

AMBEDKARISM AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIOLOGY : AN ANALYSIS

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CERTIFICATE

This dissertation entitled "AMBEDKARISM AND CONTEMPORARY INDIAN SOCIOLOGY : AN ANALYSIS" submitted in partial fulfilment for the Master of Philosophy degree of this University has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university and is an original work.

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We recommend that the dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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DEDICATED
TO
MY DIDI
&
GRANDMOTHER (AI-MAA)

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CONTENTS

<i>Chapter No.</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page Nos.</i>
	<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>i-ii</i>
	INTRODUCTION	1-5
CHAPTER 1	THE MEANING AND CONTENT OF AMBEDKARISM	6-60
	I. Ambedkar : A Biographical Sketch	7-19
	II. On Hinduism and the Caste System	19-32
	III. Religion as Emancipation	32-40
	IV. On Marxism vis-a-vis Buddhism	40-44
	V. Ambedkar on Gandhism	44-54
	VI. Ambedkar and Mainstream Nationalism	54-60
CHAPTER 2	CHANGING SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT AND THE RISE OF AMBEDKARISM	61-94
	I. Complex Relationship between Caste and Politics	62-69
	II. Tamil Nadu : Assertion of Anti-Brahminism	69-74
	III. Maharashtra : Assertion of the Mahars and Challenge to the Dominant Hegemony	74-83
	IV. Bihar and Uttar Pradesh : Backward Caste/Dalit Assertion and Changing Political Equations	83-94
CHAPTER 3	AMBEDKARISM AND SOCIOLOGICAL RESPONSES : AN ANALYSIS OF SELECT TEXTS	95-161
	I. Gail Omvedt : Exploring the Liberatarian Possibilities of Ambedkarism	97-123
	II. Kancha Illaiah : Debunking the 'Hindu' Cultural Tradition	123-148
	III. Gore : Renewed Interest in Ambedkarism	149-161
	CONCLUSION	162-166
	SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY	167-170

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, an attempt has been made to define the concept of Ambedkarism and its ideological influence on contemporary sociological writings. Defining a concept is the most difficult task. It requires in-depth knowledge and clear insight. I have tried my best to elucidate the concept of Ambedkarism though there will always be room for flaws and criticisms. This dissertation tries to bring out clearly that Ambedkar's ideas and philosophy have found an inspiring quarter of followers. They get influenced by Ambedkarism in every walk of their life when they assert themselves in a society where inequality and oppression are the cardinal principles. Specifically in Indian context, the Untouchables have no ideologies to inspire them propounded by one of them except that of Ambedkarism. Take for example, Gandhism, Nehruvian socialism or the nationalism perspective—all of them, as it has often been argued by militant Dalit activists or ideologues, have come from above and have been defined, shaped and professed in terms of upper caste values. Even the values propounded by Phule, Periyar or the subaltern perspective have not overwhelmingly elevated the Untouchables. These perspectives have certainly contributed a lot in carving out a better place for them in an inequitous Hindu society but it is the Ambedkar ideology or Ambedkarism that has precisely delineated and envisioned a society where the Untouchables will live with self-respect and dignity. What will be the goals, the means and strategies, the

safeguards needed - all of these were ingeniously devised and articulated by a visionary like Ambedkar. He emerged in a situation when nationalism was gradually engulfing everybody's consciousness. He took up the cudgel against Hinduism and the Hindu social order in a very crucial period of volatility and vehement anti-imperial struggle and thereby attempting to create and sustain a separate and distinct consciousness and identity of the Untouchables. Nobody like Ambedkar worked with so much passion, rigour and vision for them. So, no other perspectives, no other ideologies inspire the Untouchables so much as Ambedkarism does. Ambedkarism is an ideology that has been created from the existential reality of Hindu society just like Marxism from the existential reality of capitalist society. The Untouchables can well relate to it and they get overwhelmingly inspired and guided in their struggles for assertion.

In a time as of today when the environment is resonant with the reverberated sound of positive/protective discrimination, affirmative action, reservation, Mandalisation, Ambedkarisation (establishing Ambedkar village, erecting Ambedkar statue), Dalit upsurge, Dalit consciousness, Dalit struggle and so on, taking up a study of the theme of this kind, I do not think, is of any less significance. The importance is so much that the sociological writing is also getting influenced. The relevance of this study lies in the contemporary period because millions of people are getting mobilised by the thoughts and philosophies propounded by Ambedkar. Even the other Backward Classes are also getting influenced. When we talk of emancipatory politics, we have to talk

about Ambedkar. So what are the thoughts and philosophies of such a man, what are the socio-political contexts that provided a boost to all these thoughts and philosophies and how pervasive their influence is (in terms of the influences on sociological writing) - are, I think, some of the significant questions to be explained and hence, I have taken up this study.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, this dissertation contains three fundamental chapters.

In the first chapter, the meaning and content of Ambedkarism has been clearly explained. The socio-cultural context in which Ambedkar was born, his encounter with untouchability during childhood, his educational career and his aftermath experience of untouchability, his role in politics, his encounter with Gandhi, his role as a constitution maker and his major writings - all these have been briefly portrayed. How Ambedkarism is a diatribe of Hinduism and caste system, how it explains religion should be emancipatory and views Buddhism in this fashion, all of these are also parts of the chapter. Moreover, this chapter also deals with a critique of Marxism and Gandhism as well as Ambedkar's role in the nationalist struggle. Very often he is criticised as being anti-national in the sense of not participating in the freedom struggle. In this chapter, an attempt is made to show how Ambedkar's perception of freedom of the country was different from the other nationalist leaders and hence, he took the stand of not participating in the struggle for independence.

The second chapter, on the other hand, is devoted to the exploration of the link between caste and politics in Indian context. It also delves into an analysis of anti-caste movement and especially, the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra and some other movements of Dalit assertion. How the decline of Congress hegemony gave a favourable twist to the backward caste and other deprived sections to assert their autonomy and consciousness has also been reflected in this chapter. In a nutshell, how the changing socio-political contexts in terms of the decline of the Congress hegemony, rise of some backward caste political parties and the reservation gave a momentous fillip to the rise of Ambedkarism as a broad anti-caste paradigm is the crux of this chapter.

In the third chapter, I have tried to reflect that in such favourable socio-political contexts when Ambedkarism is gaining momentum, its influence goes beyond and inspires the intellectual realm. Sociological writings have been influenced by such a paradigm and some sociologists (defined here in terms of sociological writing and not strictly in the technical sense of the term) have written books with the subject matter drawn from Ambedkarism. Hence, I have analysed Gail Omvedt, Kancha Illaiah and M.S. Gore to explore the influence of Ambedkarism in their writings.

This study has got all the feed-backs from the secondary sources like the books, journals, magazines and other relevant documents.

The first limitation of the study is that it is not based on any empirical work. The second limitation is that I have not covered all aspects of Ambedkar's thought and work though I have tried to include most of them. Among the major areas left out are Ambedkar's economic theory though it has been mentioned but not in great detail, and Ambedkar's thought and work in the area of education.

These limitations notwithstanding, this dissertation, I would argue, has got its relevance. Because it is a humble effort to contribute to the study of sociological ideas; how, for example, Ambedkarism has succeeded in redefining our sociological concerns and categories.

CHAPTER 1

THE MEANING AND CONTENT OF 'AMBEDKARISM'

This chapter tries to highlight and delineate exclusively the concept of Ambedkarism. In order to make sense of the impact of Ambedkarism on contemporary Indian sociology, it is important and necessary to comprehend the meaning of Ambedkarism. As such, in this chapter, a diligent effort has been made at a comprehensive projection of the meaning and content of Ambedkarism. In other words, the issue of 'what exactly constitutes the meaning, scope and domain of Ambedkarism', is very carefully and lucidly spelt out in this section.

Great and Charismatic leaders emerge and disappear with the passage of time but their enunciated ideas and views, values, thoughts and philosophy never fade into oblivion. They immortalise their progenitors. The ideas and philosophy, in due course, are transformed into a strong and firm ideology, an ism. It is a common observation that those who indoctrinate and adhere to an ideology, start identifying themselves with it. We have ideologies like Buddhism, Maoism, Gandhism, Marxism, and so on. The believers in such ideologies never hesitate in fact, take pleasure and pride in proclaiming themselves as Buddhists, Maoists, Gandhians, Marxists, and so on. With such an understanding of ideology, we find that Ambedkarism stands on the same plane. It is an ideology... it is an embodiment of Ambedkar's innovative ideas and world-view, his thoughts and philosophy. The vociferous criticism of Hinduism and the caste system

constitutes the core of Ambedkarism although Ambedkar had reflected his thought-provoking ideas on a wide ranging issues. It is primarily and profoundly an ideology of protest and criticism against the inequitous Hindu social system that perpetuates graded inequality and reinforces inhuman treatment of some human beings through untouchability. It leads to a very radical albeit critical way of making sense of Hinduism and the Indian society. It diagnoses and wide-opens the inbuilt caste-discrimination of Hinduism. Thus, Ambedkerism may be said to be a counter ideology. However, as the discussion proceeds, we will find the gradual unfolding of the salient features of Ambedkarism subsequently. Now it should be pertinent to throw some light on the biographical background of Ambedkar to facilitate the understanding of Ambedkarism.

I. Ambedkar : A Biographical Sketch¹

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a towering figure and was of an astonishingly uncanny foresight. He was born to Mahar (untouchable) parents - Ramji Maloji Sankpal and Bhimbai at Mhow (military house of war) near Indore (Madhya Pradesh) on 14th April, 1891. He was the fourteenth child of humble parents and married to Ramabai at the age of fourteen in 1905. His father was a

¹ For this section, for more details see:

Ambedkar, 1991, *Who's Who in Viceroy's Council*, in "Vol.10";

M.S. Gore, 1993, "The social Context of an Ideology";

K.N. Kadam, 1993, "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar - The Emancipator of the Oppressed (edited);

G.S. Lokhande, 1977, "Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar - A Study in Social Democracy";

E. Zelliot, 1992, "From Untouchable to Dalit";

Emancipation as Justice by Upendra Baxi, in "Crisis and Change in Contemporary India" edited by Baxi and Parekh, 1995.

Subedar Major in the British Army. Had the recruitment of Mahars to the Army not been stopped in 1892, it is possible that the Subedar's son would have followed the profession of arms as well, but things were to be otherwise. Realising the value of education, the Subedar did his best to educate his sons. This called for great effort. Schools refused to admit the children of a Mahar, and from his native village Ambavade in the district of Ratnagiri (Maharashtra), he went to Satara and later to Bombay, where he finally settled. At one stage, he had to decide which of his two sons he could afford to keep at school, and he chose the youngest boy, now worshipped as the messiah of the Depressed Classes.

Dr. Ambedkar completed his elementary education from Satara. He matriculated from Elphinstone High School of Bombay in 1908 and graduated from Elphinstone College of Bombay in 1912 on a fellowship from the Maharaja of Baroda. Even though Ambedkar was born to an educated and economically moderate family, he still experienced and was subject to various socio-religious disabilities as a consequence of being an untouchable. He became a victim of the culpable system of imposed oppression and exploitation. So, gradually Ambedkar grasped the precarious plight of the Untouchables in the society, himself undergoing the humiliations and indignities which were inflicted upon him. These however, could not retard Ambedkar's ambitions rather these only spurred him to achieve higher echelons in the academic arena. He became intellectually ambitious and socially rebellious. In the school, he had to undergo the painful experience of untouchability and highly discriminatory school education rarely

available those days to the untouchable pupils. While going to school in Satara, he had to carry a piece of gunny cloth to squat on in a corner of the classroom. The school servant would not touch the cloth which he had to carry to and fro everyday. He could not touch the school tap and could only quench thirst if the school peon was there to open it for him. At home, his sisters did the family washing as no dhobi (washerman) would wash their clothes. Once Ambedkar was, alongwith his brother, coming back home in a bullock cart, on the way he was denied a drop of water from evening till midnight. He was made to know that the razor of the barber would be polluted by contact with his hair while it could be used without fear of pollution in shaving buffaloes. So, his sisters used to cut his hair. It was not only during the childhood that Ambedkar borne the full brunt of the practices of untouchability but also when he returned from abroad, he faced such bestial treatment. A foreign return Ambedkar went to Baroda as a Probationer in the office of the Accountant General of Baroda but he did not get any accommodation there. Initially, he persuaded a Parsi innkeeper to board and lodge him. Luckily there were no other lodgers, but after ten days, a number of Parsis armed with Lathis (sticks) called on him, asked what he meant by defiling a hotel reserved for their community and told him to quit by that very evening. He appealed to two friends, one a Hindu and the other a Christian, for shelter. The first said, 'If you come to my home my servants will go'. The second friend wanted to consult his wife, and Ambedkar, knowing that husband and wife came of orthodox Brahmin stock and that the latter still suffered from inhibitions

regarding caste, decided to return to Bombay. A highly qualified scholar, respect from whom was withheld even from peons in the office who thought it morally wrong to hand him office papers and files, which they simply used to fling at him. Thus, Ambedkar understood existentially what it meant to be an untouchable in India. He took upon himself the duty to obliterate such a system of forced inequality and inhumanity. It was indeed an uphill task but the crusader as he was, Ambedkar knew the ways to achieve his goal. He knew that education would enable the Untouchables to rise against the imposed bestial living and social ostracism that they were made to suffer from. Thus, after completing his matriculation and college education, he went abroad for higher studies.

Ambedkar first went to U.S.A. and then to Great Britain. He worked for eighteen hours a day in Columbia University to obtain the M.A. (Economics) degree in 1916 and published his doctoral thesis eight years later on the 'Evolution of British Provincial Finance in British India'. He grew into a bibliophile and purchased about 2,000 books in the city of New York. For years, he went to London Museum and toiled there from dawn to dusk till the watchman had to seek him out to leave. He lived on a frugal budget so that he could use his savings for buying books. In 1916, he joined London School of Economics and Political Science and also the Gray's Inn. He was a voracious reader, a hardworking student and a polymath. He achieved high levels of academic excellence. Besides his specialisation in Economics, Ambedkar had also acquired commendable knowledge and expertise in Commerce, Philosophy and Religion

or Theology, Political Science, Anthropology and Sociology. In 1921, he obtained his M.Sc. degree and in 1923 his D.Sc. degree in England and was called to Bar. However, Ambedkar returned to India in 1923, after nearly ten years of study in the United States and England though using his knowledge and expertise, he taught at the Sydenham College of Commerce and Economics in Bombay as Professor of Economics for a brief period from 1918-20. He was a highly educated man. His degrees, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., M.Sc., D.Sc., LL.D., D.Litt., Bar-at-Law are sung in a sort of incantation in one of the Mahar songs about him.

Ambedkar's identity of one of the educated elite, could be reinforced by clothes and manner. In 1918, a Professor in the University of London recommended him for his extraordinary practical ability, adding 'his character is rather Scotch-American, though in appearance he is a fat Indian'. While Gandhiji's saint peasant garb reinforced the identity with the Indian masses he sought, Ambedkar's western dress and his independent critical temperament underlined the new identity he sought for the Mahar.

Ambedkar's life had however, been tremendously influenced by some of the most notable and erudite figures of yesteryears. He himself claimed that he had three gurus: The *Buddha* whom he eulogised as the first Indian who enunciated the principles of humanism and the greatest teacher of mankind who taught the noblest doctrine of Love, the fifteenth century iconoclastic saint-poet

Kabir, and the nineteenth century radical social reformer *Mahatma Jotiba Phule*. All of them had spoken against the caste system and preached for a casteless society.

Being western educated, Ambedkar was, from the beginning, more confident of political means to raise status and effect improvements than of religiously oriented methods. He was however, very clear in his mind that unless the Untouchables were made aware of their conditions, nothing could be achieved. So, he, in January 1920, established a Marathi fortnightly, the *Mooknayak* (the voice of the dumb) and published many articles mounting a vigorous and visceral attack on the social space provided to the Untouchables in the society. Ambedkar had consistently demanded political safeguards for them since 1919. In that year, he gave his evidence before the *South borough Franchise Committee* and strongly put forward the demand for political rights for them. Later on, he founded the *Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha* (Society to Serve the Interests of Outcastes) on 20th July 1924, for bringing about moral and material progress of the Untouchables. The *Bahiskrit Hitakarini Sabha* did much quiet work for the untouchable students but was not able to achieve anything spectacular, and generally the period 1924-1927 continued to be a fallow period for the Ambedkar Protest Movement. The *Mooknayak* had also ceased publication and Ambedkar had neither a platform nor a medium to promote his cause. But the year 1927 seemed to mark a change. Ambedkar was nominated as

a member of the Bombay Legislative Council in that year. He launched the famous *Choudar Tank Satyagraha* at Mahad on 25th December 1927 and appeared before the *Simon Commission* the next year. What was significant about the Mahad Satyagraha was the burning of a copy of the *Manusmriti* – the sacred law book of the Hindus. In the *Bahiskrit Bharat* (Excluded India) – another Marathi fortnightly established by Ambedkar on 3rd April 1927, which was changed to *Janata* (the people) later, he however justified the burning of the *Manusmriti*, and on the other hand, still considered himself to be a Sanatan Hindu. According to him, ‘... There are Hindus who do not accept the authority of the Vedas. I do not accept any book except the Bhagwat Gita to be worthy of respect or as an authority. Though I do not accept the authority of the Vedas, I consider myself to be a Sanatan Hindu’.

In his deposition before the *Simon Commission*, Ambedkar, for the first time, claimed a separate minority status for the Untouchables outside the Hindu community, and asked for a separate electorate if there was going to be no adult franchise. He said, ‘... we claim that we must be treated as a distinct minority, separate from the Hindu community. Our minority character has been hitherto concealed by our inclusion in the Hindu community, but as a matter of fact, there is really no link between the depressed classes and the Hindu community... I would submit that, as a matter of demand for political protection, we claim

representation on the same basis as the Mahamedan minority. We claim reserved seats if accompanied by adult franchise.²

Along with this demand, Ambedkar's critical analysis of the (Motilal) Nehru Committee Report (January 1929) established him as an important figure on the national political scene.

However, two important events took place in 1930, which marked the transition of Ambedkar from the social to the political and also from the regional to the national sphere. One of these was *Kalaram Temple-entry Satyagraha* at Nasik in March 1930. The other was the *First Round Table Conference* in November 1930. The Nasik Satyagraha went on for a prolonged period of six years until April 1936, to end inconclusively without gaining its specific objective. An embittered Ambedkar said at the *Yeola Conference* on 13th October 1935 that even though he was born a Hindu but he would certainly not die a Hindu. Attending the *First Round Table Conference* which was boycotted by the Indian National Congress, Ambedkar reiterated his demands for the Depressed Classes made to the *Simon Commission*. However, though Gandhiji must have known of the forceful demand made by Ambedkar on behalf of the Untouchables, he had admitted as late as August 1931 that he was not aware of the fact that Ambedkar was himself an untouchable. Gandhiji said, 'I did not know that he was a Harijan. I thought he was some Brahman who took deep

² Ambedkar, 1982, *Evidence before Simon Commission*, in "Vol.2", p.465.

interest in Harijans and therefore talked intemperately'. The first meeting of Ambedkar with Gandhiji however, took place in Bombay on 14th August 1931. They met again in the Second Round Table Conference in 1932. However, they did not have a platonic or very cordial relationship between them. Without going into detail about the conflict-ridden relationship between these two giants which will however be discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter, it can be maintained that Gandhiji and Ambedkar never saw eye to eye on many issues and specifically on the issues relating to the Untouchables.

All these events (various Satyagrahas, Round Table Conferences, Poona Pact etc.) took place without the Untouchables having any concrete political party but as late as August 1936, the political movement of the Untouchables started under a political party, with the establishment of the *Independent Labour Party*, Babasaheb being its President. The Government of India Act 1935 heralded the era of electoral politics and the Dalits³ did not have any political party as such. So, Ambedkar set up a party of the Dalits though not exclusively comprised of the Dalits. To enlarge the support base, he formed the Labour Party to include all industrial as well as agricultural labourers both the Dalits as well as the Hindus but the election brought to light the fact that the class consciousness was too weak and fragile to overcome the deeprooted caste consciousness. Most

³ The term Dalit came into being during 1930s and 40s from English translation of the Depressed Classes and it was popularised during 1970s with the emergence of the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra.

of the Hindu labourers did not give encouraging response. Hence, Ambedkar, being confronted with various dramatic occurrences like the outbreak of the *World War II*, the *Cripps Mission* and its neglect and overlooking of the Dalits' interests, established the *Scheduled Caste Federation* (SFC) as an all India political party in April 1942 at the Nagpur session of the Scheduled Caste leaders who came from all over the country. However, in the election of 1946 to the Provincial Assemblies, the SFC was completely routed by the Congress. Out of fifty one seats it contested, only one from Bengal (J.N. Mandal) got elected. Ambedkar did not contest due to the adverse political situation and scarcity of means. However, the *Cabinet Mission Plan* made no reference to the demands of the Scheduled Castes and made it clear that India would be united and federal and there would be a Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar could not however, get elected to the Constituent Assembly from the Bombay Legislative Assembly as there was no member to support his candidature. Therefore, he got elected from the Bengal Provincial Assembly. However, due to the partition of Bengal under the Indian Independence Act, the seat won by him was lost. The Congress, ultimately, got him elected from the Bombay Provincial Legislature in July 1947. In march 1947, Ambedkar prepared a memorandum which envisaged state socialism, parliamentary democracy, and special provisions for the Scheduled Castes. On 29th April 1947, the Constituent Assembly resolved to abolish untouchability. He was also included in the first cabinet of free India as a Law

Minister. On 29th August 1947, he was appointed as the Chairman of the *Drafting Committee* of the Constituent Assembly.

The constitution drafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar and passed by the Constituent Assembly came into force on 26th January 1950. He incorporated the principles of *justice, equality, fraternity and liberty* in the constitution as well as the special opportunity (reservation) for socially unequal. He is acknowledged as the father of the Indian Constitution. The man who made a bonfire of *Manusmriti* was hailed as a *modern Manu*. However, for his effort, the Shastraic jurisprudence gave place to justice-based jurisprudence.

Ambedkar however, resigned from the Cabinet on 27th September 1951 over a difference of opinion with Pandit Nehru. The first General Elections under the new constitution were held in January 1952 and the SFC put up its own candidates, thirty four in toto, but only two were elected. Ambedkar himself could not get elected. He tried again in the Lok Sabha by-election in 1954, but to no gain. He was however, elected from the Bombay Legislature to the Rajya Sabha in March 1952. In the elections to the Legislative Assemblies, the SFC got only twelve seats out of two hundred and fifteen seats contested. Thus, in electoral politics, the SFC made no significant gains or for that matter, the two political parties founded by Ambedkar achieved nothing substantial but they were able to achieve great success in protecting the interests of the Depressed Classes. However, such a giant who will be remembered as the Saviour, the giver of rights

and who stood tall among most of his contemporaries, took his final adieu from his hectic but purposeful journey, on 6th December 1956.

In a nutshell, it can be mentioned that Ambedkar during his lifetime (1891-1956), played three roles: that of a caste leader, that of an untouchable spokesman, and that of a national statesman. In his first leadership role, he was guide, guru and decision-maker for his own caste, the Mahars of Maharashtra, from the mid-twenties of this century until his death. From the early 1930s onwards, he was the chief spokesman of the Untouchables in the eyes of the government of India, the Untouchable leader who had to be dealt with from the view point of the Indian National Congress, and the individual most responsible for India's policy of compensatory discrimination toward the Scheduled Castes.⁴ In his third role, he spoke on all phases on India's development, worked on problems of labour and law as a member of the government, and even put aside some of his own theories to help create a viable, generally acceptable constitution.

However, Ambedkar, like Marx, did not spend the major part of his active life in research and writing. His political activism or putting it more precisely, the demands of leadership absorbed the major part of his time. The 1930s being a period of intense turmoil, there was little space for writing. Though many of his crucial ideas were formed during the 1930s, almost all of his writings came in the

⁴ The term Scheduled Caste came into being in the Government of India Act, 1935 for the Depressed Classes.

1940s and 1950s when he was spending most of his time in Delhi as Labour Minister and the general political spokesman of the Untouchables. From the beginning of his political career, Ambedkar travelled all over India to arouse the spirit of self-respect in the Untouchables. He felt that he should produce literature to guide the future generations. He had written on many issues: social, political, religious, economic. However, some of his major and invaluable writings are noted below.

- 1) *'Annihilation of Caste'* - an address which could not be delivered at the annual conference of Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal, Lahore, 1935, published in 1936.
- 2) *'Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah'* - 1943.
- 3) *'What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables'* - 1945.
- 4) *'Who were the shudras and how they came to be the fourth varna in the Indo-Aryan Society?'* - 1946.
- 5) *'States and Minorities'* - 1946, Published in 1947.
- 6) *'Thoughts on Linguistic States'* - 1955.
- 7) *'The Buddha and His Dhamma'* - 1956, Published in 1957.

II. On Hinduism and the Caste System

Here the discussion on Hinduism and the caste system will proceed in an intermingling way because of the close association of Hinduism and its culpable

offshoot - the caste system with both of them having in-built discriminatory feature and inequality. Ambedkar's virulent indignation of the caste system is well-evident from his statement that 'turn in any direction you like, caste is the monster that crosses your path.'⁵ He maintained that 'a caste is an enclosed class' and further, 'that due to the prevalence of customs like *Sati*, enforced widowhood and childmarriage, the class has become the father of the institution of caste'. The originator of these customs was the Brahmin class. Ambedkar was however of the opinion that Manu did not create caste. According to him,

'Manu did not give the law of caste and that he could not do so; caste existed long before Manu. He was an upholder of it and therefore philosophised about it, but certainly he did not, and could not ordain the present order of Hindu society. His work ended with the codification of existing caste rules and preaching of caste Dharma'.⁶

Similarly, he stated that the Brahmins might have been guilty of many things but the imposing of the caste system on the non-Brahmin population was beyond their mettle. They might have helped the process by their glib philosophy, but they certainly could not have pushed their scheme beyond their own confines. Ambedkar further maintained that the orthodox Hindus also believed that Shastras had created the caste system and hence, it could not but be good because it was ordained by Shastras and the Shastras could not be wrong. According to Ambedkar,

'caste in the singular number is an unreality. Caste exists only in the plural number. There is no such thing as a caste. There are always castes. While

⁵ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.47.

⁶ Ambedkar, 1979, *Castes in India*, in "Vol.1", p.16.

making themselves into a caste, the Brahmins, by virtue of this, created non-Brahmin caste; by closing themselves in, they closed others out'.⁷

The caste system as Ambedkar argued, was not merely a division of labour but it was also a division of labourers into watertight compartments. It was also a hierarchy in which the division of labourers were graded one above the other. He stated that such a division of labour was not a division based on choice infact, individual sentiment, individual preference had no place in it. It was based on the dogma of predestination.

Ambedkar felt that the Hindu society lacked social endosmosis. As such, the Hindu society did not exist at all. It was only a collection of castes. There was no communication among or between the four-fold varnas and the resultant groups of various castes and subcastes. There was no associated mode of life. There was an utter lack among the Hindus of what the sociologists call 'consciousness of kind'. There was no Hindu consciousness of kind. In every Hindu, the consciousness that existed was the consciousness of his caste. That is why Ambedkar said that the Hindu society as a society or nation did not exist at all.

Ambedkar though discarded the Hindu society from being elevated to the status of a society, he however, spared no efforts infact, devoted two chapters of his book (volume - 3) published posthumously (1987a) to analyse the essential

⁷ Ambedkar, 1979, *Castes in India*, in "Vol.1", p.20.

147-7963



principles and unique features of the Hindu social order. As he argued, the Hindu social order was not a free social order. The first of the two essential prerequisites of a free social order, according to him, was that

‘the individual is an end in himself and that the aim and object of society is the growth of the individual and the development of his personality. Society is not above the individual and if the individual has to subordinate himself to society, it is because such subordination is for his betterment and only to the extent necessary’.⁸

The second essential was that ‘The terms of associated life between members of society must be regarded by consideration founded on liberty, equality and fraternity’.⁹ As Ambedkar opined, the Hindu social order never recognised the individual. According to him,

‘The Hindu social order does not recognise the individual as a centre of social purpose. For the Hindu social order is based primarily on class or varna and not on individuals. Originally and formally the Hindu social order recognised four classes: (1) Brahmins, (2) Kshatriyas, (3) Vaishyas, and (4) Shudras. Today, it consists of five classes, the fifth being called the Panchamas or untouchables. The unit of Hindu society is not the individual Brahmin or the individual Kshatriya or the individual Vaishya or the individual Shudra or the individual Panchama. Even the family is not regarded by the Hindu social order as the unit of society except for the purposes of marriage and inheritance. The unit of Hindu society is the class or varna to use the Hindu technical name for class. In the Hindu social order, there is no room for individual merit and no consideration of individual justice. If the individual has a privilege, it is not because it is due to him personally. The privilege goes with the class, and if he is found to enjoy it, it is because he belongs to that class. Contrarywise, if an individual is suffering from a wrong, it is not because he by his conduct deserves it. The disability is the disability imposed upon the class

⁸ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles*, in “Vol.3”, p.95.

⁹ Ibid.

and if he is found to be labouring under it, it is because he belongs to that class'.¹⁰

Thus, in Ambedkar's opinion, the Hindu social order lacked the first essential of a free social order. Regarding the second essential, he maintained that the Hindu social order recognised neither liberty nor equality nor fraternity. In his view, the Hindu social order did not recognise the liberty of thought and action. Each varna or caste was traditionally assigned specific type of occupation and pattern of behaviour. Members were not allowed to undertake occupation and behaviour pattern other than that of their varna or caste. Such system (the Hindu social order) did not also provide fraternity among the individuals who were loyal to their varna or caste though there might exist limited fraternity among members of one varna or caste against those of others. This was so specially in event of antagonistic relations between the two varnas or castes. Similarly, graded inequality instead of equality characterised the Hindu social order and this was its first principle.

The Hindu social order was based on three principles. The first and foremost was the graded inequality. The four classes of the Hindu society were not on the horizontal plane rather they were on the vertical plane. Not only different but unequal in status, one standing above the other. In the scheme of Manu, as Ambedkar argued, the Brahmin was accorded the apex rank and in a

¹⁰ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles*, in "Vol.3", pp.99-100.

descending order of rank and status, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, the Shudra and the Ati-Shudra or the untouchable were placed in the hierarchy. According to him, 'This order of precedence among the classes is not merely conventional. It is spiritual, moral and legal. There is no sphere of life which is not regulated by this principle of graded inequality'.¹¹ The second principle on which the Hindu social order was founded was that of fixity of occupations for each class and continuance thereof by heredity. Every member must follow the trade assigned to the class to which he belonged. As has been discussed earlier, it left no scope for individual choice, individual inclination. It was, in Ambedkar's opinion, an inexorable law from which he could not escape. The third principle was the fixation of people within their respective classes. This, in Ambedkar's view, led to isolation and exclusiveness which was inimical to a free social order. According to him, 'What a free social order endeavours to do is to maintain all channels of social endosmosis'.¹² But what was striking about the Hindu society was its ban on inter-course between different classes. There was a complete ban on inter-dining and inter-marriage.

Thus, the Hindu social order was opposed to fraternity. It was inimical to equality. Far from recognising equality, it made inequality its official doctrine. It was also antagonistic to liberty. So far as choice of occupation goes, there was no liberty. Everyone had his occupation determined for him. Only thing left to do

¹¹ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *The Hindu Social Order: Its Essential Principles*, in "Vol.3", p.107.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.113.

was to carry it on. As to freedom of speech, it was there but only for those who were in favour of the social order, the status-quo. The freedom, in Ambedkar's opinion, was not the freedom of liberalism. As such, there was no room for iconoclasm.

Based on the three essential principles, there were three essential or unique features of the Hindu social order. These were: (1) worship of the Superman (Brahmin), the representative of God irrespective of his worth, (2) the maintenance and preservation of social order from dissents or rebellions, and (3) the Divine social order created by God himself and as such not subject to abrogation, amendment or criticism. The Brahmin was bestowed with all worldly and other-worldly privileges including marrying or entering into wedlock with a woman of any varna, punishing any 'wrong' doer, taking away anybody's hidden treasures and issuing commands even to the king. By denying opportunities to rise, the Hindu social order, in Ambedkar's opinion, had fixed the socio-economic status of the lower varnas or castes forever through the mystic scheme of *Karma* (deeds), *Bhagyan* (fate), and *Punarjanma* (rebirth). In other words, it had doctinated the people of lower varnas that they were lower and hence deprived because the God had created them so, and also because of their bad karma, fate and birth in the past. Since God himself had created them so and the Hindu social order, Ambedkar argued, only he could change it. So, human beings could do nothing about it. Through such a mystic notion, the dissent or rebellion was discarded and the order remained intact, Ambedkar said.

Speaking on Hinduism that has given birth to such an inequitable social order as the Hindu social order, Ambedkar said, 'To argue that all religions are good is a false notion. Everything depends upon what social ideas a given religion holds out as a divine scheme of governance'. He further said, 'Hinduism is a religion of rules and not a religion of principles'. Distinguishing between rules and principles, he clarified that while 'principles connote responsibility, rules do not. Religion based on rules ceases to be religion as it kills responsibility which is the essence of a truly religious act and hence Hinduism is not a religion at all'.

Ambedkar however, not only diagnosed the ills of Hinduism and as such its caste system, he was also much more concerned about how to bring about the reform of the Hindu social order, how to abolish caste. Like a social doctor, he had suggested his techniques to ameliorate and cure the anomalies plaguing the Hindu society. There was a view that the first step in the direction of abolishing caste was to get rid of sub-castes but he had strong reservation against this view. According to him,

'what guarantee is there that the abolition of sub-castes will necessarily lead to the abolition of castes. On the contrary, it may happen that the process may stop with the abolition of sub-castes. In that case, the abolition of sub-castes will only help to strengthen the castes and make them more powerful and therefore more mischievous. This remedy is therefore neither practicable nor effective'.¹³

¹³ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.67.

Another plan of action for the abolition of caste was to allow inter-caste dining. This, in Ambedkar's view, was also an inadequate remedy for there were many castes which allowed inter-caste dining but 'the spirit of caste' and 'the consciousness of caste' was not to be killed or disappeared. The real remedy for breaking caste was therefore, inter-marriage. 'Nothing else will serve as the solvent of caste'.¹⁴ According to Ambedkar,

'Fusion of blood can alone create the feeling of being kith and kin and unless this feeling of kinship, of being kindred, becomes paramount, the separatist feeling - the feelings of being aliens created by caste will not vanish'.¹⁵

Further striking at the root of the problem, Ambedkar made it clear that caste might be bad and it might lead to inhuman treatment of man by man but Hindus observed caste because of their ardent religious nature and not because they were inhuman or wrongheaded. In his own words 'people are not wrong in observing caste. In my view what is wrong is their religion, which has inculcated this notion of caste'.¹⁶

Thus, Ambedkar stated that it was not possible to break caste without annihilating the religious notions on which it, the caste system, was founded. Untouchability - the notorious and pernicious practice was, according to him, endemic to and inherent in the caste system. The Untouchables who were

¹⁴ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.67.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.68.

variously referred to as the Asprushyas, the Antyajjas, the Ati-Shudras, the Panchamas, the Antyevasins, the Brokenmen, the Avarnas, the non-Hindus, the Downtrodden, the Protestant Hindus, the Scheduled Castes, the Harijans, and now the Dalits, were considered to be so impure that their very touch, even very shadow was defiling enough to be scorned. They were segregated and relegated to the outskirts of the village. The idea of hoping to remove such a condemnable practice-untouchability, without destroying the caste system, in the opinion of Ambedkar, was an utter futility. He said that untouchability and caste were not two different things but were one and inseparable. The former was only an extension of the latter. According to him, 'The two stand together and will fall together'.¹⁷ Thus, as is evident from Ambedkar's views, untouchability will vanish only when the whole of the Hindu social order, particularly the caste system is dissolved. Every institution is sustained by some sort of a sanction and there are three kinds of sanction: legal, social and religious. According to Ambedkar,

'The sanction behind the caste system is the religious sanction, for, the caste as a new form of the varna system derives its sanction from the Vedas which form the sacred book of the Hindu religion and which are infallible'.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ambedkar, 1989(a), *The Hindu and His Belief in Caste*, in "Vol.5", p.101.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.102.

Thus, obviously the enemy in Ambedkar's view, is not the people who observe caste, but the sacred books like the Shastras, the Vedas which teach them this religion of caste. According to him,

‘criticising and ridiculing people for not inter-dining or inter-marrying or occasionally holding inter-caste dinners and celebrating inter-caste marriages, is a futile method of achieving the desired end. The real method is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras’.¹⁹

He said that to agitate for and to organise inter-caste dinners and inter-caste marriages was like forced feeding brought about by artificial means. ‘Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine or inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so’.²⁰ Since Hindus like others are basically religious, Ambedkar recommended for the abolition of hereditary priesthood and for state appointment of qualified and efficient priests holding *sanads* (certificates). Being thus appointed, these priests would be governed by the normal rules of the land, he said.

Ambedkar was thus, in favour of killing the germ of religious sanction behind the caste system which was the root of all evils in the Hindu society. And once this is achieved, the journey to a just society (which he envisioned) based on liberty, equality and fraternity will become shortcut and smooth.

¹⁹ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in “Vol.1”, pp.68-69.

²⁰ Ibid.

Ambedkar was however, very critical of the doctrine of Chaturvarnya preached by the Aryasamajists. He said that they were though critical of caste, talked about varnas which though different in letter, were similar in spirit. Chaturvarnya means the division of society into four classes viz., Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra instead of the four thousand castes found in our society. He said, 'As a system of social organisation, chaturvarnya is impracticable, harmful and has turned out to be a miserable failure'.²¹ He further held that this wretched system of chaturvarnya had completely disabled the lower classes of Hindus for direct action. On account of it, they were denied education. They were condemned to be lowly and not knowing the way of escape and not having the means to escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate. 'There can not be a more degrading system of social organisation than the chaturvarnya. It is the system which deadens, paralyses and cripples the people from helpful activity'.²² In Ambedkar's eyes, there was one period in history - the period of the Mourya Empire which was characterised by freedom, greatness and glory. At all other times, the country suffered from defeat and darkness. The Mourya period was so glittering because there was the absence of chaturvarnya, and the Shudras, who constituted the mass of the people, came into their own and became the rulers of the country in this period. The period of defeat and darkness was the period when

²¹ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.59.

²² *Ibid.*, p.63.

chaturvarnya flourished to the damnation of the greater part of the people of the country.

Thus, Ambedkar being a torrential critic of the caste system neither wanted a society characterised by it nor by the chaturvarnya, rather he visualised an ideal society, the edifice of which would be founded on the solid pedestal of liberty, equality and fraternity.

‘An ideal society, in his words, should be mobile, should be full of channels for conveying a change taking place in one part to other parts. In an ideal society, there should be many interests consciously communicated and shared. There should be varied and free points of contact with other modes of association. In other words, there must be social endosmosis. This is fraternity, which is only another name for democracy. Democracy is not merely a form of government. It is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence towards fellowmen’.²³

There should be liberty of members in the society in the sense of a right to property, tools, and materials necessary for earning one’s livelihood but the liberty of one individual should not hinder another’s liberty. It should promote fraternity. Similarly, Ambedkar knew that all persons could not be made equal in each and every aspects of their life. Therefore, he said, ‘it may be desirable to give as much incentive as possible to the full development of everyone’s powers’.²⁴

²³ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in “Vol.1”, p.56.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

Society should treat all men alike irrespective of whether they are alike. Ambedkar was so much concerned about his ideal society that he incorporated all these liberal principles in the constitution (this has already been discussed earlier) when he was assigned the responsibility to draft the constitution.

III. Religion as Emancipation

B.R. Ambedkar is regarded as the greatest emancipator of the Depressed Classes. It is only because of his tenacious zeal to emancipate the Untouchables or for that matter the Depressed Classes. As has already been discussed, Ambedkar from the very childhood, experienced the indignities inflicted on the Untouchables. They were born as Hindus yet, they were not Hindus. They were considered to be defiling and polluting and hence, relegated and kept outside the four-fold division of the Hindu society. It is the religion that provided the life force to such a despicable social system. Ambedkar's vitriolic attack on Hinduism should thus be seen in such a context. Though he was deeply religious, he was not fanatic and superstitious enough to overlook the flaws of Hinduism. He had a rational bent of mind. Hinduism for him was a majoritarian religion which was simply a Brahminic tool for exploitation of the Untouchables. Religion should be, in his opinion, emancipatory and should have a social philosophy. He was for true religion (religion of principles) whose basis should be in consonance with liberty, equality and fraternity, in short, with democracy. Being embittered and disgusted, Ambedkar found his throat choking under

Hinduism. So, he wanted to be out of such a degrading religion but as a religious man, he knew very well that he would be within the fold of certain religion. He was for conversion into some other religion which certainly would provide relief from social and mental agony of caste discrimination and untouchability and which would enable the untouchables to lead a life of dignity and self-respect. As has already been mentioned, as early as 1935, Ambedkar made it clear that though he was born a Hindu but he would certainly not die a Hindu. In the conversion speech of 1935, he said,

‘Because we have the misfortune of calling ourselves Hindus, we are treated thus. If we were members of another Faith, none would dare treat us so. Choose any religion which gives you equality of status and treatment. We shall repair our mistake now. I had the misfortune of being born with the stigma of an untouchable. However, it is not my fault; but I will not die a Hindu, for this is in my power’.²⁵

In his ‘Annihilation of Caste’ also, Ambedkar made his intention clear for a change of religion. He said, ‘... you must make your efforts to uproot caste, if not in my way, then in your way. I am sorry, I will not be with you. I have decided to change’.²⁶ But Ambedkar did not specify to which religion he would change. So there was much speculation in the air.

However, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism and Buddhism were the alternative religions for conversion. Islam and Christianity were never considered very seriously at any stage because of their foreign origin. The other important factor

²⁵ See Zelliott, 1992, *Religion and Legitimization in the Mahar Movement*, in “From Untouchable to Dalit”, p.206.

²⁶ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in “Vol.1”, p.80.

was that the Indian caste system did not even spare them from its clutching and demeaning influence. Sikhism was contaminated by this contagious disease too. According to Ambedkar, 'caste is no doubt primarily the breath of the Hindus. But the Hindus have fouled the air all over and every body is infected, Sikh, Muslim and Christian'.²⁷ "As recently as 1934, Ambedkar and some of his fellow workers visited Daulatabad Fort in the Nizam's Dominions while on a sight seeing tour. They reached the Fort covered with dust and unthinkingly took water from a tank to wash. While they were getting permission to go around, an old Mohammedan ran up and raised an outcry, shouting, 'The Dheds (untouchables) have polluted the tank'. The situation became serious and, exasperated by the attitude of the Mohammedans, Ambedkar asked; 'Is that what your religion teaches? Would you prevent an untouchable from taking water from this tank if he became a Mohammedan?' That silenced the crowd, but the Untouchables were only allowed to go round the Fort with an armed soldier who saw that they did not pollute water anywhere else".²⁸ Similarly, as has already been noted, Ambedkar was not given any accommodation in Baroda by Christians as well as Parsis. So, it is obviously clear that the Hindu caste system had infected all the major religions on Indian soil. The religion, Ambedkar seemed to lean toward for a while was Sikhism but soon he dropped the whole idea when it became clear that after conversion, they could not carry the new political privileges of the

²⁷ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.80.

²⁸ Ambedkar, 1991, *Who's Who in Viceroy's Council*, in "Vol.10", p.8.

was that the Indian caste system did not even spare them from its clutching and demeaning influence. Sikhism was contaminated by this contagious disease too. According to Ambedkar, 'caste is no doubt primarily the breath of the Hindus. But the Hindus have fouled the air all over and every body is infected, Sikh, Muslim and Christian'.²⁷ "As recently as 1934, Ambedkar and some of his fellow workers visited Daulatabad Fort in the Nizam's Dominions while on a sight seeing tour. They reached the Fort covered with dust and unthinkingly took water from a tank to wash. While they were getting permission to go around, an old Mohammedan ran up and raised an outcry, shouting, 'The Dheds (untouchables) have polluted the tank'. The situation became serious and, exasperated by the attitude of the Mohammedans, Ambedkar asked; 'Is that what your religion teaches? Would you prevent an untouchable from taking water from this tank if he became a Mohammedan?' That silenced the crowd, but the Untouchables were only allowed to go round the Fort with an armed soldier who saw that they did not pollute water anywhere else".²⁸ Similarly, as has already been noted, Ambedkar was not given any accommodation in Baroda by Christians as well as Parsis. So, it is obviously clear that the Hindu caste system had infected all the major religions on Indian soil. The religion, Ambedkar seemed to lean toward for a while was Sikhism but soon he dropped the whole idea when it became clear that after conversion, they could not carry the new political privileges of the

²⁷ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.80.

²⁸ Ambedkar, 1991, *Who's Who in Viceroy's Council*, in "Vol.10", p.8.

Untouchables into a new religion. Thus, the only religion left was Buddhism which was also free from caste infection. For Ambedkar, the interest in Buddhism was aroused long back since his school days when a Bombay teacher, K.A. Keluskar, gave him a copy of the life of Buddha in 1908, on the occasion of his passing his matriculation examination, an incident which is part of the religious lore of the Buddhist today.

Ambedkar however, did not opt right away in favour of Buddhism, but his preponderant interest in Buddhism was quite discernible. In 1934, the house he had built in the predominantly Brahman Hindu colony in Dadar, Bombay, was named *Rajagriha*, after the ancient city of the Buddhist Kings. The first of the colleges established by his People's Education Society, which began in 1946 in hutments in Bombay, was called *Siddharth*, Buddha's personal name, and a second college founded in 1951, was given the name of *Milind*, after the Greek King who converted to Buddhism. In 1948, he republished *The Essence of Buddhism* written by P. Lakshmi Narsu and Dharmananda Kosambi with the preface written by him (It was first published in 1908). In the same year (1948), Ambedkar propounded a new theory of the origin of untouchability. He published his own book *The Untouchables* with this theory that *Brokenmen* were Buddhists, and they were reduced to the level of untouchables or made untouchable in India. In the book, he wrote:

'Why did the Brahman regard broken men as impure? Why did the broken men regard Brahmins as impure? What is the basis of this antipathy? This antipathy can be explained on one hypothesis. It is that

the Broken Men were Buddhists. As such they did not revere the Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and regarded them as impure. The Brahmin, on the other hand, disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhists and preached against them contempt and hatred with the result that the Broken Men came to be regarded as untouchables'.²⁹

Thus, in Ambedkar's opinion, untouchability was born out of the struggle for the supremacy between Buddhism and Brahminism.

In May 1950, Ambedkar gave a talk at the young Buddhists conference in Colombo on the rise and fall of Buddhism. In the same year, he began his own compilation of Buddhist scriptures, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, which was published posthumously in 1957. However, it was probably on 29th September 1950, in a speech at the Buddhist temple in Worli that Ambedkar made the first open plea to his people to embrace Buddhism as a way out of their sufferings, and declared that he would devote the rest of his life to the revival and spread of Buddhism.³⁰ In one of his most important articles written on Buddhism - *The Buddha and The Future of His Religion*, published in the MahaBodhi (Calcutta) in 1950, he wrote,

'Hinduism is a religion which is not founded on morality. Whatever morality Hinduism has, it is not an integral part of it. It is not embedded in religion. It is a separate force, which is sustained by social necessities and not by the injunction of Hindu religion. The religion of the Buddha is morality. It is embedded in religion. Buddhist religion is nothing if not

²⁹ See, *The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches on Buddhism* by Bhagwan Das, p.123, in "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Emancipator of the Oppressed" edited by K.N. Kadam, 1993.

³⁰ See M.S. Gore, 1993, *Religion : Hinduism and Buddhism*, in "The Social Context of an Ideology", p.250.

morality. It is true that in Buddhism there is no God, there is morality. What God is to other religions, morality is to Buddhism'.³¹

Further he said,

'Hinduism will lapse and cease to be a force governing life. There will be a void which will have the effect of disintegrating the Hindu society. Hindu will then be forced to take a more positive attitude. When they do so, they can turn to nothing except Buddhism'.³²

In January 1955, speaking in Bombay, Ambedkar said, 'Religion is my personal affair. I liked Buddhism so I chose it for myself... I have embraced Buddhism. I would like you to do so too - not untouchables alone but the whole of India and even the world'.³³

The actual conversion ceremony to Buddhism took place in 1956, twenty years later, when he first expressed the desire to come out of Hinduism. Ambedkar by this time was an old man and so ill that he died only two months later. He took *diksha* from the oldest Buddhist Monk in India before a large audience in Nagpur and set in motion the conversion process that brought over three million Indians to the Buddhist fold in the next few years. Most of the converts were former Mahars of Maharashtra.

³¹ See *The Significance of Dr. Ambedkar's Writings and Speeches on Buddhism* by Bhagwan Das, p.123, in "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: The Emancipator of the Oppressed" edited by K.N. Kadam, 1993.

³² *Ibid.*, p.124.

³³ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Religion : Hinduism and Buddhism*, p.251, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

Ambedkar decided and finally embraced Buddhism because in his opinion, it was a religion of emancipation, a religion ingrained in which the most egalitarian principle, equal treatment to all human beings, a religion which was based on the tenets of equality, liberty and fraternity. According to him, 'The Buddha never claimed that he was a prophet or a messenger of God (unlike Mohammed and Jesus). A more important point than this is that his religion is a discovery (it was discovered by man for man). As such, it must be sharply distinguished from a religion which is called Revelation'.³⁴ Further he said, 'All prophets have promised salvation. The Buddha is one teacher who did not make any such promise... He was only a *marga data* (way finder). Salvation must be sought by each for himself by his own effort'.³⁵ A very significant point about Buddhism was noted by Ambedkar and that was 'He (Buddha) never claimed infallibility for his message... He said that it was open to anyone to question it, test it and find what truth it contained'.³⁶ Unlike the Hindu scriptures like Vedas, Shastras etc. which were not open to abrogation, amendment and even criticism, Buddha's example of opening his preachings for anybody to question and test was something quite enlightening for a rationalist like Ambedkar. According to him, for Buddha worth and not birth was the measure of man unlike the theory of chaturvarna based on birth. This was quite liberating for the Untouchables who

³⁴ Ambedkar, 1992, *His Place in His Dhamma*, in "Vol.11", p.217, The bracket is not in the original.

³⁵ Ibid., p.218.

³⁶ Ibid., p.222.

were subjected to untold sufferings and humiliations as a result of their low birth. Buddha's indomitable faith in the capacity of man to shape his own destiny whereas the lack of recognition of individual's capacity in Hinduism revealed to Ambedkar, the superiority of Buddhism over Hinduism as a better religion. Though Buddha believed in rebirth and the doctrine of karma, he discarded the belief in transmigration of soul. According to Ambedkar, 'The Buddha's Law of Karma applied only to karma and its effect on present life. He was the first to say: Reap as you sow'.³⁷ Regarding rebirth, Buddha said 'when elements of a body (Prithvi-earth, Apa-water, Tej-fire and Vayu-wind) join the mass of similar elements floating in (Akash) space, a new birth takes place'. Thus, it is not the soul which takes rebirth, it is the elements of a body which take a new birth. According to Ambedkar, Buddha's 'Dhamma (religion) is social'. 'It is righteousness, which means right relation between man and man in all spheres of life. As such, society can not do without Dhamma'.³⁸ Ambedkar further highlighted the salient and enlightening principles of Buddhism. In his opinion, 'Buddhism makes learning open to all (males and females of all castes)', 'It breaks down barriers between man and man (in terms of caste division)', 'It promotes equality between man and man'.³⁹ Buddhism also underlined 'maitri or

³⁷ Ambedkar, 1992, *How Similarities in Terminology Conceal Fundamental Difference*, in "Vol.11", p.338.

³⁸ Ambedkar, 1992, *Religion and Dhamma*, in "Vol.11", p.316.

³⁹ Ambedkar, 1992, *What is Saddhamma?*, in "Vol.11", p.271. The brackets are not in the original.

fellowship towards all must never be abandoned. One owes it even to one's enemy'.⁴⁰ As such, in Buddhism, doors were open to all irrespective of caste, or class. Anybody could join the Buddhist Sangh. It is however amply clear that what attracted Ambedkar to Buddhism was its message of equality and fraternity, its respect for human being, its universal morality and its emphasis on the quality of compassion. Thus Buddhism was consistent with a modern liberal philosophy. It was a true religion in the sense of having a social mission.

IV. On Marxism vis-a-vis Buddhism

It can however be unambiguously stated here that as a proof of the rejection of Hinduism as well as due to the emancipatory nature of Buddhism, Ambedkar got converted. But another development which was also no less important in his conversion was the spread of communism in Buddhist countries. It really pained Ambedkar. The relatively prosperous living under communism in Russia and the growth of dictatorship in Germany and Italy made people get attracted towards Communism. So, Ambedkar wanted to establish a religion (read here the revival of Buddhism) which, in his opinion, would serve as a bulwark against Communism. He delivered an address on *Buddha and Karl Marx* at the World Fellowship of Buddhists Meetings at Kathmandu in 1956 shortly after his conversion. Here he dealt at length on Buddhism and Marxism and presented Buddhism as a substitute for Marxism. However, Ambedkar's

⁴⁰ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *Buddha or Karl Marx*, in "Vol.3", p.442.

acceptance of many basic assumptions of Marxism remained throughout his life and can be seen in his final writings on *Buddha and Karl Marx*. According to him,

‘What remains of Karl Marx is a residue of fire, small but still very important. The residue in my view consists of four items:

- i) The function of philosophy is to reconstruct the world and not to waste its time in explaining the origin of the world.
- ii) That there is a conflict of interest between class and class.
- iii) That private ownership of property brings power to one class and sorrow to another through exploitation.
- iv) That it is necessary for the good of society that the sorrow be removed by the abolition of private property’.⁴¹

In Ambedkar’s opinion, Buddha too had similar ideas as the above with the only difference that Marx used the term exploitation while Buddha used the terms like misery and sorrow. ‘If for misery one reads exploitation Buddha is not away from Marx’.⁴² However, Ambedkar was very critical of Marxism on many other issues. According to him,

‘There is hardly any doubt that Marxist claim that his socialism was inevitable has been completely disproved. The dictatorship of the proletariat was first established in 1917 in one country after a period of something like seventy years after the publication of his *Das Capital* the gospel of socialism. Even when the Communism - which is another name for the dictatorship of the proletariat - came to Russia, it did not come as something inevitable without any kind of human effort. There was a revolution and much deliberate planning had to be done with a lot of violence and blood shed before it could step into Russia. The rest of the world is still waiting for coming of the Proletarian Dictatorship. Apart from this... Nobody now accepts the economic interpretation of history as the only explanation of history. Nobody accepts that the proletariat

⁴¹ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *Buddha or Karl Marx*, in “Vol.3”, p.444.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p.446.

has been progressively pauperised. And the same is true about his other premises'.⁴³

Ambedkar said, 'It is clear that the means adopted by the Buddha (to ensure Communism) were to convert a man by changing his moral disposition to follow the path voluntarily'.⁴⁴ 'What the Buddha wanted was that each man, should be morally so trained that he may himself become a sentinel for the kingdom of righteousness'.⁴⁵ But 'The Communists say that there are only two means of establishing Communism. The first is violence. Nothing short of it will suffice to break up the existing system. The other is dictatorship of the proletariat. Nothing short of it will suffice to continue the system'.⁴⁶

Thus, Ambedkar said, '(while) the differences are about the means, the end is common to both'.⁴⁷ Buddha as such was against violence. "But he was also in favour of justice and where justice required he permitted the use of force".⁴⁸ According to Buddha, Ambedkar said, 'An offender must be punished and an innocent man must be freed',⁴⁹ but punishment or the use of force 'must not be for selfish ends'.⁵⁰ Regarding dictatorship, he said, 'Buddha was a thorough

⁴³ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *Buddha or Karl Marx*, in "Vol.3", p.444.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.450.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.459.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.450.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.451.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

equalitarian' and his 'Bhikhu Sangh had the most democratic constitution'.⁵¹ Buddha, in his opinion, was never a dictator nor he appointed anybody as his heir by saying that 'The Dhamma is the Supreme Commander of the Sangh'. As such Buddha was, in his view, for Parliamentary Government because 'in Parliamentary Government you have a duty, and a right; the duty to obey the law and right to criticise it' but 'in Dictatorship you have only duty to obey but no right to criticise it'.⁵² According to Ambedkar, 'The Communists themselves admit that their theory of the State as a permanent dictatorship is a weakness in their political philosophy. They take shelter under the plea that the State will ultimately wither away'.⁵³ But 'when it will wither away? and what will take the place of the State when it withers away?' These were, in the opinion of Ambedkar, two significant questions, the latter being more important. To the first question, the Communists have not given any definite time. So, Ambedkar asked,

'when the State withers away, will it be succeeded by Anarchy? If so the building up of the Communist State is an useless effort. If it can not be sustained except by force and if it results in anarchy when the force holding it together is withdrawn what good is the Communist Sstate'.⁵⁴

According to him, 'The only thing which could sustain it after force is withdrawn is Religion.'⁵⁵ Buddhism unlike Christianity did not make people other-wordly

⁵¹ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *Buddha or Karl Marx*, in "Vol.3", p.452.

⁵² Ibid., pp.452-453.

⁵³ Ibid., p.459.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.460.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

and made them suffer from poverty in this world, said Ambedkar. It rather preached for acquiring wealth but lawfully. So, in Ambedkar's opinion, the Russians or for that matter the Communists should pay attention to 'Buddhism as an ultimate aid to sustain Communism when force is withdrawn'. According to him,

'The Russians are proud of their Communism. But they forget that the wonder of all wonders is that the Buddha established Communism so far as the Sangh was concerned without dictatorship. It may be that it was a Communism on a very small scale but it was Communism without dictatorship, a miracle which Lenin failed to do'.⁵⁶

There was the abolition of private property in the Sangh without any bloodshed or dictatorship. So in Ambedkar's view, Buddhism was certainly superior to Communism and it could be a better alternative to it.

Thus, Ambedkar's alternative philosophy to Communism was based on universal values like equality, liberty and fraternity which were certainly ingrained in Buddhism - an emancipatory religion as he found it to be.

V. On Gandhism

Ideological differences do not always culminate in so much of bitterness as was existing between Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi. They had an antagonistic familiarity between them in terms of always having diagonally opposite viewpoints. It might be because of difference in their caste background, Ambedkar - an out-caste Mahar, Gandhiji - a caste Bania, and it might also be

⁵⁶ Ambedkar, 1987(a), *Buddha or Karl Marx*, in "Vol.3", p.461.

because these two prodigies were egoists, not tolerating and withstanding each other's erudition and popularity. Whatever may be the cause of their incompatibility, the above reasons are being my conjectures, it is certain that these two titans did not have a cordial and affilial relationship. They had not only differing opinions regarding untouchability and the caste system but also they were at loggerheads with each other on many other issues. As we further move on the discussion, it will be amply clear about the conflict-ridden relationship between these two prolific geniuses.

As has already been pointed out earlier, Ambedkar first met Gandhiji in Bombay before going to the First Session of the Round Table Conference in which Gandhiji had told Ambedkar that he was not in favour of regarding the Untouchables as a separate entity for political purposes.⁵⁷ And then onwards, the viewpoints of Ambedkar and Gandhiji never coalesced on any issue. The Congress boycotted the first session and hence, Ambedkar alongwith other non-Congress leaders put forward their views in the First Session. Ambedkar just reiterated his demands for the untouchables to be recognised as a separate political entity which he made to the *Simon Commission*. When Gandhi joined the Second Round Table Conference as a representative of the Congress, the verbal duel between him and Gandhiji regarding political safeguards to the Untouchables got heightened. Gandhiji said that except the special treatment of

⁵⁷ Ambedkar, 1991, *A Mean Deal*, in "Vol.9", p.56.

the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, he would most strongly resist any further special representation. According to Ambedkar, 'This was nothing but a declaration of war by Mr. Gandhi and the Congress against the Untouchables'.⁵⁸ Speaking on Gandhiji's claim of the Congress representing the Depressed Classes, he said,

'The Mahatma has been always claiming that the Congress stands for the Depressed Classes more than I or my colleague do. To that claim I can only say that it is one of the many false claims which irresponsible people keep on making, although the persons concerned with regard to those claims have been invariably denying them'.⁵⁹

When the *Minorities Pact*⁶⁰ was agreed upon among the minorities and presented in the Second Round Table Conference without Gandhiji's knowledge, Gandhiji was furious. He, as Ambedkar put it, attacked everybody who had taken part in producing the pact. He was particularly furious for the recognition given to the Untouchables as a separate political entity. Gandhiji expressed his dissatisfaction and concealed anger in the session. According to Ambedkar, he said,

'... I claim myself in my own person to represent the vast mass of the Untouchables. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the Untouchables, their vote, and that I would top the poll. And I would work from one end to the other to tell the Untouchables, that separate electorate and separate reservation is not the way to remove this bar-sinister (Read here untouchability), which is the shame, not of them, but of Orthodox Hinduism... I am speaking with a due sense of responsibility, and I say that it is not a proper claim which is registered by Dr. Ambedkar when he seeks to speak for the whole of the Untouchables of India. It will create a division in Hinduism which I can not possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind

⁵⁸ Ambedkar, 1991, *A Mean Deal*, in "Vol.9", p.57.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁶⁰ Pact for political safeguards given to the minorities - the Mohammedans, the Depressed Classes, the Sikhs, the Anglo-Indians, the Indian Christians etc.

Untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I can not possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of the political right of Untouchables do not know their India, do not know how Indian society is today constructed, and therefore I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I would resist it with my life'.⁶¹

For Gandhiji's such kind of rigidity, as Ambedkar put it, everybody felt that Mr. Gandhi was the most determined enemy of the Untouchables. He said,

'so much of his energy and attention did Mr. Gandhi concentrate on the question of the Untouchables that it would not be unfair if it was said that the main purpose for which Mr. Gandhi came to the Round Table Conference was to oppose the demands of the Untouchables'.⁶²

However, when a solution could not be reached in the conference regarding the communal question, the Prime Minister, Mr. J. Ramsay MacDonald asked for the authorisation for his arbitration to which everybody agreed except Ambedkar who felt that the demands of the Untouchables were so reasonable that no arbitration was necessary. But when the decision of the Prime Minister was announced on 17th August 1932 and it was known that the Depressed Classes were recognised as separate political entity and got joint electorate right,⁶³ Gandhiji reacted sharply to revoke the decision or else he threatened to launch his fast unto death from the jail (He was arrested just after his return from London). Ambedkar said, 'He (Gandhiji) forgot that as a signatory he was bound to accept the award'. Consequently, when the order was not revoked, Gandhiji

⁶¹ Ambedkar, 1991, *A Mean Deal*, in "Vol.9", pp.68-69. The bracket is not in the original.

⁶² Ibid., p.70.

⁶³ Right to vote for reserved constituency as well as general constituency.

took to fast on 20th September 1932. In this fast, Ambedkar however faced a problem. The life at stake was none other than Gandhiji's life and unless the Communal Award was altered, Gandhiji would not break his fast and for a solution, Ambedkar could be the key figure. So, all eyes were turned to him. As Ambedkar said,

'As to myself it is no exaggeration to say that no man was placed in a greater and graver dilemma than I was then. It was a baffling situation. I had to make a choice between two different alternatives. There was before me the duty, which I owed as a part of common humanity, to save Gandhi from sure death. There was before me the problem of saving for the Untouchables the political rights which the Prime Minister had given them. I responded to the call of humanity and saved the life of Mr. Gandhi by agreeing to alter the Communal Award in a manner satisfactory to Mr. Gandhi. This agreement is known as the Poona Pact'.⁶⁴

The Poona Pact, in the opinion of Ambedkar, though increased the fixed quota of seats for the Untouchables, took away the right to the double vote.

Apart from the Poona Pact that hammered on the interests of the Untouchables, there was the Temple Entry Movement started in 1933 to allow the untouchables to enter the temples. Ambedkar was asked by Gandhiji to lend his support to the movement but he declined to do so. Ambedkar said,

'To the question I put to Mr. Gandhi in my statement, he gave a straight reply. He said that though he was against untouchability he was not against caste. If at all, he was in favour of it and that he would not therefore carry this social reform beyond removing untouchability. This was enough for me to settle my attitude'.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Ambedkar, 1991, *A Mean Deal*, in "Vol.9", p.88.

⁶⁵ Ambedkar, 1991, *An Abject Surrender*, in "Vol.9", p.113.

The temples which were opened, in the opinion of Ambedkar, were no longer temples, being in a dilapidated condition and inhabited by dogs and other animals. Thus, it may be said that this was just a lip-service coloured by publicity camouflaging the deep-seated hatred and orthodox mentalities of the caste Hindus towards the Untouchables.

The differences in viewpoints between Ambedkar and Gandhiji were also made candidly clear after Ambedkar published his undelivered speech 'Annihilation of Caste' prepared for the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. Gandhiji, in his *Harijan*, said that Ambedkar made the mistake in his address by picking out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value to substantiate his argument. In his opinion, Shastras should be interpreted by Saints and not by learned men. He further said that judged by the standard applied by Ambedkar, every known living faith would probably fail. He also said that a religion should be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. There was no calling too low and none too high. Everybody should follow the ancestral calling, he said. To these, Ambedkar replied one by one. He held that the texts used by him were not at all of doubtful authenticity. He said, 'I should like to state that the texts cited by me are all taken from the writings of the late Mr. Tilak who was a recognised authority on the Sanskrit language and on the Hindu Shastras'.⁶⁶ Further, Ambedkar argued that the Shastras could also be interpreted

⁶⁶ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.87.

differently by the Saints and the interpolations could gradually become parts of the Shastras. Though Ambedkar agreed that the best specimens should be taken to judge a religion rather than the worst specimens, but according to him, ‘... why the worst number so many and the best so few?’⁶⁷ Criticising Gandhiji’s emphasis on sticking to ancestral calling, Ambedkar wanted to know how far Gandhiji practised what he preached. He said that Gandhiji preferred law to trading, his ancestral calling, and later he became ‘half-saint and half-politician’. Similarly, his youngest son married a Brahmin girl and served a newspaper magnate. Gandhiji never condemned him for not following the ancestral calling. Ambedkar said, ‘It may be that his failure to practise (what he preached) is due to the ideal being too high to be attainable; It may be that his failure to practise is due to the innate hypocrisy of the man’.⁶⁸ Though he admitted that the standards used by him to judge Hinduism would disqualify it or for that matter any religion, but any religion, in his opinion, should be judged by social standards based on social ethics, and by this standard, Hinduism failed to be a religion. Ambedkar further criticising Gandhiji said,

‘The Mahatma appears not to believe in thinking. He prefers to follow the Saints. Like a conservative with his reverence for consecrated notions he is afraid that if he once starts thinking, many ideals and institutions to which he clings will be doomed. One must sympathise with him... In so far as he does think, to me he really appears to be prostituting his intelligence to find reasons for supporting this archaic social structure of

⁶⁷ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in “Vol.1”, p.88.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.90. The bracket is not in the original.

the Hindus. He is the most influential apologist of it and therefore the worst enemy of the Hindus'.⁶⁹

In spite of such direct antagonism between them, Ambedkar had also spoken on Gandhism as a whole in a very dissecting and critical way. According to him, 'Quite recently a new 'ism' has come on the Indian horizon. It is called Gandhism... Some have so much faith in it that they do not hesitate to offer it as an alternative to Marxism'.⁷⁰ He further said,

'... Some Gandhists have conjured up a conception of Gandhism which is purely imaginary. According to this conception Gandhism means return to the village and making the village self-sufficient. It makes Gandhism a mere matter of regionalism. Gandhism, I am sure, is neither so simple nor so innocent as regionalism is. Gandhism has a much bigger content than regionalism. Regionalism is a small insignificant part of it. It has a social philosophy and it has an economic philosophy. To omit to take into account the economic and social philosophy of Gandhism is to present deliberately a false picture of Gandhism. The first and foremost requisite is to present a true picture of Gandhism'.⁷¹

Ambedkar however underlined two features of Gandhism.

'The first special feature of Gandhism is that its philosophy helps those who have, to keep what they have and to prevent those who have not from getting what they have a right to get. No one who examines the Gandhian attitude to strikes, the Gandhian reverence for caste and the Gandhian doctrine of Trusteeship by the rich for the benefit of the poor can deny that this is upshot of Gandhism. Whether this is the calculated result of a deliberate design or whether it is a matter of accident may be open to argument. But the fact remains that Gandhism is the philosophy of the well-to-do and the leisure class'.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ambedkar, 1979, *Annihilation of Caste*, in "Vol.1", p.95.

⁷⁰ Ambedkar, 1991, *Gandhism*, in "Vol.9", p.274.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.275.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.291.

Similarly, 'The second special feature of Gandhism is to delude people into accepting their misfortunes by presenting them as best of good fortunes'.⁷³

Ambedkar gave two illustrations to clarify this. According to him,

'The Hindu sacred law penalised the Shudras (Hindus of the fourth class) from acquiring wealth. It is a law of enforced poverty unknown in any other part of the world. What does Gandhism do? It does not lift the ban. It blesses the Shudra for his moral courage to give up property!'⁷⁴

Similarly, Gandhism, in Ambedkar's opinion, without condemning scavenging, sought to perpetuate this system by praising scavenging as the noblest service to society. Further he held,

'To preach that poverty is good for the Shudra and for none else, to preach that scavenging is good for the Untouchables and none else and to make them accept those onerous impositions as voluntary purposes of life, by appeal to their failings is an outrage and a cruel joke on the helpless classes which none but Mr. Gandhi can perpetuate with equanimity and impunity.... Criticism apart, this is the technique of Gandhism, to make wrongs done appear to the very victim as though they were his privileges. If there is an 'ism' which has made full use of religion as an opium to lull the people into false beliefs and false security, it is Gandhism. Following Shakespeare one can well say: Plausibility! Ingenuity! Thy name is Gandhism!'⁷⁵

Gandhism, in the opinion of Ambedkar, professed to abolish untouchability and this was hailed as the greatest virtue of Gandhism. But it was opposed to the idea of inter-dining or inter-marriage to abolish untouchability. Ambedkar said that what Mr. Gandhi's anti-untouchability meant was to class together the Shudras and Ati-Shudras making the Untouchables as Shudras in the

⁷³ Ambedkar, 1991, *Gandhism*, in "Vol.9", p.291.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.293.

process. But it was clearly evident that such assimilation was not possible from the new name, *Harijan* given to the Untouchables by Gandhiji. According to Ambedkar, 'He (Gandhiji) has also by his new name counteracted assimilation and made it impossible.'⁷⁶ Similarly, though Gandhism allowed access to any kind of education by the Untouchables, it however clearly specified that such educational achievement should not be used to further one's living. No other than the hereditary calling should be followed as occupation or profession. So according to Ambedkar, 'Under Gandhism the Untouchables are to be eternal scavengers.... The virtue of anti-untouchability plank in Gandhism is quite illusory. There is no substance in it'.⁷⁷

Ambedkar however, said that Gandhism and Hinduism were one and the same with the only difference that Gandhism provided a philosophic justification for Hinduism and its dogmas and thereby making it appear decent, respectable and even attractive from the surface. The philosophy provided by Gandhism was that 'All that is in Hinduism is well, all that is in Hinduism is necessary for public good.'⁷⁸ A later Gandhiji however spoke against caste and said that it was an anachronism but Ambedkar said that much should not be read into it.

'In the first place what Mr. Gandhi has said is that caste is an anachronism. He does not say it is an evil. He does not say it is anathema. Mr. Gandhi may be taken to be not in favour of caste. But Mr. Gandhi does not say that he is against the *varna* system. And what is Mr.

⁷⁶ Ambedkar, 1991, *Gandhism*, in "Vol.9", p.295, The bracket is not in the original.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.296.

Gandhi's *varna* system? It is simply a new name for the caste system and retains all the worst features of the caste system.'⁷⁹

Further differing views between them are to be found on their ideas on machinery and civilization. While Gandhiji was out and out against machinery displacing human labour, and modern civilization, Ambedkar was an outspoken protagonist of the same. According to him,

'Machinery and modern civilization are indispensable for emancipating man from leading the life of a brute, and for providing him with leisure and making a life of culture possible. The man who condemns machinery and modern civilisation simply does not understand their purpose and the ultimate aim which human society must strive to achieve. Gandhism may well be suited to a society which does not accept democracy as its ideal. A society which does not believe in democracy may be indifferent to machinery and the civilization based upon it. But a democratic society can not.... Under Gandhism the common man must keep on toiling ceaselessly for a pittance and remain a brute. In short, Gandhism with its call of back to nature, means back to nakedness, back to squalor, back to poverty and back to ignorance for the vast mass of the people'.⁸⁰

Thus, Ambedkar's trenchant criticism of Gandhism clearly shows the extent to which the relationship was sour and bitter between them.

VI. AMBEDKAR AND MAINSTREAM NATIONALISM

Apart from his conflict-ridden relationship with Gandhiji, Ambedkar's role in mainstream nationalism is another significant aspect to be dealt with. However, he was criticised by many as not being a nationalist, a patriot, and more harshly and rudely, considered to be a British tool. These kinds of charges were the most damaging stains in his chequered career. Though there was no

⁷⁹ Ambedkar, 1991, *Gandhism*, in "Vol.9", p.297.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.284.

grain of truth in such charges, Ambedkar's actions however, to a great extent, justified such allegations. He was a nationalist at heart in the true sense of the term but he did nothing overtly to prove his nationalist bent of mind. He was certainly against the continuation of British rule in India. This was clearly evident from his speech delivered to the convention of students union of London University in 1924. It was also known from his thesis submitted for his Ph.D. degree. But at that time, Ambedkar was not actively involved in politics and when he entered politics and became a leader to reckon with, his attitude and action towards national struggle for independence was quite surprising and disgusting for mainstream nationalists. According to him, the Untouchables as a community never took part in what was called Fight for Freedom and this was particularly noticeable in the last campaign of the Fight for Freedom which followed Quit India resolution passed by the Congress in August 1942. Even, as he pointed out, it is only once that the Musalmans took part in it and that was during the *Khilafat* agitation. They soon got out of it. The Fight for Freedom, as Ambedkar stated, was carried on mostly by the Hindus.

The Congress, however, gave the reason for the indifference of the Untouchables to the freedom struggle. It said that the Untouchables were the tools of the British Imperialism and that's why they did not join the fight for freedom. Ambedkar was however of the opinion that such explanation given by the Congress was an absurd explanation to which circumstances lent an apparent plausibility. He said that the Untouchables did not join the struggle not because

they were the tools of the British Imperialism but because 'they fear that freedom of India will establish Hindu domination which is sure to close to them and forever all prospect of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and that they will be made the hewers of wood and drawers of water'.⁸¹ He further said, '... They (the Untouchables) do not wish to be placed under *Hindu Raj* in which the governing class would be the *Bania* and the Brahmin with low class Hindus as their policemen, all of whom have been the hereditary enemies of the Untouchables.'⁸² The Untouchables as such were not opposed to freedom from the British Imperialism, but they refused to be content, as Ambedkar put it, with mere freedom from the British Imperialism. What they wanted was that free India should be made safe for democracy in which they would have safeguards in the constitution to prevent the tyranny of a Hindu communal majority from coming into being. And unless, this was guaranteed, they found no exhilarating impetus to join the struggle. The Congress, on the other hand, regarded the freedom of India from the British Imperialism to be 'the be-all and end-all' of Indian nationalism. Ambedkar said, 'Nothing more, it thinks, is necessary for the welfare of the Indian people in a free India'.⁸³ The Congress, when asked about the constitution of a free India said that it would be democracy based on adult franchise and ruled out any other safeguards for preventing the tyranny of a

⁸¹ Ambedkar, 1991, *A False Charge*, in "Vol.9", p.168.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., p.169.

Hindu Communal Majority as it would lead to the vivisection of the nation. Ambedkar said that this argument of the Congress had its origin in the genius of Mr. Gandhi to whom the high class Hindus, who stood to lose by these safeguards, felt so grateful. Thus, according to Ambedkar,

‘What the Congress wants is a free India with full, unrestricted freedom to the Hindus in a free India to dispose of the Untouchables in anyway they liked. No wonder the Untouchables have refused to take part in such a dishonest agitation, elevated though it may be by such high sounding name as “Fight for Freedom”!’⁸⁴

Even in the Second Round Table Conference, Ambedkar made it clear that the Untouchables were not for transfer of power from the British to the Indian people. He said,

‘...The Depressed Classes are not anxious, they are not clamorous, they have not started any movement for claiming that there shall be an immediate transfer of power from the British to the Indian people.... Their position, to put it plainly, is that we are not anxious for the transfer of power; but if the British Government is unable to resist the forces that have been set up in the country which do clamour for transference of political power - and we know the Depressed Classes in their present circumstances are not in a position to resist that - then our submission is that if you make that transfer, that transfer will be accompanied by such conditions and by such provisions that the power shall not fall into the hands of a clique, into the hands of an oligarchy, or into the hands of a group of people, whether Muhammedans or Hindus; but that solution shall be such that the power shall be shared by all communities in their respective proportions.’⁸⁵

Thus, Ambedkar or for that matter, the Untouchables as a community never took the freedom struggle as their own and never took part in it. Though

⁸⁴ Ambedkar, 1991, *A False Charge*, in “Vol.9”, p.178.

⁸⁵ Ambedkar, 1991, *A Mean Deal*, in “Vol.9”, p.66.

they were not opposed to the freedom per se but certainly they were not outright supporters of the struggle for independence for which they were branded as non-nationalist, non-patriot. They were for freedom from the Hindu domination first, then from the British domination.

Hence, it may be rightly said that Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was never an integral part of the mainstream nationalism rather he was always away from it, always striving for the cause of Dalit justice which was very close to his heart and which was dearer than even the independence of the country.

After the perusal of the whole discussion, the meaning of Ambedkarism becomes crystal clear. It is a new 'ism', an ideology of protest and criticism against the inequitable and exploitative Hindu Social System. It does not stop at that. It goes beyond and envisions the emergence of a new society devoid of untouchability, slavery and exploitation, and which is based on equality, fraternity, liberty and justice.

Ambedkarism underlines the importance of religion in life but clearly spells out what it means to be an emancipatory religion. Hinduism is discarded but Buddhism gets the approval of being an emancipatory religion that establishes communism without any blood shed and violence. And hence, Ambedkarism presents Buddhism as an alternative which is certainly superior to Marxism which is ridden with violence.

Ambedkarsim also stresses on the concept of freedom. For the Untouchables who never know what it means to be free, free from exploitation, free from untouchability, free from inhuman treatment, free from abhorrence, freedom of the country does not bring any exhilaration and ecstasy to them. They will still be under the vicious clutches of the Hindu exploitation. So, the freedom of the country has to be accompanied by freedom from the age-old and immediate cause of suffering i.e., the Hindu domination which is of paramount importance to them than the freedom of the country from the British Imperialism. Ambedkarism makes it clear that freedom means provision of equality, liberty and fraternity. So unless these become the cardinal principles of society, freedom makes no sense.

Ambedkarism not only makes a critical analysis of Marxism but also of Gandhism. It shows Gandhiji in a very poor light vis-a-vis the Untouchables. Gandhiji is hailed as the champion and saviour of the untouchables but Ambedkarism portrays him as the most determined enemy of the untouchables. It also underlines that Gandhism with its rejection of machinery and modern civilization will make us lead the life of a brute. Ambedkarism is on the other hand, for more machinery and more civilization.

Further, very specifically and concisely both in the narrower and broader scope, Ambedkarism may be comprehended in the following way:

- a) Ambedkarism is a subaltern diatribe against majoritarian Hinduism which is same as Brahminism that glorifies perpetual slavery and inhuman treatment of the Untouchables.
- b) It is a radical paradigm that leads to iconoclastic analysis of the Hindu society.
- c) It is a law that gives capital punishment to such a culpable system like the caste system based on deep religious sanction that originates and sustains the graded inequality and socio-religious disabilities.
- d) It is all about pragmatism, rationalism, humanism, egalitarianism, and justice; It brings to the fore the principles of social justice, social democracy and emancipation (of the Depressed Classes).
- e) It is a conflict theory that throws light on the inherent and age-old contradictions and antagonisms of and within the system (Hindu Social System).
- f) It is an ideology pregnant with liberalism.
- g) It is about change; change towards humanity and fraternity.
- h) And finally, it is about criticising Marxism, Gandhism and presenting Buddhism as an emancipatory religion and as an alternative to Marxism.

CHAPTER 2

CHANGING SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT AND THE RISE OF AMBEDKARISM

As we gather from the elaborate as well as lucid discussion in the previous chapter, it becomes clear that Ambedkarism is a broad paradigm that aims at the liberation of Dalits from all the oppressive features of (Hindu) society. However, in the contemporary period, Ambedkarism has got an unprecedented boost and patronage because of the growing consciousness of the underprivileged. It emits magnetic influence, and has become a constant inspiring and guiding force to the millions of deprived in the society in their strivings to better their socio-economic and political conditions. It has ushered in new vistas of opportunities and optimism for them. The rise of Ambedkarism is however, associated with a conducive and congenial socio-political context. This precisely forms the crux of the present chapter which makes a deep-delled attempt to explore the favourable socio-political context that has augmented the rise of Ambedkarism.

Before we proceed in our discussion, a brief but nevertheless relevant analysis of the complex relationship between caste and politics will be helpful, and is thus, undertaken to facilitate a meaningful understanding of the peculiar interface of caste and politics in Indian society. The rise of Ambedkarism draws enormous impetus from such a socio-political structure where caste assumes a significant political role.

I. COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CASTE AND POLITICS

It is obvious that what characterizes the changing social context is the realization on the part of the Dalits/lower castes that politics is an important source of power. As a result, caste sufferings and identities begin to get articulated through politics. This political mobilization of lower castes seeks to alter the fundamentals of a hierarchical Brahminic society. It is, therefore, important to understand this dynamic interplay of caste and politics.

Politics becomes indispensable in a heterogeneous and complex society for effective channelisation of power relations. Even in a simple society, power relationships operate. It is the innate tendency of an individual to assert himself in an interaction situation. Some are able and some are less able, but it is everybody's will to influence others. It is in the sense of influencing others, getting one's work done even against the resistance of others with whom one is in interaction that a power relationship operates. Weber rightly said that 'every social relationship is a power relationship'. So, unless, these power relationships in a society are managed, controlled or manipulated properly, there will be chaos, anarchy, anomie, or putting Hobbesian term 'war of all against all'. Politics is the right channel for the articulation of power interests, political ambitions, and so on. It provides the scope for transforming power relationships into authority relationships wherein, power can be exercised with legitimacy. However, politics survives on mobilisation of support. When there takes place

an intense struggle for power, new support bases are explored and mobilised on a large-scale. As Kothari states,

‘politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realisation of certain goals, and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilise and consolidate positions. The important thing is organisation and articulation of support, and where politics is mass-based the point is to articulate support through the organisations in which the masses are to be found. It follows that where the caste structure provides one of the principal organisational clusters along which bulk of the population is found to live, politics must strive to organise through such a structure.’¹

Thus, in Indian society, caste and politics are drawn to each other as Indian society is essentially a caste society. In the opinion of Kothari, those in India who complain of ‘casteism in politics’, are really looking for a sort of politics which has no basis in society. He further states,

‘the alleged casteism in politics is thus no more and no less than *politicisation of caste*. It is something in which both the forms of caste and the forms of politics are brought nearer each other, in the process changing both. By drawing the caste system into its web of organisation, politics finds material for its articulation and moulds it into its own design. In making politics their sphere of activity, caste and kingroups on the other hand, get a chance to assert their identity and to strive for position’.²

So, it is apparently clear that in the process of being drawn to each other, both caste and politics use each other in furthering their own interests. But as Kothari argues, ‘Where caste itself becomes a political category it is futile to argue as to whether caste uses politics or politics uses caste’.³ However, without going into

¹ Rajni Kothari, 1970, *Introduction*, in “Caste in Indian Politics” (edited), p.4

² Ibid, p.5.

³ Ibid.

the intricacy of the debate, one thing becomes transparent that both benefit in the process of being engaged with each other.

In India, as the Varna model or the caste hierarchy ordains, the Brahmin occupies the apex position in the society, and hence, it was this Brahminic section that first responded to English education and was the first to benefit from political and administrative power. However, with the slow expansion of the franchise and the party system, others came in. In some other regions where the Brahmins were not dominant, certain agricultural upper castes wielded social and political power, and it gradually spread down the hierarchy. So in the opinion of Kothari, the liberal education, governmental patronage and slowly expanding franchise have been the three influences that have penetrated the caste system and involved it by stages.

However, during the initial period of modernisation process and political activity, in the opinion of Kothari, the Indian caste structure got polarised between two castes or subcastes, one *entrenched*,⁴ the other *ascendant*.⁵ It so happened because certain upper castes who were traditionally endowed with pedagogic and sophisticated skills, took the advantage of modernisation process. This led to a feeling of deprivation and antagonism in other high castes, and as a

⁴ According to Kothari, *Entrenched* caste, is though similar in meaning to dominant caste used by Srinivas, it does not always share all the characteristics of dominant caste. See Kothari, 1970, *Introduction*, in "Caste in Indian Politics" (edited), p.24.

⁵ Sometimes this includes, in Kothari's view, more than one caste or sub-caste. Examples cited by him are Brahmin vs non-Brahmin in Maharashtra & Madras, Rajput vs Jat in Rajasthan etc. see *Ibid*.

consequence, another political group, ascendant caste, still drawn largely from the higher castes, emerged. This was gradually followed by intense competition that took place due to power strivings, and demands for benefits got exceeded the availability of resources. Numerous bases of support were looked for, and hence, caste fragmentation or 'factionalism'⁶ took place within the entrenched and more articulate sections of society. As Kothari puts it,

"Inter-caste competition - between the entrenched caste and the ascendant caste - was now supplemented by inter-caste competition and the process of politicisation. And the process first started within the entrenched caste (or castes) which got factionalised and there followed a new structuring of political organisation. Leadership cleavages were created,... and there came into being multi-caste and multi-factional alignments. Mobilisation of further support for each of the contending factions gave rise to a process of 'co-optation' from other castes that were till now kept out of the power system. A similar process took place within the ascendant caste..."⁷

However, in regions of vertical inter-caste ties, existed by reason of agricultural and other economic bonds, traditional hypergamic relationships, or regional variations in dominated-dependent relationship, politics found a ready-made group for mobilisation. The upper tiers of each of the rival camp got recruited in politics and in the process, the whole network was carried with them. Thus, in the opinion of Kothari, the expanding mobilisation of politics was achieved through a vertical network. However, where such a network did not exist, in the process of factionalising caste-structure, it was created and mobilised. In both

⁶ To Kothari, this factionalism is created out of political competition, and is different from the traditional factionalism prevalent on lines of kingroup and lineage.

⁷ See Kothari, 1970, *Introduction* in "Caste in Indian Politics" (edited), p.15.

the cases, the social structure of caste was used for political organisation, and was also extended to include other forms of patronage and socio-economic relationships.

Thus, in the context of factionalised politics when competition became very sharp, the hitherto dormant sections were drawn for mobilisation either through simple co-optation by giving junior or subordinate positions or through coalitions, alignments, bargaining, appealing to wider identities and animosities, and in the process securing their support. This was however, dependent on the extent to which these sections were aware of their political rights, and their eagerness to taste political power, and throw up a challenge to the domination of the upper castes. It is also a common knowledge that as politics became mass based, new types of managerial and organisational skills were warranted. Hence, for this, the Brahminic and administrative castes, in the opinion of Kothari, began to be outnumbered by commercial and peasant proprietor castes. So, gradually, the politicised values and impulses made inroads into the entire caste structure. One important thing which Kothari has stressed in his analysis of caste and politics is that 'It is not politics that gets caste-ridden; it is caste that gets politicised'.⁸ He is further of the view that competitive politics has transformed the apolitical nature of caste and has given it a new status. Castes take on new organisational forms like caste associations and caste federations under the

⁸ See Kothari, 1970, *Introduction*, in "Caste in Indian Politics" (edited), p.20.

politically active environment. They are formed for specific purposes, sometimes for securing economic benefits, jobs or social concessions, sometimes for uniting against the hegemony of upper castes or ruling castes, or bargaining with political party or the government. In course of time, though formed on the basis of caste identities, Kothari argues, they carry on sub-caste functions, even enroll other caste members, and join issues with other voluntary organisations, interest groups and political parties, and gradually, become a distinctly political group enjoying bargaining strength and numerical power though they do not give up caste sentiments and consciousness in the process.

So, Kothari's analysis of 'Caste in India politics' makes it clear that in Indian situation, caste and politics have a very intimate association with each other. Caste can not be kept out of the political mobilisation process in India. Caste became a significant political tool in the early twentieth century with the emergence of the non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, and the Mahar movement in Maharashtra. Ambedkar also emphasized the role of political upliftment being an important indicator of social upliftment for the lower castes in the society. So, political assertion of the lower castes also forms a part of the broad paradigm of *Ambedkarism*. Realising the importance of political rights, the lower castes as well as the backward castes⁹ who were for long, banned from political privilege, are, of late, on an ascending march to assert

⁹ Backward castes are the Shudra sub-castes, referred to in the 1950 constitution as 'Other Backward Classes'.

their political rights both in the states and national level in the pan-Indian soil. It has thrown up a challenge to the domination of the upper castes in general, and the Brahminic hegemony in particular. The Dalits and the backward castes though have differences between them, have broadly the same goal, the anti-Brahmin attitude, the political rights, reservation, fight against atrocities, and so on. And here, they draw enormously from the broad perspective of Ambedkarism. It provides them with inspiration, vision, as well as determination to carry on the struggle till the ends are met. However, though the Backward Class movement and the Dalit movement took place almost all over the country, we find that in certain regions, they emerged early and in certain other regions, later. Even their intensity, pattern of mobilisation etc. vary from one place to the other. While in the South, they emerged quite early in the pre-independence period, and the political accommodation of the backward castes as well as the Dalits have been smooth and done early, in the North, they emerged after independence, and there have been a lot of violence for the political accommodation of the backward castes and the Dalits.

However, it is not possible here to deal with the varying patterns of conflict between the forward castes and the backward castes, over all the diverse regions in India. So, two main states in the South, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, and two in the North, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, have been taken up for discussion because the formers were the two presidencies under the British Raj where the non-Brahmin and the Mahar movement first emerged respectively, and the latter

were the two Aryan heartlands which saw a spate of violence for political accommodation of the deprived and also each has its own complex and heterogeneous caste composition.

II. TAMIL NADU : ASSERTION OF ANTI-BRAHMINISM

The Non-Brahmin movement in Tamil Nadu was formally launched with the issue of a manifesto in December 1916. It presented a detailed figures showing an extremely high concentration of Brahmins in the public services, in public bodies and in the educational system and contrasting this with the three percent they formed of the total population of the presidency.¹⁰ Thus, the Justice Party which spearheaded the Non-Brahmin movement, emerged as the champion of non-Brahmin interests and demanded more equitable representation for them in the educational system, in local bodies and in the services which the government of Madras Presidency granted within only five years, in 1921.¹¹ This was because the British regarded the Non-Brahmin movement as a possible counter-weight against the agitation from home rule identified with Brahmin leadership in the Indian National Congress.

In 1921, Madras Presidency came under the control of the Justice Party which continued till 1936.¹² After it came to power, non-Brahmin representation

¹⁰ See *Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamil Nad* by Andre Beteille, p.267, in "Caste in Indian Politics" edited by Rajni Kothari, 1970.

¹¹ *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by Francine R. Frankel, p.233, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

¹² Ibid.

in political bodies increased. In 1925, another organisation, the Self-Respect League, came into being which also mobilised the backward Hindus.¹³ It was formed under the leadership of E.V. Ramaswamy Naicker, popularly known as EVR. He attacked the Vedic scriptures, the caste system, and the very concept of God. He developed self-respect marriages involving an exchange of garlands at Hindu weddings to eliminate the need for Brahmin priests. He mounted a sharp attack on Brahminism. As Frankel puts it, 'The Backward non-Brahmans were first organised as a political force in Tamil Nadu in response to the self-respect movement.'¹⁴

By the late 1930s, the backward non-Brahmans in Madras had become a powerful political force. They played an important role in 1938 agitation protesting the Congress ministry's introduction in the schools of compulsory Hindi which symbolised the social domination of Aryan Brahmins over Tamil society.¹⁵ In 1944, the militant Dravida Kazhagam (DK) was formed as a result of the merger of the Self-Respect League with the Justice Party to provide a social base of a new political party in opposition to the Congress.¹⁶ The DK preached and at times practised violence against the Brahmins. It organised all the lower castes against the Brahmins and the Congress.

¹³ *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by Francine R. Frankel, p.234, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p.235.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Though the Justice Party was the champion of non-Brahmin interests, it actually was an elite party dominated by urban, western-educated, land owning and professional people.¹⁷ It was spearheaded by Vellala elites who wanted to acquire power vis-a-vis the Brahmins. Frankel states that once the position of non-Brahmins was secured by the reservation policy, the Justice Party permitted its members to enter the Indian National Congress as early as 1927. By the late 1930s, almost all of the forward non-Brahmins went over to the Congress who formed the government in 1937 under the leadership of a Brahmin, C. Rajagopalachari.¹⁸ Due to this, the Justice Party lost support of the disadvantaged sections of Hindu society. Though, there had been demand for recognition of 'backward castes' as political category since 1934, it is in 1947, that the Madras government responded to toe the line. Frankel states, "It was the first official recognition of 'Backward Hindus' as a political category".¹⁹

After independence, the Brahmins migrated from villages to towns and from towns to other parts of the country. This large scale exodus of the Brahmins provided an opportunity to the backward castes who had numerical strength, to assert politically to come to terms with the political chauvinism of the Brahmins. So, the political accommodation gradually became smooth without

¹⁷ *Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamil Nad* by Andre Beteille, p.277, in "Caste in Indian Politics" edited by Rajni Kothari, 1970.

¹⁸ *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.233, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.234.

any concerted resistance from the Brahmins or for that matter, forward castes.

According to Beteille,

“Perhaps the most important consequence of the non-Brahmin movement (for which more later) was the introduction of a ‘Communal or Caste Idiom’ into South Indian politics. The composition of political bodies was changed by it, sometimes artificially, through reserved seats, and everywhere communal loyalties became important in giving or withdrawing support. It is doubtful whether the movement even attempted to organise politically the entire body of non-Brahmins. But it certainly did succeed in creating a lasting impression that in virtually every political context it was important whether a person was a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin.”²⁰

Though non-Brahmin dominance in the organs of state and municipal government began with the success of the Justice Party in capturing power in the elections of 1921, it was only after the introduction of adult franchise, and particularly of Panchayati Raj that the tables were finally turned on the Brahmins. The DMK’s (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) anti-Brahmin campaign led by C.N. Annadurai continued till 1962. However, in both 1962 and 1967, the Brahmins supported the DMK. So, the DMK had to renounce its anti-Brahmin rhetoric. The support of the Brahmins to the DMK who were solidly behind the Congress till the mid-fifties, was as a result of their displeasure over the replacement of the veteran Brahmin leader C. Rajagopalchari from the Chief Ministership by the non-Brahmin leader, Kamaraj Nadar. ‘The most dramatic political change, according to Frankel, occurred in Tamil Nadu in 1967 when the DMK led by C. Annadurai, delivered to the Congress a decisive defeat from

²⁰ *Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamil Nad* by Andre Beteille, p.267, in “Caste in Indian Politics” edited by Rajni Kothari, 1970.

which it never recovered. The advent of the DMK marked the first entry into state politics of the Backward non-Brahmins as a dominant group.²¹ In the opinion of Frankel, the DMK had no Brahmins in their rank and file and most of its members were drawn from the disadvantaged backward castes, whereas, the Congress party was the party of the Brahmins and the well-to do landlords and religiously inclined upper castes. So, the DMK could become a party of the masses very soon as the backward castes comprised the majority of Tamil population.

Interestingly, as Frankel puts it, the entry into Madras politics of the Backward non-Brahmins did not present any crisis of democratic incorporation either in the form of a confrontation between Brahmins and non-Brahmins, or between the large land owners from elite cultivating castes and the small farmers of the lower rank.²² He further states that by the late 1960s, however, the forward non-Brahmins constituted a major chunk of the DMK administration, but the leaders were committed to the rational ideology of the party of defying caste barriers, and even the practice of untouchability. They did not however favour agrarian reforms in the fear of losing their economic domination in the village society. This policy did not also irk the elite land lord castes, and in fact, helped them. To compensate for this the DMK or its successor, its splinter party, the All

²¹ See *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.243, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

²² *Ibid*, p.244

India Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIMDK), as Frankel states, adopted some populist policies like reservation and social welfare measures. As we all know, Tamil Nadu introduced the reservation for the first time, to the Backward Classes in education and the government services, but by the 1980s, it pushed up the proportion of reserved seats, according to Frankel, in college admissions and government employment to almost seventy percent.²³ It also undertook various social welfare programmes 'ranging from massive urban housing developments for the lower middle classes to rural programmes for building village roads, constructing school buildings, providing drinking water, installing one electric light connection in every hut, and most popular, the free mid-day meal scheme for eight million school children has given substance to the government image of generosity and its claim to caring for the poor.'²⁴

Thus, the DMK and AIMDK have successfully reconciled both the backward castes and the forward castes along with their charismatic leaders, and have captured power by dethroning the Congress from its hegemonic seat in Tamil Nadu.

III. MAHARASHTRA : ASSERTION OF THE MAHARS AND CHALLENGE TO THE DOMINANT HEGEMONY

In Maharashtra, on the other hand, there were movements against the

²³ See *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.246, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, p.1991.

²⁴ Ibid.

Brahminic domination, or more broadly against the caste system. The movement started by the Untouchables (Mahars) was famous as the Mahar movement. As we know from the previous discussion, it brought a degree of awareness and unity that enabled the Untouchables to create a political party, various hostels, schools and colleges, and an effective Buddhist conversion movement before the death of its leader, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The other movement was the non-Brahmin movement which grew chiefly among the dominant agricultural castes of the Marathas (farmers). The non-Brahman movement of Madras actually has a more coherent history and an earlier period of successful political activity than that of Maharashtra.²⁵ Regarding the Mahar movement, Zelliott however states,

‘There was also a movement, or a group of movements, among the Untouchables of Madras, although neither this movement nor others among the Ilavas of the Malabar coast, the Chamars of Chhastisgarh area, the Depressed Classes of the Punjab or the Namshudras of Bengal were as sustained and all-encompassing as that among the Mahars of Maharashtra’.²⁶

Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah of Madras, was also involved in political action and was considered to be Ambedkar’s chief rival for the Depressed Class leadership. He was the first nominated member from the Depressed Classes on the Central Legislative Assembly. He instituted Depressed class conferences and also testified to the Simon Commission. He had some following even among the Mahars of Vidarbha as well as in South India, but Ambedkar surpassed and

²⁵ See Eleanor Zelliott, 1992, *The Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra* in “From Untouchable to Dalit”, p.33.

²⁶ Ibid.

outshone him.

We will discuss here the Mahar movement first. As we know Mahars were inferior village servants but with the coming of British administration, the village roles of Mahars got reduced, and they took up various new occupations. According to Zelliott, 'New occupations and the concomitant upward thrust created a new sort of Mahar and the pioneering leadership for the larger movement came from a group which lacked neither education nor a sense of self-respect.'²⁷ The early leadership and inspiration came mostly from people who had entered the British Army and later it came from the educated intellectual community. Gopal Baba Walangkar, Subhedar Bahadur Gangaram Krishnajee of Pune, Subhedar Savadkar, Shivram Janba Kamble and B.R. Ambedkar were some of the prominent figures who provided the life-force to the Mahar movement. After the astute leadership of Ambedkar who strived through out his life for the betterment of the Untouchables, not a significant leader of his stature emerged in Maharashtra but the party, he visualised to form, took birth in 1957 after his death. The Republican party of India tried to champion the Dalit interests but in electoral politics, it could not make any significant breakthrough. As Ghanashyam Shah puts it, 'The Scheduled Castes as a group have very little opportunity to win the battle in electoral politics because they are a minority in the constituencies. Moreover, their leaders have been coopted by different

²⁷ See Eleanor Zelliott, 1992, *The Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra*, in "From Untouchable to Dalit", p.36.

parties in an effort to gain the support of Scheduled Caste voters.²⁸

In spite of electoral debacle, the Scheduled Castes organised a morcha (procession) in 1965 to the Council House, Bombay, against the single member constituency.²⁹ A number of scattered and spontaneous agitations have also launched in the post-independence period. For instance, two massive land Satyagrahas were offered in the mid-fifties, in Maharashtra, demanding distribution of waste land to the landless Harijans. There were also certain Schedule Caste sponsored land grab movements in Maharashtra in the mid-sixties. Shah states that confrontation between Scheduled Caste agricultural labourers and upper land owning classes have also been frequent in Maharashtra as well as in other parts of the country like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra and Tamil Nadu in the post-independence era. However, according to Zelliott, between December 1965 and January 1966, a large Satyagrah was held in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra in which 3,00,000 Satyagrahis participated. It made a number of demands. They were :

- (a) A portrait of Dr. Ambedkar as 'Father of the Indian Constitution' in the Central Hall of parliament,
- (b) The nation's land given to the tiller,
- (c) Idle and wasteland given to landless labour,

²⁸ *Grass-Roots Mobilization in Indian Politics* by Ghanashyam Shah p.272, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

²⁹ Ibid.

- (d) Adequate distribution of grain and control over rising prices,
- (e) Improvement of the situation of slum dwellers,
- (f) Full implementation of the Minimum Wages Act of 1948,
- (g) Extension of Scheduled Caste privileges to the Scheduled Caste members who have embraced Buddhism,
- (h) The ceasing of harassment of the Depressed Classes,
- (i) Full justice under the Untouchability Offences Act,
- (j) Reservation in services for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes completed by 1970.³⁰

Recently some other demands have been made in accretion to the above. They are, (a) a change of the name of Marathawada University to Dr. Ambedkar University, (b) the creation of Dalitstan for the security and safety of Dalits. So, there has been an ascending spirit of consciousness among the Dalits in the contemporary era.

Prakash Ambedkar, the grandson of Ambedkar is now in the helm of affairs of the Bharatiya Republican Party but it has lost its charm because of opportunistic alliances with the Congress and Shiv Sena. However, according to Shah,

“with the change in market structure in the post-independence period and the rise in education among small sections of Harijans, small entrepreneurs and a white-collar middle class have emerged among the Scheduled Castes. These have become militant and call the Scheduled

³⁰ See Eleanor Zelliot, 1992, *Learning the Use of Political Means : the Mahars of Maharashtra*, in “From Untouchable to Dalits”, p.117.

Castes the 'Dalits', that is a poor and exploited class."³¹

Zelliot states that the Dalit Panther, which was formed in 1972 by a group of young educated Buddhists imitating the Black Panther of America, is the most interesting socio-political development among Ambedkar's followers. However, in the opinion of Lata Murugkar, there were several factors which contributed to the birth of the Dalit Panther movement in Maharashtra. The worsening socio-economic conditions of landless labourers and small farmers with increasing inflation and unemployment, the failure of the Third Five Year Plan to tackle these problems, the growing consciousness of the youth, the increasing atrocities on Dalits, the constant apathy of political parties towards the Dalits' problems, EVR's impact in terms of his rhetoric against Hinduism and Brahminism, the impact of the Bhim Sena movement in Karnataka, the impact of the Naxalite movement of 1967 started in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and North Bengal, and the deep influence of rebellious and explosive Dalit literature were some of the prominent factors that facilitated the emergence of the Dalit Panther.³² The Panthers offered a challenge to unite to the politicians in Ambedkar's movement and attempted to counter violence against the Untouchables in the village. They also brought to public attention the emerging Dalit Sahitya, the literature of the oppressed, a revolt against the mainstream literature which has purportedly failed

³¹ See *Grass-Roots Mobilisation in Indian Politics* by Ghanshyam Shah, p.273, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

³² For more details, see Lata Murugkar, 1991, *Factors Responsible for the Emergence in "Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra"*.

to depict the problems and agonies of the downtrodden. As Shah states, 'The increasing number of atrocities against the Scheduled Castes find their echo in Dalit Literature, "which contained intimations of revolt".'³³ However, 'by the late 1980s, as Zelliott states, the united power of the Dalit Panthers is much reduced by splits, but local efforts continue and the literary movement which accompanied the rise of the Panthers, is still blooming.'³⁴ Though the elites of the Dalits have been won over and coopted by the Congress and other parties, the Dalits however do not back track to put up a brave fight when injustice and atrocities are perpetrated on them on a large scale. They retaliated in Bombay city in 1972, in Marathawada in 1979, and in Gujarat in 1981 and 1985. The recent garlanding of Ambedkar's statue with chappals led to a caste riot in Maharashtra as a result of vigorous retaliation from the Dalits. Though exploited, they are no longer suppressed and dormant, and are infact, more conscious and better equipped than ever.

On the other hand, the non-Brahmin movement had also its presence felt for quite sometime, in Maharashtra. The first non-Brahmin organisation, the Satya Shodak Samaj (Truth-seeking Society) was established in Pune in 1873. According to Zelliott, 'It is this organisation which is seen as the earliest sign of

³³ *Grass-Roots Mobilisation in Indian Politics by Ghanashyam Shah, p.273, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.*

³⁴ Eleanor Zelliott, 1992, *Gandhi and Ambedkar : A Study in Leadership*, p.180, in "From Untouchable to Dalit."

the modern non-Brahman movement.’³⁵ Jotirao Phule spearheaded the movement, and it was consisted chiefly of urban-based non-Marathas. Thus, ‘The early non-Brahman leadership, according to Zelliott, did not come from those directly affected by the decline of the Maratha power’ (with the obvious exception of the Sahu Maharaj of Kolhapur who gave momentum to the movement till 1923).³⁶ But with the coming of the British, and decline of the Maratha power in the form of administrative changes that led to the disadvantage of the *Patil* (village headman, traditionally a Maratha), and to the advantage of the *Kulkarni* (village accountant, traditionally a Brahmin), that the Marathas jumped into the movement and took up the leadership. In 1948, when a Maharashtrian Brahman assassinated Mahatma Gandhi, Zelliott states, almost every village in the *desh* (plains) area of Maharashtra erupted in violence against the Brahmans of that place.³⁷

However, the reform associations of the Brahmins led by Ranade and Tilak, contributed to the intellectual justification of the non-Brahman movement in Maharashtra. Western India’s religious reform movement, the Prarthana Samaj, allowed its ceremonies to be conducted by Marathas. However, the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra was absorbed into the Congress in the 1930s whereas the Mahar movement remained outside the power of Congress

³⁵ See Eleanor Zelliott, 1992, *The Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra*, p.37, in “From Untouchable to Dalit.”

³⁶ *Ibid.*, The Bracket is not in the original.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.41.

absorption, solely due to Ambedkar. He associated his Mahar movement with the non-Brahmin movement initially, but after the mid-1930s, according to Zelliott, there were no independent non-Brahmin leaders left in Maharashtra. All of them, had joined the Congress. Joining the Congress did not however, mean that non-Brahmins gained any decisive power over the organisation at the state level. In the 1937 elections, the Congress formed the government. It was however, dominated by Gujaratis and Maharashtrian Brahmins. In 1948, according to Gail Omvedt,³⁸ the non-Brahmin leaders who joined the Congress, being disillusioned for the domination of the capitalists and Brahmins in the party, left the Congress to form the Shetkari Kamkari Paksh (SKP). In 1952 the radical section of the SKP led by the communists were expelled from the party and they formed the Kamgar Kisan Paksh (KSP). The SKP, KKP and CPI, all contested the 1952 elections and fared relatively well than Kerala and Andhra. So, the Congress responded to this radical non-Brahmin challenge by finally admitting non-Brahmins to its top level state leadership. Y.B. Chavan - a Maratha leader emerged at the top and he could win back many important non-Brahmin leaders from both the SKP and the CPI. So, the Congress party again consolidated its position in Maharashtra. In the late 1950s and 60s, the Congress party was unusually strong in Maharashtra in comparison to the rest of India. Thus, in the opinion of M.S. Gore,³⁹ the non-Brahmin movement failed in

³⁸ For more details, see Gail Omvedt, 1994, "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

³⁹ For more details, see M.S. Gore, 1989, "Non-Brahmin Movement in Maharashtra".

Maharashtra to sustain its separate and independent existence because 'it seemed to have reached a stage of natural merger in the large nationalistic stream' in the pre-independence era and got incorporated into the Congress in the post-independence era.

IV. BIHAR AND UTTAR PRADESH : BACKWARD CASTE/DALIT ASSERTION AND CHANGING POLITICAL EQUATIONS

In the pre-independence period, there was hardly any sustained sub-altern mobilisation in the North except, the Adi-Hindu movement in western Uttar Pradesh, and the Ad-Dharm movement in Punjab. It is only after independence, with the introduction of universal adult suffrage, parliamentary democracy, and spread of egalitarian values that the lower castes got an opportunity to assert a claim to power in the North. As we know, in 1955, the Backward Class Commission recommended reservation for the 'Other Backward Classes'. By 1957, the Upper Sudras (Yadavs, Koeris, Kurmis) became a significant part (22 percent) of the ruling Congress Legislature party in Bihar.⁴⁰ In Uttar Pradesh, however, the forward castes were less accommodative to the interests of the backward castes. By 1962, the Backward Classes however, managed to account for 30.3 per cent and 27.3 per cent of MLAs in the Praja Socialist Party and the Socialist Party respectively.⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.249, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.250.

However, Frankel is of the view that the intra-party conflict among the dominant upper castes provided a base for establishing an independent political power in both the states.⁴² In Bihar, inter-elite rivalries between Bhumihar and Rajput-led sub-coalitions became so bitter by the early 1960s that the Congress Chief Minister was forced to turn to leaders of the upper backwards who commanded a substantial group of following.⁴³ In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, Charan Singh emerged as the unrivaled leader of the prosperous Jat peasantry and became the spokesman of Backward Class interest. He was the first to recognise the political potential of channelizing the discontent of the backward castes. In the elections of 1967, the Congress suffered a set back in Uttar Pradesh in terms of the decline of vote from 36 percent in 1962 to 32 percent in 1967.⁴⁴ In Bihar, on the other hand, the leaders of the Socialist Party took up the reservation issue as an instrument to defeat the Congress and thereby strengthening their social base among the Backward Classes. The 1967 elections produced a popular leader of the Backward Classes, Karpoori Thakur, a socialist and a member of barber caste who took up the Backward Class issue very persistently. However, one of the major defeats suffered by the Congress party in eight states in 1967 occurred in Bihar. The party's popular vote declined from over 41 percent in 1962 to 33 percent five years later and its seats dropped from

⁴² *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.249, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp.251-252.

185 to 128. The Socialist Party, on the other hand, gained from 5 percent to 17 percent popular vote and its seats from 7 to 68.⁴⁵

The defeat of the Congress in the two largest states of India made the leaders realise the need to mobilise the lower castes for support. This led to the rise of Yadavs in Bihar politics. In Uttar Pradesh, the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) formed by Charan Singh, emerged as the second largest party in the state after the Congress. Frankel states that it is not only the adult suffrage that helped the rise of Backward Classes in North India but also the abolition of Zamindari system played a vital role.⁴⁶ This led to a considerable extent the shrinking of economic gap between the forward and backward castes and helped the process of their political assertion. In 1969, there was split in the Bihar Congress.⁴⁷ While Brahmins stood solidly behind Indira Gandhi, senior Bhumihar and Rajput faction leaders joined the rival group. A Yadav was chosen as Chief Minister in Bihar when the Congress formed the government in 1970. In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, by 1974, Charan Singh was getting stronger with his increasing support base among the Backwards. Frankel states that the period of Emergency from 1975-1977 further alienated the Upper Backwards from the Congress.⁴⁸ In Bihar, the Brahmin Chief Minister, Jagannath Mishra, opposed the reservation to

⁴⁵ *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.251, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.253.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.255.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.256.

the Backward Classes recommended by the state Backward Class Commission in 1976. So, in 1976, the election to the State Assemblies saw an unusual alignment in Bihar.⁴⁹ Bhumihars and Rajputs as well as Yadavs support the hastily organised Janata Party comprising of the Bharatiya Lok Dal of Charan Singh, the Samyukta Socialist Party, successor of the Socialist Party, and Jana Sangh. The Congress support base shrunk to its Brahman-Scheduled Caste axis. The Janata in Bihar won an unprecedented 68 percent of the vote for the Lok Sabha, and won a two-thirds majority of seats in the legislative assemblies at seven states, including Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.⁵⁰ The Emergency was a significant factor though the growing political awareness of the Backward Class also played a key role because of the anti-reservation stand taken by the Congress government in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

After the Janata Party formed the government at the Centre in 1977, Charan Singh was empowered to appoint Chief Ministers in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Haryana. Karpoori Thakur became the Chief Minister of Bihar who undermined the growing dissent of the Forwards and gave important positions to the Backwards. Moreover, he announced in Bihar of 25 percent reservation for the 'Other Backward Classes'.⁵¹ This led to the outburst of growing displeasure of the Forwards and there were street-fighting and large scale destruction of

⁴⁹ *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F.R. Frankel, p.256, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

public property by upper caste youth who vociferously rejected the reservation policy. Thakur was however, toppled before he could implement his plans. In the Centre, on the other hand, Charan Singh defected and formed his own government, but did not last more than a month. The lack of coordination, proper organisation, and greed for power cost them dearly facilitating the Congress to come back to power in 1980. Similarly in Uttar Pradesh, Ram Naresh Yadav, the nominee of Charan Singh, announced in 1977, a more modest reservation policy providing 15 percent government jobs for the Backward Classes.⁵² Riots however, broke out and the Chief Minister was toppled. So, any threat to the domination of the upper castes was met with stiff resistance.

As Kothari puts it, it is not only in the entrenched castes but also in the ascendant castes that inter-personal, inter-group, or inter-caste rivalry takes place. The Backward Classes also fall a prey to the same weakness. Some joined certain political parties for political survival, some formed their own parties. The Backward Class as a whole which by nature is a heterogeneous bloc, however, failed to act as a solid block. The polarisation, thus, between the Forwards and Backwards did not materialise. The Congress though said to be a forward caste party, tried to woo the Backward Classes as well. However, as Frankel states, 'The Forward Castes gained power once again but the caste ideology that

⁵² See *Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics* by F. R. Frankel, p.258, in "India's Democracy" edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

historically legitimated their dominance had been grievously damaged.’⁵³

So, in the post-independence era, we find that the Backward Classes as well as the Dalits have been enormously politicised and mobilised. According to Shah, ‘The Kolis in Gujarat, the Yadavs, the Koiris, and the Kurmis in Bihar, the Kuruba and the Beela in Karnataka, the Nadars in Tamil Nadu, the Izhavas in Kerala are some of the important backward castes that have been mobilised in politics.’⁵⁴ Due to the economic development and the spread of egalitarian values, these castes have emerged, as Atul Kohli puts it, as a ‘free-floating political resource’.⁵⁵ Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, we find sudden upsurge of Dalit as well as Backward Class movements. Alongwith Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, there was a Dalit Sangharsh Samiti in Karnataka that emerged out of the 1973 riot over a Dalit minister’s description of conventional Kannada literature as *bhoosa* or cattle feed. It was, as Gail Omvedt sates, organisationally the strongest and long lasting Dalit movement in the country.⁵⁶ In Gujarat, Dalit Panthers were formed after rioting over extending reservations to ‘Backward Classes’ focused attacks on Dalits. In Bihar and Andhra, Indian People’s Front (IPF) and People’s War Group (PWG) were formed in the Naxalite fashion which are still carrying out the struggle. In Andhra, a separate Andhra Dalit

⁵³ See *Middle Classes and Castes in India’s Politics* by F. R. Frankel, p.258, in “India’s Democracy” edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

⁵⁴ See *Grass-Roots Mobilization in Indian Politics* by Ghanashyam Shah, p.266, in “India’s Democracy”, edited by Atul Kohli, 1991.

⁵⁵ *Introduction* by Atul Kohli, p.15, in “India’s Democracy” edited by Atul Kohli, p.1991.

⁵⁶ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Conclusion* in “Dalits and the Democratic Revolution”, p.337.

Mahasabha was formed in 1984 after a series of village atrocities took place. So, a spate of Dalit organisation has grown all over the country alongwith assertion of the Backward Classes. And as it has been made clear from the whole discussion that the Congress party lost its hegemony in the political field after 1960s. It has come to power off and on but its dominance as a single party has got washed away when the Backward Classes became more self-aware and politically conscious. The implementation of Mandal Commission Report for giving 27 percent reservation to the 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs) triggered off a series of anti-reservation agitations leading to violence, destruction of public property, self-immolation of by upper caste youth, in most parts of the country. Whether reservation should be given, whether it serves the purpose for which it is intended, though are important issues, do not form a part of the discussion here. What is important to note here is that the reservation or positive discrimination provided the OBCs with hope to come up in the social ladder in terms of status and power. As DN⁵⁷ argues that a considerable section of the upper backward castes (like Yadavs, Koeris, and Kurmis in U.P. and Bihar) have emerged as rich peasants and even capitalist farmers in the last two decades by taking advantage of the reservation in education and jobs. Their strength is visible in their growing importance in electoral politics. It is the growing strength of the upper backward castes which is providing a challenge to upper

⁵⁷ For more details, see *Reservation and Class Structure of Castes* by DN in "Economic and Political Weekly", January 13, 1990, p.13.

caste domination. The Dalits and the lower sections of the backward castes are too low down the scale to pose a challenge to upper caste domination of higher-level jobs and professions. So, the struggle in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is of the rising sections of the backward castes challenging the monopoly of the upper castes, while the upper caste backlash is trying to preserve the crumbling monopoly. It is also the case in other parts of the country. Its always the upper sections (who are educationally, economically and politically relatively developed) of the deprived (SCs, STs, and OBCs) that take advantage of opportunities to rise in the social hierarchy. But, some times, as BM⁵⁸ argues, they tend to become alienated from their own social base and develop a vested interest in the entrenched power structure. Whatever, they tend to become they however, emerge as a threat and challenge to the upper caste domination. So any attempt from the upper caste to deprive them of the reservation facility which was made in the wake of the implementation of the Mandal Commission recommendations, was met with consolidated resistance. This is one of the many manifestations of the new role of the backward castes.

The rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh is a significant indication of the Dalit as well as Backward Class assertion. The BSP had its origin in a lower middle class trade union organisation of government employees, the BAMCEF formed in 1976 by Kanshi Ram, who had briefly

⁵⁸ See *Elite's battle for Status-Quo* by BM, in "Economic and Political Weekly", September 15, 1990, p.2036.

joined the RPI in the late 1960s, but left it as he felt it was a Congress Stooge.⁵⁹ It was later in 1984 that BSP was formed. Before this, except in 1977 when a section of the Scheduled Caste with its leader Jagjivan Ram joined the Janata Party, the Scheduled Caste's support to the Congress was overwhelming. But, with the coming of the BSP and the ascendance of Mayawati to Chief Ministership, Dalits' supports have inched towards the BSP. Together, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, represent a post-Ambedkar leadership which has tried to adapt Ambedkarism to the North Indian political situation.⁶⁰ When in power in the 1990s, they have also attempted to draw on the legacy of not only Jotiba Phule but also Periyar through the *Periyar Melas*. The ideology of the BSP is similar to that of the anti-Brahmin movements of South India. However, as Sudha Pai argues, a fundamental difference is that its anti-Brahminism is more political than cultural. The basic aim is to replace Brahminical political rule by that of the Dalit-Bahujans, as it would provide the latter better status and speedier economic advancement.⁶¹ The BSP also believes in total revolution like Ambedkar but in a different way. In the opinion of Sudha Pai, the BSP wants to capture power through mobilisation and electoral victory from the Brahmins who comprise only 10-12 percent of the population, and when electorally it penetrates deeper into society, it would automatically transform it. If one analyses the

⁵⁹ *The BSP in Uttar Pradesh* by Sudha Pai, in "Seminar-471", November, 1998, p.39.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

electoral statistics from 1985 onwards, then it becomes clear that the BSP is gaining ground. It has made alliance with the Samajvadi Party of Mulayam Singh in 1993 and in doing so, it drew inspiration from Ambedkar who himself advocated for an alliance with the Shudra. This however, did not last as a result of competition and conflict between the two sections. The backward castes are very often the perpetrators of atrocities on Dalits, and hence, the incompatibility hinders the forging of a durable alliance. However, in recent time, the BSP has transformed itself into an opportunistic party by aligning with the BJP in 1995 and 1997, and making an electoral alliance with the Congress. But for Kanshi Ram, these alliances are short-term strategic associations to capture power in order to introduce social change from above.⁶²

However, there is a process of 'Ambedkarisation' which is in the offing.⁶³ This leads to the erection of numerous statues of Ambedkar in Dalit *bastis* in villages across Uttar Pradesh, the building of Ravidas and Valmiki temples and Libraries, and use of 'Jai Bhim' and not 'Ram Ram' as a form of greeting. Thus, a strong Dalit consciousness is gaining momentum in the present scenario. Earmarking developmental programmes for Ambedkar villages and a launching of Ambedkar Rozgar Yojana by Mayawati government are symptomatic of Dalit assertion in the socio-political arena. Thus, in the opinion of Gajendran, the emergence of BSP has upset the applecart of pro-caste Hindu politics. It has

⁶² See *The BSP in Uttar Pradesh* Sudha Pai, in "Seminar-471", November 1998, p.41.

⁶³ Ibid.

actualised in electoral politics what Phule began in 19th century Maharashtra as a social reform movement and what Ambedkar contemplated in his political experiments of the 1940s.⁶⁴ In spite of all these, the vast majority of the Dalits remain poor, illiterate, lack the requisite skills for competing in the modern world, enjoy unequal access to productive resources, and so on. The Indian ruling classes are no longer in a mood to accommodate the needs of the masses. Not a single one of the measures (land reform, minimum wages, dry land development, rural industries, etc.) meant for the welfare of the masses, especially the rural poor who mostly belong to the SCs, STs and the Backward Castes, has been implemented. Moreover, the natural resources like forests, fisheries, firewood etc. are slipping from the use of the poor to the hands of the rich who are also in the occupation of land.⁶⁵

Thus, in spite of the BSP coming to power, a Dalit becoming the President of India still, the Dalits have to go a long way. The upper castes are yet to walk that extra mile to embrace the Dalits without any hesitation and a sense of purity and pollution in mind. There are still increasing incidences of atrocities.

All that we have discussed so far makes it clear that we are witnessing a new socio-political context: a context that is challenging the earlier hegemony of the dominant castes, a context that is creating sufficient space for the subaltern

⁶⁴ *Transforming Dalit Politics*, by A. Gajendran, in "Seminar-471", November, 1998, p.25.

⁶⁵ See *This anti-Mandal Mania* by K. Balgopal, in "Economic and Political Weekly", October 6, 1990, p.2234.

castes to assert themselves in the political arena, a context in which, it seems, the Congress system or the 'grand Gandhi-Nehru consensus' has crumbled. It is in this changing context that the Dalits and other lower castes are seeking to gain their human agency. True, as we have already said, the situation is not yet fully conducive to the growth of a free/equal society. The atrocities against the oppressed castes continue. Yet, what cannot be denied is the awakening on the part of the subaltern castes and their active presence in the political life. No wonder, their struggle needs a philosophy, a worldview. It needs an ideologue. It needs a distinctive identity. And our point is that it is Ambedkarism that comes forward to fulfil this historic task. This explains the assertion of Ambedkarism in our times. This assertion is so powerful that it has shaped even the contemporary sociological writings - a phenomenon that we intend to discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

AMBEDKARISM AND SOCIOLOGICAL RESPONSES : AN ANALYSIS OF SELECT TEXTS

In the previous chapter, we saw how favourable socio-political contexts gave a momentum to the mercurial rise of Ambedkarism in the contemporary scenario. However, in this chapter, we will deal with a different issue though still revolving round the core issue of Ambedkarism. We know that Ambedkarism has influenced Dalit movement, Dalit struggle, Dalit consciousness, or putting it very clearly, it has boosted and catapulted the entire Dalit upsurge in the present day socio-political milieu, but what we fail to discern clearly at times is its indelible impact in the intellectual realm. There has been a fresh interest in Ambedkar who was sidelined for quite sometime for various reasons; one of them may be that the intellectual world being monopolised by upper castes grossly ignored and marginalised a subaltern hero like Ambedkar. Whatever may be the reasons, the prolonged apathy and indifference of the mainstream intellectuals could not however, dwarf the burgeoning importance of Ambedkarism in the society which is highly unequal and exploitative. Socio-politico-educational awakening along with better economic conditions have led to the rise of subaltern intellectuals. There has also been the growth of intellectuals who do not operate under the guise of upper caste inclination. So, Ambedkar could become a subject of intellectual discourse and as of today, we find a bulky collection of literature on Ambedkar and his thought-provoking

ideas. As Gopal Guru says, 'The Study of the Dalit movement has attracted some leading sociologists over the past two decades in the country and abroad. The centenary year of B.R. Ambedkar has seen a plethora of publications, thus, adding to the growing literature on Ambedkar, Dalit politics and Dalit movement.¹ The present chapter tries to highlight how contemporary Indian sociology has responded to the growth of a new paradigm like Ambedkarism. Putting it more plainly, 'how sociologists have been influenced by Ambedkarism in their thoughts and writings' is what constitutes the subject matter of this chapter.

The sociologists in their analyses of Dalit movement, however, usually revolve round certain concepts like 'social mobility', 'reference group', 'relative deprivation', 'anticipatory socialisation', 'emulation and sanskritization' etc. As Gopal Guru argues, scholars like M.S.A Rao, Barbara Joshi, Harold Issac, Owen Lynch, James Silverberg, Sachidanand, Anil Bhatt, Singer and Cohen, Nanduram, Patwardhan have made most of the above concepts as the major frame of reference for discussion of the emergence of reform, protest and movement among the Dalits.² However, these in no way exhaust the list of scholars who have contributed to the literature on Dalit movement. There are many others who are equally noteworthy for their commendable contributions.

¹ See Gopal Guru, *Dalit Movement in Mainstream Sociology* in "Economic and Political Weekly", April, 3, 1993, p. 570.

² Ibid.

Due to time constraint and other considerations, I have restricted myself to picking up some excellent sociological contributions of only three established scholars of the contemporary period, Gail Omvedt, Kancha Illaiah and M. S. Gore who have excelled in their analyses of Ambedkar's thoughts and Dalit movement, and I have tried to see in this chapter how Ambedkarism as a broad anti-caste paradigm, has shaped and moulded their analytical frameworks. However, the analysis of one by one in no way suggests the priority and importance attributed to them in that order. All of them are equally important and significant for this study.

I. GAIL OMVEDT : EXPLORING THE LIBERATARIAN POSSIBILITIES OF AMBEDKARISM

Gail Omvedt is a scholar activist with new social movements, especially women's groups and farmers' organisations. A Ph.D. from the University of California, she has been a citizen of India since 1982. She has been actively involved in anti-caste campaigns since the 1970s. Her academic writings include several books and articles on class, caste and gender issues. She is a consulting sociologist on gender environment and rural development and lives in Kasegaon in southern Maharashtra. However I will pick up her 'Dalits and the Democratic Revolution' (1994) and 'Dalit Visions' (Tracts for the Times/8, 1995) for our analytical purpose where she has extensively dealt with Ambedkar and his ideas and philosophy.

DALITS AND THE DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION (1994)

In this book, Omvedt has tried to explain that there had been the spread of a broad democratic ideology with values of freedom, equality and autonomy with the spread of capitalism. Though there was also the coterminous development of increased repression and exploitation but the emancipatory forces connected to the broad democratic ideology were inherently subversive of all forms of subordination and inequality. From this perspective, Omvedt states, the Dalit movement and the overall radical anti-caste movements were a crucial expression of the democratic revolution in India, more consistently democratic – and in the end more consistently nationalistic – than the elite-controlled Indian National Congress.³ She has primarily focused on the development of ideologies of Dalit liberation (particularly that of Ambedkar) and their relationship to Marxism as understood in the Indian context, and Gandhism.

Omvedt has followed a revised ‘historical materialism’ or ‘revisionist Marxist approach’ because she has moved beyond the narrow ‘class’ approach as well as the understanding of ‘nationalism’ only in terms of political opposition to a foreign power.⁴ Also, she has followed the ‘discourse-analytical approach’ of Laclau and Mouffe - the neo-Gramscian theorists, who stress ‘the struggle for ideological hegemony, without privileging class actors or particular class positions, arguing that even working class struggles will not be revolutionary or

³ See Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Introduction*, p.16, in “Dalits and the Democratic Revolution”.

⁴ Ibid.

progressive unless they are articulated in a context of general emancipation. This context of emancipation has to be provided by an ideological discourse...'⁵ Initially, it was provided by the broad democratic ideology with values of equality, freedom and autonomy and later by Ambedkar's emancipatory values.

Omvedt states that the 'exploited' as a whole included a very wide range of castes, the broad 'toiling caste' majority.⁶ However, there was no absolute unity and solidarity among the exploited as such rather there was enough divisions and contradictions having a retarding effect on class struggle. There was caste rivalry even among the untouchables e.g., Mahars and Mangs in Maharashtra, Chamars and Chuhras in north India, Malas and Madigas in Andhra. Even peasants used to exploit Dalit labourers. Those very low in the caste hierarchy also exploited the Dalits. So the toiling class never posed a unified picture. But Omvedt has made it clear that though the Dalits have contradictions, once they get organised, they could be more revolutionary and could play a vanguard role. However, Dalit revolt, unlike the Peasant revolts which were not quite anti-systemic rather for the establishment of a new level of feudal intermediaries, was more likely to be anti-systemic and in the opinion of Omvedt, perhaps for this reason, it is hard to trace it as a collective factor in the pre-British period.⁷ Cast struggle like class struggle could become, according to

⁵ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Introduction*, p.16, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

⁶ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Towards a Historical Materialist Analysis*, p.48, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.49.

her, revolutionary only when it could pose an alternative, a more advanced system, rather than being simply a negative protest or a competitive struggle for more economic or socio-cultural rights within the framework of exploitation.⁸ It was with the onset of the British rule and spread of ideologies like radical democracy and socialism that a new anti-caste revolt was increasingly spearheaded by a Dalit liberation movement alongwith other struggles like peasant struggles coming into being.

However, even in the British India, caste orthodoxy could engulf significant spheres of life. As Omvedt puts it, religious 'Private law' defining family/gender/caste relationships as interpreted by Brahman pundits and Muslim Mullahs was taken cognizance of by the British-run courts.⁹ While on the one hand, caste orthodoxy was maintained, on the other hand, colonialism had a complex effect on the functioning of the caste system. Omvedt points out that it did not simply create 'classes' alongwith 'castes' but also new groups like a factory working class and plantation proletariat came into existence...¹⁰ By and large, caste channelled workers to segmented labour markets. Brahmans continued to have near-monopoly control over administrative positions and professions, and miners and plantation workers were drawn from the lowest

⁸ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Towards a Historical Materialist Analysis*, p.49, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

⁹ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Caste, Region and Colonialism : The Context of Dalit Revolt*, p.85, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.86.

groups. So, according to Omvedt, caste hierarchy remained as usual with Brahmans at the top and the most mobile, and the lowest castes, especially Dalits, also mobile but so greatly impoverished and exploited as to find it very hard to benefit from such mobility.¹¹

However, as Omvedt analyses, the various elite reforms initiated from above like Prarthana Samaj, Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj, though did not do much to uproot the caste system as well as its exploitation, but certainly, it helped in the process of building the consciousness that was growing among the Dalits. Phule's ideas and leadership also provided the impetus to a new Dalit movement that was to grow. His stress on 'Aryan theory of race' to indicate the Dalits and Shudra castes being the natives and Brahmans to be the outsiders gave a fillip to the consciousness of the Dalits. However, Dalit movement though was quite formidable in Maharashtra under Ambedkar's able guidance, it was not quite so in other regions and even glaring variations were to be found.

Omvedt argues that till the 1930s, organizations, struggles and activities were emerging out of very different political and socio-economic conditions, from the largely backward political autocracy of Hyderabad state to the agriculturally based commercial development of coastal Andhra to the industrial-agricultural centre of Nagpur-Vidarbha. These movements had some similar features: they were nearly all based on the largest 'untouchable' caste of the

¹¹ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Caste, Region and Colonialism : The Context of Dalit Revolt*, p.88, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

region; they emerged out of the initiations from the caste Hindu reformers; and they all had believed in the 'non-Aryan' ideology giving the Dalits the status of the sons of the soil.¹² The two trends which were quite in the air, were integration and autonomy. While some were inclined towards an integration approach, others wanted a radical assertion of autonomy from Hinduism and from the social and political organisations of caste Hindus. In such a crucial scenario, Ambedkar, as put by Omvedt, provided ideology, vision and leadership to the Dalits for an autonomous Dalit movement to emerge for radical assertion of autonomy.

Omvedt states that in the context of rising working class and peasant organising and the growth not only of nationalism but of a non-Brahman political party, Bombay presidency 'saw the most vigorous Dalit movement in India emerge under the leadership of B.R. Ambedkar.'¹³ Though the movement was based on the Mahar caste, Ambedkar nevertheless showed interest for alliance with Shudras. Omvedt considered Ambedkar to be the heir of Phule's call for a movement of Shudras and Ati-Shudras.¹⁴ Though Ambedkar 'accepted some of Phule's ideas, he also rejected Phule's other ideas. He remained aloof from the interpretation of the Dalits as non-Aryan original inhabitants. He also drew back

¹² Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Emergence of the Dalit Movement, 1900-30*, p.133, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

¹³ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Emergence of the Dalit Movement, 1910-30 : Bombay Presidency*, p.140, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.149.

from a decisive rejection of Hinduism and of the Gandhian trend within the Congress. But, as Omvedt has put it, it was later that he made a decision to take a fully anti-Congress stand to build an independent political party in the context of an anti-Gandhism that was to remain through out his life.¹⁵

In taking the stand of building a political alternative to the Congress, in seeking an alliance with non-Brahmans (a Dalit-Bahujan or Shudra-Ati-Shudra alliance) in seeking to organise peasants and workers, and in fight for the destruction of the caste system and not just the abolition of untouchability, Ambedkar, in the opinion of Omvedt, was maintaining and carrying forward a tradition begun by Jotiba Phule.¹⁶ It is a fact however, that almost all other movements that emerged against the Brahminic hegemony and Congress got merged with the Congress in course of time. This did not happen with the Dalit movement and the whole credit goes to Ambedkar. Gandhism did not offer any promise for Dalit liberation from caste exploitation and inhumanities as it laid stress on reforming Hinduism and retaining the Chaturvanya and the caste system.

Gandhi formed the Harijan Sevak Sangh which was led by him and his followers. Ambedkar intervened and sought the control of the Sangh in the hand of the Dalits. Gandhi did not agree to this and said that untouchability as an evil

¹⁵ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *Emergence of the Dalit Movement, 1910-30 : Bombay Presidency*, p.159, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

¹⁶ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *The Turning Point, 1930-36 : Ambedkar, Gandhi, the Marxists*, p.166, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

of Hinduism had to be purged by the Hindu themselves. Thus, it was simply impossible for Gandhi and Ambedkar to work together on this basis.¹⁷ And on many other counts, they had a clash of ideas which have been clearly dealt with in the first chapter. So, for Ambedkar, according to Omvedt, Gandhism was not at all a panacea for the ills and woes suffered by the Dalits. So, he looked for Marxism as an alternative. Marxism, in its Indian incarnation, did not take up issue like caste and untouchability at all. The communists denounced Ambedkar as ‘separatists’, ‘opportunistic’ and pro-British.¹⁸ Thus, Marxism in its embodiment in the Indian communist movement failed to offer a real alternative.¹⁹

Hence, Gandhism as well as Marxism had little to offer to the Dalits for their liberation. Ambedkar got this idea very clearly. His effort at building a united political front comprising non-Brahmans, peasants and workers as social groups who were against Brahminism also failed. The failure was suicidal for the ILP as it could not continue as a militant party representing the interest of workers and peasants against both economic and caste oppression. So the SCF was formed and as Omvedt argues, it was a step backwards from the 1930s radicalism. Its formation meant giving up the effort to form a broad radical

¹⁷ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *The Turning Point, 1930-36 : Ambedkar, Gandhi, the Marxists*, p.176, in “Dalits and the Democratic Revolution”.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.183.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.162.

party of Dalit and caste Hindu workers and peasants.²⁰ After independence till 1956, Ambedkar just acted like a vigilance officer whose job was to see that the interests of the Dalits were not trampled upon. As Omvedt puts it, turning away from the effort to form a broad political party with a vision of revolutionary social transformation built around a class-caste alliance of Dalits and Shudra workers and peasants, the SCF and Ambedkar functioned from 1942 to 1956 as the political representative of Dalits, as a special interest group within a statist-capitalist democratic structure.²¹ It is because, Ambedkar realised that there was no longer time left for the visions of a socialist future and no organised force to ally with the Dalits in fighting for it.²²

In spite of extensive discussion on Ambedkar in the entire book, Omvedt has further analysed what Ambedkarism is, in a separate chapter. She views it as the theory of Dalit liberation. According to her, Ambedkarism is today a living force in India, much as Marxism is. It defines the ideology of the Dalit movement, and to a large extent, an even broader anti-caste movement.²³ She argues that Ambedkar's thought was not always consistent and it did not fully resolve the problems he grappled with. But some themes stand out –

²⁰ Gail Omvedt, 1994, *The Years of Radicalism: Bombay Presidency, 1936-42*, p.217, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

²¹ Ibid., p.218.

²² Ibid.

²³ Gail Omvedt, 1994, '*Ambedkarism*': *The Theory of Dalit Liberation*', p.223, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

1. An uncompromising dedication to the needs of his people, the Dalits which required the total annihilation of the caste system and the Brahminic superiority it embodied;
2. An almost equally strong dedication to the reality of India-but an India whose historical-cultural interpretation he sought to wrest from the imposition of a Hindu identity to understand it in its massive, popular reality;
3. The eradication of caste required a repudiation of Hinduism as a religion and adoption of an alternative religion, which he found in Buddhism;
4. Economic radicalism interpreted as socialism;
5. Rationalism, even he interpreted Buddhism on rational grounds;
6. He wanted a firmly autonomous Dalit movement with a constantly attempted alliance of the socially and economically exploited, projected as an alternative political front to the Congress party seen by him as the unique platform of Brahminism and capitalism.²⁴

Omvedt however states that Ambedkar's socialism had grown out of his interpretation of democracy rather than, as with Marxism a belief in the revolutionary destiny and world-creating powers of the proletariat. Thus, while he shared the belief of both liberals and Marxists of his time in the progressive forces of industrialism, science and modernity, he distinguished his views from

²⁴ Omvedt, 1994, '*Ambedkarism*' : *The Theory of Dalit Liberation*, pp.223-24, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

communism both in terms of the means necessary to achieve them and in terms of stressing democracy over the dictatorship of the proletariat. In a sense, 'state socialism' was aptly named in contrast to 'proletarian socialism'; it retained the belief in the state as a necessary phenomenon in even a socialist society and sought a share in power of workers and Dalits without seeing this as creating any unique kind of state.²⁵ She further argues that though Ambedkar's ideas of state ownership of basic industries and collective farmers would be questioned by many today along with his faith in a centralised, industrial factory-based economy but few would question his ideas regarding 'market by itself can not generate equality', 'the state might play a defining and guiding role or the members of society must act collectively through the state to regulate, limit and at points, supersede the market. This flexible 'socialism', coupled with political democracy and non-violent mass struggle, makes Ambedkar's economics still relevant today.²⁶

Regarding the historical analysis of Indian society, Omvedt is of the opinion that Ambedkar's interpretation remains incomplete in crucial ways because he failed to see social processes involving contradiction, violence and exploitation in terms of changing economic structures that underlay or influenced these rather he saw these entirely in terms of political and group conflict.²⁷

²⁵ Omvedt, 1994, '*Ambedkarism*': *The Theory of Dalit Liberation*, p.239, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.240.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.242.

According to Omvedt, Ambedkar proclaimed that no united ancient 'Hindu India' had ever existed; instead, there were 'three Indias' preceding the Muslim period. These were :

1. Brahminism describing the Aryan society of the Vedic period and a barbarian phase;
2. Buddhism-Mauryan empires embodying a Buddhist revolution, the rise of civilization and the assertion of basic forms of human equality;
3. Hinduism or a Hindu counter-revolution marked with the triumph of caste, and the subordination of women and Shudras.²⁸

This theory of Ambedkar denies the ancient character of the Hindu religion; and it also denies, in effect, the inevitability of its hegemony, the irrevocable and essential character of its association with India.²⁹ In his scheme of analysis, Ambedkar revealed that the origins of Shudras and the untouchables were essentially associated with Buddhism. And the social evolution in India took place through a civilizational clash between Brahminism and Buddhism. This kind of analysis was quite different from previous analysis. Omvedt argues that inspite of its incompleteness, this approach is methodologically helpful for an on-going analysis of the development of Indian society, It also strikes a theme radically different from his political writings of the 1940s which accepted a

²⁸ Omvedt, 1994, '*Ambedkarism*' : *The Theory of Dalit Liberation*, p.246, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

²⁹ Ibid., p.247.

Hindu identity.³⁰

Omvedt further discusses that Ambedkar's conversion to Buddhism was seen by Ambedkar and by large numbers of those who took part, as a social rebirth, a gaining of a new identity, a way in which the Dalits were leading, not simply joining a movement for the recreation of India.³¹ Thus, according to her, with the conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar achieved what Phule and Periyar, for all their resistance to Hinduism, had failed to achieve making a conscious non-Hindu identity a collective material and radicalising force in India.³²

Omvedt argues that relevance of Ambedkarism in the political arena has also become prominent today. Its insistence on a share in power as a precondition for Dalit liberation, interpretation of reservation in terms not simply of economic gain but of access to power, rejection of the politics of patronage, all have been major themes up today and we can see their full expression in Ambedkar : 'we must become a ruling community' was only one of his never-to-be-forgotten slogans.³³

However, Omvedt has taken up for analysis certain regions like Mysore, Coastal Andhra and Hyderabad where Ambedkar's active influence was negligible.

³⁰ Omvedt, 1994, '*Ambedkarism*': *The Theory of Dalit Liberation*, p.247, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution."

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.248.

³² *Ibid.*, p.249.

³³ *Ibid.*

MYSORE

According to Omvedt, there was neither an Ambedkarite (as in Maharashtra) nor a Marxist (as in Andhra) challenge to Congress hegemony among the Dalits, or among the masses in general. Nevertheless, perhaps even because of this lack of a clear political challenge, the Mysore case allows us to discern some major themes of the bourgeois – Brahman incorporation of Dalits in modern India.³⁴ A very strange phenomenon, indeed. She states that non-Brahmanism lacked the revolutionary zeal in Mysore and was, infact, engaged in the politics of reservation, each section of non-Brahman operating as interest group fighting for a share of the pie. As the non-Brahmans were numerically strong, Brahmins, to take on the challenge from them, aligned with the Dalits through an incorporate ideology.

Gandhism was quite influencing in Mysore. Gandhi's nation-wide 'Harijan tour' (7 November 1933-2 August 1934) gave birth to widespread activity in the Kannada-speaking district.³⁵ According to Omvedt, the dominant Gandhian-Brahminic reform effort was focused on religiously-defined moral upliftment coupled with appeals to a paternalistic state...the entire mobilising effort of the Harijan Sevak Sangh and similar bodies was from the top down, mobilising the middle classes and upper castes to act for the downtrodden and

³⁴ Omvedt, 1994, *Mysore, 1930-56: The Politics of Ram-Raj*, p.260, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.263.

conspicuously avoiding scope for the Dalits to organise themselves.³⁶ She further states that inspite of these limitations, the Gandhian effects were, until perhaps the 1970s, practically the only forum where some kind of philosophy of equalitarianism and social mobility could reach any significant number of rural Dalits.³⁷ Thus, while in Mysore, Gandhism provided both an incorporate ideology and an institutional mechanism whereby reformist Brahmans could build a kind of alliance with Dalits the non-Brahman movement in the opinion of Omvedt, centred not on radicalism but on the all-pervasive politics of reservations, provided an equally important context for assimilation.³⁸ As is evident, the incorporate ideology never allowed any movement of the Dalits to emerge in Mysore. This however remained till 1970s after which a new Dalit movement represented mainly by the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, a new opposition farmers' movement, the Rayat Sangh and a women's movement emerged in Mysore influenced by ideologies like Marxism, Ambedkarism and Lohiaite Socialism.³⁹

Omvedt argues that Marxism and Ambedkarism never had much force in Karnataka before the recent decades but Lohiate socialism had its impact since 1950s. It laid stress on caste, class and gender issues. Lohia saw caste as a

³⁶ Omvedt, 1994, *Mysore, 1930-56: The Politics of Ram-Raj*, p.266-67, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

³⁷ Ibid., p.267.

³⁸ Ibid., p.268.

³⁹ Ibid., pp.261-62.

crucial aspect of domination and exploitation in India, and projected an alliance of Shudras, Harijans, Muslims, Adivasis and women as central to a revolutionary movement.⁴⁰ His attention to women's oppression had also got a wide following. According to Omvedt, Lohiaism did not come into Karnataka as an ideology of full-scale Dalit liberation but rather as a reformist trend which was in some ways compatible with the liberal co-operation patterns that had been established in the 'Ram-Raj' atmosphere of the state. Nevertheless, Ambedkar considered the socialist tradition that Lohia represented closer than almost any other political force...⁴¹

ANDHRA AND HYDERABAD

According to Omvedt, a vigorous autonomous Dalit movement had emerged in both coastal Andhra and Hyderabad during the 1920s. Dalits were economically and socially radical in these regions and they resisted absorption into either a strong 'Hindu' or a strong 'Muslim' identification. They agitated for rights to land and fair wages and as such, fought against feudalism and other social and economic oppression. But, as Omvedt puts it, during the 1930s and 1940s, the Dalits were pulled in various directions by the major forces in Telugu politics, either into the communist movement or into a pro-Hindu Congress or pro-Muslim politics of patronage...⁴² However, certain sections who aligned with

⁴⁰ Omvedt, 1994, *Mysore, 1930-56: The Politics of Ram-Raj*, p.272, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.277.

⁴² Omvedt, 1994, *Andhra and Hyderabad, 1930-46 : Foundations of Turmoil*, p.281, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

Ambedkar tried to constitute a 'third force' but were unable to do so effectively. Omvedt states that in Hyderabad during the 1940s both the rationalistic thrust and organisational incapacity of Ambedkar's all-India leadership becomes clear.⁴³ In the end, Ambedkarite 'Dalit movement' had little impact.⁴⁴ The left could not take up the caste issue effectively and failed to emerge as a recognising force for the Dalits. The Dalits in large number were getting absorbed into the Congress with its Harijan terminology and its reiteration of a Hindu identity. Thus, the vigorous Dalit movement which emerged during 1920s faded away after the late 1940s due to lack of strong leadership and organisation. Ambedkar's preoccupation with Maharashtra and his subsequent involvement in Delhi hindered any chance of strong organisation and concerted effort being made elsewhere and especially in coastal Andhra. In Hyderabad, Dalits had strong organisation and effective leadership and Ambedkar's impact was felt here due to Hyderabad's proximity with Bombay. However, the leadership rivalry and pro-Muslim leaning of some leaders thwarted the unity and solidarity. So, especially, two organisations namely *Depressed Classes Association (DCA)* headed by Venkatrao-a former Ambedkarite with a pro-Muslim leaning and *Scheduled Caste-Federation (SCF)* headed by Subbiah-an Ambedkarite, contested for hegemony in the Dalit community of Hyderabad state. But it is the

⁴³ Omvedt, 1994, *Andhra and Hyderabad, 1930-46 : Foundations of Turmoil*, p.281, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

⁴⁴ Ibid.

DCA under Venkatrao which gained an upper hand over SCF because of the Nizam taking certain steps for the Dalits. Finally, in a situation of extreme volatility and trauma as experienced in Hyderabad and coastal Andhra after independence, it is the lack of direction from central leadership that drastically affected the Dalit movement. Ambedkar himself in building up the SCF during the late 1940s had frequently urged that 'I have only to give a call and people will mobilise'.⁴⁵ Such organisational methods according to Omvedt, proved inadequate outside Maharashtra. In such a context, Gandhian approach provided scope for the political incorporation of the Dalits. Thus, as Omvedt argues the slavery imposed on the Dalits and other exploited classes and castes got reconstructed rather than abolished after independence due to lack of communication among various struggles that were taking place, and also due to the lack of strong, united, organised, mobilised, well directed, autonomous and independent Dalit movement in the regions.

Concluding Omvedt states that even after independence inspite of planned development, stress on strong heavy industrial base under the public sector largely in the direction of what Ambedkar himself had seen as the desired path of development, the injection of a veneer of Gandhism with Panchayati Raj and Khadi-village industries programme, economic exploitation, impoverishment and misery continued. Political democracy did not end the domination of an elite. It

⁴⁵ Omvedt, 1994, *Revolution, Repression and Recuperation*, p.315, in "Dalits and the Democratic Revolution".

is clear that a still-surviving caste system is continuing to structure these. The Dalits have thus renewed their struggle in the 1970s and 80s. Today the Dalits are no longer willing to accept a subordinated status. They are now quite assertive, organised, educated, aware of the democratic promises of the late twentieth century. There have been numerous organizations mushrooming almost all parts of the country, and Ambedkarism and Dalit themes are today in the 1990s gaining ground every where and providing ideological inspiration.

DALIT VISIONS (1995)

In 'Dalit visions', Omvedt has tried to explain Hinduism in its various facets as well as how various Dalit visions and ideals have emerged and opened up new ways of looking at the structures of their oppression within Hinduism and the premises of their emancipation. In her analysis, it becomes clear that alternative traditions to Hinduism are nurtured within Dalit movements which have questioned the traditional (taken-for-granted/Hindu) way of looking at Indian society and its history. Much of the ideas have already found its expression in the book just discussed 'Dalits and the Democratic Revolution'. So an attempt is made here to avoid replication.

Hinduism, according to Omvedt, has given birth to rampant and unjustifiable social inequalities and has also spawned the protests against these.⁴⁶ However, Hinduism always tried to thwart any challenge aimed at its hegemonic

⁴⁶ Omvedt, 1995, *Introduction*, p. 1, in "Dalit Visions".

status. Whether it comes in the form of the Dalit movement (Untouchable movement), or Non-Brahman movement, or various other movements which have emerged of late, like Tribal movement, Women's Movement, Environmental Movement, Naxalite Movement, Hinduism could not be dethroned. Rather the aggressive politics of the Hindutva forces that equates Hinduism with Nationalism has emerged and strengthened its status. Many, according to Omvedt, take the liberty to criticise communalism and the Hindutva politics but not Hinduism. They all fall to the impression that identifies 'Hindu' with 'Bharatiya', and Hinduism with the tradition of India. This position has however been vigorously contested by the Dalits.

Gandhi's principle of reformed Hinduism to incorporate the Dalits, religious tolerance for example to solve the problem of communalism, as well as Nehruvian secularism stressing on class to transcend caste and religion, never really solved the problem. Both of them, on the opinion of Omvedt, were Hindu spokes persons. While Gandhi tried to reform Hinduism and retain the caste system, Nehru completely ignored it and the exploitation and contradiction it involved. He thought that demands (such as reservations) raised by non-Brahman and Dalit groups were divisive, and tried to ignore them. Similarly, his historical discussion of caste sees it as essentially functionalist and integrative...⁴⁷ Omvedt argues that both Gandhian and Nehruvian solution failed in reforming

⁴⁷ Omvedt, 1995, *The Construction of Hinduism*, p. 14, in "Dalit Visions"

Hinduism sufficiently to allow a full participation in its religious centre by the low castes, in preventing the growth of a virulent and aggressive form of the religion, interpreting it as the national identity of India. By the 1990s both were reeling under the blows of popular disillusionment and the rise of the most virulent forms of 'Hindu nationalism'.⁴⁸

As has been discussed by Omvedt, the first challenge to Hinduism came from a Shudra caste social radical Jotiba Phule who saw Hinduism as Brahman exploitation and a weapon of domination. He inverted the 'Aryan theory of race' and held the Aryans as cruel and violent invaders who subjugated an egalitarian society and imposed a hierarchical and exploitative system with Hinduism as its legitimating ideology.

In her examples of Tarabai and Ramabai, Omvedt has tried to show Hinduism as a patriarchal tool. It does not give any space to women. According to Omvedt, Pandita Ramabai proclaimed that 'the Sanskritic core of Hinduism was irrevocably and essentially anti-woman'.⁴⁹ Though she accepted much of the frame work of Hindu social system, she finally left it and got converted to Christianity. Tarabai, similarly, wrote a hard-hitting attack on Hindu patriarchy, *Stri-Purush Tulna* in 1882.⁵⁰ She tried to show the whole pattern of life laid out

⁴⁸ Omvedt, 1995, *The Construction of Hinduism*, p. 15-16, in "Dalit Visions"

⁴⁹ Omvedt, 1995, *Hinduism as Patriarchy : Ramabai, Tarabai and Others*, p. 26, in "Dalit Visions."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

for women, especially for widows who were blamed for disposing their babies but the sexual assaults on them being ignored. She had also attacked the texts and scriptures of Hinduism. According to Omvedt, it was early feminists like Ramabai and Tarabai who were closer to the general attitude of lower class and peasant women in taking the *Puranas* as stories and not scriptures, and seeing them as representing the many facets of male oppression rather than as divinely-oriented ideals of human relationships.⁵¹ The later upper caste and elite women's organisations however, in the opinion of Omvedt, worked within the Hindu framework and spoke Sita and Savitri as ideals for women, not as symbols of male oppression.⁵²

By the 1920s, Omvedt states, anti-caste and anti-Brahman movements acquired a more popular basis. Some of them asserted a Dalit identity within terms set by Brahminical Hinduism : fighting for Kshatriya status and the right to enter temples. Others-like the Ad Dharm in Punjab, Adi-Hindu movement in Hyderabad, Adi Dravida in Andhra and Adikarnataka in South India-traced the history of their oppression to Aryan conquest and claimed that the non-Brahmans were the original inhabitants of these different regions. During this period, as Omvedt puts it, 'an increasingly sophisticated ideology of Hindu nationalism and its spread' took place.⁵³ The founding of major organisations such as Hindu

⁵¹ Omvedt, 1995, *Hinduism as Patriarchy : Ramabai, Tarabai and Others*, p. 33, in "Dalit Visions".

⁵² Ibid, p.30.

⁵³ Omvedt, 1995, *Hinduism as Aryan Conquest : The Dalit Radicals of the 1920*, p.39, in "Dalit Visions".

Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) occurred in this period. While the RSS remained aloof, the Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj tried to woo the low castes by giving the Hindu identity to them. By the 1930s, it was clear that this kind of approach had its appeal and not only large sections of non-Brahmans but also Dalits were won over.

Nehru's criticism of Gandhi's upliftment programme of Harijan as mundane, communist's uncritical adoption of the term of Harijan without much concern for whether it would appeal to the people concerned, spread of nationalistic fever, communist's criticism of the Dalit and non-Brahman movements as pro-British, all of them in the opinion of Omvedt, contributed to the fragility in the sharpness of anti-caste fight. The radicals though condemned Hinduism but (gradually) began to see it more and more as a reality.⁵⁴

The most significant attempt to transcend this fragmentation (some joining the nationalist struggle and thus losing the sharpness of anti-caste feeling) in the 1930s and 1940s, according to Omvedt, was made by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, one of the great democratic leaders of the twentieth century.⁵⁵ She has repeated the description of Ambedkar's formation of ILP and the transition from ILP to SCF, his difference with Phule over the Aryan theory of race and his linking of Untouchables to Buddhism, all of which have already been discussed.

⁵⁴ Omvedt, 1995, *Hinduism as Aryan Conquest : The Dalit Radicals of the 1920*, p. 42, in "Dalit Visions".

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Continuing her discussion, Omvedt states that when Hindu nationalists emphasized the link between blood, territory and language and projected Hindi and Sanskrit as the quintessential Indian languages, other linguistic groups reacted sharply, and identified themselves as separate nations. The centralizing tendencies within Hinduism and nationalism produced movements against caste and Brahminism which took the character of revolts of the regions against north Indian domination. Periyar in Madras established the Dravida Kazhagam (DK) and demanded Dravidastan. Thus, as Omvedt argues, sub-national identities or regional nationalism were becoming a major under-current of politics in the 1940s. Tamil Nationalism along with the anti-caste movement became a powerful force in the South. However, the post-independence Congress government succeeded in diluting the radicalism of the DK and forced it to give up the separatist demand giving birth to the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and then to AIADMK. However, according to Omvedt, the alienation of the Hindu Mahasbhaite M.C. Rajah who was the most well-known Dalit leader than the radical Ambedkar in Tamil Nadu from the movement as well as splits between Dravidians and communists led to the losing of organised fight. Thus, Omvedt puts it very plainly that the triumph of the Congress finally represented both a triumph of a 'Hindu' identity and of a centralised, Delhi-based state in the Indian sub-continent.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Omvedt, 1995, *Hinduism as Delhi Rule : Periyar and the National Question*, p. 62, in "Dalit Visions".

The 1970s saw a new turmoil, the emergence of a new radicalism, the Dalit Panthers. 'Their thrust, according to Omvedt, was to universalize the Dalit identity as proletarian experience'.⁵⁷ They saw their enemy, Hinduism as feudal backwardness. They had a strong militant or Naxalite flavour. In the opinion of Omvedt, Marxism had separated class and caste oppressions in India, but now the two were sought to be joined. This new project laid the ground for the upsurges of the 1970s and 1980s. However, they also faced splits on the lines of Buddhism versus Marxism. But, Omvedt argues that the fragmentation of the Panthers was only an episode in a long upsurge.⁵⁸ They called for unity between Dalits and non-Brahmans and urged for a "Kunbi-ization" of Marathas (i.e. accepting their identity as toiling peasants rather than as village rulers). They also demanded that 'India shall become dalitistan as they are 98.5%'.⁵⁹ Dalits were thus, as Omvedt argues, beginning to define identities and ideologies for other sections of the exploited.⁶⁰ It led to the spread of a kind of 'Dalit consciousness' to many other movements. This came to signify the uniting of social and economic issues.

The 1980s were marked not only by the assertion of Dalits and other low castes, but also by the rise of other new social movements of peasants fighting

⁵⁷ Omvedt, 1995, *Hinduism as Feudal Backwardness : The Dalit Panthers*, p. 75, in "Dalit Visions".

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.79.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

against their exploitation by the market and state, of women, of tribal and caste Hindu peasants fighting against environmental destruction and displacement. These movements began to identify at least in part with a critique of Hinduism and to put forward new cultural themes that began to converge with those of the Dalit and anti-caste movement, and some times drew on this tradition.⁶¹ V.P. Singh provided a new twist through the process of Mandalisation to new social movements in terms of caste and class challenge. But, they failed to make any break through. As Omvedt puts it, the farmers' movement suffered a major split in 1989; women and environmentalists remained fragmented and unable to cope with the processes of the political arena, and the Dalit movement itself, inspite of significant political clout, was far from uniting. By 1988-89 Kanshi Ram's BSP in north India, and the Bharatiya Republican party of Prakash Ambedkar in Maharashtra had achieved renewed strength, yet they remained at odds with each other and could not mobilise a coordinated political force. Dalits and their low caste and minority allies remained on the margins of politics, unable to cope effectively with the coopting processes of the Congress and of the opposition political parties.⁶² The new Dalit movement was by the 1990s, still strong but floundering.⁶³ In such a scenario, the BJP stepped up campaigns of militant Hinduism and succeeded in its appeal and got the Babri-Masjid demolished at

⁶¹ Omvedt, 1995, *The Logic of Dalit Politics*, p. 82, in "Dalit Visions".

⁶² Ibid, p. 89.

⁶³ Ibid., p.90.

Ayodhya. Thus, the failure for a unity and alliance between movements, between different sections of the oppressed and exploited, provided scope and space for reactionary forces to rise in the 1990s.⁶⁴

Thus, from the discussion of both the books by Omvedt, it becomes clear that the Dalits have renewed their assertion though still to be properly organised and united, and they have not only strived to get better deal in the society but also influenced many other social movements which are in the offing. Ambedkarism as a broad anti-caste liberating ideology has provided inspiration to these social movements, and Omvedt has immensely been influenced by such resurrection of the exploited and oppressed class being guided by Ambedkar-Phule tradition and has devoted these books – good sociological works, for that cause.

II. KANCHA ILLAIAH : DEBUNKING THE ‘HINDU’ CULTURAL TRADITION

In addition to being a reader in political science at Osmania University, Hyderabad, Kancha Illaiah is an activist in the Dalit-bahujan and civil liberties movements in Andhra Pradesh. He is also a member of the Satyashodhak research team. Having completed his Ph.D on ‘Gautama Buddha’s Political Philosophy’ he went on to write books and many articles especially on caste, civil liberties, and reservation policy. He is a founder member of the first Dalit-

⁶⁴ Omvedt, 1995, *The Logic of Dalit Politics*, p. 93, in “Dalit Visions”.

bahujan journal, *Nalpu* and is at present a fellow of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Delhi. However, I have picked up his 'Why I am not a Hindu : A Sudra critique of Hindutva philosophy, culture and political Economy' (1996) where he has highlighted the ills and flaws of Hinduism and Hindu culture as such and the stark and glaring differences between it and the Dalit-bahujan culture giving Kudos to the latter for being democratic and more humane than the former. Though he has not expressed this candidly but he has been influenced by Ambedkarism. It is apparently clear from the various occasions of his analysis where he has showered encomiums on Ambedkar for his efforts at liberating the Dalit-bahujans from the tortuous clutches of Hinduism.

WHY I AM NOT A HINDU (1996)

In this book, Illaiah has become a spokesperson for the entire Dalit-bahujans – a concept he has used to refer to 'people and castes who form the exploited and suppressed majority' – of India. As is evident from his admission that this book is the result of an internal turmoil that took place in him when the Hindutva philosophy since 1990 onwards, tried to propagate day in and day out that every one in India who is not a Muslim, a Christian or a Sikh is a Hindu. This utterly shook him off balance as being born in a Kurumaa (shepherd caste) family, he was never aware of the fact that he was a Hindu. The Hindu (twice born) culture and the Dalit-bahujan culture of which he is an integral part are two polar opposite cultures, and hence, Illaiah is at excruciating pain and is not at

all ready to admit the propaganda as fact. Having been born and grown in a socially castigated and vitiated environment, he is not at all prepared to be drawn into the Hindu fold. So, in this book, he has made an attempt to show why he is not a Hindu. He looks at the socio-economic and cultural differences between the Dalit-bahujans and the Hindus in the contexts of childhood, family life, market relations, power relations, Gods and Goddesses, death and not least, Hindutva. Collecting many of the ideas of the Dalit-bahujans, he presents their vision of a more just society. However, Illaiah has used the narratives of personal experiences as his analytical framework. According to him, this is a method which has been used by feminists as well as by Indian Dalit-bahujan thinkers like Mahatma Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. He argues that this is the only possible and indeed the most authentic way in which the deconstruction and reconstruction of history can take place.⁶⁵ Now, let us have a look at the detailed and salient themes of the book.

The first context in which Illaiah has tried to reflect the differences between the Dalit-bahujan culture and the 'other' culture, i.e., the Hindu culture is childhood. The childhood formation in both the cultures is astonishingly different. The boys and girls of the Dalit-bahujan families get training usually on production tasks at a very early age depending upon the caste into which one is born as caste occupations differ. But, Illaiah became astonished to learn later

⁶⁵ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Introduction*, p. xii, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

that the children of the upper castes in general and the Brahmins in particular are never taught to go to the field, or to look after the cattle or crops, but are supposed to go to school at an early age. Similarly, the boys and girls in the Dalit-bahujan families learn about sexual matters at an early age. The boys learn in their male companies and the girls learn from their mothers who usually discuss every aspect of life with the daughters, and also from other elder women who discuss every thing when sit together. The fathers in these families do not also hesitate to talk in front of their children about their relations with other women. And even the sexual life of parents comes into the open when a quarrel starts. But this is not the case in Hindu families. What happens here is a strict restriction on the discussion on sexual matters. It is a taboo in these families. Illaiah further states that in the Dalit-bahujan culture, people relate directly to their Gods and Goddesses without any intermediary and in their native language but in the Hindu culture, a priest is needed to relate to Gods and Goddesses and that to in Sanskrit language.

However, as Illaiah argues, the language of the Dalit-bahujans is structured around the production. So, every caste has certain occupation-specific languages apart from the communicative language they generally use among themselves. What is ironical to Illaiah is that the recitation of several names of one God or many Gods is construed as wisdom, whereas knowing the language of production and the names of productive tools is not recognized as

knowledge.⁶⁶ The concept of purity and pollution, in the opinion of Illaiah, operates in Hindu families and specifically in a Brahmin family.⁶⁷ Child rearing is a wife's burden as washing a child is seen as unclean. Similarly, kitchen is a dirty place, so is reserved for only women. The women are also supposed to cook in a wet cloth to remain 'pure' while cooking. But, nothing of this kind is observed in a Dalit-bahujan family. A Hindu family is hierarchical; girls must obey boys and children must obey elders. Thus, sex and age are two determining and measuring rods of the status within the family.⁶⁸ The wife is abused but is not supposed to speak out. This does not happen in a Dalit-bahujan family. Hierarchy is not strictly enforced. The wife if abused, retorts back in the same coin then and there.

Though child marriage is also a part of the Dalit-bahujan culture, Illaiah states that it is not inhuman like the Hindu practice. Girls are allowed remarriage if husbands die; even divorces are allowed for bad marriages unlike the Hindus who do not allow widow remarriage, and divorce is not simply the practice. Similarly, there is no such practice of Sati among the Dalit-bahujans unlike the Hindus. Women usually share relatively equal status with men because of their active involvement in production process. Illaiah argues that the Brahminical culture eulogizes negative heroes and heroines while the Dalit-bahujan culture

⁶⁶ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Childhood Formations*, p.6, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.9.

worships real heroes and heroines.⁶⁹ Among the Dalit-bahujans, according to Illaiah, there is no concept of temple in a definite place or form.⁷⁰ Goddesses and Gods live in all forms and in all shapes and in different places. There are common village Dalit-bahujan as well as caste-specific Goddesses and Gods. Though they believe in Goddesses and Gods, they do not however, have the concept of heaven and hell. Similarly, they believe in the existence of soul or spirit which they think, comes in the form of ghosts. Illaiah argues that the consciousness of all the dead live together some where in the skies has not yet taken the shape of an organised religion.⁷¹ Among the Dalit-bahujans, reading the book, going for the temple, chanting prayers etc are entirely absent. The Hindu religion and its Brahmin wisdom, as stated by Illaiah, prohibited literacy to them. Till modern education and *Ambedkar's* theory of reservation created a small educated section among these castes, letter-learning was literally prohibited.⁷² Today, though some lower castes are allowed into temples, they can never relate to that God or Goddess. In schools, they find one culture i.e., the Hindu culture narrating Hindu stories of the Puranas and the epics with Brahminized language, and back at home, they have another culture, their own culture. Even teachers and upper caste students treat them derogatorily and inhumanely. The so-called communists, atheists or rationalists, according to Illaiah, also never pick up the

⁶⁹ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Childhood Formations*, p.17-18, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.11.

contents of daily lives of the Dalit-bahujans as their subjects.⁷³ So, the alienation is enormous.

In such circumstances where Hindu Children are taught to live differently from Dalit-bahujan children, just as they are taught to despise and dismiss them, and where Hindu inhumanism becomes a part of their early formation; hating others-the Dalit-bahujans-is a part of their consciousness,⁷⁴ the claim that Dalit-bahujans are Hindus becomes ridiculous and highly shocking to the author.

The next context Illaiah has analysed is market relations. He argues that marriage is as central to Dalit-bahujan families as to Hindu families. But, still there is a difference. While marriage is a human and worldly affair that performs the human functions of production and procreation for the Dalit-bahujans, it is not so for the Hindus. For them, it is a sacred ritual divorced from all kinds of productive activity even notionally. Even in procreation the main intention is to produce a son who can pave the father's way to heaven.⁷⁵ The priest however comes into contact with the Dalit-bahujans only on occasions like marriage and death and he extracts wealth from them on such occasions in the form of *dakshina*. Illaiah argues that the relationship between the priest and the people is that of exploiter and exploited. And it not only remains confined to that, it has

⁷³ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Childhood Formations*, p.14, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁷⁵ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Marriage, Market and Social Relations*, p.20, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

also some social dimensions like at the end of the marriage, everybody present is expected to touch the feet of the priest, described by Illaiah as a brazenly shameful act.⁷⁶ Nobody understands the incomprehensible Sanskrit he recites during the marriage but follows whatever they are asked to do.

Discussing on production, Illaiah states that while a Dalit-bahujan, both male and female gets up early in the morning and engages in various production works depending upon the caste, without any kind of bath or prayer, a Hindu on the other hand, gets up to take a cold water bath and starts relating to god. He/she never engages in any kind of productive tasks and only recites mantras. The priest however, aspires to enjoy the fruits of the work of the Dalit-bahujans which he abhors as dirty and mean. Illaiah points out that even in cooking, God is central to a Hindu family. Thus, the cooking and the eating activities start with prayers. But, in a Dalit-bahujan family, it is considered as a mundane activity meant to feed the human body and keep it going.⁷⁷ It has already been discussed that women in the Dalit-bahujan culture enjoy relatively better status. They are very much political beings, social beings and economic beings but this is not true of Brahmin women. The existence of Hindu women is generally subsumed into their husbands' existence.⁷⁸ While the Dalit-bahujans believe in the fruits of their works, Illaiah argues that the Bhagavad Gita speaks that 'you have the right

⁷⁶ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Marriage, Market and Social Relations*, p.20, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.26.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.27.

to work but not to the fruits'.⁷⁹ And the fruits of their works are obviously appropriated by the non-productive people, the Hindus. He further states that it is the (Baniya business) *Vaisya Vyaaparan* that exorbitantly exploits the labour of the Dalit-bahujans. The Baniyas are much like the Brahmins. A Baniya is supposed to establish a business, the art of which is taught right from childhood.⁸⁰ He meets people of all castes and deals with people one by one to manipulate easily unlike a priest. A Baniya woman is however a part of the home-centred business and lures the Dalit-bahujan women folk through skillful rapport, deceit and lies. Illaiah contends that a Hindu-Baniya market presupposes a lie to be part of its sacred form as well as its business culture and still remains within the Hindu morality.⁸¹ The caste also plays a role in the transaction; the lower the caste of the customer, the higher would be the price, and while selling it would be opposite.⁸² However, there are also markets for specific caste-based production because the Hindu-Baniya market refuses to buy or sell anything that is a non-Hindu commodity like beef, mutton, sheep, toddy, leather etc. So, there are markets run by individuals coming from Dalit-bahujan castes, Muslims or Christians. Illaiah stresses that these markets operate outside the principle of divinity – they are 'secular' markets.⁸³ It is not that the influence of Baniya

⁷⁹ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Marriage, Market and Social Relations*, p.28, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.29.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.30.

⁸² Ibid., p.31.

⁸³ Ibid.

market is invisible here but in such markets, the sellers and buyers philosophically, socially and economically relate to each other and Illaiah contends that this could be one of the reasons why the non-Hindu, Dalit-bahujan market dealers do not become visibly rich.⁸⁴

The man and woman relations also differ in both the cultures regarding their approach to the concept of *Kama* (sexual love). While for a Hindu, sex is a leisure-bound divine activity, for a Dalit-bahujan, it is a part of production.⁸⁵ The interaction between husband and wife often becomes momentary in these castes. They view sex as an organic need of the body and not a pleasure of the heart as is cherished by Hindus. Moreover, in the Hindu culture, the stories of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are full of descriptions of sexual encounters but this is not to be found in the narratives of Dalit-bahujan Gods and Goddesses.⁸⁶ Illaiah contends that not only young Hindu girls worship Krishna who is a patriarchal sexist god but also love him and invite him to bestow his love on them.⁸⁷ The Hindu thought in terms of man and woman relations also gets influenced by Vatsyayana's *Kamasutra* where sixty-four forms of sexual expression are portrayed and these become a part of the sculpture in the Hindu temples.⁸⁸ The Dalit-bahujan culture on the other hand, never values sex nor

⁸⁴ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Marriage, Market and Social Relations*, pp.31-32, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.33.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.32.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.33.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

projects it as divine. A Dalit-bahujan woman never treats her husband as a God nor performs *Pada Puja* (feet worship). In a situation of dispute, as has already been noted, words for words, abuse for abuse is the practice. Illaiah argues that patriarchy as a system does exist among Dalit-bahujans, yet, in this sense it is considerably more democratic.⁸⁹ He further contends that a Dalit-bahujan couple may also aspire for a son but for entirely different reasons as compared to the Hindus. The son is not a divine gift who will take the father to heaven rather a son is viewed as a relatively more productive force.⁹⁰

However, what disturbs the author is the emergence of a new group, called by him as 'Neo-Kshatriyas' who are none other than the 'Sudra upper castes' and are moving into the fold of Hindutva both physically and mentally.⁹¹ Illaiah states that the caste system itself sets up a certain type of power relations. The lower the caste of a person, the higher will be the level of obedience, and the higher the caste of a person, the stronger will be the motivation to speak and to command. The power relations between castes are so structured that the self-respect of Dalit-bahujan people is mutilated. Illaiah argues that a new trend is discernible in all south Indian villages which may be the case in North India too, that while Kshatriya caste is becoming dormant, a neo-Kshatriya force is emerging to capture all structures in which power operates and they are

⁸⁹ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Marriage, Market and Social Relations*, p.34, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid., p.35.

increasingly identifying themselves with the Hindu religion though they are not twice-born. They have roots in the agrarian structure and they provide connecting links between the Brahmin-Baniyas and the lower castes. Due to them, unequal relations are perpetuated and as Illaiah contends, Brahminism would have weakened with the spread of modernity into the villages but has been saved by them.⁹² They are not owning up the Dalit-bahujan culture and at the same time are not accorded the status of dwija caste. So, they are trying to capture economic and political power and hence, trying to create a new cultural status for themselves. They are, according to Illaiah, distancing themselves from actual work in the fields and manipulating the 'lower' caste labour for all works. They are emulating all the life styles of upper castes. So, Illaiah contends that the neo-Kshatriya ambition is not to dalitize or democratize human relations, but to Brahminize them.⁹³ Moving further in his analysis, he argues that though patriarchy exists in the Dalit-bahujan culture, but it is a patriarchal democracy. Women are allowed to take issues to caste panchayats where judgement is decided in public. Thus, Dalit-bahujan law does not emerge from authority but it arises out of community.⁹⁴ The women also form their own association for resolving problems. However, Illaiah stresses that the notion of 'private' does not exist in Dalit-bahujan consciousness. So also the concept of 'personal'. The

⁹² See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Neo-Kshatriyas and the Reorganisation of Power Relations*, p.38, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.39.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.40.

individual is a part of the collective which is both social and political and functions in an open way.⁹⁵ Though the concept of private property is slowly gaining currency but by and large, the notion of property as public still holds the sway. According to Illaiah, the Dalit-bahujans have never believed that power is embodied in property.⁹⁶ On the other hand, Brahminical patriarchy is based on authoritarianism. The male patriarch establishes his authority over the entire family and especially over the women. Even the patriarchal Gods are projected as all-powerful.⁹⁷ Illaiah contends that Brahminical patriarchy creates two different kinds of mentalities; one is male mind that can control, manipulate and finally structure, and female mind that can be manipulated, controlled and structured.⁹⁸ Thus, male Brahmins negate women in their own families and negate Dalit-bahujans in the larger society.

Similarly, the Baniya operate on similar principles in business, and for them business is private as priesthood and family are for the Brahmins. Operating in the same ideological domain, classical Kshatriyas structure political power as their private property. The neo-Kshatriyas have also picked up caste hierarchy, the notions of power, property, private and so on. They have given up their caste panchayats and their homes are gradually moving from the secular to

⁹⁵ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Neo-Kshatriyas and the Reorganisation of Power Relations*, p.41, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.42.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.44.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

the spiritual domain. In the context of post-Mandal assertions of Dalit-bahujan castes, the neo-Kshatriyas found an entrenched place in Hindutva as they provided a counter force to the Dalit-bahujans' assertions. In the post-colonial period however, the Brahmins have captured political, administrative as well as economic power, and Illaiah contends that this has every potential to negate secular modernity and secular socialism in India.⁹⁹ The Dalit-bahujans are also systematically excluded from the exercise of power through the state institutions that have come into existence in the villages. Illaiah makes it clear that from the village institutions of patel and patwari to tehsil offices, collectorates, state and central secretariats; from gram panchayats to municipalities, zilla parishads to state legislatures and the central parliament, each institution is made the preserve of the upper caste forces, with Brahmins being in the lead in many of these institutions. The neo-Kshatriyas, while co-existing with them, accept their hegemonic role in law-making and interpreting history.¹⁰⁰ The Brahminic hegemony was also enormous over the political parties and many social organisations that emerged during anti-colonial, nationalist movements like the Congress party, the Communist Party of India (CPI) etc. However, Illaiah argues that it is the Britishers who helped the Brahmins to exert their hegemony in the society. At the same time, he holds that British colonialism also provided a ground for the emergence of Dalit-bahujan, organic intellectuals in states like

⁹⁹ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Neo-Kshatriyas and the Reorganisation of Power Relations*, p.46, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.49.

Maharashtra, from where anti-Brahmin ideologies began to emerge.¹⁰¹ Mahatma Phule, the initiator of the modern anti-Brahman movement and Ambedkar, the initiator of the nationalist anti-caste revolution, were products of these revolutionary forces. The modern education that defined knowledge in altogether different terms from those of the Brahminical-Sanskrit ideologies, facilitated the emergence of such subaltern intellectuals. Illaiah contends that Ambedkarite anti-caste philosophical school punctured Hinduism as well as Brahminical hegemony in the post-colonial period.¹⁰² Emerging from below, Ambedkar could cause a revolution to occur in the minds of the Dalit-bahujans against their cateized slavery. His decision not to join any political party headed by upper castes and his attempt to create his own party shook the foundations of Hinduism. However, Illaiah argues that though Marxism at that time was a force to reckon with but, it did not do much for the Dalit-bahujans as it fell into the hands of the Brahmins. So, the power relations between communist and non-communist Brahminical forces appeared to be antagonistic but the social relations remained non-antagonistic.¹⁰³ In the 80s and 90s, Dalit-Bahujan intellectuals who have emerged from the context of Ambedkarite theory and practice are attempting to break new ground to displace Brahminical forces and seize power structures in all spheres. The Mandal and anti-Mandal struggles in

¹⁰¹ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Neo-Kshatriyas and the Reorganisation of Power Relations*, pp.49-50, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹⁰² Ibid., p.50.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p.51.

the 1990 reflected the beginning of an all-India caste struggle. Illaiah argues that the Brahmins occupying the bureaucracy have transformed its nature and are not initiating any development in the rural economy in the fear that new social forces from the Dalit-bahujans might emerge who can pose a challenge to their hegemony. So, the anglicized Brahminical class has also become an anti-development social force.¹⁰⁴ In the process they are granting a small fraction of politico-economic power to the most dangerous and reactionary forces, the neo-Kshatriyas, and thus, destroying the revolutionary spirit of the Dalit-bahujans who are getting organised under specific and universal ideologies like Ambedkarism and Marxism.¹⁰⁵ The Brahmins have a long history of coopting revolutionary forces. It happened to the anti-Brahmin struggles also. Illaiah argues that the neo-Kshatriyas do not understand the politics of the Brahmins and are becoming victims of their diplomacy. They have even given support to the anti-Mandal forces. So, Illaiah categorically warns the Dalit-bahujans to treat the Brahmins, the Baniyas and the neo-Kshatriyas as inimical forces in the establishment of Dalit-bahujan democracy in India. To fight these forces, he advocates the formation of a united front of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and minorities after resolving all the contradictions they have.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ See Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Neo-Kshatriyas and the Reorganisation of Power Relations*, p.52, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p.53.

Has contemporary Hinduism done something good for the Dalit-bahujans? Illaiah is constrained to find that the answer is a resounding 'No'. The Dalit-bahujans find that their culture, life-style, production-based skill etc. are not part of the history. It is as if they had never had a history. The literary texts are full of the condemnation of their culture and are brazenly silent about caste inhumanity. They were never told that Phule and Ambedkar were as competent as Gandhi and Nehru were. They were always told only about Gandhi, Nehru, Subash Bose and so on, people they could never relate to, people whose upbringing had nothing to do with their upbringing. Similarly, the nationalist movement was presented as a Brahmin-Baniya fight against colonial power and the role played by the Dalit-bahujans was never mentioned.¹⁰⁷ The Hindu Gods and Goddesses are even worshipped in the institution of civil society, offices and other places like shops and hotels. The Dalit-bahujans' Gods and Goddesses are not to be seen anywhere in public places. Many Dalit-bahujans are getting sanskritized and taking to Baniya occupations but are still not free from caste indignities. Those who are entering white-collar jobs due to Ambedkarite reservation policy, Illaiah contends, are also not free from caste inhumanities like untouchability.¹⁰⁸ These people are however becoming a source of inspiration for others to be like them. Even in the left party and secular and liberal party like Congress, the gap between the upper castes and the Dalit-bahujan is never

¹⁰⁷ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Contemporary Hinduism*, p.58, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.58.

bridged. Though the Indian communists talk of counter-culture, they never distance themselves from the Hindu notions of life.¹⁰⁹ So, Illaiah argues that the philosophical perception of a liberal Hindu and a communist Hindu about the Dalit-bahujan is similar to that of a classical Hindu. The post-colonial universities to where the Dalit-bahujans have started entering have sharpened the conflicting interests between the upper castes and them. While the upper castes see in this a decline of merit, the Dalit-bahujans perceive merit in a different way. They firmly believe that work produces merit. They criticise the Brahminical textual and book-centred knowledge as irrational and their production-based knowledge as more valuable and rational. So, Illaiah argues that which ever institution they enter, either through reservation or through other means, such institutions become the centres of conflict between Hindu irrationality and Dalit-bahujan rationality, Hindu closeness and Dalit-bahujan openness, Hindu silent violence and Dalit-bahujan loud self-defence.¹¹⁰ Due to their openness, they have spread to almost all walks of life ranging from teaching, science, medicine, engineering, administration to politics, and in the process, along with production-based knowledge, have become rich repositories of knowledge.¹¹¹ Though they have made significant dent in the Brahminical hegemony, they are always seen as enemies and outsiders. The Brahmins and

¹⁰⁹ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Contemporary Hinduism*, p.61, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.65.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.65.

Baniyas know that the emerging Dalit-bahujan consciousness is dangerous and hence, they have systematically established their control over markets, industrial capital and other institutions that have come to operate in India during the post-colonial period. Indian capitalism has been converted into caste capitalism.¹¹² The entrepreneurs and the managerial class belong to the Brahmins, the Baniyas or the neo-Kshatriyas and the working class is the Dalit-bahujans. So exploitation and caste inhumanities are pervasive.

However, Illaiah states that the many who tried and try to sanskritize themselves have realized that it is not the panacea to caste-based humiliations and Hindu barbarity. They do not own up the Dalit-bahujan culture, emulate Brahmin life-style, send their children to English-medium schools but they fail to get a good job without reservation, an 'upper' caste daughter-in-law or a Brahmin son-in-law. They do not get assimilated into the Hindu culture. This is the reason why Ambedkar embraced Buddhism to build a counter culture to Hinduism as he knew sanskritization is no solution to Dalit-bahujan woes.

Discussing further, Illaiah has made a trenchant analysis of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and show them in a very poor light. He argues that the Hindu Gods are basically war heroes like Indra, Brahma, Vishnu, Rama, Krishna, Vamana, Shiva who are either engaged in wars or abetted and helped the wars against the Dalit-bahujans. Similarly, some of the Hindu Goddesses are also

¹¹² Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Contemporary Hinduism*, p.68, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

accomplices in the war against the Dalit-bahujans like Saraswati, Lakshmi, Parvathi by helping their husbands. They are however, subordinated and shown as only submissive and serving their husbands and thereby highlighting the patriarchal authoritarianism. The wars against the Dalit-bahujans, according to Illaiah, are meant to create a society where exploitation and inequality are part of the very structure that creates and maintains the caste system.¹¹³ The epics like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Hindu religious text like the Bhagwad Gita, all have been viciously critiqued and the contradictions have been exposed. Though a detailed analysis is not feasible here but this is the obvious theme of the analysis that the whole construction of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses is structured by the Brahmins against the Dalit-bahujans, sometimes killing them, sometimes subjugating them and sometimes coopting them through the establishment of a consent system. The fact that the Hindu Gods and Goddesses are approachable only through a priest who can communicate only in Sanskrit is enough indication that their alienation from people is total.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, Illaiah has endeavoured to highlight the Goddesses and Gods of the Dalit-bahujans who are entirely different from Hindu hegemonic Gods and Goddesses. The Dalit Bahuan Goddesses/Gods (especially in Andhra Pradesh) like Pochamma (for Crop), Kattamaisamma, Polimeramma (for border), Potaraju (for

¹¹³ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Hindu Gods and Us: Our Goddesses and the Hindus*, p.101, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

security of crop), Beerappa (for sheep-breeding) and many others, Illaiah argues, are culturally rooted in production, protection and pro-creation. In these stories, there is no construction of an enemy image. War and violence are not central to the people. They directly relate to the Goddesses and Gods without any intermediary. Barriers like language, sloka and mantra are not erected.¹¹⁵

Similarly, Illaiah has analysed the differences that exist regarding death. He argues that a Brahmin believes that life must be lived for the sake of death which will make him eternal; after death, he will go to heaven. So, for this, two things are important, food and sex. He eats not for himself but for God. Sex is important because a son will pave his way to heaven. So, he marries a girl before puberty to ensure the son is his and his alone. After his death, his wife has to die in the same pyre to become Sati so that she can give him pleasure in the heaven. Along with these two, leisure and prayer are also important. When a Brahmin dies, it is held that it is the day when God's call comes. So, generally, death is not an occasion for mourning though silent weeping is allowed. The death is followed by feast till the twelfth day and after that, month-wise and gradually, year-wise *Shraadh*a along with feast is observed. Even in modern time, this kind of rituals are being observed only with the difference that an emphasis on a luxurious life in this world is the practice now. After death, Illaiah argues that people become historically important even though they have only ate and cheat in

¹¹⁵ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Hindu Gods and Us: Our Goddesses and the Hindus*, p.100, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

their life times.¹¹⁶ Newspaper advertisements have become modern methods of ‘upper’ caste celebrations of a person’s death and of the perpetuation of the dead man’s memory.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, for the Dalit-bahujans, life is a one time affair; death of a person is a loss in terms of productive work. For a Dalit-Bahujan, life must be lived for life’s sake, and the life is related to work. Leisure is condemned and labour is valued. Similarly, eating is considered as a part of life. They work first, eat later.¹¹⁸ Their Gods and Goddesses do not also demand divine feasting. Life in terms of prosperity or death in terms of eternity does not figure in their relationship with Goddess or God.¹¹⁹ Regarding sex, Illaiah’s view has already been noted earlier, the Dalit-bahujans view sex as an essential social function and not as a leisure-based pleasure activity. The concept of heaven is absent and son is seen as the caretaker of old parents and not as one who ensures a place for the father in heaven.¹²⁰ Dalit-bahujan castes perform rituals on third day and eleventh day, but after that, anniversaries are not celebrated and the identity of the dead person is not retained historically. The death of a woman is also mourned and rituals are observed. In a Hindu family, a women’s death is mourned but not eloquently. In a Dalit-bahujan family, however, it is mourned loudly. While the married men and women are burnt, unmarried men, women

¹¹⁶ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Hindu Death and Our Death*, p.107, in “Why I am not a Hindu”.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.109.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid., p.111.

and children are buried. It is a practice in both the cultures as the Dalit-bahujans have been influenced by the Hindu culture. Thus, Illaiah has shown that the Hindus and the Dalit-bahujans share almost nothing in common while living and even after death.

Thus, from the whole detailed analysis of Illaiah's scathing exploration of the Hindu culture vis-à-vis the Dalit-bahujan culture, it becomes crystal clear that at every stage in the human life-cycle-childhood formation, man-woman relations, family making-as well as in market relations, power relations, the construction of Gods and Goddesses and even in death, the Dalit-bahujan and the Hindu approaches to life are totally different. There is nothing in common; both the cultures are polar opposites. Illaiah argues that the Hindutva ideologues who talk about Hindutva being the religion of all castes must realise that the Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes and Scheduled Tribes of this country have nothing in common with the Hindus.¹²¹ The Dalit-bahujans have a much more humane and egalitarian tradition and culture than the Hindu tradition and culture, he states. He emphatically contends that if the Brahmins, the Baniyas, the Kshatriyas and the neo-Kshatriyas of this country want unity among diversity, they should join the Dalit-bahujans and look to Dalitization, not Hinduization. Dalitization requires that the whole of Indian society learns from the Dalit waadas (Scheduled Caste localities) the entire culture and tradition.

¹²¹ Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Hindu Gods and Us : Our Goddesses and the Hindus*, p.101, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

Their emphasis on production, labour, collective consciousness, democratic and human ethos, relatively equal space for women etc. are some of the cardinal principles that shape a Dalit-bahujan mind, and these should be the bases for building a just society as against the Hindu culture which delegitimizes production, emphasizes leisure over labour, stresses on private property and is based on patriarchal authoritarianism. So, according to Illaiah, the future of the society is gloomy if Dalitization is not expedited. Of course, it will not be an easy task. Amazonian hurdles will crop up. The upper castes will make it enormously difficult task as they have everything at stake because they have to lose the hegemonic and pleasure-based life. Illaiah has warned the Dalit-bahujans that in the process of Dalitization, they must not be carried away by Gandhian Brahminism or Namboodiripad's communism. While Gandhi modernised a dying Hinduism, the Brahminical communists undermined the emerging Dalitism. The first effort at Dalitization of administration was violently resisted by the upper castes during 1990 Mandal struggle. Similarly, in 1993, after the Dalit-bahujan government was formed in Uttar Pradesh Assembly, the Brahminical forces attacked the Dalit-bahujan legislatures. So, these are symptomatic of the upper caste resistance to the Dalit-bahujan assertion. The Dalit-bahujans have also retaliated and this is an indicator of the future course of history. So, Dalitization of civil society, state and administrative apparatus should be undertaken. And, Illaiah is optimistic that though the upper caste women are yet to be fully receptive to Dalit-bahujan problems and to the process

of Dalitization, but most conscious among them will quickly realise the need for it and facilitate the process. They are already following the Dalit-bahujan concepts of divorce and remarriage.¹²² The next step is to dalitize the Hindu temples and seize the enormous wealth there in. These temples should be converted into public education centres, where the Dalit-bahujans begin to reschool the 'upper' castes.¹²³ They should be trained in productive work. The neo-Kshakriyas, because of their roots in the Dalit-bahujan culture, can be easily dalitized but before that, they must be neutralised in socio-political terms. The most important thing in the process of Dalitization is the production of Dalit-bahujan organic intellectuals as mainstream intellectuals are usually from the upper castes and hence, are being integrated into the Hindutva school. Once this is done, they have to reexamine thoroughly every word and every sentence that has been written by Brahminical thinkers, writers, politicians, historians, poets and art critics, virtually every thing in every field.¹²⁴ Then, the new era of wisdom, knowledge and confidence will become part of the every day life and everybody can learn and relate to it.

The detailed analysis of the book was, in my view, necessary to put forth Illaiah's critique of the Hindu culture and thereby making it precisely clear why he does not want to be a Hindu. It is for the simple reason which he has

¹²² Kancha Illaiah, 1996, *Dalitization Not Hinduization*, p.129, in "Why I am not a Hindu".

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.130.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.131.

described that his culture is more enlightening, more democratic and more humane than the Hindu culture and thus he is fine being a Dalit-bahujan and not a Hindu. He, however, not only speaks out his own mind but also speaks for the entire Dalit-bahujan community. It is a subaltern diatribe of the Hindu culture as was done by Phule, Ambedkar and Periyar. As millions of Dalit-bahujans are being influenced by Ambedkar's ideas and thoughts in their assertions in the contemporary period, Illaiah has also been influenced tremendously by Ambedkarism to write this book, I would say, a very thought-provoking and magnificent sociological work giving an interesting account of the socio-cultural-economic and politico-religious life of the Dalit-bahujans and an incisive critique of the same of the Hindus.

In a way, it can be said that Illaiah is retaining the intellectual tradition that Ambedkar initiated : evolving a critique of the Hindu/Brahminical tradition and giving self-dignity to the oppressed and the marginalized. Perhaps in Illaiah's writings the core of Ambedkarism asserts itself. Illaiah debunks the myth of value free/neutral sociology. He finds himself located in his social milieu; he sees the world from the perspective of the oppressed caste. As a result, the entire way of looking at the dominant caste Hindu society alters. Perhaps it can be said that Illaiah, as a contemporary academic, is eager to create an 'anti-Brahminic' Indian sociology and thereby giving Ambedkarism a privileged position in the arena of sociological ideas.

III. M. S. GORE : RENEWED INTEREST IN AMBEDKARISM

M.S. Gore apart from being an eminent scholar, has had a rich and distinguished career. Among the posts he has held are Principal, Delhi School of Social Work (1954-62), Director, Tata Institute of Social Science, Bombay (1962-82), and Vice-Chancellor, Bombay University (1983-86). He has also been Chairman of the Indian Council of Social Science Research and of the Police Training Committee constituted by the Government of India. He has written or edited many books. I have picked up his 'The Social Context of an Ideology : Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought' (1993) where he has analysed Ambedkar's ideology within the context of social movement.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF AN IDEOLOGY (1993)

In this book, Gore has delineated the social context of an ideology, in this case Ambedkar's ideology which is an ideology of protest against the inequitable Hindu social order. He has followed two paradigms : one is the modified communication paradigm and the other is the modified sociology of knowledge paradigm. Perceiving that a protest is also a form of communication, the former asks question **Who protests against Whom for What reasons to what Ends and with what Means ?** instead of the questions asked by the original paradigm – **Who says What to Whom with what Effect?** Similarly, the latter paradigm is not concerned with the knowledge or approaches to knowledge as the original one does rather it is concerned with its application to ideology. Thus, in applying the

Mertonian paradigm to an ideology, Gore tries to assert that ideologies are not idiosyncratic mental products (though they are mental products), that they are systems of ideas which have social roots, have social functions and can be so studied. While the modified communication paradigm helps to study the content and characteristics of the Ambedkar ideology, the modified paradigm of the sociology of knowledge focuses on the relationship of it to the socio-historical context within which it arises. But, these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, states Gore.

In order to establish a link between a social movement and an ideology, Gore argues that ideologies can not remain merely systems of ideas. They are related to action, inspire action, or arise out of action already begun. The action element related to an ideology is what we call a social movement.¹²⁵ Thus, in case of a social movement, an ideology often turns out to be the source as well as the legitimisation of particular forms of social action. Social movements have usually the potential of giving rise to social confrontation. They attempt to change the existing values and relationships which results in a division of members of a society into followers, potential opponents and unaffected onlookers. With such an understanding of social movement and ideology, it becomes clear that the Ambedkar ideology of protest movement is a social movement.

¹²⁵ See M.S. Gore, 1993, *The Nature of an Ideology of Protest*, p.46, in “The Social Context of an Ideology”.

However, before Ambedkar emerged to champion the cause of the untouchables, there were two significant leaders who took up this issue. They were Phule and Shinde. But, neither of them was an untouchable, Phule-a Mali, Shinde-a Kshatriya Maratha. Apart from this, Gore argues that the movements they led were either not protest movements or not exclusively focused on untouchability eradication.¹²⁶ While Shinde though speaking exclusively for the Untouchables was a reformist, Phule was aligning himself with and speaking on behalf of all non-Brahmans (Shudras) and not exclusively on behalf the Untouchables. In such a period, Ambedkar emerged as the spokesman of the Untouchables. He himself being an untouchable and highly educated, could give voice to the voiceless. At that time, the nationalist movement was gaining ground. So, without opposing nationalism, Ambedkar made it clear that the agitation for 'self-government' could not appeal to the Untouchables unless it gave them an adequate share of political power in the legislatures and that too through their own representatives.¹²⁷ Similarly, he was very critical of Shinde who failed to support the demand of separate representation for the Untouchables. Thus, in doing so, Gore states, Ambedkar was simultaneously addressing himself to his potential followers from among the Untouchables and his potential 'adversaries' represented by the nationalist leaders and reformist

¹²⁶ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Evolution of an Ideology of Protest*, p.73, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹²⁷ M.S. Gore, 1993, *The Nature of an Ideology of Protest*, p.70, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

social workers.¹²⁸ The demand for a separate electorate, according to Gore, was the most important political demand of the Ambedkar movement. It followed logically from the ideological position taken by Ambedkar in the first instance, viz., that the interests of the Untouchables were not the same as the interests of the caste Hindus and that they could not be subsumed in the latter.¹²⁹

Ambedkar was well aware of the fact that he had to take cognizance of the complexities of social reality. While caste Hindus were divided into nationalists, moderates and Hindu Mahasabhis, and also into political liberals, active social reformers and orthodox social reactionaries, his own followers were divided by caste loyalties and by the degree of their readiness to precipitate a confrontation. The attitude of the British administrators was also critically important since they held the effective power to make administrative and political decisions. The attitude could vary from inaction to willingness to enforce the law in upholding civic rights in favour of the Untouchables. So, the development of the ideology of the protest movement under Ambedkar's leadership, as Gore argues, had to respond to these various nuances of the social context.¹³⁰ However, according to Gore, the Ambedkar ideology seems to have consisted of the following propositions :

1. We, the Untouchables of India, protest.

¹²⁸ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Evolution of an Ideology of Protest*, p.75, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹²⁹ Ibid., p.79.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.100.

2. As Untouchables we may belong to the same religion as the caste Hindus, but we do not belong to the same society.
3. Untouchability emanates from and reaffirms a philosophy of inequality. Brahminism is the culprit responsible for this situation and Hinduism is but Brahminism. It is inflexible and it frustrates all attempts at reform.
4. As Untouchables, we have historically been a clear identifiable, exploited group, we are a minority in need of special protective measures-reserved seats, reservation in government jobs and in admission to educational institutions.
5. We demand equality and justice, not pity or favour.
6. Pious resolutions and half-hearted ameliorative measures will not be enough or acceptable to us. Political independence has not solved any of our problems or met our needs. We will now have to explore new linkages and new strategies to attain our social, economic and political goals.
7. We have now got adult franchise, reserved seats in the legislatures, reservation in jobs and educational institutions. But, the discrimination against us continues.
8. Our problems are not those of any other group which is poor. They are problems of enforced social backwardness, continued discrimination and economic exploitation.

9. We continue to assert our separate identity and demand a more effective share in political power. For this we need to continue to educate, organise and agitate.
10. We have now reached the conclusion that a life of dignity is not to be attained within Hinduism. We will seek it in a new religion-Buddhism.¹³¹

Gore has however clearly stated that though there were essential bases for the Ambedkar ideology to emerge like the social inequality and the practice of untouchability but it is the new values of national freedom and social equality gained currency during the nationalist movement that provided an opportunity for the deprived sections to demand their rights. The manifest goal of the Ambedkar ideology was to sensitize the Untouchables to their own deprivation, to make them socially and politically articulate, to organise them and to agitate on their behalf to ensure immediate modifications in social and civic arrangements, to benefit the deprived. If fulfilled, these objectives would also lead to the fulfilment of the latent goal of the ideology, i.e. the total social order would undergo change and in the long run, would be consolidated on the basis of the new value of equality of opportunity for all in place of the earlier value of inequality of status even at the point of birth.¹³² The assertion of the separate identity of the Untouchables as a group, the threat of religious conversion, the

¹³¹ M.S. Gore, 1993, *The Ambedkar Ideology*, pp.221-22, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹³² *Ibid.*, p.224.

demand of separate electorate and reserved seats to retain political leverage—all were parts of the strategy of the Ambedkar ideology to remain outside the mainstream nationalist movement so that they could bargain with the mainstream on the one hand and the powerful outsider, against whom the mainstream was battling, on the other.¹³³ Gore states that Ambedkar in his leadership of the untouchables, was categorically clear that he was not speaking on behalf of the tribals or the other socially backward groups, though they might also need special protective measures. He was, of course, prepared to make common cause with different groups at different times – as for instance, with non-Brahman leaders during the earlier part of his career or with industrial workers while the ILP was in existence—but his priorities were unambiguously clear. He was keen to establish a separate, unified identity of the Untouchables and infuse a sense of pride and confidence in them. His own charisma as a leader according to Gore, was to provide the nucleus around which a new, proud identity would arise.¹³⁴ In a stratified and unequal society like Hindu society which was full of conservatives and orthodox reactionaries, Ambedkar knew it very well that the means available for registering the protest were limited. While he did launch Satyagrahas, registered a protest by burning the *Manusmriti*, drank water from the Mahad water tank, led a movement to gain entry to the Kalaram temple, his

¹³³ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Evolution of an Ideology of Protest*, p.121, in “The Social Context of an Ideology”.

¹³⁴ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Summing - up*, p.343, in “The Social Context of an Ideology”.

most effective tool was his able advocacy of the untouchable caste at the Round Table Conference, which led to the Communal Award and the aftermath Poona Pact. Except on the point of a separate electorate, Ambedkar, according to Gore, obtained everything that he set out to fight for, in so far as the law of the land is concerned.¹³⁵ Gore further argues that though Ambedkar did not try to formulate a theory which would be applicable to all human societies but it is possible that his perceptions of Indian society, the position of the Untouchables within it and the strategies available to them for registering their protest and of seeking an effective share in the power structure of Indian society could perhaps provide a framework for developing a more generalised ideology of protest for sub-national, deprived groups.¹³⁶

The Ambedkar ideology also involves a strident analysis of Hinduism and the Hindu social order. For Ambedkar, according to Gore, the function of religion is to provide legitimacy to the set of values and rules that will help establish a moral order among human beings. This moral order should be based on the principles of individual freedom, individual worth and equality. Hinduism, according to Ambedkar does not recognise the principles of freedom and equality and has not succeeded in evolving a universal morality. Buddhism, if it is cleansed of the Brahminic interpolations of the doctrines of Karma and rebirth, will certainly provide a better alternative where the Untouchables may lead a

¹³⁵ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Summing - up*, p.343, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

dignified life. In choosing an alternative religion for conversion, Ambedkar was however, according to Gore, guided by what he thought would ensure cultural continuity for his followers within the broader Indian ethos, so he chose Buddhism.¹³⁷ Similarly, Ambedkar had a pugnacious analysis of the Hindu social system for its centrality of the caste system with its notorious hierarchy and graded inequality and for its negation of individual worth.

However, Gore argues that two things, temporal and social structural factors play a vital role in influencing an individual's perception of social reality, and further, that the nature of this perception influences his ideological formulation. Gore has picked up one prominent figure, Nehru and has held him in contrast to Ambedkar. He has tried to show how both the leaders differed from each other in the interpretation of Indian history. While Nehru saw an undercurrent of synthesis and a drive towards unity in the midst of diversity in Indian history, Ambedkar felt that Indian history exemplified the process of division, stratification and fracturing of society. The former represented the ideology of mainstream nationalism in pre-independence India, and the latter's was the ideology of 'minority' groups seeking to establish the distinctness of their groups and the need for measures for the special protection of their interests.¹³⁸ Nehru stood at the apex of the Indian social hierarchy in terms of

¹³⁷ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Summing-up*, p.344, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹³⁸ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Ideology and the Interpretation of History*, pp.312-13, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

caste (Kashmiri Pandit) and class (son of a highly successful lawyer) and as a nationalist leader, he tended to emphasise the internal differences based on caste, class, religion, race, language, sub-region or a combination of these, because he regarded them as divisive and likely to adversely affect the nationalist struggle. For him, political independence was of primary importance, both as a goal in itself and as a means of facilitating the social changes necessary to ensure social justice.¹³⁹ On the other hand, Ambedkar's social location in the low caste (an untouchable), low class (son of a subordinate officer in the Indian Army) segment of Indian society sensitized him more to the iniquitous social arrangement, and made him impart a greater sense of immediacy to the achievement of social equality within Indian society than to the goal of freedom from foreign rule.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the relative social location of the two spokesmen reflected in their different reconstructions of Indian history.

The other example Gore has picked up is a combination of two leaders, all of whom were dedicated to the cause of the Untouchables, Phule and Shinde and they have been compared with Ambedkar. According to Gore, the major part of Phule's life pre-dated the emergence of the nationalist movement in India and he was thus, separated from Shinde and Ambedkar, both by social background and historical location. Whereas Shinde and Ambedkar were somewhat

¹³⁹ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Ideology and the Interpretation of History*, p.314, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

contemporaneous, though Shinde's most active period was nearly over when Ambedkar emerged on the scene, they represented two political philosophies.¹⁴¹ While Phule emphathised with the Untouchables, he was not of them. His strategy of building a common front of non-Brahman touchable castes and the Untouchables did not appeal to Ambedkar. On this point, Gore thinks, the status difference between them made for a difference in their strategies and in their perception of the groups that needed to be mobilised.¹⁴² The other point of difference was that during Phule's time, there was not much scope for political mobilisation; the opportunity arose for the first time between 1915 to 1919, when Ambedkar was just emerging. While Phule sought to eschew political activism, Ambedkar came to consider it central to his strategy. Similarly, according to Gore, Shinde and Ambedkar differed from each other in terms of caste as well as temperament.¹⁴³ Shinde being a touchable Kshatriya Maratha, preached for social reform. He whoever, could not conceive of himself as the leader of the Untouchables in any political confrontation with the caste Hindus. At the national level he probably gave freedom priority over social reform. Ambedkar, on the other hand, was mobilizing the Untouchables for their self-respect to be restored and tried to ensure that their interests were not lost sight of in the larger nationalist cause. He thought that there was a need to serve, educate and change

¹⁴¹ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Social Location and Ideology*, p.320, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.333.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.335.

the life style of the untouchables, there was a greater need to confront and shake the complacency of the touchables in their attitude towards the Untouchables. Shinde thought in terms of sympathy and fair play on the part of caste Hindus. Ambedkar thought in terms of equality, justice and the rights of the Untouchables.¹⁴⁴

Thus, Gore has described that social location both as location in the social hierarchy as well as location in the process of historical development helps in understanding the differences in the ideology of these leaders. He is however categorical that ideological commitment making a difference in the perception and explanation of social phenomena as well as it is being rooted in social location – all these were indicated by the individual cases examined and these must at best be regarded as possible hypotheses which need to be examined and tested by further studies.¹⁴⁵

Gore himself has admitted that he was an engrossed reader of the writings of Gandhi and Nehru. So his taking up a study on Ambedkar is really indicative of the fact that he has obviously been influenced by Ambedkar's thought. This interest in Ambedkar might have emanated from his study on Phule, Shinde and the non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra. Dedicating a book to espouse and construct the Ambedkar ideology is in itself a proof of the bearing of

¹⁴⁴ M.S. Gore, 1993, *Social Location and Ideology*, p.335, in "The Social Context of an Ideology".

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.337.

Ambedkarism on Gore. It is a very interesting book which has clearly delineated sociologically the Ambedkar ideology both theoretically as well as substantively.

So, it becomes quite clear that Ambedkarism has its impact on the present day sociological writings. Nobody takes up a study unless he/she is interested in it. Gail Omvedt, Kancha Illaiah and M.S. Gore though may not be influenced by Ambedkarism to the same degree but they are certainly impressed enough to write their books. It is thus, obvious that the contemporary sociology has been influenced by Ambedkarism. Here we have studied the select texts of only three sociologists. But as we look at the sociological literature, we realize that many more sociologists like Nanduram, P. Jagdand and so on, have been influenced by Ambedkarism. Indeed, like Marxism and Gandhism, Ambedkarism too has occupied an important place in the sociology of ideas.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

In the introduction, it was made clear that in undertaking this whole exercise, I had two objectives in mind - first, the definition and delineation of Ambedkarism, and secondly, to reflect its influence on the contemporary Indian sociology. And I have taken utmost care to address both the objectives. Though each chapter has its own concluding remark, here again, a total summing up of the whole exercise is attempted to make the observations more focused and clear.

The first chapter started the discussion with the main focus on presenting Ambedkarism as an ideology. As we gather, it is the thought and philosophy of Ambedkar that got consolidated into an inspiring ideology for the millions of deprived, especially the Untouchables. Ambedkar is no more here but he is very much here through his innovative ideas and enunciated values. Ideas never die, so, the persons associated with the ideas also never die. Though they do not exist physically, they live in the heart, soul and mind of the people who appreciate and admire their ideas and in fact, get inspired by them. This means, a complete engulfing of the personality takes place when a specific ideology appeals to one. Ambedkarism has the same mesmerising effect on its followers.

However, the chapter reflected that Ambedkarism was profoundly an ideology of strident protest and incendiary critique against the inequitous Hindu social system. Hindu society which was based on graded inequality, and which

enforced inhumanity and indignity was not a society to cling on for the Untouchables. Ambedkarism made this clear when it evolved as an emancipatory ideology. Though Ambedkar tried his best to reform Hinduism and alter the graded inequality through his emphasis on equality, fraternity, liberty and justice, he shelved this effort when he became unable to ensure any discernible change in the attitude of the Hindus. A very important aspect of Ambedkarism thus, evolved during this time and that was of leaving Hinduism. Though Ambedkarism stressed on clean occupation, education, political participation and mobilisation as the key to carving out a dignified and self-respect life, his own example refuted this. Being highly educated and a foreign returned intellectual, he could not even find himself free from the clutches of untouchability. Hinduism had no dignified status to offer to the Untouchables. This was precisely clear and Ambedkar thought of his strategy to denounce Hinduism.

Ambedkar's leadership also demanded his political activism. As Hindu society was not ready even to change the demeaning attitude towards the Untouchables, leave alone granting any concession for their betterment, Ambedkar knew that any thing good for the Untouchables if at all done, could be done by the Britishers. So, while creating and maintaining a separate untouchable consciousness and identity, and adopting an equi-distance from the Indian National Congress as well as the British government, he was however having a slightly pro-British attitude in the context of getting some favourable politico-administrative decisions. His political role as a leader brought the Untouchables

the political right. His emancipatory zeal found the expression in the Indian constitution, the drafting of which was his responsibility. Though he introduced the principles, like equality, liberty, fraternity, justice, and protective discrimination (reservation) for the Untouchables and tribals as well as the practice of untouchability as a punishable offence, keeping the future in mind his disenchantment with Hinduism that grew from his childhood however, never dissipated rather kept on multiplying. He left Hinduism towards the end of his life because his suggestion of giving Hinduism a humane touch through inter-caste marriage and the withdrawal of religious sanction behind the caste system was never practised. Ambedkarism which stressed on the principle of humanism found Buddhism to be a more humane and emancipatory religion than Hinduism which was not considered to be a religion for its oppressive features. Ambedkarism was also shown as emphasizing on Buddhism as an alternative to Marxism which was critiqued for various reasons. It was also portrayed that Gandhism with its all noble intentions of serving the interests of the Untouchables only served the interests of Hindus and nobody else.

In the second chapter, it was shown that in the Indian context, 'caste and politics have a very close association'. For this reason, caste plays a vital role in political process. Right from the non-Brahmin movement through the Dalit Panther movement of 1970s to the rise of BSP and other Backward Class as well as Dalit organisation, caste has always been a significant political factor to reckon with. In the present day politics when reservation and Dalit assertion

have important value attached to them, Ambedkarism has found itself a very encouraging fillip and become a constant and only source of inspiration for the deprived.

The third chapter brought out clearly the influence of Ambedkarism on contemporary Indian sociology. Though this generalisation is based on picking up only three scholars of repute, the influence is very much evident and it has been portrayed. An ideology or perspective can not influence everybody. As a matter of fact, ideology does not influence, people who find it appealing or inspiring get influenced. Though there are more cases which could have been picked up, it is due to certain constraints that the number has been reduced. Omvedt's two books clearly show that Ambedkar's thoughts and ideas have almost been the centrestage of her analysis. Her commitment to caste issues and other deprived sections have thus tremendously been inspired by Ambedkarism. Similarly, Illaiah himself being a Shudra or what he calls 'Dalit bahujan', like Ambedkar, had experienced all sorts of caste discrimination and the stark differences between the Hindu culture and his culture. So, he questions that when he was never a part of the Hindu culture why he should become a part of it now. Thus, he shows the differences between the Hindu culture and the Dalit bahujan culture holding the latter more humane and democratic and the former demeaning and oppressive. Hence, he has expressed his verdict of why he does not want to be a Hindu in the context of the Hindutva philosophy propagating that the Dalit bahujans are Hindus. This is another example of subaltern critique which has got

enormous inspiration from the great subalternist - Ambedkar and his ideology - Ambedkarism. M.S. Gore, on the other hand, has tried to elucidate the ideology developed by Ambedkar in the course of his life long struggle to ensure that the Untouchables of India got their legitimate share in any political arrangement that finally evolved out of the conflict that took place between the nationalist forces and the representatives of colonial rule in India in the first of this century. At a different level, his effort was also diverted towards creating their distinct identity and their sense of self-respect.

Even after fifty years of independence, atrocities on Dalits are still on, untouchability in one form or the other is still a practice. One is thus led to ask 'Has Ambedkarism really solved the problems of the Untouchables? If not, can it solve and if yes, how long will it take?' These are some of the questions this study has not addressed and answered. So a further study may be taken up in this regard.

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