

## From Harijan to Bahujan: Dalit Politics in Search for an Identity

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### Abstract:

*Dalit politics and their assertion of “identity” have acquired a vital place in the contemporary Indian politics. In the past, they were pushed outside the central political arena and excluded from the power game of acquiring offices of governance. Now they can no longer be ignored and taken for granted. No political party dare to neglect them. For a long time, they were socio economically deprived, culturally separated and politically limited. But, at present, they are conscious about their ‘identity’ and strong minded to struggle for their ‘rights’. This change has not come in one day. It was a great struggle for them which is still continuing. Generally, these movements were anti-higher caste or anti Brahmin. They tried to build up an alternative culture based on “identity”. They were given different “identities” by different social reformers. For example, they were known as Harijan, Untouchable, Panchama, Achchuta etc. The objective of this paper is to explore the fact that if these given identities could change their social position or abolish the stigma of ‘untouchable’.*

*There are many writings on Dalit movements. Social scientists like Ghanshyam Shah (2001), Gail Omvedt (1994), Sudha Pai (2002), Gopal Guru (2001) and Kancha Illaiah (1998) are eminent in this field. The first section of the chapter deals with the meaning of untouchability. The second section deals with the contending views on different terms of ‘untouchable’. An overview of Dalit movements is the substance of third section.*

**Key words:** Harijan, Bahujan, Dalit Politics

## I

### Untouchability: What it means

The term 'untouchable' is used to refer to those castes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy whom the other "upper" castes historically regarded as irredeemably polluted. Gandhi gave them the name 'Harijans', which is still widely used, but increasingly this caste has preferred to describe themselves as "Dalits" (Sharma, 2002: 47). Traditionally, in the Hindu social order they are placed at the bottom of the hierarchy, considered *Ati-shudras* or *Avarna*, those whose place is outside the chaturvarna system. They are also known as *Perial*, *Panchama*, *Ati-shudra*, *Antyajaja* or *Namashudra* in different parts of the country. Their touch, and sometimes their shadows and even their voices are believed to pollute caste-Hindus. Mulk Raj Anand, the famous writer in his book "Untouchable" (1935) has given a very touchy description of this ignominious social practice.

In several parts of our country some practices were used to mark differences and enforce the distance with other castes. These included obliging them to live in separate hamlets; we separate wells to draw water, imposing prohibitions on the wearing of certain items of clothing or ornament which are deemed to convey dignity or status. In some areas, low caste women were forbidden to wear blouses under their saris. Similarly, in many areas untouchable children have found it difficult to attend school because the high castes do not take it positively. The precise degree of social distance between the high castes and these excluded groups varies locally (Sharma, 2002: 48).

According to Dr. Ambedkar, the caste system has been legitimized through the shastras. It has religious sanction. 'It is spiritual, moral and legal. There is no sphere of life which is not regulated by this principle of graded inequality' (cited in Shah,

2001: 18). In Ambedkar's view, at a theoretical level, the Hindu social system involved a framework of a production organization and a scheme of distribution (Ambedkar, 1987). Five important economic attributes of the caste system which made it a peculiar system of a production organization and a scheme of distribution were:

1. Fixation of occupation for each caste and continuance thereof by heredity.
2. Unequal distribution of economic rights related to ownership of property, employment, wage, education, etc, among the caste groups with the principle of graded inequality transcending into the economic field.
3. Occupations were not only fixed and unequal in their distribution, but some occupations or economic activities were treated as superior and others as inferior, thus maintaining their hierarchy based on the social stigma of high and low.
4. The Hindu religious order recognised slavery, and the principle of graded inequality was extended to slavery.
5. The Hindu social order also provided for a system of social and economic penalties to enforce the caste-based economic order.

Though the visible practice of untouchability has declined—certainly in public spheres—incidents of atrocities against Dalits have not shown a similar downturn and continue unabated in post-independent India in various forms—murder, grievous hurt, arson and rape. Caste prejudices often contribute, but are not solely responsible for the atrocities against Dalits. Conflicts over material interests and political power contribute a great deal to such incidents (Shah, 2001: 20).

According to 2001 census, the SCs, contribute 16 percent of India's population. The numbered around 1,680 lakh. Thirty-six percent of them are workers. Among the workers, forty-

eight percent are agricultural labourers (Shah, 2004: 118). Nearly 13 percent of the SC households, against 11 percent of the others, are landless. And among those who own land, a vast majority comprise small and marginal formers. The post-independent Indian state does not legitimize caste based discrimination. A small section of SC cultivators—4.5 percent against 10.5 percent of the others—are middle or rich peasants owing 4 hectares or more (Shah: 2001).

A section of Dalits pursue traditional caste occupations along with agriculture. They are leather workers, weavers, scavengers, basket-makers etc. As the present age is the age of market or age of commodity, India is not the exceptional case. The capitalist system has opened avenues for those whose skills and products are marketable. For instance Chamars in Agra have improved their condition by marketing their products, though their social position has not changed much (Lynch, 1969). In urban areas, SCs are employed in the organised and unorganised industrial sectors; they are petty shop-keepers, small entrepreneurs, scavengers and white-collar workers, mainly in the public sector. Scavengers in urban areas have become blue-collar workers, but their social status has not changed. Their occupation is still looked down upon as polluting (Shah, 20001:20).

Social reformers differ in their view regarding 'untouchability'. They have always stood against this evil practice. They have tried to make understand people about the irrationality of this custom. Gandhi and Ambedkar are most important among them. In the next section we will discuss the views of Gandhi, Ambedkar and others on different meanings ascribed to the word 'untouchable'.

## II

### Contending views on Untouchables: Gandhi, Ambedkar and Beyond

Mahatma Gandhi, an ardent champion of removing untouchability within the Hindu Chaturvarna framework, called the untouchable, '*Harijan*'—man of God. Gandhi borrowed the name from a Bhakti Saint of the seventeenth century, Narsingh Mehta (Shah, 2001). He primarily appealed to caste Hindus to use the term Harijan instead of Antyaja. He explained:

The 'untouchable', to me is, as compared to us (caste- Hindus); really a 'Harijan'—a man of God—and we are 'Durjana' (men of evil). For whilst the untouchable has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the short coming and faults that we may lay at the door of these untouchables. It is still open to us to be Harijan ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them. (Gandhi, 1971: 244)

According to Gandhi, untouchability had no part in this divine ordering—the treatment of castes below the Shudra level as unclean was not only inhuman, but harmful to Hinduism. Gandhi described it at various times as a curse, an excrescence on Hinduism, a poison, a snake, a canker, a hydra-headed monster, a great blot, a device of Satan, a hidden untruth, Dyrism and O'Dwyerism, and the bar sinister (Zelliot, 2010: 154). He wrote, "An untouchable should be regarded as a Shudra because there is no warranty for belief in a fifth caste" (Young India, 23 April, 1925).

Although Gandhi castigated the contemporary Indian caste system with its superior and inferior division, he held to the end a belief in the traditional ordering of the society for the preservation of harmony and the growth of the soul, and with it, traditional duties. "The Law of Varna prescribes that a

person should, for his living, follow the lawful occupation of his forefathers”, but with the understanding that all occupations are equally honourable: “A scavenger has the same status as a Brahmin” (Young India, 17 November, 1927). While Shudra were created to serve the other three castes, their work was honourable. All Varnas e possess equality of status, but not equality of opportunity. “One born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire a lawyer or your president. That, according to me, is Hinduism” (Harijan, 6 March, 1937).

Gandhi had always contested the opprobrium which blighted the Untouchables by arguing that their occupations were no more demeaning than any other. To set an example he insisted that every resident of his Sabarmati ashram in Ahmedabad had to clean the toilets. Under his guidance, Congress passed a motion declaring the work of Bhangis (sweepers) as respectable (Jaffrelot, 2008: 60). He often used the metaphor of the mothers cleaning work of her child as a counterpart to the Bhangi’s work for society. He himself cleaned a dirty latrine at the Calcutta Congress of 1901 and records it in his autobiography. He declared that if he had to be reborn among the untouchables as to share their punishments, insults and sufferings and would try to rescue them from their miserable condition (cited in Jaffrelot, 2008). Moreover, he said, “If I had my way I would persuade all caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands” (Harijan, 7 July, 1946).

The term Harijan has been widely used by caste Hindus as a substitute for *achchuta*, that is, untouchable. Many SCs also began to call themselves so hoping that the caste Hindus would change their behaviour towards them. But it did not provide a new worldview, symbol or path to attain equal status, which was their demand. In fact, for Gandhi, the new category aimed at persuading caste Hindus to express repentance. By

doing so, they were expected to change their heart and behaviour towards untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar and his followers did not find any difference whether they were called *achchuta* or *Harijan*, as the nomenclature did not change their status in the social order (Shah, 2001: 21).

According to Ambedkar, saints (like Narsingh Mehta) never carried on a campaign against caste and untouchability. The saints of the Bhakti sect 'were not concerned with the struggle between man and man. They were concerned with the relation between man and God' (Kumber, 1979). Later, a section of the SC leaders rejected the term *Harijan*, considering it an insult rather than an honour. Though Dr. Ambedkar did not popularise the word 'Dalit' for untouchables, his philosophy has remained a key source in its emergence and popularity. 'Dali' means 'ground down', or 'broken to pieces', in both Marathi and Hindi. B.R. Ambedkar first used the term in 1928 or so, in his newspaper *Bahishkrit Bharat*, but the term gained new potency in Maharashtra during the 1970s, a period of literacy and cultural efflorescence that saw the birth of Dalit Sahitya (literature). Today, the widespread currency of the term is also belated recognition of the Dalit's militant claims upon a history of humiliation and suffering (Rao, 2008). Dalit panthers used the term to assert their identity for rights and self-respect. It includes all the oppressed and exploited sections of society. It does not confine itself nearly to economic exploitation in terms of appropriation of surplus. It also relates to suppression of culture—way of life and value system—and, more importantly, the denial of dignity (Shah, 2001). It has essentially emerged as a political category. According to Gangadhar Patawane: 'Dalit is not a caste. Dalit is a symbol of change and revolution. The Dalit believes in humanism. He rejects existence of God, rebirth, soul, sacred books that teach discrimination, faith and heaven because these have made him a slave. He represents the exploited man in his country' (Cited in Das and Massey, 1995: iv).

Dalit Panthers view 'dalit' as a revolutionary category for its hermeneutic ability to recover the revolutionary meaning of the historical past of the Dalit and its great capacity to reach out to larger sections of people. This category has an ontological ability to encompass within itself the lower castes—Adivasis, toiling classes and women (Bagul, 1981). Some dalits define the Dalit category as representing those who have been broken, grounded down by social groups above them in a deliberate and active manner (Zelliot, 2001: 267).

Interestingly, in the academic realm, various terms have been used in understanding of the Dalit category by the scholars, working on Dalit politics. For example, Harrold Issac has used the category of ex-untouchables in his study (Issac, 1965); some other scholars use the term 'untouchables' (Mendelsohn and Vicziana, 2000). Barbara Joshi and Lelah Dushvin use the categories of ex-untouchables and SCs quite interchangeably (Joshi, 1982). In administrative parlance, Dalits are known by various legally constituted terms—SCs, STs or Depressed Classes—originally used by the imperial state.

The category of Dalit was defined by Ambedkar in a most comprehensive way. He says, 'dalithood is a kind of life conditions which characterise the exploitation, suppression and marginilization of Dalits by the social, economic, cultural and political domination of the upper castes Brahminical ideology' (Omvedt, 1994). Ambedkar, however, did not use this category very often in his writing. In fact, he used a number of categories depending upon the context. For example, when he was dealing with the imperial state, he would use the category of Depressed Classes. If he was addressing high caste Hindu adversaries, he would use the term 'Bahiskrit', that means, one who is an outcaste. In the arena of competitive politics, he would use the term 'Scheduled Caste'. This was evident the establishment of Scheduled Caste Federation by him in 1942. Finally, when addressing his own social constituency, he preferred to use the

term 'Pad Dalit', meaning those who are crushed under the feet of the Hindu system (Guru, 2001).

According to the Gopal Guru, the category of Harijan is an ascribed one –it did not come authentically from among the untouchables. It was artificially imposed on them by Gandhi and the upper castes. Gandhians and the entire upper-caste people could not genuinely integrate this Harijan category as part of their consciousness despite the fact that it offers divine association and spiritual honour. Thus, the category of Harijan lacks discursive capacity. On the contrary, the category of Dalit is not a metaphysical construction. It derives its epistemological and political strength from the material social experience of its subjects. It is the social construction of dalithood that makes the category authentic and dynamic rather than passive or rigid. By drawing upon the ideology of Buddha, Phule, Marx and Ambedkar, the Dalit category becomes human centred rather than God-centred, unlike the Gandhian category of Harijan (Guru, 2001: 102-3).

In recent years, some politicians in the country have also discarded the Dalit category as a socially reactionary, negative one and sought to replace it with the 'Bahujan' category. But this rejection by leading Bahujan political leaders is basically followed by empty emotionalism and can never be progressively integrated into the theoretical consciousness of Dalits. The language of the Bahujan political discourse does not accord to the category of Harijan a radical material status and hence this category will continue to differ radically from the Dalit category (ibid.).

In the context of the redefinition of the Dalit category and the theoretical resources to be deployed for the redefinition, the category itself was taken up for discussion. Historian Romila Thapar said certain categories, including "Arya" and "un-Arya", lose their significance, when examined in the light of the notion of out-of-date history. One could argue that the categories of Shudra and adi-dhamma have similarly become

part of out-of-date history. However, she traces the roots of Dalit category in Pali literature in which Dalit means “the oppressed”, and so she is for holding on to the dalit category (Guru& Geetha, 2000).

Guru has concluded that the category of Dalit cannot be accommodated within the majority- minority divide or the Bahujan- Mahajan dichotomy. It does not perceive people as numerical entities to be manipulated by the Dalit- Bahujan power brokers or poll pundits. Because this category does not exist readymade, either for statistical jugglery or for electoral arithmetic, it has to be discursively constituted and negotiated with other vibrant and sensitive categories across social and ideological spaces. Thus, the deployment of the Dalit category has the logical insight which contains an element of negation and also the conjunction of categories from the same logical class. The Dalit category is historically arrived at, sociologically presented and discursively constituted (2001: 105-107).

So, from the above discussion it is evident that though many have used different categories to describe ‘untouchable’, ‘Dalit’ seems to be the acceptable and mostly used term. Now the next section will deal with the historiography of the movement of the Dalits as it demands serious attention and any discussion on the Dalits in general remains incomplete without it.

### III

#### **The movement of the Dalits: An Overview**

The earliest known historical people to have rejected the caste system were Gautama Buddha and Mahavira. Their teachings eventually became independent religions called Buddhism and Jainism. The earliest known reformation within Hinduism happened during the medieval period when the Bhakti movements actively encouraged the participation and inclusion

of Dalits. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and the Ramkrishna Mission actively participated in the emancipation of Dalits. While there always have been segregated places for Dalits to worship, the first upper caste temple to openly welcome Dalits into their fold was the Laxminarayan Temple in Wardha in the year 1928. It was followed by the Temple Entry Proclamation issued by the last King of Travancore in the Indian state of Kerala in 1936. The Sikh reformist Satnami movement was founded by Guru Ghasidas, born a Dalit (Geetanjali, 2011: 6).

The forerunner to the Dalit movement in Organizational structure and content is to be found in the Adi movements of the 1920s. These movements, found across the country were the first major attempts among the 'untouchables', with a geographical spread, to break with Hinduism. The activities in the Adi movements claimed to be the original inhabitants of India and their status in the hierarchy was explained in racial terms. The Aryans were supposed to have invaded the country from the north-west and they were met by the original inhabitants of India (Dravidians). The so-called 'untouchables' were the descendants of the defeated original inhabitants. The Adi movements broke the bonds with the Hindus and they did it on racial grounds, as the original inhabitants, claiming to be the rightful owners of the Indian soil (Hardtman, 2009: 54).

'AD' or 'adi' means ancient or original. Jotiba Phule (1826-90) was a forerunner and an inspiration to many of the organizations criticizing contemporary Hinduism. He criticized Brahminism and even Hinduism and formulated theories that the Brahmins were Aryans who conquered the original inhabitants, who belonged to another race. Phule was partly influenced by the European-originated 'Aryan theory of Race' and partly by the theistic doctrines of the 'Rights of Man' (Omvedt, 1994: 241). He also emphasized the importance of education and scientific knowledge.

Phule believed that the lower castes, in order to advance, had to be the beneficiaries of an education comparable to that provided by the missionaries—who took particular care to attract untouchables to their schools. In 1853, he established a school that was intended above all to educate Mahars and Mangs. Phule also played a pioneering role in organizing the low castes. While he was at first attracted by the Arya Samaj, he soon turned against it and then against the Sarvajanic Sabha. He mistrusted these upper caste's efforts to bring to a successful conclusion the emancipation of the lower jatis. Phule also distanced himself from the Indian National Congress which was founded in 1885 in Bombay. He regarded it as a Brahmin pressure group and greedy for power at that (Jaffrelot, 2008: 16). According to him,

There cannot be a "Nation" worth the name until and unless all the people.....such as Shudras, Ati-Shudras [untouchables], Bhils [Tribals], fishermen etc., become truly educated, are able to think independently for themselves and are uniformly unified and emotionally integrated. If [a tiny proportion of the population such as] the upstart Aryan Brahmins alone were to found the "National Congress", who will take any notice of it? (Phule, vol.2: 25)

Phule founded the Satyashodak Samaj [society for the search of truth] in 1873 to unite the lower castes and untouchables. He referred to pseudo-historical episodes testifying to an ancient solidarity between Mahars and Shudras and denounced stratagems devised by the Brahmins to divide the lower castes (Jaffrelot, 2008). He lauded the Untouchable communities of Maharashtra, the *Mahars* and *Mangs*, for putting up the strongest resistance against the Aryan- Brahmin invaders. He analysed that the term 'Mahar' meant Maha- Ari, or the 'Great Enemy'. By doing so he argued that the Maha-Ari had been severely punished by the Aryan- Brahmins for their fierce resistance to them. It was to punish them for their resistance to Brahminical domination that the Maha-Ari were banished from

Society and condemned to poverty, to feeding on dead carcasses, and to wearing a black thread around their necks as a symbol of servitude. Thus, Phule was the first to recuperate Dalit's history as a militant struggle against Brahminical hegemony, which was met, subsequently, by their defeat and degradation (Rao, 2008: 13).

Early Dalit activists such as Gopal Baba Valangkar and Shibram Janba Kamble drew on this narrative of a founding antagonism between the Brahmin and non- Brahmin communities. Like Phule, Kamble argued that the Mahars had been in the employ of the virtuous Dravidian Kings like Bali, Ravana, and Hiranyakashipu, who were defeated through trickery, and later castigated in Puranic literature as asuras, or demons (cited in Rao, 2008). Valangkar, too asserted the heroism of the untouchable communities, and argued that the Mahars, Mangs, and chambhars were Dravidian Kshatriyas who had fought the Aryan invaders twenty one times, before they were finally defeated.

The ideological conflict between Dalitism and Brahminism has acquired not only a pan- Indian social base but it has also become very intense. In epistemological terms, the Indian nationalist discourse (pre and post independence) expressed itself in the thought process of three schools: (a) Religious nationalism of which Hinduism is the central and hegemonic school, (b) Dalit- Bahujan nationalism which believed in restructuring the Indian society into a casteless, classless, egalitarian Sangha and (c) Communist secular socialist nationalism which believed in 'abolition of class' (on the European model) with a 'caste- blind' scheme of 'revolution' or transformation of the Indian society into a 'secular, socialist and communist society' (Illaiah, 2001: 108-109).

The second school differs from the first and third schools in its very social roots. Its epistemological foundations were, therefore, rooted in Anti- Hindu and Anti- Brahminical consciousness (Edwards, 1967: 8). Phule's concept of 'Bali

Rajya', Satyashodak, or Periyer's notions of 'Dravida Rajya' or 'Ravan Rajya' or Ambedkar's notion of 'Same Sangha Nirmana', all were built in opposition to the Hindu Brahminical 'Rama Rajya' or 'Akhand Hindu Rajya', and so on. These philosophical and ideological discourses have their origin in ancient Indian Dalit Bahujan schools of thought which constructed their epistemology in their day to day interaction with prakriti (nature), and hence it, seems to have had a strong material basis and also inclination to link itself to the production process of the Indian subcontinent (Illaiah, 2001: 109-10).

The movement launched by Periyer in Tamil Nadu is also known as Self Respect Movement. The movement has the aim of achieving a society where backward castes have equal human rights, and encouraging backward castes to have self respect in the context of a caste based society that considered them to be a lower end of the hierarchy. The movement was extremely influential not just in Tamil Nadu, but also overseas in countries with large Tamil population, such as, Malaysia and Singapore. The major political parties in Tamil Nadu, such as, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (ADMK) own their origins to the Self Respect Movements, the latter a 1972 break away from the DMK. Dravida nationalism was rooted in Tamil language and Dravida Un- Aryan cultural histories. Periyer tried to construct a democratic Dravida Nadu without caste exploitations and religious superstitions inherent in Hindu Religion. Though it was an alternative vision of nationhood, the values it wanted to propagate since the Self Respect Movement, were conspicuously civic in its nature. They tried to build up counter- culture hegemony against the Aryan Brahmin "other". Periyer build a notion of 'Ravan Rajya' as against the notion of 'Rama Rajya' of Gandhi. He organised to publicly denounce the Hindu Gods and many Hindu deities' statues were removed from the temples. As against the celebration of 'Ramleela' festivals in North India,

the DK movement used to organise the 'Ravanleela' festivals. Clearly, it built its discourses more as an Anti- Brahmin rather than Anti- Caste discourse (Illaiah, 2001: 125).

During the 1920s- 1940s, Ambedkar accepted most of the economic analyses of Marxism and attempted to organise a radical movement along these lines. According to him, Capitalism and Brahminism were two separate systems of exploitation, one to be fought by class struggle and the other by caste struggle. As he put it in his famous address to the Mahar railway workers at Mahad:

There are in my view two enemies which workers of this country have to deal with. The two enemies are Brahminism and Capitalism..... By Brahminism I do mean the power, privileges and interests of the Brahmins as a community by Brahminism I mean the negation of the spirit of liberty, Equality and Fraternity. In that sense, it is rampant in all classes and is not confined to the Brahmins alone though they have been the originators of it (reported in Times of India, 14 February, 1938).

At the end of his life, as he moved closer to Buddhism, he moved away from his analysis. In 'The Buddha and his Dhamma', he gave it a modernistic, 'liberation theology' interpretation that interpreted *dukkha* as exploitation and called for a Sangha oriented to social welfare (Omvedt, 2001). Ambedkar's "who were the Shudras?" is in part a refutation of a racial interpretation; it argues that the 'Shudras' were originally a section of Aryans in competition with Brahmins and downgraded in the course of intense factional and political struggle; only later were masses of non-Aryans absorbed into the now inferior 'Shudra' category (Omvedt, 1994). It is in the introduction that Ambedkar identifies himself as a "non-Brahmin scholar". Ambedkar's thesis is posed most sharply to the 'nationalist' school which was in reality a Hindu nationalist school. His argument were essentially that no united ancient

‘Hindu India’ had ever existed; instead there were ‘three Indias’ preceding the Muslim period. These were:

1. ‘Brahminism’, describing the Aryan society of the Vedic period and in reality a barbarian phase;
2. ‘Buddhism’, with the Magadha- Mauryan empires embodying a ‘Buddhist revolution’, the rise of civilization and the assertion of basic forms of human equality;

‘Hinduism’, or a ‘Hindu counter-revolution’ marked with Pushyamitra Sunga’s rise to power in North India and associated with Manu, the triumph of caste, and the subordination of women and Shudras (Omvedt, 1994: 246).

Rather than focusing on the Untouchables’ changing position in the caste-Hindu order, Ambedkar’s account emphasized the world historical defeat of Buddhism by Brahminism, as well as the Dalit’s identity as a non-Hindu Buddhist, and thereby laid claim to a genealogy for the Dalit that lay outside Hindu history (Rao, 2008). Ambedkar was not only born in an untouchable Mahar family, but all through his life stood for the suppressed oppressed and exploited masses.

The Phule/ Ambedkar/ Periyer tradition represents the effort to construct an alternative identity of the people based on non-north Indian and low-caste perspectives, critical not only of the oppressiveness of the dominant Hindu caste society but also of its claim to antiquity and to being the major Indian tradition (Omvedt, 1994: 244). Though a third school called the Marxist school emerged, it remained in the hands of Brahminical upper castes and as far as the Dalit-Bahujans were concerned, it remained a ‘green snake in green grass’[as described by Kaansi Ram] whereas ‘the BJP-RSS Brahminism is a White snake in green grass’ (Illaiah, 1998: 282).

Sudha Pai (2001) traces the emergence of political consciousness, participation in politics and parallel attempts to form a new social identity ‘Dalit’ by the SCs. The formation RPI in 1958 inaugurated a new and ‘separatist’ phase in the SC

movement in UP, but it proved to be shortlived. The 1970s can be described as a phase of integration. During this phase SCs moved closer to the upper castes and the Congress who were able to co-opt them and gain their support. In the 1980s, the SC movement in UP entered a new phase with the establishment of B.S.P. The roots of the BSP and, consequently, its nature and ideology are different from other Dalit movements/parties. The leaders of BSP are militant in outlook and describe themselves not as SCs or 'harijans' but as 'dalits', i.e., poor and exploited. In the early 1990s, the BSP tries to mobilize BCs, OBCs, SCs, STs and religious minorities on a common plat-form of 'Bahujan'. Pai observes:

“The fall of the SP-BSP coalition in June 1995 inaugurated a new post-Bahujan phase of the dalit movement in which two contradictory mobilizational trends are visible: coalition-building with upper castes parties and a deepening of the movement at the grass root level.” (Pai; 2001: 279)

But there are some cautious warnings too along with such warm analysis. The political power seizure by BSP has introduced the party in public with a new political ideology different from the consistent idea of 'social engineering' between the deprived sections of the country. In the thirst of capturing "sarvajan", there is a possibility of compromise in delivering social justice to the Bahujan masses. Such openness to the non-bahujans can also undermine the moral guidelines of the movements and offer an opportunity to the manuwadis to gradually consolidate their domination under the garb of sarvajan (Guru, 2003: 26). We have already witnessed this in contemporary Uttar Pradesh.

## **Conclusion:**

The Indian Republic has completed sixty seven years, but the contradictions mentioned by Dr. Ambedkar have still not been resolved. Social and economic equality is a distant dream. What

we have is a lot of lip service and empty rhetoric as vote-catching devices. However, the fact of matter is that the Dalit community has become politically more conscious of its rights and more determined to build a better future for itself and for other similarly-oppressed groups through social transformation. Protective discrimination through reservations in government jobs and admission to educational institutions has paved the way for Dalits to enter the middle class. Now, Caste in India has become more an “identity” and less a “hierarchy”. Now the Dalits do not want to abolish their “identity” but strength it. An “elite” class within the community has emerged. They assert for identity, but their passion and action for the problems that the vast majority of poor Dalits experience everyday are not visibly high. Polarization within the community has developed.

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