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NATURE AND CRISIS OF DALIT LEADERSHIP IN INDIA
A MACRO SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled, "NATURE AND CRISIS OF DALIT LEADERSHIP IN INDIA - A MACRO SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS", submitted by Mr. Vivek Kumar in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY of this University. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree to this University or to any other University and is her own work.

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


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SUPERVISOR


(PROF. K.L. SHARMA)
CHAIRPERSON

*Dedicated to
my
Amma, Abba
and
Mummy, Papa*

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Vivek Kumar
VIVEK KUMAR

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It has rightly been suggested that "the 'Leadership' of the society is a criterion of the values by which that society lives. The breadth of the social base from which it is recruited, the way in which it exercises the decision-making power, the extent and nature of its accountability ...these and other attributes are the indicators of the degree of shared power, shared respect, shared well being and shared safety in a given society at a given time".¹ By learning the character of political leaders, one learns much about the character of a society. This is equally applicable to Indian society.

As the Indian society has changed over the years so has the nature of its leadership. The leadership in India started with the monarchical-feudal² lords of the traditional types whose social structure as well as the world view was hierarchical. The leadership during the ancient and Mughal India can be cited as examples. Besides, the roles were ascribed to these leaders on the religious, patrimonial and other particularistic grounds. The source of the legitimation of their authority was in their inherited traditional status, honour and charisma.

The monarchical - feudal type of leadership was replaced by the national - liberal³ type. The British colonial rule in India helped in the process in many ways. In fact it was the latent function of the colonial rule which led to the emergence of the national - liberal leadership which was initially oriented toward social reform and, later on, transfer of political power. Basically, the leaders of this period were influenced by the Western ideology of liberal - humanism, democracy, egalitarianism, nationalism, etc. The leadership had a unique confluence of traditionality and modernity. Most of them were highly westernized and belonged to an emerging professional group or class. The leaders of this era addressed many social evils like disabilities of the caste system, widow remarriage, child marriage, etc. They also preached cultural values of nationalism, liberalism, economic advancement etc. but without any specific policy.

Though they all had a common goal of fighting against the alien enemy, they themselves were divided on ideological grounds. For instance, by 1925 there were different political parties based on their specific political ideology. The Indian National Congress⁴, All India Muslim League⁵, All India Hindu Mahasabha⁶, and Communist movement⁷, all had established. The Dalits had also formed their own political organization. It is

alleged that the communists and Dalits supported the British rule in India. But it is a known fact that the Indian National Congress, the biggest political organization during that period, also used to support the British Raj. Gandhi and other moderates had full faith in the British administration and initially used to submit petitions asking for some concessions to the 'native' people. Another notable fact about the social composition of the leadership of this era was that it was dominated by the upper castes like the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Kayasthas, etc. It is this leadership that fought for the transfer of the political power from the British imperialism in India in the last phase of its role in the first half of the present century.

However, the nature and composition of the national leadership changed substantially after independence. The political and cultural goals, which were defused and idealistic before independence had now to be translated into specific goals and the former exhortations were to be converted into actions. The National movement had now to be transformed into an effective system of political movement under the framework of parliamentary democracy. Moreover, the common enemy, the British rule, had disappeared. By the end of its first decade of independence, India lost some of its

political giants - Ambedkar, Gandhi, Patel, Subhas Chandra Bose, etc. resulting into a drastic change in the character and social composition of its new leadership. There emerged a second generation of leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajendra Prasad, Abulkalam Azad, Jayprakash Narayan, Govind Ballabh Pant, etc. to lead and guide the nation towards a parliamentary system. These leaders were largely answerable to the people through the elections. Moreover, they had Gandhism as their political ideology and programme of action. Equipped with all these they were harping on building a basis for a communitarian participatory democracy wherein the citizens from the lowest class/caste would also get chances of sharing in the process of decision-making. Democratic decentralization of power and resources was their primary agenda.

But with the demise of these leaders there came a void of the committed leadership. Moreover, the recruitment of leaders also changed. Formerly, it was the upper caste/class people who had monopolised the institutions of politics due to their earlier access to education and modern institutions. But now the middle and lower castes also started joining politics. The political dominance of the Indian National Congress popularly known as the Congress Party by this time also got reduced. A

number of new political parties emerged on the scene reflecting the social structural realities in the country and articulating the interests of languages, castes, regions and religions. The growth of a large number of regional political parties in different parts of the country are examples of such a trend. With this has emerged a new crop of political leaders who have been called as leaders with populist political orientations.⁸ They do not have any dominant ideology on the basis of which they can guide the nation. To capture power has become their sole objective. For this they do not appeal to the masses on the ground of any generalised nationalistic theme but they prefer to mobilise groups in their community or region. The rise of various political parties with large support of specific caste and religious groups is the best example of this development. Even the so-called nationalist political parties are heavily dependent on the caste and communal loyalties of their leaders. Besides, different pressure groups have emerged within a political party and outside.

The state has become very powerful. With the tussle for power and endurance of ones' rule becoming the sole aim, the general welfare and progress of the masses have been ignored by the leadership. To capture power all fair and foul means are used. Money and muscle power

are the most prominent of them. Members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assemblies are bought from one party to another. The weaker sections (Dalits) are forced to vote in favour of some specific leader and if they assert themselves then atrocities are unleashed on them. This endurance of political power has produced a craze for dynastic succession of leadership with no commitment to the nation and the people. The most glaring cases are of Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi, K.C. Pant, V.C. Shukla, Najma Heptullah, Mira Kumar, Ajit Singh, Sunil Shastri, etc. who inherited the leadership and have ruled the country for decades. Corruption has become very rampant. Each year a new issue of corruption comes to light. The most glaring examples of corruption in the recent times are the Jaguar Plane deal, St. Kitts, the Bofors Gun deal, the Bank Security Scam and now the Sugar Scam. The Irony is that in all these cases 'National Leaders' have been involved, every time the enquiry committees are set up to find nothing substantive against them. All these give messages of playing high level dramas and befooling the poor masses. The non-committal approach of leaders can be seen also in the general status of the individuals. It is a fact that the majority of the people in the country suffer from poverty, illiteracy and unemployment which are increasing in numbers day by day.

All this has led to the process of an endless morass of confusion and stagnation in the contemporary Indian political system. The general political leadership in the country now faces a serious crisis of the lack of political ideology to lead the masses. Hence it needs to come out of its parochial, faction-ridden and self aggrandizing nature. Otherwise, the problems of the general masses will not be properly attended to and will remain neglected. This is needed more so as the self-fulfilling prophecy breeds violence, corruption, secessionism and so on. There have already emerged a number of groups like the 'Peoples' War Group (P.W.G.) in Andhra Pradesh, the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC) in Bihar, various Dalit militant groups like the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti of Karnataka, Dalit Sena of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, Dalit SEEDIA Organization of Kerala and secessionist voices from Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir which have lost their faith in the present leadership and political system in the country. The general leadership in the country is also facing a crisis of the lack of a mass leader acceptable to all social groups and political parties. Such a leader may also bridge the gap between the masses and the leaders of different lines who have already become inaccessible to the common people.

The above mentioned crises of the general leadership are also found in the Dalit leadership. Its non-committal and self-sustaining attitude at the cost of the Dalit masses has become the rule of law. The leaders have nearly ceased to identify themselves with the cause of the Dalits. They are also divided not only on the bases of their political ideology and the plans of action which they intend to pursue but also on the bases of their petty interests and self-gratification. These leaders have failed to build up a national movement of uniting all sections of the Dalits. They are still trapped in the sub-caste differences which are used by the general leadership to create cleavages among them. The Dalit Leadership has also proved its inability to create a comprehensive ideology and a consistent line of action for the social amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits.

It is then ironical on the part of the Dalit leaders that even after 47 years of independence, they face the dilemma of the joint electorates through which they are elected to Parliament and State Assemblies. More specifically, the dilemma is whether they represent the general masses or the Dalits of the reserved constituency. This is really a bigger crisis from the point of the very principle of reserved constituency, the Dalit leaders and Dalit masses, because it is the most

important factor which breeds a non-committal and self-sustaining attitude of the leadership. But the leaders of the Dalit community have failed to resolve this crisis by doing away with the system of the joint electorate and getting it replaced by the system of separate electorate. They are not yet ready to sacrifice their office and comfort for the betterment of their brethren. Instead, a creamy layer of the political elite has emerged among the Dalits which is by and large non-committal to the cause of the Dalit masses as stated earlier. Hence there is general apathy among the people in the country towards the existing political system and the leadership which is largely shared by the Dalit masses.

The Present Study:-

In the light of the above discussion, the present study proposes to examine the nature and the crisis of the Dalit Leadership in the Indian society. Since the socio-political scene in the contemporary period is not entirely independent of the continuation, in some forms, of the historical legacy, this study seeks to analyse the crisis of the Dalit Leadership in the present time in relation to that existed in the past. Dalits are part and parcel of the Indian society though a section of them has been asserting time and again for their social identity outside

the pale of the Hindu social order. The nature of their leadership has also been greatly influenced by the general leadership in the country. Therefore the present study tends to explain the nature of the Dalit Leadership in relation to that of the general national leadership all over in the country.

This is however not to suggest that the Dalit Leadership has always remained identical to the general leadership. Since the socio-economic, religious and political problems of the Dalits have always been different from those of the general population, their articulations and approaches to resolve them have also been different. The present study seeks to enquire into the ways in which the problems of the Dalits were different from that of others. It also proposes to examine in detail the nature and role of Ambedkar's Leadership which had dominated the socio-political scene for nearly three decades and provided a more assertive and respectful social identity to the Dalits and a distinctive character to their Leadership.

Indian society has witnessed both qualitative and quantitative changes since independence. It has also experienced more qualitative change in its polity or political system since 1970 onwards. Politics has now

become not only a game of number but also of manipulation and manoeuvring leaders are dependent more on such politics rather than that of commitment. Consequently, they face a number of crisis vis-a-vis crisis of the nation. The Dalit leaders also share such crises. The present study, therefore, examines finally the nature and intensity of crisis of Dalit Leadership and attempts to analyse ways in which their crises are qualitatively different from those of the general leadership in the country.

Conceptual Explanations:-

The two specific concepts of 'Leadership' and 'Dalit' frequently used in this study need some explanations.

The term Leadership has a specific connotation in political sociology and social psychology. In social psychology it refers to the traits of taking up a challenging role and setting up a model for others. But in political sociology it is used for the quality of a politician who has the capacity of binding people together and leading them towards the path of advancement. It should, however, not be confused with social reformer. However, we have used the term leadership, in the present study for both the social reforms and the political

aspects specially of the early decades of this century because there happened to be considerable amount of overlapping in their roles. But we have used it in our subsequent analysis, for the role of the politicians who are not only required to articulate various interests of the people but to lead them towards the path of progress.

The other term centrally discussed in this study is Dalit. The term Dalit found its expression in the Vinaya Pitaka of the Buddhist texts, which has connotation of the poor and deprived masses.⁹ It was also used by Jyotiba Phule for oppressed people in his work like Gulamgiri etc. Later on, it is found in the novels of Prem Chand - the Hindi novelist, who used it for the oppressed people.

In recent times the term Dalit was used and popularised by the Dalit Panthers - a militant organization of untouchable youth in early 1970s in Maharashtra. They defined the term with a broader connotation and used it for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Neo - Buddhists, working class people of the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who were exploited economically, politically and religiously.¹⁰ Having a class connotation, the term Dalit provides a sense of pride and self assertion.

Though the term Dalit represents a broader social category of people, it has been used obliquely for certain untouchable castes like Mahars in Maharashtra, chamars in U.P., etc. But in the most recent years the term Dalit has become a nation wide phenomenon and is largely used by all untouchables irrespective of traditional and parochial caste distinctions. It has also become a symbol of their social identity. Like its usage in social science research in the present time, we have used this term in this study for all the castes which are legally known as the scheduled castes or ex-untouchables.

Chapter Scheme:-

Besides this chapter the next discusses the socio-historical profile of the Dalit Leadership in India beginning since the last decades of the previous century. It highlights the main issues addressed by the then leaders and their achievements in the contemporary socio-political situation. Besides analysing causes of the emergence of a separate Dalit Leadership, this chapter also focuses on the factors which led to the failure of the Dalit Leadership in regard to their roles in social amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits.

Chapter 3; entitled 'Dalit Leadership and the Role of Ambedkar' tries to highlight the importance of Ambedkar's leadership vis-a-vis that of other Dalit leaders. How he tried to mobilise his people initially through the religious and social symbols and later on how he took them to the confluence of socio-political reforms have also been discussed in this chapter. Besides this chapter analyses some of the socio-political factors which convinced him to conceive that only a genuine and committed Dalit Leadership can honestly articulate the socio-political interests of the Dalits and socially ameliorate them. This chapter also refers to the roles of other Dalit leaders of the Ambedkar era for providing betterment to the Dalits in different parts of the country. The chapter ends by mentioning some of crises which the Dalit leaders including Ambedkar himself had to face and resolve. Some of the crises discussed in this chapter are the social identity and unity among Dalits and finding their genuine allies.

Chapter 4; briefly analyses the socio-political profile of the contemporary Dalit Leadership. Besides examining the qualitative changes that the leadership in general and Dalit leadership in particular have undergone, this chapter highlights the death of Ambedkar. This chapter also analyses the former's nature and

crisis in the contemporary time. More precisely it explains a few indicators which depict the failures of the Dalit leaders. Finally the last chapter summarises the findings of this study and the main issues which the Dalit leadership ought to wage struggle for the better appreciation and redressal of the problems of the Dalits.

Methodology:-

The present study is analytical in analysing the nature and social composition of the Dalit Leadership. A number of hypothesis relating to the role of the Dalit Leadership both in the past and in present time have been verified with the help of data extracted from secondary sources like Government Reports, Newspapers, Political Pamphlets, Books and Journals. The Data from these sources have been chronologically analysed to measure the nature and composition of Dalit Leadership for more than six decades in the Indian society.

FOOTNOTES

1. Harold D. Lasswell, Daniel Learner & C. Easton Rothwell, *The Comparative Study of Elites: An Introduction and Bibliography*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, p. 1, quoted in Y. Singh, *Modernization of Indian Tradition*, Rawat Publications, New Delhi, 1988, p. 130.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
4. The Indian National Congress was founded in December 1885, by seventy-two political workers. It was the first organised expression of Indian Nationalism on an all India scale, Chandra, Bipin, *Indias Struggle for Independence*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989, p. 61.
5. At the end of 1907, the All India Muslim League was founded by a group of big Zamindars, ex-bureaucrats and other upper caste Muslims like the Aga Khan, the Nawab of Dacca and Nawab Mohsin-ul-Mulk. *Ibid.*, p. 417.
6. The first session of the All India Hindu Mahasabha was held in April 1915 under the Presidentship of the Maharaja of Kasim Bazar. *Ibid.*, p. 418.
7. It was in the second half of the 1920s that a consolidation of various left ideological trends occurred and began to have a significant impact on the National Movement. *Ibid.*, p. 219.
8. Singh Y., *Opp.cit.*, p. 140.
9. Culluvagga - Senasanakhandhak - 3 - Navakamma, Culluvagga is a part of Vinaya Pitaka.
10. Jogdand, P.G., *Dalit Movement in Maharashtra*, Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p. 71.

CHAPTER 2
**DALIT LEADERSHIP - A BRIEF
SOCIO- HISTORICAL PROFILE**

CHAPTER II

DALIT LEADERSHIP - A BRIEF SOCIO-HISTORICAL PROFILE

The autonomous Dalit Leadership has always been perceived as synonymous to the leadership of Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. But it is a well known fact that though Ambedkar was the first Dalit leader who had an all India following, the autonomous Dalit Leadership of several varieties existed much before he came on the Dalit liberation horizon. Moreover political mobilization of the Dalits on the national scene can be traced to the late 1920s when the British Government initiated a series of Round Table Conferences to provide political safeguards and representation to various minority communities including the Scheduled Castes (Dalits).¹ But this fact is again debatable. One can see that the seeds of the Dalit Leadership existed in different parts of the country much earlier than this. Dalits had organised demonstrations against the Indian National Congress in Poona and Madras way back in 1895 and had burnt its effigy.² But they had carried out more organised movements in different parts of the country since 1920s onwards. Therefore the 1920 can be taken as the culmination point for analysing the nature and social composition of Dalit Leadership in different parts of the country.

There is no doubt that there was very limited Dalit independent organising before 1920s and, hence, very limited independent and autonomous Dalit Leadership. Yet the Dalit Leadership had produced a number of leaders with a large following throughout India. For instance among the early Dalit Leaders in Maharashtra the most well known were Kisan Faguji Bansode (1870-1947), Gopal Baba Walankar, V. Ravji Moonpandit (1860-1924), Shivram Janba Kamble, Kalicharan Nandagawali (1886-1962), G.A. Gawai (1888-1974), and others.³ Similarly in South India M.C. Rajah, the leader of the **Adi-Dravida** movement, was the chief spokesman of the Dalits and also their representative in the Legislative Council in 1926. The **Adi Dravida** movement had been active in Madras since 1918. The other important leaders of the South were Bhagyareddy Verma, Murugesh Pillai etc. Swami Achutanand was working in north for the betterment of Dalits during the 1920s. The other key leaders in the north specially in Punjab in early 1920s were Vasant Pai, Thakar Chand, Swami Shudranand, and in late 1920s emerged another leader named Mangoo Ram.⁴

Dalits began to form political and social organizations also in 1920s. The first independent Dalit political movement in India appear to have been launched in 1910, when the All India Depressed Classes

Federation was established under the encouragement of the 'Bombay Presidency Social Reform Association'. The initial purpose was to pressurise the Indian National Congress to include the removal of untouchability as one of its main planks and they succeeded after 32 years of their movement in getting their demand acceded to by the Congress in its annual session held at 1917 in Calcutta.

Afterwards the political climate changed in the country substantially. The Government of India Act, which took effect in 1919, provided explicitly for communal representation in Indian Parliament. This stimulated the formation of new Dalit political organizations which aimed not only to secure benefits for Dalits but also to organise them into coherent political blocks. There is no doubt that there was a general concern about separate political identity among the scheduled castes (Dalits) throughout India during the early 1920s and a desire to create political organization(s) that would reflect autonomy of their leadership.

As the social, economic, political and geographical realities of the various regions in India were different, so were the dominant issues related to the emergence of an autonomous Dalit Leadership. Not only this but each region had a different level of social consciousness in terms of oppression and exploitation,

due to different social and historical movements which had taken place in the Past. Therefore, for a proper understanding of the nature and social composition of Dalit Leadership it is necessary to analyse it in this chapter region wise since like the general leadership the Dalit Leadership has also been region based.

DALIT LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH INDIA

The decade of the 1920s saw the emergence of the Dalit Leadership vis-a-vis movements as a conscious and organised force in the social and political life of Northern (United Provinces and Punjab), Western (Bombay and Nagpur of Bombay Presidency), Central (Vidarbha) and Southern India (Hyderabad, Mysore, Kerala of Madras Presidency). In the south the independent Dalit Leadership began to emerge in the 1920s. Here, agricultural commercialization laid the basis for a wide-spread rural movement of the Dalits unlike their movements in urban industrial centres found in Western and other parts of India.⁵ The Dalit Leadership emerged more distinctively in seven districts of the Coastal Andhra (Srikakulam, Visakhapatnam, East and West Godavari, Ongole, Guntur and Nellore) and four districts of Rayalseema (Kurnool, Chittoor, Anantapur and Cuddapah) which were included in Madras Presidency during the

colonial rule. Being influenced by the non-Brahman movement in the region, the Dalit movement concentrated on agrarian issues like their right over lands, wages, etc. More precisely, there emerged the non-Brahman movement in 1917 in Madras Presidency which challenged the dominance of Brahman elites in the Indian National Congress. It also rejected the Brahman dominance in almost every walk of life and laid the basis for many of the themes influencing Dalit Leadership and movement, including a non-Aryan or Dravidan Identity.

The term '**Adi-Andhra**' rose in post 1917 period when Dalits in the south, influenced by the 'non-Aryan' theme of the Dravidian movement, were identifying themselves as **Adi-Dravidians**, **Adi-Andhras** and **Adi-Karnatakas** - the original sons of the soil. For instance the census data of 1931 enumerated the population of the **Adi-Andhras** at 6.5 lakhs as compared to a little more than 8 lakh of **Mallas** and 6 lakh of **Madigas**, the major untouchable castes (Dalits) in Andhra Pradesh. The important leaders of the movement were Sundru Venkaiah, Kusuma Venkatranaih, Mutakki Venkateswarlu, Devendrudu, Kamatam Shanmugan, etc. Through organising meetings and conferences throughout the districts the Dalit Leadership had a broad rural base. The **Adi-Andhra** consciousness and the broad ideology of political autonomy implied in it



were becoming a significant social force in the Andhra coastal region, even though much of the mass-based Telugu consciousness was taking on the Hindu plank and an acceptance of Hinduism.

Contrary to this, an active but factionalised urban based Dalit Leadership emerged during 1920s in Hyderabad, the largest state of the British regime in India. Dalit movement here developed within an already dangerously polarised Hindu-Muslim communal tension. As stated by Gail Omvedt, " In some way there was a closeness in Dalit and Muslim relations in the Hyderabad area itself. Yet it was a closeness characterised by ambiguity".⁶ In this narrow and communalised framework, a small but vigorous Dalit movement developed in 1910 based among Hyderabad **Malas**. Two important leaders who stood at the centre of it were Bhagyareddy Verma and Arigay Ramaswamy. It was Bhagyareddy (1888-1939) who presided over not only the momentous conference at Vijayawada in 1913 when the '**PANCHAMA**' identity was rejected, but also over a number of other conferences there after. His organising activity began in 1912 when he formed the **Adi Hindu Jatiyonnati Sabha** and **Manya Sangam**. The organizations were formed with the help of Dalit employees which gives a sense of emerging 'Dalit Middle Class'.⁷ At the same time Arigay Ramaswamy, began a

social reform group in Secunderabad, and Maduri Audia. He had also started another **Manya Sangam** with the objective of social reforms. Through these organizations the leaders stressed internal social reforms within the Dalit community. Attempts were made to ban drinking of alcohol and meat eating at social functions, abolition of the **Devdasi** customs etc. This group of leaders also found themselves in conflict with the '**Caste Chaudharis**'. They also set up many alternative courts to handle the disputes within the castes.

The radicalization among Dalits throughout South India brought with it an identification with the '**Adi-Ideology**'. Four **Adi-Hindu** Conferences were organised in Hyderabad itself between 1912 and 1924. Bhagyareddy transformed his **Manya Sangam** into the **Adi-Hindu** Social Service League, which became the main organization of the Dalits in Hyderabad. This appeal to **Adi Hindu** Identity was the result of Bhagyareddy's close connection with North Indian **Adi Hindu** movements. The term '**Adi Hindu**' was spreading among sections of north Indian **Chamars** during this time. And Bhagyareddy himself had travelled and attended several conferences, notably two in 1927 and 1930, which described depressed classes as **Adi Hindus**.⁸

Two opposing sections of **Adi Hindus** emerged during this period in Hyderabad. One group consisting of Tamils represented the **Adi-Dravida** and formed the 'The Adi Dravida Educational League'. The other group consisted of Telugu-speaking Dalits describing themselves as **Adi Hindu**. The **Adi Dravidas** claimed to be the aborigines and to have a separate history, philosophy, civilization and culture etc. which were distinct from those of Hindus. On the basis of this they claimed their separate corporate group identity. The Telugu speaking **Adi Hindus** repudiated the above argument on the basis that the concept of God, the mode of worship, the system of rituals and code of customs, the manner of dress and way of the socially depressed classes were identical with those of the caste Hindus, and therefore they maintained that religiously **Adi Hindus** were Hindus. This was a clear case of the autonomy - integration dichotomy in terms of religious - cultural identities.

Later on the Leadership got indulged in intensive competitive struggles. During the 1920s these were primarily between Bhagyareddy and Arigay Ramaswamy. A similar trend continued during 1930 onwards.

The Dalit striving in south India was also witnessed in Kerala, where the **Pulayas** - untouchables - had organised their socio-cultural revolts since the

beginning of this century under the able leadership of Ayyankali and Vellikara Choti. The aim of such revolt initially was not for economic gain but for entry into educational institutions and other public places.⁹ **Pulayas** won the freedom to walk along public roads and entry to schools for their children by 1900 which were not fully accepted by caste Hindus and other. Therefore, Ayyankali and Vellikara Choti had organised another movement in 1914 for school entry for **Pulaya** children with considerable amount of resistance by caste Hindus. Another leader Gopala Das fought against the custom of wearing bead necklaces by **Pulaya** women. The social revolts of the **Pulayas** brought to them a new awakening. This awakening became dependent on the wide spread political developments of the state with the representation of Dalit Leaders in the Assembly and Legislative Council in 1911 and 1926 respectively. The voice of the **Pulayas** was first heard within the political walls of the state.

The Dalit organizations came into existence in Mysore state also the **Adi-Dravida** Abhi-Vrudhi Sangh, apparently Tamil supported was led by Murugesh Pillai though it sought to include kannadigas. The other organization called **Adi-Jambava** Sangha was exclusively formed and supported by **Madigas**. The leaders of the

organization convened a 'political conference' of **Panchamas** in 1920. Though being invited to participate Ambedkar could not attend this conference due to a state ban on his entry into state. Other conferences were organised in 1923 and 1925 under the Presidentship of M.C. Rajah. The conferences passed resolutions by using the **Adi-Karnataka** and **Adi-Dravida** terminology. Their basic demands were admission of Dalit students in educational institutions, access to water tanks temple entry, etc. From the 1920s onward Dalits were also asking the government for allotment of wastelands and other follo lands for cultivation. They asked for land at concessional rates in the newly irrigated tracks of the Irwin canal. Moreover, demands for relieving Dalits entirely from traditional caste duties were also made. It was also argued that if they were not relieved, then they should be directly paid by government for their duties out of a cess collected from peasants.

But all these activities functioned within the framework of the Politics of Petitions and Patronage.¹⁰ Another aspect of the movement in Mysore state was that Dalits hardly spoke in their own voice. When the issue of untouchability was defined as a 'social issue', since the end of 1920s, it was first taken up by caste Hindu organizations dominated primarily by Brahmans. These

organizations were 'Mysore League Against 'Untouchability' and 'Harijan Sevak Sangh'. Here it is not to deny that a capacity for struggle clearly existed among the rural Dalits in Mysore state, but there were no leaders to organize it. The Kannada educated Dalits remained powerless and relatively voiceless in the absence of a sound industrial base and political organization of their own.

The Dalit Leadership up to 1920s was multi-faceted. It covered a wide range of issues relating to the life and socio-economic status of the Dalits. The Dalit Leadership in the different parts of South India made the Dalits conscious of their social existence, exploitation and social degradation. The Dalit Leaders organised various movements through which they raised the issues of separate Dalit identity, Dalits' access to public places and resources. They also struggled for the political rights of Dalits and their representation in the different political bodies. Besides, they also fought for economic rights including rights of land and adequate wages to be paid to them. They succeeded in getting fulfilled some of their demands but failed on many counts. As a result they continued the movements in the subsequent decades.

DALIT LEADERSHIP IN WESTERN INDIA:

There was some limited independent Dalit organising in Western India before 1920s. Prior to the emergence of Dr. Ambedkar as the saviour of the untouchables (Dalits), a few spokesmen had led the **Mahar** movement in Bombay Presidency as mentioned earlier. Gopal Baba Walangkar the retired army officer led the Ratnagiri based group and sent a petition to the government as early as in 1890. This was the beginning of the articulate protest among **Mahars**. A Bombay newspaper 'Indu Prakash' reported "the disadvantaged are raising their voices" and quoted an evidence of protest address of Walangkar to the leaders of Hindu Society.¹¹ He highlighted the grievances of the people by writing in 'Dinbandhu' and 'Sudharak', Marathi newspapers in which he argued that casteism and untouchability had no religious base and were the monsters created by the Hindus. To prove his thesis he published a booklet titled, "Vital Vidhwansak", in 1918. He formed 'Anarya Doshpariharak Mandli' (non Aryan group for removal of wrongs) at Dopali in the localities of Ratnagiri district, where untouchable (Dalits) castes such as **Chambhar**, and **Mahar** pensioners lived. Earlier, the **Mahars**, **Mangs** and **Chambhars** were recruited in the army of the East India Company, but around 1890-91 their recruitment ceased. Further, those

already in service were asked to leave. Enraged over this, Walangkar drew up a petition in July, 1890 requesting re-acceptance of the Dalits in the Army. In this mission he secured little support from his fellows. This itself speaks of the level of consciousness among the Dalits for their rights. The petition advocated for **Mahars, Mangs and Chambhars** who had served both in the army and domestic services. It made the claim that the 'Dalits were kshatriyas', demoted by the Peshwas at the time of the Mahadurgadevi famine in 1676 for eating whatever they could find to save their lives.¹² It is said that with the work of Walangkar, a new era had emerged for the Dalits. He aroused these people to fight against economic, social and religious disabilities. Here, on the basis of his efforts, Walankar can be termed as the first social thinker, the first revolutionary, and the first initiator of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra.¹³

The pre-Ambedkar era saw the emergence of another leader Shivram Janba Kamble. He formed Oppressed India Association in Nagpur. In 1904 Kamble, eloquent in English, sent a memorandum to the Governor of Bombay on behalf of 1500 **Mahars** in the Dellan and Konkan areas. Kamble, along with Gangaram Krishnaje, also submitted another petition supported by documents in 1910 asking for employment in the lowest grades of the public services,

in the ranks of police sepoy and the solidiers in the Armed forces. Kamble later on organised four conferences in Bombay during 1917-18. A few of these were also organised under the caste Hindu leadership, who were also concerned with untouchables (Dalits) for their increased political importance in the overdue reforms. In fact Kamble was the first man to hold a conference of the Dalits in India.¹⁴ Besides this he formed a **Mahar** caste association and also published a Marathi newspaper '**Somvansh Mitra**'. He was a leader in the 'Parvati Temple Satyagraha' conducted by the Dalits and a few caste Hindus in 1929.¹⁵ He also fought against the customary practices of **Devdasi** system prevalent among **Mahars** and **Mangs**. When Ambedkar appeared on the public scene in 1920, Kamble welcomed him as a leader of Dalits. They often met and discussed different issues. However, they had differences with regard to the 1937 election procedures. As a result Kamble dissociated himself from Ambedkar. But, despite the differences, Kamble never undermined the efforts of Ambedkar.

Yet another Dalit leader in the pre-Ambedkar era, who is remembered even today is Kisan Fagojī Bansode from Nagpur as stated earlier. He founded '**Sanmarg Bodhak Nirashrit Samaj**' (Depressed class society showing the right path) in 1903. The Samaj existed for showing the

principles of right 'Panth' to Mahars. He founded many educational institutions including a school for girls in 1907. He also started several newspapers, like the Nirikshak Hindu Nagrik (1910), Vithal Vidhvansak (1913), Mazur Patrika (1918) and Chokha Mela (1931). Bansode published several books on the Mahar saint Chokhamela from his own press in 1941. He also started a library in Mohapa. He not only held conferences for the Dalits but went from house to house preaching self-respect among the people. His Samaj argued with Mahars, Mangs and Chambhars not to become Christian, for the removal of ignorance, not to eat what is not to be eaten, not to drink liquor, to take to education, to organise and to create a feeling among Hindus that the Dalits should be raised up.¹⁶ He further formed 'Antaj Samaj' (Last Born Society) in 1919 and 'Mahar Sudharak Mandal' in 1920. He also wrote 'Tamasha' (folk dramas) in order to educate and liberate his people from the yoke of Hindu customs and blind faiths. Bansode had close ties with Ambedkar till the latter's announcement of religious conversion in 1935. Bansode went almost all the way with Ambedkar in social and political matters but retained the belief that progress could be made within Hinduism.

Of a slightly younger generation two spokesman of Dalit community in the pre-Ambedkar era or contemporary to

Ambedkar were Ganesh Akkaji Gavai (1888-1974), from Amraoti district who began by founding a 'Mahar library', and 'Mahar Sudharak Mandal' in his home village and Kalicharan Nandagwali (1886-1962) a less educated but wealthy malguzar, who is credited with founding the first girls, school and who along with Gavai became one of the first Dalit member of the Legislative Council. Gavai along with Bansode was pulled into the orbit of the Tilakites and a pro-Hindu position thus getting linked to nationalists.¹⁷ Gavai was influenced by Vithal Ranji Shinde, a nationalist Maratha leader. Gavai and Bansode organised Depressed Classes Association in 1915. The two had met Shinde in 1910 and together joined the Prarthana Samaj. Gavai had also associated himself with Shinde's Depressed Classes Mission. He was involved in organising many Dalit conferences in Maharashtra during the 1920s and also participated in the conference of **Adi Hindu** in north India. Gavai eventually supported a Hindu Mahasabha proposal for bringing about a compromise between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1932 over the issue of separate electorate for Dalits. He ultimately joined the Mahasabha in 1933 and harshly criticized Ambedkar's call for religious conversion in 1935. But before that, by 1932 Gavai had lost all influence over Dalits. In spite of the prominence the Gavai-Bansode group gained as Dalit spokesmen, social reformers, members of the Legislative

Council and of many government committees, it could not maintain a Dalit base that was anti-Ambedkar and pro-Congress.

It was a unique confluence of social and political leadership which existed prior to Ambedkar. But prior to Bansode, there were some other social reformers like Keshavraoji Khandare, Vithoba Raoji Moon santpande, Kalicharan Nanda Gavli, Rewaram Kawade, Babu Hardas and many others in Vidharbha region. Vithoba Raoji built a separate bathing place for Mahars at Ramtek near Nagpur around 1914. He was the founder President of Mahar Sabha, formed in 1912. And with the formation of the Sabha, the social movements of the Dalits from different parts of Maharashtra were linked with that of the movement of the Dalits of Vidharbha. The Hindu social reformer took a note of the work of Vithoba and his colleagues in 1913. Kalicharan Nanda Gavli another social reformer at that time, had established schools for girls in 1909. He fought against injustices and published booklets in order to mobilize the people of the Dalit community. Kalicharan was the convener of the 'Bhartiya Bahiskrit Parishad' which held its meeting at Nagpur in 1920 under the Chairmanship of Sahu Maharaj of Kolhapur. He also highlighted the problems of the Dalits to the Southborough committee in 1919 and the Simon Commission in 1928.

People stopped supporting him because of his inclination towards the Indian National Congress.

Thus the Dalit Leadership up to the 1920s in Western India was committed to both the social reforms and political representation of the Dalits. Though its loyalties were divided, it was concerned primarily with the cause of Dalits.

DALIT LEADERSHIP IN NORTH INDIA:

The contemporary movements of Dalits in Northern India were limited in comparison to their movements in south and western India. Very limited historical material of these movements is available. However, two prominent movements which can be mentioned here are **Adi Hindu** movements of Uttar Pradesh and **Ad Dharam** of Punjab as stated at the very outset. Though initially religious in nature **Ad Dharam** later on raised important socio-political issues related to Dalits.

The **Adi Hindu** movement rose during 1920s in Uttar Pradesh. Swami Achutanand was the leader of the movement. He was from Kanpur - the industrial metropolis of Uttar Pradesh. Here supported by several Dalit leaders he had published a small newspaper in Hindi entitled **Adi Hindu**. The leader of the **Adi Hindu** movement had submitted a

memorandum to the Simon Commission in 1928 asking for separate status and rights and representation to be given to the Dalits. According to Owen Lynch, the Swami also preached in Agra but was driven out by the leaders of the Jatwakshatriya movement because of his radical doctrines.¹⁸

The **Adi Hindu** movement of Uttar Pradesh was in contact with the **AD Dharm** of Punjab and **Adi Hindu** of Andhra. A meeting was convened by Swami Achutanand in Delhi in early 1926 which was attended by some leaders of the **Ad Dharm** of Punjab.¹⁹ Bhagyareddy Verma from Andhra also participated. The purpose of the meeting was to bring some unity among Dalit activists in different parts of the country. The meeting displayed a certain amount of agreement regarding the need for establishing a separate Dalit organization and some attempt was also made to forge a united front. But there was disagreement over the name of the organization and its significance. According to the **Ad Dharm** leaders, Achutanand wanted the '**Adi**' movements all over India to unite behind the same name whereas the Punjab Dalits thought they should first attain regional strength under separate names, and then unite. In addition, the Punjab delegates objected to using a name that would include the word 'Hindu'. Thus the names remained separate as did their organizations, although the

movements continued to maintain contact through meeting in Kanpur and Lucknow in 1927 and 1929.

The **Ad Dharm** movement of Punjab risen in the soil of Aryans on its part produced a number of leaders. In the early 1920s a handful of educated young Dalit activists who had been meeting in Jullundar began serious discussion about developing a circle of communication and political strength. The three key leaders were Vasant Rai, Thakar Chand and Swami Shudranand. These leaders were educated in the schools sponsored by the Arya Samaj. "The Samaj provided an organizational model for a new social group to emulate, and for the **Ad Dharm** leaders it was initially something even more. It was the maternal ? context in which their movement was conceived, and from which it grew".²⁰

Before the founding of **Ad Dharm**, a Dalit member of the Arya Samaj from Hoshiarpur, Sant Ram, B.A., had began a new movement for Dalit equality within the Arya Samaj. Sant Ram's organization the Jat Pat Todak Mandal (society for the abolition of caste), began in 1922 was involved by 1924 in a major conflict with the Arya Samaj Organization and eventually lefted. The Central theme of Jat Pat Todak mandal was that of intercaste marriages. The same organization planned to have Dr. Ambedkar presidential

address in 1936 which was eventually cancelled due to ideological differences between him and the organization.

The Mandal however, definitely encouraged the young generations of Dalits to create an organization of their own. As a result, the **AD Dharm** emerged as an organised movement of Dalits in 1926 in Punjab with Mangoo Ram as the President of the Executive Committee. He was a folk hero, who had lived in America with the Gadar party - a militant movement of nationalist youths living in California. The main plea of the **AD Dharm** movement was that the untouchables (Dalits) constituted a **quam**, a distinct religious community similar to those of the Muslims, Hindus and Sikh communities and their **quam** existed in India from time immemorial i.e. before the Hindus (Aryans) arrived.²¹

In the later stage the leaders of the **Ad Dharm** felt the lure of two models of social organizations and political influence. One of these was the example set by Muslim nationalists who demanded a separate territory of their own. The other was provided by political parties and a network of religious communal support for electoral candidates. "Members of Dalit community in the Punjab adopted the first model along the lines of the Muslim separatism and came up with the notion of **Achutistan**, a geographically distinct "Land of the untouchables".²² The

idea was never worked out in any systematic way, nor was there even a suggestion as to which areas of India might be incorporated into such a nation.

Through the second model of legislative representation **Ad Dharm** in 1936 supported independent candidates, and to their own surprise, they swept all but one of the seats. A consistent pattern of friendship developed between Muslims and **Ad Dharm** in electoral politics. Both the unionist Muslim landlords and the members of the **Ad Dharm** opposed upper caste Hindus, Sikhs, and the Indian National Congress.

Mangoo Ram and other leaders thought, that the best way to bring benefits to people was to be situated inside the government rather than protesting from outside. And in fact one of Mangoo Ram's first actions as an M.L.A. was to demand greater Dalit representation in government jobs.

But with the political power coming in the hands of **Ad Dharm** leaders the faction became visible. The family rivalries and personal disputes created a separation between leaders. The lure of office, with all the power and status that it seemed to imply, magnified the personal ambitions of those who had up till then been content with the political arena that the **Ad Dharm**

provided, and aggravated their rivalries, which led to the downfall of the movement and later on it was subsumed by Ambedkar's All India Scheduled Castes Federation in 1946.

In sum the Dalit leadership in North India was confined primarily to two major issues. These were a separate Dalit Identity emphasising the aboriginal status of the Dalits, and demand for political representation including that in administration. The first type of demand also got culminated abruptly into the demands for a separate homeland which they did not pursue later on. Efforts were also made to evolve an all India Dalit Organization and establish contacts with the Dalits of other parts of the country, which could not materialise due to ideological as well as material differences among the leaders.

THE DALIT LEADERSHIP IN EAST INDIA:

Ironically the land of Indian renaissance Bengal produced a very faint voice of Dalit leadership unlike the other regions of the country.

Influenced by the European socio-political philosophy of liberalism, utilitarianism and positivism, many social reforms in varying degrees took place. The broad aims of what is called social movement in the 19th

and 20th centuries were caste reform or caste abolition, equal rights for women, a campaign against child marriage and ban on widow re-marriage, a crusade against social and legal inequalities etc. Apart from individual efforts, organised attempts by the Brahmo Samaj the Social Reform Conference and the Ramakrishna Mission were made to eliminate the existing disabilities from the society. But the major issues relating to life and existence of the untouchable castes of the Bengali society were hardly addressed by these reform movements, nor, these movements made any significant impact on the socio-political status of the Dalits.

Basically, Dalits in Bengal were fragmented and divided in the past. But gradually they started organising themselves. Out of many Dalit groups in Bengal **Namshudras** were the largest and politically the most organised group. They numbered over two million in Bengal and Assam in 1905. And constituted about ninety per cent of the entire lower caste Hindu agricultural population of East Bengal.²³ It is stated that due to their degraded position in the past many **Namshudras** converted to Islam way back in 16th century.²⁴ This can be seen as a mark of protest against the tyranny of dominant religion. It is difficult to say any thing about the leaders who led this conversion. Later on with the emergence of consciousness

of their exploitation and degraded status in the caste system the remaining **Namshudras** who continued to be Hindus organised themselves. In the year 1906 **Namasudras** of Bakarganj district convened a meeting which was presided over by a Zamindar Babu Rajendra Nath Mandal, himself a Dalit. Here a resolution was passed in which they supported the Secretary of State in India for the Partition of Bengal in 1905. They also passed a resolution asking for communal representation in the Legislative Council and Assemblies like the Muslims. It was also expressed that Muslims and Dalits had very cordial relations which should continue. Above all, the meeting also passed a resolution unanimously stating that, "it is simply owing to the dislike and hatred of the Brahmins, the Vaidyas/Vaishyas, and the Kayasthas that this vast **Namasudra** community had remained backward; this community has therefore not the least sympathy with them and their agitation, and will henceforth work hand in hand with their Mohemadan brethern."²⁵

The other non-Shudra leaders had also connections with the **Ad Dharm** movement of Punjab. In fact one branch of **Ad Dharm** was actively working in Calcutta. The members of the movement were basically manual labourers in the metropolis of Calcutta and used to send monetary help to **Ad Dharm** in Punjab.

Later on, the **Namshudras** organised themselves under the head of the Scheduled Caste Federation, during the second decade of the present century.²⁶ Under the head of this organization, they again demanded their political and social rights. Moreover they maintained links with Ambedkar extending him their support during his presentation of the case of the Scheduled Castes in the Round Table Conferences and later nominating him from Bengal to the Constituent Assembly to draft and pilot the Constitution of free India.

In sum it can be said that though there was a Dalit movement in the eastern part of the country but it was quite limited. Moreover it did not produce very vibrant Dalit personalities and Leaders. The movement remained headless most of the time.

CONCLUSION

We may conclude our analysis made in this chapter with a note that the Dalit Leadership of different varieties had already emerged by 1920s in different parts of the country. Though there was very little unity and communication among the Dalit leaders located in northern, western, southern and eastern parts of the country even then their demands were more or less similar. For

instance the demand for an identity of Dalits separate from Hindu religion was almost universal and the Dalit leaders and social reformers from all over the country were unanimous on this. They proclaimed their aboriginal status and removal of social disabilities imposed on them by caste Hindus and others. They started movements with the socio-religious reforms and went on later to ask for separate political safeguards, economic rights and identity for Dalits. There were obviously differences of opinion among the leadership on the issue of whether progress could be achieved within the Hindu social order.

As far as their contacts with the Dalit masses were concerned, they had opted for the medium of vernacular language newspapers of their own. Moreover, they used to organise conferences of inter - and intra-regions as well. But the Dalit Leadership till 1920s followed the policy of persuasion and petition. Except a few demonstration organised against the Indian National Congress they could not organise any act more strongly by organising many more demonstrations, agitations etc till Ambedkar came on the scene. If we compare the frequencies and intensities of these movements we find that the Dalit Leadership in western and southern India was more active than that in northern and eastern parts of the country. Infact the Dalit Leadership could not emerge as an

effective force in eastern India except for the organising of the **Namshudra** - the untouchable caste of undivided Bengal where they claimed for their separate identity which was different from their being part of the Hindu society.

Despite many achievements the Dalit Leadership couldn't search even its natural ally. The reason could be that the interests of the Dalits were totally different from and even opposed to the interests of non-Dalits. However, leadership aligned in limited ways with different groups in different regions though their alliance could not be sustained for longer periods. It could also not bridge the inter-caste differences and rivalries within the Dalit communities themselves.

FOOTNOTES

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CHAPTER 3
**DALIT LEADERSHIP AND THE
ROLE OF AMBEDKAR**

CHAPTER III

DALIT LEADERSHIP AND THE ROLE OF AMBEDKAR

It is difficult to conceptualise the Dalit Leadership without acknowledging the most significant role played by Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar for the upliftment of the Dalits in India. With him emerged a completely new type of socio-political consciousness among the Dalits and equipped with this consciousness there also sprang an autonomous Dalit Leadership. According to Zelliott, Ambedkar's programmes were intended to integrate the untouchables (Dalits) from a state of 'dehumanization' and slavery into one of equality through the use of modern methods based on education and the exercise of legal and political rights.¹

We have mentioned in the previous chapter that there were several Dalit leaders who had organised a number of Dalit movements in different parts of the country before Ambedkar emerged on the political scene. Most of these leaders had their allegiance to the Indian National Congress and they tried to achieve upliftment of the Dalits within the Hindu-fold. Only a few Dalit leaders had their independent organizations and asserted themselves for achieving a separate social identity for

Dalits. This in turn marred the militancy of the Dalits and discouraged their strife for achieving their group autonomy. Accordingly, the earlier Dalit leaders were blamed by growing numbers of the lower castes as having compromised with the status-quo. Before Ambedkar there were no lower caste leaders of national stature who could speak the language of the educated elite without being too closely identified with them. In fact Ambedkar was the first major leader of the Dalits who rose to the height of logical articulation and materialisation of their socio-political aspirations and interests.

It is not very difficult to find at what stage the idea of protest takes shape in the mind of an individual. It is yet relatively easy to say when that idea of protest gets crystallised in some form of social action.² From this standpoint, the year 1919 seems important in tracing the historical beginning of the Ambedkar movement, because he appeared on the political scene for the first time in the year 1919, when he was called to testify to the Southborough Committee.³ Ambedkar's first public political plea for Dalits in 1919 resulted in failure. The Southborough Committee ignored him and a number of others who urged for the direct representation of the depressed classes to the Bombay Legislative Assembly but the Committee made provision for one member to be

nominated to the same. But Ambedkar did not stop at this point. In 1920 he established a Marathi fortnightly, 'Mooknayak' (Hero of the Dumb) which was dedicated to making the Dalits aware of their conditions. Through its editorials he addressed himself to two important strands of thought. One of these reflected his reactions to the dominant nationalist movement as led by the Indian National Congress. He addressed the questions of whether and how the Dalits should relate themselves to the Nationalist movement and how they could successfully articulate their own specific goals without appearing to obstruct the larger National goal. The second issue was the relationship of the Dalits'; own movements for securing their rights to the reformist movements carried on caste-Hindu social reformers on behalf of the Dalits.

In clarifying his own stand on the national movement for transfer of political power and the upper caste-led reformist movements, he argued, as Gore writes "in such a stratified society self-government was not enough. There must be an equal emphasis on good government - a good government dedicated to opening up the channels of development to all sections of society".⁴ Ambedkar raised this question because the Indian National Congress, which initially had achievement of good government as its main objective, under the influence of

the extremists, had changed its goal to attainment of self-government. He opined in the Mooknayak, "while one cannot object to the principle involved, we would not be able to support this change in objective unless we know whose self-government this is going to be and what will be its practical goals -for practice is more important than principle".⁵ He further writes in another issue of the Mooknayak, "freedom or 'self-government' must mean freedom and security for the individual, the recognition of his right to property, equality before the law, freedom to act in consonance with one's conscience, the right to be represented in the legislature and the right of opportunity for employment in public or government agencies".⁶ He wanted to be assured that the untouchables (Dalits) would also have a share in such a self-government as without it the 'self-government' would mean a government to rule over the already depressed people. Ambedkar argued that the untouchables (Dalits) should receive not just a proportionate but a weighted representation in the legislatures. The more backward a group, the higher should be its representation. Without opposing the struggle for political freedom, Ambedkar made it clear that the agitation for 'self-government' could not appeal to the Dalits unless it gave them an adequate share of political power in the legislatures and that too through their own representatives. Moreover, Ambedkar

criticised the upper caste leaders for keeping the government ignorant of the true conditions of Dalits. He also wrote that the upper castes were opposed to the Dalits for demanding a share in the political power through their independently chosen representatives.

Later at an All India Conference of untouchables (Dalits) held in May 1920 at Nagpur, Ambedkar criticised the representation submitted by V.R. Shinde to the Southborough Committee and made an important policy speech. As a result, the conference passed a resolution requesting the government to reject Shinde's suggestion of a nominated member and to let the Dalits select their own representatives. Gore writes about this resolution, "This demand for a separate electorate 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".⁷ Thus, with these three events of submitting a testimony to the Southborough Committee, publishing the 'MOOKNAYAK' and appearing at two major conferences of Dalits during 1920, Ambedkar made his claim to be an alternate but independent leader of the Dalits. His main objective was to prepare the Dalits for having their own

identity and not being used any more by caste Hindus in the Indian society.

Ambedkar's leadership spread into three inter-related phases. The first phase began in early 1920 and continued till 1930.⁸ During this period he acted more like a social reformer in fighting against the rigid caste system and its rude practice of untouchability. The second phase started in 1930 and ended with his resigning from the Nehru Cabinet in 1951. Being fully recognised as the undisputed political leader of the Dalits he emphasised the need of acquiring political power for raising their socio-economic status. Towards the close of the second phase he established a number of educational institutions as well. Finally in the third phase of his leadership (1952-56) he embraced Buddhism along with his followers. He emerged during this period as a religious reformer for Dalits and led a revolt against Hinduism.

SOCIAL REFORMS:-

Throughout his life Ambedkar favoured social and religious reforms instead of harping directly on political reforms. Hence in the early 1920s he participated in a few attempts of the Dalits for their 'sanskritization' in which they imitated some rituals of the caste Hindus.

For instance he supported a number of Mahar satyagrahas for their entry into several Hindu temples which we will discuss later. But soon he realised the futility of such efforts for Dalits because their efforts of sanskritization failed to accord them a higher status in the caste hierarchy. Therefore, before taking on to mass action to gain socio-religious and political rights for the Dalits, Ambedkar formed a society (the Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha, society to serve the interests of outcastes) in 1924 which could place their social and political problems before the government. The prime motto of this organization was 'Educate, Organise and Agitate'. In a note seeking enrolment of members, Ambedkar clarified the objectives of the organization.

"In order to bring about the uplift of outcastes it is first necessary to awaken them. Any community before it can progress must develop a consciousness. As someone has put it while the poor are certainly handicapped by their poverty, the real obstacle in their path is their inertia and their indifference! To overcome this inertia and indifference it is necessary that they should become charged with resentment of the injustice of their own condition. Without it, they cannot get rid of the factors that obstruct their progress".⁹

Ambedkar went for a mass action programme in 1927 and in the same year he was nominated by the Governor to the Bombay Legislature. The event that catapulted Ambedkar to the front-rank of Dalit leadership was the Mahad satyagrah campaign. This was the first act of public protest by Ambedkar. The satyagrah consisted simply of the assertion of the right of Dalits to drink water from 'chowdar' an open public tank in the tehsil town of Mahad in Konkan. A group of several thousands Dalits moved en mass to the tank and drank water. Later in 1927 Ambedkar called another conference at Mahad to reiterate the Dalit rights to use the public water supply. In his Presidential speech he said that the movement was not only to gain access to the water or the temple or to remove the barriers to commensality. But its aim was to break down the Varna system which supported inequality in society. One can observe here a definite broadening of goal of achieving equality and eradicating the contradictions of the Varna system. The immediate programme of drinking water from the Mahad tank was only a symbolic protest.¹⁰

Another very unique event that took place during the Mahad satyagrah was burning of the 'MANUSMRITI', the sacred law book of the Hindus. Moreover, the resolution proposing the burning of the Manusmriti was moved by

Gangadhar Neelkanth Sahasrabuddhe, a Brahman associate of Ambedkar. Justifying his action of burning the 'Manusmriti', Ambedkar said in the 3 Feb. 1928 issue of his Bahishkrit Bharat, that his reading of the Manusmriti "had convinced him that it was abusive and insulting in its treatment of the Shudras and it did not even remotely support the idea of social equality. To burn a thing was to register a protest against the idea it represented. By so doing one expected to shame the person concerned into modifying his behaviour. He said further that it would be futile to expect that anyone who revered the Manusmriti could be genuinely interested in the welfare of the untouchables".¹¹

Ambedkar organised the largest and longest satyagraha on 2nd March, 1930 at Nasik for the Dalits' entry to the 'Kala Ram' temple. Around 15,000 Mahars and Chambhars had assembled at Nasik. But the temple had to be closed for about a year to keep them away from entering it. The Parvati Satyagraha in Poona also met the same fate. Thus, Ambedkar's effort of social reforms could not bring any positive result in changing the Hindu social order which he argued was based on graded inequality.

Yet, he took up the challenge as he was convinced by his knowledge about the social and political reforms carried all over the world. He argued that "history

bears out the proposition that political revolutions have always been preceded by social and religious revolutions. The religious reformation started by Luther was the precursor of the political emancipation of the European people. In England Puritanism led to the establishment of political liberty. Puritanism founded the new world. It was Puritanism which won the war of American independence and Puritanism was a religious movement. The same is true of the Muslim Empire. Before the Arabs became a political power they had undergone a thorough religious revolution started by the Prophet Mohammad. Even Indian history supports the same conclusion. The political revolution led by Chandragupta was preceded by the religious and social revolutions of Buddha. The political revolution led by Shivaji was preceded by the religious and social reform brought about by the 'saints of Maharashtra. The political revolution of the Sikhs was preceded by the religious and social revolution led by Guru Nanak. It is unnecessary to add more illustrations. These will suffice to show that the emancipation of the mind and the soul is a necessary preliminary for the political expansion of the people".¹² That is why he used to criticise the Indian National Congress for giving precedence to political reforms over social and religious reforms. Moreover, Ambedkar was much critical of the types of

reforms which the Congress was promoting and the genuineness of its concern about the amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits.

Taking note of the kind of social reform which reformers were agitating for, Ambedkar opined that it was necessary to make a distinction between social reform in the sense of reform of the Hindu family and social reform in the sense of the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The former had emphasized widow remarriage, prohibition of child marriage etc., while the latter related to abolition of the caste system. The Indian National Congress and the contemporary reformers were concerned mainly with reform of the high caste Hindu family. That is why the social reforms did not provide any help to Dalits.

Regarding the genuineness of the Congress for the amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits, Ambedkar was very suspicious. His suspicion was based on the historical resolutions passed by the Congress at its annual meetings, its various programmes and views of its leaders. The Congress passed after 32 years of its existence in 1917 a resolution for the amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits. Ambedkar blamed that the Congress did this with an ulterior motive of getting some concessions announced on 20th August, 1917 by Mr.

Montague, the then Secretary for India. Prior to that Ambedkar had a bitter experience of B.G. Tilak leading the anti-social reform section of the Congress workers and threatening to burn the 'Pandal' if the Congress allowed the use of it for the Social Reform Conference.

Taking note of Annie Besant, the President of the 1917 annual session of the Indian National Congress. Ambedkar said, "I don't know that she was ever a friend of the untouchables. So far as I know she felt great antipathy towards the untouchables".¹³ To prove his point he quoted from Annie Besant's article in which she had expressed her opinion on the question whether the children of the Dalits should be admitted to the common school. She wrote,

"Here, as everywhere, education is the lever by which we may hope to raise them, the untouchables, but a difficulty arises at the outset, The children of the depressed classes need, first of all, to be taught cleanliness, outside decency of behaviour, and the earliest rudiments of education, religion and morality. Their bodies, at present are ill-odorous and foul with the liquor and strong smelling food out of which for generations they have been built up; it will need some generations of purer food and living to make their bodies fit to sit in the

close neighbourhood of a school-room with children who have received bodies from an ancestry trained in habits of exquisite personal cleanliness, and fed on pure food-stuffs. We have to raise the Depressed Classes to a similar level of physical purity, not to drag down the clean to the level of the dirty, and until this is done, close association is undesirable".¹⁴

All these events compelled Ambedkar to take up social reform as his primary goal for the amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits. He also confessed that social reform was very necessary for Dalits because it was through this that they could be united and made conscious. Equipped with a clearcut ideology and sorting out who were friends and who were enemies, Ambedkar prepared himself and his followers for the second phase.

STRIFE FOR POLITICAL POWER:-

In the second phase of his leadership? Ambedkar emphasized on acquiring political power for his people. Why did Ambedkar resort to the political weapon to get over the age old disabilities, degradation and backwardness of the Dalits ? This may be because "religious movements have failed to bring about any

improvement in the social status of Dalits in a substantial measure, it was thought that this (Hindu social order) should be attacked from more secular grounds like economic betterment, education and political representation of the downtrodden in the body politic".¹⁵ Ambedkar wrote, "when the untouchables lost all hope for their salvation through social reform, they were forced to seek political means for protecting themselves".¹⁶ Moreover, Ambedkar proved that the problems of Dalits were essentially political. Contrary to the Congress treatment of Dalits problems as social, Ambedkar opined, "It is wrong to say that the problem of the untouchables is a social problem. For, it is quite unlike the problems of dowry, widow remarriage, age of consent, etc. which are illustrations of what are properly called social problems. Essentially, it is a problem of quite a different nature in as much as it is a problem of securing, to a minority, liberty and equality of opportunity at the hands of a hostile majority which believes in the denial of liberty and equal opportunity to the minority and conspires to enforce its policy on the minority. Viewed in this light the problem of the untouchables is fundamentally a political problem".¹⁷

Ambedkar's plan to lift the status of Dalits through political means became very clear from his

bmitting a memorandum to the Simon Commission, stifying before Southborough Committee, his rticipation in the three Round Table Conferences and --rming political parties. As a result of the political plea made by him to the Southborough Franchise Committee in 1919 for elected Dalit representation to the legislatures as stated earlier D.D. Gopala and Ambedkar himself were nominated to the Bombay Legislative Council (Ambedkar was nominated in 1926). This was basically a result of the 'Muddian Committee Report'. Further Ambedkar along with eighteen Depressed Classes (Dalits) associations testified willingly to the Simon Commission in 1928 and asked for separate electorates for Dalits (the Congress boycotted the Commission). Ambedkar told the Commission that "the untouchables were relieved of anxiety because the Simon Commission did not include an Indian, since such a nominee could not be truly representative of all groups".¹⁸ However, he did not renew, till 1931-32, his 1919 demand for separate electorates for the Dalits, instead he asked for adult franchise and reserved seats, upto 22 in all, in a Bombay Assembly of 140 (15 according to their numbers plus seven as weightage to insure their rights). Ambedkar also requested guarantees for the Depressed Classes, as did an appeal from the Central Provinces Depressed Classes Association. This group requested: (1) an increase in the government power of

veto for protection of the minority, (2) separate representation not only in legislature, but all public bodies including universities in proportion to their numerical strength, (3) posts in government service for Depressed Class members, with minimum qualification required, (4) representation in the Cabinet dependent only upon Depressed Classes votes, (5) special grants for education, and (6) no application of a bill affecting the Depressed Classes if three-fourths of the community opposed it.¹⁹ Though Ambedkar couldn't achieve anything by his representation to the Simon Commission, these demands proved to be a testimony to the confidence which Ambedkar had revived in the modern political institutions by which he sought to uplift the Dalits.

Later, Ambedkar was nominated to the 1930 Round Table Conference held in London to discuss India's future constitution. This was an acknowledgement of the leadership he had gained among the Dalits. Zelliott writes that by this time his fame had extended to every corner of Maharashtra and beyond. For Ambedkar, his own and of Dewan Bahadur R. Srinivasan's nominations to the Round Table Conference meant, that "the untouchables were regarded not merely as a separate element from the Hindus but also of such importance as to have the right to be consulted in the framing of a constitution for India".²⁰

This was a great achievement so far as Dalits were concerned. Though their efforts through social reform movements could not give them a separate identity, this political movement accorded them a separate identity in no time. This can also be seen as a victory for Ambedkar's political vision of shift from the social reform to acquiring a separate political identity for Dalits. He opined that, "it is only in a swaraj (self) constitution that one has any chance of getting the political power in one's own hand without which one cannot bring salvation to one's people".²¹

At the First Session of the Round Table Conference held in November 1930, Ambedkar put the list of the safeguards to be provided to the untouchables (Dalits) for their protection against the tyranny and oppression of the Hindus. The list included subjects like 'equal citizenship', fundamental rights, free enjoyment of equal rights, punishment for boycotting of Dalits, their protection against discrimination, adequate representation in the Legislatures and Cabinet adequate representation in the services, special departmental care, etc. The list of demands proves his knowledge of law and also his ability to use the Round Table Conference as a forum for asking for political safeguards for Dalits.

Gandhi opposed the demand of Ambedkar of separate electorate for Dalits at the second session of the Round Table Conference convened in 1931. Speaking on behalf of the Congress he said, "the Congress has reconciled itself to special treatment of the Hindu - Muslim - Sikh tangle. There are sound historical reasons for it but the Congress will not extend that doctrine in any shape or form to the untouchables. Therefore, I would most strongly resist any further special representation".²² Gandhi further said that the separate electorate "will create a division in Hindism which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. I do not mind untouchables, if they so desire being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages".²³ Replying to this version of the Congress and Gandhi, Ambedkar opined after some period, "The reasoning of the Congress appears to be correct. But it is only a superficial view of the matter. These elections take place once in five years. It may well be asked how can social solidarity between the Hindus and the untouchables be advanced by one day devoted to joint voting if for the rest of the five years they are leading severely separate lives. Similarly, it may well be asked how can one day devoted to separate voting in the course of five years make greater separation than what already

exists or contrarywise how can one day in five years devoted to separate voting prevent those who wish to work for union form carrying out their purposes. To make it concrete how can separate electorate for the untouchables prevent intermarriage or interdining being introduced between them and Hindus? It is therefore puerile to say that the political recognition of the untouchables as a separate element and granting them constitutional safeguards will perpetuate separation between them and the Hindus if the Hindus desire to put an end to it".²⁴

Ambedkar succeeded in getting the separate electorate accepted for the Dalits like for the rest of the minorities. It was an important achievement for him. British Government announced its decision known as the Communal Award on August 14, 1932. The Communal Award gave 78 seats to Dalits. Besides, Dalits had two more advantages. viz, (i) A fixed quota of seats for the Dalit representatives to be elected by separate electorates. and (ii) The provision of the Double Vote, one to be used through separate electorates and the other through the general electorates. According to Ambedkar the separate electorate system gave a special status to the Dalits. "The second Vote given by the Communal Award was a priceless privilege. Its value as a political weapon was beyond reckoning. The voting strength of the untouchable

in each constituency is one to ten. With this voting strength free to be used in the election of caste Hindu candidates, the untouchables would have been in a position to determine, if not to dictate, the issue of the General Election. No caste Hindu candidate could have dared to neglect their interest if he was made dependent upon the votes of the untouchables".²⁵

But before any thing could be achieved in concrete terms, Gandhi opposed the Communal Award and went on a fast unto death. Ambedkar issued to the press a statement on Gandhi's fast exposing his tactics, "suffice it is to say that although Mr. Gandhi declared a fast unto death, he did not want to die. He wanted very much to live".²⁶ The fast created a problem of how to save Gandhi's life. All eyes turned on Ambedkar for the same. Because the Prime Minister had made it clear that the British Cabinet would not withdraw or alter the Communal Award of its own. In response to the urgent plea of the Congress party leaders and others, Ambedkar agreed with lot a of pain to forego the privileges of the Communal Award and signed a Pact which later became famous as the Poona Pact. In the words of Ambedkar, "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".²⁷

The Poona Pact had produced different reactions. Ambedkar himself felt that Dalits were at a loss. Because he thought that the joint electorate was not useful to the Dalits as far as their effective and real representation was concerned, he opined that in the Joint electorate only that Dalit would be elected who was a nominee of the Hindus and, hence, a tool in their hands. He also argued on the basis of the composition of the constituencies in which the Dalit voters were out numbered in the ratio of 1 to 24 or in some cases 1 to 49. Further, according to Parvathamma, "Ambedkar was forced to sign the 'Poona Pact' and retrace his steps. Gandhi shot two birds with one bullet. He proclaimed that Dalits are Hindus. As Hindus they cannot have communal representation. But as socially, economically, politically and educationally degraded Hindus, he was willing to concede some special provisions for their upliftment. Ambedkar thus lost the cause of the SCs as a separate entity. Having retraced

his steps once - rightly or wrongly - he was just not able to claim for SC separatism, though he kept on 'fumbling along these lines for the rest of his life'".²⁸

Anyway, Ambedkar had to satisfy himself with the social and political reservations which he got through the Poona Pact. But he did not restrict himself to these gains only. Having won the privilege for the Dalits to elect their own representatives for the first time in history, Ambedkar went on to form a separate political party for Dalits in the realization that if the interests of the untouchables had to be protected in the era of electoral politics which was about to begin, the Dalits needed to be organised as a political party. Being convinced about the less effectiveness of the Dalits' own party, he sought the support of the industrial and agricultural labourers who had common interests with the Dalits. Ambedkar's new party won as many as 11 of the 15 reserved seats in the 1937 elections to the Bombay Legislature. This was a great achievement for Ambedkar, as his party became a political force within no time. The Independent Labour Party, however, was rarely successful, though it had won some rights for Dalits. It failed in the areas concerned with labour and agricultural policies. It also failed to secure a base among caste Hindus.

In 1942, Ambedkar reformulated his political plans. He formed a new party with the name the 'Scheduled Castes Federation'. This time he limited its organization to the Dalits only in the hope of uniting all the Dalits in a new battle for political power. But in the 1945 elections to the provincial legislature the Scheduled Castes Federation was routed. Later, the Scheduled Castes Federation was declared an organization with local influence in Bombay and the central provinces by the Cripps Mission. This was a set back to Ambedkar, as the Congress gained an upper hand. In 1956 Ambedkar made another attempt to transform the Scheduled Castes Federation into a party which would speak for all the 'dispossessed' - the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, other Backward Classes and the minorities. This attempt again was for taking Dalits out of untouchability into a larger political group. But Ambedkar passed away before the party could start functioning.

Ambedkar not only worked independently for political and social rights for Dalits. In 1942 he joined the Viceroy's Executive Council as the incharge of labour affairs. There also he asked for the safeguards and protective discrimination for the Dalits in services and scholarships in education. It is thus evident that Ambedkar always tried to grab the opportunities for

providing rights for Dalits whenever and wherever they came. After independence Ambedkar joined hands with that vision with the Congress government at the Centre as the Law minister. He was also made the Chairman of the Drafting Committee to draft the Constitution. His presence in the Constituent Assembly facilitated the making of suitable provisions in the Constitution in favour of the Dalits. Since he never compromised on the basic issues related to the Dalits, he resigned from the Cabinet in 1951, when he found that the government was not interested in uplifting the Dalits.

FINAL PHASE OF THE LEADERSHIP:

Being out of the Cabinet, Ambedkar faced two election defeats and increased illness in the final years of his life. But the last two public acts of his life namely his conversion to Buddhism and the foundation of the Republican Party should not be accepted as symptoms of his failures or renewed expression of separatism Zelliott tellingly potrays. "The conversion to Buddhism in October 1956, which came just before his death was the result of a personal conviction as well as a conscious effort to lay down a way his people could follow after his death".²⁹ This conversion which is considered as a religious movement has been regarded as the final phase of his

movement. Basically, he declared his intention to relinquish Hinduism at the Yeola Conference in 1935. It was because of his growing detachment with efforts to change the orthodox Hindu opinion and with Hindu reformist elements. He saw no future for his people in Hinduism. "His major critique against Hinduism was that it supported institutionalised inequality in society - inequality based on the birth in a caste. He said that the Hindus had no social conscience. What they had was only a tradition, a ritual for social life and an abstract philosophy whose noble doctrine declaring man to have the essence of the divine in him, bore no relationship to the prescription for daily life".³⁰ Criticising Hindu society he himself opined, "the first and the foremost thing that must be recognized is that Hindu society is a myth. Hindu society as such does not exist. It is only a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence. A caste has no feeling that it is affiliated to other castes except when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot. Indeed, the ideal Hindu must be like a rat living in his own hole refusing to have any contact with others".³¹

He thus embraced Buddhism because Buddhism spoke of this worldliness, social equality between human beings, and self-respect to the individual. It emphasised compassion as a central moral and spritual principle. In

sum it had all the three elements of liberty, equality and fraternity which a democratic system should have. Hence, it was more useful for the Dalits.

AMBEDKAR AND THE CONTEMPORARY DALIT LEADERSHIP:

Though there were Dalit leaders and Dalit Leadership at the time of Ambedkar but these were overshadowed by the dynamic and coloussus personality of Ambedkar. Some of these leaders were with the Congress and some were working independently. Ambedkar became the sole representative of Dalits. Not only this, he became the focal centre of the other political organizations too. His growing popularity can be testified by the episode relating to the Poona Pact. "Ambedkar's chief rival for Depressed Class Leadership, Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah of Madras, was also involved in political action. Rajah, the first nominated member from the Depressed Classes on the Central Legislative Assembly, also instituted Depressed Class Conferences, testified to the Simon Commission, and had some following among the Mahars of Vidarbha as well as in the South of India. He and Dr. B.S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha brought forward a compromise plan allowing reserved seats in a general constituency for the Depressed Classes in 1932 before the Poona Pact was signed, but although M.C. Rajah was present at the Poona Pact

negotiations, he was eclipsed in importance by Ambedkar".³²

Moreover, Rajah and Ambedkar joined forces only in 1942, when they protested together against the lack of provision for separate electorates for Dalits in the Cripps proposal. Even then, Rajah could not register his hold on Dalits and was sidelined. Before that Ambedkar had criticized Rajah for not supporting him on the issue of separate electorates.

The other leader acknowledged by Ambedkar himself in the Dalit movement was Dewan Bahadur R. Srinivasan, a member of the Dalit community from Madras. Alongwith Ambedkar, he also represented the case of the Dalits at the Round Table Conference held in 1930. But he faded out of the political picture. Shyam Sunder was another Dalit leader who was also a scholar, thinker and writer. The credit for transposing many of Ambedkar's revolutionary thoughts into an action packed programme goes to Shyam Sunder. He had also formed Bhim Sena, a militant force of the dedicated Dalit youths which created tremendous impact particularly in the three states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharastra.³³ In fact the Bhim Sena derived its name from Ambedkar's name, Bhim Rao. He called the Bhim Sena a self-defence force based on truth and justice. But he also could not make his independent identity and

remained in the shadow of Ambedkar. Besides these, B.S. Venkat Rao was a prominent Dalit leader from Hyderabad state who had close ties with Ambedkar. Venkat Rao was the elected President of the Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association, established in 1938. In 1939 this organization agitated for separate electorate along with the reservations of seats for Dalits in the state. The organization also asked for educational concessions.

Besides, there were other Dalit leaders also like G.A. Gavai and Jagjivan Ram but they were associated with the Congress. Hence, they had no independent status.

A highly educated man with his degrees, B.A., M.A., Ph.D., M.Sc., D.Sc., Barister-at-Law, Ambedkar was a political person, practical and pragmatic. Hence, he could respond to most of the needs of Dalits. He grabbed each and every opportunity for their upliftment. He attacked the stinking Hindu society for the amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits from social, religious, political and economic fronts with mass actions as well his own intellectual writings. Throughout his socio-political movements Ambedkar did not succumb to the racial demands like "Lord of the Land", the "pre-Aryan inhabitants of India", etc. of the early Dalit leadership. Since he regarded the Indian culture and the people

homogenous, he did not ask for the racial identity of the Dalits.

Ambedkar wanted to make his people socially and politically conscious which could not happen earlier. He made the Dalits aware of the indignities heaped on them and sought to arouse their pride as human beings. For that he started initially many satyagrahas which included the demands of civil rights. These were the use of public places, like roads, tanks, etc. He organised satyagraha for temple entry also as stated earlier. But he was very clear in his perception of the ultimate goal. In fact, it was an indirect action to gain political and educational power for the Dalits. In the words of Ambedkar, "I did not launch the temple entry movement because I wanted the Depressed Classes to become worshippers of idols which they were prevented from worshipping or because I believed that temple entry would make them equal members in and an integral part of Hindu society. So far as this aspect of the case is concerned, I would advise the Depressed Classes to insist upon a complete overhauling of Hindu society and Hindu theology before they consent to become an integral part of Hindu society. I started temple entry satyagraha only because I felt that was the best way of energizing the Depressed Classes and making them conscious of their position. As I believe I have achieved that,

therefore, I have no more use for temple entry. I want the Depressed Classes to concentrate their energy and resources on politics and education".³⁴

Abandoning the satyagraha, Ambedkar took the cause of the Dalits via more secular institutions like politics and education. This was yet another innovation made by him for the Dalits. The earlier Dalit leadership had very little knowledge of using this weapon for the rights of the Dalits. Ambedkar used his American experience and knowledge for demanding the fundamental rights of the Dalits. And the best part of all this was that Ambedkar did this without the sponsorship of caste Hindus. He was always in the forefront. His presentations and negotiations with the British were incredible. His arguments to the Southborough Committee, Simon Commission and at the Round Table Conferences were based on a deep analysis of the Hindu social order, which he believed was based on graded inequality. He also criticized caste Hindus for not telling the real conditions of Dalits to the British. That is why, he always felt that the Dalits should be represented by themselves and not by caste Hindus. Maybe he believed more in the dictum that, 'only wearer of the shoe knows where it pinches'. He believed that caste Hindus could only sympathise with the cause of the Dalits but they

would not empathise with them. Hence, they could not represent them properly. That is why, he once said, "the efforts of others are like a nurse and I am their mother".

Criticising Gandhi for not cooperating in the abolition of untouchability, he opined that Gandhi himself was perpetuating the caste and Varna systems. Ambedkar argued that if Hindu social order was to reorganise and revitalise, then its caste system must go. He was of the view that sanctity of the sacred scriptures should be challenged because the social order draws its strength from these scriptures. But Gandhi was never in his favour. Rather, he relied on a change of heart and drew his morality from these sacred scriptures. That is why, Ambedkar accused Gandhi of being lost in his double role of the Mahatma and a politician. He said "As a Mahatma he may be trying to spiritualise politics. Whether he has succeeded in it or not, politics has certainly commercialised him. A politician must know that society cannot bear the whole truth and that he must not speak the whole truth; if he is speaking the whole truth it is bad for politics. The reason why the Mahatma is always supporting caste and Varna is because he is afraid that if he opposed them he will lose his place in politics. Whatever the source of his confusion, the Mahatma must be

told that he is deceiving himself and also deceiving the people by preaching under the name of Varna".³⁵

As mentioned earlier, he also criticized the Congress for not taking up the cause of the Dalits. Its 'genuine' concern was exposed by Ambedkar time and again on account of whether it was passing a resolution about the Dalits after 32 years of its formation or it was bungling in the use of public money earmarked for the upliftment of the Dalits. For instance, one crore and thirty lakhs of rupees were collected in the Tilak Swaraj Fund in 1921 for undertaking the constructive programmes at the Bardoli session of the Congress in 1922. Out of this only seven thousands of rupees were spent for the abolition of untouchability. Such was the hypocrisy of the Congress.

Ambedkar exposed the hypocrisy of these leaders and organizations. Ambedkar emphasized on education. He started a number of fortnightlies like the 'MOOK NAYAK' (Leader of the Dumb), 'BAHISKRIT BHARAT' (Ex-Communicated Indians) 'PRABUDHA BHARAT' (The Enlightened Indian) and JANATA. Through these he wanted to awaken the downtrodden masses from their age-old lethargy and inaction and unite them. He asked the government to grant concessions, scholarships and other facilities to Dalit students. He himself founded the People's Education Society in Bombay

in 1945 which set up a number of colleges and schools to provide basic and non-discriminatory education to Dalits.

One significant feature of Ambedkar's leadership was that it was militant in nature. He reminded his followers that they had once belonged to the warrior caste and urged them to remain militant. He said, "Goats, not lions, are sacrificed". This militancy and bitterness was justified by the objective reality of the lonely position of the Dalits. Gore has stated that it may be also because of the hurt and the disillusionment caused by the realisation that even a highly educated individual like Ambedkar with a coveted foreign degree, did not have the right to live a life of self-respect in India's caste-ridden society as he was born a Dalit.³⁶ Further, Dhananjay, Keer, the biographer of Ambedkar gives another reason for this militancy. According to him, it was due to Ambedkar's feeling towards the Congress which was willing to make all kinds of concessions to accommodate the Muslim interests, as could be seen from the Congress League Pact but it was not sensitive to the problems of the Dalits.³⁷ Whatever be the reasons for the militancy of his leadership, it was channelled for achieving the rights of Dalits.

As for as identity for the Dalits was concerned, the nature of Ambedkar's leadership became that of protest. With protest he wanted to change the identity of the Dalits which used to be that of the meek and servile, uncomplaining and ever-obedient Dalit who swept the villages streets and worked in the farms of caste Hindus. Before embracing Buddhism Ambedkar had sought to establish the identity of the Dalits through his explorations in history. In his book on the Dalits, Ambedkar put forth the hypothesis that the Dalits were historically "broken men", i.e. primitive tribes. They were defeated and, hence, broken into segments. He rejected the theory of racial differences as the basis of untouchability. He believed that the broken men of ancient India were followers of Buddhism and had not cared to return to Brahmanism when the latter triumphed over the formers. Ambedkar postulated that the Dalits were made to live outside the village not because they were 'untouchables', but because they had always lived outside the villages. They came to be regarded as 'untouchables' later because of their religious differences and the imposition of new ideas of purity and impurity of the post-Buddhist Brahminism. So, when Ambedkar embraced Buddhism along with millions of his followers, it did not surprise many. But he definitely did this to take them away from untouchability and pull them into a larger religious

group.

CRISIS OF THE DALIT LEADERSHIP DURING AMBEDKAR ERA:

As far as the crisis of the Dalit leadership of this period is concerned, it did not in the beginning have a viable unity and network at the all India level. More like the earlier leadership, it was also fragmented. The movement of Ambedkar was confined mainly to Maharashtra and the adjoining areas, though Dalits in the country found in him a spokesman of their own. Though Ambedkar did try to unite them through social and political mobilizations but he could not succeed in bringing out a unifying formula for Dalits. The patronising skills of the Congress were stronger than Ambedkar's resources for the mobilization of the Dalits. Hence, the Congress attracted many Dalit leaders who could have given their valuable support to Ambedkar to make his movement stronger.

Ambedkar tried to unite the Dalits under a common banner when he formed the Independent Labour Party in 1936. He did it only when he saw that for electoral purposes it was necessary that the mobilization of Dalits and others could be on different lines. He thought that industrial workers would be the best allies of the Dalits. As the interests of Dalits coincided with those of the

labourers, they could be brought together. And this paid also to a great extent. But in 1942 Ambedkar reformulated his political plans with a vision of uniting all the Dalits (untouchables). In the arena of power politics, he established a political party called Scheduled Castes Federation as mentioned above. It was exclusively restricted to the Dalits. This attempt to unite the Dalits on political lines failed miserably as Scheduled Castes Federation was routed in the 1946 elections. One of the many reasons for this failure was that the Dalits were still not conscious of the power of their votes. They had no education about the use of this power. Moreover, mobilization of the Dalits was restricted to western and some southern parts of the country. Ambedkar has been criticised by some of his closest biographers for the neglect of organization building which was also responsible for not socializing the Dalits in the political realm. Keer opines, "Ambedkar did not try to organise his political party on modern lines..... There were no regular annual conferences or general meetings. When he wanted his people to assemble under his banner, he simply gave a clarion call and the organization sprang up like a crop in the rainy season. In the summer there would be nothing in the field, the banner resting in his study corner and the people at home".³⁸

The Scheduled Caste Federation as a political organisation led to another problem. The Dalit movement led by Ambedkar became a very narrow based movement. Ambedkar could not solve the riddle of who were the possible allies of Dalits. The problem of earlier Dalit Leadership erupted again and could not find any solution. This may be so as Ambedkar could not trust any body. And he had genuine reasons for that. He had argued that in the Hindu social order nobody could be the ally of the Dalits and uplift them except the Dalits themselves. Even his temporary trust in the British was not free from problems and it was a pragmatic move. Ambedkar could not resolve in his life time this riddle of allies. However, one gets some clue of resolution in his remark that, "we cannot fight all our enemies at once". And on the basis of this statement Omvedt has drawn an inference, "This meant making difficult choices about the 'lesser evil', for instance as between Muslims, the Congress, British imperialism etc. At other times it meant seeing forces or political parties as positive allies (the communists ? the non-Brahman parties the Muslims). In terms of the traditional caste structure even once Dalits had defined themselves as separate and taken an 'untouchable touchable' distinction as providing the first ground for action, they still had to look at the rest of the caste structure in a sharper sense were all 'touchables' equally

enemies or should one make distinctions taking 'Brahmans' as the 'main enemy' while 'non-Brahmans' or 'Shudras' were potential allies".³⁹ This question of the possible allies of the Dalits still haunts the contemporary Dalit Leadership.

Over the years the Dalits have had different social, religious and legal identities. Ambedkar did not largely succeed in giving any separate identity to all the Dalits. His conversion to Buddhism did give a different identity to them but those who could not convert remained in the pale of the Hindu society. They are still part of the graded inequality though they have got legal identity of the Scheduled Caste. Even Dalit converts to Buddhism, Islam, christianity etc. On the one hand do not identify themselves with Dalits at large, and on the other they still suffer from the stigma of untouchability and low status. Hence, Dalits still do not have one single identity, though they have a single problem of untouchability.

Despite the shortcomings, which were very few, of Ambedkar's Leadership, his struggle helped the Dalits in getting those social and political rights which were enough for the Dalits to march ahead. A concrete foundation was prepared for the transition to a higher

level of socio-cultural and democratic movement of the Dalits, for the Dalits and by the Dalits. In other words Ambedkar had provided such a dimension to the struggle of the Dalits, which had reached a point of no return. There was no question of going back to the past. But he was not very optimistic about the Dalit movement and the Leadership and he had solid reasons for that. In the last days of his life he told, "I also wanted someone from among the Depressed Classes to come forward in my life time and take the heavy responsibility of running the movement after me. There, however, seems no one who would rise to the occasion. My lieutenants, in whom I had full faith and confidence to run the movements, are fighting among themselves for leadership and power, unmindful of the heavy responsibility that is going to fall upon them".⁴⁰ But even then he tried to guide his followers and cautioned them as to how to channelize their action in future. He expressed that, "whatever I have been able to achieve for them (Dalits), I have done it single handed, passing through crushing miseries and endless troubles, in the midst of abuses hurled at me from all sides, more so from the Hindu Press. Fighting with my opponents, all my life, as also with a handful of my own people who deceived me for their selfish ends. But I will continue to serve the country and my down-trodden people till my end. With great difficulty, I have brought the caravan where it is

seen today. Let the caravan march on and further on, despite the hurdles, pitfalls and difficulties that may come its way. They must rise to the occasion , if they want to live an honourable and respectable life. If my people, my lienteuants are not able to take the caravan ahead, they should leave it where it is seen today, but must not, under any circumstances allow the caravan to go back".⁴¹

FOOTNOTES

1. Zelliott, Eleanor, "from Untouchables to Dalit Essays on the Ambedkar Movement", Manohar, New Delhi, 1992, p. 158.
2. Gore M.S., "The Social Context of an Ideology, Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought", Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1993, p. 74.
3. Zelloit Eleanor, "Learning the use of Political Means", The Mahars of Maharashtra, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1986, p. 40.
4. Gore, M.S., Opp.cit. p. 75.
5. Ibid., p. 75.
6. Ibid., p. 76.
7. Ibid., p. 79.
8. Mathew dates it is in 1918 while Jogdand fixes 1924 See: Jogdand, P.G., "Dalit Movement in Maharastra", Kanak Publications, New Delhi, 1991, p. 52 and Mathew, Josep, "Ideology Protest and Social Mobility", Inter-India Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p. 60.
9. Gore, M.S., Opp.cit. p. 84.
10. Ibid., p. 86.
11. Ibid., p. 106.,

Ambedkar compared the burning of the Manusmriti to the burning of foreign clothes recommended by Gandhi, (see Gore, M.S., Opp.cit., p. 106.

Also, though Ambedkar justified the burning of the manusmriti, he still regarded himself as a **Sanatan** Hindu. He said, "though I do not accept the authority of the Vedas, I consider myself to be a Sanatan Hindu". Quoted in Gore, M.S. Opp.cit., p. 106.
12. Ambedkar, B.R. "Writing and Speeches" Vol. 1, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1980, pp. 34-44.

13. Ambedkar, B.R., Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar writing and Speechs Vol. 9, Education Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, 1991, p. 3.
14. Ibid., p. 5.
15. Parvathamma, C., Sheduled Castes at the Cross Roads, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1989, p. 132.
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17. Ibid., pp. 190-91.
18. Zelliott, Eleanor, Opp. cit., 1992, p. 101.
19. Ibid., p. 102.
20. B.R. Ambedkar, "Waht Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables", in "Writings and Speeches", Vol. 9, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1990, pp. 40-41.
21. Zelliott Eleanor, Opp.cit., p. 102.
22. Ibid., p. 57.
23. Ibid., p. 69.
24. Ibid., p. 191.
25. Ibid., p. 90.
26. Ibid., p. 88.
27. Ibid., p. 88.
28. Parvathamma, C., Opp.cit. p. 218.
29. Zelliott, Eleanor, Opp.cit., p. 136.
30. Gore, M.S., Opp.cit., p. 218.
31. Ambedkar, B.R., "Writings and Speeches", Vol. 1, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1989, p. 50.
32. Zelliott, Eleanor, Opp.cit., p. 105.

33. Jogdand, P.G., Opp.cit., p. 62.
34. Zelliot, Eleanor, Opp.cit., p. 131.
35. Gore, M.S., Opp.cit., pp. 147-48.
36. Gore, M.S., Opp.cit., p. 79.
37. Keer, Dhananjay, "Dr. Ambedkar, Life and Mission", Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1962, p. 40.
38. Ibid., p. 477.
39. Omvedt, Gail, "Dalit and the Democratic revolution, Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India", Sage, Publications, New Delhi, 1994, p. 135.
40. Kadam, K.N. (ed.), "Dr. B.R. Ambedkar the Emancipator of the oppressed", Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1993, p. 241.
41. Ibid., p. 241.

CHAPTER 4
NATURE AND CRISIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY
DALIT LEADERSHIP

CHAPTER IV

NATURE AND CRISIS OF THE CONTEMPORARY DALIT LEADERSHIP

The electoral politics in India after independence is based on the multiparty system with some reflection of social structural composition of different political parties. This has changed the nature and the basis of political mobilization of the people. The earlier dominance of the Congress party has also been reduced. All this has affected considerably the political mobilization of the Dalits. Earlier it was the Congress and other Dalit organizations which mobilised the Dalits for political processes. But after Ambedkar became the chief spokesman of the Dalits, a greater degree of polarization took place. Both the Congress and Ambedkar became two different representatives of the Dalits, of course, both were pole-apart. However, after Ambedkar's challenge to the Indian National Congress as the acclaimed representative of the Dalits, it took refuge in the process of patronising the Dalit Leaders and through them it tried to sabotage the socio-political movement of Ambedkar which was without any crutches of caste Hindus.

The first general elections held in British India in 1937 testified to the Indian National Congress edge over Ambedkar's leadership "In these elections Congress

got 51% of the total reserved seats for Dalits".¹ The Congress though not representing the Dalits in the real sense of the terms, as Ambedkar himself had said time and again, won more seats than Ambedkar just because of its greater and wide network of organizational structure. This took away the advantage from the Dalits of their independent and autonomous leadership which was taking shape under Ambedkar and others. Since then onwards the Dalits have never been able to organise their autonomous movement. This may be so because of the nature of modern political institutions or because of the internal conflict among the Dalits themselves. The autonomous Dalit leadership seems to be a remote possibility now. In the contemporary Indian society there are many political parties which proclaim to be the champion of the Dalits but the oppressed condition of Dalits proves contrary to their claim.

REPUBLICAN PARTY OF INDIA (RPI):-

We have stated in the previous chapter that after the death of Ambedkar in December 1956 the Republican Party of India was formed in early 1957. The founder of the party N. Shivraj was its leader till his demise in 1964. The Party used to have its regular annual sessions till 1975. Now, it remains in the form of a fragmented

group with some leaders in Uttar Pradesh and others in Maharashtra. The Party, however, accepts the fundamental tenets of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity enshrined in the Indian Constitution. It aims to pursue these objectives through the parliamentary democracy.

The Party had worked effectively in the past on different fronts. These were: (i) voicing its grievances against the atrocities committed on Dalits and making them conscious of their exploitation, (ii) the revival of the Samata Sainik Dal founded by Ambedkar in 1928, which was done in 1957 to have a volunteer corps to maintain discipline in the party, (iii) a plan was worked out to form a women's organization. In this context, an All India Women's Conference was organized on 2nd October, 1957 at Nagpur under the Presidentship of Smt. Shantabai Dani, (iv) the Party contributed to establish the Dalit Sahitya Sangh, and (v) it started the All India Republic Students Federation. It also established a number of other associations and organizations but these could not survive for long.

The Party initially did well and tried to represent and get the problems of the Dalits resolved. The period from October 1957 to October 1959 is considered to be the 'Golden Age' of the Republican Party of India.

As pointed out by Zelliott, "At the local level, the Republican Party has a strong voice in a number of Maharashtra urban centres, particularly in Vidarbha and in the railroad towns. In Zilla Parishad elections the Party gained at least one seat in twelve of twenty - five districts, a better record than the Communist party's, or the Jan Sangh's. In Amravati district, the Republican Party ran a number of caste Hindu candidates and won, defeating the Congress by twenty-three to twenty-one seats".² During this period the leaders had concentrated their efforts on acceptance of the genuine demands of the Dalits, and when not successful, offered united protest.

It is clear that the Party took up the social, economic and political demands of Dalits very seriously. It played a very significant role in generating awareness among the Dalits and registering their protests whenever times demanded. Two major land satyagrahas were organised, one in 1954 in the Marathwada area of Maharashtra and the other in 1959 around Nasik, Jalgaon, Dhulia and Ahmednagar evidently with some results of the distribution of wasteland to the landless. Silent marches were carried out in a number of cities in 1964 calling attention to the harassment of Buddhists in villages in Maharashtra. Similar satyagrahas were organised though

less publicised in December 1965 and January 1966 in Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and a few areas in other states in which nearly 300,000 satyagrahis participated.³

But these good works of the party did not last long and it faced the difficulty of split in the Party leadership time and again. Zelliott has very clearly predicted the fate of the Mahar political unity. "The factionalism that was kept more or less in order during Ambedkar's lifetime has now come to visible ruptures and the ensuing competition for leadership may cut into the Mahar political unity severely".⁴ The first split took place in 1959 after two years of its formation when B.C. Kamble a Bombay lawyer pulled himself away from the Party. Another prominent split took place after the seventh session of the Party in 1975. The Party was then divided into three factions. "The entire history of splits, reunions and renewed splits in RPI has no ideological basis, but they are due to clash of personalities and political ambitions".⁵ Nonetheless, there were some genuine problems behind these splits. One which came to the fore was the alliance of RPI with the Congress. The policy of alignment with the Congress was not endorsed wholly by the entire leadership of the Party. Some leaders criticised this by saying that by forming an

alliance with the Congress the Republican Party lost its militancy and adopted a compromising tendency. In the process the real issues of the Dalits were not taken up.

DALIT PANTHERS:-

The disintegration of the Republican Party of India created discontent among the Dalits in general and their educated youth in particular in Maharashtra. The Dalit youth came forward and took up the task of bringing all the Dalits on to one platform and of mobilizing them for the struggle for their civil rights and justice. Thus there emerged the Dalit Panthers Movement in 1972 in Maharashtra. Deriving their name from the Black Panthers of the United States of America, the Dalit Panthers elected Raja Dhale as their President, Namdeo Dhasal as a Defence Minister and J.V. Pawar as General Secretary.

Dalit Panthers are in fact responsible for popularising the term Dalit for the untouchables. Earlier the terms used for the Dalits were 'Panchama', Untouchables, depressed classes, Harijans and scheduled castes. According to Prof. Oommen, "This (Dalit) is a very recent coinage and it came into vogue in the 1970s in Maharashtra with the formation of the Dalit Panthers, a distinct political party. Later the Dalit Sahitya movement emerged and the label was legitimised and

reinforced".⁶

The coinage of the term Dalit is a symbol of assertion for identity. It is a protest. The Dalits do not want the names given by others nor do they want to live on the mercy of others. Oommen writes, the " content of Dalit identity is primarily political and hence its orientation is militant and rebellious. The identity created by Dalit Panthers though crystallised first in Maharashtra spread fast, gaining wide currency and now is used all over India".⁷ Dalit Panthers started with the criticism of government policies. They declared that the protective discrimination policy had not brought any real benefit for the Dalits. There was a mark of protest in this criticism. This protest was against the atrocities and the overall situation unfavourable to them. Hence, they were convinced to organise themselves and protest against this. In this regard Dr. Nandu Ram says "various types of movements launched by the scheduled castes in the different parts of the country are basically to protest against their exploitation, degraded social status and the numerous types of atrocities inflicted on them by caste Hindus".⁸

A brief sketch of the programmes and actions of the Dalit Panthers can be had from their manifesto itself.

Their Manifesto elaborates, "we have a clear perspective of our allies and enemies..... All those who are victims of political and economic suppression are our allies..... Power, money and prestige are our enemies. Landlords, capitalists, money lenders and their agents and the government are our enemies. We stand for political emancipation. We want to rule the entire country. We aim not at individual but at the system. A mere change of heart or liberal education will not end injustice or exploitation. We shall rouse the revolutionary masses, and organize them; the flame of the revolutionary will emerge through the struggle of these vast masses. The social system cannot be revolutionized by mere demands for concessions, elections and satyagrahas. Our rebellious idea of social revolution will germinate in the soil, grow in the minds of the people, and ultimately flash into existence like hot burning steel".⁹

It is quite evident from the Manifesto of the Dalit Panthers that they were for complete revolution. They were for a system where Dalits could exercise their power in economic, political and cultural fields as well. But this was an uphill task against a giant enemy. Omvedt recognises this fact very clearly. She writes, "In spite of their proclamation of the goal of power in the manifesto, however, the Panthers did not really have a

political strategy. Instead, they fought battles on two fronts and against two enemies; at the symbolic level, against Brahmanism; and at the concrete level, against atrocities and the caste Hindu peasants and artisans who were directly responsible for these".¹⁰

Soon after its formation splits started taking place. Leaders like Namdeo Dhasal, Raja Dhale, Arun Kamble, Ramdas Athwale, Gangadhar Gade, etc. could not keep the movement's unity alive. It is also said that the movement alienated certain other Dalits such as Mangs, Chambhars, Dhors, Wardars, Holars, etc. and hence became a very sectarian movement and lost its base. It is now almost defunct to have any impact on contemporary social and political milieu in Maharashtra and the country as well.

BAHUJAN SAMAJ PARTY (BSP):-

At the death-bed of these organizations rose the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) to represent the anti-caste upsurge in contemporary India. It is seen as the strongest Dalit organisation. The recent state elections in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh etc. have proved it. BSP has won 69 seats out of 425 Assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh and is now an ally of the ruling party. An alliance of Dalits, Backward Classes and minorities has

helped in making BSP reach to this position. According to Omvedt, "In fact, Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party was envisaged precisely as a party of dalits, backwards and minorities, with Dalits playing a kind of vanguard role, and it was projected from the beginning as being based not on sentiment, but on practical politics. Power could be taken precisely because the Dalits and Shudras together were a majority".¹¹

Kanshi Ram, the leader of the BSP started in 1978 an organization of the Dalit Government employees called BAMCEF (Backward SC/ST and OBC and Minority Communities Employees Federation). Though Kanshi Ram has in a way partaken from it, the organisation mobilises and activates the Dalit employees with the basic objective to pay back to the oppressed and exploited society to which they belong. The nature of this organization is non-political, non-agitational and non-religious. To mobilise the other forces besides employees, the DS-4, Dalit 'Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti, an offshoot of the BAMCEF, was formed on 6th December 1981. The leader was again Kanshi Ram besides D.K. Kharpade and others. It was under the banner of DS-4 that Kanshi Ram went on a bicycle tour in March 1983. He travelled, with his followers, 3000 Kms covering thirty-five important places in seven states of Northern India within forty days, primarily making the

Dalits conscious of their status and preaching unity among Dalits, Muslims and backwards.

Not satisfied with this achievement, Kanshi Ram founded the Bahujan Samaj Party on April 14, 1983 to broaden his political base. Since then, it is Kanshi Ram's Bahujan Samaj Party which is most successful in capturing the new anti caste upsurge. A look at the way its main slogans are framed illustrates his appeal.

"Brahman Bania Thakur Chor

Baki Sab Hai DS4".¹²

"Tilak, Tarazu, Kalam, Talwar,

Enko Maro Jute Char"¹³

Other slogans of the party are also very catchy and have a clear cut message about who are the enemies and allies of the Dalits. Moreover, they also depict the consciousness of political power which Dalits possess for instance,

"Mat Hamara Raj Tumhara,

Nahi Chalega Nahi Chalega"¹⁴

"Vote se lenge PM/CM,

Arakshan se lenge SP/DM"¹⁵

Kanshi Ram is convinced that only with political power of the country they will be able to change the

existing power structure. Unlike his ideal Dr. Ambedkar, he adheres to the racial theory of Aryans and the indigenous people for the identity of Dalits and difference between caste Hindus and Dalits. He opines that the basis of dominance of caste Hindus is Brahminism. He portrays, "there is complete dominance of those who practise Brahminism in every realm of society. There are five bases of power - politics, bureaucracy heredity, economic system and, religion and culture. They (Brahmins and others upper castes) have dominance in all these and via these they are exploiting the oppressed".¹⁶ He rejects the political reservations to the Dalits on the ground that as soon as the backward classes realise the value of their votes there will be no need of political reservations. But he supports the reservations in bureaucracy. Discussing about the disadvantages of political reservations for Dalits he opines that this is a means to produce sycophants. In his book 'The Chamcha Age' (Age of Sycophants) he has argued that "combined electorate gives only symbolic representation of Dalits not in reality. The means provided to Dalits by Poona Pact to protect their self respect, identity and pride were snatched by Gandhi via his shrewd plans. Only those leaders win from reserved constituencies who are either supported by Congress or caste Hindus. And in this manner

sycophants are produced".¹⁷ Therefore, to give Dalits their real representatives we do not need any political reservations.

Though Kanshi Ram has economic, political and social plans in his mind, he has not prepared any manifesto of his party. He argues that the manifestoes of every party are the same and hence there is no need of issuing any manifesto. But he is very much after political power as he himself says "we have a one-point programme to capture power".

Kanshi Ram after getting 'partial' success in U.P. is busy in organising his party at an all India level. His allies in other states are the backwards and minorities. But his changing political postures have lent the BSP a mysterious character. This is specially true of his attitude towards the Congress. At the organizational level too, the party is enigmatic as it relies heavily on a core group which co-ordinates its activities in various parts of the country. Yet, Kanshi Ram's shifting stances have given the jitters to many leaders and Dalit masses as well. Whether the hopes of Dalits, Backward and Minority alliance will produce a grand success in terms of capturing political power and ruling the country is not clear - one thing is clear that his alliance with a few political parties is currently more of convenience than of

ideological commitments to the cause of the Dalits.

NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY DALIT LEADERSHIP:-

Taking together both successful and unsuccessful socio-political movements carried out by the RPI, Dalit Panthers and BSP - all of these have derived inspiration from Ambedkar's ideology and actions. There is definitely some improvement in the life of the Dalits in the country. Yet, with political reservations at all levels including village Panchayats the Dalits have not been able to produce leaders worth to name to champion their cause. The new political opportunities offered through reservations have not really attracted people interested in the upliftment of scheduled castes. Though the leaders pose themselves as the saviours of the Dalits, they hardly identify themselves with the Dalit cause. Ambedkar's ideology remains their guiding force. But the contemporary Dalit leadership has been fragmented after the demise of Ambedkar. Various Dalit movements and a few Dalit political parties have emerged but all have become defunct. The Republican Party of India, the Dalit Panthers, etc. are a few examples as stated earlier. There is a lack of a wider linkage of the Dalit movements organised in different parts of the country. Thus, after the demise of Ambedkar there is a great void as there is

no Dalit leader of repute who can replace him. Zelliott opines, "Although (late) Jagjivan Ram comes nearest to fill in the role of Ambedkar, he is primarily known as an astute politician".¹⁸

It is true that political reservation has made it possible for a greater number of Dalit leaders to enter the state legislatures and Lok Sabha (there are some in Rajya Sabha and state Councils also though there is no provision of reservation in these houses). In fact, according to the latest statistics, as many as 79 of 545 Members of Parliament (MPs) and 577 out of 3997, members of all the states Assemblies (MLAs) are Dalits. But of these there are a very few who identify with the Dalit masses and try to help them out. Others have left the cry of their bretheren in oblivion. In the words of Parvathama, "scheduled caste politicians have nearly ceased to identify themselves with the cause of scheduled castes. Like their caste Hindu - brethren in politics, they are interested in enjoying the privileges that power brings. Their immediate interests are all inward looking and they are there for personal and family prestige to elevate themselves to become neo-Brahmins. Given the choice they are willing to identify themselves with upper castes".¹⁹

With such attitudes these leaders have nearly no relationship and contact with the Dalits or concerns for their problems. The existence of a sizeable number of Dalit legislators has not helped in changing the oppressed and exploited conditions of Dalits. They still face many problems. More precisely, they suffer from the problems of untouchability, unemployment, atrocities, harassment and so on. We shall discuss in detail these problems and the roles of the contemporary Dalit leadership to resolve them.

At the outset, the problems of untouchability and atrocities loom large in front of the Dalits throughout the country. Article 17 of the Constitution legally abolishes untouchability and prohibits its practice in any form. The Untouchability (Offences) Act of 1955 was intended to wipe out untouchability and the social disabilities arising out of it, by making its practice in any form punishable under law. But 17 years after it came into force, it was felt that the Act was not serving its purpose and the punishment provided under it was inadequate. Therefore, the Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act was passed in 1976 by increasing the purview of the Act. Even then the cases of offences of untouchability against the Dalits specially in rural areas have not stopped. For instance, 4058 and 4087 cases

of untouchability were registered in 1981 and 1982. (See Table 1) But the Dalit leaders had not mounted adequate pressures on the government to take effective measures to stop such crimes. In fact, they wake up only when some cases of untouchability occur and then again go to sleep till the next event. Though the number of cases of untouchability give some idea of its persistence, these are not sufficient to bring out the real magnitude of the evils committed against the Dalits. For, more often than not most of the cases go unnoticed and unreported.

Closely related to the persistence of untouchability is the perpetration of atrocities against the Dalits. The cases of atrocities registered during 1989-92 can be seen in Table 2. There atrocities persist though there exists the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989. We can assess the plight of the Dalits just by having a glance of the cases of atrocities inflicted on them. Here, also are the number of cases of atrocities reported to police and various other government agencies but there are much large number of cases which go unreported. All the legal measures are not effectively implemented. This is clear from the figures given in Table 3 which show the percentage of convictions and acquittals of total cases disposed off by the courts and the ratio of convictions to

TABLE I

Statement showing number of atrocities and untouchability cases against members of the scheduled castes.

Year	Atrocities				Untouchability Offences		
	Murder	Grievous Hurt	Rape	Arson	Other offences	Total	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1981	403	1482	804	1295	10434	14318	4058
1982	514	1428	635	1035	11441	15054	4087
1983	525	1351	640	993	11440	14948	3948
1984	541	1454	682	873	12327	15887	3825
1985	502	1367	700	980	11824	15373	3332
1988	564	1408	727	1002	11715	15418	N.A.
Total	3138	8501	3998	6278	69181	91097	19378

Source: The Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 20th Report 1986-87.

N.A. - Not Available.

TABLE II

Number of Cases of Crimes Against SCs Committed by Members of Non-scheduled Castes in the Various States/Union Territories. Based on Data Furnished by State Govt./U.T. Administration.

No. of Cases of Atrocities Registered

Year	Murder	Grievous Hurt	Rape	Arson	Others	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1989	556	1630	330	703	2080	15799
1990	569	1658	838	559	14081	17735
1991	604	1608	781	576	14108	17677
1992*	472	595	1009	392	8651	11119

Source: Annual Report 1992-93.

Ministry of Welfare Government of India

* The Data for 1992 are incomplete.

TABLE III

UNTOUCHABILITY AND ATROCITIES

Convictions and Acquittals of Total Cases Disposed of by Courts under the PCR Act.

Year	Percentage of convictions	Percentage of acquittals	Convictions/ acquittals ratio
1977	27.4	72.6	1:3
1978	19.7	80.6	1:4
1979	22.9	77.1	1:3
1980	30.7	69.3	1:2
1981	17.5	82.5	1:5
1982	10.9	89.1	1:8
1983	Note available	-	-
1984	14.2	86.8	1:6
1985	12.2	87.8	1:7
1986	19.6	80.4	1:4
1987	15.4	84.6	1:5
1988	12.8	87.2	1:7
1989	21.7	78.3	1:4
1990	12.3	87.7	1:7

Source: Social Action, Vol. 43, Oct.-Dec. 1993.

acquittals for 1977-90. Not only has the proportion of convictions never exceeded half of the acquittals as compared to the preceding year during 1977 to 1980 but the proportion of convictions has flagged and fallen in subsequent years. This itself is enough to prove the ineffective implementation of the law. This also shows that the Dalit Legislators have not used their numerical strength to ensure the speedy implementation of the existing measures, nor have they been able to pressurise the government to strictly apply these laws. Therefore, besides the adoption of a strong political will by the government and gearing up of its implementation machinery, the Dalit representatives have to launch crusades for effective implementation of the existing legal measures and putting checks over the commission of such atrocities against the Dalits.

Closely related to the persistence of untouchability and atrocities is the existence of Dalits as bonded labourers. The Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1976 is intended to abolish this evil practice, and identify, free and rehabilitate the victims of whom at least 80% are reported to be Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Data available in the eighth report (1985-86) of the Commission for SCs and STs reveal that as on 31 March 1986 only about 2 lakh bonded labourers

were identified and freed. And of them only about 1.6 lakhs (78%) were rehabilitated (See Table 4). But according to a survey conducted by the Gandhi Peace Foundation in collaboration with the National Labour Institute, the total number of bonded labourers in the country was 22.4 lakhs in 1978. If this is an indication of resolving the problem of the bonded labourers, the Act has only scratched the surface.

Many of the social disabilities are still among the Dalits due to their continuing existence as the poorest of the poor.²⁰ Among 80% of the total population of Dalits live in rural areas and most of them are landless labourers. In 1982 the SCs owned only about 8% of the total land of the rural areas in the country as a whole, though their households accounted for about 20% of the total rural households, (See Table 5). Land is the principal resource and the main source of power, dominance, oppression and exploitation in rural India. Dalits being landless are economically dependent on higher castes and hence have to accept their dominance. Under these circumstances if the land reforms and provisions of the Land Ceiling Act are fully and properly implemented, the chief beneficiaries would be the Dalits. But no steps have been taken by the Dalit leaders to effectively pressurise the government for this purpose.

TABLE IV

Bonded Labourers Identified, Released and Rehabilitated, 1986.

S.No.	States	Identified & freed	Rehabilitated	Percentage
1.	Andhra Pradesh	24788	18418	74.3
2.	Bihar	11002	9566	87.0
3.	Gujarat	62	57	91.9
4.	Haryana	295	295	100.0
5.	Karnataka	62689	40033	63.9
6.	Kerala	823	823	100.0
7.	Maharashtra	780	626	80.3
8.	Madhya Pradesh	4761	3630	76.2
9.	Orissa	42421	30256	71.3
10.	Rajasthan	6836	6382	93.4
11.	Tamil Nadu	33132	32517	98.1
12.	Uttar Pradesh	18334	17662	96.3
	Total	205923	160268	77.8

Source: Tabulated from the Commission for SCs and STs, 8th Report, 1985-86.

**BUT
Estimated No: of Bonded Labourers:**

1978	22.4 Lakhs
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Source: Gandhi Peace Foundation in Collaboration with the National Labour Institute.

TABLE V

Percentage of SC HHs to total HHs and % of Area owned by them to total area owned, 1982.

S.No.	States	Households	Area Owned	Index of access to Ownership
1.	Haryana	23.4	0.8	0.03
2.	Punjab	39.3	2.1	0.05
3.	Kerala	13.2	2.2	0.17
4.	Bihar	14.9	3.2	0.21
5.	Gujarat	11.7	3.2	0.27
6.	Tamil Nadu	24.0	8.2	0.34
7.	Andhra Pradesh	22.9	7.9	0.34
8.	Maharashtra	8.5	3.5	0.41
9.	Uttar Pradesh	24.7	10.5	0.42
10.	Himachal Pradesh	28.0	13.9	0.49
11.	Karnataka	17.6	8.9	0.51
12.	Orissa	18.6	9.6	0.52
13.	Madhya Pradesh	14.9	7.9	0.53
14.	Rajasthan	20.1	12.5	0.62
15.	West Bengal	29.5	20.6	0.70
	All	19.7	7.9	0.40

Source: NSS, 37th Round, no. 330, January-December 1982.

Literacy is another factor where Dalits are

lagging behind (See Table 6). Dalits can take advantage of safeguards, especially of employment and educational reservations only through their educational advancement which in turn also acts as an antecedent to and consequence of their socio-economic advancement. Though some financial assistance in the forms of stipend and scholarship are provided to the Dalit students but the amounts are too meagre to cater to their minimum needs during pursuing their educational endeavour (See Table 7). But no effective voice has collectively been raised by the Dalit Leadership to adequately raise the amount of the financial assistance provided to the Dalit students. Some progress in the growth of literacy among the Dalits have been achieved in the recent years. In 1961 the literacy percentage among the Dalits and the general population including them were 10.27 and 24 respectively whereas these increased to 21.38 and 36.2 respectively in 1981. Yet the literacy rate is less than that of the general population. This is more distinctively pronounced among the Dalit women (See Table 6).

Interestingly it is only in the field of political reservations that the quota is completely filled in. But, it is a well known fact that the Dalit leaders affiliated to different parties have not effectively mounted adequate

TABLE VI

Literacy Rate in Percentage

India	1961	1971	1981	1991	<u>Growth Rates</u>	
					1961-71	1971-81
General	24.00	29.45	36.23	52.19	28.71	23.02
SC	10.27	14.67	21.38	37.41	42.84	45.74
All Communities including SC/STs	27.91	33.80	41.30	-	21.10	22.19
Gap between SCs and Non-SC/STs	15.81	18.50	-	-	-	-

Female Literacy:

India	1971	1981	1991	<u>Growth Rates</u>	
				1971-81	
SC	6.44	10.93	23.76	69.72	
All communities including SC/STs	22.25	29.43	39.29	32.27	
Gap between SC and Non-SC/ST	15.91	18.50	-	-	

Dropout Rates of SC Students 1981-82

India	Primary stage	Middle stage	Secondary stage
SC	58.21	74.76	85.72

Source: Report of Commissioner for SC/ST 1987-88.
Government of India.

Table 7

Groupwise Maintenance of Allowance Rates Under the Centrally Sponsored Scheme of Post Matric Scholarship for Students Belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

(in Rs.)

Group	Rate	
	Hosteller	Dayscholars
(1)	(2)	(3)
A	280	125
B	190	125
C	190	125
D	175	90
E	115	65

GROUP BRIEF DETAILS OF THE COURSE

- 'A'
1. Medical/Engineering
 2. B.SC.(Agriculture), B.V. Sc and higher technical and Professional studies like degree and post graduate course in Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences.
- 'B'
1. Degree and Diploma level courses in India Medicine, B.A. MS and comparable course in Ayurvedic, Unani/Tibbia and Homeopathic system of medicine.
 2. Diploma and Comparable courses in Engineering Technology, architecture, etc.
- 'C'
1. Certificate course in Engineering technology, Architecture and medicine, etc.
 2. Diploma/Certificate course in agriculture, Veterinary Science, etc. Sanitary Inspector course, course for rural services, sub-officers at the National Fire service college, Nagpur.

3. Degree/Post-graduate diploma and post graduate courses in teachers training like B.Ed. etc.
- 'D' General courses upto graduate level (2nd year and onward)
- 'E' Class XI and XII in 10+2 system etc. 1st year of general level graduate courses.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:-

- (i) Income ceiling of Rs. 24,000 per annum in the case of Group 'A' category students and Rs. 18,000 per annum in respect of other group students.
- (ii) Maximum two children per parents.

Source: Annual Report 1992-93, Ministry of Welfare, Government of India.

pressurise the Government to fulfil its commitments to provide the demands of the Dalits. Each party fulfils the Constitutional obligation by sponsoring Dalit candidates in different elections. In the words of Parvathamma, "Now, other regional and national political parties also woo and have scheduled caste candidates as 'show pieces'. From the very beginning, scheduled caste candidates were groomed under the guidance of party leaders and bosses by pledging their loyalty to the party".²¹

If the government claims to be committed to the cause of the Dalits, then why are reservation quotas meant for them in educational institutions and public services have not been fully filled in ? (see Table 8-9). The situation has always remained pathetic with regard to their representation in teaching jobs especially in the institution of higher learning. For instance, even less than 1% Dalits (SCs) were absorbed as professors, 1.04% as associate professors and 3.16 % as lecturers in various educational institutions in 1987. The situation remains more or less the same in the subsequent years, (See Table 8). As there is not a single study on this subject, it is rather difficult to say whether such -representation is due to the lack of suitable persons or due to discrimination practiced against them in the selection or due to both.

TABLE VIII

Employment in Educational Institutes in India: 1987

Category	Total	SC	Percentage
Teaching Posts (41 Universities)			
Professors	2,133	13	0.61
Readers/Associate Professors	3,261	34	1.04
Lecturers	5,341	169	3.16
Research Associates etc.	674	71	10.53
Manual Posts (41 Universities)			
Group A	3,525	118	3.35
Group B	4,833	221	4.57
Group C	19,811	1,686	8.51
Group D	17,607	2,628	14.93

Source: Report of Commissioner of SC/ST 1987-88.

Finally, their representation in the central services have increased over the years in all the four categories of jobs. But it is only in categories C and D of manual and clerical jobs that it has been adequate. In categories A and B or higher and lower level administrative jobs their representation is far below the prescribed quota (See Table 9).

It is thus, clear on the basis of the above data that the Dalits still suffer from the cumulative deprivation - social, economic, educational, political etc. But their leaders have not taken much care of this. This is however not to say that they have not been raising their voices for amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits. But there is no denying the fact that there is a lack of effective Dalit leadership. They speak the language of the party to which they are affiliated and remain subordinate to the dictates of it and of their bosses. They have restricted themselves to the very peripheral demands like putting up portraits of Dalit leaders in Parliament and state assemblies, erecting statues of their leaders in public places, renaming of roads and organizations after their leaders, and occasionally the issues of filling up the job quota in services. Though these are definitely important issues

TABLE IX

Percentage representation of SCs in Central Services.

Date	Class 1	Class 2	Class 3	Class 4	Population %
1.1.1960	1.2	2.5	7.2	17.2	14.7
1.1.1965	1.6	2.8	8.9	17.8	-
1.1.1970	2.3	3.8	9.9	18.1	14.8
1.1.1975	3.4	5.0	10.7	18.6	-
1.1.1984	6.9	10.4	14.0	20.2	15.6
1.1.1987	8.23	10.4	14.46	20.9	-

Note: Corresponding population %s as per the Censuses of 1961, 1971 and 1981 respectively.

Source: Government of India, Report of the Planning Commission's Working Group on SCs and STs, 1980-85; Reports of the Commissioner for SCs and STs, 1970-71 to 1979-81; and of the Commission for SCs and STs, 1978-79 to 1985-86.

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but more important issues pertaining to Dalits are removal of their poverty, allotting them adequate land, protection from day to day atrocities and making available for them avenues or their economic independence.

The inability of Dalit legislators to influence the public policy and practice is a major criticism levelled against them. Another major weakness of these leaders is their failure to evolve effective political networking amongst themselves, across their party affiliation at least on a commonly agreed minimum programme of action to benefit the Dalits. Further, the majority of these leaders have virtually no contact with the masses. Yet, they knowledgably talk from public platforms about the plight of the Dalits. "The SC politicians do not wish to be identified as SC leaders. The access to power enhances the secular status of SC political leaders. Hence the class mass differences are inevitable among themselves".²²

But it is not the Dalit leaders who are solely responsible for this grim situation. But it is more appropriately due to collapse of the political system and the societal norms. If we look at the political system then we find that in the Lok Sabha only 79 M.P.s belong the reserved category out of 545 seats. Hence they will always be in a minority. Even if they want to get a

resolution benefiting Dalits passed they can not do so because they are up against a majority. Secondly, even if they are trying to be too vocal for the rights and privileges of Dalits in the party, they may be thrown out of the party in the name of party discipline. Lastly, the ranks and files of the general leaders themselves have gone corrupt. The lack of genuineness in the general leadership at the national level is itself a moot question. Every year there are cases of involvements of leaders in one type or the other of bungling whether it is the Jaguar aeroplane deal, St. Kitts scandal, Bofors gun deal, Bank security scham or the sugar scham, to name a few. In fact, these have become a regular feature of the Indian polity. Caste and communal cleavages are exploited for political gains and leaders appear to be power brokers. Under these circumstances the Dalit leaders have also taken the same path. But real sufferers are the Dalit masses.

Thus the crisis of the Dalit Leadership which they have not been able to resolve since the pre-Ambedkarite era can easily be perceived in the specific aspects of the Dalits' Identity, identifying their allies, and their effective and committed representation of the Dalit interests at appropriate fora. We have seen earlier in this as well as in the previous chapters that the question

of a respectful but distinct social identity of the Dalits has always been on the agenda of the Dalit Leadership. The pre-Ambedkarite Dalit Leadership had appealed to an identity of Dalits as 'original inhabitant' or 'sons of the soil' of India. They had argued that the Aryans or caste-Hindus were outsiders who conquered and enslaved the native people. Judged by the history, philosophy and civilization, the Dalits were not Hindus. The various 'Adi' movements launched in different parts of the country claimed this type of separate identity for Dalits with an element of their 'racial distinctioners'.

Ambedkar on his part never went in for a separate identity for Dalits on racial grounds. But he argued that Dalits were different from caste Hindus on the basis of their separate history, philosophy and civilization. Hence he argued for their separate identity. According to him, "To the question: are the Untouchables in their origin only Broken Men, my answer is in the affirmative. An affirmative is bound to be followed by a call for evidence. Direct evidence on this issue could be had if the totems of the touchables and the untouchables in the Hindu villages had been studied".²³ The Hindu and Dalits were two different tribes. Moreover, he argued that, "Broken Men were Buddhist. As such they did not rever the Brahmins, did not employ them as their priests and

regarded them as impure. The Brahmins on the other hand disliked the Broken Men because they were Buddhist and preached against them contempt and hatred with the result that the Broken Men came to be regarded as untouchables".²⁴ Ambedkar also proved through his analytical, writings and speeches and convinced others that the Dalits were in a minority and hence a separate entity from Hindus.

In the contemporary Indian society the question of Dalits social identity separate from the Hindu social order is fairly articulated though not much emphasised by the Dalit leaders. Dalits have been given the legal identity of the Scheduled Castes. Besides Gandhi called them Harijan which has largely been rejected by them and they have accepted their identity as being 'Dalit' which reflects their assertion and self-respect. It is however, very difficult to say that this identity of Dalits will be the final one. It is also not easy to predict the type of identity they might adopt in years to come.

The second crisis of the Dalit Leadership which remains unresolved is that of their allies as stated earlier. Their assertion for independent identity has, in a way, alienated them from the majority of caste Hindus. The changing feature of their political mobilisation has also antagonized their relations with others. Even the

Sudras or Backward castes do not socially and politically get along with them in different parts of the country. This is more in those states where the backward castes have captured power and seemed better representation in the bureaucracy and in the other sectors. The alliance of Dalits in U.P. with backward castes and Muslims is also not having a smooth sail. There is every likelihood that it may not last long.

Can there be a permanent ally of the Dalits ? The answer to this can be found through having a look at Ambedkar's perspective in which he argued for solidarity among the Shudras and Dalits. He stated, "The reason for this want of solidarity is not far to seek. It is to be found in the system of graded inequality whereby the Brahmin is above everybody, the Shudra is below the Brahmin and above the untouchable. If the Hindu social order was based on inequality, it would have been overthrown long ago. But it is based on graded inequality so that the Shudra while he is anxious to pull down the Brahmin, he is not prepared to see the untouchables raised to his level. He prefers to suffer the indignities heaped upon him by the Brahmins to join untouchables for a general levelling down of the social order. The result is that, there is nobody to join the untouchable in his struggle. He is completely isolated. Not only is he

isolated, he is opposed by the very classes who ought to be his natural allies".²⁵ Hence, Dalits can't have any allies till the Hindu social order exists. The Dalits Leadership will have to take this step to dismantle the social order otherwise the crisis will never end.

Another crisis which the Dalit Leadership faces is of its effective representation. In the system of joint electorate a Dalit leader faces 'role conflict' since he/she is jointly elected by Dalit and non-Dalit voters even in the reserved constituency. Hence, his/her role is divided for both types of voters. His/her close identification as a crusader of the Dalit cause would result in alienating the larger caste Hindu population whose support is vital. Consequently, the Dalit leader faces the dilemma whether he is the representative of the Dalits or the general population of the constituency from where he is elected. But it is a fact that most of the time Dalit leaders cater to the interests of caste-Hindus. One of the reasons for ignoring the interests of the Dalits is the fact that the Dalits constitute a minority in every reserved constituency and nothing adverse may happen to their leaders so long as they enjoy the patronage and support of caste Hindus and others. Parvathamma states,

"If they may choose to ignore the SC problems altogether, there is nothing which could be invoked against them. Quite a few of them have had successful political career by choosing to be lukewarm as far as SC problems and their obligations to them are concerned".²⁶ Under this joint electorate system the Dalit leaders speak the language of their party bosses and easily dismiss the basic problems and demands of their brethren. They themselves are unable to stand on their own and always need a godfather to remain in power which they legitimise in the name of party discipline. Ambedkar perceived this very early and because of that he opposed the joint electorate. He opined, "If, on the other hand, there is a joint electorate in these (reserved) constituencies the representative of the untouchables would be only a nominal representative and not a real representative, for no untouchable who did not agree to be a nominee of the Hindus and a tool in their hands could be elected in a joint electorate in which the untouchable voter was outnumbered in ratio. The joint electorate is from the point of the Hindus to use familiar phrase a "rotten borough" in which Hindus get the right to nominate an untouchable to sit nominally as a representative of the untouchable but really as a tool of Hindus".

In sum, if the Dalit Leadership has to acquire an autonomous and dignified existence, to win over the confidence of the Dalits at large, and to function more effectively than it has been doing so far, it has to resolve the above mentioned crisis. It has to get united if possible in a single unified political organization and function as an effective and meaningful pressure group. It has also to look for its genuine allies to acquire political power at various levels. For all these the Dalit Leadership needs a radical change in its nature and social composition along with an ideology which strongly advocates for social equality, justice and fraternity which are the most cherished goals of the modern society in India.

FOOTNOTES

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2. Zelliott, Eleanor, "From Untouchable to Dalit: Easays on the Ambedkar Movement", Manohar, New Delhi, 1992, p. 115.
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4. Ibid., p. 116.
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6. Oommen, T.K., Times of India, May, 1994.
7. Ibid.
8. Ram, Nandu, "From Atrocities to Protest Movement; An urge for Social Development" in Srivastava S.K. (ed.), "Social Movement for Development", Chug Publication, Allahabad, 1988, p. 129.
9. Manifesto of Dalit Panthers reproduced in Joshi, Barbara (ed), Untouchable: Voice of the Dalit Liberation Movement, Select Book Service Syndicate, New Delhi, 1986, p. 141.
10. Omvedt, Gail, "The anti-caste movement and the discourse of Power", Journal of Race and Class, Vol. 33 #(2), 1991, p. 22.
11. Ibid., p. 24.
12. Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Bania are thieves; the rest are ours.
13. Hit the representative symbols of Brahmins, Kshtriyas, Vaishyas and Kayathas with shoes.
14. From our votes, you have the rule - No longer no longer.
15. From Vote we will take Prime Minister and Chief Minister, from reservations Supritendent of Police and Distric Magistrate.

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CONCLUSION

AN OVERVIEW

We have analysed extensively in the preceding chapters, the nature and social composition of the Dalit Leadership. We have also discussed the multiple types of crisis which it faces with regard to its roles in the various aspects of life of the Dalits in the country. However, for refreshing our memory we shall present here an overview and try to draw some inferences which may help in deciding the future course of actions to be adopted by the Dalit Leadership.

It is clear from the preceding analyses that a number of socio-political organizations, struggles and various types of activities of the Dalits had emerged out of an altogether different socio-economic and political condition in the past. Historically, the nature and socio-political composition of the Dalit Leadership has been divided in the previous chapters, into three broadly interrelated phases. The first phase started since the last decade of the 19th century and subsided, with the emergence of Ambedkar as the leader of the Dalits by 1920s. The second phase saw Ambedkar as the emancipator and 'the' saviour of the Dalits since 1920s till his death in 1956. With his death began the third phase of the Dalit Leadership which continues even today. We have

characterised the Dalit Leadership of each phase as peculiar in terms of the issues it has (or had) addressed and the success and failure it has achieved. We have also seen in the previous chapters that the Dalit Leadership has remained qualitatively different in terms of the dominance and intensity of its protest against injustices. The leaders in some regions of the country were more militant and conscious about the rights of the Dalits than those in other regions. For instance, the Dalit Leadership in the southern and western parts of the country was more militant and dominating in comparison to that in the east and north India. The militancy and socio-political consciousness among the Dalits in particular regions can be explained on the basis of their socio-historical background. As these regions had already witnessed a number of protest movements against the existing Hindu social order, this in turn energised the Dalits and made them conscious to wage struggles for ameliorating their degraded social status and limited civil rights accorded to them.

As discussed in chapter 2, in the first phase the Dalit Leadership of several shades existed much before Ambedkar ascended the political throne 'of the Dalit Leadership'. Within the broad framework of the Dalit Leadership two distinct trends prevailed. The first was a

trend towards a racial assertion of autonomy from Hinduism and from the social and political organizations of the Hindus. Carrying out a number of the 'Adi" movements in north and south regions was a testimony to that. The claim of the leaders of the first trend was that the Dalits and Adivasis were the original inhabitants of this land and were enslaved by the conquering Aryans which had racial implications too. The second was a trend towards integration within the existing Hindu social order. The first choice was represented by leaders like Bhagyareddy Varma of Hyderabad, Mangoo Ram of Punjab and others. And the second was set by Arigay Ramaswamy in Hyderabad, and Kisan Faguji Bansode, G.A. Gawai and others, to name just a few, in Maharashtra. Hence, the first phase of the Dalit Leadership was confronted with the choices of autonomy and integration.

Independent initiatives of the Dalit Leadership to uplift the Dalit masses were also difficult in the early years of this phase. Therefore, they took the help from some benovelent missionaries and Muslims, magnanimous Hindus and revolutionary non-Hindus. The advent of the British also helped these leaders to have an exposure to new values of equality, liberty and fraternity. Modern education, new professions, etc. also gave an impetus to their struggle. Equipped with education and economic

independence (though very limited) Dalits thus threw the crutches of the others and became able to independently lead the Dalit masses. Thus, a historical beginning of an independent and autonomous Dalit Leadership was made in the first phase.

In its formative years the Dalit Leadership was more reformist in nature. It stressed the need of internal reforms within the community itself. As already discussed, the Dalit leaders emphasised on cleanliness, giving up meat eating, drinking alcohol, following right panth, etc. The Dalit Leadership followed the policy of persuasion and petition to the caste Hindus and British administration for granting to the Dalits the civil rights such as their access to public roads, water tanks, admission of their children to schools, etc.

Very limited political demands were made by the Dalit leaders of this period. Juergensmeyer has explained why the Dalit leaders of this period did not stress on the political demands of the Dalits. According to him, "in India there has traditionally been very little organised articulation and not much of a central authority, especially from the perspective of village. In most instances, however, the political competition has taken place between rival groups - castes, regions, religious communities and not necessarily in the arena of central

authority".¹ But as the civil rights were denied to the Dalits, they never had the experience of participating in politics. Hence there were no political demands made by the Dalit leaders in the first phase of their struggle. It was only in the later years of the 1920s onwards that they started shifting their emphasis from social reform movements and communal organization to participating in the electoral politics and articulating the political demands of the Dalits. The demand for separate electorate was put forward for the first time in 1918 by Subedar Ganpatrao Govind Rokde, a Mahar Leader of Maharashtra.² Later an abortive demand of separate land for Dalits, the 'Achutistan' was raised by the leaders of the Ad Dharm in Punjab which they did not pursue for long.³ The Dalit leaders succeeded in getting the political representation materialised with the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1919 according to which five Dalit representatives were to be nominated by the Government in the Madras Provincial Legislature, two each in the Central Provinces as well as in Bihar and Orissa, one each in Bengal, Bombay, the United Provinces and Assam.⁴

We have found in the present study that in spite of these and some more significant achievements the Dalit Leadership of that period had largely failed on many other important issues. For instance Dalit Leadership could

not achieve unity among different movements existing in different parts of the country during that period. The Leadership remained region-based and could not project a united national front for the Dalits. Though an attempt was made as stated earlier by Swami Achutanand to forge an alliance between 'Adi' movements carried in different parts of the country, it could not materialise.

Another failure of the Dalit Leadership was that the leaders couldn't find their genuine ally(ies) who could help them in their struggle. Ironically both these problems of unity among the Dalit movements of various shades in the country and of a political ally still exist. Moreover, the problem of a separate identity from Hindu social order also remained unresolved. The Leadership failed to solve these enigmas.

The Leadership and role of Ambedkar for the socio-political amelioration of the conditions of the Dalits has extensively been analysed in chapter 3. We have also made a brief mention in this chapter, of some contemporary Dalit leaders for better appreciation of Ambedkar's role in the Indian politics in general and in the Dalit politics in particular. However, for our convenience we have divided Ambedkar's Leadership into three inter-related phases. The first phase started roughly since the

middle of the second decade of the present century. Ambedkar's major emphasis was more or less on social reforms among the Dalits particularly the Mahars in Maharashtra and within the Hindu social order. He used religion as the basic means for mobilising and energising the Dalit masses who were demoralised by the age-old oppression, suppression and exploitation. In this connection, we have also seen that he was very critical of the philanthropic roles played by the Hindu social reformers and the lip service extended by the Indian National Congress to the social amelioration of the Dalits.

The reason for the latter being not committed to the cause of the Dalits was that they did not give adequate importance to social reform in comparison to political reforms and transfer of power from the British imperialism. Hence, Ambedkar asked the leaders of the Indian National Congress, "Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow a large class of your own countrymen like the untouchables to use public schools ? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public wells ? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them the use of public streets ? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to wear what apparel or

ornaments they like ? Are you fit for political power even though you do not allow them to eat any food they like ? Every Congressman who repeats the dogma of Mills that one country is not to rule another country must admit that one class is not fit to rule another class".⁵ Ambedkar always favoured social reform but he changed his stance in the second phase of his leadership.

When he realised that the social reforms had failed to bring any positive and significant change in the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits. he resorted to political reforms. Moreover, the British administration threw many avenues open to the Dalits for acquiring social change and economic betterment. Ambedkar found the British attitudes somewhat favourable to the Dalits. According to him "until the advent of the British the untouchables were content to remain untouchables. it was a destiny preordained by the Hindu God and enforced by the Hindu state. Fortunately or unfortunately, the East India Company by recruiting soliders and also educating them (the untouchables) gave them a vision and a value. They became conscious that the low esteem in which they had been held was not an inescapable destiny but was a stigma imposed on their responsibility by the cunning contrivances of the priest. They felt the shame of it as they never did before and were determined to get rid of

it".⁶ Realising the significance of the consciousness and awakening among the Dalits, he went in for seeking political safeguards for them. At the outset, he asked for the representation of Dalits by their own leaders elected by them. He opined that the caste Hindus could not represent the Dalits because their interests and that of the Dalits were contradictory. He opposed the concession given to the Dalits in the form of their representatives to be nominated by the government instead of their elected representation to the Council and Central Legislature. He also represented the case of Dalits to a number of commissions and committees. The year 1932 was the culmination point of his political demands when he asked for separate electorates for Dalits and had to face the opposition from a leader not less than M.K. Gandhi. Even then he succeeded in getting reservations in the political elections for the Dalits.

We have already mentioned in chapter 3 that Ambedkar first formed the Independent Labour Party and then the Scheduled Castes Federation to make the Dalits socially and politically conscious of their rights. He also tried to forge the political unity between the Dalits and labourers whose majority belonged to the Dalits. Through this he tried to bring the Dalits and other depressed classes into the mainstream of the political

life. At the fag end of his political career he worked for the formation of the Republican Party of India. While acting as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee for framing the new Constitution of India after independence he was able to provide a number of political and social safeguards to Dalits.

We have also seen in this chapter that, as a believeor in 'knowledge is power', he gave the slogan 'Educate, Organise and Agitate'. He also gave a concrete form to his ideas of education when he established the People's Education Society in Bombay in 1945. The Society in turn set up a number of colleges and schools in Bombay and Aurangabad in Maharashtra to provide modern and non-discriminatory education to the Dalits.

His conversion to Buddhism has been regarded as the final phase of his movement. Being not satisfied with the required outcome of his social and political movements which he had launched to establish an alternative and egalitarian social order for Dalits as well as for the people as a whole, he took refuge in the religious conversion. Since then, millions of Dalits have been converting to Buddhism every year. That is why, conversion has been considered as a movement of Dalits for providing them social equality, sense of self-respect, and establishment of their social identity separate from

Hinduism.

It is quite evident from our analysis made in this chapter that there was no parallel to Ambedkar during his life time as well as even today as far as the Dalit liberation is concerned. Though there were a few Dalit leaders in his life time, all of them were subsumed by his tall leadership and he became the undisputed champion of the Dalit cause and remained so till his death in 1956.

Though Ambedkar successfully made the Dalits conscious of their rights, prepared them to fight for the same, and got a number of significant safeguards for them, he was not fully satisfied from such achievements. One of the major aspects of his mission was to organise the Dalits from all over the country under a single banner and prepare them to act as a political force to reckon with. He also wanted them to achieve a social identity separate from the Hindus. But both the missions could not be fulfilled during his life time due to the petty interests and divided loyalties of the Dalit leaders and his lieutenants in the changed socio-political scenario in the country. His mission remains unfulfilled even today.

As stated earlier, with the death of Ambedkar started the third phase of the Dalit Leadership. A stage was set by the leadership of Ambedkar where Dalit

movements vis-a-vis leadership should have been groomed and furnished in the third phase. His own charismatic leadership provided the nucleus around which the new leaders from amongst the Dalits have arisen. But that has not happened. As discussed in detail in the previous chapter, there is a lack of an effective and committed Dalit Leadership in the present time. The Dalit Leadership claims today to carry the legacy of Ambedkar's ideas and philosophy. It also enjoys the political rights and privileges made available to the Dalits through the relentless struggles of Ambedkar. They have not made any progress in fulfilling his incomplete mission. There are a number of socio-political and legal safeguards provided to the Dalits in the Constitution. Yet, their position has not improved substantially. Instead, it is deteriorating day by day. The increasing cases of untouchability and atrocities committed on them, the problems of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty, etc. are clear indicators of the cumulative deprivation and the plight of the Dalits.

We have also discussed in the previous chapter that the leaders have not effectively and collectively reacted to such plights of the Dalits. They are divided along party lines and speak the language of their party bosses justifying their party line. As stated earlier

they occasionally act like a pressure group with the more peripheral and glossy demands, like that of renaming of some streets, installing the statues of some Dalit leaders in public places and fulfilling the reservation quota etc. But they never raise the issue of distribution of land to the landless and taking power to the powerless specially in rural India whose the majority are Dalits. If these issues are raised and resolved effectively then Dalits will be the major beneficiaries. But the leaders have hardly raised these issues in the present time.

The Dalit leaders may however, not be solely responsible for the present plight of the Dalits. Though they themselves have become part of the system, it is the system which has its own inbuilt mechanisms which stop these leaders from taking any drastic steps for the amelioration of the plight their brethren. The joint electorate system in the reserved constituencies is one such mechanism through which a leader can escape easily, without answering his voters, even if he does not serve them properly in the constituency. Similarly the social composition of the party on whose ticket Dalit leaders contest and win election even in the reserved constituency, is such that they have to depend on some influential caste Hindu leaders for their success. Since their representation in the State Assemblies, Parliament

and in the ministry is almost a Constitutional gift, they are seldom tolerated by the ruling party to be vocal and to articulate the interests of the Dalits. The ideal behaviour pattern expected from them is their submissiveness. Hence as suggested earlier a complete new socio-political system with egalitarian values is required to do away with the age-old oppression of the Dalits and their cry in oblivion.

FOOTNOTES

1. Juergensmeyer, Mark, "Religion as Social Vision", the Movement against Untouchability in 20th Century Punjab, University of California Press, 1982, p. 143.
2. Zelliott, Eleanor, "From Untouchable to Dalit, Essay on the Ambedkar Movement", Manohar, 1992, p. 121.
3. Juergensmeyer, Mark, Opp.cit., p. 159.
4. Gupta, S.K., "The Scheduled Castes in Modern Indian Politics, Their Emergence as a Political Power", New Delhi, 1985, pp. 187-92.
5. Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb, Writings and Speeches, Vol. 1, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1979, p. 41.
6. Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb, Writings and Speeches, Vol. 9, Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, 1991, p. 189.

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