CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims at scrutinizing and analyzing the deep-rooted crises in contemporary Indian literature in English. Indian literature may be read as a reflection of the oppression of the dalits owing to an age-old predominance of mainstream brahmanic ideology. But lately, the challenge thrown at fundamental pre-suppositions of the official framework of literature by the subaltern intellectual movements allows us to interrogate the underlying literary practices of Indian writing. The modern day critical debate reflects a perceptible clash between the dominant official framework and an alternative approach offered by the subaltern stream of thought. We observe that some social groups, particularly dalits, have not been able to be a part of the mainstream even after nearly six decades of Independence and they remain ‘in’ and yet ‘outside’ the concept of the Indian nation. Indeed, it was only during the nationalistic struggle that Indian leaders thought of working on an agenda of unity. It is my purpose in this thesis to analyse dalit consciousness through the investigation of the growth of the Indian nation during and after its freedom struggle to argue that the traditional structures of domination are still in operation, though in a different manner and that the dalits continue to face discrimination and marginalisation. Further, this thesis is centered on the representations of caste in literary texts, since caste plays a significant role in the formation of the brahmanical canon and in the construction of the dominant tradition of brahminism in India. This is followed by an interrogation into the consequences of such a dominant discourse and its effects on subaltern identities.

No understanding of a literary discourse is possible without unfolding its inbuilt political agenda. It is in this context that the study of Raja Rao’s The Serpent and the Rope, U R Anantha Murthy’s Samskara and Laxman Gaikwad’s
The Branded is taken up in the next few chapters. This thesis will first study The Serpent and the Rope, widely held as one of the most representative Indian novels, for an exploration of the hidden underside of the metaphysical structures in the plot and in establishing Rao’s affiliation with the revivalist and aggressive nationalists. Rao’s basic preoccupations in his works particularly The Serpent and the Rope, The Cat and Shakespeare, Comrade Kirillov and The Policeman and the Rose and his adoption of the theme marked by metaphysics, is parallel to chauvinist Hinduism employed by revivalist nationalists during the freedom struggle. This analysis is aimed at questioning the relevance of metaphysics in free India that is fraught with a number of new problems. This is also done in view of the non-representation of marginalized identities in India particularly the dalits. The author’s preoccupation with religion and the caste system in the plot is seen as the intermingling of the ideological and the dramatic (Sethi, 154). I look at the nation as a concept and its evolution and growth in the Indian context to analyse the shifts in power equations and the perpetual subordination of dalits.

U R Anantha Murthy’s Samskara is then examined to take the caste debate further and investigate the issue of representation of dalit voices in literary works by non-dalit authors. This will be taken up in light of the claim by dalit thinkers that dalits are either unrepresented or misrepresented in literary works by non-dalit authors. The Branded by Laxman Gaikwad is taken up to analyse the underpinnings of dalit literature which has come up as a comprehensive revolutionary category specifically designating those social segments of Indian society that are culturally, socially and physically repressed by dominant sections and maintained by virtue of a traditional, inequitous and hierarchical socio-cultural dispensation in a sub-human state of subservient subalternity called untouchability.

In this view, it can be argued that the contours of a nation are defined and constructed once the power centre has been established with a pre-conceived
homogeneity. As a result, the smaller groups termed as minorities are displaced. Indian nationalism was no different. Towards the last decade of the nineteenth century, Hindu revivalists started working on the folk traditions, religion, rural dialects, myths and symbols and managed to appropriate all oppositional influences. This appropriation was done primarily in the name of creating a national identity to challenge colonial power. The promised nation-state was to be glorious; but that ‘imagination’ resulted in the marginalisation of certain sections of society. I propose to focus on the nature and consequences of Hindu nationalist resurgence in the light of contemporary arguments about the marginalized sections of Indian society, particularly the dalits.

India contains people of various castes, religions and languages which makes it very difficult for the nation-theorists and scholars to portray India as a single nation. Even after the Indian National Congress came into existence, making all efforts to inculcate a sense of unity among the Indian masses, much was yet to be attained. There were fissures within various groups, yet the fragmented society managed to become a unified whole in the name of a single nation. In 1947, Indians drove away the English and fragmented sections attained a unified identity. It is worthwhile to analyse the nationalistic struggle in which all diverse identities combined together to put up a united fight against the British and also the future of that large unification. It is understood that every section of the Indian society made some sacrifices to bring unity and coherence to the nationalistic struggle, but it is often said that vows made in the storm are forgotten during the calm. The unity of India was overshadowed by the violence of diverse sections of the society in the aftermath of 1947. The internal differences came to the fore and resulted in the partition of the country which is also remembered as the worst human catastrophe in its entire history. The fight for supremacy and domination did not stop even after the partition and the ‘dismembering’ carried on. Politically independent people could not free themselves from the colonial relation
(equation) of the ruler and the ruled, the master and the slave. The pre-colonial power structures were imposed once again and the hegemonic structures imposed by dominant groups in caste hierarchy prevented a major section of the population called dalits to live a life based on equality.

The Growth of Nationalism in India – The Wooing and Wounding of Minorities.

Nationalism in India has been studied from various perspectives. The phenomenon has been conceived of as a ‘derivative discourse’ or as ‘catachreses’ (Spivak, 13), as an example of ‘hybridity’ (Bhabha, 94) and ‘invented traditions’ (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 25). However, one needs to be cautious while using these expressions, particularly in the Indian context, as all these explanatory efforts contain a considerable amount of simplification and generalization. None of these ideas take into account all the nuances of the intricate and complex exchange between the native and colonial forces.

My thesis intends to explore the oppression, violence and deprivation inherent in the concept of Indian nationalism with special reference to the dalit struggle. The British conquered the Indian Territory which comprised 600 native states, 168,006,000 Hindus, 60,000,000 Muslims and 10,000,000 depressed classes. During the freedom movement, there was no common ground where all these diverse social and cultural beliefs could be placed in consonance with one another to put up a fighting face against the colonizer. Hindu revivalist groups began the work of appropriation of folk traditions, religions, rural dialects, myths and symbols and through an appropriation of lower sections of society managed to create a ‘united self’ towards the end of the nineteenth century. This ‘united self’ was meant to challenge the colonizer and it proved very effective in breaking free from the shackles of slavery. The process/agenda of a ‘united self’ involved ideas and principles of both exclusion and inclusion. The promised nation state was to be glorious and emancipating because it provided for the articulation of the local
culture and political identity. But very soon it was evident that this ‘imagining’
had a wicked face too. Through identity politics, the normalization of difference
and the extension of power into private as well as social life, Hindu
majoritarianism began to exhibit scorn for those inassimilable into its governing
imaginary. Hindu nationalism is aided by the new (post-colonial) state as it
operates as legatee to its imperial colonizer, inherited and modified its bio-politics
turning Indian nationalism into a Hindu ideology.

Through the analysis of three literary novels, Raja Rao's The Serpent and
the Rope, U R Anantha Murthy's Samskara and Laxman Gaikwad's The Branded,
I intend to explore the means, methods and objectives that went into the making of
the discourse of Hinduism which was appropriated by nationalistic forces during
the Independence struggle and later by the brahmanical forces to perpetuate their
domination. These literary works are quite popular and have generated substantial
critical response. Rao's expatriate Indian, Ramaswamy, is faced by an identity
crisis; in his efforts to resist cultural alienation, he constructs a self image based on
the monolithic tradition of Hinduism. U R Anantha Murthy’s Samskara depicts
two heroes, Praneshacharya and Naranappa, who too undergo an identity crises
but of an altogether different nature. Praneshacharya is an ardent follower of
brahmanic instructions whereas Naranappa is disillusioned with the brahmanic
traditions and beliefs. Naranappa derives great pleasure in flouting the
institutionalised practices of Hindu religion. Samskara, originally in Kannada, was
translated into English by A K Ramanujan in 1976. On the other hand, Laxman
Gaikwad’s The Branded is an autobiographical work in which he expresses and
exhibits his serious concern and dissatisfaction with the hierarchical system of
Hindu society and the trials and tribulations faced by dalits and denotified tribes.
Gaikwad’s work is originally in Marathi and I refer to its English translation by P
A Kohlarkar.
The question of identity in India has always been very significant in debates on culture, politics and nationalism. The scenario reflects a confrontation on the one hand with a militant Hindu revivalism trying to define India in terms of an upper-caste Sanskritic Hindu identity and on the other, with voices from below, from tribals, dalits, religious, linguistic and ethnic groups which are demanding elbow room and acceptance of their specific cultural identity in the Indian nation.

I would like to posit that Indian civilization is the outcome of a confluence of various cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic traditions. Over the years of mutual contact, synthesis and challenge, Indian civilization has come to be characterized by a diversity of culture, religion, language, race and caste groups. According to Kothari, “In the absence of a centralized political authority it was 'the Indian civilizational enterprise' which 'over the centuries achieved a remarkable degree of cohesion and held together different sub-systems in a continental-size society” (Kothari, 2223). Thus, the unifying force of Indian civilization was the acceptance of multi-cultural and linguistic diversity rather than a political ideology of regimentation.

Recently, India’s pre-colonial past has come to assume an ever more significant role in the conduct of contemporary debates and politics. Most historical investigators start their studies about the Indian past from the Aryan age. It is assumed that the Indian civilization traces its origin from the Aryan origins of approximately 1500-1000 B.C. It has been proved after historical explorations that Aryans were not the original inhabitants of the Indian land and that they uprooted the indigenous culture to established their domination. The Aryans came to rule the indigenous population and drove them into the interior and southern areas. For the next two millennia, the Aryans reigned supreme over the other oppositional forces. The more celebrated identified with Mauryas, Guptas and Harsha in the north and the Cholas and Pallavas in the south. The historical findings about the Aryan race have received a mixed response as these have a number of supporters
I find that this revivalism is actually a part of Hindu upper-caste strategy to perpetuate the age-old social relations, particularly the caste system. It has been observed that the concept of the “Indian nation” was founded on Aryan Vedic culture which later came to be known as Hindu culture (Panniker, 185). The appropriation/homogenization served the purpose of unity during the colonial period; but once the colonizer was ousted, cracks in this system of exclusion/inclusion were inevitable. It is useful to explore the build up of this process of selective appropriation of cultural and intellectual traditions and their privileging through the intervention of innumerable organizations. It is called selective because it excludes those with non-Hindu affiliations. Even in the Hindu past, only what was ideologically useful is invoked. The purpose of this appropriation was to inscribe on Hindutva\(^2\) the stamp of the authentic tradition of the nation. As a part of this endeavour, Hindu religious events have been turned into national cultural celebrations, even when they are alien to regional cultures or unknown to different sections of Hindus. Rakshabandhan\(^3\) and Ganapati festivals\(^4\), for instance sponsored by the *Sangh Parivar*\(^5\), have now become public celebrations even in South India where they were earlier unknown.

The appropriation is not limited to cultural tradition alone; even political and intellectual leaders of the past have been turned into Hindu nationalist icons (Panniker, 204). Ancient and medieval rulers, even if they had followed the principles of secular governance, are claimed as Hindu. So are those who fought against colonial rule. Hindu religious reformers of the 19th century, such as Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda and Aurobindo are celebrated as the progenitors of Hindu nationalism. But their ideas of inclusive nationalism are completely overlooked. Vivekananda, for instance, has argued that the union of Hindu and Islamic civilisations offered an ideal solution for India's regeneration. Aurobindo's concept of nationalism is marked with contradictions as he does not subscribe to a Hindu denominational nationalism in which the followers of other religions have no place.
Secular and tolerant rulers such as Ashoka, Akbar, Jai Singh, Shahu Maharaj and Wajid Ali Shah do not figure in Hindutva's list of national heroes. Among those who revolted against the British - Bahadur Shah, Zinat Mahal, Maulavi Ahamadullah and General Bhakt Khan - are conspicuous by their absence. Even syncretic traditions such as the Bhakti movement are largely ignored. It is noteworthy that the advocates of religious universalism, including modernisers such as Rammohan Roy and Keshab Chandra Sen do not figure in the Hindutva pantheon.

The selective appropriation is based on the premise that national regeneration and resurgence would require the recreation of an “authentic” culture by reclaiming the indigenous and purging the exogenous. While Rammohun Roy cherished a vision of an Indian society rejuvenated by centuries of exposure to Western science and Christian morality, Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) advocated the regeneration of Hinduism through adherence to a purified “Vedic faith”. The Vedic Aryans are praised by Dayananda as a primordial and elect people to whom the Veda has been revealed by God and whose language (Sanskrit) is said to be the ‘Mother of all languages’ (Dayananda, 249). They migrated in the distant past, at the beginning of history, from Tibet — the first land to emerge from the Ocean — towards the Aryavarta. Their territory, the original homeland of the Vedic civilization, covered the Punjab, Doab and the Ganges basin. From there the Aryans were in a position to dominate the whole world till the war of the Mahabharata, a historic watershed that inaugurated a phase of decadence. National renaissance for Dayananda implied a return of the Vedic Golden Age.

Dayananda’s attack on other religions like Christianity and Islam is vigorous. His book, Satyartha Prakash (Light of Truth) contains a polemical chapter against Christianity, one against Islam, one against Buddhism and Jainism and several against allegedly degenerative trends in Hinduism. The Arya Samaj
has two items in its manifesto: Shuddi, the meaning of which is purification, a term for the ceremony by which non-Hindus are converted to Hinduism and Sangathan which literally means union that is the promotion of solidarity among Hindus. In short, the Arya Samaj wanted to establish a Hindu nation by propagating a common religion and culture in India and converting others to Hinduism through the ceremony of Shuddhi (Jordens, 273).

The ideas of Vivekananda (1863-1902) mark the culmination of 19th century social revolt. He founded the Ramakrishna Mission for the dissemination of Hinduism and for social service. He believed that India alone had a spiritual message whereas the West was steeped in sensuality: “Up, India and conquer the world with your spirituality” (Vivekananda, 600).

One of the most influential works in the development of the Hindu nationalist ideology was: Hindutva: Who is a Hindu? This was first published in Nagpur in 1923 by a Maharashtrian Brahmin and future president of the Hindu Mahasabha (1937-42), one of the torch bears of Hindutva, Vinayak D. Savarkar. Hindutva refers to a people united by common country, blood, history, religion, culture and language. The concept stems from the mythical reconstruction of the Vedic Golden Age of the ‘Aryan’ race (Klostermaier, 33). The idea of Hindutva became influential in all RSS’s organizational activities. The nationalism propounded by Hindutva is distorted and undemocratic. It rejects the identities of peoples other than Hindu. Even among the Hindus, only the brahminical Hindu culture is considered as mainstream. Hedgewar, an Andhra brahmin settled in Maharashtra, a discipline of Balkrishna Shivram Moonje and a close friend of Savarkar, established the Rashtriya Swamyamsevak Singh in 1925 in Nagpur. Hedgewar initiated the young recruits to weekly sessions where they were acquainted with matters relating to the Hindu nation, its history and heroes. While rejecting politics as the means to attain its particular objectives, the RSS has nevertheless in the past supported the political work of the Hindu Mahasabha and has been closely linked with the Jana Sangh and Bharatiya Janata Party.
The Hindutva Vision of Nationhood

According to Golwalkar, who succeeded Hedgewar, the Hindu nation has existed for 8,000 to 10,000 years and India has been in possession of the Hindus for at least that length of time. In fact, the Hindus are not immigrants but believed to be indigenous sons of the soil. At the heart of the Hindu religion are the noble ideas of the Vedas. Golwalkar proclaims that *Bharatvarsha* (India) has been a *rashtra* (country) since Vedic times. He states that every race develops a language of its own. The diverse languages of India are offshoots of Sanskrit, the dialect of the gods. Race is a population with a common origin and with one culture. Therefore, the maintenance of racial unity in a nation necessitates the assimilation or inextricable fusion of foreign populations in it. In other words, they should merge fully into an original national race not only economically and politically but also religiously, culturally and linguistically. Race is, by far, the most important of the five ingredients of a nation. India, suggests Golwalkar, can learn and profit from Germany, where racial pride led to the attempt to eliminate the Jews because deep-rooted differences prevented their total assimilation into the German race.

Golwalkar makes it clear that India is a Hindu nation. Muslims and Christians, though born in this country, do not feel that they are the children of the land after they have changed their faith. He goes on to suggest that such people should be placed behind bars during the time of national crisis. Golwalkar does not hide this that secularism is not his path for national integration; it should come through Hinduization. His idea of the best solution to the problems of minorities is contained in one word - assimilation. According to him, they should be “wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment - not even citizen’s rights” (Golwalkar, 55-56). Like Savarkar’s Hindutva, Golwalkar’s definition of Hindu is political rather than religious (Heehs, 117). The role of dalits is taken for granted and they are expected to occupy same peripheral space in the Indian social scene which they have been
assigned from the time of Manu. To counter Golwarkar, one could say that the
demand by the dalits for representation in the mainstream is not just a demand for
equality but a must for restoration of order, dignity and equal rights. The social
ostracism, economic deprivation, political marginalisation and cultural subjugation
of the dalits have exacerbated due to the inadequacy of the vision of the
nationalists.

The *Hindu Rashtra* campaign successfully took the social agenda away
from the problems of dalits-untouchability, poverty, inequality and discrimination.
By taking away their rights and dignity, the Hindutva forces roused an intense
campaign to co-opt dalits into the Hindutva fold. Along with this, they started
various programmes to impose brahminical culture and value systems upon them.
The complex machinations are being well orchestrated by different groups of the
*Sangh Parivar*. The assimilation and co-opting process is mainly to hold on to the
power and not for any emancipation or equalitarian state.

Several affiliated organizations (referred to in the RSS literature as the
‘family’) are working in politics, in social welfare, in the media and among
students, labourers and Hindu religious groups linked to the RSS in India. The
symbiotic links between the RSS and the ‘family’ are strengthened by the
recruitment into the affiliates of ‘swayamsevaks’ (members) who have already
demonstrated organizational skills in the RSS (Koenraad, 73).

In this manner, the process of Hindu revivalism is carried out. The origin of
Hindutva and its promotion by Hindu nationalistic groups such as the Hindu
Mahasabha, the Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Ram Rajya Parishad, the Jana
Sangh, the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the Shiv Sena, Bajrangdal and Bharatiya Janata
Party, have their roots in the traditions of late nineteenth-century Hindu
nationalism (Anderson and Damle, 1987).
In an interesting speech, a Hindu Mahasabha leader attempted to list the cultural changes which non-hindus would have to undergo in order to become acceptable nationals of the Indian (Hindu) state of the future. First, they would have to accept the Ramayana and Mahabharata as their epics and reject the Arabic and Persian classics. They would have to regard Ramachandra, Shivaji and the Hindu gods Rama and Krishna as their heroes and condemn various other non-hindu historical figures as foreign invaders or traitors (Despande, 10). The most vociferous and militant Hindu nationalists are now training their guns on the very basic constitutional concept of pluralism. Public opinion is being shaped to the effect that some people i.e. the upper and middle classes/castes are patriotic whereas others are not. Tribal people are looked at with suspicion and their national loyalty is being questioned. Similarly, the aspirations of the whole dalit community and their movements for equality have been brushed aside as suspect. There is, in the minds of religious nationalists one supreme value — the Hindu nation — on whose altar everything, including claims for equality, must be sacrificed. Their policy of cultural regimentation has one aim — the consolidation of a Hindu national identity.

The main figures of the larger non-Aryan and anti-Brahmin vision of Indian nationalism are Jotiba Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar with many others throughout India, like E.V. Ramaswamy ‘Periyar’, Narayanswami Guru in Kerala, Acchutanand in Uttar Pradesh and Mangoo Ram in the Punjab. They attacked exploitation at all levels, culturally, economically and politically. Jotirao Phule was the first Indian in modern India to proclaim the dawn of a new age for the minorities. It was his aim to reconstruct the social order on the basis of social equality, justice and reason. In Phule’s time, the ‘Aryan theory of race’ constituted the most influential intellectual guideline in discussion on caste and society. European orientalists used it to establish an ethnic kinship between Europeans and the ancient Vedic peoples. The constant interest of European scholars in ancient
Aryan society and their praises of this society was an important moral boost to high caste Indians. Thus, Indian civilization was seen as primarily derivative from Aryan civilization and the caste system was lauded as a means by which people of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds were brought together and subjected to the civilizing influence of Aryans (Omvedt, *Cultural revolt* 103). At one level, Phule simply reversed the perception, arguing that the low castes, whom he sometimes called ‘Shudras and Ati-Shudras’ and sometimes simply listed as ‘Kumbis, Malis, Dhangars, Bhils, Kolis, Mahars and Mangs’, were the original inhabitants of the country, enslaved and exploited by conquering Aryans who formulated a caste-based Hinduism as a means of deceiving the masses and legitimizing their power. It was the confirmed view of Jotirao that the ancient history of India was nothing but the struggle between Brahmins and non-Brahmins (Keer, *Mahatma Jotirao* 120). Hence, Phule consciously sought to bring together the major peasant castes (these were, besides the Kumbis or cultivators, the Malis or ‘garden’ cultivators and Dhangars or shepherds) along with the large untouchable castes of Mahars and Mangs in a common ‘front’ against Brahmin domination.

Jotirao's attack on Brahminism is clearly evident. He puts forward the idea that the seeds of Brahmin power, supremacy and privileges lay in their scriptures and Puranas; and that these works and the caste system are created to exploit the lower classes. Phule also reinterprets sacred religious literature, for example, by reading the nine avatars of Vishnu as stages of the Aryan conquest. He uses King Bali (a non-Aryan King) as a counter-symbol to the brahminical scriptures and Puranas. He revolts against priestcraft and the caste system and set afoot a social movement for the liberation of the Shudras, Atishudras (untouchables) and women.

To achieve his ambition for a casteless society, Phule founded the Satya Shodhak Samaj in 1873. The Samaj opened the first school for girls and untouchables and organised widow remarriages, marriages without Brahmin
priests. Phule’s view of exploitation was thus focused on cultural and ethnic factors rather than economic or political ones.

Ambedkar was inspired and guided by the noble example set by Mahatma Jotiba Phule, though Phule was not alive to guide Ambedkar. Nevertheless, his example made an indelible impression on the mind of Ambedkar who was determined to complete the work started by Jotiba (Rajashekhriah, 18-19). He led the fight against untouchability, Hinduism and the Brahmin caste. He taught that caste was not only unjust but also immoral. He established a new dispensation, a new religion (Neo-Buddhism) whose foundation is its unequivocal rejection of Hinduism. The fight against casteism and untouchability was at the heart of his agenda. Hence, he was very critical of the two prevalent approaches in his time to reform the caste system, namely, those of Dayananda Saraswati and Gandhi. According to Ambedkar, society should be based on the three fundamental principles of liberty, equality and fraternity.

If caste was to be destroyed then its religious foundation, the Vedas and Shastras, must also be destroyed. Faith in these scriptures was nothing more than a legalized class ethic favouring the Brahmins. If one wished to bring about a breach in the system, then one would have to apply the dynamite to the Vedas and Shastras which deny any part to reason, to the Vedas and Shastras which deny any part to morality. One must destroy the religion of the Smritis (Annihilation 70).

Ambedkar also rejected the position of Gandhi with regard to caste and its reform. Gandhi felt that the ancient Hindus had already achieved an ideal social system with the varnavyavastha that is division of people based on their birth in a particular caste. So according to Gandhi, “the law of Varna means that everyone will follow as a matter of dharma-duty the hereditary calling of his forefathers...
he will earn his livelihood by following that calling”. In contrast, Ambedkar believed that an ideal society had yet to be achieved in India. For him, the priority was not making ‘Hinduism’ or Hindu society ‘shine forth’ but building a new, equal, free, open, non-hierarchical, modern India. According to Ambedkar, “it is wrong to say that the problem of the untouchables is a social problem…. The problem of the untouchables is fundamentally a political problem (of minority versus majority groups)” (What congress 190). Ambedkar was fully cognizant of the fact that formal constitutional and political rights could not be realized without social and economic equality. On the occasion of the adoption of the Indian constitution he warned:

On the 26th of January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value…. How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. (Jayal, 24)

Ambedkar’s observation is apropos to contemporary India. According to Oommen, a prime source of discontent in India today is the “inculcation of values of equality and social justice into an extremely hierarchical society through the agency of Indian constitution” (244).

Ambedkar’s hostility to caste is exemplified in a historic quarrel with Gandhi in the 1930s in this regard. In terms of caste, Gandhi was an opponent of untouchability although he did not want to abolish the varna system, only reform
it. According to Gandhi, the untouchables could be added to the four fold varna system of Hinduism. Ambedkar, on the other hand, felt untouchability was not an aberration of Hinduism but was inextricably bound with it and could not be rooted out as simply as Gandhi implied a judgement that has proven to be historically accurate. Whereas Gandhi was willing to accept the hierarchical varna system, for Ambedkar caste was a ‘monster’. Caste was everywhere, blocking the path of dalit advancement at every turn. According to Ambedkar, “you cannot have political reform, you cannot have economic reform, unless you kill the monster [of caste]” (Nanda, 192). At the end of his life, he demonstrated his contempt for Hinduism by converting to Buddhism interpreting Buddhism as rational “modernistic liberation theology” (Omvedt, Democratic revolution 147)

Ambedkar was able to put the untouchability issue at the centre stage of Indian politics. He painfully realized that the untouchables would never be able to obtain a respectable status and receive just treatment in Hinduism. He was also convinced that individual and group mobility was difficult for untouchables within the Hindu social system. In this context, he saw two possibilities of social emancipation: the political unity of untouchables and mass conversion. Hence, in 1936 he talked of conversion to another religion: “Though I have been bom a Hindu, I shall not die as a Hindu”. He had already made a first mention of conversion in the Yeola Conference of 1935. Hearing Ambedkar’s conversion call, the Hindu leadership was perturbed. Several leaders began to persuade him to give up the idea completely. Ambedkar expressed surprise that the caste Hindus, who had never shown any consideration for the untouchables, had suddenly felt the need for them to stay within the fold of Hinduism. In 1956, Ambedkar took his diksha (initiation) at Nagpur along with five lakh assembled Mahars on that occasion. His conversion to Buddhism was a strong protest aimed at what Hindus had failed to do. For him swaraj (freedom) did not signify anything if there was no effort to put an end to the slavery of the untouchables (Gore, 144).
The above Phule/Ambedkar discourse represents the effort to define an alternative identity for the people, based on non-Aryan and low caste perspectives, that was critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu castes, but also of the claim to antiquity and to being the major Indian tradition (Oommen, 189). The issue, however, was not basically racial but cultural, a matter of group identity.

**Hinduism is essentially Brahminism**

The general social understanding takes Hinduism to be the religion of all the people in India except those who are specifically Muslims, Christians or Buddhists. The same definition is enshrined in the Indian constitution as well. It will be interesting to note that contrary to the popular belief the terms ‘Hindus’ and ‘Hinduism’ are orientalist constructions originating with late eighteenth century British administrators who believed that “the essence of India existed in a number of key Hindu classical scriptures such as Vedas, the codes of Manu and the shastras that often prescribe hierarchical ideas -- a conclusion eagerly supported and elaborated by Brahmins” (Douglas and Prakash, 6). The British not only absorbed this understanding, they put an official seal on it by applying a legal system based on brahmanic norms to all non-Muslim castes and outcastes, the British created an entirely new Brahmin legitimacy. They further validated Brahmin authority by employing, almost exclusively, Brahmins as their clerks and assistants. This fabrication through repetition of “India as unitary Hindu society has obscured the reality of a segmented society, with Brahmins and other upper castes exercising a monopoly of power, fabricated Hinduism is found everywhere” (Bose, 56).

The historical process whereby Brahminism gained ascendancy has variously been formulated by different sociologists. To give one example, Arun Bose paraphrases Mill’s beliefs:
The ideological and a fortiori social, political and economic development of Indian society was arrested at a primitive nomadic stage by the sterilizing despotic power of ruthless caste of Brahmin priests who fabricated more successfully than any other priestly caste ever known, myths and legends to deceive, oppress and exploit the remaining castes, particularly the Sudra caste. By draconian punishments, reinforced by legends about creation and the cycle of rebirths through which strict conformity with caste taboos was rewarded and infringements penalized, they were able to enforce total and resigned submission to their omnipotent power (5).

Initially, the term Hindu began with regional overtones. The term was coined by Arabs and others, who pronounced 'S' as 'H' and to denote the people living on this side of Sindhu (Indus) they called it Hindu. It is only much later that this term was bestowed with a religious meaning. Nehru pointed out:

Hinduism as a faith is vague, amorphous, many sided, all things to all men. It is hardly possible to define it, or indeed to say definitely whether it is a religion or not, in the usual sense of the word, in its present form and even in the past, it embraces many beliefs and practices, from the highest to the lowest, often opposed to or contradicting each other (Discovery, 66).

Formulating it more sharply to bring to focus the caste factor, Hinnells and Sharp concede, “A Hindu is a Hindu not because he accepts doctrines and philosophies, but because he is a member of caste” thus implying that Hinduism is a social order and not a religion (128). Romila Thapar in her article ‘Syneticated Moksha?’ posits:
The new Hinduism which is being currently prorogated by the Sanghs, Parishads and Samajs is an attempt to restructure the indigenous religions as a monolithic uniform religion, rather paralleling some of the features of Semitic religions. This seems to be a fundamental departure from the essentials of what may be called the indigenous ‘Hindu’ religions. Its form is not only in many ways alien to the earlier culture of India but equally disturbing is the uniformity which it seeks to impose on the variety of ‘Hindu’ religions (15).

Hindu sects are multiple and diverse with many founders and these sects have survived over a long period. At times scholars use the word for a group of different indigenous religions which could vary in their belief system from animism to atheism, which are looked at with suspicion by today’s votaries of Hinduism. Thapar goes on to add:

Hinduism as defined in contemporary parlance is a collation of beliefs, rites and practices consciously selected from those of the past, interpreted in contemporary idiom in the last couple of centuries and the selection by historical circumstances -- in a strict sense, a reference to ‘Hinduism’ would require a more precise definition of the particular variety referred to Brahminism, Brahmo-Samaj, Arya Samaj, Shaiva Siddhanta, Bhakti, Tantricism or whatever (18).

In a historically rich and detailed account of the Hindu nationalist movement in India since the 1920s, Christopher Jaffrelot explores how rapid changes in the political, social and economic climate have turned India into a fertile soil for the growth of the primary arm of Hindu nationalism, a paramilitary-style group known as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), together with its political offshoots. Jaffrelot argues that political uneasiness created by real and imagined threats of
colonialism and the presence of minority groups paved the way for militant Hinduism in the Indian subcontinent. He shows how the Hindu movement uses religion to enter the political sphere and argues that the ideology they speak for has less to do with Hindu philosophy than with ethnic nationalism, borrowing from modern European models. Using techniques similar to those of nationalist groups in other nations, Jaffrelot contends, the Hindu movement polarizes Indian society by stigmatizing minorities - chiefly Muslims and Christians - and by promoting a sectarian Hindu identity. Jaffrelot's close empirical research informs his case studies of party-building at the local level and strengthens his incisive interpretations of the past failures and Hindu nationalism, as well as recent successes beginning in the decade following 1980 (517-24).

The Hindu nationalists in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and Lokmanya Tilak, pointed out that Indian national identity was indistinguishable from the concept of Hindu identity. Hindu nationalists sought to develop an ideology that suited the psycho-cultural dispositions of the majority of the people. They accepted textual brahmanism as a potent political force and linked the rising Indian identity to the period of Vedas and Upanishads and accepted the role of the state in carrying out the reforms of the religious aspects of Hindu society. Employing a psychological approach towards the understanding of the development of national identity in India, Ashis Nandy observes:

Brahmins provided, for the very first time, a basis for the collective identity, which was open to more ideas and less fettered by primordial allegiance and fragmentation of the myriad folk cultures of India. Predominantly integrationist and liberal, it was informed by a certain positivist universalism that made sense to a majority of the Indians in the public sphere. (Exiled at Home, 172)
In wake of the above arguments, it may be argued that the overall concept of the Indian nation was rooted in the Hindu religion which was primarily brahmin and the culture with complete disregard for dalits. The nationalists sought its manifestations in the unity of the Hindus through the country. It was inevitable that the imposition of Hindu ideology laced with symbols and myths of Hindu religion would play a divisive role in a socially and culturally plural society like India. Through the medium of textbooks, the media, official propaganda and ceremonies of remembrance, a nationalist discourse was produced to appropriate every oppositional thought and concept towards a pre-dominantly Hindu nation.

The elasticity and liberalism in attitude was nowhere to be seen. The people were identified by two categories - Hindus and non-Hindus. Due to this ‘imagining’, the dalits who form the excluded sections and social outcastes in the hierarchical structure of the Hindus continue to be treated in the same degraded fashion. Brahmanical Hinduism imposes restrictions on dalit participation in the religious life. Although the British colonizer have gone but the dalits are still colonized by their brahmanical masters. Exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation which emerge out of the caste system in general and untouchability in particular, have been the historical and societal lot of the dalits. It is also a fact that socio-religious reforms, participation in electoral politics, poverty alleviation programmes and special welfare schemes and even affirmative action did not have the expected impact on the practices of caste system and untouchability. Adivasi (tribal) leaders allege that the Hindutva has appropriated their beliefs, their faith and their culture in the name of one nation, one religion and one culture.

The basic point I want to raise here concerns the historical construction of Hindu identity and its 'others' especially dalits ostracized by the caste-ridden society and the transformation of these identities in the colonial and post-colonial periods in relation to the rise of nationalism. In addition to this, I want to probe the
role of literature as a homogenizing discourse of brahmanism and target the primary constituents of nationalism fashioned by the elites by positing the subaltern here, identified as the dalit, as a point of opposition.

**Dalit: The Term and Dimensions**

It is appropriate that the term ‘dalit’ is explained as this has caused considerable critical discussion in recent times. The etymology of the term ‘dalit’ goes back to the 19th century when a Marathi social reformer and revolutionary, Mahatma Jyotirao Phule used it to describe the ‘outcastes’ and ‘Untouchables’ as the ‘oppressed and crushed victims of the Indian caste system’. In the 1970’s the dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra gave currency to the term ‘dalit’ as a reminder that they were the deprived and the dispossessed section of Indian society and as a means of rejecting other names given to them with a patronizing attitude.

The word “dalit” literally means “ground into the earth” or that which is exploited and oppressed. Dalit literature is the literature of the Untouchables of the Indian Territory, of those who are looked down upon even by other workers. The issue that dalit thinkers and philosophers have raised from time to time is that it is not originally and essentially a literary exercise. The practice of writing dalit literature does not aim at achieving an aesthetic performance in literature as an art. It serves the purpose of social intervention and, accordingly carries strong militant connotations. Dalit is Marathi for ‘the spurned’. The term was first used for the Untouchables in 1930. It is a comprehensive expression which now includes Harijans such as Mahars, Mangs, Mallas, Chambhars and Pulayas. Dalit literature is a protest literature against all forms of exploitation based on class, race, caste or occupation.

Nowadays the word dalit stands for much more, it has become a comprehensive revolutionary category specifically referring to those social
segments of Indian society which are culturally, socially and physically repressed by dominant sections and maintained by virtue of a traditional, iniquitous and hierarchical socio-cultural dispensation in a sub-human state of subservient subalternity called ‘untouchability’. For radical dalit thinkers (for instance, Baburao Bagul, a major ideologue of the Dalit Panthers) the category is constructed and extended as to carry the history of the revolutionary struggles of all dalit people and has the “ontological ability to define itself with all the lower castes, tribal people, toiling classes and women.” “The term represents those who have been broken and ground down by those above them in a deliberate manner...In the term and concept Dalit itself there is an inherent denial of dignity, a sense of pollution and an acceptance of the karma theory that justifies the caste hierarchy.” (Zelliot, 267). The idea of dalit literature is essentially to acquire a medium towards achieving a sense of cultural identity. It aims at stamping out the inferiority complex associated with dalit identity. This change has its essence in the desire for justice for all mankind. ‘Dalit’ is a matter of appreciating the potential of one’s total being. Thus individual, culture, social burden and dalitness cannot be isolated. For this new dalit individual, social and cultural freedom is a possibility because of his self-elevation and self-identification. Today’s dalit literature renounces the degraded Hindu social set-up. Dalit writers relentlessly expose and target the inhumanities and prejudices of caste society and instill a new social and cultural consciousness.

“Outcastes” in India have been known by different names such as: “Harijan”, meaning children of Hari (God) given by Gandhi; “Avarrias” meaning casteless; “Panchamas” meaning fifth caste; “Chandalas” meaning worst of the earth; “Depressed classes” given during British Colonial days and Scheduled Caste given by the Indian Constitution. Recent dalit protest movements in India have increasingly used the term dalit to demonstrate the rejection of derogatory names given by outsiders and further, to refer to their pain, suffering and hope for liberation.
James Massey, a prominent dalit theologian, captures the wide usage of the term dalit as follows:

Dalit is thus not a mere descriptive name or title but an expression of hope for the recovery of their past identity. The struggle of these “outcastes” has given the term dalit a positive meaning. The very realisation of themselves as dalit, the very acceptance of the state of ‘dalitness’ is the first step on the way towards their transformation into full and liberated human beings (25).

It has been observed that the inspiration drawn from the struggles of the blacks and black movement in the U S A and the people’s agitations in Korea are mainly instrumental for pioneering a dalit identity in India. Zelliott in one of the important studies on dalits supports this idea:

The Negro should not change the colour of his hide, nor the Untouchable his caste. There is no difference between the place of the Negro in America and the step or level of the Untouchable in India. And so, for a long time, both were caught in whirlwind of self-denigration and self-hatred. Both were confined in the prison of fatalism. To prolong this imprisonment, the whites found authority in the Bible’s myths and symbols and the clean castes in the Vedas and Manusmriti! (281).

It is mainly since the nineteen sixties that in practical parlance the word dalit becomes an explosive catchword for social, cultural and political revolutionary movements launched by Untouchable castes, essentially the Mahars, in such expressions as ‘dalit literature’ (Dangle, 54) and ‘dalit movement’ (Jogdand, 142).
The use of the word actually tends to be appropriated for the castes traditionally discriminated as Untouchable and refers to their specific conditions of cultural indignity and social subalternity. This limitation is often and on several accounts, denounced as an illegitimate political discursive event. But the supporters, as well as the critics and opponents of the dalit liberation movements in India, overtly or openly, commonly use the word, with this restrictive meaning.

This literature is certainly not another piece of ‘deodorized dog shit’, nor is it meant for an escapist pastime. It should be understood as something offering a testimony to what concerns us as enlightened people. It is a statement of protest by the ‘wretched of earth’. Just as Frantz Fanon claimed in his Black Skins White Masks: “I have one right alone: that of demanding human behaviour from the other” (229), Sharan Kumar Limbale clearly declares the dalit literary agenda in his poem entitled White Paper: “I ask for my right as a man”. Dalit literature is much more than a literature. It is basically an attempt to document a revolution launched by a set of population for basic human rights. This is a saga of an oppressed dalit psyche grappling with the tragic reality of ‘othering’ in its own homeland.

The caste system is based upon the organization of the society in four distinct classes, historically known as chaturvarna. The origin of this division/classification can be found in Purusha Sukta, the nineteenth hymn of the tenth mandala of the Rig Veda. This document presents a theory of the origin of the universe. Different cultures and civilizations have their own theories and ideas about this. For example, the Egyptians had developed a very extensive theory about the origin of the universe. Another famous cosmogony is found in Chapter 1 of the genesis in the Old Testament. These theories of origin are not a subject of common debate and discussion and remain confined to the academic and intellectual circles. Verses 11 and 12 of the Purusha Sukta are devoted exclusively to the origin and classification of caste. Centuries old system demands them as
containing a super truth and a mandatory injunction from the creator to the effect that the society must be constituted on the basis of the four-fold division mentioned in the Sukta. These documents are said to contain a divine injunction prescribing a particular form of the constitution of society. (ambedkar.org)

It is said that there are four castes prescribed – Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras. Among these, each preceding caste is superior by birth to the one following. Purusha is taken to be a symbol of the universe, immortal and supreme, which has been given human attributes. It is said that the brahmin was his mouth, the Kshatriya formed his arms, the Vaishya his thighs and the Sudra was born from his feet. Later on, this theory was incorporated in other religious texts, including the Apastamba dharma Sutra, Vashistha Dharma Sutra, the Vishnu Purana, the Harivansha, the Satpatha brahmin and the Manu Smriti. Alan Dundes, a professor of Anthropology and folklore at the University of California at Berkeley, has offered a Freudian analysis of caste and untouchability in his book Two Tales of Sparrow and Crow (1997). He says that it is the persistent, obsessive fear that the top, clean mouth might be contaminated or defiled from the bottom that “underlies and permeates the entire caste system. This explains why a higher caste can not accept food from the hands of lower caste … feet are dirty because they are in contact with the outside ground where faeces might lurk.” (www.scienceblog.com)

The concept of caste, which has taken deep roots in the Indian social structure, was made extra stringent by integrating it with religion. The cyclical theory of rebirth, with the possibility of birth in a higher caste being linked to the carrying out of one’s duties as per caste rules, generated a fatalistic acceptance of one’s situation. The pseudo-religious practices of untouchability and endogamy which segregated one caste from another, apart from the various social privileges, drilled into the minds of the people that caste is a preordained and hereditary institution which has divine sanction. Samskara explicitly suggests the relationship between the division of labour and caste.
If we see caste in the context of Hinduism, we find that these are not two inseparable entities. The institution of caste forms the backbone of Hinduism. Like Hinduism, the origins of caste are obscure. The earliest Hindus who inhabited the area once known as the Punjab, included Persians and Greeks who in the years B.C. steadily invaded from central Asia. Their northern Aryans pushed the Dravidian inhabitants southwards and it is believed that the caste divisions may have come about when the original population was incorporated into the conqueror’s new civilization in a servile form known as Sudra. There is a reference contained in the Rig Veda (1200-900 B.C.), the first time the concept of caste is recorded in the history of Indian civilization, which suggests a second theory of caste origins, namely that the system was formed within a group of families claiming a common descent from the Buddha, the mystical forefather. Initially the father was the brahmin, the priest the teacher, the brother the warrior and protector, the sister the keeper of the household and so on. However after a few generations such organization became impossible to perpetuate. So groups of individuals with the same role drew apart into separate sections or castes.

There is a third theory contained in an equally strange myth similar to the story of Noah wherein a celebrated man called Mahanuvu, greatly respected by all Hindus, escaped the great flood in his own ark taking with him seven famous penitents. When the water subsided, they set about dividing mankind into four castes. The fourth theory of caste origin can be attributed to a reference in the Bhagavad-Gita (ch.iv, v. 13) to the words of Brahma: ‘The four castes were created by me. Though I am its creator, know me to be incapable of action or change’. Philosophers engaged in the research of this work believe that the reasoning behind caste has an emphasis on gunja (aptitude) and karma (function) but not jati (birth and sub caste.). The design of the embryonic caste system was thus based on man’s inherent nature – each and every one of us possesses three main characteristics: pure qualities (meditative and contemplative), active qualities (the...
need to work and desire to participate and contribute) and qualities of inertia and lethargy (a lack of both willingness to utilize the mind and intellectual conceptions). Social position, jati, is then dictated by these three characteristics.

Whatever may be the exact origin, by the fourth century B.C., the system was firmly entrenched and the theory that the castes, the four Varna, issued from the one Almighty deity, Brahma, is the most generally acknowledged:

From Brahma’s mouth came the brahmins, assigned special powers of divinity and six duties of responsibilities of study, teaching, sacrifice, assisting others in their sacrificial duties, giving alms and receiving gifts for their priestly service. In the modern day era too, brahmins continue to play the same role.

From his arms came the Kshatrya, assigned the qualities of strength and the duties of studying, sacrifice giving alms, acquainting themselves with the use of weapons and protecting treasure and life so that good government can be assured. Today a lot of people opt for the army and the police force or become rich and influential landlords. The Rajputs are one of the most powerful sub castes.

From his thighs came Vaishaya, assigned the duty of work, study, giving alms, cultivation and trading and tending cattle. Today these people are businessman, moneylenders and landowners.

From his feet came the Shudra, their duty being to serve the three higher castes. Today they are broken into thousands of sub castes with specific jobs, such as carpenter, blacksmiths,
weavers, shepherds, toddy tappers (whose job it is to scale the tall toddy palm to extract the pungent liquor from within the tree), potters, dhobis (the washer men) and many other. (Massey, 33)

It is observed that to enumerate caste and chart out boundaries to differentiate one caste from the other is very difficult. Scholars leave it to the respondent to identify his/ her caste. For the respondent, the meaning of caste varies from context to context. G. H. Ghurye observes, “It appears to me that any attempt at definition is bound to fail because of the complexity of the phenomenon” (Caste and Class 35). As indicated above, the caste system has been governed by the concept of purity and pollution. It is necessary for each Hindu to confine relationship and interaction within the restricted circle called caste. In Louis Dumont’s words, “the principle of opposition of the pure and impure underlies hierarchy, which is the superiority of the pure to the impure, underlies separation because the pure and the impure must be kept separate and underlies the division of labour because pure and impure occupation must likewise be kept separate” (95) Thus, there are four essential features of the caste system which maintains its Homo Hierarchius character: 1) Hierarchy 2) Commensality 3) Relation on marriage 4) Hereditary occupation.

Ambedkar’s observation on the nature of caste, which he pointed out in 1936, holds relevance:

Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindu from commingling and which has therefore to be down; it is a state of mind.

The world of caste is a world of exploitation and oppression. Caste status condemns many to a life of total passivity. It imposes insult and deprivation upon them. The meanings they impose on caste-bound life and the ways they find
meaning in it are not reducible to the various ideological forms of caste hierarchy, with which the anthropologists have been so concerned. Much effort has been expanded on defining the form of hierarchy; much less has been made to understand the total experience of the caste world. The world of caste expects the low caste people to act in a particular manner as if they do not know themselves in any terms other than those given by the hierarchical model for an interaction, disguising whatever dissident thoughts they may have in their hearts.

Through announcing themselves as dalits, writers like Valmiki recognize an identity that is born in a historic struggle to dismantle the caste system, responsible for the entire crisis facing them and to restructure society on the ideas of human dignity, equality and respect. Some non-dalit authors too have started giving space to the agonies and oppression experienced by dalits. This representation, both directly and indirectly, reveals various levels of existing discrimination. But, if observed and analysed closely, it is noticeable that the non-dalit authors do not delve deep into the problem. Most of such works merely end up expressing sympathies for the dalit issues and problems and lack serious concern. Non-dalit authors always attempt to represent the dalit cause but never target the core issue that is the caste system.

The Literary Ground For Exploration

In the following chapter, I would analyze the role of tradition and to show how the formation of a dominant tradition takes place. Answers to questions like how one tradition gets institutionalized and supersedes others, or how the tradition of brahminism is understood and represented in Indian Writing in English are sought. I look at the tendencies in the works of Raja Rao and U R Anantha Murthy who are seemingly reluctant to recognize the existence of subaltern traditions of India in their writing. This thesis is an attempt to grapple with questions associated with the construction of the dominant tradition of brahminism and the consequential marginalisation of dalits. In the process, it identifies and develops a
discussion on certain specific dimensions of tradition and examines the elements that constitute the concept of tradition.

The chapter on *The Serpent and the Rope* explores the opposition between the east and the west projected through Ramaswamy and Madeleine. Ramaswamy, the 'protagonist, is engrossed in his research in France on the Albigensian heresy while his wife, Madeleine, is involved in her work on the legends of the Holy Grail. The course of their marriage from the very beginning is not smooth. Their first baby dies when only seven months old. The rift between them widens when Rama goes to India to perform the obsequies of his father. The journey to holy places, like Benaras, the Ganges and the Himalayas, fill him with a renewed awareness of his roots in India. The death of their second child pushes Madeleine towards Buddhism. Critics attribute the break-up of their relationship entirely to the essentialised dichotomies of the east and the west. Although indisputable, the argument would derive strength if linked to the influence of orthodox brahminism which drives Ramaswamy away from Madeleine.

Hindu chauvinists have always refused to acknowledge any autonomous existence of Buddhism. However at times, these beliefs are absorbed into an assimilative Hinduism for the sake of superficial unity. Likewise, in *The Serpent and the Rope*. Rao works for a militant Hindu nationalism of the post-colonial phase in which all oppositions have been either subordinated or removed. While dwelling on this aspect of chauvinism and domination, I want to take up the case of the complete absence of dalits in Rao's novel. I would like to interrogate whether the brahmanic or the Hindu identity is the only identity available to India as a secular and democratic nation. Due to representations like Rao's, dalits have always been faced by an identity crisis. In spite of a glorious history and an independent culture, as Kancha Ilaiah would argue, they find no place either in society or in national history. They are considered incapable of defining themselves. Even after half a century of Indian independence, a dalit continues to
be treated as someone without any hope, ambition, self-respect and self-reliance. Dalits go through unspeakable horror and humiliation everyday. Rape, violence and arson are everyday phenomena and dalits who raise their voice against this injustice are murdered. Their women are raped and houses burnt. Dalits cannot assert their rights and freedom. With the exception of a minority who have benefited from India’s policy of quotas in education and government jobs, dalits are relegated to the most menial of tasks, as manual scavengers, removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers and cobblers. Dalit identity emerges out of the attempt to seek a new identity for them. It is based on their own autonomous religion and culture which had been suppressed or destroyed by dominant communities. In their struggle against historical as well as contemporary processes of domination, dalits and indigenous groups have become conscious of their identity. The struggle for dalit identity is a counter culture in relation to the brahmanical culture that continues to serve the interests of the elite and privileged sections in the society. Through my study, I want to account for the continued violence against the dalits and the denial of an equal space and a separate identity to them.

I intend to look into the imagination and ignorance in the project of nationalism as reflected in Raja Rao’s *The Serpent and the Rope*. Here, I would focus on the various facets of cultured nationalism more popularly known as Hindu nationalism, which is rooted in Hindu cultural revival and social reform movements of the nineteenth century. To the Hindu elites in the nineteenth century, the concept of Indian national identity was indistinguishable from Hindu identity. I will analyse *The Serpent and the Rope* in detail and establish Rao's affiliation with the Hindu revivalists of the late 1920s who worked diligently on the hoary past - folk traditions, rural dialects and religion to reify the notion of nationalism. My purpose is not to ignore the contribution of this revivalism to the independence of India, but to highlight the other side of this ‘imagining’. I purport
that the revival of residual past and traditional values can be harmful and sometimes amount to a kind of colonization itself since it results in large-scale displacement and minority persecution.

I seek to set a parallel between Rao's explicit bias towards brahminism and the nationalist intelligentsia's neglect of all non-Hindu identities in the period following independence. In short, this chapter will expose the regressive nature of the culturally reified structures in the postcolonial phase and the resulting widespread marginalisation and displacement. Corresponding to the argument of this chapter, the focus will move to dalits and their status in the hierarchical Brahmanical structure in the fourth. I want to emphasize through this chapter how the definitive Hindu nationalism led to the further exclusion of the already excluded dalit population. Here, I would analyze U. R. Anantha Murthy's Samskara, which portrays a decaying brahmanic system. Samskara depicts the degraded state of the dalits in a brahmin-dominated society and their condition in the face of casteism. The main objective is to take into account the issue of dalit reality and its representation as found in the writings of non-dalit writers. This narrative brings out flaws in the institutionalized definition of a brahmin and thus helps in interrogating the homogenizing discourse of brahmanism.

My argument takes off from the view that all subaltern identities are imbued with heterogeneity and these are capable of defining themselves. The movements of dalits have come a long way from moderate to militant like the dalit leader, Ambedkar who refused to agree to characterize India as a nation in his manner of protest. This chapter will derive its impetus from the arguments enshrined in Kancha Ilaiah's Why I am a not a Hindu. Ilaiah's revolutionary and resistant work launches a severe attack on the brahmanic tradition on the one hand and declares the superiority of dalitist tradition and culture on the other. Other writers and thinkers who help to substantiate my argument are B.R. Ambedkar, Gail Omvedt, Nanduram, Maheep Singh, Andre Beteille, M.N.Srinivas
and Eleanor Zelliot. In this chapter, I would take up some theoretical issues which are crucial to the making of dalit identity.

I seek to analyze the struggles of insurgents in the dalit context and explore the textual production of these instances of rebellion. This chapter is a study of non-dalit writers like U R Anantha Murthy who have articulated dalitist identity in their works. The basic question to be posed through this chapter is: Is dalit identity an autonomous identity? There have been several dalit movements throughout India in Maharashtra, Tamilnadu, Telengana, Andhra Pradesh and Punjab. I examine the history of all these major movements to take note of the issues of conflict and confrontation. It is also a part of my project to see the conflicts within the dalitist struggle. Since there are dalits within dalits or margins within margins, there are untouchable, unseeables and other outcastes. There are, in a way, outcastes lower than the lowest scheduled caste, on the lowest rung of the social hierarchical order. The politics, education, religion and economics of mainstream society never touched them and they are living in a world of primitive norms and ignorance. It is significant to investigate whether all of them speak in agreement with each other or whether there is a clash of interests in this regard.

After discussing the textual representation of dalits by non-dalit writers, I would take the case of The Branded by Laxman Gaikwad in the fifth chapter. Historically, the Dalit movement has used literary modes in order to protest against caste-based discrimination and question the legitimacy of cultural traditions which uphold the practice of untouchability. The growth of dalit literature in Hindi since the mid-1980s has provided a public space in which dalits can raise their voices in dissent. This chapter seeks to give an analysis of current dalit literary discourse in order to analyse how these writers create a sense of dalit identity, how they contest colossal social structures such as Hinduism or the caste system which form the basis of their oppression and most importantly, what kind of imagined future they are struggling to achieve.
This chapter focuses on the evolution and current status of the dalit movement and the dalitist strategies to overcome the subjugation and alienation they are faced with (Sanskritization, conversion to other religions). This chapter also includes brief studies of some other dalit writers like Daya Pawar, Maheep Singh, Nandu Ram, Laxman Mane, 0 P Valmiki and others to add to my observation and argument. The Nomadic and Denotified tribes constitute about five million people in Maharashtra and about 60 million all over India. There are 313 Nomadic Tribes and 198 Denotified Tribes. Due to the nomadic nature of these people over hundreds of years and existence without any ostensible means of livelihood under the influence of the caste system, they are forced to live under sub human conditions. The large section of these tribes is known as ‘Vimukta jaatis’ or the ex-criminal tribes because they are branded as criminals by birth under the Criminal Tribes Act 1871 enacted by the British government. In spite of the repeal of the act in 1952, they are still treated as criminals by birth and subjected to harassment and persecution at the hands of the police and the state machinery. They have even been deprived of the status of Scheduled Tribes provided by the Indian Constitution due to certain historical circumstances and the insensitivity on the part of the government and society.

The Branded is not a work of fiction but an exhibition of real life hardship that seems to have no end. The author/sufferer expresses his sheer dissatisfaction over the status assigned to dalits and denotified tribes in Hindu society. He narrates his childhood experiences when he is sent to school, how he was forced to sweep the floors in his school just because he was a dalit while his caste Hindu classmates would study. He reveals that discrimination has no boundaries. The nature of discrimination is such that a dalit or a denotified tribesman cannot escape it even when he/she manages to climb high in society.

By positing The Serpent and Rope, Samskara and The Branded against one another, I aim at examining the complexity of the everyday web of personal
relationships, the prevalence of ostracism or banishment (bahishkar) by which some human beings expel others out of their human constituency, denying them a right to exist in society. I aim at interrogating the brahmanical and nationalist discourse and also taking stock of the marginalisation of dalits and denotified tribes. I find that the questioning of brahmanic ideals and conceptions in *Samskara* and *The Branded* is a pertinent exercise because only such an exercise can facilitate subaltern alternatives for dalits and other minorities.

### NOTES

1 A term used in postcolonial theory to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes (women, dalits, social and religious minorities).

2 Hindutva is used to describe a movement advocating Hindu Nationalism. The Hindu nationalists look upon themselves as great nation builders, excluding Muslims and Christians. For some critics such nationalism comes close to a form of “Indian fascism”: a term that has been applied by critics to organisations based on the principle of Hindutva, in particular the *Sangh Parivar*.

3 On the day of Raksha Bandhan, sisters tie “Rakhi” on their brother’s wrists and express their love for him. By accepting a Rakhi from a sister a brother gladly takes on the responsibility of protecting his sister.

4 The annual festival is held in honour of Ganesh or Ganapati, the elephant-headed deity who is known as the remover of obstacles and the god of auspiciousness. Tilak sought to link the Ganapati festival to his political agenda and as his newspaper *Késari* openly declared (8 September 1896): “This work [of political education] will not be as strenuous and expensive as the work of the Congress. The educated people can achieve results through these national festivals which it would be impossible for the Congress to achieve. Why shouldn’t we convert the large religious festivals into mass political rallies? Will it not be possible for political activities to enter the humblest cottages of the villages through such means?”

5 The Sangh Parivar is a loose “family” of organizations, which promote the ideology of Hindutva. The word *parivar* means family in Hindi, so the term *Sangh Parivar* is used to refer to the family of organisations affiliated to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.