

Dalit Counterculture in Punjab and Popular Music: Emerging Consciousness and Identity Formation

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The paper endeavors to examine the rising Dalit consciousness and the subsequent emergence of a Dalit counterculture challenging the hegemonic discourse in Punjab. While multiple complex economic, cultural, social and religious factors are at play, three factors have had a transforming role to play in creating and sharpening Dalit consciousness. These are globalization exuberated by the economic reforms of 1991, the yellowing of the Green Revolution, communication exposure in terms of accessibility to the mobile phone and cheap availability of the internet and the emergence of a significant Dalit middle class both in Punjab and the diaspora. It is this middle class which has been the catalyst for ushering in the process of change by creating awareness about identity, dignity, social and political awareness. All these factors have converged with the emergence of a Dalit counterculture conspicuously highlighted in the domain of popular music.¹

Hardtmann (2009, 3) has emphasized that the Dalits have fought their 'suppression' and 'invisibility' by forming a 'counter-public sphere' Judge has elaborated this discussion by stating that 'even now the idea that there is something like a counterculture of the Dalit's subsumes two things. First it might have emerged because of contestation against hegemonic culture of upper castes and secondly; it was created and constructed as a project involving time and space. Therefore, the creation /construction /emergence of counterculture is a conscious endeavor of each of the Dalit castes. In this regard, the Chamars have made visible attempts in the politics of representation in contestation with the dominant caste, that is the Jats' (2015, 54). A very significant development in India has been the emergence of the Dalit counter public, in various dimensions of public discourse. This concept has been elucidated by Fraser who states: This history records that members of

subordinated social groups - women, workers, people of color, and gays and lesbians - have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics. I propose to call these subaltern counter publics in order to signal that they are parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate operational interpretations of their identities, interests and needs... Still, insofar as these counter publics emerge in response to exclusions within dominant publics, they help expand discursive space...the proliferation of subaltern counter publics means a widening of discursive contestation and that is good for stratified societies' (Fraser 1992,123) (Fraser 2014,83-84)

Going Beyond Fraser and 'appraising new social movements triggered from below Fenton and Downey (2003) have further elaborated the conceptualization of the "counter public sphere" as one that challenges the bourgeois or dominant public sphere by including new voices of dissent. As they are "multiple and coexisting Publics" (Squires 2002) Fenton and Downey (2003,19) stress competitive and symbiotic relationships between different public spheres. Highlighting differential power relations, Asen (2000, 425), in a similar vein, emphasizes the complexity of counter publics and identifies "public places and topics" as the key counter-elements in the counter public sphere' (Thakur 2020, 364)

In the context of Dalit articulation in India, Bruek has discussed Dalit literature as an oppositional or 'counter public' sphere 'this alternative public sphere engages, opposes and redefines the limits of traditionally elite literary discourse'(201,4) Beth Hunt has elaborated that the Dalits, 'using literature as a means of contesting such hegemonic cultural images,' which have been 'some of the most prevalent imaginations of Indian society' have alternately 'offered new depictions of Indian life from the perspective of the lower castes'(Beth Hunt 2014, 4). For Bruek 'the Hindi Dalit counter public includes diverse organizations with differing missions, perspectives and strategies. Yet, they are all united by an allegiance to the ideology of Ambedkar and creating an active Dalit public sphere that demands recognition and respect from the mainstream public' (Bruek 2014, 40). The emphasis of this model is the idea that a public "is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse' where 'the Hindi Dalit literary sphere' becomes 'a space for encountering and exchanging diverse discourses. Each discourse is relevant to the contemporary Dalit experience in

Indian society and is missing from the discourse of the dominant public' (Bruek, 2017, 41). While for Narayan basing his study on UP, 'The Dalit public, as a counter public, may not be seen as a homogeneous alternative public but as a heterogeneous and varied and full of various kinds of tension that are present within the Dalits as a group. The processes of formations, de-formations and new formations of different caste, class and cultural identities in their everyday life may be observed as various kind of interpublic (between public) and Interpublic (within the Dalit counter public) tensions that are continuously being produced, dissolved and negotiated and adjusted, and can be documented in rural Indian life' (Narayan 2011,121). Loynd has illustrated how 'BSP has been able to achieve political success by taking its message to the Dalits of UP face to face and through printed literature. Together the booklets the newspapers, the myths, the icons and the BSP's political project form a powerful counter public sphere that has negated the effect of media bias in the mainstream media and relegated its importance to the periphery of most Dalit lives' (Loynd 2008,86)

However, with growing development, change and emerging transnationalism, as Judge (2015,56), has put it, 'the first world where the virtual and the actual interact and intersect provides immense possibilities of the production and consumption of culture. Such production and consumption is the process by which tradition is constituted as a counterculture to hegemonic culture' (2015,56). One important consequence of 'these processes of linkages across borders includes a restructuration of spaces for 'marginals' leading to a disappearance of fixed links to the villages, towns and national frontiers...tries to break the barriers i.e. de-capsulation of communities and identities' (Saxena 2014,182). In this context as Mitra illustrates, 'the internet is providing "a unique forum for the dispossessed" to articulate opinion and "produce their presence" in the public sphere' (c.f. Thakur 2020,361). Here the emerging, 'Dalit mobilization online should be situated in the broader climate of "voicings" which aims to actively contest mainstream caste hegemonic discourses online (Chopra 2006;Udupa 2015).Online media are providing the techno cultural means to express lived experiences of systematic injustice, thereby enabling Dalit activists to articulate counter meaning -making practices' (c.f Thakur 2020,361).Though it is a point of debate whether 'internet as a public sphere' in India is restricted in use by 'barriers of digital divide, illiteracy, and a rigid social structure 'as well as structural constraints of

'market control and access'(Thakur2020,363).It is very noticeable that 'despite such limitations Internet enabled media have opened up "democratic spaces" to participate in public domain (Thirumal and Tartakov, 2011). A new generation of Dalit activists who have emerged with new media, often consider online media as "alternative media" (Kumar and Subramani 2014,128) and use them as preferred outlets to contest caste hierarchies' (c.f. Thakur 2020,363). The emerging trend signifies 'how against the state incompetence, the 'Dalit' population is strategically mobilizing themselves through online ethnography and multimedia. Relevantly 'Spivak's (2003) insistence that we transform the site of cross-cultural knowledge into an open field of new 'self-other' relations are of particular significance for the so called 'Dalits' (Saxena 2014,180). Kumar has emphasized in the context of Dalit diaspora 'it is also a fact that for long Dalit diaspora has been invisible, however with information revolution Dalits have been able to utilize the new technology and have carved out a new virtual space for themselves by establishing websites, blogs and e-magazines and have increased connectivity among themselves via e-mail, Facebook, twitter mobile phone' (Kumar 2004,116). The modern technology of internet and computers has also further facilitated Dalits to develop transnational relations with their own groups.

Ahuja broadens this focus and emphasizes that 'today on Dalit websites and discussion forums, Dalit's from India and its diaspora are building a digital counter public sphere to exchange ideas, share information and present a perspective on issues from their vantage points...'(Ahuja 2019,206). As a result 'The effects of this connectivity are strengthening a national Dalit consciousness and democratizing Dalit politics. In the past, Dalit political assertion in different parts of India has often failed to spread beyond linguistic and cultural boundaries to develop into a cohesive national movement (Ahuja 2019,207). Today the imagination of the Dalit community is no longer restricted by city or state boundaries. Exposed to online Dalit discourse from different parts of the country, Dalit youth have begun to imagine themselves as a community across language and cultural barriers' (Ahuja 2019, 2007). Thus, following what 'Nayar (2011,71,72) has succinctly argued, 'communities of interest online' can help create a 'transnational subaltern project' on global marginality (c.f. Thakur 2020,361).

Punjab: A Profile of Chamar Dominance

In terms of Clotti's description 'The Chamar caste has a population of many millions fragmented into a vast number of subdivisions spanning across the states of central and north India. Burdened by a history of 'impure' activities, such as removal of dead animals, leather work and midwifery - these implying defilement, immorality and lowliness - the derogatory identity core associated with this caste has been crystallized, molded and mobilized by a number of intertwining factors' (Clotti 2017,4). Judge emphasizes that, 'the Chamars of Punjab are among the most influential among the Dalit castes in terms of politics and culture. The census of India refers to various SCs in Punjab which could be clubbed under the single category of Chamar. These are: Chamar, Ravidasia, Ramdasia, Raigar and Addharmi. The Chamars are among the most numerous SC communities in North India. In terms of Briggs (1920), the Chamars category includes castes which seem to have a distinct identity. The Mochis, the Julahas and the Koris can be included under the umbrella of Chamar' (Judge 2015,58). According to Jodhka, 'of all the states of the Indian Union, Punjab has the highest proportion of SCs. Against the national average of around 16% percent, in Punjab according to the 2001, census nearly 29% of the population was listed as SC. The proportion of SCs in Punjab has also increased more rapidly than in India as a whole. In 1971, the proportion of SC population in the state was 24.7% percent increasing to 26.9 percent in 1981 and 28.3 percent in 1991, although by only 0.6 percentage points by 2001' (Jodhka 2010:16). Ram estimates that 'SC's in Punjab have been categorized into 39 castes of varying numerical strength, geographical spread, religious and political affiliations, social mobility, status and identity, economic conditions and cultural outlook'(2017,55)... of these 'the four major castes of Chamar (23.45%), Addharami (11.48%), Balmiki (9.78%) and Mazhabhi (29.72%) constitute 74.44% of total SC population in Punjab.'(2017,55). In terms of geographical spread, 'this share varies from 32.07% to 42.51% in many districts of Punjab with 57 villages having 100% SC population. In the other 4,799 villages (39.44%), their share is 40% or more consequently, Punjab has a 25% share in reservation against 15% reservation at the national level'(Ram 2017, 54). Again, in terms of geographical contours 'another interesting feature of the SC population of the state is that it is concentrated in some pockets/districts of the state. In the prosperous Doaba sub region, for example, population is over 35% much larger than the state average. In

the district of Nawashehar in Doaba region, the SC population during the 2001 census was 40.46% (Jodhka 2009, 80). At the same time 'there are a number of variations in the distribution of the population of the SC's according to the districts, Some districts such as Nawan Shehar, Jalandhar, Hoshiarpur and Faridkot have a higher proportion of SC's than the state average' (Judge 2015,55). For Judge the 'Chamars are highly concentrated in Punjab. According to the 1911 census the total number of Chamars was 11,39,941. In addition to that Mochis were 4,19,378, Julahas were 6,35,044 and Koris were 18,050. According to 2001 census the total number of Chamars in Punjab is 28,84,158 (Judge 2015,55). For Ram 'the Chamar caste cluster consists of two castes of Chamars and Adharmis. Chamar- an umbrella caste category-includes Chamars, Jatia Chamars, Rehgars, Raigars, Ramdasias, and Ravidasias. Though this cluster is largely confined to the Doaba region of the Punjab, Chamars are also numerous in Gurdaspur, Rupnagar, Ludhiana, Patiala and Sangrur districts (Ram 2017,55). Akshay Kumar has talked about 'pockets of relative Dalit affluence in Punjab's Doaba region which has a high concentration of Ravidasis thrives with rare prosperity, thanks to large scale migration of its low caste youth to the first world and gulf countries' (2017, 67). While the 'Mazhabis are mainly settled in Majha and Malwa regions. Ramdasias and Rai Sikhs are largely concentrated in Malwa and Balmikis in both the Doaba and Malwa regions' (Ram 2017, 55). In terms of the 2001 census 'the Bhangis/Valmikis/Mazhabis constitute 32,99, 209' (Judge 2015,55). Among the Bhangis the Mazhabis have a higher population implying that the number of Sikh Bhangis is overwhelmingly higher (22,20, 495) than those of Hindus' (Judge 2015, 55).

In terms of levels of education 'the literacy rate shows that SCs of Punjab have made a significant headway during, the 1991-2001 decade. The overall literacy rate, which was 41.1 percent at 1991 census has gone up by 15 percentage points to 56.2 percent according to 2001 census. The Adharmis have the highest literacy rate at 76.4 percent and occupy the top position among the SCs. The Mazhabis who are numerically the largest community, have the lowest literacy rate at 42.3 percent. (Sharma2012,30). In terms of occupational activity, 'the work participation rate of the SC population in Punjab is 37 percent which is lower than 40.4 percent aggregated at the national level for all SC's (2001 census). They mainly work as agricultural laborers (38.4%) and only 3.9 percent of them have returned as cultivators (2001 census). About 55.2

percent of Mazhabis constitute 'agricultural labor' followed by 'other workers' (39%) In contrast 68.7 percent of the Addharmis returned the category of 'other workers' followed by 'agricultural laborers' (22.8 percent). These would also include the migrant laborers from UP, Bihar, Orissa who have come for work and settled in Punjab acquiring voting rights in the aftermath of the Green Revolution. (Sharma 2012, 30, JPS; 19:1).

A very important factor which 'made Chamars different from the other Dalit castes was the level of their mobilization in the 20th century in the form of the Adharam movement which raised their consciousness and brought qualitative changes in their social and political life (for details see Juergensmeyer 1982 and Judge 2015:55). It was pivotal 'in developing an autonomous political identity and consciousness among the Chamar Dalits of Punjab ...was an important turning point in the history of Dalit movements in Punjab (Jodhka 2010, 23).

The Addharam movement lost its intensity, however it successfully raised the awareness and consciousness among the Chamars. 'In the post 1931 phase Addharam movement lost its momentum. It was successful in raising the awareness among the Chamars as well as giving them a distinct religious identity, the famous medieval saint became their Guru and his writings as included in the Guru Granth Sahib the sacred book of the Sikhs, became the textual identification of the new religious identity. In spite of all the limitations the formation of new religious identity further fostered a new unity among the Chamars who began to call themselves Addharmis. When the green revolution occurred, they had already begun to acquire education and among the various SCs in Punjab they got maximum benefits of reservation policy'... (Judge 2015, 55. Also significantly it affected caste relations, 'over the years, caste relations have undergone some major changes. Not only has the ideological hold of caste nearly disappeared, but structurally Dalits have also moved away from tradition-based caste occupations, and in some regions, even from the local agrarian economy. Their growing autonomy also finds expression in their urge for cultural and religious autonomy (Jodhka,2009,84). In terms of historical process undergone by the state 'From Adharam movement led by Mangoo Ram to present day Dera culture, Punjab has seen Dalit consolidation through what may be termed as quasi-religious mobilization. Dalits in Punjab are not contained to the backwaters or that they are not cut off from the

processes of culture-be it Sanskritization, westernization or modernization... (Akshay Kumar 2017,66)'.

Judge points to a very interesting and meaningful dimension about the Chamars, 'despite such differences marked by caste and class status, the Jats and Chamars share one common characteristic. They are the most numerous among the Punjabi diaspora, that is, their proportion in the total population of Punjabis abroad is higher than their proportion in the population of Punjab. The Jat Sikhs constitute 70% of the Punjabis in the English-speaking countries of the west' (Judge 2015, 55). According to estimates 'as many as 10% of UK's east Punjabis belonged originally to SC's in Punjab, with a large proportion of these from the Chamar and Ravidassia communities of Doaba'(Juegnesmeyer 1982; Judge 2002; Singh and Tatla 2006; Hardtmann 2009; Ghumman 2011; Taylor 2014a) (Taylor et al 2016 ,4). The factors facilitating migration was the 'long tradition of international out migration from Doaba' which 'to some extent spread throughout the caste structure -enabled partly by the material and educational advancement of particular caste groups (Chamars, Ravidassias/Addharmis) within the Punjabi SC category' (Taylor2016,4). This coupled with factors like 'rising economic prosperity in absolute terms during the post-green revolution era of the past 40 years, particularly enabled by occupational diversification and access to reservations, educational opportunities, elections, wages and control over religious places (Judge 2015,55) were important catalysts for migration abroad.

To a large extent, 'the middle east remains the most frequent destination for Punjabi Dalit overseas migrants , from the late 1990's onwards we have also seen a rise in Dalit migration to western societies such as UK, Canada, and Australia, particularly via (intra-caste) kinship and marriage networks...The majority of the jobs performed by Dalit migrants abroad, whether in the middle east or western societies, remain unskilled, low paid and temporary-jobs such as building laborer, truck driver, farm laborer, truck driver, petrol pump attendant, and more recently old age care worker.'(Taylor 2016:11).This movement proves 'Nevertheless Punjabi Dalits are truly transnational actors frequently moving (physically, financially, virtually, socially and culturally) across international borders (Taylor 2016,12).

It can be seen that while personal consumption remains the priority for a majority of overseas Dalit migrants, there has been a 'rise of the Dalit involvement and investment in political/religious institutions and

activities associated with the Addharmi/Ravidassia community' (Taylor 2016, P13). A significant change which has accelerated after 2009 Vienna shooting at two Ravidassia saints associated with the Dera Sachkhand Ballan (Taylor, 2016, 13, Ram 2017, Jodhka 2010, Judge 2015). Singh has attributed the 'recent visibility' of the deras to the economic contribution of the overseas Ravidassia population and terms it as "diasporic dividend" achieved by the community (Singh 2019, 152). Ram has illustrated in detail how 'Punjabi Dalit diaspora has established their separate Ravidas deras abroad in large numbers. Some of the most prominent Ravidas deras abroad are in the following cities : Vancouver, Calgary, Brampton, Toronto, Montreal (Canada), New York, Sacramento, Pittsburg, Seattle, Fresno, Fremont, Selma and Houston (United States), Wolverhampton, Birmingham, Bradford, Coventry, Derby, Lancaster, Southall, Southampton, Kent and Bedford (United Kingdom) (Ram 2012, 689-690). Similarly, 'In the last few years Ravidas temples and Gurdwaras have also been built in Austria, Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Holland, New Zealand, Greece and Lebanon. It is pertinent to note that Ravidas Deras have emerged not merely as centers of spiritual gatherings for Dalits but have also metamorphosed slowly into epicenters of protest' (Jodhka 2009, 84).

In the Dalit diaspora it is the Chamars/Adharmis who 'continue to monopolize overseas Dalit migration from Punjab and, as such, continue to be the dominant fraction, within the Dalit population' This commanding presence in the diaspora has 'exacerbated inequalities between/Chamars/Addharmis and other groups within the heterogeneous Dalit population' (Taylor 2016, 12). The resurgence of the Ravidass has been expressed by Lum in terms of the 'concept of situational ethnicity' (2014, 95). Putting her perspective in the aftermath of the Vienna attack. She has emphasized that the 'most visible change has been cultural' (2014, 101), which has involved the way in which 'the term Chamar has been reclaimed by the community' It can be seen that that 'starting in 2009, there has been an explosion in songs that imitating the preexisting trends to exalt 'Jatness' in Punjabi folk music, sing the praises of the Chamar caste. Diaspora Ravidassias have played a key role in funding and promoting this musical renaissance' (Dogra: 2011)' (Lum 2014, 101). In the process giving a space 'for the first time' to the 'Ravidassia youth' who 'are able to listen to songs that speak to their needs to assert themselves culturally and claim collective self-respect, in

a broader context in which they feel their identity is under attack' (2014,101).

For Lum a significant and crucial role has been played by social media in the articulation of this consciousness, 'Ravidassia youth use social media such as YouTube to listen to and share videos of their favorite songs...In the Gurudwara 'have you heard the latest song' has become a common theme of conversation. The youth proudly discuss the number of songs now available. During the 2010 celebrations of Guru Ravidas in Barcelona one of the most popular '*Put chamaran de*' songs was sung during the religious ceremony, indicating how symbolically important such songs have become' (2014,102).

A consequence of this response and involvement with the mission music implies that 'now a growing number of Ravidassia youth, both male and female are becoming micro ambassadors for Chamar pride in their daily lives through attempts to normalize their caste identity-that is by declaring their caste identity as nonchalantly as their upper caste counterparts do. Just as Chamar pride songs seek to make the Chamar caste like any other, declaring their caste identity with inner pride and confidence seeks the same in daily social life. For such normalization to take place, Ravidassia youth must just begin the process of 'de-Othering' themselves in their own minds, which enables them to embrace their stigmatized identity, and feel comfortable with it despite its devaluation. It is a process of defying stigma from within and coming to terms with stigma in such a way that it no longer provokes anxiety or feelings of inferiority'(2014,103).

It can be observed that 'the phenomena of a currently emerging multidirectional Ravidassia mediascape of global dimensions seems to be an expression of a significant upheaval.In the course of renegotiating religious belonging...' , (Kirchof 2019,195).However 'the emerging Ravidassia mediascape' which highlights 'ongoing transformation processes', has not received attention as ' focus of scholarly research', while 'some scholars point to specific forms of media or technologies'(Kirchof 2019, 196). Kirchof has emphasized 'the need for an actor centered research focusing on how people constitute change through their changing mediatized practices' (Kirchhof 2019, 196,198) which 'understand media and religion as closely intertwined (see especially Lovheim 2011, Radde-Antweiler 2017), rather than as two separate entities' (Kirchhof 2019,199).This assumes criticality 'regarding media appropriation in anti-caste contexts and new information and

communication technologies (ICT's) further substantiate the need for a techno centric actor centered mediatization perspective' (Kirchof2019, 204).

Connected with this is the historical continuities with the specific and distinctive ways that the marginalized have used to register consequently their protest. Here the emergence of Ravidassia linkage to popular protest music opens a series of links and continuities between traditional and modern systems of communication. While Sherinian has emphasized that 'for those oppressed by caste, class and often gender the means of protest communication in South Asia is rarely public speech. It is more often song and performance, that is the subaltern sing and drum their subjectivity' (Sundar 2007:160-162). While Sherinian sees the 'Dalit mode of action is to sing and drum their resistance and liberation, using accessible tools of identity such as those evolved from village folk culture that inherently empower them in their own cultural resources (language, nonverbal music style, instruments etc. (2015, 359). Therefore the 'key to this action in the field experience is the transformation through cultural and musical disorientation (Hahn 2006; Wong, 2008), which we can perhaps call a subaltern praxis of reversal, reorientation through reflection and interpretation (Freire, 1984). It is here that 'performance is central to contemporary views of culture as enacted, rhetorical, contested and embodied. It functions as an organizing trope to examine a wide variety of social practices' (Hamera 2006,2). Performance becomes 'both an event and a heuristic tool that illuminates the presentational and representational elements of culture. Its inherent 'evenness' ("in Motion") makes it especially effective for engaging and describing the embodied process that produce and consume culture' (Hamera 2006, 5). This is particularly highlighted in comparison with Punjabi Dalit autobiographies which are an important source of Dalit self-expression; Akshay Kumar discussing Punjabi Dalit autobiographies feels that 'Punjabi Dalit Autographers do suffer agony and pain, yet the sense of injustice before it ossifies into a potential emotion for a sustained rebel gets distracted into discourses of reform and ideological appropriation ...Therefore, in its rather contained character; it reveals discontent, yet it does not simmer with it. Multiple discourses intervene and possibly postpone a unified Dalit Backlash' (Akshay Kumar 2017, 74). It is in the performance of Dalit Music both in its repackaged form and in continuity with traditional processes that

come the moment of arrival for Dalit cultural and political consciousness.

All the factors converge at the important catalyst: the growth of an effervescent Dalit Middle Class. Srinivas has pointed to the potential role this Middle Class is expected to play in the Diaspora and Punjab, 'In other words, Dalit Middle Class is both a vehicle and stabilizer of Dalit ideology and identity. Middle Class Dalits play a major role in the modernization among Dalits because, as catalysts, they inspire and assist Dalits in emerging as self -asserting individuals with community consciousness' (Srinivas2016, 38). This development creates linkages with the emergence and popularity of the Dalit music videos, creating Dalit diasporic consumers and emerging Identity consciousness as well as assertion on the global stage. As many studies have shown that 'the production of many of these videos has the financial backing of the Ravidassia group and many organizations settled abroad. The Demand for these videos is high among the diaspora who actively upload these videos on youtube and other media sites to counter dominant Jat pop music videos' (Singh 2017, 35). Apart from the music videos which are produced by the singers what are crucially significant fan made videos reflecting largely Ravidassia communities sense of self in the diaspora as well as the comments sections which show ugly spats between different caste groups largely Jats and Chamars (Judge 2015, Singh 2017). This articulation, participation and intense responses has given the Dalit singers a global stage and international opportunities. The Diaspora Ravidasis have played a crucial role promoting the musical renaissance. Many of these singers are invited abroad for performances by members of the community. 'The shelves of Roop Lal Dhirs well-appointed living room are filled with plaques of recognition from community organizations all over Punjab, Europe, Canada and US' (The Hindu Business line Jan 16, 2018). For Raj Dadral a veteran Dalit musician 'online platforms like YouTube were helping musicians gain unprecedented exposure in places where caste poses no boundary to success. We have been able to reach newer markets and audiences including Indian expatriates abroad' (The Hindu, April 1, 2017). Indeed 'Dalit expats spend millions of rupees in organizing their shows in various countries' (sabrangindia.com Nov 15, 2018). Singer Raj Dadral has elaborated about the contribution of 'people like Amarjit Begumpuri and Narendra Kheda in Canada, Kamal Mehta and CK Jassi in UK and Makhan Lohar in the US who organize concerts almost as if it is a

mission of their lives.’ Indeed, the expatriate interest and patronage mutually reinforce and channelize a spurt in demand for a continuous flow of new and popular demand for songs, singers and themes. An important catalyst in spiraling this emerging market is ‘low financial costs involved’ in the production of Dalit music videos ‘which can be shot for as little as 60, 000 while other music videos cost over rupees 15 lakh’ (sabrangindia.com Nov 15, 2018). As singer Raj Dadral recognizes ‘significant YouTube support’ due to which we can put our music out in the public without any substantial cost and reach a lot of people.’ The trend of Dalit music has also seen the emergence of several production houses in Punjab like DS Music, Taj Enterprise Ashok Entertainers, Noor Music etc. (Kalyani 2022, 7) fostering the ‘emergence of New Dalit art, entrepreneurs and organized cultural performances’(Kalyani 2022, 8). Thus, following Castells framework of network society, it seems likely that “power relations[...] as well as processes challenging institutionalized power relations are increasingly shaped and decided in the communications field” (Castells 2007, 239).

The Dalit Popular music usually revolves around the themes related to the teachings of Guru Ravidas, his teachings, and his Bani, Dera Sach Khand Ballan as the nerve center of Ravidasia protest, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, the pilgrimage to see Govardhanpur in Benares, and the Vienna episode and martyrdom of Sant Ramanand.

Lastly the most popular which I have discussed in detail is the success of the Ravidasis abroad and the emergent socio-political identity which draws popular feedback and response. Roop Lal Dhirs ‘*Cha Gaye put Chamaran de*’ clearly articulates this community assertion. In this video shot in the backdrop of the seaside surrounded by large ships, giving a European milieu. He articulates:

Saathi ban gaye valmikian yaaran de
Europe de vich Cha gaye put chamaran de
 We keep expensive cars
 We have fun with our chums
 Now we have become friends with Valmikis
 Sons of chamars have begun to dominate Europe.
 As they dance to gay abandon they assert:
 It is all the blessings of Jagat Guru Ravidass
 The Lions of Valmiki and Baba Sahib
 Have set aside a line of jackals...

What talk of Italy and Greece
 Even Greece is no less
 No one can compete with
 Portugal, France and Spain
 They work hard to earn a living and win the hearts of these
 regimes...
 No 1 Chamar is no less than anyone
 Even the enemy cannot bear the injury inflicted by us...
 We seek nothing else but love and affection
 We have made Guru dhams in foreign lands...
 The ones from Pirgarhi are sired by the Tigress
 Dharampal is fond of weapons
Europe de vich cha gaye put chamran de.

The other relates to Australia where Roop lal Dhirs song proudly states 'they take rounds in a Lambargini car, in Sydney everyone is talking about this *chamar*.'



Figure 1. Rooplal Dhir in *Cha Gaye put Chamaran de*, courtesy YouTube

Ginni Mahis Song 'Dollar' Jeet too embraces this global reach and quest for identity. The song recorded in 2019 is again signified with tall skyscrapers, prominent places of foreign destinations, the sole singer in the video coming out of an expensive car and playing with wads of currency notes.



Figure 2. Dollar, courtesy YouTube

Amar on a beat

Seeing our success, they are playing guessing games

The boys of the street are living it up

Guruji your children are playing in dollars, pounds and Drums



Figure 3. Dollar, courtesy YouTube

They are scaling new heights

They don't accept servitude from anyone

We set them straight those who give us a dirty glance

Our trawlers go to America and Canada

Our trawlers go to Europe and Canada



Figure 4. *Success*, courtesy YouTube

*If someone hurts our pride
We retort like a serpent crawling on the chest
His grace has made us kings
It is not just like that we dominate the world
The trendiest in the world hang around us
The one who shows their ego we dust them off
Tearing their page from our notebook*



Figure 5. *Success*, courtesy YouTube

Gini Mahi's popular song *Success* follows a similar trajectory

They left home and came abroad
 With dreams of a bright future
 They earned well by working hard
 They made great achievements
 Children of Guru Ravidas did well
 They did well all over the world
 Those who had borrowed and come abroad
 Were able to return the principal amount with interest within a year
 Everyone called them sahib sahib
 When they came on their first visit home
 Those who were resentful earlier were fawning on them with hand fans
 Baba sahib they made progress abroad
 They made progress in the entire world
 They have made top class bungalows
 Move around in Audis and Ferraris
 They remain in high spirits
 Never lost heart during hard times
 Always kept their spirit high
 Stopped many gushing storms
 As they started their ventures abroad
 They began to fulfil their desires
 ...now they live a life of pride
 They are not cowed down by others
 This is true to the tune of 16 annas
 We have made progress in Canada
 We have made progress in America
 We have made progress in Dubai

A separate assertion is also reflected in '*Ravidasian diyan flightan*' by Onkar Sandhu (2018). It begins with a video of flights landing from different countries. It begins with a conversation between a man and a woman

Woman: 'Jai jai Gurdev'

Man: Dhann Guru Dev

Woman: *I want to come to India on the anniversary of Sant Ravidas*

Man: Delhi or Amritsar

Do one thing, an airport has now been inaugurated in the name of Guru Ravidas at Adampur, get a ticket for that

The Song begins

What to talk of Europe and Arabia

Gurpurab te aon ge saare

All will come to celebrate Gurpurab

At the Guru Ravidas Airport

The devotees will perform Bhangra

Ravidasian diyan flightan Aadampur siddhian aon giyan

The flights of all the sangat devotees will land straight in Adampur

What to talk of Europe and Arabia

All will come on Gurpurab.



Figure 6. *Ravidasian diyan Flightan*, courtesy YouTube

Similarly, William Soraya's '*Putt Ravidassian de Chaye hoye ne*' too announces this arrival.

Whether it is America or England
 Everywhere the planes of Ravidassias land
 They drive trawlers in Europe and foreign lands
 They are into big things
 People are talking everywhere
 The sons of Ravidasis are dominating the world

Dhira Sidhu and Chandni Sitara's *Famous Chamar* (Jan 2020) also begins with shots of Canada and its famous locales and of men and large parked trucks. Along with that it draws parallel and is congruous to the global branding of the concept of Chamar:

W: Come on glance at me
 They call me the queen of Canada
 Get aside young man
 I am a girl who studies in the city of Toronto and no less than anyone
 M: If you are a girl of Canada, take out some illusions from your mind
 We have progressed with hard work
 I own sixty trawlers
 Our trawlers run in Canada
 Chamars are no less than anyone balliye
 W: I have used the brands of Gio Armani
 The makeup of Loreal and wear Jimmy Choo
 M: The clothes which I wear become a brand
 When we take a position, we stick to it
 Taking it to the extreme
 ...come and see in England
 I am not pulling a fast one
 Our Trawlers run in Canada
 Our Trawlers run in UK
 Our Trawlers run in America
 Our Trawlers run in Italy
 Chamars are no less Balliye.'

Chalda Sikka by Raj Dadral too uses the symbolism of a coin to express the Chamar domination of the world stage Feb 2020

Listen my enemy, you be all ears
Don't cross your limit
Otherwise, I will trample you
Our coin dominates the entire world



Figure 7. *Famous Chamar*, courtesy YouTube



Figure 8. *Chalda Sikka*, courtesy YouTube

It is not a question of Delhi or England
The whole world is led by our bang bang

Bharti Sharma (King star Canada) *Kaum* too asserts this economic domination:

Ravidas Guru with your blessing your *quam* is touching new heights
Baba Sahib with your grace your *quam* is touching new heights
Many are running businesses abroad
After earning degrees have dominated in the offices of those countries
They have earned well
Bringing a ray of sunshine to their homes.



Figure 9. *Chalda Sikka*, courtesy YouTube

Kaum Nazare Laindi Hai by Shah Sisters Jan 27, 2020, captures this global dominance in its lyrics and visually. The song begins with Shots of Guru Ravidas and of famous destinations abroad, airplanes landing, the Canadian flag, the statue of liberty and the procession to celebrate the anniversary of Guru Ravidas abroad.



Figure 10. *Kaum Nazare Laindi Hai*, courtesy YouTube

The song begins with shots of foreign locales, planes landing at Ravidassia dhams, statue of liberty, Canadian flag and procession groups and goes on to include

The plane has landed in London and America
 Now we have become permanent residents of New Zealand
 Now we have become permanent residents of England



Figure 11. *Kaum Nazare Lehndi Hai-Ravidas Jayanti Shobha Yatra abroad*, courtesy YouTube

This oppressed *quam* of yours now lives in high spirits
 It is your grace Satguru
 Ravidassias have begun to dominate the world
Dabbi kuchli quam teri hun chardi kala wich rehendi hai
 Your oppressed *quam* now lives in high spirits
 It is your blessings Satguru that your *quam* is enjoying the pleasures
 of life

Ravidasias have now begun to dominate the world
 Now the old times have gone
 Now our aspirations touch the sky
 With your grace we earn dollars and pounds abroad
 The destiny which was cut off
 Itself remains in pain
 The Ravidasias are dominating everywhere
 That's what the whole world says

'Mission' by Kamal Talhan 2018 is distinctive as it openly acknowledges and recognizes the role of the Diaspora Ravidasis in bringing about social change in Punjab. The song too begins with a flag of Canada, picture of Ambedkar, large trucks being driven, clearing of snow, skyscrapers, symbolic picture of BSP its symbol the elephant.

Mandiran vich talle khadkane
 Ringing bells in the temple
 Performing jagos and chowkis at home
 Lighting lamps every Thursday
 Prostrating almost everywhere
 They call themselves missionary...
 Bless you Canada wallahs who are carrying on the Mission
 Bless you America wallahs who are carrying on the Misson
 My simple folks how do you earn your money
 With such difficulty you make your earnings, and you stand by us
 You are the true heirs of Bheem
 We are just taking credit for ourselves
 Bless you England wale who are running the mission
 Bless you Europe wale who are running the mission
 Bless you Arab wale
 Bless you Australia wale
 Who are running the Mission
 Bless you New Zealand wale
 Who are running the Mission.

Similarly, Raj Dadrals *New Mission 2017* conveys a moment of arrival

Whether it is England or Canada
 We play with dollars and count our pounds

Very hardworking, this is true to the tune of 16 annas
 The sons of Ravidassis have touched the extremes
 They dominate across India, USA and the entire Europe
 They have brightened up all these countries (*char chand lagaye hoye ne*)
 These lively youngmen (*gabru shaukeen*)
 Are no less than anyone



Figure 12. Courtesy YouTube

MRD wrote

They keep an open mind
 Achieve progress
 They have kept the most expensive cars
 They studied well
 That is why they hold a high regard (*uccha mat*)...
 The boys of Mitthapur are very famous
 They love to gym and are far away from all intoxicants....

This assertion of transnational identity also comes about in the types of weapons possessed. Narinder Khera and Gurpreet Lali in '*Gun Amreeka di*' produced by King star Canada give this interesting pioneering song. Conversation between two people takes place in the song

'Brother today they again gathered at Jalandhar bus stand and said
 'we will grab the land,
 let me call Roshi of Kheda from Buta mandi'

'wait, you are being very hasty, I alone will tell those ponies what the value of a chamar is'



Figure 13. *Gun Amreeka* de-photos of Hollywood action stars, courtesy YouTube

Gun Amerika di gaddi vich paa ke rakhda
Pistol Russia di dab ch paa ke rakhda
 Keep my American gun in the car
 Our hearts are as strong as the lions
 We set the truant one's right
 Got the ranking of lion Chamar
 Cannot tolerate anyone's domination
 Keep the gun from America in my car
 The pistol from Russia is tied on my hip (*dab*)
 (Driving the car in the US behind the wheel shots of open spaces)

We are friends of the brave
 Friendship is more precious than life
 We will make them bite the dust
 To the ones who speak rudely to us
 We learnt to swim in the deep waters
 Holding fire in our hands
 We walk the stride of an elephant
 No one dare stop us
 From Ludhiana to Canada
 Lalis flag flies high
 We don't stand by lies
 We are always with the truth...

As the song ends the men are driving the car in US behind the wheel open spaces fancy buildings which are interspersed with posters of mission and songs and a message of no compromise. Interpreted with posters of mission and posters of songs- no compromise with self-respect and dignity.

'*Tarrakiyan*' Hardeep Deepa is perhaps one of the rare songs that highlights the role of the Arab World in the emerging Chamar mobility and consciousness

Soch saadi Burj khalife ton ucchi
 Our thinking is higher than the *burj khalifa*
 We are humble in our hearts, but make good progress
 We share a common lifestyle and business with the Sheiks
 We hold our own in the country and abroad
 That's why you get and see young man
 It's the Ravidasias who exert their might in the world
 Like the Dubaiwala sheikh
 Satguru Kanshiwala has kept a benign hand on our head
 We are always mentioned on google media
 Bhimrao all because of you
 We have written a separate history
 Almost a lakh of devotees congregated in London
 Our trucks are operating in Saudi and Dubai
 Canada vich transport paiyane
 We have transport in Canada
 Pammi Lohara considers Dubai as God ...

Where he broke his bones and earned well
 I have three loves parents, constitution and bani

The identification with the Constitution and the Dalit icon BR Ambedkar is an interesting take full of glorification and reverence.



Figure 14. Picture of a Dubai freeway, courtesy YouTube



Figure 15. Material success at home in *Tarakiyan*, courtesy YouTube

(Parked trucks, muscular arms, car outside the home, flag, driving truck, photo of Guru Ravidas, Picture of Ravidas temple, huge house

constructed, picture of Motorcycles and truck amplifying material success are all an important ingredient of the video).

The other youtube videos which I have looked at relate to fan made videos which give an insight on the emerging Chamar consciousness. I will discuss a few of them. The first uploaded by Amit Chauhan on the song '*jithe khad gaye bas bas khad gaye, jithe add gaye bus ad gaye* (We remain steadfast on our point of view, no one can move us from our position). That is why people address us as *adab* obdurate Chamars. This song is packed with images of well-built bare-bodied even black bodies, with the name Chamar inscribed on the torso of the men, pictures of Guru Ravidas and the emblem of arms. A picture inscribing the Ravidas Sabha U.S.A and a final picture of the great Khali. A similar articulation takes place with videos like Freedom Lion Chamar and Chamar Cool. While in the video '*Chamar Teekhi Talwar*' the reel of Arnold Schwarzenegger is played in the backdrop of the song 'Be careful in taking a risk with the Chamars. Our Sants were attacked...the song ends with a volley of machine gun fire. Similarly, Ravidasia Boys shows a picture of Ravidassia Sabha Vancouver, with the close-up of a lion, photos of firearms, with a young man breaking chains and calling himself '*Bhimraoji ke chele*' then poses with a gun and two lions and is also adorned in a uniform. In *Yodha Rai Chamar* it is again the picture the pictures of Guru Ravidas, young men in googles, jackets, working on a computer with song 'none dares to openly challenge us, we *ankhi put chamaran de* live in style.' The song ends with a focus on the back of the tee-shirts where it is written 'Rai Sahib 1'

Chamar in London, shows three Chamar boys in the backdrop of huge escalators, snowcapped peaks, skyscrapers, the London eye, the river Thames, driving on the highway in the backdrop of the song 'riding red safari jeeps and Land cruiser sons of Chamars are off to a fair', finally culminating with a close-up of the T-shirt 'Lonsdale London' and the lines of the song : what all one has to bear for the *paapi pet* (to feed oneself) This received 18, 217 views and 2, 388 likes. The song '*rokeye nahin rukde put Chamaran de* (Now the sons of Chamars are unstoppable) shows the life of a family abroad. First in a religious gathering, pictures of fancy cars implying aspirations, the reverent young men wearing googles and staring straight into the camera highlighting their success abroad. The songs '*Chamar kala hi bathera*' which received 13, 977 showcases the life of a young Chamar boy '*saanu kisse di lod koi na, chamar kalla hi bathera* (we don't need anyone, A Chamar can manage on

his own and is self-sufficient).’ The song highlights body builders, wrestlers and huge biceps concentrating on physical strength and supremacy.

Almost 15 men who were Dalit NRI’s were interviewed in detail in the district of Jalandhar through the snowballing technique when they came home for a short stay abroad on the condition of anonymity on their response to Dalit Music. Though they were keen to talk they did not want to be *identified for many reasons*. Though this study was part of a wider project on the relationship between Dalit NRI’s and their homeland. The most significant strand that came across regarding Dalit music is that something belongs to ‘us’ it is ours ‘*hamara*’ and it is ‘*apna*’ a sense of belonging. The other realization relates to a growing assertion that it is the music which helps them fight a sense of inferiority that weighs them down as they come back home. For as most assert in the west ‘we are all *barabar* equal, it is in fact they (Jats) who are encroaching upon our professions. Now they are ready to become janitors too.’ As one articulates ‘they can only drive trucks, but we have a variety of skills which give us an opportunity and an edge to become more successful.’ That is why as one points out ‘danger chamar’ is not an ‘abuse’ but our ‘*pehchan*’ identity. It is ‘through this music that we learn from whom to lean on for drawing our strength’ as another puts it ‘it is my dream to go near the Jat Sikh houses in our village and ‘*bula bakre*’ (challenge them). It is our parents who have in their stories shared about the world of suffering and struggle they have left home’ ‘now we have built *pucca* and big houses.’ As another middle-aged man says how he reassures his parents ‘*hun main aa gaya haan, tuhanu koi takleef nahi hoigi*’ (now that I have come you will face no problem), he states ‘*piche piche unhan de kyon jao, apna rasta aap chun lao*(why follow others find your own path).’ Similarly, ‘this is our experience and something we cannot share beyond our community. I keep on checking what new song has been uploaded, only someone with the same interest can understand my curiosity.’ They were very univocal in providing support to the mission singers ‘*Agar tuhade back te koi hai, taan hi tussi khade ho sakde ho, te apne nu andar ton strong ate takatwar bana sakde ho*’ (If someone strong stands up for you only then can you get up and make yourself strong and powerful from inside). This is our way to pay back to our community.’

I would like to discuss the three prominent female Dalit mission singers who have become prototypes of women Dalit singers in contemporary Punjab. Rajni Thakarwal dresses up in a turban largely

projecting a certain androgynous self. The song *Put chamaran de* is sung by her as a challenge and as a tease for her men to act. As she challenges the upper caste her focus remains on articulating this challenge through giving a reminder of the Vienna episode. The pictures of the grievously injured Sant Ramanand and attack on him give her the necessary vigor to extol the men of her own caste to wake up and rise. Secondly, she takes up the issue of strong Ravidassia men holding their own against Jat Sikh men who can stand up and fight for their women and uphold their honor. While Thakarwal focus is on the contemporary iconography of Sant Ravidas, Ginni Mahi in her songs considers herself as a '*dhi*' (daughter) of Baba Sahib. She feels a sense of fulfilment in the gift and blessings of Baba Sahib. She discusses equality and talks of aspiration and mobility, the scope of Dalit's to do well abroad, to rise in the government sector, driving a car with a red beacon is an important symbol of her song. Thus, for her making use of protective discrimination gives a cutting edge to caste consciousness to succeed. As one mission singer whom I met pointed out on the condition of anonymity: Of all the three singers Miss Pooja has been maligned the most in chatrooms and particularly targeted in the comments section by trolls, where she has been a victim of sexual innuendos, and even direct threats to rape. She has been made to pay the price for asserting and accepting her identity. Miss Pooja has recorded the maximum number of duet songs in Punjab with a variety of male singers. She has interesting albums to her credit like Bomb Jat, Jat Jaguar, Romantic Jat, Jat Land and others valorizing Jat masculinity. However, when she gives a call '*saanu Begumpura vasana hai* (we must set up Begumpura) where she embraces her Dalit identity stirring up Jat resentment.

Dalit Music, Social Media and Spectatorship: Chamar Boys and Identity Formation

Around twenty Young Dalit Chamar boys between the age group of 15-25 who were employed in both the formal and informal sector were interviewed at Bootamandi, Jalandhar, the center of Punjab Dalit resistance through an interview schedule and focused group discussions.ⁱⁱ The first very interesting aspect was that the Dalit boys were very clear about their favorite singers which was their personal space and that choice did not emanate from only caste considerations. For Nikhil a school student it was Sangha, while Binod who did wall painting insisted *Gurdasmann da gaana roti haq di khay mainu bahut changa*

lagda hai (Gurdas Mann's, song I eat food that is my right). However they were quick to recognize a difference between mainstream and Dalit singers, most of the respondents kept a revered space in their hearts for the Dalit music which had become something to be revered and idealized. As Nikhil emphasized 'it is through their singing that Dalit singers can assert *'sadi biraderi sab ton utte hai'* (our brotherhood is at the top). Binod who listens to Dalit singers like Raj Dadral and Roop Lal Dhir *'unhande gaane vich dalit samuday di chavi disdi hai'*(their singing reflects the personality of the Dalit community' while for Prabhveer his favourites were Sidhu Moosewala and Karan Aujla. He listened to Vicky Badshah, SS Azad, Ranjit Rana, Rooplal Dhir. Similarly Aryan had a liking for Babbu Mann as he felt that Babbu Mann 'did not talk of caste' While Rahul too opted for Babbu Mann, Diljit Dosanjh and Prabh Gill. Most of the young Dalit spectators had two sets of favorite songs a separate category of their own 'Dalit singers' or 'mission singers'ⁱⁱⁱ Nikhil liked *'koi virli maa hi jamdi.'* Binod preferred all the mission songs of 'Miss Pooja and Ginni Mahi and Shah sisters' For Paras 'on an emotional level one felt a connect and a bond with *'apne kalakar'* (our artists) he felt a sense of oneness with Praveen Parsi,Raj Dadral,SS Azad etc. Babblu Thapar, a conductor too vacillated between two poles one Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan and the other Vicky Badshah.While Avishek spoke with an adoration *'Asal vich bahut changa lagda hai Sidhu Moosewala* (real fondness for Sidhu Moosewala). At the same time, he had a great deal of reverence for all Dalit singers. He stated 'I am fond of all Dalit singers. People of lower caste would feel embarrassed at themselves that we are born in a lower caste, but now after listening to all these songs *aapne aap te naaz hota hai'*(one feels proud of oneself).Ankush too had these contradictory choices, 'I listen to DJ songs in which there is a fast beat I prefer Parmesh Varma and Karan Aujla. Sometimes I listen to Roop Lal Dhir and Raj Dadral who are motivational singers for us' This demarcation appeared less severe in the case of female singers their favorites being a range of both Punjabi and hindi singers: Miss Pooja,Ginni Mahi, Gurlez Akhtar, Sunanda Sharma, Nimrat Khera and Neha Kakkar, Sunidhi Chauhan.

The main theme of Dalit singers as Nikhil states is that they are 'songs of our community.' Earlier people felt a *'sankoch'* (hesitation) in using the word, Chamar. Now that the word has become a part of 'our' everyday songs it has become easy for everyone to use and accept.' Nikhil explains 'there are many such words which have been woven in

'*changi changi*' (very good) lines. When one listens to them and tries to understand them '*zindagi di ek nai dishsa mildi hai*' (one gets a new direction in life). Binod who had earlier worked in Dubai mentioned the popularity of Dalit singers there and emphasised that 'it is through the medium of song about Guru Ravidasji and Baba Sahib that they convey how '*badlav*' (change) will come.' For Rahul too 'the main theme of these songs is about '*jati vyvastha*' (caste system) and our 'religious Gurus.' This was also endorsed by Avishek. Paras however pointed to the change in the type of songs that have taken place 'while the earlier singers talked about *bhakti*, it is the new singers with their new focus which have completely changed things' Aryan emphasizes the themes related 'For Dalit singers the main theme is related to their caste *aapne andar de sher nu jagakar duniya vich laana*' (to invoke the lion within us and bring it to the world), Babblu Thapur, feels that 'Dalit singers want to showcase their *biraderi* and also highlight that '*oonchi jat walian di chal naal Dalit samaj nu niman tapke vich rakha gaya hai* (It is due to the games played by the upper Caste people, that the Dalits have been kept at the bottom). Krishan Lal Jhoolewala too endorses that 'main endeavor of the Dalit singers is to spread the fame of their Gurus and give respect to their caste'

Regarding the difference between Dalit and Jat songs, Binod felt that 'both communities give importance and precedence to their own caste' Akashdeep feels 'Dalit singers have not reached a position of high status in society '*uchi samanjanak stihthi*' (higher caste status). The singers are trying to uplift themselves so that they are in a respectable situation. It is through their singing that they are trying to achieve and strive for respect status and position in society.' Akashdeep felt that 'The Jats do not control us and what we want to listen, but they try to give a position of superiority of their own caste and *Jati* in their songs something which we have always been accepting and only recently began to question.' Rahul elaborated, '*Jat log gaane apne alag andaz vich sunde ne unhana di alag choice hai, jis gaane vich chamar yaan Valmiki shabad ka prayog hunda hai hai us gaane nu o nahin sunde*' (Jats listen to songs of their own choice, but they never listen to songs where the word Chamar or Valmiki is used). Prabhveer concurs that 'Jats never listen to our songs (*unhan da bas chale taan saade gannean nu release vi na hoon den. saade gaanean ton bade chidde han*' (If it is in their hands, they would never let our songs be released. They are resentful towards us) I can't say much but in many ways our songs are a bit like them we too don't accept anyone below us.' Aryan eloquently

describes the situation 'we listen to songs of jats but they do not listen to our songs for our songs always use the word *chamar jo jattan nu pasand Nahin* (the Jats do not like). They don't control what we listen, but they want to keep the dominance of their songs which bring them name and fame. After all they have more name and fame, their music has more razzmatazz, paisa, music directors, choreographers, *brand te trend farak taan phir aa hi jaanda hai* (brand and trend makes all the difference)' Paras too felt that 'Both Jat and Dalit singers want to prove their one upmanship. There are a lot of differences between the two which come out through their songs.' Aryan states 'both give a priority to their '*jati*' and '*quam*' and want to keep themselves at the upper edge. That is why there builds up a '*takkar*' (confrontation) between them, *pehlan taan jattan de mure khadan wala koi nahi si assi himmat taan keeti* (earlier there was none who could challenge the Jats. At least we made a move)'.

Babblu Thapar explained with clarity the 'difference between Dalit and Jat singers is in their type of singing. While Dalit singers do bhakti of their Gurus, *aur apni niman jati ton mukti paane aur ooncha uthan di gal karde han. Magar Jat singers tan apne ko top te samajhete hain or rakhte hain* (While Dalit Singers want to free themselves and uplift their community from the confines of the low caste, Jat singers think that it is their right to be at the top and maintain themselves at that position). Avishek made an interesting cultural point 'there is not much difference between the two as both want to promote their own community. All top singers have Jat names, one does not know *asli hai ki nahin, jad koi chal jaanda hai oh Jat ban jaanda hai* (whether he is the original one, when he becomes popular, he becomes a Jat)'. Avishek saw a positivity in the entire exercise 'Both relate to their own *jati te khoob bada Chadha ke gaande han* (praise the virtues of their own caste to the skies). At least we have come to their level (*barabar*). Now people have started comparing the two communities this is the power of singing. In one breath we take the name of Jat and Dalit.' For Krishn Lal Jhoolawaala 'Dalit singers are still striving to search for their identity. While those who are connected to the upper caste do not have to address these issues in their singing. *eh loki apne gaane vich ouch jaati da hone da bhav pragat karte hain* (Their songs automatically convey the expressions of being high caste). This is the main difference. Krishan Lal Jhoolawala 'Jats don't even listen to songs of Dalit singers. They are resentful of Dalit singers) and wherever the word Chamar/Valmiki is invoked they will never listen. Jat singers in their songs address the superiority of their caste and matters related to it.

They are proud of belonging to the uppercase. Dalit singers sing about the glory of Guru Ravidas, Baba sahib and struggle to achieve equality.' Mandeep Singh 'Jats want to prove that they are *sabton utte* (superior) and want to maintain their popularity, no one can even touch them.' Nirmal Thapar explained that 'Dalit singers sing about their own community. Even today the society suffers from such a mentality that it makes the lower castes go through a great deal of ordeal. Why will Jats listen to songs which talk about the upliftment of other castes or about Guru Ravidas or Baba Sahib.' Prince Thapar explains the need for 'Dalit singers to construct the identity of their own caste or Jati which was not their earlier in their songs and build a role of the future.' Akashdeep elaborated that 'earlier we felt a sense of inferiority that we belonged to a lower caste. But these singers through their songs have tried to give our *jati* a respectable and equal position in the society. Music is important as it is through the medium of music that we can bring equality in the society.'

Rahul too feels that with music is a medium *jis naal badlav aa janda hai* (which ushers in change). It sends a message to society and *lokan vich jagriti aa jaandi hai aur is prakar samaj vich badlav aana shuru ho jata hai* (people are awakened and it ushers in the process of change.' He feels that 'the songs may be a very important medium in creating Dalit unity particularly between the Chamars and Valmiki. Wherever the Dalit people get together they play the music of Guru Ravidas which brings a feeling of oneness.' Paras 'every singer is like an *aaina* (mirror) to the world and people follow him 'when these songs are played people are emotionally linked together, this plays an important role in creating a sense of unity in them' Avishek explains that '*aapne samuday de lokan te asar hunda hai kyoki gaane naal unhan di bhavnayan judia han*' (people from one's own community respond as emotions are involved). Aryan gives credit to 'these songs have played a very important role in making me aware of things. I have come to know the relevance of Guru Ravidas in the Society. I have also heard about Baba Sahib. Songs bring '*jagriti*' (awakening). By listening to songs, a change comes in the peoples thinking and society.' Aryan thinks that 'people like us begin to feel that it is not a bad thing to be born in a lower caste.' Krishan Lal Jhoolewala explains 'Dalit singers in their songs talk about providing '*aatman samman* (self-respect and dignity) to '*nimman jati*' (low caste) and how to live in the society with pride. Highlighting the ills of our society. Singing is a good way for the Dalit singers to rise and make a name for

themselves in society by achieving respect and status. Prabhveer elaborates 'I give you my example, belonging to a chamar caste, earlier I used to feel very embarrassed, since the time the word Chamar has begun to be used in the songs *'assi lokan no is jaati vich paida hon naal shaan mehsoos hundi hai* (We feel proud to have been born in this caste). In this way there will be a change in society'

Avishekh 'I have been born in this Dalit community. I am proud of having taken birth here and realize through these songs that we have a distinct identity *alag pehchan* and we take our communities name with pride.' For Avishekh 'Mission Music is very important it rallies people together for a cause. Then these songs are played which affect us emotionally and we respond strongly' Krishan Lal Jhoolewala echoes similar sentiments 'when we listen to mission songs ek special feeling *aandi hai* and we have a sense of *apnapan* when the word Chamar appears in their songs *saare samaj vich ekjutta di bhawna paida hundi hai* (a special feeling overcomes us and we have a sense of identification when the word Chamar is heard in the song. It appears as if our society has become united) a feeling of unity emerges in the entire community. Babblu Thapar feels that 'it is from the songs that we come to know that the world is so big, our people are going places, and we should also have big dreams, it is through these songs that we see the pictures of the world and us being part of it. Avishek thinks that 'yes songs raise relevant *samajik mudde* (social issues). They also tell us whats going on in the society today. Those social issues are discussed which have a possibility for bringing about change. Prince Thapar is inspired 'I want to become a singer like them and express my views because songs are an important medium to convey the message to the people and then change comes from within. Moreover, I will gain status in society.'

The claim to a common cultural resource becomes an important issue when the choice for weddings songs is made. For at weddings 'mixed songs are played. We listen to all songs, but Jats don't listen to our songs. They set the trends, but we follow in our own way.' Akashdeep states that '*we prefer mauj masti wale gaane* (songs of fun and frolic) in our weddings.' Rahul said 'people usually prefer a mix DJ or they like to listen to songs where they can dance.' Prabhveer describes that in weddings '*mix gaana bajte hain zyadatar DJ wale gaane bajaye jaate hain jis par log nachte hain*' (mixed songs are played, usually DJ songs on which we can dance). Paras 'plays the song of Karan Aujla whether it is a wedding or any other function. Well people of our age play certain

songs, whether it is Jat people or people like us. Similarly for Aryan 'in weddings it is mostly DJ wale *gaane* which are played and Mika Singh, Honey Singh, Badshah are very popular.' Babblu Thapar feels that 'people prefer to listen to DJ songs to be able to dance.' Krisan Lal Jhoolewala also explains 'during wedding s mostly DJ songs are played, but at times *Guru ki mahima wale gaane* (songs praising Guru Ravidas) are also played. *Assi Bhangra vi Paunde haan. O koi Jattan di Jagir thodi hai* (we perform Bhangra too, that is not the private resource of the Jats).

The most important point relating to Dalit songs now was their accessibility to its consumers. Earlier it was television, Doordarshan, Chankata and Lashkara but now the respondents stated that it is simply through YouTube, that they come to know of the latest song, then this song is shared on WhatsApp and becomes popular. All of us have internet packs and mobiles now' Krishan Lal Jhoolewala recognized the role of both 'two things are responsible for bringing about change in our *samaj* one is mobile and the other are the songs which have conveyed a lot of messages' Almost all recollect the first step of defiance after being inspired by the mission songs that was expressing their identification as Chamars on their motorcycles. Nikhil has 'written Guru Ravidasji Maharaj in front of my motorcycle and consider him to be my Guru.' Binod 'Yes I have written on my motorcycle '*tere roop par mar gaya chora chamar ka.*' Rahul too has 'placed a photo of Guru Ravidasji on my motorcycle' Krishan Lal Jhoolewala has 'written CHAMAR on my bike. I have also got a tattoo made which I have on my arm. Prince Thapar has written '*BAPU BAMBAY DA CHAMAR* all emphasizing a small but firm caste assertion

The most important issue which was to be seen related to what happens after they receive and watch the song; this was emboldened with the role of creative expression - the use of TikTok and WhatsApp. This related to an emerging sense of creativity and self-expression with the rise of TikTok. The 'most important is the act of sharing' as Naveen emphasizes 'there are a lot of good and funny videos on TikTok which I like and share. Then come the songs on which we make videos' Naveen explains further 'we usually choose songs which convey a message or some song which a Dalit singer sells well-a song he sings for the community.' Rahul too has 'an active TikTok account, I make videos and share usually with one of these mission songs and placing my pictures and activity in between' Binod feels that 'yes in today's time it is very easy to make a video and share it on TikTok. Sometimes songs with

social message and videos made on songs and other videos can easily be shared from one group to another.' Prabhveer '*aaj kal aise cheezan da samay aa gaya hai tan assi vi karte hain* (today's times are of these things and we also practice them). If there is a good song or video then we make a video on it we share it with friends and likewise' Prabhveer too follows a similar process 'there are many songs which are popular today. Out of the many songs of popular dalit singers, we make TikTok videos and share them. Abhishek too endorses this point 'when good songs are played we always make videos on them' as he says pun intended '*video ka video sada apna hota hai*' (The video of a video is ours).

Paras and Aryan who has just entered teens are also privy to the process and says, 'yes I have a TikTok account, whenever there is a function, birthdays, *mundans*, *pooja*, or other occasions it's an atmosphere of revelry (*masti ka mohal hota hai*). We make videos' Babblu Thapar too similarly describes the procedure: 'yes, I have an account I make videos and share whenever there is a big or small function at home, we play music, we make videos and share. Then we also see how many 'likes' come. We made a TikTok video with a Sidhu Moosewala song and it became very popular. Avishekh too follows: 'yes, I have an account, anyone can access the app with a mobile. I love to make TikTok videos, at the time of family events otherwise sometimes we go for a walk to the market, attend the Ravidas Jayanti, I like to record events from our lives, set them to these mission songs and feel as if we are part of the world, we make short videos share and wait for the likes *thoda technical jeha hai aavee hi silsila chalda hai* (It's a bit technical, that's how the process goes on). This has led to some new changes in the system of celebrations 'we have also started celebrating functions like *bade log* (big people) we also make a cake for our birthday and have our own *cake wallahs*. We usually do a *khana* (dinner) in which we serve food and cut the cake in the evening. We clean the room, spread a clean sheet *TikTok jo banana hai aur dikhana hai* (after all we must make and show on Tik Tok). Nirmal Thapar too explains 'yes, I have a TikTok account and make videos during any family program and function. Apart from that I specially prepare a video on the song of any Dalit singer who gives a message about Dalit upliftment and share it.' Krishan Lal Jhoolewala uses his brother's TikTok account. 'I always share a message *wala gaana* and popular songs of Dalit singers on TikTok and WhatsApp. This I do because 'I want to create awareness among people and understand myself better (*hor main aapne aap nu vi bhi theek tareeke naal samaj*

sakan.' Prince Thapar explains 'my TikTok account is active and I love to make videos of our birthdays, mundans and on mission songs. Deepak says: 'yes, I have a TikTok account and these days we are all trying to update our technology. I like to make videos on the songs of Parveen Warsi and Raj Dadral. I like to make TikTok videos and share any song of 'our singers' on WhatsApp'

Our response to Dalit singers is divided is as follows: Song is released, we listen, share, make videos, load and draw a sense of satisfaction that we are also participating in the struggle. I feel even if I don't go to protest, I can register my participation here.' Nikhil too endorses this approach of 'sharing messages, songs of Dalit singers, whats app videos of mission singers. I love TikTok videos, because it is not stars, but people like you and me who come on the screen.' Binod shares his brother's account 'sometimes on my brothers tik Tok account I like videos. Sometimes they are very good videos with which you get emotionally attached *aur lagta hai ik like taan banta hai(It deserves a like)*' Aryan too goes through this process which makes him feel good '*Tik Tok per share karna accha lagta hai. Emotional, funny aur mission vale videos share karne ka aapna hi nasha hota hai. Jab us par like aata hai to bahut accha lagta hai.* (I like to share on TikTok. Sharing emotional, funny and mission videos is very intoxicating). *I share videos of Vicky Badshah, make videos on Dalit songs sometimes Hindi and Punjabi videos.*

Along with the creative use of TikTok, WhatsApp is an important means to communicate. Binod uses it very frequently. 'I always like or forward the songs of both Dalit and missionary singers '*aur kuch nahin taan hath taan jod dinde haan'* (emoji of raised hands). Rahul too is more 'active on WhatsApp and face book, particularly regarding '*aaj kal sadde samaj vich ki chal reha hai* (regarding what is happening in our society) I read whatever is forwarded to me, especially some important social message to keep myself 'updated' *jagrup rakhna painda hai'* (one must keep oneself abreast of what is happening).

Prabveer 'one participates in the activities of the society by sharing, forwarding, sharing and like. Yes, I am active on WhatsApp and Facebook. videos come on Wats app we pass them on to other groups '*forward kar dende han issi nu kar ke eek samajik bandish ton azzadi mehsoos hundi hai'* (this act of forwarding by just doing this we feel free from so many social constraints).Prabhdeep emphasizes that 'we usually share videos of Dalit singers and it is WhatsApp which has linked us to a larger Dalit '*biraderi'*. We Dalits are not limited to Punjab their issues are

concerned with India and abroad. We become aware immediately and react as our community elders tell us' Paras is well versed in all mediums and shares songs on them. Babblu Thapar is eloquent. 'I have a WhatsApp id and share many songs and messages specially songs of Dalit singers.' Avishekh also 'shares videos of Dalit singers so that people 'Jag jaan' (awaken) and people come to know what is happening in society.' Deepak feels that 'WhatsApp is the most important means of communication these days. People send and pass messages the songs of singers we usually share are Dalit and a big community has been created (*Loki kahan kahan se jud gaye hain. Duniya mutthi vich lagdi hai*) and it appears as if I can hold the world in my fist. There will be a time when these likes will spill onto the streets and we will change the society.'

Conclusion

The paper has tried to look at the emerging Dalit Counterculture and consciousness in Punjab with a particular focus on the Chamars. The paper sees how music has played an important role in creating this awareness. It has raised important questions whether music and art are a common resource and how they are linked to capillaries of power and hegemony. By mirroring Jat music, the Chamar popular music has staked claim to Punjabihood in a similar vein as the Jats and the assertion of Chamar masculinity is closely tied to power as a resource.

This is very significant in the context of Dalits reclaiming Bhangra and Punjabi music, which they feel had been usurped by the Jats. Now seen by the Chamars as a common resource. Unlike Jat music which relates to continuity of dominance, Chamar music represents the enigma of arrival.

Second the growing gap between Chamar and other Dalit communities in terms of resources and mobility in Punjab. Becomes obvious. Will Dalit music and its musicians retain its pure form. When will Punjab which has pioneered Dalit music follow the steps of popular Dalit music in UP and Maharashtra that is both radical and activist and is leading to struggles to bring visible change on the ground. The paper has examined how the Dalit engagement with music has led to the mobilization and assertion of caste identity and emerged as a means of resistance, assertion and churning the old resistant established structures of power and resultant social change.

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NOTES

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- ⁱⁱ Since the Chamars were the economically and numerically most dominant and the songs were largely reflecting Chamar artists we preferred to interview young Chamar boys and focus on Chamars among the Dalit communities. The interviews were completed just before Tik-Tok was banned in India.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Mission singers are those who talk of uplifting the community and bringing social justice. The unity between Chamars and Valmikis and the differences between them and other Dalit groups gave rich data. However to keep focus on Dalit response to popular culture and music we have not put this issue in our discussion here.