhian ideology, was taken aback having heard Ravan’s polemics on the issue. He (Chandrakant) found “the effect of his words was beyond his wildest expectations” (23) and this was his volcanic eruption: “the whole building, Mazagaon, Bombay city seemed to resonate with that cry. Don’t you ever, ever step into this house. Chandrakant, if I see you talking to this boy again, I will strangle you with my own hands.” (24)
Economic and Material Conditions

The identity of a person has an inalienable link with his/her economic and material conditions in which a person finds himself/herself placed. In other words, the identity and subjectivity of a person is influenced and even shaped to an exorbitant extent by the economic material conditions and class position that a person occupies in a given society. In this connection, a cultural critic Gary Day notes:

...... ‘individual’ means different things in different periods, but in feudalism and capitalism it is intimately related to class. This is not just a matter of ownership of the means of production but of how the very idea of the ‘individual’ is shaped by the dominant forms of economic organization. The term ‘subject’ better captures this sense of the ‘self’ being conditioned by the outside forces than the term ‘individual’ which implies self-determination.” (Day, 200: 106)

Karl Marx (1818-1883) as a materialist philosopher, argues that human consciousness is ultimately a product of matter. According to him, human consciousness and the particular form that consciousness takes is a result of the state of economic production in a given society. The history of human subjectivity, according to him, is to be understood primarily in terms of changes in the economy. Marx writes:

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations are productions correspond to a definite stage of development of their material power of production. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of the society – the real foundation, on which rise legal and political super structures and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life conditions the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness. (Marx, 1964 : 51).

The subjectivity of a person is very strongly formed in relation to his/her material forces and pressures. Material conditions have a very strong effects and influence over our sense of selfhood and identity. Our consciousness is very much embedded in our economic material circumstances. It cannot be independent of these forces as was maintained by the seventeenth century, French philosopher, Rene Descartes. According to him, the human body and the
human mind are two independent entities. The essence of mind is that of consciousness while that of body is spacialty. In his view, the human mind is purely conscious, completely autonomous, which remains uninfluenced and unaffected by the external situations and circumstances. To give a critique of the Cartesian account of the person, it can be said that one’s body and daily physical circumstances provide an inescapable basis of one’s subjectivity. Self cannot exist and work independent of its historic-material conditions.

Karan Nagarkar, in the Chapters 4 and 6 of the novel, has given a very extensive and tangible delineation of physical and material circumstances, which, in turn, have gone into the making and constituting the subjectivities and sensibilities of the central character, such as that of Ravan, Eddie, their parents, Parvati, Shankar-rao, Violet and that of many others’. To throw some light on Nagarkar’s treatment of certain sections in the novel such as ‘A Harangue on Poverty’ (38) and ‘The Great Water Wars” (68) would be the most befitting account of the physical circumstances and how they impacted, capacitated and even incapacitated the subjectivities of the various characters. The novelist has very perceptively observed the conditions and the consequential cultural milieu. He writes:

In India as in other poor countries, we have a line that is invisible and abstract and yet more powerful and pervasive than anything the West or the Japanese have invented. It is called the poverty line. Above the poverty line are three meals a day. Below it is a spectrum that stretches all the way from 2.99 to zero meals. As familiar as a clothesline, most people in India spend their entire lives trying to reach out beyond it. It is their greatest aspiration. If you are fortunate, if the gods smile and you are lucky, you may get a glimpse of it. You can’t see the line, you can’t touch it and five hundred million people are trying to get to it. But if you brush against it, sink your teeth into it, grow your nails, scratch at it as if you were trying to gouge out the eyes of a man who had tried to rape you, take a breath, deep but quick and hoist your right leg. No grip, no toehold, no thin end of the wedge, no chink in the armour, just the transparent, give of air, what patent nonsense, you knew that all along, you twist, get that leg out, flail, rage, fume, fight, you’ve torn your right thigh, it’s a bleeding, gurgling and bubbly mess, whole chunks of its are flapping red and merry in the air, that’s fantastic, that’s glorious just so long as your leg is pinned and pierced into the barbed wire of that lien to the big time. You’ve made it. (39)

The working class woman Parvati has to cook and supply food to earn her livelihood and to run her household which also includes feeding her son Ravan, and her idle husband Shankar-rao. She has to slog to make her ends meet. “Time and circumstances had taken their toll on” (37) her.
She was a non-stop, squelching, slushy mess. Her hair sweated, her neck, ears, hands, arms, breasts, the small of the back, her buttocks, her thighs, her heels and toes sweated. She wiped herself with the end of her sari and, when that was dripping, with the middle, back and sides of her sari and petticoat. If she stood in one place, in front of the three jumbo stoves in her kitchen, for instance, the sweat dripped from her thighs and calves and formed puddles under her. (37)

There is barely anything in her life that may correspond with her divine name ‘Parvati’ may stand for. “What is in God’s name, was the matter with Parvati?” (40)

She spent twelve hours a day in front of three monster kerosene-stoves cooking lunch and dinner for fifty bachelors or at least quasi-bachelors. They had left their wives, farms and homes behind in the coastal villages and hinterlands of Maharashtra and come to Bombay in search of work. Some stayed four to a room, some shared the same space with ten or twelve others. Still others occupied a room in shifts. Parvati supplied them meals. (40)

Water, considered as one of the life sustaining and life giving necessities, is not easily available for the consumption of the Chawl residents. They have to struggle everyday to procure it. Nagarkar writes:

They should have killed for water, the men and women of the CWD Chawls. People have been known to kill for less: religion; language; the flag; the colour of a persons’ skin or his caste; breaking the queue at a petrol pump. One of these days, they may get around to it but so far Ravan, Eddie, their mothers and the tenants at the CWD Chawls haven’t committed murder in the name of water. Though God knows there have been times when they were close to it. There have been words, nasty, bitter, venomous, corrosive words; genealogies have been traced, incestuous sexual acts involving mothers, brothers, and sisters invoked in swear-words; hostilities have been declared, words have led to physical fights. Frictions have festered; attitudes hardened and prejudices led to Pavlonian reflexes of bellicosity and at times it’s been touch and go. (68-69)

The water scarcity faced by the dwellers of the Chawl is there mainly due to the callous and unconcerned attitude of the municipal officials and incharges. As a consequence, “on any given day, there was anywhere between a hundred to two hundred and fifty pots waiting in queue. What a sight it was” (72) and “the response to the sight of flowing water is desperation, a frenzy of pointless activity and loss of sanity”. (73)

The self that one has or the kind of person that one becomes, is a very direct result of one’s “social and material circumstances and of experiences that one undergoes. The vicious and constraining impact of such physical circumstances is very much visible on the personalities of Ravan and Eddie, who end up becoming nothing less than spoilt and degenerated brats.
Slur of Caste and Gender Violence

Caste based on hierarchical division of Hindu society and gender meant for the social construction of male-female identity, play a very crucial role in the formation of our subjectivity. The mechanisms of caste and gender work as agents of socialization and social control in the Indian social set up. “The caste system”, operating exclusively in India is “both a form of social organization and a system of values. Ideas of purity and pollution keep different castes apart. Endogamous marriage is an important mechanism for preserving caste integrity”. (Bullock and Trombly, 1997: 106)

There are various seminal features of caste system prevalent in India such as segmental division of society based on birth, a definite scheme of social hierarchy, restrictions of feeding and social intercourse, civil and religious disabilities, lack of unrestricted choice of occupation and restriction on marriages. The caste system puts Brahmins at the top and Shudra at the bottom, Kshtariya and Vaishya occupy the middle position. A large chunk of population within the hierarchical caste system remains outside the verna scheme known as untouchables.

The caste system considered initially based on the principle of division of labour is viewed to be a social stigma to the India society. Various evil practices in India such as untouchability, purdah system, dowry, discrimination and inhumane division of Indian society etc. are considered to derive their impetus from this stratificational social structure.

Likewise, ‘gender’ an idiom for talking about the relationship between nature (sex) and culture (gender), is an integral process of social organization. It has often been considered as an ideological mechanism working for the subordination and exploitation of women. Feminist scholars have discovered gender as a means whereby patriarchy (rule of the father) exercises control authority and domination over women. Both the social institutions – caste and gender – control, and constrain the subjectivities of dalts including women.

Kiran Nagarkar, finding the menace of ‘caste’ and ‘gender’ so pressing and oppressive specially in women, that he could not help giving narrative vent to his sensibility and sensitivity in the novel. Towards the end of the chapter seven, Nagarkar has given a very harrowing and unnerving account of caste and gender related violence. Mr. Sarang, his wife
and nine unmarried but of marriageable age daughters, live at one of the floors in Chawl number 17. This family is frequently visited by Ravan. Mr. Sarang an upper caste but with a very low income, more often than not sozzled, takes recourse to wife and daughters battering, on one pretext or another. The burden and pressure of not being able to arrange dowry to marry off his young daughters, seems to be one of the major reasons of his violent behavior. Tara, one of the nine daughters, being in love with a lower caste untouchable, Shahaji Kadam, is caught to have gone to see a movie with her lover, while pretending to have gone for the above with her friend, Sandhyarani. At this defiant act of Tara, Mr. Sarang reacts angrily, saying “she is lying. The bitch is always lying”. (111) When another one of his daughters, Shobhan, pleads his father not to react as it is her birthday that day, Mr. Sarang erupts: “The izzat of our family is at stake and you talk of your bloody birthday, you cloven-hoofed goat. Do you know who she has been seeing on the sly?”. (111-112) Mr. Sarang felt cheated as her daughter Shobhan was aware of the Tara-Kadam affair and yet she did not disclose it to him. ‘You knew, you knew she was seeing Shahaji Kadam, that untouchable slime from the ground floor and you kept quiet? Oh you bitch, how could I have fathered such a traitor?’ Finding his daughter’s act quite low to his upper caste status and dignity, Mr. Sarang w.rll never allow Tara “to go around with a bhangi”. (112) Being worried about the fate of his other daughters matrimonial prospects, he says: ‘And what happens to my other daughters? Who will marry them once they discover that we have a Mahar, an untouchable, sorry, a neo-Buddhist, isn’t that what one calls them now, among us?’. (112) Tara being unable to bear the brutal and violent behavior of her father anymore, she finally finds a voice of herself: “We are all going to die spinsters, father, because there are just too many of us and you haven’t got the money to bribe a caste-Hindu to take us off your hands”. (113) As a consequence, “Mr. Sarang’s leg rose in the air. It slammed into Tara’s belly. It was a powerful kick. Tara staggered and then fell back” (113) and he (Sarang) further says: “No daughter of mine is going to live with an untouchable. Never.’ He kicked her again, a little harder, if that was possible. When Shobhan tried to pull him away, he threw her against the wall. A slow, red pool was forming under Tara”. (113) The foregoing horrendous account should make it clear that Tara is meted out with brutal acts of violence by her father, as she instead of simply “washing up dishes and putting children to bed”, using Virginia Woolf’s phrase from her book ‘A Room of One’s Own’ (1929),
attempts to structure her life not according to given injunctions of caste and gender and strays away from the path of propriety and righteousness by deciding to marry someone of her own choice and that to with the one who stands at a lower wrung than her in the ladder of caste and thus not conforming to the expectations of her family. Tara being a victim of social structures of gender, caste and even class (as she belongs to poor family with no quality education considered as passport to social case), she is not even given right to fulfil her emotional and romantic aspirations. In this regard, Vrinda Nabar has very aptly commented: While Marxist ideology would posit, that women are twice discriminated against in any class-society, in India the discrimination against them would be by and large threefold: sex-based (stri-jati), caste-based (jati) and class-based. To be caste as woman in India, is to live out this tripl-layered existence. (Nabar, 1995 : 50)

Identity and Difference

The phrase ‘identity and difference’ is in circulation as a buzzword in the debates of contemporary critical theory. The term ‘Difference’ came into prominence in the work of twentieth century linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. In his succinct proposition, he remarks: “In language there are only differences, and no positive terms” (Saussure, 1983: 118). This statement challenges the referential theories of language, whereby a direct link between the language and reality is proposed. The referential theory of language asserts that the function of language is to represent the reality and not to construct and constitute it. Contrary to this traditional theory regarding the relationship between language and reality, Saussure maintains that meaning is generated only through the difference and relations between signs. Sign, according to Saussure is a two sided entity, having a signifier (word) and a signified (meaning). The value of a sign, i.e., is generated by differences between words, which implies that the signified content of a sign is not a thing in the world but a linguistic relationship.

The legacy of Saussure’s linguistic insights has been used by cultural critics in the analysis and interpretation of various cultural phenomena. Prof. Mark Currie writes:

A theory of subjectivity or personhood, for example, might locate identity not in the body of the individual but in the relations between that person and others. In other words, a person might not be defined by inherent characteristics, but .... be understood as an identity only because of the relationships that person has with other
people, in a system of family, friendship and social relations. This would be referred to as a relational view of personal identity. The same might be said of collective identities. (Currie, 2004: 13)

The British cultural critics and literary theorists, Peter Child and Roger Fowler have very aptly explained the significance of the term ‘Difference’ in their co-authored book:

..... the concept of difference plays a pivotal role in the construction of our subjectivity. According to post-structuralist thought, the subject is, precisely, a construction and most obviously, a construction of language (we are born into a language system that pre-dates and shapes us). Moreover each subject - like the linguistic sign – depends upon its relation to and difference from, other subjects. Thus, we are all constituted through relations of both similarity and difference and our sense of what we are depends, in part, on what are not. Group identities are predicated on the same principles, To identify yourself as a member of a group is to claim certain similarities with its other members, but it is also, and equally, to differentiate yourself from other groups and their members (Child and Fowler, 2005: 56)

The terms ‘identity and difference’ are used to convey our sense of selfhood that a person has of himself/herself. They give us a sense of location in the world and present the link between us and society in which we live. They also act as markers of our identity conveying the sense of exclusion/inclusion, insiders/outsiders and us/them. Thus our identities are constructed in terms of opposition such as man/woman, healthy/unhealthy, normal/deviant. They are always produced, consumed and regulated within a given social set up, what is known as the ‘circuit of culture’.

Construction of community identities of the ‘Hindus’ and ‘Catholic Christians’ is one of the key concerns of Mr. Nagarkar in writing this novel. The chapter twelve of the text with a subtitle ‘A Meditation on Neighbour’ is primarily devoted to this ‘theme’, Being concerned with the question of collective identities of the two communities, the novelist remarks: “there are some elementary or critical differences between the Catholics and Hindus in the CWD Chawls” (172), which explains with a few examples as ‘Hindus bathe in the morning, Goan Catholics in the evening’. (172) Nagarkar, extending his point further, says:

Hindus, atleast those who had excess to little water, were hyperconscious about personal cleanliness. They bathed religiously or atleast led the water wet them everyday and even forced their poor gods to shower whether they were installed at home or in temples. Christians, on the other hand, didn’t think that salvation and bathing were casually related. (173)

The novelist further explains other differences between the two communities:
Religion is a crucial marker of one’s cultural identity. All the followers of a religion are supposed to adhere to a set of codified beliefs, rituals, study holy texts and form to a particular cultural tradition. On account of these factors, a religion or the religious identity of a group or community becomes distinct from that of other religions/religious identities. In this regard, Nagarkar writes:

It was of course religion that was the source of all the differences between the two communities. Hindus went to temples as and when they felt like it. Catholics, one and all, went to mass on Sundays. For Ravan, it was Sundays that separated Hindus from Catholics. Run-of-the-mill, routine weekdays, when everybody went to work or school, were shared by both communities in equal measure. But, on Sundays, God turned His back on the Hindus. Ravan had not expected such discrimination, out and out partiality, and injustice from God. (174)

At times religious bigotry i.e., the sense of superiority of one religious community over other one becomes a nuisance. In certain extreme circumstances, a new sect comes into existence as a revolt against the previous one. For example, the Buddhist faith came into being in India as a reaction against the Hinduism, on account of its certain evil practices such as the subordination and discrimination based on the imperatives of caste, gender etc. etc. In this context Mr. Nagarkar writes:

..... it did not cross the minds of most Hindus that barring exceptions, they were responsible for Catholicism in India. The outcasts of Hinduism, the untouchables, who fell beyond the pale of the caste-system had ample reason to convert to Catholicism. The caste-Hindus, as a matter of fact, left them no choice. As sub-humans they were little better than slaves. (177-178)

The converted (Indian Christian Catholics) enjoyed a sense of self-respect, dignity and “offered them a chance to work at any profession they fancied” (178), which was not permissible to them in the Hindu system. As per the credo of Hindu caste-system, one’s profession is determined by one’s birth into a particular jati.

In addition to religion, language is another institution that differentiates Hindus from Catholics. A speaker of a particular language has a sense of belongingness to the entire
linguistic community. In other words, language like religion, is a key uniting factor that develops a sense of bond and affiliation among the speakers of the same language. But at the same time,

Along with religion, the other great divider in the CWD chawls was language. Often, the one got confused with the other. Hindus spoke Marathi, Catholics, English. Konkani was still very much the lingua franca in the Goan home but outside the house, the younger people communicated almost entirely in English. English was the thorn in the side of the Hindus. Its absence was their cross, their humiliation and the source of their life-long inferiority and inadequacy. It was a severely debilitating, if not fatal, lack that was not acknowledged, spoken of or articulated. It was the great leveler. It gave caste-Hindus a taste of their own medicine. It made them feel like untouchables. It also turned the tables. The former outcastes could now look down upon their Hindu neighbours. (178-179)

Nargarkar’s remark regarding the privileged status of English language in India vis-a-vis with various other vernaculars is quite perceptible. Sanskrit which may have had the privilege of being “the language of gods” (181) and “of Brahmins” (181), cannot be a matter of pride for its speakers in contemporary times. It (Sanskrit) is not a language of empowerment for them.

English is a mantra, a maha-mantra. It is an open sesame’ that doesn’t open mere doors, it opens up new worlds and allows you to cross over from one universe to another.

English makes you tall. If you know English, you can wear a ‘suit-boot’, do an electrician’s course or take a diploma in radio and refrigeration technology. You can become a chef at the Taj Mahal Hotel or a steno at Hindustan Lever, even a purser with Air India or Pan Am. If you know English and someone steps on your foot, you can say to him, ‘Bastard, can’t you see?’ You can talk like a foreigner. Sit down in a local train and hold a best-seller like Peyton Place in front of your eyes and even read it. If you know English, you can ask a girl for a dance. You can learn Eileen Alva against the locked door of the terrace and press against her, squeeze her boobs and kiss her on the mouth, put your tongue inside it while slipping your hand under her dress. (180)

Another marker of difference in the identity construction of the two communities - the Hindus and the Catholics - is a preference for movies in different languages.

There is one other difference between the Hindus and the Catholics. Or at least there was at that time. Hindu boys and girls and their parents saw Hindi movies. Catholics wouldn’t dream of it, they went to English films. It was the kind of difference that would take Ravan & Eddie further apart than they already were. (182)

Not only the construction and constitution of our identities take place in a given socio-historical space, but even the issue of crisis of identities also occurs within the same,
especially when there is a disruption and discontinuation in adherence to a socially accepted mores and values central to our outlook towards life. A person experiences an identity crisis, when "the integrity of a person’s self image is threatened, disrupted or destroyed, usually in conflict of loyalties or aspiration" (Bullock and Trombley, 1993 : 413)

A situation of identity crisis emerges for Violet, when her son Eddie (a Christian Catholic) is caught red handed by her mother reading stories from Mahabharata (a Hindu Epic) to her utter shock. The story book was given to Eddie by a Hindu fanatic, Lele Guruji at one of the Sabha meetings with an objective to bring transformation into Eddie’s Christian soul. Lele Guruji ruminates: “the battle was not for Eddie’s body, it was for his soul”. (98) The destructed and deviant behavior of Eddie’s possessing and reading a book meant for the Hindus, the adversary of Christians, was nothing less than a horrifying experience to Violet. This made her blabber “like a demented woman”. (118) And as a consequence, “she had planted such a singeing slap on his back, that the imprint of all the five fingers of her right hand stood out in relief on his chest.” Rebuking Eddie further, Violet goes on: “‘Idol worshipper.’ Eddie could barely decipher her hysterical words. ‘Where did you get this Satanic book? Did that Hindu boy, the devil himself, give it to you?’ She was beating him like a woman possessed, slapping him, boxing his ears, pulling his hair.” (119)

Violet takes her son, Eddie to the father, D’Souza, complaining against her sons “committing a heinous sin” (135) of reading and listening to those stories. She appeals to “exorcize him” (133) as “he’s joined the people downstairs and become an idol worshiper” (133), which goes very much against the Christian religious ethos. There was going to be no end to Eddie’s chastising. While responding to a question, Eddie says in his complete innocence that “..... the Gita is the word of God” (135), “father D’Souza’s wrath now knew no bounds”. (135) To make Eddie admit “that the matter was more serious than life and death for it was obvious that Eddie’s a moral soul was in jeopardy”. (134) As if Eddie had-crossed all the limitations, Violet tells father that “He has sold his soul and worshiped pagan gods” (134) such as, Ram, Shankar, Ganesh, Indra, Shivji etc.

On account of the above parameters of community and religious identities as exhibited by the novelist, it can be argued that both our identities and identity crisis are integral to the social set up in which we live. Our sense of ‘self’ that ‘who we are’ is created in a given social context. ‘We’, instead of being an ‘essence’, are what we think us to be and what other people believe us to be.

Cinema and Psyche
Cinema or a film is not only an audio-visual medium of entertainment, but also a system of signification consisting of such materials as images, dialogues, music, narrative, etc. A film is produced by recording images from the world with camera. Cinema as a cultural artifact is very intricately embedded in the linguistic cultural ideologies of a society, of which it is a representation. A film both reflects and transforms the culture it deals with. Films are very much reflection of what the twentieth century British philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein calls a ‘form of life’ (Wittgenstein, 1991 : 241) i.e., the sociological, historical, linguistic, physiological, behavioural determinants with which a given language has meaning.

Cinema is inscribed in the subjectivity of a person in numerous ways. Ideal images on the screen may go into the making of a subject. Films are very effective tools of generating community consciousness. The cultural ethos of a cinematic text may go into the mediation and making the self of a person. They are very powerful tools of educating and even indoctrinating. Movie goers/spectators may have or do have a sense of involvement and identification with the protagonist or with other characters of a film. How a film spectator identifies with a character, has been explained in multiple ways. Film theorists Robert Lapsay and Michael Westlake explain the concept of identification with reference to Lacan’s term ‘lack’: “A child is born into the experience of lack, what Lacan terms manqué à être (‘the want to be’); and the subject’s subsequent history consists of a series of attempts to figure and overcome this lack, a project this doomed to fail”. (Lapsay, 1988 : 67) Thus, in view of Lacan, the human subject remains engaged in the act of identification with some object, person or ideal the whole life.

Christian Metz, a French film theorist is of the view that a film offers the spectators images of wholeness and completion. According to him, in cinema the spectator is presented with images of a world which exist elsewhere. Metz refers to this world by saying that cinema is an imaginary reflection of reality. Ien Ang another film theorist points out the significance of narrative in cinema. According to him narrative provides the spectator with multiple and shifting points of identification. In this regard, he writes:

One does not just recognize oneself in the ascribed characteristics of an isolated fictional character. The character occupies a specific position within the context of a narrative as a whole. Only in relation to other characters in the narrative is his/her personality brought out. In other words, identification with a character only becomes possible within the framework of whole structure of the narrative (Ang, 1985 : 29)
The cinema as a techno cultural device, acts not only as a means and medium of entertainment but also in varied ways, plays a very pivotal role in the making and transforming of our psyche in the modern times.

The novelist has very deftly accounted for the very deep impact that cinema (both Hindi and English) has on the psyche of the central characters of the novel Ravan (in relation to the Hindi movie, ‘Dil Deke Dekho’) and Eddie (with reference to the English movie ‘Rock Around the Clock’). Nagarkar writes:

..... Ravan’s life took on a new colour and complexion. It changed the landscape of his mind and the way he viewed the world more deeply and pervasively than any revolution or traumatic experience could have.

Vivekanand met Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Mephistopheles found Faust, the Buddha sat under a pipal tree and gained enlightenment, the Virgin Mary woke from a deep sleep with an immaculate conception, Ravan saw Dil Deke Dekho. (182)

Ravan had a very obvious sense of identification with and a liking for with hero of the movie Shammi Kapoor ‘Dil Deke Dekho’ was revolutionary. It was about youngsters, teenagers. Shammi Kapoor, a tall and athletic, wild and uncouth man, became a “cult figure” (186) with his film. ‘Tumsa Nahin Dekha’. “Shammi Kapoor rarely ventured into serious or social films. He did not have the sensitive or romantic good look of his brother Raj Kapoor”. (186)

Commenting on the phenomenal impact that Shammi had on the psyche of the Indian masses through his clarion call ‘yaa-hooo’ (188), the novelist writes:

Cinema and not religion had become the opium of the masses after the country won independence and Shammi Kapoor gave the people of the smaller cities and towns a high that no other celluloid hero could.

Shammi seemed to suggest that it was all right to work in a restaurant or a band and not belong to the hoity toity classes. You could still make it and get the girl. What he had was a total lack of self-consciousness. He was uninhibited and utterly indifferent to making as ass of himself. He didn’t give a centipede’s shit about how absurd you thought he was. Quite the contrary. He rejoiced in the knowledge and cocked a snook at you and went on to perform even more ridiculous capers. (187)

The impact of the film ‘Dil Deke Dekho’ was so overarching and overwhelming on the psyche of Ravan that he “saw Dil Deke Dekho seventeen times” (191). Even when he was not able to arrange money to buy tickets for the film, he “sold his books one after another” (191) and as if this was not sufficient,

Ravan sold one of his mother’s gold ear-rings. If the need had arisen, he would have undone the clasp of the mangalsutra from around her neck while she slept, and
pawned it. Luckily, Dil Deke Dekho was taken off after celebrating a silver jubilee and Parvatibai’s mangalsutra stayed around her neck. (191)

Watching English movie gave a very distinctive sense of identity and a sense of difference from that of the Hindus, to the Catholic spectators. Eddie being a Catholic Christian, saw the English movie ‘Rock Around the Clock’, despite the fact that the movie did not have approval of the Church yet, as it was considered to incite the rowdy behavior among teenagers. The film, in his mother, Violet’s view, had a devastating impact on Eddie’s psyche. Both his mother and father D’Souza were shocked, when they got to know that Eddie had seen the film ‘Rock Around the Clock’. They considered the film with rock & roll music, an evil in itself, promoting profanity and sensuality, instead of being an aid to piety and enhancing the glory of God.

However, for Eddie watching the film was very ordinary and commonplace experience. He never considered his act of watching the film as “horrendous and unmentionable crimes” (252), while in the view of father D’Souza, Eddie’s act was no less diabolical and blasphemous than the act of Satan, the Prince of Darkness, Lucifer himself. Father Agnello, finding Eddie “fallen so low” (259), “erupts with a vengeance” (259), saying verily, Eddie, you have sinned” (259). To purge his soul from the sin, Eddie’s Grana asked him to go “for confession” (255), so that “Jesus might just possibly take pity on him” (255). As a consequence, Eddie was brought to such a realization that a sea-change was to be wrought “in a wicked and incorrigible sinner” (260) like him and he undergoes a penance and confession and thereby his soul is retrieved from the claws of Satan.

The above account of both the films – ‘Dil Deke Dekho’ and ‘Rock Around the Clock’ – makes it clear that cinema plays a tremendous role – both positively and negatively – in the formation and transformation of our psyche. This idea is conveyed more convincingly by the novelist himself in the epilogue of the novel:

Eddie was going to follow in the footsteps of Bill Haley, Gene Vincent and Elvis Presley. Raju, the hero from Dil Deke Dekho, was Ravan’s role-model. He would sing and play the drums and blow the horn just as his hero had done. He kept an open mind. A girl-friend and a job as musician on the hotel circuit were a must. But who knew, he might even join the movies and become a hero. (329)
Cinema being the reflection of society, acts as a medium of socialization and enculturation. It is also a medium through which a particular set of values and ideologies are interpellated amongst us consciously and unconsciously.

**Conclusion**

The articulation of subjectivity that takes place in the novel is marked by a point that human being are not ahistorical, unchanging, fixed essences; rather they are the ones constituted and conditioned through various historic-cultural discourses. Historical and socio-cultural settings and circumstances not only give rise to our sense of selfhood, but also shape and direct our desires, goals and expectations and even stirs the negative emotions amongst us such as discontentment and frustration. The very cultural contents of our consciousness are derived and determined by the forces of cultural institutions and agencies including caste, class, gender, religion etc., whose totality may be said to constitute human history. The shaping and transformation that occur in the psyche of the two central characters – Ravan and Eddie – are reflection of the material conditions and cultural milieu of their social existence.

The journey of their lives since their birth till the age of their adolescence (where the novel concludes), is also a story of their struggle and survival. The novel set against the backdrop of Bombay in the Chawls, portrays people's dreary lives embedded in their concrete situations and circumstances and how they suffer into those. Besides, it also shows a concern for morals, ideologies and political agendas of its people.

The narrative of the novel centres primarily on the two religious communities: the Maratha Hindus and the converted Catholic Christians – and their communal and community concerns. The text also exhibits that despite their differences in their faiths and religious practices, their sufferings are almost similar caused by their pressing economic and material disadvantages and deprivations. The back-breaking struggle in making their ends meet, their low cost houses i.e., Chawls with a common verandah, the routinised water war and shared toilets etc. have unnerving and unsettling impact on their subjectivities.

The aforesaid account of the novel should make it clear that human subjectivity and identity appear to be formed largely by the forces outside of our control. Our subjectivity, it may be said, is a result of an interplay between subjective experiences of the world and the cultural and historical settings in which our social formation takes place. In this connection it would
be quite befitting to quote Paul Gilroy’s saying that “people do make their own identities, but
no in circumstances of their own choosing and from resources they inherit” (Roy, 1997 : 301).