

Edited by
Anand Teltumbde

Hindutva and Dalits

Perspectives for Understanding
Communal Praxis

Revised Edition



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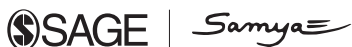
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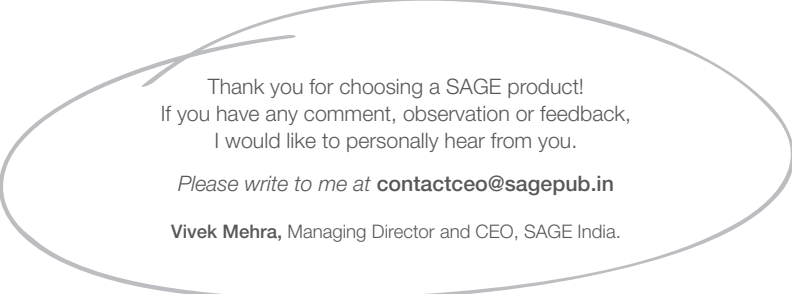
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To all those who are struggling against
the resurgent casteism and communalism in the country
to preserve the idea of India.



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Foreword

Hindutva and Dalits, a collection of sixteen thoughtful chapters, was first published in 2005, under the shadow of the Gujarat massacres of 2002. Its purpose was a searing one: to probe why subaltern and marginalized Dalits and Adivasis joined in violent attacks against a vulnerable minority community, instead of making common cause against them as a rainbow coalition of threatened people. More than a decade later, in the wake of the second NDA government being sworn in, the collection has gained in relevance. The editorial introduction tracks the changes that have occurred in the intervening years and it also historicizes the Dalit–Hindutva relationship.

Some of the chapters trace the history and the ideological apparatus of Hindutva forces. Others study, in close detail, the emergence of an unlikely alliance between Dalits and Hindutva power in places as different as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Punjab, Karnataka and Kerala. In the process, we get a richly textured analysis of Hindutva mobilization tactics, strategic calculations and flexibility. We also see the varied forms of Dalit politics and movements: Ambedkarite and Periyarite radical social revolutionism, accommodation with Congress politics in its KHAM (Kshatriya–Harijan–Adivasi–Muslim) phase, the upsurge and decline of Dalit Panther militancy, autonomous Dalit electoral parties and an embrace of the Hindutva agenda at different points of time. There is no linearity in the process. Instead, different stories have unfolded at different paces at different points of time. Some situations promise a relatively hopeful Dalit response to Hindutva—as in Tamil Nadu, for instance—and answers are sought in its historical and political specificities. Some seek to establish intersecting forms of subordination: as Dalit women face and resist upper caste and Hindutva backlash, for instance. Some focus on Hindutva and bring out startling evidence of blatant casteism in the writings of its leading ideologues. Others look closely at how Hindutva operatives have worked and grown among Dalits and Adivasis in a Left-dominated region like Kerala. Many seek to correlate the rise of Hindutva politics to the spread of

neoliberal reforms in interesting ways. Most essays also reflect on how political parties opposed to the BJP have failed to provide an alternative organizational and ideological drive that could have countered it.

The essays, therefore, cover a vast and complex area of Indian politics and history. In varied ways, and from different sites, they collectively ask a critical question. Why and how do Dalits and Adivasis endorse a politics that is certain to pose threats to themselves? That question is key to understanding hegemony in general; and Hindutva's hegemonic agenda in particular: where subalterns develop a stake in their own subordination and accept the ruling ideology of the dominant forces—not in resignation or despair but in eager self-identification with it.

In the Indian case, Sanskritization and upward mobility through communal violence, as well as the erosion of working class cross-community solidarities and shared workplaces under neoliberal assaults on large industries, are some of the important answers. There are incisive accounts of growing internal stratification among Dalits which leads the upper stratum to make common cause with Hindutva and to distance themselves from progressive social movements. The book provides a strong sense of how the Hindutva agenda actually offers little of substance to Dalits. It certainly never sought structural transformation in their social and material deprivation, nor led movements against their cultural stigmatization. Yet, through a policy of symbolic incorporation within the Hindu community, it has emerged as a strong political option among some Dalit leaders and ideologues.

In the 1990s, when Hindutva first became a mass movement on a national scale, the great secular hope was that the growing democratization of the Indian electoral system—where for the first time, subaltern castes came to prominence on their own—would help stem the tide of communal politics. Forces released by the Mandal Commission recommendations, and the agitations around it, would stop the advance of Mandir-based mass mobilization. Two decades on, the hope seems a forlorn one.

Yet, not entirely so, as recent years have definitely registered a new Dalit upsurge, albeit in circumstances of intense repression and danger, it is quite clear that there are other movements afoot too, among Dalits—whom Anand Teltumde has called foot soldiers of Hindutva. Intellectuals and subalterns alike have turned repeatedly against Muslims during riots while OBC–Dalit contradictions have emerged

with great force. Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis have signally failed to make common cause against communal violence, and against neoliberal depredations.

The great strength of this collection is that it asks difficult questions and does not provide easy answers. It registers and analyses, with a wealth of empirical data and serious reflection, the strength of Hindutva ideological mobilization, its utilization of the neoliberal economic context to its own advantage. It also critically examines Dalit foot soldiers of Hindutva and processes of cooptation not only into Hindu nationalism, but also into its most violent manifestation.

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Introduction to the Revised Edition

Anand Teltumbde

There is no Hindu consciousness of any kind. In every Hindu the consciousness that exists is the consciousness of his caste. That is the reason why the Hindus cannot be said to form a society or a nation.

—Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*

The main trigger for *Hindutva and Dalits* in 2005 was the perceptible overtures of the Hindutva forces to woo Dalits since they tasted power in 1999 with the BJP grabbing power at the centre and the shocking evidence that these efforts were bearing fruit in terms of Dalits participating in anti-Muslim riots in 2002 as their foot soldiers in Gujarat.¹ While this phenomenon remained subdued over a decade, since then during the UPA I and II terms, it resurfaced forcefully in the wake of 2014 elections. Most Dalit leaders slipped onto the BJP bandwagon to ride the ascendant Modi-wave. Udit Raj (formerly Ram Raj), who floated paper organizations—the Lord Buddha Club (1996), the All India Confederation of SC/ST Organizations (1997) and thereafter the Indian Justice Party (2003)—to launch himself as a Dalit leader, had joined the BJP on 23 February 2014,² Ram Vilas Paswan, who perhaps holds a dubious record of changing parties and managing to stay as a minister at the centre,³ deserted the Congress-led UPA and joined the BJP-led NDA. Ramdas Athwale, another turn-coat Dalit leader from Maharashtra, also hitched his non-existent bandwagon of Bharatiya Dalit Panthers to BJP's NDA. Besides these three Dalit Rams⁴ many other smaller Dalit leaders across states also did the same and contributed some badly needed Dalit votes to offer the BJP its dream run to power. The last five years of Modi rule have been devastating to Dalits, as to the entire lower strata of the society. Going beyond the worst apprehensions expressed in the book, it has almost pushed them back to the dark alleys of Brahminism from

where they had barely managed to escape with their struggle during the last century.

HINDUTVA'S FOOT SOLDIERY

As mentioned, Dalits were mobilized by the Hindutva forces in Gujarat in 2002. I came across it in my first visit to Ahmedabad in the thick of this tragedy. It was incredible as I was a close witness to the state-wide attack on the Dalits during the 1981 reservation riots.⁵ These riots had striking similarity with the anti-Muslim riots in their genesis. A case of two academically poor students belonging to the upper castes who failed to get admission in B. S. Medical College, Ahmedabad, was developed as a pretext to unleash a state-wide attack on the Dalits, quite like the mysterious incident of burning a bogey of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra station was used to incite the full-fledged genocide of Muslims. I wrote an instant piece right during this visit that highlighted the Dalits participation in the attacks on Muslims with Hindutva goons.⁶ It shocked readers and created an unexpected chain reaction, which unfortunately went awry in its amplification, something as a pervasive phenomenon, which it was not. It fanned latent casteist prejudice against Dalits as though it was they who executed the inhuman killings of Muslims and raped their women. The fact, however, was that while this happened at some places in Ahmedabad city, elsewhere in the state there were enough stories of how Dalits sheltered their Muslim neighbours and saved their lives from the killer gangs.

While it was so, even a small section of Dalits accepting foot-soldiery of the Hindutva forces in executing their vile design was alarming enough. In February 1985 riots again broke out in the city of Ahmedabad basically on the issue of reservations but turned communal, targeting the Muslims.⁷ There were widespread attacks on Dalits and Muslim neighbourhoods in Ahmedabad and Vadodara.⁸ The riots went on till October 1986, resulting in the death toll of 275, and thousands being injured and displaced.⁹ The riots were organized to cause the downfall of the government of Madhav Singh Solanki, who had won the elections in March that year.¹⁰ Solanki had formed a government which had 14 Kshatriyas out of total 20 ministers. The state announcement of an increase in the reserved quotas for the lower castes from 10 to 28 per cent in state employment added fuel to the fire.¹¹ Although it was stayed by the High Court, the

BJP got a pretext to cause the downfall of the Solanki government in July 1985.¹²

Despite these beatings in 1981 and thereafter in 1985, the riots-weary Dalits were found enthusiastically participating in the annual Rath Yatra in 1986.¹³ Thereafter, again a wave of riots struck Gujarat during the L. K. Advani-led Ram Rath Yatra, which started from the town of Somnath on 25 September and ignited violence in several towns in Gujarat along the way.¹⁴ In Ahmedabad alone 30 to 40 persons lost their lives in April and in October. The violence spread to the towns of Vadodara, Anand, and Surat on the occasion of the Hindu festival of Ganapati. In Vadodara, riots erupted when a Ganapati procession, led by the BJP Health Minister of Gujarat, crossed a Muslim locality. The crowd went on the rampage looting Muslim shops. The BJP minister prevented police intervention and thus let the rioting mobs have a field day. Eight persons were killed. In Anand, on 4 September, the same scenario was repeated and three lives were lost when a Ganesh procession shouted anti-Muslim slogans while passing through a Muslim area. On the same day, in Surat, one person was stabbed to death during the Ganapati festivities. No reference was made to Dalit participation in these incidents, however.¹⁵

The active preparation for this foot soldiery was afoot for some years. The aggressive advances by the Sangh Parivar—the family of various outfits under the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—to woo Dalits had begun in the wake of the BJP gaining power in October 1999 after two brief interludes of 13 days and 13 months from 16 May to 1 June 1996 and 19 March 1998 to 10 October 1999, respectively. The BJP, until then a marginal political force, never appeared aggressively oriented towards Dalits, although the efforts of the RSS had begun in 1980s to make cultural inroads among them. The BJP including its precursor in Bharatiya Jan Sangh (BJS) could never make an electoral mark in Indian politics. The Sangh Pariwar claimed and continues to claim that it was a socio-cultural organization but in the wake of the first general elections floated its political outfit in the form of BJS which made a debut securing 3.1 per cent votes and winning 3 seats out of 94 contested as against 45 per cent votes and 364 seats of the Indian National Congress (INC). BJS remained at the margin with a vote share in the range of 6 to 9 per cent until 1971. It soon jumped onto the wave of popular movements that led Indira Gandhi to commit a blunder of declaring an internal emergency

in 1975, which brought the BJS a halo of defending democracy. In the wake of the 1977 elections, when most political parties came together to form a combined opposition party to the INC, the BJS also jumped onto this bandwagon and merged itself into the Janata Party. Riding the nationwide wave against the Emergency, the Janata Party captured power winning 41 per cent of the popular votes and 295 Lok Sabha seats. Many BJS members got ministerial berths in the government. They, however, engineered dissensions in the party and on the issue of dual membership, caused the collapse of the government. They regrouped as the BJP, misappropriating the legacy of the Janata Party that symbolized the pro-democracy struggles in the country. But even then it was pushed back to its pre-1971 position, securing just 7.4 per cent votes and the lowest ever 2 seats in 1984 elections. The INC swept the elections with highest ever 48.1 per cent votes, riding the sympathy wave over the assassination of Indira Gandhi and consolidating votes on communal lines.

CONGRESS CAUSING BJP'S RISE

Enthused by this success of communal politics, Rajiv Gandhi, as advised by his strategist Arun Nehru, committed a series of blunders. In his anxiety to create a constituency of Hindus, he persuaded the then chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Bir Bahadur Singh, to open the lock of the Ram Temple in 1986 and allowed religious rites to take place inside the disputed structure.¹⁶ It triggered a mass movement by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to break free the idols of Lord Rama and Sita from 'captivity' and to instal them in a grand Ram Temple. People were called upon to contribute sacred stones from all over the country for the foundation of the temple. It raised communal tempers and resulted in massive riots across north India, particularly in Bihar and UP. It coincided with V. P. Singh's revolt against Rajiv Gandhi who was allegedly involved in the Bofors scandal.¹⁷ On the one hand Rajiv Gandhi gave Hindu fanatics an issue of the Ram Temple and on the other; he committed another blunder that further fanned their communal passions. In the Shah Bano case (1985), he capitulated before Muslim orthodoxy by annulling the Supreme Court judgement favouring maintenance given to an aggrieved divorced Muslim woman by making a controversial law that conceded the right to maintenance for the period of *iddat* after the divorce, and instead shifted the onus of maintaining her to her relatives or the Wakf Board.

On 10 November 1989, the government allowed the controversial foundation laying of the Ram temple at Ayodhya to take place on the disputed site. Subsequently Rajiv Gandhi launched his campaign from Ayodhya promising 'Ram Rajya' across the country, the ineptitude of which can only be matched by his son, Rahul Gandhi, today when he awkwardly goes around projecting himself as *janeudhari* Brahmin (one who wears the 'sacred thread') and proclaims that it is only he who can build Ram Mandir at Ayodhya. For a long time, it remained a mystery how the foundation laying at Ayodhya was accomplished by defying the court's order, which restrained the VHP and other organizations to do anything on the disputed site. Obviously, either Rajiv Gandhi or N. D. Tiwari, who was the then chief minister of UP, or both had given tacit approval to it. It was said that Buta Singh, who was the Home Minister then persuaded Rajiv Gandhi to allow the foundation-laying stealthily, in contravention of the court's order. All these blunders necessarily cost the Congress heavily. The Congress found itself decimated by losing support bases all across the country to the BJP. The BJP's rise thus can be clearly seen as facilitated by the Congress. It made full use of the opportunity to the extent that it disarmed the entire opposition, which became mute spectator to the continuing preparation for the Ram temple at Ayodhya for the last three decades.

The rise can be clearly seen in BJP's electoral performance in the 1989 elections. Its vote share zoomed from 7.4 per cent to 11.4 per cent and seat tally from just 2 to 85. It could not have been possible without a significant section of Dalits voting for it. The Congress vote share was eroded by a whopping 8.6 per cent and its seat tally came down from 415 to 197. The opposition parties came together as a National Front under the presidentship of the TDP (Telugu Desham Party) supremo N.T. Rama Rao, making V. P. Singh the prime minister. In the attempt of creating his political constituency among the most populous backward castes, V. P. Singh implemented the Mandal Commission's recommendations, which were gathering dust with successive governments since the report was submitted on 30 December 1990. It granted 27 per cent reservation quota for the OBCs. It triggered anti-reservation agitation by the upper-caste youth in which paradoxically Dalits, identified with reservations, became the target of the upper castes and also of OBCs. The OBCs, for whom the reservation was meant, could not comprehend it and beat up Dalits along with upper-caste youth. Taking advantage of the

precarious political situation, L. K. Advani, the then president of the BJP, launched a Ram Rath Yatra in September–October 1990. It triggered huge social disturbance and political turmoil wherever it passed through. When the Rath Yatra entered Bihar then ruled by Laloo Prasad Yadav, who was the part of the V. P. Singh-led Rastriya Janata Dal (RJD), arrested Advani at Samastipur when his Ayodhya movement had reached its peak. While V. P. Singh was undecided under the threat of withdrawal of support by the BJP on whether he should stop the Rath Yatra, Laloo saw great opportunity in stopping Advani in his tracks to win over Muslims who were completely disenchanted with the Congress after the 1989 Bhagalpur riots in which nearly 1,000 people were killed. He visited Delhi and brought about the consensus and arrested Advani at Samastipur. Even Mulayam Singh Yadav, who was the chief minister of UP but did not have the best of terms with V. P. Singh had threatened Advani similarly if he entered the state. Consequently, the BJP withdrew support causing the V. P. Singh government to collapse.

Elections were held in 1991. After the first round of elections, during an election meeting at Sriperumbudur, Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by a suicide bomber on 21 May 1991. The election took place in a polarized atmosphere, Mandal versus *Kamandal* or, the Mandir issue, of the BJP. The BJP further improved its tally to 120 seats and raised its vote share to 21 per cent. Both Congress and Janata Dal lost their vote share by 3.87 per cent and 28.89 per cent respectively. Congress managed to form the government under the prime ministership of P. V. Narasimha Rao with the help of the Left parties.

Paradoxically, this Left-supported minority government changed the course of history by discarding the liberal socialist ethos and adopting the imperialist neoliberal reforms. Rao employed Dr Manmohan Singh as his finance minister to implement them. Rao's years as prime minister also saw the emergence of the BJP as an alternative to the Congress. He played a dubious role in winking at the destruction of the Babri mosque by the BJP-VHP mob on 6 December 1992 that unleashed large scale communal violence, the most extensive since the Partition of India. Hindus and Muslims indulged in massive rioting across the country, and almost every major city including Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Bhopal struggled to control the unrest. In the next elections held in 1996, the BJP had a marginal mark-up (0.18 per cent) in its vote share

but emerged as the biggest parliamentary party with 161 seats, forming the government albeit for just 13 days. The Congress lost 7.46 per cent vote share and came down to 140 seats. In the political uncertainty, the non-Congress, non-BJP opposition parties came together to constitute the United Front with support of 332 members out of the 545 seats in the Lok Sabha and made H. D. Deve Gowda from the Janata Dal the prime minister for about 18 months to make room for I. K. Gujral to take over for the balance 11 months before declaring the next elections in 1998.

In the 1998 election the BJP won a record number of seats (182) with a record vote share (25.59 per cent) that again made Vajpayee the prime minister but in a shaky alliance with regional parties, which could not sustain him for more than 13 months. In 1999, the BJP accomplished a solid alliance with regional parties in the form of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and showed strong performance in the election. The 1991, 1996, and 1998 elections saw a period of consistent growth for the BJP and its allies, based primarily on political expansion in terms of cultivating stronger and broader alliances with other previously unaffiliated parties and through regional expansion which had seen the NDA become competitive and even the largest vote takers in previously Congress dominated areas such as Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Assam. BJP's Vajpayee became the prime minister and completed his full term until the NDA was dislodged by the Congress in the next two successive elections.

Dalits had a significant contribution not only to the NDA's win but also to the expansion of the BJP's vote base. There were visible attempts to woo Dalits by the BJP from 1990 onwards. At its 1990 national conclave in Bhopal, the BJP had for the first time found space for portraits of Babasaheb Ambedkar among others like Mahatma Gandhi and Jai Prakash Narayan on the dais. That was a marked departure from a leadership that had treated Gandhi and Ambedkar with scant respect. The same convention had also finalised Advani's watershed Rath Yatra in response to Mandalization. Party president Atal Bihari Vajpayee did not like his colleagues' unabashed lust for power. But he favoured the outreach towards Dalit and secular vote banks.

GENESIS OF HINDUTVA

Hindutva defined by its progenitor, V. D. Savarkar, as Hindudom (actually Brahmindom) is based on the geo-psychic criterion of India

being both *punyabhumi* (holy land) and *pitrubhumi* (father land), automatically othering the adherents of the Abrahamic religions. When it was coined in 1925, the latter comprised nearly one-fourth of the total population and half of the Hindu's. It was the first time the Hindu leaders like Lala Lajpat Rai wanted India be bifurcated into Muslim and Hindu India.¹⁸

Historically, the origins of Hindu fundamentalist politics can be traced to the ideas of the Hindu Sanghatan (Hindu consolidation), which germinated in nineteenth-century Bengal just after the Sepoy rebellion of 1857 that had shocked the colonial establishment by demonstrating the political potential of Hindu-Muslim unity. While the British succeeded in quelling the rebellion with brute force, they came increasingly to realize the need to build a base of support among kings and landlords, and the usefulness of communal division between Hindus and Muslims.¹⁹ It may not be surprising, therefore, that one of the earliest Hindu nationalist texts of the colonial era was the celebrated novel *Anandamath* (Abbey of Bliss), written in Bengali by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee.²⁰ Chatterjee was the first Indian to have been directly appointed to the post of Deputy Magistrate in the year 1858. *Anandamath* has two distinct thrusts: hatred of Muslims and admiration for British rulers, which suggests that Hindu nationalism was conceptualized at its inception mainly in opposition to Muslims. The novel is replete with passages in praise of Santans (rebel hermits) plundering and killing Muslims: they came down to the Muslim villages and torched their houses. The Muslims were worried for the safety of their lives and the Santans robbed them of everything.²¹ At the same time, the novel exudes love for the British colonialists: 'There is no possibility of restoring the Santan-virtue without the Englishman becoming King'.²² 'Therefore, we would make the Englishman our King . . . The subjects would be happy in the English kingdom—they would practice the virtue without any trouble'.²³

From the 1870s, the Hindu revivalist trend began to emerge, which in turn metamorphosed into Hindu nationalism. One of the strongest reviving forces to lay the foundation of a virile nationhood was the Arya Samaj, which was founded on 10 April 1875 at Bombay by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), a militant monk of Gujarat who proclaimed Hindu theism on the basis of Vedic infallibility. Militantly anti-Muslim,²⁴ the Arya Samaj inculcated a vision of a Hindu nation among its members and influenced generations of Hindus through network of educational institutions.²⁵ The Arya Samaj

adopted nearly all the techniques introduced into the Punjab by Christian missionaries. It provided Hindu militancy. They demanded licence for arms for Sangathanist, similar to Akali Sikhs, and justified it by claiming that the sacred writings of Swami Dayanand required those who follow him to carry a double edged sword.²⁶ The Arya Samaj, while refusing to be called 'Hindu', provided a unique sense of Hindu identity and turned Hinduism into a proselytising religion. After the death of Dayanand in 1883, Arya Samaj continued to develop in Punjab and became politicized in the form of launching Punjab Hindu Sabhas.²⁷ These Punjab Hindu Sabhas together with the Sanatan Dharma Sabhas of the United Province would form the Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha in Hardwar in 1915 in response to the formation of the Muslim League in 1906.²⁸

The British encouraged the formation of the United India Patriotic Association (UIPA), a political organization founded in August 1888 by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and Raja Shiv Prasad Singh of Benaras. This was an organization of the declining classes of landlords, kings and other nobility, both Hindus and Muslims.²⁹ The UIPA resolved to cultivate Indian loyalty to the British crown, and later served the colonial policy of divide and rule by eventually giving way to the formation of the Muslim League on one side and the Hindu Mahasabha on the other.³⁰ The Hindu Mahasabha, intended to be an umbrella organization of the Hindus, proved stillborn because of persisting conflicts between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis over social reforms and also over the attitude towards British rule. While the Sanatanis continued to pay allegiance to the British in spite of everything, Arya Samajis resented their reconciliatory politics and even indulged, sometimes, in a radical form of resistance.³¹ Besides this conflict, the Hindu Mahasabha could not make a political dent as a Hindu organization because of the Congress which was taken as representative of the Hindus (despite its own claim) since the Morley-Minto reforms (1909).³²

In response to these circumstances, perhaps, the Hindu nationalists strategized and launched another organization called Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) through Dr Keshav Baliram Hedgewar, a Telugu Brahmin settled in Nagpur. Dr Balakrishna Shivram Moonje, the president of the Hindu Mahasabha was a friend as well as a mentor of Hedgewar. Moonje, celebrated by the RSS as 'Dharmaveer' (hero in a religious struggle) was one of its five founding members who considered Hedgewar his most loyal follower in Nagpur.

The RSS maintained an institutional affinity and continuity with the Hindu Mahasabha as a parallel Hindu movement drawing support from the latter for its expansion and development in north India. It was linked to the Hindu Mahasabha through membership and leadership; many of their activists had dual membership and functioned as office-holders in the other organization. Officials in the Home Department noted that the RSS was the ‘volunteer organization of the HM’.³³ Deeply inspired by Mussolini, Moonje saw the RSS with potential to be developed as fascist organization:

Our institution, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh of Nagpur under Dr Hedgewar is of this [reference to Balilla institutions of Mussolini] kind, though quite independently conceived. I shall spend the rest of my life developing and extending this institution of Dr Hedgewar all throughout Maharashtra and other provinces.³⁴

The RSS was a right-wing response to the nationalist mass upsurge against the Rowlatt Act in 1919 as well as other developments like the emergence of a working-class movement with the founding of the All India Trade Union Congress in 1920, the rise of several communist groups and workers’ and peasants’ parties and, most importantly, the rise of an anti-caste Dalit movement.³⁵ The biggest threat was the emergent Dalit movement that potentially threatened the cultural fabric of Hindu society. Caste being the defining feature of anything Hindu, Hindu culture could not survive sans caste content. Interestingly, the RSS or Hindutva proponents skilfully avoided speaking about caste but whenever they had to, praised it as the most ideal feature of the social structure along with whatever that existed in pre-medieval India.

The RSS claimed to be an apolitical cultural organization but conducted as a militaristic wing through its akharas and an indoctrinating (bauddhik) organization through its shakhas. After returning from Italy Moonje wanted to establish fascist institutions like Mussolini’s Central Military School of Physical Education, the Fascist Academy of Physical Education, and, most importantly, the Balilla and Avanguardisti organizations, which were for youth. While he established a Bhonsla Military School at Nashik, the RSS was viewed as the prototype for the rest. As such, Moonje persuaded Hedgewar to reorganize the RSS along militaristic lines with khaki shorts and

black cap as its uniform, in emulation of the Black Shirts of Mussolini's fascist band.

HINDUTVA AND CASTE

Though Hedgewar founded the RSS his contribution remained limited to organization building. After his death on 21 June 1940, Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, who became the Sarsanghchalak, provided it with the ideology of cultural nationalism. Golwalkar was influenced by Swami Vivekananda's call to worship the Motherland and also by Bal Gangadhar Tilak's emphasis on making culture central to national identity and self-assertion.³⁶ Golwalkar's thoughts and lectures were collected in two books: *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, 1939 and *Bunch of Thoughts*, 1966. Golwalkar guided the RSS for 33 long years with zealous and ardent commitment to making India a Hindu Nation. In the prologue of *We or Our Nationhood Defined*, he extolled praises for the *chaturvarna* (the system of four varnas)³⁷; and argued in his *Bunch of Thoughts* that the caste system has been beneficial to our country in maintaining the integrity of India. Golwalkar admitted that casteism is the perverse form of the varna system but he still praised it for maintaining a fine balance between individual satisfaction and discipline. There is no instance, he argued, 'of its having hampered the progress or disrupted the unity of society. It in fact, served as a great bond of national cohesion.'³⁸ He also argued that castes saved Hindu people from foreign invasions—thus spake Golwalkar—that castes were never an obstacle for national unity. On the contrary he blamed Buddhism as the factor responsible for the suspension of the caste system in northwestern and northeastern areas that resulted into their easy defeat by Muslim invaders.

Golwalkar has been candid in his justification of castes. The Sangh Pariwar today may not, however, be as candid. Notwithstanding its attempts to dodge the question of caste, its abiding pride in India's 'glorious' past clearly reveals its love for the caste system. In any case, the Sangh Pariwar considered the varnashram order as god-given, which induced hierarchy into the proto tribal society that resulted when nomadic tribes settled for agriculture without losing their tribal features because of the ideal endowment of the subcontinent for cultivation of land.³⁹ Arguably, this was the origin of castes, within the overarching varna frame, which in course of time multiplied and acquired a self-organizing, self-regulatory character. Although it is not

possible to restore this order in its entirety, it is quite possible to restore its spirit—the unquestioned rule of ‘naturally’ superior person(s) and submission of the rest to their authority—which is made the prototype in modern times by Fascism. The unashamed affinity of Hindutva progenitors with fascist ideology testifies to these undercurrents. Fascism provided them with a prototype for their ‘Hindu Rashtra’.

The RSS is clearly patterned on the fascist militia. As the fascist regimes roused the nationalist sentiments of people by scapegoating some identified by ethnicity or ideological persuasion, the Hindutva project is based on othering the Muslims, who spelt civilizational threat to their superiority. Golwalkar had identified three ‘enemies’ of the Hindu nation: Muslims, Christians and communists in his *Bunch of Thoughts*, which the contemporary RSS finds embarrassing.⁴⁰ It may be interesting to see the Hindutva hatred for Muslims, and for Christians, as mentioned earlier, being rooted in the low-caste antecedent of the majority of these communities. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who founded the political wing of the RSS—Bharatiya Jan Sangh—voiced this sentiment in the wake of the partition of Bengal by saying that the high-caste Bengalis would be made to live under the low-caste mlechhas.⁴¹ This sentiment among the Hindus about Muslims and Christians as unclean, impure or inferior people, as they think of Dalits, is commonly encountered. It should make it clear to many progressives, who are enthused by anti-communalism but are apathetic when it comes to caste that the problem of communalism or secularism is essentially rooted in caste consciousness.

As Golwalkar endowed the RSS with ideology, his successor Madhukar Dattatraya, alias Balasaheb Deoras, imparted it strategic direction. He realized that by remaining in its brahminic cocoon, it would be impossible for the RSS to achieve its goal of Hindu Rashtra in the prevailing power structure determined by numbers. Deoras spoke up against the caste system and Untouchability, which Golwalkar never did. Deoras also started proposing the idea that non-Brahmins could be *pracharaks*, the highest position that one could reach after three years of training and the pledge that goes with it.⁴² Sanskritization was Golwalkar’s preferred model. But starting with Deoras and his attack on the caste system, it has been decreasing in importance. During the stewardship of Deoras, the RSS acquired concrete strategic direction to expand its appeal. It led to intensification of work among the tribals and out-reaches to Dalits. The first of the initiatives was the inclusion of Babasaheb Ambedkar, whose diatribe

against Hinduism was an embarrassment to the RSS, into its pantheon as the *pratahsmaraniya* (the one who is venerated at the daybreak). Then they devised a vehicle called Samajik Samrasata Manch (social harmony platform) to co-opt middle-class Dalits who aspired for social recognition but did not have avenues within the prevailing social milieu. The RSS created literature, skilfully mixing up half-truths with pure lies, to distort Ambedkar as someone who was friends with Hedgewar and Golwalkar, appreciative of the RSS's work and great benefactor of the Hindus. It did not make notable mark but with its characteristic perseverance, they succeeded in influencing sizable Dalit votes. All these overtures just served to thicken the smokescreen over its real mission of bringing in the brahminic paradigm of Hindu Rashtra.

MODI'S RISE

The most significant development post-publication of this book in 2005 was the resurgence of the BJP under the leadership of Narendra Modi in 2014. Modi, an RSS pracharak, worked his way into the BJP and became the chief minister of Gujarat on 7 October 2001. As a newcomer in the state BJP, he badly needed to consolidate his position. Just after four months, an incident at Godhra took place in which 59 kar sevaks (those who offer services for free to a religious cause) were burnt alive in a mysterious fire in the bogie of Sabarmati Express, in which they were travelling, on 27 February 2002. They were returning after a religious ceremony at the site of the demolished Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. The incident was projected by Modi as a terror attack planned by local Muslims.⁴³ The next day, the VHP called for a bandh across the state, which was supported by the president of the state unit of the BJP.⁴⁴ The government's decision to move the bodies of the train victims from Godhra to Ahmedabad further inflamed the passions. The mobs ran rampant, attacking Muslim localities, burning properties, torturing and killing people as the police looked on and at times facilitated them. The partisan role played by the state machinery was widely commented upon and even resented by Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was the prime minister then. Summarizing academic views on the subject, Martha Nussbaum said: 'There is by now a broad consensus that the Gujarat violence was a form of ethnic cleansing, that in many ways it was premeditated, and that it was carried out with the complicity of the state government

and officers of the law.’ Modi’s personal involvement in the 2002 events continues to be debated. During the riots, Modi had said that ‘what is happening is a chain of action and reaction’.⁴⁵ While the state government stated later that 790 Muslims and 254 Hindus were killed, independent sources put the death toll at over 2000.⁴⁶ Approximately 150,000 people were driven to refugee camps.⁴⁷ Numerous women and children were among the victims of mass rapes and mutilations.⁴⁸

The Godhra incident and the carnage of Muslims that followed did consolidate Modi’s position among the Gujarati Hindus as a decisive leader and terrorized Muslims into submission, which helped him to get three consecutive terms as chief minister and run the state in an autocratic manner. Having consolidated his political position, he began using up state resources to attract industrialists to invest in the state, curbing any resistance with an iron hand. According to the industries minister, Suresh Mehta, who later resigned from the BJP, Modi made top industrialists fund, and also politically support, his well-publicized festivals and business meetings, including the biennial Vibrant Gujarat world business summits, and in return doled away huge concessions to them. For instance, in exchange of contribution of ₹55 lakhs to Modi’s *Shardotsava*, Welspun was given 48 acres of land in Kutch for kickstarting an industrial unit at the rate of ₹15 per sq.m against the actual market rate of ₹200 and the government assessment rate of ₹78 per sq.m.⁴⁹ When Tata re-sited the Nano project from Singur in West Bengal to Sanand in Gujarat in January 2009, Modi gave the company 1,100 acres of land at ₹900 per sq. m against the market rate of around ₹10,000 per sq. m and that too payable in instalments. The company was given an exemption of stamp duty of ₹20 crores levied on the sale of land, deferred payment of Value Added Tax (VAT) on the sale of cars for twenty years, loans amounting to ₹9,570 crore, 3.3 times the promised investment of ₹2,900 crores, at just 0.1 per cent interest rate, repayable in twenty years and doing away the existing policy regarding 85 per cent recruitment of locals. Similar concessions were doled out to Larsen and Toubro, which was given 800,000 sq. m of prime land in the industrial zone of Hazira without auction, at the rate of Re 1 per sq. m; to the Essar group which was given 2.08 lakh sq. m of disputed land for a steel plant on the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) and forest land, which just cannot be given, and of course concessions to his favourites, Ambanis and Adanis. No wonder hundreds of companies crowded in his Vibrant Gujarat Summit, committed lakhs of crores investment.

It is a different matter, however, that in reality, less than 10 per cent of this committed investment materialized on the ground. In fact, Maharashtra, Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu cumulatively accounted for 65 per cent of total FDI inflows in India from April 2000 until June 2018 while Gujarat garnered only 5 per cent of the same despite the Vibrant Gujarat summits.⁵⁰ The industrialists, however, continued to shower hyperbolic praises on him. For instance, in 2013, Anil Ambani, who had already projected Modi as the next prime minister of India, likened him to Mahatma Gandhi, Sardar Patel, Dhirubhai Ambani (his father) and Arjuna, the hero of the *Mahabharata*, before calling him 'king of kings.'⁵¹

Over a long period of over 12 years, Modi thus convinced global capital that he could serve it better than anyone else. In the wake of listless performance of the Congress-led UPA II, or its projection by the BJP, Modi had a pact with capital and catapulted himself to be the BJP's prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 elections. He was marketed with consolidated corporate zeal as *vikaspurush* (man for development) to win the majority for the BJP on its own in the Lok Sabha. Soon after the election, he consolidated his hold over the party by bringing his henchman, Amit Shah, as BJP's president. Having thus achieved full control on the party as well as the government, he began projecting himself as a strong and decisive leader. Though inimical to the spirit of democracy, he endeared himself to the burgeoning middle class and youth who saw their own prospects hitched to the economic development of India that his rhetoric promised. They believed in the numerous schemes he announced, many of them being just a rehash of the old Congress schemes, and their rhetorical projections as being fulfilment of promises.

Modi, with his powerful oratory, backed up by the army of party men, the RSS and Bhakts (devotees of Hindutva, the irrational bunch that faithfully followed him) overpowered dissent. With this Goebbels-like strategy, he almost decimated the opposition and won election after elections in states. He has repeatedly unleashed strategies that completely disarmed the opposition. The BJP rode roughshod on two horses, neoliberal economic policies and Hindu identity. The former is used as the development plank and the latter as the majoritarian plank, for example, *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*. The opposition parties contrary to the expectation of countering them, showed their bankruptcy in validating them. The Congress leader Rahul Gandhi would project himself as a Kashmiri Brahmin, claiming that Ram

Mandir could only be built by the Congress, short of saying that it is not Modi, but he who could make India a Hindu Rashtra. The entire opposition was rendered defensive with Modi's powerful pro-Hindu rhetoric, and nationalism backed by enormous resources he garnered for the party.

MODI'S STRATEGY ON DALITS

In relation to Dalits, Modi's strategy was to display his intense devotion to Ambedkar. He played up his OBCness (his caste Ghanshi, equivalent to Teli in other states, was an upper caste until 2002 but soon after his becoming the chief minister of Gujarat, it was included into the list of the OBCs of the state) and attributed his rise to the top post to Ambedkar, the maker of the Constitution that made it possible. He deployed his superb theatrical skills to outdo any political leader in appropriating the legacy of Ambedkar. He declared that his government would develop *Panchteerth* (five places connected with Ambedkar)—Mhow (where he was born); 10 King Henry's Road house in London (where he stayed while studying at the London School of Economics); the Deeksha Bhumi at Nagpur (where he embraced Buddhism); Mahaparinirvan Sthal at 26 Alipore Road in Delhi (where he spent his last days and breathed his last); and Chaitya Bhoomi in Mumbai (where he was cremated). Thawarchand Gehlot, the minister for Social Justice and Empowerment, exceeded the hyperbole in declaring that they would grandly memorialize wherever Babasaheb Ambedkar set foot. Indeed, the BJP government quickly resolved the issue of Indu Mill site, and acquisition of Ambedkar house at London (both by the Maharashtra government) which were being demanded by Dalits through the Congress governments and tried winning loyalty of Dalits. Later, a grand Ambedkar memorial in Delhi at 26 Alipore Road, where Ambedkar lived and died also was indeed inaugurated.

While this strategy of appropriating Ambedkar's legacy through a display of devotion to his persona was impressively implemented, the ideals Ambedkar upheld and the people he worked for were both trampled upon with impunity. As such, Modi's love for Dalits was exposed by his patronizing view in his book *Karmayog* that Dalits cleaned human excreta because they gained spiritual experience. It reflected the basic contradiction in the Hindutva strategy; while it served well to consolidate all castes under a Hindu identity, this identity

itself would be against the assertion of Dalits. BJP's coming to power strengthened the innate casteist instincts in non-Dalits, which had remained suppressed for long under the hegemonic egalitarian discourse. Both the Hindutva and neoliberal strategies of the BJP violated against this discourse and treated independent expression of Dalits as a threat. It reflected in the sudden spurt in the numbers of atrocities after Modi came to power, slashing funds for many a scheme for the Dalits such as scholarship, special component plan, and so on, and dampening developmental avenues such as reservations and promotions in jobs. Table I.1 provides the budget allocations towards the Scheduled Caste Sub-Plan (SCSP) and Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) for years from 2014–15 to 2017–18, which clearly reveals the deficit on both the schemes. While the BE (Budget Estimate) on the SCSP remained in the range of 1.74 to 2.87 per cent the same for the TSP remained in the range of 1.13 to 1.84 per cent of the mandated amounts. Not only were these schemes starved of funds but the Union Budget

Table I.1. SCSP–TSP Schemes in Union Budgets FY 2014–18 (numbers in ₹ crores).

	2014–15 BE	2015–16 BE	2016–17 BE	2017–18 BE
Total BE	17,63,214	17,77,477	19,78,060	20,91,735
Total allocations for SCs	50,548	30,851	38,833	52,393
Amount mandated by policy (SC)	81,460	82,119	91,386	96,847
BE on SC schemes as per cent of total BE	2.87 per cent	1.74 per cent	1.96 per cent	2.50 per cent
Total allocations for STs	32,387	20,000	24,005	31,920
Amount mandated by policy (ST)	42,141	42,482	47,276	49,992
BE on ST schemes as per cent of total BE	1.84 per cent	1.13 per cent	1.21 per cent	1.53 per cent

Source: N. Paul Divakar, The 2017 Budget Is Taking SC/ST Welfare Backwards. <https://thewire.in/rights/budget-2017-sc-st-welfare>.

2017–18 also actually done away with the policy of the targeted budget itself. They merged the plan and non-plan categories, thereby enhancing the scope of large-scale diversion of SC/ST funds to items such as pensions, salaries and other administrative expenses which are contra to the underlying principle of directly benefiting individuals, families and hamlets belonging to SC/ST communities. The actual utilization figure indicates that even these meagrely allocated funds are hardly used in full. The percentage utilization for the SCs has been 59, 99, and 88 per cent for the years 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 respectively and for the STs it has been 62, 106 and 91 per cent for these years (see Table I.1).

Several of the directly beneficial schemes for SCs and STs, like the National Scheduled Caste Finance Development Corp, venture capital fund for SCs, credit guarantee fund for SCs, self-employment of manual scavengers and rehabilitation of manual scavengers, national overseas scholarships for SCs and pre-Matric scholarships for SC students have also either been severely under-funded or funding has been slashed.

Some of the campaigns the RSS and its affiliated organizations like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its youth wing, Bajrang Dal, launched with open or tacit support of Modi, directly hit Dalits. For instance, many Dalits and Muslims suffered from the Ghar Wapsi (homecoming) programme of the Hindutva mobs, which was a move to reconvert people to Hinduism. It is a fact that Dalits have converted to other religions like Islam, Christianity and Sikhism in the hope that they would escape their social oppression and humiliation within Hinduism. Several incidents of the beating of such Dalits who had converted to Islam by the Hindutva hoodlums were reported from the northern states.⁵² One Pawan Kumar, a Dalit Hindu from Shamli, India, converted to Islam and was beaten up by Bajrang Dal activists who forced him to renounce Islam. He said, 'I want to remain a Muslim but these right-wing activists beat me up and shaved off my beard.' The police reaction to such incidents reveals the rot in the system brought about by the Modi regime. Shamli S.P. Dev Ranjan Verma had said, 'We had sent a police team but he was not ready to share details of the cleric who helped him convert. Some Bajrang Dal men conducted his shuddhikaran (purification). We are keeping a watch on the situation.' For the police, the harassment and beating by the goons of an innocent youth is of no consequence; what is important is whether he converted to Islam or who converted him to Islam! And for the media, it is just news, not worthy of comment. The Ghar Wapsi

was actually a rehash of Arya Samaj's *shuddhi* (purification) which took for granted that other religions are impure and only Hinduism is pure.⁵³ As such, it negated what Ambedkar did. While the BJP kept deceptively arguing that Hindutva was not a Hindu religion, taking shelter under validation by the Supreme Court's Hindutva judgement,⁵⁴ it left no stone unturned in promoting Hinduism and its customs in government. For instance, there was a demand for making the Bhagvad Gita the national book; or Modi gifting it to the US President. Ambedkar detested the Bhagvad Gita as a counterrevolutionary text: 'If anything, the Bhagvad Gita is a more formidable supporter of counter-revolution than Jaimini's *Purva Mimansa* could have ever been.'⁵⁵ Every revivalist move of the Hindutva forces thus potentially violated the Dalit interests. Unfortunately, Dalits are a fragmented lot, and hence some of them neither follow their leaders nor are able to discern causal linkages between their worsening condition and the government policies, and thus may still go for the BJP.

REPRESSION OF RADICAL DALITS

The first of the numerous episodes that exposed the anti-Dalit attitude of the Modi-regime was the ban on the Ambedkar Periyar Study Circle (APSC) in IIT, Madras (IITM). APSC was created as an independent student body on 14th April 2014, by a group of students of IITM to promote Ambedkar-Periyar thoughts and to initiate debates on socio-economic-political and cultural issues within the academic fraternity. IITM has a long history of right-wing activism that propagated its ideology through the outfits like Vivekananda Study Circle, RSS Shakha, Hare Rama Hare Krishna, Vande Matram, Dhurva, and so on. APSC emerged as the only counterpoint to this hegemonic right-wing discourse in the IITM campus. It took up many progressive issues such as agrarian crisis, coal bed methane projects, language politics, MHRD's overt attempt to have separate vegetarian mess halls in IITs and IIMs and organized talks by noted public intellectuals and experts. Though the APSC provided platform for the students to develop their critical faculty towards becoming responsible citizens, it continuously faced threats from right-wing groups within the campus and hostility of the IITM Administration. In June 2014, the Dean of Students had asked the APSC to change its name stating that the names 'Ambedkar and Periyar' were politically motivated. APSC declined to comply citing the right-wing outfit named after Vivekananda.

However, in September 2014, he reiterated it, this time through the general counselling unit for students run by IITM, saying that the names would polarize students.

The next year APSC celebrated Ambedkar's birth anniversary in April 2015 by organizing a talk on the contemporary relevance of Dr Ambedkar. Pamphlets issued inter alia stated how communalism and corporatism were the two sides of a single coin which is tossed by the present government against the common masses. After the event, the Dean sent a mail on 22 May 2015, saying 'because of the misuse of the privileges' given to your study circle, your student body is de-recognized by the institute'. The action was occasioned by a letter from MHRD in response to an anonymous complaint. It said, 'APSC is trying to de-align the ST, SC students and trying to make them to protest against MHRD and Central government and trying to create hatred against honorable prime minister and Hindus'. Even on explanation that the activities of APSC were meant to promote social consciousness and scientific temper among students mandated by the Indian constitution, the Dean asked APSC to desist from such activities in the future. The unwarranted and draconian action by the IITM administration against APSC provoked a countrywide wave of condemnation. Eventually, the IITM administration had to eat humble pie and restore the recognition in June 2015. While it appeared to have ended administratively, the APSC was marked for harassment by the Information Bureau. Even the fabricated letters of the so-called Maoists in the Bhima-Koregaon episode had reference to the APSC. In February 2019, Ramesh, one of the founding members, who is currently working as a teaching staff on a contractual basis at Anna University, and another woman member of the APSC, were threatened by intelligence officials of charging them under UAPA in the Bhima-Koregaon case.

Soon after the APSC in IIT Madras, a similar episode instigated by Modi's MHRD exploded in Hyderabad Central University (HCU). On 3 August 2015, the Ambedkar Students Association (ASA) in HCU protested against the death penalty for Yakub Memon, a convict in the 1993 Bombay bombings, as many progressive people in the country did and also condemned the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) protest against the screening of the documentary *Muzaffarnagar Baaqi Hai* in Delhi University. In response, ABVP's university unit president, Nandanam Susheel Kumar, called them 'goons' on his Facebook page. The ASA students went to his room

and demanded an apology, which he tendered. It was witnessed by the security personnel of the HCU. However, the next day Kumar admitted himself to hospital and lodged a complaint of assault against ASA members at Gachibowli Police Station. The BJP functionaries including union minister Bandaru Dattatreya took up the case with the MHRD, which in turn, pressured the HU administration to take action against the ASA. The HCU actuated its bureaucratic processes and eventually punished the five students on 16–17 December by driving them out of hostel and banning them from accessing other common facilities in the campus. It was akin to reminding these students of their status as untouchables. The convict students set up their makeshift accommodation in the open spaces on the Shopcom arena in the campus naming them Velivada (a Telugu word that means Dalit Ghetto). Experiencing humiliation, financially stressed without fellowship since August, Rohith took an extreme step of hanging himself on 17 January 2016. A month before his suicide, Rohith had written a poignant note to the vice chancellor, asking him to provide a bottle of poison and ‘a nice rope’ to every Dalit student admitted in HU and clearly complained the persecution on campus for ‘students like me’ was so widespread that the campus should facilitate euthanasia. The VC did not have an answer when I confronted him in an interview. Rohith left a suicide note, which may be remembered for a long time as representative of the plight of Dalit students by the Hindutva establishment in the country.

The incident created protest waves across the country. The Gachibowli Police registered a case naming union minister of state for labour and employment Bandaru Dattatreya, vice-chancellor P. Appa Rao and ABVP leader N. Susheel Kumar under the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and 306 (abetment of suicide) of the Indian Penal Code. To prevent the arrest of Dattatreya, Apparao and Kumar, the BJP sparked off the controversy about Rohith’s caste, whipped by union ministers Sushma Swaraj and Thawar Chand Gehlot. After a fact-finding committee of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (NCSC) established the responsibility of the university for Rohith’s death, the then union minister of Human Resource Development (HRD) Smriti Irani, set up a one-member judicial commission comprising former Allahabad High Court judge A. K. Roopanwal on 28 January 2016 to probe the circumstances leading to his suicide. This judge forgot his brief and instead observed that Rohith was not a Dalit. Roopanwal was very well aware that the

Guntur district collector Kantilal Dande, who is the competent authority in this matter, had already confirmed in his report to the NCSC that Rohith was a Dalit. P. L. Punia, chairman of the NCSC, also reiterated that all records and his investigations proved that Rohith indeed was a Dalit. The BJP then commissioned one Darsanapu Srinivas, a Dalit belonging to the Hindu Dharma Rakshak Sangh to complain to the Guntur collector against Rohith's brother, Raja Vemula. The complaint was that Raja had fraudulently obtained a caste certificate saying he was a Dalit. The collector, having already confirmed Rohith as a Dalit, could have dismissed the complaint but he forwarded it to the District Caste Scrutiny Committee. This committee expectedly enough gave a report that Raja was not a Dalit. In this way, despite the unprecedented scale of protest, justice to Rohith stands shelved by the anti-Dalit establishment.⁵⁶ Rather, when the Dalit students and some faculty protested at the VC's residence when he returned to the campus after absconding during the protests in campus, they were mercilessly thrashed by the police. Twenty-five students and two faculty members were arrested and incarcerated in jail for a week before they could manage bail.

HOLY COW, UNHOLY INTRIGUES

Another policy-cum-campaign of the Hindutva forces was for the beef ban, which directly hit the Dalits in two ways: one, by depriving them of the cheap protein source and two, being vulnerable to suspicion as cow killers because of their caste vocation to process dead cattle. The prohibition of cow slaughter is a part of the constitution, under Article 48: under the title, 'Organisation of agriculture and animal husbandry' it states 'The State shall endeavour to organise agriculture and animal husbandry on modern and scientific lines and shall, in particular, take steps for preserving and improving the breeds, and prohibiting the slaughter, of cows and calves and other milch and draught cattle.' It is one among the 25 articles (Articles 36–51) of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), which are the guidelines or principles given to the federal institutes governing the state of India, to be kept in mind while framing laws and policies. These provisions, contained in Part IV of the Constitution of India, are not enforceable by any court, but the principles laid down therein are considered irrefutable in the governance of the country, making it the duty of the state. There is another Directive Principle, for example, Article 47:

'The State shall regard the raising of the level of nutrition and the standard of living of its people and the improvement of public health as among its primary duties', which arguably directly conflicts with the zealous implementation of the anti-cow slaughter part of the Article 48 as done by the BJP. Article 48 has three parts. First, the agriculture should be improved on scientific and modern lines. Second, the cattle breed should be improved; and third, the cow and other cattle should be protected from slaughter. These are meant to achieve the objective of growing more food and improving agriculture and the cattle breed. Slaughter of the cow in it is a minor part and is just an extension of the 'preservation' of the existing breed. But interestingly, only that part has been emphasized by the successive governments overlooking the rest to pander to the sentiments of the 'majority' community. What BJP did is extending it to the extreme what the earlier regimes have done in this as in most others.

It is interesting to see the debate over this Article in the Constituent Assembly. When Pandit Thakur Dass proposed the bill for banning cow slaughter, he had couched it with economic rationale but during the debate it acquired religious overtones. It naturally provoked a reaction from Muslim members, who were keen that it should not create a cleavage between Muslims and Hindus. Mohammed Saadullah from Assam and Z. A. Lari sought clarity that the ban on cow slaughter was proposed for religious reasons and not economic ones. When the bill was eventually passed, it was premised on the economic rationale. However, the Hindutva forces have always exploited this Article for rousing religious sentiments of gullible people. In 1966, Swami Rameshwaranand of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh led a march of sadhus to Parliament on 7 November, asking for a blanket, nationwide ban on cow slaughter. The siege of Parliament led to mayhem and consequent police firing in which at least seven people lost their lives. Indira Gandhi, after she won the Lok Sabha polls the following year, constituted a committee headed by Justice A. K. Sarkar, then recently retired as chief justice of India along with other members that included then RSS chief M. S. Golwalkar, to look into the proposal for a national law to ban cow slaughter. It was given six months to submit its recommendations. The committee never submitted its recommendations and was eventually wound up in 1979 during the prime ministership of Morarji Desai.

As of August 2013, 24 states/union territories had already strict laws that either prohibited the slaughter of cows completely or banned

killing cattle under a certain age, which made it difficult for restaurants to source, store or serve beef legally. Nonetheless, consumption of beef and buffalo meat together topped the list of highest meat consumption in India. Annually, India produces an estimated 1.5 million tonnes of buffalo meat, of which only 24 per cent is exported. The alternate meat being expensive, beef remained as the affordable meat and source of protein for the entire lower strata of people, mainly comprising Dalits, Muslims, Christians and Tribals. In 2012, to protest against the ban on beef in the campus, the Dalit students of the Osmania University, Hyderabad asserted their culinary rights in public and make a political statement of dietary habits of Dalits and Muslims by cooking and eating beef biryani on campus. They were expectedly attacked by the Hindutva forces; a young activist from Chennai, Meena Kandaswamy, who was the guest to the programme being singled out for the threat of gang rape and acid attack.

The veneration of the cow comes from its utility in ancient agricultural economy as it gave dairy products, bullocks for tilling the fields, and cow dung as a source of fuel and fertilizer. It did not have much to do with religion as even the Muslim rulers like Mughal emperor Babar, who ruled in 1520s; later Mughal emperors Akbar (1556–1605), Jahangir (1605–1627), Hyder Ali, sultan and de facto ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore from 1761 to 1782 and Ahmad Shah (1748–1754), had banned or restricted cow slaughter. During the colonial period, the cow became a tool of mass political mobilization to unite Hindus by the upper-caste led freedom movement. Gandhi said, ‘My religion teaches me that the conviction of cow-killing is a sin and that, therefore, it ought to be abandoned’⁵⁷ and then declared, ‘I worship it and I shall defend its worship against the whole world.’⁵⁸ Today, in the era of neoliberal capitalism with its social Darwinist competition, the feudal sentiment of veneration or sacredness is overtaken by the efficiency and productivity consideration towards the animal’s effective use. The economics demand that cattle after their productive period are slaughtered to maximize their utility and reduce the drain on scarce resources.

India accounting for 57 per cent of world’s buffalo population and with 16 per cent of world’s cattle, ranks first in the world. India is also the world’s largest milk producer, with a total of 132.4 million tonnes of liquid milk produced in 2012–2013, valued at over ₹2,900 billion (approximately US\$ 45 billion), higher than the combined value of other major agricultural crops like paddy, wheat and sugarcane.

Livestock production is the most important agricultural activity in the country, contributing about 24.8 per cent to the agricultural gross domestic product. Dairy farming dominates livestock production, providing 18 million people, 70 per cent of them women, with employment. The dairy sector is also the major source of income for an estimated 27.6 million people, particularly belonging to landless farmers, who get a large share of the total price paid by consumers (77 per cent) compared to 45 to 48 per cent in Germany and the USA. This makes milk production very attractive; it offers many of India's farmers a way out of poverty. However, the average milk yield of Indian cow is poor: just 1,284 kg as against 6,212 kg in the European Union and 9,117 kg in the United States. It reflects the lack of technology and management methods. Besides, the advanced countries have a beef industry as an integral component of cattle productivity management. While the West has perfected the efficient and scientific way, India still follows the vedic technology of cattle rearing. The most efficient way of intensive dairying is to keep cows indoors in hygienic condition, impregnating them artificially by 'dairy bull' or a 'beef bull', and milking them only for the most productive first two lactations. The milk yield and quality drops after the first two calvings. The dairy cows after about 4–5 years are turned into hamburgers and young heifers replace them even though technically they are good for another 10 years of milking. In India, dairy cows are inefficiently milked for 6–8 lactations by the first owner and perhaps 2–5 by subsequent owners with inferior quality milk. This means cows are milked almost for their entire life. It is not that farmers do not know this to be uneconomical but they do not have any recourse to dispose off the animal. The upper-caste Hindutva brigade feigns love for the cow but the brunt is borne by the poor low-caste cattle farmer, who wants to sell it for slaughtering as the surreptitious business amply shows. Slaughtering of cows is not necessarily cruelty; keeping them alive in a painful condition is. Over 90 per cent of all cows are slaughtered for four main reasons: infertility; mastitis (a persistent and potentially fatal mammary gland infection); laminitis; and lameness (a persistent foot infection or leg problems) causing infertility and loss of production. Cattle today are the basis of a multi-billion-dollar industry worldwide. The international trade in beef for 2000 was over \$30 billion and represented only 23 per cent of world beef production. This hare-brained malafide policy has already caused havoc in the countryside with the spurt in the population of stray cattle which get

into farms of poor people and destroys their standing crops, adding to the already aggravating distress.⁵⁹

MOBOCRACY OF GAU RAKSHAKS

From 2014 onwards the cow was used to unleash its terror over Dalits and Muslims who traditionally consumed the relatively cheaper beef as their protein food and worked in abattoirs or the leather industry. In a country where 80 per cent diets are protein deficient,⁶⁰ the obsessive beef-ban by the BJP is bound to prove disastrous. Many of these protein-deficient people belong to poor Dalits and Muslims, whose only source of protein was cheap beef. Next, the cow protection laws, NGT (National Green Tribunal) and PETA (People for Ethical Treatment of Animals) are misused to close down abattoirs and meat shops in the unorganized sector that employed mainly Dalits and Kasais (butchers) who are Pasmenda (Dalit) Muslims.⁶¹ These closures have spiralled into closure of the downstream leather industry, which typically employs low-caste Muslims and Dalits. They cart and flay dead cattle, labour in tanneries and make shoes, bags and belts even for big brands such as Zara and Clarks.⁶² In Kanpur, 98 tanneries closed down when a national environmental tribunal found that they were dumping pollutants into the Ganges. The cumulative impact of these policies has been deleterious on Dalits, irrespective of their religions.

When BJP came to power in 2014, 24 of India's 29 states had varying degrees of ban on the slaughter of cows and other cattle. But post-2014, most BJP state governments made their cow laws stringent. For instance, on 3 March 2015, the Maharashtra government got the presidential assent to its draconian bill prescribing harsh punishments not only for killing the cow and its progeny but also for just possessing their meat in any form. As a matter of fact, Maharashtra has always had prohibitions and restrictions on certain types of bovine meats. It almost set in motion a competition among BJP-ruled states, Haryana having already proposed making punishment for cow slaughter equal to that for killing a human being. Another BJP ruled state, Gujarat, recently brought in the Gujarat Animal Preservation (Amendment) Act, 2017, which has very stringent punishments for slaughter, possession and sale of beef. While the minimum and maximum punishments have been enhanced to ten years and life imprisonment, respectively, the Act also punishes 'illegal' transportation

of cow, beef or beef products to seven years of imprisonment. In November 2017, the Madhya Pradesh law was made more draconian by creating a new offence: that of abandoning of old or non-productive cows, thus saddling farmers with the financial burden of providing for these animals. Apart from the violation of fundamental democratic rights of people to eat what they want, such Acts, it is scarcely realized, can invite veritable economic disaster. In a country where over 1.83 *million children die* before their fifth birthday, where two Dalits are murdered every day, where thousands of farmers have been committing suicide every year, where on an average of 130 people are killed yearly in communal violence, and millions suffer the intrinsic violence embedded in its anti-people policies, killing of cows assumed such dire priority.

These draconian cow laws were not implemented by the police but were outsourced to cow vigilante gangs. According to Indiaspend,⁶³ 94 incidents of cow related violence, including mob lynching, occurred between 2012 to 2018, in which 37 persons died, victims numbered 308 and the number of major assaults was as high as 164. Most of them happened since the Modi government came to power. The victims are Pasmanda Muslims.⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch has reported that there has been a surge in cow vigilante violence since 2015. The surge is attributed to the recent rise in Hindu nationalism in India. Many vigilante groups say they feel 'empowered' by the victory of the Hindu nationalist BJP in the 2014 election. Between January 2016 and March 2018, PUDR documented 137 such incidents across 22 states, based on media reports in English and Hindi as well as fact-finding reports. They have documented 20 instances of reported deaths in which 29 persons died and 13 cases of attacks on Dalits, overwhelmingly in Gujarat.⁶⁵ See Table I.2 that gives a detailed summary of these atrocities.

Even the previous BJP-led NDA government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee had seen gory killing of Dalits on suspicion of cow killing. On 15 October 2002 five Dalits were brutally lynched to death by a mob of VHP and Bajrang Dal at the Dulina Police Chowki in Jajjhar district of Haryana in the presence of three sub-divisional magistrates, the deputy superintendent of police, the SHO and about 60 to 70 police personnel who had been sent there after urgent wireless messages from the chowki. Two cases of murder and attempt to murder were registered against 32 villagers but not before lodging a case against the victims under the Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act and had even sent

the cow carcass for a postmortem. Only after the results came in that the cow had been dead 24 hours before the lynching, the case was withdrawn. Among those arrested at least four were Dalits so that the Atrocity Act would not apply.⁶⁶ In 2010, the trial court convicted seven accused with life imprisonment but acquitted all others in the case. But even after the trial court verdict, the accused are out on bail and have appealed against the lower court verdict in the Supreme Court, which is still pending.

On 11 July 2016, the cow vigilantes struck in Una, Gujarat. Seven members of a Dalit family were skinning a dead cow, killed by lions in Mota Samadhiyala village of Una taluka. They had bought the carcass in Bediya village. At 10 a.m., a white car passing by stopped next to them and upper-caste Gau Rakshaks alighted and beat them with iron pipes and sticks, accusing them of killing a cow. Four young members of the family—Vashram Sarvaiya, his brother Ramesh and cousins Ashok and Bechar—were put in the car and taken to Una town, where the four youth were stripped, tied to the vehicle, paraded on the streets and publicly beaten again. So emboldened were the attackers that they videoed the flogging and posted it on social media. Unfortunately for them the video went viral, enraging Dalits all over the country. On 12 July 2016, a huge protest rally was at first organized in Chandkheda by various Dalit leaders like Tushar Parmar, Rajashree Kesri and many others in which more than 2000 Dalits participated and blocked the state highway. On 13 July 2016, hundreds of Dalits organized a protest rally against the assault and later occupied Trikon Baug, the main square in Una, for an hour. On 21 July, the issue was discussed in the Rajya Sabha, the upper house of Parliament. The protests spread across Saurashtra region. Twelve Dalit youths attempted suicide in protest across the region and one of them died. Four police officers were suspended and the case was handed over to Crime Investigation Department. By 28 July 2016, 20 accused were arrested. Jignesh Mevani, an activist, led the protest march called Dalit Asmita Yatra from Ahmedabad to Una which culminated on 15 August 2016, attended by some 20,000 Dalits, who took a pledge to give up their traditional jobs and demanded five acres of land.

There were many incidents of mob lynching which were mostly suffered by poor Muslims and Dalits. See Table I.2.⁶⁷

Table I.2. Caste Vigilantism: Attacks on Dalits.

Date/Place	Who are the victim/s?	Circumstances of Attack	Comments
22 May 2016 Rajula town, Amreli, Gujarat	7 men: Ravi Zakhada, Prembhai Rathod, Dileep and 4 others. Skinning carcasses in place allotted by local municipality	Brutal thrashing with bats, iron rods and swords by 30 gau rakshaks who broke hands and legs of victims.	Incident came to light only in July 2016. Victims alleged that gau rakshaks planned to burn them alive. Police registered case only against 19 after repeated complaints. In July, after Una, the police arrested 6 persons
10 July 2016 Kondur village, Chikmagalur, Karnataka	5 men, Muttappa, Balaraj Sandeep, Dhanushand one other	Seven members of Bajrang Dal raided home of one victim on suspicion of theft and slaughter.	Dal members alerted police who arrested 3 victims for cruelty against animal. Victims stated that were legally slaughtering an ox which they had bought and filed counter FIR against 7 Dal activists for raiding and attacking Dalits. Dal members obtained bail and were not arrested.
11 July 2016 Mota Samadhiyala village, Una, Gujarat	7 Dalits attacked when four of them were skinning a dead cow. Assault occurred just outside the PS, using the lathis of policemen.	Victims were stripped, tied to a car with a Shiv Sena sticker, dragged or about a km. and then beaten up with iron rods and ticks.	Widespread protests in the state and later nationwide against injustice and for Dalit rights. On July 31, thousands pledged in Dalit Maha Sammelan in Ahmedabad to stop picking up carcasses and give up occupations like manual scavenging. 43 persons arrested under SC/ST Act but 32h ave already obtained bail. Case still on.
27 July 2016 Navsari, Gujarat	Girish Sosa	Victim thrashed by Gau RakshaSamiti for allegedly carrying beef	Victim said he was unaware of content which was given to him by vegetable seller Kishor Morey for delivery. Arrested for selling beef but obtained bail.

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Date /Place	Who are the victim/s?	Circumstances of Attack	Comments
4 August 2016 Sultanpur town, Raisen district, Madhya Pradesh	Manu Lal Parmar, Mohsin Khan (Driver and helper)	Bajrang Dal activists attacked duo when truck accidentally killed cattle	Parmar drowned in Barna river while escaping from Dal members. Khan survived. Case registered against 'unknown' persons.
8 August 2016 Amalapura, East Godavari, AP	Mokati Elisha Lazar	Victims tied to coconut tree, stripped and beaten by mob for skinning dead cow	Victims were hired to skin dead cow that had been electrocuted. Both hospitalized after attack. Case registered under SC/ST Act. Two accused identified, but information on arrests not known.
20 August 2016 Bhavda village, Ahmedabad dist. Gujarat	Harsh Parmar, student	Beaten by 2 activists as his father refused to dispose cattle carcasses; and for participating in post-Una protests	Victim traumatized and had to be sent away from village. Father lodged complaint under SC/ST Act. Father has pledged to give up caste-based menial occupation. Now, lives by wage earning. Police has downplayed the incident as 'minor scuffle'.
21 August, 2016 Mandal village, Amreli dist. Gujarat	Nagji Rathod Mayabhai Rathod	Thrashed at home by locals, including sarpanch for refusing to clear carcass of calf	Victims hospitalized after beating. Both had pledged, after Una, to give up caste-based menial occupation and because of growing attacks by vigilantes. Police registered case against 7 persons under SC/ST Act
23 September 2016 Mota Karja village Banaskantha dist. Gujarat	Sangeeta and Ramesh Ranawasia and 4 others	Victims assaulted by 10 Darbar community men after refusing to clear cow carcass	Victims had given up, post Una, caste-based menial occupation. Coup leader admitted to hospital especially since Sangeeta was five-months pregnant. Case against six under SC/ST Act.

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Date /Place	Who are the victim/s?	Circumstances of Attack	Comments
July 15, 2017 Bapunagar, Ahmedabad Gujarat	Vishal Arsodiya	Abused and stabbed by 3 men after victim accidentally kicked cow-blocking his scooter	Victim hospitalized. Police claimed to have identified 3 accused, including assailant, Raju Rabari.
15 August 2017 Anand, Gujarat	Maniben Shailesh Rohit (mother and son)	15 Darbar men barged into home and mercilessly beat and abused duo over skinning carcasses allegedly near crematorium	According to victims, the upper caste vigilantes accused Shailesh of creating a stink even though he skinned carcasses at appointed place, away from village. FIR registered against accused but no arrests made.
8 January, 2018 Rasra town, Ballia, UP	Two Dalit men	Victims tortured, paraded by Hindu Vahini activists on charges of theft of cow.	Victims forced to wear placard saying, 'hum chor hai' while being paraded. FIR against victims for theft. FIR also lodged against 15 unknown persons under section 342, 323, 506 IPC and SC/ST Act.
15 January 2018 Chinnakandukuru village, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri dist. Telangana	11 Dalits belonging to Madiga community	Victims attacked by 20-30 RSS men on news of slaughter for sankranti. Victims fled and vigilantes stole a cow from one victim.	Attackers vandalized homes. However, police filed case against Dalits for slaughter. Also filed case against attackers under SC/ST Act. Dalits have resolved to hold a beef festival and also form a committee with neighbouring village and local Left leaders for demanding arrest of RSS goons.

Source: 'PUDR, Cow Vigilantism: Crime, Community and Livelihood, January 2016 to March 2018', People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), March 2018.

BHIMA-KOREGAON: THE END OF PESHWAI

The ongoing plot linked with the Bhima-Koregaon commemoration on 1 January 2018 is an extremely serious anti-Dalit act that stands out. It was the 200th anniversary of the last Anglo-Maratha battle fought at Koregaon village near Pune, in which a small army of East India Company that included a significant contingent of Dalit soldiers fought gallantly against the much bigger army of the Peshava and defeated the latter. This victory had marked the end of Peshavas and firmly consolidated British rule in India. An obelisk was constructed at the site inscribing the names of the martyred soldiers among whom many names could be identified as those of Dalits. When the British banned the entry of the Dalits into army in 1890 with the pretext that they were not the martial race, the then Dalit leaders used the Koregaon battle as the historical testimony for their gallantry. Shivram Janaba Kamble was one such leader from Pune who invited Babasaheb Ambedkar to a commemorative function held at the obelisk on 1 January 1927. Since then, it is said that Ambedkar paid a visit to the obelisk whenever he happened to pass it by. Bhima-Koregaon became the place of pride for the Dalits. Following Ambedkar's legacy, the Dalits began to observe anniversary of Bhima-Koregaon battle on 1 January since the 1990s. Hundreds of thousands of people congregated and paid homage to their martyred soldiers at the obelisk, without any untoward incident.

Interestingly, the attitude of the RSS towards Dalits taking pride in Bhima-Koregaon has been inimical. Golwalkar contested Ambedkar's interpretation of Bhima-Koregaon by portraying the Peshwas as proto-nationalists who defended India against foreign invasion. It was obviously a gross anachronism as in 1818, there was no such thing as a unified Indian nation but rather a series of competing powers, of which the Peshwas controlled merely one kingdom among many. Golwalkar wrote,

In their heart of hearts, very few of these anti-caste zealots experience the sense of unity that can transcend the present-day perversities. Anti-caste tirade has verily become a mask for them to strengthen their own positions among their caste fellowmen. To what extent this venom has entered our body-politic can be surmised from an incident which occurred some years ago. There is a Victory Pillar near

Pune, raised by the English in 1818 to commemorate their victory over the Peshawas. An eminent leader of the Harijan once addressed his caste-brethren under that pillar. He declared that the pillar was a symbol of their victory over the Brahmins as it was they who had fought under the British and defeated the Peshawas, the Brahmins. How heartfelt it is to hear an eminent leader thus describing the hated sign of slavery as an emblem of victory, and the despicable action of fighting as slaves of a foreigner against our own kith and kin as an achievement of hatred, not even able to discern the simple fact of who the victors were and who the defeated! What a perversity!⁶⁸

Even in 1966, Golwalkar was not ready to acknowledge Babasaheb Ambedkar as a learned scholar and also the maker of the Constitution. It reveals what the RSS really thought of Ambedkar, notwithstanding its strategic volte face in misappropriating his icon and legacy and is not entirely disconnected from what happened to the commemoration in 2018. Justice P. B. Sawant, the retired judge of the Supreme Court and Justice B. G. Kolshe Patil, the ex-judge of the Bombay High Court, took a lead in observing the 200th anniversary of Bhima-Koregaon in the form of an organized opposition to the fascist-brahminic rule of the BJP. They invited activists and progressive intellectuals from Maharashtra to a planning meeting which decided to organize an Elgar Parishad on the 31 December. More than 250 organizations had joined the organizing committee, some of them belonging to the Marathas, who had never aligned politically with the Dalits in the past. Right since the BJP–Shiv Sena formed the government in the state under a Brahmin chief minister, the displeasure of the Marathas manifested in various forms, the biggest of course was the Maratha Morchas, that erupted using the pretext of an unfortunate incident at Kopardi where a minor Maratha girl was raped and killed by some miscreants, one of whom happened to be a Dalit. The administration had promptly acted and therefore the legitimate demand for justice to the victim was tilted to an unconnected demand for the annulment of the Atrocity Act. The mass mobilization was used later to demand reservations for Marathas. In course of time, a large section of Marathas⁶⁹ began sensing the need to align with the Dalits to defeat the brahminic dispensation in the state. It was reflected in some of their youth organizations joining the organizers of the

Elgar Parishad that echoed their sentiment in the slogan, 'Bury the New Peshwai'. The infamous oppressive rule of the Brahmin Peshwai has been vividly described in the literature. They were forbidden to move in public spaces in the mornings and evenings lest their long shadows defile high-caste people in the streets⁷⁰; they were made to wear an earthen pot round the neck to hold their spittle, and a thorny branch tied behind to brush out their footsteps.⁷¹ Kumbhojkar (2015) cited Mukta Salave, a 15-year-old girl from the untouchable Mang caste as follows: They regularly used to make the Mangs and Mahars drink oil mixed with red lead and then buried them in the foundations of their mansions, thus wiping out generation after generation of these poor people. Under Bajirao's rule, if any Mang or Mahar who happened to pass in front of the gymnasium, had his head cut off and used to play 'bat ball', with their swords as bats and the head as a ball, on the grounds.⁷²

NEW PESHWAI'S PLOT

The Peshwai was used as a metaphor for the brahminic BJP rule. It was largely symbolic but could well be seen as portending a risk to the BJP's apple cart. Both the main organizers of the conference happened to be the Marathas, which alarmed the BJP, which responded with commissioning its agent provocateurs in Milind Ekbote, founder of Samastha Hindutva Aghadi and Sambhaji Bhide, the ex-RSS functionary and the founder of Shiv Chhatrapati Pratishthan, to create a rift between Dalits and Marathas. A Samadhi of Sambhaji Maharaj, son of Shivaji, situated at Vadu Budruk, just 4 km from Bhima-Koregaon was used to cook up a controversy. For the last 300 years, the popular history of the Samadhi held that when Aurangzeb had Sambhaji killed, Govind Mahar collected the dismembered pieces and gave Sambhaji a respectable funeral. He built a memorial on his field. When he died his family built his memorial by the side of Sambhaji's. The conspirator duo fabricated a story that it was not Govind Mahar but a Maratha family 'Shivale' who did it provoked the Marathas against the Dalits. Using this rift at Vadu Budruk, they could incite Marathas against the Dalits congregating at Bhima-Goregaon on 1 January, which was also declared to be a bandh in the area. The preparations in surrounding villages were visible to the public but the administration feigned ignorance. On 29 December, the Dalits found the canopy and the information board put up at the Samadhi

of Govind Mahar damaged. It created tension between communities as designed but to the misfortune of the conspirators, the villagers patched it up the next day.

It was generally apprehended that something untoward would take place on 1 January. The complicity of the state apparatus was conspicuous through the scanty police force which was pathetically inadequate to control the attacker gangs. On 31 December Elgar Parishad took place as planned at Shaniwarwada. At the end of the conference, the people present were administered the oath that they would never vote for the BJP and would try to protect the constitution of India. The entire conference was video-recorded by the police as well as by the organizers. Nothing untoward took place at the conference and all the delegates dispersed peacefully.

On 1 January, when Dalits began congregating at Bhima-Koregaon, the Hindutva goons mounted an attack on them at around 10:30 a.m., as planned, with stone pelting from the terrace of houses lining the road, beating people and burning the buses and stalls. They fluttered saffron flags and shouted Hindutva slogans in the name of Bhide/Ekbote's outfits. The police just looked on as they were not in enough number; stray videos on WhatsApp messages clearly showed saffron flag bearers shouting slogans in the name of Ekbote and Bhide, chasing and beating the Dalits who were caught unaware. Many Dalits were injured, their vehicles were damaged, many stalls were burnt down and a youth lost his life.

On 2 January, a social worker and member of the Bahujan Republican Socialist Party, Anita Ravindra Salve, lodged a complaint under the SC/ST Atrocity Act with the Shikrapur police station, naming Ekbote and Bhide as the culprits for the attack on the Dalits the previous day. Nothing happened on this complaint. A call of a Maharashtra Bandh was given by Prakash Ambedkar on 3 January, which went largely without any untoward incident. However, the police actuated themselves and started arresting Dalit youths, accusing them of committing violence. In all 655 FIRs against 11,000 Dalit youths were lodged across Maharashtra. On 8 January, Tushar Damgade, an RSS functionary and a disciple of Sambhaji Bhide, filed an FIR naming some Kabir Kala Manch activists for organizing the Elgar Parishad, claiming that inflammatory speeches were given in the Parishad that caused violence on 1 January. It was *prima facie* a preposterous claim. Firstly, the police themselves had witnessed the proceeding of the Elgar Parishad and had a complete video recording

to verify the claim. If indeed there were any inflammatory speeches, they could have filed an FIR themselves and acted against the speakers. There was no need to wait for nine days for someone to file an FIR. Nonetheless, the police picked it up for executing a scripted plan. They raided houses of the named people and began insinuating that the Elgar Parishad was funded by the Maoists, ignoring the public statements by Justice Kolshe-Patil, the chief organizer of the Elgar Parishad along with Justice P. B. Sawant that they did not need any money. Till today, having developed this event into a big conspiracy of the Maoists and misleading courts to believe in its lie, the police haven't enquired with these two justices to verify their premise. In the chargesheet, they have attached a statement attributed to Justice Sawant, which he has publicly denied. Even such a grave crime is ignored by the courts.

With the pretext of the Maoist funding theory, the Pune police, in a 'joint operation' closely coordinated with the police of Nagpur, Mumbai and Delhi, raided the houses of and arrested five activists on 6 June 2018.⁷³ Except Sudhir Dhawale, none of them was remotely connected with the Elgar Parishad. Since the arrest, the police went on weaving stories—from claiming that the five persons were behind the violence that disrupted this year's annual celebrations at Bhima-Koregoan memorial, to saying they were supporting Naxal activities to finally the most recent story—that they were plotting a 'Rajiv Gandhi-style' assassination of prime minister Narendra Modi. These stories came handy for the police to apply the dreaded Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), which does not leave one with any defence and it can incarcerate him/her for years in jails.

Basically, these raids were used to get hold of the electronic devices of the victims that can then be used to yield whatever police wanted to claim. The method of raids was strange. The raiding police would carry two witnesses from Pune to distant places like Delhi, Nagpur, and Mumbai, making a mockery of laid down procedure. They would confine the inmates of the house in a room while the house is ransacked and carry the confiscated materials in another room for sealing. Susan Abraham who is herself a lawyer and witnessed this process when her house was raided for her husband, Vernon Gonsalves, has described that the police had brought their own computers and other devices with them. The only claim the police make for their process of confiscation being fool proof and the judges faithfully accept it is that they videoed the complete process. The judges would not

care to understand that electronic devices could be tampered with even remotely and any number of files could be transmitted within a matter of seconds. Video cannot be a method of establishing the integrity of electronic devices, even if it is continuous. The integrity of the computer devices could only be guaranteed by a hash value generated by specific algorithm and unless both are acknowledged by the victim, it can never be relied upon. Due to this well-known experts and professors in computer science from IITs and other technical institutes have collectively issued a statement that the documents recovered by the police should not be used as a primary evidence in the critical cases particularly with political import. The courts, however, would take a blind view, saying that it is a matter of trial, knowing fully well that it could take several years and until then an innocent person and his family could be completely ruined under UAPA.

Police began claiming that they recovered letters from the computer of those arrested purportedly written by the Maoists. The letters produced by the police were bizarre, speaking of real names of people providing their real phone numbers, and so on. That these letters were pure fabrication by the police can be seen by the manner they are worded. As though, the Maoists are running a government organization that elaborately communicates their plans and expects their recipients to preserve records for audit. Maoists are known for their secrecy, using networks of human couriers, and insisting upon destruction of messages after they were read. Such an organization could not be communicating with its functionaries through essay-like letters. Many people analysed these letters in public domain and proved their fakeness. Experts such as Ajay Sahany, executive director of the Institute of Conflict Management, which deals with the studies of such organizations, trashed them as fake. Even Justice Chandrachud of the Supreme Court, the only judge who has gone into the merit of the police case, in his minority judgement faulted these letters and recommended the entire case be investigated by the SIT as prayed for by Professors Romila Thapar, Devaki Jain, Prabhat Patnaik, Satish Deshpande and Maja Daruwala, all noted public intellectuals in the country. They had petitioned to the Supreme Court when the police raided the houses of next batch of seven activists and intellectuals⁷⁴ and arrested five⁷⁵ of them on 28 July 2018. None of these activists had anything to do with either the Elgar Parishad or Bhima-Koregaon violence. But the strange process of law would not budge by these

contra evidence and would be ready to sacrifice the lives of innocent people at the altar of the so-called process of law, which itself in reality is worse than punishment. These so-called Maoist letters had names of Rahul Gandhi, Prakash Ambedkar, Digvijay Singh, and so on, indicating that they were also accomplices of the Maoists' plans. It squarely exposes the political intent of defaming these leaders. It is strange that the police would not even try to get the facts from these political people and the courts would not ask them why.

HINDUTVA'S COUNTERREVOLUTION

Narendra Modi, having demonstrated his decisive prowess in ruling Gujarat for over a dozen years and transforming the state into a haven for investors, endeared himself to capitalists and won for himself the top post in the country. This Gujarat model of development, despite the exposure of its hollowness, was trumpeted with Goebbels-like zeal and massive propaganda. In the backdrop of the lacklustre performance of the UPA II government which was additionally saddled with a series of corruption cases, Modi won a clear majority for his party, a veritable feat in the coalition era that was supposed to have set in since the last three decades. He surprised many by not speaking a word about his communal plans during the election campaign and, as mentioned earlier, rather devised a slogan of '*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*' (development of all with support from all) and projected himself as a vikaspurush (someone leading development). His macho theatrics and oratory impressed many, particularly young voters, in contrast to the inarticulate political novice Rahul Gandhi projected by the Congress as its leader. They voted massively for him.

Modi used the old RSS/BJP strategies of communally polarizing people but with renewed confidence backed by the state power, which was consolidated by systematically capturing its institutions by installing the RSS people at their heads and other important positions. Institutes of higher education were the first targets with dual objective: one, to promote Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), its student wing, and to nip the Left-Liberal tendencies among students in the bud. A programme of saffronization was pushed through these institutions to counter the influence of radical ideologies. The traditional citadels of the latter such as Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) became the special target for suppression, where students were arrested and tormented with draconian charges like sedition.

Other institutions, particularly those enjoying constitutional autonomy and hence capable of posing potential obstacle in furthering the saffron agenda were then won over with the same methodology. The political opposition, particularly the Congress Party, which showed its incompetence in finding a capable enough leader to stand this monstrous challenge and still tagged itself to the Gandhi-Nehru dynasty, was ruthlessly attacked and demoralized. The lumpen thugs of the Sangh Pariwar launched their saffron campaigns with tacit support from Modi to humiliate and terrorize minority communities and Dalits to consolidate the Hindus. In this way, just within one term the Narendra Modi–Amit Shah combine has systematically decimated the opposition, destroyed institutions, and pushed its polarizing agenda to the hilt. During these five years, it has tried to erase the signs of previous regimes by changing the names of institutions, roads, schemes, and so on, and create its own monuments, memorials, and schemes such that the public memory of the past could never conjure up resistance. It has gone to the extent that the unthinkable was undertaken: demonetizing 86 per cent currency at a huge cost to people and economy and replaced it by its idiosyncratic denominations. During these five years, there were unprecedented developments like four judges of the Supreme Court having to hold a press conference to expose the rot in the apex court to the public and 65 former IAS officers pleading with the government and public institutions to curb this ‘rising authoritarianism and majoritarianism, which do not allow for reasoned debate, discussion and dissent.’

The lasting damage Modi has done is to poison the masses with communal venom to forge a constituency of Hindus who account for the brute majority of over 80 per cent of the population. With the unfortunate adoption of majoritarianism to operate our democracy, every political party would have jumped to have this Hindu constituency but it did not find that identity viable in contrast to caste identities. Therefore, they pursued wooing castes and religious communities rather than the generic Hindus. The BJP found their opportunity to consolidate Hindus, when, as mentioned earlier, Rajiv Gandhi opened the locks of the Ram temple in Babri Masjid and then reversed the Shah Bano judgement of the Supreme Court through enacting a law. It is thus the Congress’s ineptitude and political adroitness of the BJP that they worked out this overarching political identity as ‘Hindus’ based on an irrational pride in the Indian past and hatred for the Muslims, Christians and communists,

as three grave internal threats defined by Guru Golwalkar long ago.⁷⁶ And Dalits were those who had converted to Islam and Christianity. and emancipatory aspirations of the Dalits potentially making them 'enlightened', the analogue of being communists. In any case, as discussed before, the superstructural Hindu cannot exist without Dalits constituting its foundational scaffolding as amply evidenced by the last five years. The BJP's foolhardy strategy to terrorize Dalits by labeling them as Maoists, as evidenced in Bhima-Koregaon case, is bound to boomerang once Dalits wake up to this reality.

BJP's success in constructing Hindu majoritarianism out of numerous minorities (castes) may be dazzling but is certainly fragile and short-lived. Even after riding a Modi-wave in 2014, it could not cross even the one-third mark in votes (its vote share was just 31 per cent). BJP's electoral success is entirely due to its astute managerial strategies making fullest use of the first-past-the-post election system. In any case, more than two-third of India's population is still either opposed to or indifferent to it. It spells an opportunity for the opposition parties to fortify this fragmented mass with the counter ideology and programme in terms of intensification of a progressive and pro-people agenda and secular pitch. But they, best represented by the Congress Party, chose the awkward 'follower' strategy of competitively claiming Hinduness and thereby lent the BJP much-wanted legitimacy.

The opposition parties should have grasped the fragility of BJP's strategy due to the inherent contradiction in pursuing aggressive Hindutva for its politics and intensive neoliberalism for its economics. While neoliberal policies are loved by capitalists and upwardly mobile middle classes, they would be wary of Hindutva that disturbs social stability and dents economic development. While Hindutva may emotionally appeal to the lower classes and help in managing politics, the neoliberal policies may not be liked by them as they hit them hard. This fatal contradiction, the BJP is aware, can only be managed over a short term. And it is therefore that it appears to be in hurry to accomplish its goal of achieving a Hindu Rashtra, a brahminic fascist state. It explains why the entire Hindutva camp has reposed its complete faith in the Modi-Shah leadership and why this leadership is riding roughshod playing riskiest gambles with the people of this country. The BJP has won the 2019 election and now aims at making India a Hindu Rashtra.

What is in store for the Dalits in this Hindu Rashtra? As Babasaheb Ambedkar perceptively commented, 'If Hindu Raj does become a fact,

it will, no doubt be the greatest calamity for this country, Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost.⁷⁷ The meaning of the Hindu Rashtra is to be found in the vision of the Hindutva progenitors. It is the restoration of the brahminic rule based on the ethos of varnashram, and ordained by *Manusmriti*, justifying caste-based distinctions. It need not be taken literally as obviously it cannot be revived in the twenty-first century. However, its ethos, in terms of the superiority of a few to rule, and internalization by the others to be ruled for the sake of orderliness of the society can certainly be realized. The modern-day proponents of Hindutva found their ideal model in Fascism that emerged in Europe in 1920s and 1930s. Echoing Hitler's slogan '*Ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer*' (one people, one nation, one leader), Golwalkar had conceptualized Hindu nationhood in terms of one religion (Hindu religion), one rigid social order (varnashram order) and one language (Hindi). No other deviation from this ideal construct seemed practicable to Golwalkar. So far as the minorities were concerned Golwalkar wrote: 'The non-Hindu peoples in Hindusthan must either adopt Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of glorification of Hindu race and culture In a word, they must cease to be foreigners, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment—not even citizen's rights.'⁷⁸ As a matter of fact, India as a museum of diversity may violate this Hindutva imagination of homogeneity. But that is the irrational stuff it is made of! It would mean complete reversal of whatever little India accomplished in terms of egalitarian endeavours since the last century. It will broadly mean governance by one supreme leader advised by the *dharma sansad* (parliament of religion) manned by the sadhus and saints; restoration of hierarchical social structure; abolition of rights and imposition of duties; de-intellectualization of the society; degradation of womenfolk; and physical extermination of dissenters.

It is a scary prospect for Dalits whose interests are entangled with the project of bringing about radical change defined by Ambedkar in terms of liberty, equality, fraternity. The essays contained in the book were written to expose the face of Hindutva to them from various angles so that they comprehensively understand the magnitude of the impending calamity that Babasaheb Ambedkar spoke of. Hindutva is just not Brahminism as they might think; it is brahminic Fascism, which is the violent negation of the democratic project Ambedkar

desired India to accomplish. The essays that follow, by scholars and activists, assume greater relevance today than they were written 13 years ago. Along with this new Introduction, Tanika Sarkar has provided a Foreword, Martin Macwan has prepared a new essay (see Chapter 16) and a bibliography has been provided. I hope the readers will agree with me on the value of this edition.

Notes

- ¹ See Concerned Citizens Tribunal—Gujarat 2002, Crime Against Humanity, An inquiry into the carnage in Gujarat, 21 November 2002. Volume 1: <http://www.sabrang.com/tribunal/tribunal1.pdf> Volume 2 <http://www.sabrang.com/tribunal/tribunal2.pdf>.
- ² On the eve of 2019 elections, he joined the Congress Party, discovering that the BJP wanted only deaf and dumb Dalit leaders. He immediately managed himself a ticket from the Congress for North Delhi constituency.
- ³ Paswan has served as a union minister under five different prime ministers and holds the distinction of continuously holding on to a cabinet berth in all the Council of Ministers formed since 1996. He also holds the distinction of being part of all the national coalitions (the United Front, the National Democratic Alliance and the United Progressive Alliance), which have formed the Indian Government from 1996 to 2019.
- ⁴ See my column ‘Three Dalit Rams Play Hanumans to BJP’, *EPW* 49, 15 (12 Apr 2014).
- ⁵ For details, see I. P. Desai, ‘Anti-Reservation Agitation and Structure of Gujarat Society’, *EPW* 2 (May 1981): 819–23.
- ⁶ Anand Teltumbde, ‘Damning the Dalits for the Bania-Brahmin Crimes in Gujarat’, <http://www.ambedkar.org/vivek/DamningtheDalits.pdf>; accessed 23 April 2019.
- ⁷ Ashar Ali Engineer, *The Gujarat Carnage* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2003): 256.
- ⁸ Suchitra Sheth and Acyuta Yājñik, *The Shaping of Modern Gujarat: Plurality, Hindutva, and Beyond* (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005): 256.
- ⁹ Howard Spodek, ‘From Gandhi to Violence: Ahmedabad’s 1985 Riots in Historical Perspective’, *Modern Asian Studies* 2, 4 (2008): 765–95.
- ¹⁰ See Engineer, *Gujarat Carnage*: 12–13.
- ¹¹ C. J. Fuller, *A Companion to the Anthropology of India* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).

- ¹² Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (London: Hurst, 2003): 325–26.
- ¹³ Anand Teltumbde, 'Damning Dalits', citing Dionne Bunsha, *The Hindutva Experiment*, 19,10 (11–24 May 2002), <https://frontline.thehindu.com/static/html/fl1910/19100160.htm>.
- ¹⁴ Violette Graff and Juliette Galonnier, 'Hindu-Muslim Communal Riots in India' II (1986–2011). <http://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/hindu-muslim-communal-riots-india-ii-1986-2011>. Last accessed: 11 May 2019.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ 'Role of Arun Nehru, Rajiv in opening masjid ignored', *The Hindu*, 25 November, 2009. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/Role-of-Arun-Nehru-Rajiv-in-opening-masjid-ignored/article16894059.ece>.
- ¹⁷ The Bofors scandal was a major weapons-contract political scandal that occurred during the 1980s and 1990s, initiated by the Congress party and implicating the Indian prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and several other members of the Indian and Swedish governments who were accused of receiving kickback from Bofors.
- ¹⁸ He wrote in *The Tribune*, 14 Dec.1924: 'Under my scheme the Muslims will have four Muslim States: (i) The Pathan Province or the North-West Frontier; (ii) Western Punjab; (iii) Sindh; and (iv) Eastern Bengal. If there are compact Muslim communities in any other part of India, sufficiently large to form a province, they should be similarly constituted. But it should be distinctly understood that this is not a united India. It means a clear partition of India into a Muslim India and a non-Muslim India.
- ¹⁹ Anand Teltumbde, 'Hindu Fundamentalist Politics in India: The Alliance with the American Empire in South Asia', in Vedi R. Hadiz, ed., *Empire and Neoliberalism in Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 270.
- ²⁰ *Anandamath* was first published in serial form in 1875 in a Bengali magazine, *Bangadarshan*, edited by Sanjib Chandra Chattopadhyay, the elder brother of Bankim Chandra. It was first published in book form in 1882.
- ²¹ B. C. Chatterjee, *Anandamath* (Abbey of Bliss), trans. A. Das (Calcutta: Bandana Das, 2000): 112.
- ²² Ibid.: 192.
- ²³ Ibid.: 193.
- ²⁴ 'The Vedas permits us to kill our enemies, both human beings and animals' G. R. Thursby, *Hindu-Muslim Relations in British India: A Study of Controversy, Conflict, and Communal Movement in Northern India, 1923–1928* (Leiden: Brill, 1975): 170.

- ²⁵ N. G. Barrier, 'The Punjab Government and Communal Politics, 1870–1908', *Journal of Asian Studies* 28, 3 (May 1968): 528.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Ham Hindu Nahin: Arya-Sikh Relations, 1877–1905', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 32, 3 (1973): 457–75; S. K. Gupta, *Arya Samaj and the Raj* (1875–1920) (New Delhi: Gitanjali Publishing, 1991); D. Vable, *The Arya Samaj: Hindu Without Hinduism* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1983).
- ²⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics: 1925–1990s* (New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996): 11–79; John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000): 25–92.
- ²⁹ R. Puniyani, 'Distorting History of Freedom Struggle', Countercurrents.org, (11 September 2003). Online. Available: <http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-puniyani110903.htm> (accessed 30 May 2004).
- ³⁰ R. Puniyani, 'Complimenting Imperialist Designs', *Kashmir Telegraph* 2, 1 (May 2003). Online. Available: <http://www.kashmirtelegraph.com/0503/ram.htm> (accessed 30 May 2004).
- ³¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste and Politics* (New Delhi: Primus, 2010): 43.
- ³² The Indian Councils Act 1909, commonly known as the Morley-Minto or Minto-Morley Reforms, gave a limited increase in the involvement of Indians in the governance of British India.
- ³³ Prabhu Bapu, *Hindu Mahasabha in Colonial North India, 1915–1930: Constructing Nation and History* (New York: Routledge, 2013): 100.
- ³⁴ Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s Archival Evidence', *EPW* (22 Jan. 2000): 218–28.
- ³⁵ K. Basu, T. P. Datta, S. Sarkar, T. Sarkar and S. Sen, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags* (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993): 16–17; A. Ahmad, 'Right-Wing Politics, and the Cultures of Cruelty', Ved Gupta Memorial Lecture 1998. Online. Available: http://www.geocities.com/Indianfascism/fascism/cruelty_culture.htm (accessed 30 May 2004); Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid (2001) 'Islamic Resurgence: An Overview of Causal Factors, a Review of "Ummatic" linkages', *Journal IKIM* 9, 1 (January/June 2001): 15–47.
- ³⁶ Ramchandra Guha, *Makers of Modern India* (New Delhi: Penguin-Viking, 2012): 371.
- ³⁷ Raosaheb Kasabe, *Zhot* (Pune: Sugawa Prakashan, 2002): 12.
- ³⁸ M.S. Golwalka, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Pune: Sahitya Sangha Prakashan, 2000; 2009): 109.
- ³⁹ See Anand Teltumbde, *Dalits, Past, Present and Future* (New York: Routledge, 2017): 23–24.

- ⁴⁰ Mohan Bhagwat, for instance, said that the RSS had discarded chunks of *Bunch of Thoughts*—including the one categorizing Muslims, along with Christians and Communists, as India’s ‘internal enemies’—since the speeches were made in a particular context and could not be eternally valid. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/bhagwats-statement-on-golwalkar-after-much-thought-deodhar/articleshow/65894558.cms?from=mdr> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁴¹ In her book, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition 1932–1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), historian Joya Chatterji cited a note written by Mookerjee to show that he felt a sense of superiority as an upper-caste Hindu ‘fed by the belief that Bengali Muslims were, by and large, a set of converts from the dregs of Hindu society’. <https://scroll.in/article/811727/three-facts-about-bjp-founder-sp-mookerjee-that-a-recent-exhibition-in-delhi-wouldnt-have-revealed> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁴² ‘A battle between Hindutva and Hinduism is coming’ In a wide-ranging conversation, Walter Andersen <https://indianexpress.com/article/lifestyle/books/a-battle-between-hindutva-and-hinduism-is-coming-walter-andersen-rss-5301109/> page 5 of 14; accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁴³ Ornit Shani, *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 168–73; Eamon Murphy, ‘“We Have No Orders to Save You”: State Terrorism, Politics and Communal Violence in the Indian State of Gujarat, 2002’, in Richard Jackson; Eamon Murphy; Scott Poynting, eds., *Contemporary State Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2009): 84–103.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*: 168–173. Riots began during the bandh, and anti-Muslim violence spread through Gujarat; ‘Curfew Imposed in 26 Cities’; *The Hindu*. Chennai, India. 1 March 2002.
- ⁴⁵ Martha Craven Nussbaum, *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India’s Future* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008): 50–51.
- ⁴⁶ John Campbell; Chris Seiple; Daniel R. Hoover, et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security* (New York: Routledge, 2012): 233.
- ⁴⁷ Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005): 388.
- ⁴⁸ Nussbaum, *Clash Within*: 50–51.
- ⁴⁹ <https://sabrangindia.in/article/modi-doled-out-huge-concessions-gujarat-tycoons-creating-mechanism-legalised-corruption-ex> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁵⁰ Sharik Laliwala, Not So Vibrant Gujarat, <https://ahmedabadmirror.indiatimes.com/ahmedabad/others/not-so-vibrant-gujarat/articleshow/67579020.cms> accessed 29 April 2019.

- ⁵¹ <https://scroll.in/article/907850/how-narendra-modi-brought-industrialists-to-gujarat-and-cut-many-corners-in-the-process> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁵² Rohini Chatterji, 'Shamli: Bajrang Dal Activist Force "GharWapsi" on Dalit Man Who Had Converted to Islam', https://www.huffingtonpost.in/2018/04/26/shamli-bajrang-dal-activist-force-ghar-wapsi-on-dalit-man-who-had-converted-to-islam_a_23420600/ accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁵³ <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/first-dalit-head-of-juna-akhara-for-ghar-wapsi/articleshow/67549211.cms> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁵⁴ The Supreme Court verdict authored by Justice J. S. Verma held that Hindutva was a way of life in the case of Manohar Joshi vs Nitin Bhaurao Patil and Another on 11 December 1995 (1996 AIR 796, 1996 SCC (1) 169). It came to be known as Hindutva judgement.
- ⁵⁵ B.R. Ambedkar, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Ancient India, Babsaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches (BAWS)*, vol. 3, edited by Vasant Moon (Mumbai: Department of Education, Government of Maharashtra, 1987).
- ⁵⁶ Anand Teltumbde, 'Robbing Rohith of His Dalitness', *EPW* 52, 9 (4 March 2017): 10–11.
- ⁵⁷ *Young India*, 29 January 1925: 38.
- ⁵⁸ *Young India*, 1 January 1925: 8.
- ⁵⁹ Vikas Rawal, 'Destroying India's Livestock Economy in the Name of Cow Protection', <https://www.cpim.org/views/destroying-india%E2%80%99s-livestock-economy-name-cow-protection>.
- ⁶⁰ The Indian Market Research Bureau (IMRB) conducted a consumer survey across seven major cities titled 'The protein consumption in diet of adult Indians'. See, Bindu Shajan Perappadan, 80 % Indian diets are protein deficient: Survey, *The Hindu*, 7 June 2015. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/other-states/80-indian-diets-are-protein-deficient-survey/article7290278.ece>.
- ⁶¹ In UP numerous shops and slaughterhouses, including government-run abattoirs, have been sealed, leading to severe shortage of meat and affecting the livelihoods of thousands of people. See Manu Moudgil (IndiaSpend), 'Slaughterhouse Crackdown in UP: Butchers and Farmers Hit, Big Businesses Gain', *Hindustan Times*, 15 July 2017. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/slaughterhouse-crackdown-in-up-butchers-and-farmers-hit-big-businesses-gain/story-SE3ha4M3FArgc3n28wtqqM.html>.
- ⁶² Tommy Wilkes, Mayank Bhardwaj, 'Cattle Slaughter Ban Ripples through India's Leather Industry', *The Mint*, 14 June 2017. <https://www.livemint.com/>
- ⁶³ <http://lynch.factchecker.in>.

- ⁶⁴ Identified by the names by Naaz Khair. For instance, Pehlu Khan, Junaid, Umar, Akbar from Rajasthan and Haryana are all Meo Muslims, who belong to Pasmanda Muslims. See her article, Who are the Beneficiaries of Cow Violence, https://roundtableindia.co.in/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=9458:who-are-the-beneficiaries-of-cow-violence&catid=119:feature&Itemid=132.
- ⁶⁵ India: 'Cow Protection' Spurs Vigilante Violence, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/27/india-cow-protection-spurs-vigilante-violence>. Last accessed: 11 May 2019. The surge is attributed to the recent rise in Hindu nationalism in India. See Radha Sarkar. 'Sacred Slaughter: An Analysis of Historical, Communal, and Constitutional Aspects of Beef Bans in India', *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 17, 4. Many vigilante groups say they feel 'empowered' by the victory of the Hindu nationalist BJP in the 2014 election; Soutik Biswas. 'Why the Humble Cow Is India's Most Polarising Animal'. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34513185> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁶⁶ 'Dalit Lynching at Dulina: Cow - Protection, Caste and Communalism' (PUDR report), <http://www.pudr.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/jhajhar.pdf> accessed 29 April 2019.
- ⁶⁷ PUDR Statement, 'Holy Cow, Unholy Carcass and Dalits, <https://www.pudr.org/holy-cow-unholy-carcass-and-dalits> (accessed 29 April 2019).
- ⁶⁸ M S Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, Online edition https://www.thehinducentre.com/multimedia/archive/02486/Bunch_of_Thoughts_2486072a.pdf.
- ⁶⁹ Lower strata (wadivarcha) of Marathas. See for the division of Marathas, Anand Teltumbde, 'Behind the Ire of the Marathas', *EPW* 2, 40 (1 October 2016): 10–11.
- ⁷⁰ Shraddha Kumbhojkar, 'Politics, Caste and the Remembrance of the Raj: the Obelisk at Koregaon', in Dominik Geppert, Frank Lorenz Müller, eds., *Sites of Imperial Memory: Commemorating Colonial Rule in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015): 43.
- ⁷¹ Asang Wankhede, 'The Pot, Broom and Battle of Koregaon: Its Significance and the Rattling Rhetoric'. <https://countercurrents.org/2017/12/pot-broom-battle-koregaonits-significance-rattling-rhetoric> last accessed: 11 May 2019; Adrija Roychowdhury, Battle of Koregaon: 'Why the Dalits hate Peshwas and Celebrate This British "victory"'. <https://indianexpress.com/article/research/battle-of-koregaon-dalits-mahar-maratha-peshwa-maharashtra-protests-5010172/>. Last accessed: 11 May 2019.
- ⁷² Kumbhojkar, 'Politics, Caste and Remembrance': 43.

- ⁷³ The five activists were: Sudhir Dhawale (Mumbai), a Dalit right activist and editor of a Marathi periodical *Vidrohi*; Surendra Gadling (Nagpur), a prominent human rights lawyer famed for his legal battles for hapless tribal victims of police excesses in Naxal-affected areas; Mahesh Raut (Gadchiroli), an alumnus of Tata Institute of Social Sciences and a tribal rights activist; Professor Shoma Sen (Nagpur), a professor and Head of Department of English in Nagpur University and an Executive Member of Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR), and Rona Wilson (New Delhi), an alumnus of Jawaharlal Nehru University, and activists working for political prisoners.
- ⁷⁴ The activists were: Gautam Navlakha (New Delhi), a noted writer and civil rights activist with Peoples Union of Democratic Rights (PUDR); Sudha Bhardwaj (Ghaziabad), a prominent trade union activist and lawyer working in Bilaspur area; Varavara Rao (Hyderabad), a celebrated Telugu poet and Marxist intellectual; Arun Ferreira (Mumbai), a civil rights activists with CPDR and a lawyer; Vernon Gonsalves (Mumbai), a social activist and lawyer, Father Stan Swamy (Ranchi), a tribal rights activist and myself (Goa).
- ⁷⁵ The arrested five activists were: Gautam Navlakha, Sudha Bhardwaj, Varavara Rao, Arun Ferreira, Vernon Gonsalves.
- ⁷⁶ Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts*, XVI. Internal Threats: 148. Online edition https://www.thehinducentre.com/multimedia/archive/02486/Bunch_of_Thoughts_2486072a.pdf.
- ⁷⁷ B.R. Ambedkar, 'Pakistan or the Partition of India', in Vasant Moon, ed., *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, vol. 8 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, Dept of Education, 1990): 358.
- ⁷⁸ M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Bharat Publications, 1939): 78.

PART I

THEORETICAL
PERSPECTIVES

Dalits in the Theory and Practice of Hindutva

Shamsul Islam

On 23 January 2004, a few days before the Indian Republic was to celebrate its fifty-fifth anniversary, the BJP Government of Madhya Pradesh led by a seasoned RSS cadre, Uma Bharti, promulgated an ordinance banning cow slaughter in the state. Astonishingly, the official statement explaining the rationale behind this step referred to *Manusmriti* (The Laws of Manu) to justify the ban. It read: '*Manusmriti* ranks the slaughterer of cow as predator and prescribes hard punishment for him.'¹ Uma Bharti, a well-known sadhvi of the RSS, needs no introduction. She played a highly nefarious role as an orator in spreading hatred against Muslims in the late 1980s, which subsequently led to the organized carnage of Muslims in different parts of the country and ultimately the demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992.

This is not the place to discuss the merits and demerits of a ban on cow slaughter.² But the most worrisome aspect of this announcement was the official commitment of the Uma Bharti government to enforce the *Manusmriti* as part of the constitutional law of the country. It was for the first time in the legal history of independent India that a law was being justified for being in tune with the *Manusmriti*. It is to be noted here that Dr Ambedkar had burnt a copy of the *Manusmriti* at the Mahad conference in 1927 for its fascist anti-Dalit, anti-women stance and total disregard of the principles of equality, justice and humanism.³ The Uma Bharti government's commitment to follow *Manusmriti* was in brazen contravention of the basic principles of the Constitution which through its preamble committed itself 'to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all, Fraternity assuring

the dignity of the individual . . .’ Such an allegiance to the *Manusmriti* which openly preached hatred against Shudras also meant that the Madhya Pradesh government was not committed to the enforcement of Article 17 of the Constitution which declared that ‘Untouchability is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.’

The Codes or Laws of Manu are universally known as the anti-thesis to the existence and rights of Dalits and women. *Manusmriti* or *Manav Dharmasastra*, also known as the Laws of Manu, is believed to have been codified by the second century A.D. It presents in totality the system of jurisprudence of Hinduism. The German Indologist, Max Mueller got this translated as the ‘Laws of Manu’, which was first, published in 1886 under the series, ‘*The Sacred Books of the East*’. Manu as an eminent learned Brahmin holds a place of reverence in the high caste Hindu world of thought. Besides prescribing persecution for cow slaughter as claimed by the Madhya Pradesh government, as mentioned earlier, it denigrates lower castes and women. There has been a demand to instal a magnificent statue of Manu in the Parliament House in Delhi, and one such statue stands outside the High Court of Rajasthan in Jaipur, despite strong protest from the Dalit organizations.

The parts of *Manusmriti* reproduced later do not need much explanation and commentary. They are excessively venomous and make many objectionable and insulting statements against Untouchables who are referred to as Shudras by Manu. Perhaps this was the reason that the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche whose ideas of ‘supermen’ and the ‘will to power’ were widely used in the growth of totalitarianism in Europe in the twentieth century, fell in love with this work. The philosophical basis of the perpetual persecution of Untouchables in the whole of the Indian subcontinent came from Manu who influenced even the Muslim ruling elite of this region as we find casteism percolating into Muslim societies and high caste Muslim rulers using caste divisions to perpetuate their unjust rule.⁴ There have also have been innumerable instances when Muslim rulers had cordial, social, political, fraternal, and even marital relations with the sections of high caste Hindus rather than interacting with lower caste Muslims of Indian origin. In Pakistan, lower caste Muslims are referred as *kammi* and *mussali* (mean) by the *shurafa* or high caste Muslims, who are regarded as the natural rulers.

Coinciding with the political ascendancy of the RSS there has been a flood of low-priced mass editions of *Manusmriti* throughout India. In one edition brought out by Sadhna Pocket Books, one of the biggest publishers of pocket books in Hindi, the back cover explains the significance of this book in the following words. 'The *Manusmriti* is the oldest social system of the world which establishes constitution and justice. Largely the social and judicial systems of today's India are modelled after this book. It is an essential book for each family, organization and society.' Such publishers are unconcerned about the poison and hatred, which *Manusmriti* contains and spreads against Dalits. There seems to be a strong linkage between the mass publication of such books and increasing violence against Dalits in the country.

If the Uma Bharti government began the process of implementing the Laws of Manu, then that would surely be the end of the road for Dalits and women in India. To what miserable and dehumanized status their lives would be reduced to could be known by having a glance of the Manu Codes about them. Following are some of the prescriptions of Manu for Shudras.⁵

For the sake of the prosperity of the worlds [the divine one] caused the Brahmana, the Kashtriya, the Vaisya and the Shudra to proceed from His mouth, His arm, His thighs and His feet. (I/31) One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Shudras, to serve meekly these [other] three castes. (I/91) A Shudra, who insults a high caste man with gross invective, shall have his tongue cut out for he is of low origin. (VIII/270) If he [Shudra] arrogantly teaches Brahmanas their duty, the king shall cause hot oil to be poured into his mouth and into his ears. (VIII/272). A low-caste man, who tries to place himself on the same seat with a man of high caste, shall be branded on his hips and be banished, or [the king] shall cause his buttocks to be gashed. (VIII/281) Let [the first part of] a Brahmana's name [denote something] auspicious, a Kshatriya's be connected with power, and a Vaisya's with wealth, but a Shudra's [express something] contemptible. (II/31) [The second part of] a Brahmana's [name] shall be [a word] implying happiness, of a Kshatriya's [a word] implying protection, of a Vaisya's [a term] expressive of thriving, and of a Shudra's [an expression] denoting service. (II/32)

The service of Brahmanas alone is declared [to be] an excellent occupation for a Shudra; for whatever else besides this he may perform will bear him no fruit. (X/123) The remnants of their food must be given to him, as well as their old clothes, the refuse of their grain, and their old household furniture. (X/125) No collection of wealth must be made by a Shudra, even though he be able [to do it]; for a Shudra who has acquired wealth, gives pain to Brahmanas. (X/129) The son of a Brahmana, a Kshatriya, and a Vaisya by a Shudra [wife] receives no share of the inheritance; whatever his father may give to him, that shall be his property. (IX/155)

Let him [Brahmana] not dwell in a country where the rulers are Shudras, nor in one which is surrounded by unrighteous men, nor in one which has become subject to heretics, nor in one swarming with men of the lowest castes. (IV/61) Let a Brahmana not give to a Shudra advice, nor the remnants [of his meal], nor food offered to the gods; nor let him explain the sacred law [to such a man], nor impose [upon him] a penance. (IV/80) For he who explains the sacred law [to a Shudra] or dictates to him a penance, will sink together with that [man] into the hell [called] Asamvrita.' (IV/81)

On women *Manusmriti's* prescriptions are no less obnoxious.

Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males [of] their [families], and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. (IX/2) Her father protects [her] in childhood, her husband protects [her] in youth and her sons protect [her] in old age; a woman is never fit for independence. (IX/3) [When creating them] Manu allotted to women [a love of their] bed, [of their] seat and [of] ornament, impure desires, wrath, dishonesty, malice, and bad conduct. (IX/17) Through their passion for men, through their mutable temper, through their natural heartlessness, they become disloyal to their husbands, however, carefully they may be guarded in this world. (IX/15) For women no [sacramental] rite [is performed] with sacred texts, thus the law is settled;

women [who are] destitute of strength and destitute of [the knowledge of] Vedic texts [are as impure as] the falsehood [itself], that is a fixed rule. (IX/18)

It has been a long-standing demand of the RSS to replace the Indian Constitution with the Laws of Manu as specified in *Manusmriti*. When the Constituent Assembly of India finally passed the Constitution (26 November 1949), the RSS journal, *Organizer*, came out with an editorial (30 November 1949) titled 'Constitution':

The worst about the new Constitution of Bharat is that there is nothing Bhartiya about it ... There is no trace of ancient Bhartiya constitutional laws, institutions, nomenclatures and phraseology in it...Manu's Laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparta or Solon of Persia. To this day his laws as enunciated in the *Manusmriti* excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing.

That the *Manusmriti* is held to be holy and sacred by the Hindu Right will be clear from the following utterances of the philosopher and guide of Hindutva and the RSS, V. D. Savarkar. According to him, '*Manusmriti* is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on *Manusmriti*. Today *Manusmriti* is Hindu Law.'⁶

India came to be declared as a Sovereign Democratic Republic on 26 January 1950. On this eve, Sankar Subba Aiyar, a retired High Court Judge demanded on behalf of the RSS the immediate promulgation of the Manu Code. He wrote in the RSS organ ('Manu Rules Our Hearts'): 'Even though Dr Ambedkar is reported to have recently stated in Bombay, that the days of Manu are ended it is nevertheless a fact that the daily lives of Hindus are even at the present day affected by principles and injunctions contained in *Manu Smrithi* and other *Smrithis*. Even an unorthodox Hindu feels himself bound at least in some matters by the rules contained in the

Smrithis and he feels powerless to give up altogether his adherence to them.⁷

The Uma Bharti government's reference to the sanctions of Manu is in fact a fulfilment of Hindutva's old dream of converting the Indian Republic into a theocracy with complete brahminical hegemony. The cow may be the mascot but the real price will have to be paid by common Dalits and women. The tragedy is that there are no whistle-blowers for the Republic of India. The flag-bearers of the Sovereign Democratic Secular India seem to be in coma waiting for the Hindutva gang to make public the obituary of the Indian Republic.

Developments in Madhya Pradesh leading to the enforcement of *Manusmriti* are not isolated happenings. These, in fact, reflect the continuation of the true ideological commitment of the RSS, which believes in the total denigration of Dalits. Its deep hatred for Muslims and Christians is the outcome of its canonical hatred for Dalits as most of the followers of above religions hail from the Dalit stock. From the RSS point of view they need to be taught an unprecedented lesson for daring to improve their social status by converting to these religions.

It is often claimed by the RSS that it does not believe in caste distinctions: for them all Hindus are one. According to their arguments, the RSS stands for 'caste-free, creed-free Hindu nationalism'.⁸ A study of its internal documents since its inception in 1925 clearly reveals that it has been committed to the *Manusmriti*. In practice too, it steadfastly stood for brahminical hegemony over Indian society.

Its belief in brahminical superiority can be easily seen in its documents which deal with the biographical details of its founder, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar. The study of documents pertaining to the period when he led the RSS (1925–1940) unequivocally proves that under his leadership the organization developed as a citadel of brahminical superiority, which characteristic it has retained throughout its history. RSS literature tells us that he was born into a very superior Brahmin family that could allegedly draw its lineage from the times of the Rig Veda. The whole stress is on underlining the 'fact' that Hedgewar hailed from a highly noble Brahmin family. The glorification of this past lineage of Hedgewar is surprising as the RSS claims to be working for establishing a Hindu society sans caste. According to an RSS publication, the Hedgewar family originally hailed from Kandkurti village in Telangana (presently in Andhra Pradesh), with the following caste details:

They were *Deshastha* Brahmins of *Shakala* branch, belonging to the *Ashwalayana Sutra* of the Rig Veda. Their *gotra* was *Kashyapa*, and learning and transmission of Vedas, was their sole preoccupation. The *agnihotra* too was in vogue. There are documents indicating that in the course of his travels, *Sri Shankaracharya* used to nominate some one from the Hedgewar family to be in charge of propagation of *Dharma* in this area. Many are the families claiming to be followers of the Hedgewars, and their family documents speak with utmost reverence of the Hedgewars saying *Hedage Kulaguru poorvapara, jaise suryavamsha Vasisthava* (The tradition of Hedge family is glorious like that of *Vasistha* in the solar dynasty).⁹

The high caste bias in RSS recruitment could easily be seen in Hedgewar's directive that new recruits should be graduates. This would automatically check entry of low caste Hindus as most had not received formal education. According to Hedgewar's biography published by the RSS, 'He was very particular that the Swayamsevaks should at least be graduates, because, in the initial stages of the organization especially, when the people were entirely unaware of the nature of the work, a university degree would naturally increase the credibility of the worker.'¹⁰

How the caste factor determined entry into the RSS would be clearly known by another incident re-told in an RSS publication. According to the procedure for recruitment, Hedgewar personally interviewed every new entrant and only when he was satisfied was membership allowed. Once a person approached Hedgewar for seeking membership, and when Hedgewar inquired about his caste he told that he belonged to a 'non-Brahmin' caste. Hedgewar not only refused to accept such a caste in Hinduism but also declared, 'It is harmful for the nation to believe that one is not part of any of the specific castes of which Hindu society is formed. This gives rise to caste enmity and causes harm.'¹¹ When the concerned person refused to budge from his standpoint, Hedgewar retorted: 'You cannot be admitted in RSS as you are against one specific caste out of many [four] castes of Hinduism. RSS is the organization of all Hindus. Here Hindu of one caste cannot be inimical to Hindu of another caste.'¹²

It is only through RSS literature that we come to know that Hedgewar did not mind practicing the inhuman custom of Untouchability in order

not to antagonize high caste sympathizers. In Nasik, Hedgewar went to the house of a Brahmin known as Dr Gaidhani along with Krishna Rao Wadekar and Bhaskar Rao Ninave. When the time for meals came, Ninave who happened to be from a low caste asked Hedgewar whether he should sit separately for meals, as was commonly practised. When Wadekar suggested that there was no need for it, as Gaidhani had no way to know Ninave's caste, Hedgewar openly disagreed with the suggestion. He ordered Ninave to eat sitting separately from the Brahmins. Hedgewar's logic was that it would cause immense pain to Gaidhani. He went on to say,

and what benefit we will get out of it? On the contrary if he sits separately for the meals that [action of his] will leave a far better impression on Gaidhaniji. Our *swayamsevak* may feel a bit hurt but in the view of our work this much pain should be tolerated. First we should win him with our love then these differences will disappear.¹³

It may be relevant to know here that Hedgewar discouraged any attempt for community lunches (*sah-bhoj*) inclusive of all castes of Hindus which were being organized by a section of reformist Hindus in order to abolish the practice of Untouchability.¹⁴

The Hindutva of Savarkar is often highlighted for its anti-Muslim and anti-Christian rhetoric but his aggressive defence of the *chaturvarna* (the four varnas of Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras) system, the forerunner of the casteism, is conveniently downplayed. Savarkar as a prophet of Hindutva defended casteism in Hindu society and regarded it as a natural component essential for making a nation. While dealing with the subject under the title 'Institutions in favour of Nationality' he declared that the institution of casteism was the peculiar mark of identifying a Hindu Nation.¹⁵ 'The system of four varnas which could not be wiped away even under the Buddhistic sway, grew in popularity to such an extent that kings and emperors felt it a distinction to be called one who established the system of four varnas . . . Reaction in favour of this institution grew so strong that our nationality was almost getting identified with it.'¹⁶ Savarkar in defence of casteism as an integral constituent of the Hindu nation went on to quote an authority (not identified by him) that said: 'The land where the system of four Varnas does not exist should be known as the Mlechcha¹⁷ country: Aryawarta lies away from it.'¹⁸ His defence

of casteism was in fact a corollary of his racial approach to the understanding of Hindu nation. While refuting the criticism that casteism did check the free flow of blood in the Hindu society he argued that it was due to casteism that the purity of Hindu race was maintained:

For the very castes, which you owing to your colossal failure to understand and view them in the right perspective, assert to have barred the common flow of blood into our race, have done so more truly and more effectively as regards the foreign blood than our own . . . all that the caste system has done is to regulate its noble blood on lines believed—and on the whole rightly believed—by our saintly and patriotic law-givers and kings to contribute most to fertilize and enrich all that was barren and poor, without famishing and debasing all that was flourishing and nobly endowed.¹⁹

Interestingly, Savarkar who stood steadfastly in defence of casteism also advocated the elevation of the status of the Untouchables in the Hindu society. He organized programmes against Untouchability, strongly pleaded for their entry into Hindu temples and for letting them share water wells and ponds with others. This was not due to an egalitarian outlook or urge for providing equality to them but mainly due to the fact that he was alarmed at the numerical loss which the Hindu community had been experiencing due to the steady conversion of the Untouchables to Islam and Christianity which guaranteed them more social equality.²⁰ Moreover, as he himself admitted, due to treating them as outcasts, the then 7-crore (70-million) strong, 'Hindu people-power' did not stand in 'Our' [High caste Hindus] favour.²¹ Savarkar knew that Hindutva would greatly need the services of these Untouchables, as foot soldiers for settling scores with Muslims and Christians. So while warning Hindutva cadres that if the Untouchables did not remain in their fold, they were going to be a factor which would bring far more terrible crisis for high caste Hindus, Savarkar lamented the fact that 'they will not only cease to be beneficial for us but also become an easy means of dividing our house thus proving to be responsible for our boundless loss.'²² Otherwise, Savarkar remained a great protagonist of casteism and worshipper of *Manusmriti* throughout his life. We have already observed how Savarkar regarded

Manusmriti as a scripture ‘which is most worshipable after the Vedas’ and declared it to be today’s ‘Hindu Law’.

Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar who headed the RSS during 1940–1973, and is regarded as the greatest guide and philosopher of the RSS, like Savarkar believed that the division of the Hindu society into four varnas was a natural and integral part of Hinduism. In fact, Golwalkar went to the extent of declaring that casteism was synonymous with Hindu nation. According to him Hindu people are none else but

the *Virat Purusha*, the Almighty manifesting himself . . .
[according to *Purusha Sukta*] sun and moon are his eyes,
the stars and the skies are created from his *nabhi* [navel]
and Brahmin is the head, king [Kshatriyas] the hands,
Vaishya the thighs and Shudras the feet. This means that
the people who have this fourfold arrangement, i.e., the
Hindu People, is [sic] our God. This supreme vision of
Godhead is the very core of our concept of ‘nation’ and
has permeated our thinking and given rise to various
unique concepts of our cultural heritage.²³

This was nothing but re-phrasing of Manu’s terrible inhuman anti-Shudra codes. Golwalkar refused to accept that casteism was a bane of Hinduism or that it hindered feelings of unity among Hindus.

Persons interested in calumniating Hindus, make much
of the caste system, the ‘superstitions’, the want of literacy,
the position of women in the social structure, and all sorts
of true or untrue flaws in the Hindu cultural organisation,
and point out that the weakness of the Hindus lies solely
in these.²⁴

He drew an interesting analogy to support casteism by drawing attention towards ‘golden’ periods of Hindu history like the time of the *Mahabharata* and the rule of Harshwardhan where ‘all the so-called evils of caste, etc., were there no less marked than today and yet we were a victorious glorious nation then. Were not the bonds of caste, illiteracy, etc., at least as stringent as now, when the country witnessed the grand upheaval of the Hindu Nation under Shivaji?’²⁵

Golwalkar went to the extent of calling all those who disown their ‘cultural heritage’ (which of course included unquestioned belief in

casteism) as an anti-national and degenerated lot. He lamented the fact that such people with their 'unreasonable' and 'unjustifiable' attitudes were simply frittering 'energy in anti-national work and lay the blame upon the social order and such other things which have nothing to do with National revival . . . it is none of the so-called drawbacks of the Hindu social order, which prevents us from regaining our ancient glory, but it is only the want of proper national feeling.'²⁶

Casteism was so deeply ingrained in Golwalkar's philosophy of Hindu Nation that he made an amazing discovery that it was dismantling of the caste structure which facilitated the spread of Muslim rule in India. He manufactured his own facts to make the following claim:

We know as a matter of history that our north-western and north-eastern areas, where the influence of Buddhism has disrupted the caste system, fell on easy prey to the onslaughts of Muslims . . . But the areas of Delhi which were considered to be very orthodox and rigid in caste restrictions, remained predominately Hindu after remaining as the very citadels of Muslim power and fanaticism for a number of centuries.²⁷

Golwalkar's theory for conversions to Islam is fraught with terrible misrepresentation of facts. He cleverly glosses over the evidence that the 'Muslim' rulers with their seats of power in and around Delhi received full cooperation from the high caste Hindu oligarchy of the area.

Even after independence Golwalkar and RSS remained deeply concerned about the sanctity and utility of casteism in the Hindu society. Though he denounced Untouchability, when the founding fathers of the Constitution of independent India made provisions for reservations to the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, Golwalkar strongly reacted by alleging that the rulers were digging at the roots of Hindu social cohesion and destroying the spirit of identity that held various sects into a harmonious whole in the past.²⁸ He refused to admit that the Hindu social system was at the root of the neglect of the lower castes.²⁹ On the contrary, he held constitutional safeguards for the Scheduled Castes responsible for creating disharmony.

Dr Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for 'Scheduled Castes' for only 10 years from the day we

became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interests in them in remaining as a separate entity. That would harm their integration with the rest of the society.³⁰

We have already observed how the RSS has always been demanding promulgation of the *Manusmriti* as the law of 'Hindusthan', replacing the republican Constitution of India which aimed at establishing a just, secular and democratic polity. Golwalkar argued that anti-caste tirade was venom that had poisoned the body politic. Indeed, the RSS top brass had never been able to hide the fact that they wanted to recreate a 'golden' past of which casteism was an integral part. Its journal, *Organiser*, while engaged in a debate with the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, over the issue of relevance of the past commented that Nehru was wrong in assuming that RSS wanted to take the nation back to 200 years. It declared that, in fact, 'we want actually to take the nation even further back, a thousand years back.'³¹

Deendayal Upadhyaya was the most prominent ideologue of the RSS after Golwalkar who played a pioneer role in re-modelling Hindutva. Upadhyaya, who hailed from a Brahmin family of Mathura district, came in contact with the RSS in 1937 and became a loyal follower of Golwalkar. Upadhyaya as a full timer of the organization figured prominently in the RSS hierarchy and held crucial posts therein. He was the editor of the RSS Hindi organs like *Panchajanya* and *Swadesh*. Later, his services were lent to the Bhartiya Jana Sangh, the political outfit created by the RSS. He rose to be its president (December 1967) and continued until his death under mysterious circumstances on 1 February 1968 at Mughalsarai in eastern Uttar Pradesh.³²

Upadhyaya was no exception and supported casteism by describing it as not only natural but also practical. He went to the extent of equating it with *swadharna* (one's own religion). In fact, he declared inequality to be natural to the human society and thus considered casteism also as a natural institution. Says he,

Even though slogans of equality are raised in the modern world, the concept of equality has to be accepted with discretion. Our actual experience is that from the practical and material point of view, no two men are like. Their looks and colour of skin and their physical build are

different as are their inherent qualities. Considerable bitterness could be avoided if the idea of equality as conceived by Hindu thinkers is studied more carefully. The first and basic premise is that even if men have different qualities and different kinds of duties allotted to them according to their qualities or aptitudes, all duties are equally dignified. This is called *swadharma*, and there is an unequivocal assurance that to follow *swadharma* is itself equivalent to the worship of God. So, in any duties performed to fulfil *swadharma*, the question of high and low, dignified and undignified does not arise at all. If the duty is done without selfishness, no blame attaches itself to the doer.³³

It is due to this pro-Manu anti-Dalit philosophical legacy of the RSS that the Hindu Right upholds the banner of Hindutva. This philosophy, which began to rule India from 1998–2004, is totally unconcerned about mounting atrocities against the Dalits. Thus the states where maximum incidents of caste atrocities are taking place (Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Karnataka, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Haryana) are the states where either RSS/BJP has a substantial social base or which are being ruled by them or by their allies. In fact, Uttar Pradesh, which for the last several years has been ruled by BJP/RSS, stands first in atrocities against the Dalits.

The barbaric lynching of five Dalit youths in Haryana in October 2002 once again exposes the role of Hindutva in instigating violence against Dalits. The *Indian Express* under the caption ‘They were skinning a dead cow to sell its hide, local VHP and Shiv Sena spread rumour of cow slaughter: 5 Dalits lynched in Haryana, entire administration watches’ had reported how the Hindutva brigade organized the killing of the poor Dalits. The report from Jhajjar, Haryana dated 16 October stated³⁴:

Less than two hours from the capital, this was the scene today outside the Dulena police post in Jhajjar district: patches of blood on the road, a pile of smouldering ashes. This is where five Dalits, all in their 20s, were beaten to death last night, two of them torched. They were doing what they have been doing for years: skinning dead cows

to sell the hide. This time, however, 'someone' spread the word that the cow was alive. So a mob, returning after the Dussehra fair, dragged them out of the police post where they had taken refuge and lynched them to the cries of Gau mata ki jai. Watched by the City Magistrate, the DSP of Jhajjar and Bahadurgarh, the Municipal Corporator's husband, the Block Development Officer and at least 50 policemen One FIR has been registered against 'unknown people,' while a second has been filed against the victims under the Cow Slaughter Act. Local office-bearers of the VHP and the Shiv Sena have submitted a memorandum to the local police asking them not to take any action against the guilty.

The *Indian Express* spoke to several eyewitnesses and district officials to reconstruct the incident. And they suggested this was no impulsive act, the frenzy built up over a good three and a half hours—the Dalits were first 'spotted' at 6:30 pm, beaten and dragged to the police post and then battered to death between 9 and 10 pm. Shockingly, Giriraj Kishore, senior leader of VHP, showing once again hatred for Dalits, declared that the life of a cow was more important than any number of people. This kind of justification of lynching of Dalits was so nauseating that *The Hindu*, another prominent English daily,³⁵ expressed the anger of civil society when it editorially commented: 'The VHP leader's observation, as has been reported, that the life of a cow is very important, according to the shastras, is only a premise to suggest that the life of five Dalits who were killed were not as important. There cannot be a place for men with such ideas in a modern society and the civil administration at this stage cannot gloss over such remarks as merely another instance of raving and ranting by someone constituting the lunatic fringe of society. The danger in seeking to establish such abhorrent notions as the "national sentiment" is all too apparent.'

Earlier, the *Hindustan Times*, one of the largest circulated English daily while describing the depressing scenario in Uttar Pradesh wrote:

It has become routine for the landless Dalits to be treated as outsiders, humiliated, beaten and murdered, and their women raped and paraded naked, often as public spectacle, to teach the entire community a lesson. The perpetrators

almost always belong to the upper castes, who know that the political system is their monopoly that they will get away with almost any outrage. It is hardly a matter of surprise, therefore, that in the course of just one week, two massacres have taken place in Uttar Pradesh, in Jharna and Hasanpur in Aligarh and Fatehpur districts. A little girl has been raped, women and children have been murdered by the torchbearers of feudal pride. What was till now a free run for Ranvir Sena in Laloo Yadav's Bihar seems to becoming a predictable pattern in Rajnath Singh's UP . . . If the Dalits are complaining that the BJP led government patronizes the upper castes, they are telling the truth. What was Naresh Majhi's crime that his employers burnt alive his wife and five children in early April? A bonded labourer at a brick kiln in Hathras, Majhi had merely demanded his wages. On June 9, a Dalit was savagely beaten and his wife burnt alive in Kusumpur village in Jalaun district in UP in front of the entire village because the family had dared to campaign against the upper caste candidate in the panchayat elections.³⁶

Delhi, the capital of the biggest democracy on this earth does not seem to be different from Uttar Pradesh as far as hatred for Dalits is concerned. How grave the situation is in the capital of India, can be known by the following report from correspondent Sanjay K. Singh in *The Statesman*, 5 February 2002:

The worst of Indian caste prejudices was demonstrated in the heart of Delhi, in a function attended by among others, Mr L. K. Advani. Organizers of a function in Vasant Kunj Institutional Area forced 10 families to leave their homes at 5 a.m. on 1 February because the latter's presence would have 'polluted' the atmosphere at a havan. Mr Advani attended the havan, which was followed by his laying the foundation stone for the Vedic Studies and Social Services. The organizers, the Sri Rama Vitthal Shikshana Sewa Samiti, and the Sudesh Foundation, who had taken out newspaper advertisements announcing the function on 1 February, could not be contacted despite repeated efforts by the correspondent . . . The 10 families who were

unceremoniously dragged out of their homes and asked to shift to a forest area 300 meters away, at 5 a.m. on February 1, belong to the Jusadh caste (originally from Mahoba area in Uttar Pradesh). They were told by the organizers that their presence at the venue of havan will be inauspicious. '*Meri taang tooti hui hai aur mujhe phir bhi jane ko kaha kyonki hum jusadh hain. bade log to dus baje aaye lekin hamen subah paanch baje hi thhand mein bhaga diya* (I have a broken leg but they told me to leave because I belong to a lower caste. Though the VIPs came at 10 a.m., we were forced to shift at 5 a.m. when it was freezing cold)' said 55-year-old Jamuni Devi.

Tamil Nadu is witnessing a resurgence of Hindutva and with this there has been an eruption of violence against Dalits. According to a report in *The Hindu*, 'Despite police action against the practice of Untouchability in tea shops of rural Tamil Nadu, several shopkeepers, under pressure from caste Hindus, continue with the discriminatory 'two-tumbler system'. In the caste-riven state, tea shops in several villages do not serve just hot beverages but also trade Untouchability in "two-tumblers"—cheap glass ones for the Dalits and shiny stainless steel containers for the caste Hindus. And now, a "three-tumbler" system too is adopted in some areas- plastic cups for outsiders whose caste identity is not known.'³⁷

Another report from Tamil Nadu describes in details what is happening. 'Numerous are the ways in which Dalits are tormented. They are murdered and maimed; women are raped; their children are abused and deprived of schooling; they are dispossessed of their property; their houses are torched; they are denied their legitimate rights and their sources of livelihood are destroyed. Adding to the long list of atrocities committed on Dalits were two incidents reported recently in Tamil Nadu, in which three Dalits were forced to consume human waste.'

On September 5, at Kaundampatti in Dindigul district, Sankan, a Dalit agricultural worker, was forced to drink urine—for having lodged with the police a complaint of trespass against a caste Hindu, following a dispute between them over a piece of land. Sankan had to suffer many atrocities during his five-year-long struggle against his

[high] caste-Hindu landlord to get possession of the land. In his complaint, Sankan stated that the landlord had collected nearly ₹1 lakh over a period of 15 years through deductions from his wages, as the price of the land.

‘An equally horrifying incident occurred at Thinniyam village in Tiruchi district on May 22. Two Dalits, Murugesan and Ramasami, were forced ‘to feed each other’ human excreta. The ‘crime’ they committed was that they stood by another Dalit, Karuppiah, who was engaged in a prolonged struggle against a former panchayat president and her husband to recover an amount of money he said he had given them as bribe to get a house allotted for his sister.³⁸

Shockingly, the state of Tamil Nadu under the chief ministership of Jayalalithaa instead of taking effective remedial actions against these atrocities went ahead to promulgate on 5 October 2002, ‘The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance’ in order to further appease the Hindutva lobby in the country. The RSS, the BJP and the VHP were quick to welcome this ordinance and demanded similar law throughout the country. This is the typical Hindutva response to mounting atrocities on Dalits. If Dr Ambedkar was alive today he would have been surely debarred from converting to Buddhism! The decision that Jayalalithaa’s party contested the 2004 parliamentary elections as part of the RSS/BJP alliance once again proved the ideological affinity between the two.

Rajasthan represents the same scenario. With the ascendancy of forces of Hindutva there is a simultaneous upsurge in crimes against Dalits. Chakwara, a village near Jaipur, capital of Rajasthan has come to symbolize all that is happening against Dalits in Rajasthan. It is to be remembered here that the BJP/RSS had been paying special attention to Rajasthan as elections for the State Assembly were due at the end of 2003, which they subsequently won. According to newspaper reports, ‘the problem started an year ago in Chakawara, a Brahmin-Jat dominated village. On 14 December, Mr Babu Lal, who is from Bairwa community (cobbler by caste), dared to bathe in a ghat meant for upper caste people in the village pond. The informal Panchayat of upper caste people fined him ₹51,000. When Mr Lal refused to pay, it announced that he and members of his community would be boycotted.’³⁹ When Dalits decided to take a peaceful march to the

‘forbidden’ pond, ‘around 5000 people from the upper castes from neighbouring villages streamed into Phagi town in buses and on foot in what was clearly an organized anti-Dalit movement. Armed with lathis and stone slings, they stationed themselves on the rooftops and streets here ready to confront the nearly 3,000 Dalits (mostly women) who had marched till Madhorajpura, 14 km away.’⁴⁰

According to the late well-known columnist, Praful Bidwai,⁴¹ ‘The immediate divisive issue in Chakwara goes beyond politics and local power equations. It involves access to the common village pond, where stepped ghats have been built and maintained over the years with state funds and contributions raised by the entire village, including the Dalits. But the Dalits have been barred from using the common ghats for decades. Caste-based “purity” demands they be treated lower than the buffaloes, cows and pigs which have virtually unrestrained access to the pond. The only exception is women who too, irrespective of caste, have always been excluded.’

Praful rightly concluded: ‘This violence has a well-defined purpose: to keep the lowly in their place, the Hindu hierarchy secure, and conditions for rapacious economic and social exploitation intact. Crucial to legitimizing the violence is casteist Hinduism and obscurantist myth-making. The force of Hindutva tends to overpower even the Congress, certainly the party’s local MLA, himself a Dalit. It is impossible even to imagine liberty, human agency, development or social progress until Dalit oppression is combated. Chakwara was mentioned by Ambedkar way back in the 1930s. The Bairwas then defied the savarnas by making *desi ghee*—a “privilege” denied to them. Caste-Hindus retaliated by pouring dirt into the *ghee*.’

Praful points out ‘the Bairwas have asserted themselves again, after decades, with greater resources: most men are literate and no longer submissive. They have the law explicitly on their side. But so long as the law’s guardians, driven by parampara-based obscurantism, continue to make a travesty of it, the Dalits’ struggle for elementary human dignity will face heavy odds.’

The Chakwara incident also represents the true brahminical face of Hindutva which only wants to use Dalits against minorities without bothering to care about their human rights which are threatened by Hindus themselves. Praful goes on to tell us about the ‘painful disillusionment of people like Hari Shankar Bairwa, a politics-savvy village elder, president of the local Ambedkar Janakalyan Parishad, and once-proud member of the VHP, who even went to Ayodhya as

a kar sevak with two other Dalits from Chakwara. (Bairwa has preserved the receipt for a recent ₹20 donation to an Ashok Singhal felicitation fund.) 'He now accuses the VHP-BJP of having cynically "used" the Dalits with the high-sounding slogan of "Hindu unity" only to betray that idea and contemptuously tell them they should observe *maryada* (prescribed quasi-sacred norms) and *parampara* (tradition), that is, defer to rank casteism. So much for "unity"!'

It has also been observed, generally, that with the ascendancy of the Hindu Right to power at the national level in India there also has been a spurt in communal violence with caste related violence. In fact, persecution in the name of caste and communal violence may not be two different things for the Hindu Right. If Dalits are targeted for the sins of being of low birth so are minorities like Muslims and Christians, which, as mentioned earlier, mainly come from Dalit/Untouchable stock. All those who value the Dalit cause must keep in mind that the Hindu Right's dream of recreating the 'golden past' is fraught with terrible dangers. Whatever it may be saying about Muslims and Christians as dangerous minorities, it is indeed attempting with all its might to deprive Dalits of all their human rights. The blatant commitment of the Hindutva rulers to scriptures like *Manusmriti* only underline the fact that the real targets are Dalits.

Notes

¹ Cited in *The Times of India*, 27 January 2004.

² The RSS claim that beef eating started with the arrival of the Muslims in India is not even in keeping with the Vedic version of history. Undeniably, the poor cow has become another tool in their hands for communal mobilization. This is being done in complete disregard of the historical facts and findings of the Hindu religious leaders like Swami Vivekananda who is otherwise publicly revered by them. Vivekananda while speaking on the theme of the 'Buddhistic India' at the Shakespeare Club, Pasadena, California, on 2 February 1900 said: 'You will be astonished if I tell you that, according to the old ceremonials, he is not a good Hindu who does not eat beef. On certain occasions he must sacrifice a bull and eat it.' Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, vol 3 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, rpt 1997): 536. Other research works sponsored by the Ramakrishna Mission, the latter established by Vivekananda himself, corroborate this. C. Kunhan Raja an authority on Vedic India did not miss

the fact of widespread beef eating in the ancient India. 'The Vedic Aryans, including the Brahmanas, ate fish, meat and even beef. A distinguished guest was honoured with beef served at a meal. Although the Vedic Aryans ate beef, milch cows were not killed. One of the words that designated cow was *aghnya* (what shall not be killed). But a guest was a *goghna* (one for whom a cow is killed). It is only bulls, barren cows and calves that were killed'; see C. Kunhan Raja, 'Vedic Culture', *The Cultural Heritage of India*, edited by Suniti Kumar Chatterjee and others, vol 1 (Kolkata: The Ramakrishna Mission, 1937; rpt 1997): 217. Dr B. R. Ambedkar produced documentary facts from the Vedic scriptures to establish that Aryans ate beef. See his scholarly work 'Did the Hindus never eat beef?' in *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Become Untouchables?* (first ed. 1948) (*Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches*), vol. 7 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, 1990): 323–328.

³ The *Indian National Herald*, 31 December 1927 in *Source Material on Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Movement of Untouchables*, vol. 1 (Mumbai: Govt. of Maharashtra, 1982): 17–18.

⁴ For more details on Manu and Casteism, see Ali Anwar, *Masaawaat ki Jang* (Hindi) (Delhi: Vaani Prakashan, 2001).

⁵ All laws are the verbatim reproduction from F. Max Mueller, ed., *The Laws of Manu* (Delhi: Low Price Publication, 1996). This edition is the reproduction of the first edition published in 1886. The bracket after every code carries chapter number and code number respectively. For instance (I/31) means code number 31 of chapter I of *Manusmriti*.

⁶ V. D. Savarkar, 'Women in *Manusmriti*'. In *Savarkar Samaga*' (a collection of Savarkar's writings in Hindi), vol. 4, edited by Nishikant M. and others (Delhi: Prabhat, 2000): 415.

⁷ *The Organiser*, 6 February 1950, p. 7.

⁸ Anthony Elenjimmittam, *Philosophy and Action of the RSS for the Hind Swaraj* (Mumbai: Laxmi 1951): 45.

⁹ H. V. Seshadri, ed., *Dr Hedgewar: The Epoch-Maker—A Biography* (Sahitya Sindhu, Bangalore, 1981): 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 106.

¹¹ H. V. Pingle, ed., *Smritikan-Param Pujiye Dr Hedgewar Ke Jeewan Kee Vibhin Gahtnaon Ka Sankalan* (A collection of incidents in the life of Dr Hedgewar) (Nagpur: RSS Prakashan Vibhag, 1962): 49–50.

¹² *Ibid.*: 50.

¹³ *Ibid.*: 66–67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*: 119.

¹⁵ V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva* (Delhi: Bharti Sahitya Sadan, 1989): 27.

- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ One who does not speak Sanskrit language/non-Aryan/evil-doer/low-born according to *Brahat Hindi Kosh* edited by Kalika Prasad and others (Varanasi: Gyan Mandal, 1980): 922.
- ¹⁸ Savarkar, *Hindutva*: 39.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.: 85–86.
- ²⁰ A. R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1984): 266–267.
- ²¹ V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva Ke Paanch Pran* (Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 1996): 45.
- ²² Ibid; indeed the same worry can be seen recurring in the thought of Syama Prasad Mookerjee, another contemporary of Savarkar, and great luminary of the Hindutva cause. That Hindus badly need the physical power of the lower castes was stressed in the following speech of his: 'Let it be remembered that persons belonging to the so-called lower castes are often the source of indomitable strength and courage among the Hindus. It is amongst them more than the others that Hinduism burns in an atmosphere of unselfish devotion and piety and to allow them to be weakened either socially or economically is to strike at the very root of Hindu consolidation in India.' Cited in H. D. Sharma, *100 Best Pre-Independence Speeches 1870–1947* (Delhi: Harper Collins, 1998): 343.
- ²³ Gowalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur: Bharat Publications, 1939): 36.
- ²⁴ Ibid.: 61–62.
- ²⁵ Ibid.: 62.
- ²⁶ Ibid.: 63–64.
- ²⁷ Cited in N. L. Gupta, *RSS and Democracy* (Delhi: Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, nd): 17.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu, 1996): 363.
- ³⁰ Ibid.: 356.
- ³¹ *The Organiser*, 26 January 1962.
- ³² Balraj Madhok, a senior RSS/Jan Sangh leader who preceded Deendayal Upadhyay as president of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh (BJS), levelled serious allegations against a few of his old colleagues for conspiring to kill Upadhyay in the third part of his autobiography, *Zindagi Ka Safar—3: Deendayal Upadhyay Ki Hatya Se Indira Gandhi Ki Hatya Tak* (Journey of Life-3: From the Murder of Deendayal Upadhyay to the Murder of Indira Gandhi) (Delhi: Dinman Prakashan, 2003). He states: 'He was killed by

a hired assassin. But conspirators who sponsored this killing were those self-seekers and leaders with criminal bent of mind of Sangh-Jan Sangh' (p. 22). He goes to the extent of pointing fingers towards current Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nana Deshmukh as main conspirators in the murder of Deendayal Upadhyay (p. 23).

According to the autobiography, the murder of Deendayal Upadhyay was planned by those who were kept out of the leading positions of the BJS by Upadhyay as president. It is to be noted here that Upadhyay, after taking over the presidentship from Balraj Madhok in December 1967, had kept out both Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Nana Deshmukh from important posts. According to Balraj, Upadhyay was murdered because, 'he was constantly ensuring that ill-reputed people should get no career advancement so that the reputation of the organization was not tarnished. For this reason some characterless selfish people were finding him a stumbling block in their path of self-seeking fulfilment' (p. 145).

³³ P. Bhishikar, *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya: Ideology and Perception—Concept of the Rashtra*, vol. 5 (Delhi: Suruchi, 1991): 169.

³⁴ *The Indian Express*, 17 October 2002.

³⁵ *The Hindu*, 21 October 2002.

³⁶ *The Hindustan Times* in its editorial, 'Murderers Call the Shots' 20 June 2001.

³⁷ S. Annamalai and S. Vijay Kumar, 'The Dalit Cup of Woe in Tamil Nadu', *The Hindu*, 29 July 2002.

³⁸ Vishwanathan, 'Preying on Dalits', *Frontline*, 5 October 2002: 39.

³⁹ *The Statesman*, 22 September 2002: 11.

⁴⁰ *The Indian Express*, September 22, 2002.

⁴¹ Praful Bidwai, 'Dalits under Siege', *The Hindustan Times*, 4 October 2002.

Hindutva, Dalits and the Neoliberal Order

Anand Teltumbde

INTRODUCTION

Dalits in India occupy a unique space in the Hindu social order; while their place within the societal structure ordained by Hinduism is indeterminate, they are always assumed to be a part of this structure, both in hegemonic and problematic terms. The Hindu hegemony over the Dalit universe is claimed and seen in the extension of the caste system and a cultural paradigm among Dalits, whereas the problematic of Dalits arise out of the impermeable divide between the chaturvarna or the fourfold varna structure of Hindu society and the avarna (non-varna) Dalits, which is only bridged by the relationship of exploitation.

Hindutva, which translates as Hinduness, an essentialist definition of Hinduism (see also Foreword and Introduction) as the political and social programme of militant fascist communal Hindu organizations—because Savarkar who coined this definition has not specified its boundaries in terms of its precepts or doctrines but in monolithic cultural and racial terms. His purpose also was not in the least religious; it was expressly political. With this definition he intended to create such an identity that would transcend castewise, regional and sectarian differences within Hindu society with which he could create a Hindu *Rashtra*. He defined this identity of Hindu as ‘a person who regards this land of *Bharatavarsha*, from the Indus to the Seas, as his Fatherland as well as his Holyland, that is the cradle-land of his religion.’¹ Ostensibly, Hindutva thus pretends to abolish every kind of difference, notably caste, and appears to reassure the Dalits that they would no longer be Dalits if they donned Hindutva. But is it really so? No, what

Hindutva seeks to do is not abolish these differences but pedagogically ignore them.

Hindutva, whether it is Savarkar's conceptualization or its operationalization by the Sangh Parivar, is fraught with contradictions. Savarkar's definition excludes all those non-Indians (the powerful Indian Diaspora that paradoxically supports it) even if they consider India as their 'holyland' and also those Indians who have different religions than Hinduism. While some of these religions have originated in India, some have their birthplace outside India. The former, Jainism, Buddhism, Veerashaivism and Sikhism, not to count many minor faith systems, have their historical origins and sacred sites on Indian soil. Hindutva seeks to bracket their adherents together as Hindus notwithstanding the fact that these religions and faith systems were born out of fierce contention with Brahminism (the actual name of Hinduism) and they would still not like to be identified with it. Besides, numerous tribal cults and 'animistic' faiths which belong to this country but do not have anything common with Hinduism were likewise included within Hinduism. The foreign religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and so on, have been excluded but not equally; exclusion of Judaism (Jews), Zoroastrianism (Parsis) is not equal to the exclusion of Islam (Muslims) and Christianity (Christians) or even between them. The question about the Dalits remains in balance. Hinduism that ostracized them for millennia in every possible manner certainly cannot be said to be theirs. Having lived a ghettoized existence away from the caste society, even culturally they are different.² However, Savarkar's Hindutva would ahistorically assume they are to be included. Not worried by these conceptual contradictions in Hindutva, the Sangh Parivar went on its inclusion spree, so much so that Muslims are wooed as 'Mohammedi Hindu' and Christians as 'Christi Hindus'. The problematic of Hindutva is thus obvious; as a concept it is not attuned to the historical and sociological reality obtaining in the country and therefore came as politically mutated right from the beginning.

The plot of civilizational continuum constructed by the Hindutva protagonists or their assumption that there is a single religio-cultural fabric shared by all is simply not tenable. The case for the indissoluble connection between Hinduism and Indian civilization made first by the Orientalist and then nationalist intellectuals was basically on two planks: one, the pervasive ideological continuity of Hinduism and

two, the pan-Indian social organization characterized by caste. At the level of ideological continuity, they painted Hinduism as the oldest living faith by linking it with Vedas, which were taken as the world's oldest text through their formative influence in the philosophical content of Hinduism. At the level of social organization, they saw the ethos of Hinduism pervasively operating through a pan-Indian unifying category of caste. There was an acknowledgement that Hinduism above all was the mentality associated with caste. Both these bases have been problematized by the scholars: the first on account of the existence of two streams of ideologies: Brahmanism and Shramanism, through the ancient period and their bitter struggle³ that even survives in various forms; and the second on account of the fact that castes were local in character and only by putting them into the 'Procrustean frame of varna' they could be taken as national.⁴ Caste or varna, the second argument, is unlikely to be contested by the Hindutva forces or persisted with the Dalits who are concerned with their existential manifestation.

The attempts to construct a singular Hinduism by the Reform movements during the last two centuries, which Romilla Thapar called 'syndicated Hinduism', has helped the coinage of Hindutva. The syndication process reflected considerable amount of diversity in terms of motivation, influences, and so on, and hence the resultant product was seen as different from Hinduism. Hindutva, likewise, is claimed to be different from Hinduism, containing only a fraction of it. However, it is a mute point whether the syndicated Hinduism or Hindutva really differed in their core ethos or a worldview from Hinduism. Thapar calls this syndicated Hinduism a garbled form of Brahminism with a 'motley of values' from other sources, like the Bhakti movements and Puranic rituals.⁵ As for Dalits, Hindutva, therefore, represents not a liberating creed but just revival of the old Brahminism, today in a fancy neoliberal or neoconservative garb.

Hindutva has created a political cultural crisis among people by polarizing society into 'us' and 'them' and hegemonizing other communities. Currently, religious minorities like Christians and Muslims are being stamped as 'them' (as opposed to 'us'), as people to be excluded as per Hindutva's classic definition of 'Hindu'. The shattering of faith of these minority communities in the innate goodness of Indians by itself is bad enough but the negative externality it creates for Dalits is much worse. It is bad enough to exclude certain

communities on the basis of religion but it is certainly worse to create false consciousness of inclusion of others while in reality perpetuating their exclusion. This is precisely what Hindutva does to the Dalits. It intoxicates them to raise weapons against their class allies by depicting them as the 'enemy' and so, Dalits get effectively trapped between the warring communities; as a face of Hindutva to religious minorities and as the lowly aliens to the Hindus. The experiments carried out in the Hindutva laboratory of Gujarat have amply demonstrated this poignant fate of Dalits. While Dalits were the only other community to have suffered seriously during these experiments, they were also exposed in the media as culprits. Muslims saw them as the 'enemy' but nothing changed for them on the side of Hindus; they remained the same outcastes in the Hindu societal structure.

While Hindutva is a visible face of the monster, one tends to ignore the not-so-visible face of it in the all pervasive neoliberal order that has been threatening the existence of poor people like Dalits. While the relationship between Hindutva and neoliberalism may not be so evident; as the former ostensibly is inward looking while the latter essentially is outward looking; while the former swears by goodness of Hindu culture and traditions, the latter affirms the developmental prowess of international trade and global culture, they are indeed very closely related. It is not a coincidence that the development of these two phenomena in our country has gone parallel. Certainly, they have been complementary to each other in more than one way. But even at the ideological level they appear to reflect substantial similarity in orientation; a sort of ideological affinity. Over the years, having been harassed by the devastating impact of neoliberal globalization, people tend to see xenophobic Hindutva as being opposed to globalization, which is even deliberately propagated through Hindutva outfits like the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch. But it is just the diffusive and deflective stratagem of the Sangh Parivar to kill the opposition by containing it.

People have suffered the ill effects of globalization as well as Hindutva and come to consider them as two mutually exclusive problems. Some have felt the severity of the first vis-à-vis the second, and some vice versa. This has manifested in the form of two separate sets of struggles; one against neoliberal globalization and the other against the communalism of Hindutva. This conceptual mistake has become a strategic folly inasmuch as the resistance forces are split into

two different units, both trying to hit half-real half-virtual enemies, thereby reducing the chances of winning to a mere quartile. Even this chance is further eroded by the agent saboteurs who thrive in the spaces created by this confusion.

HINDUTVA: CHANGING COLOURS OF THE CHAMELEON

The Rashtriya Swayansevak Sangh (RSS) has been the ideological vehicle of Hindutva. It started as a cultural organization that repeatedly claimed not to have any truck with politics and much less with economics. It stressed the cultural rejuvenation of Hindus. Dr K. B. Hedgewar, a Telugu Brahmin from Nagpur, a disciple of Dr B. S. Moonje, and friend of V. D. Savarkar, who founded the RSS in 1925 at Nagpur had 'felt an acute need for organizing the Hindu community for reawakening'. The Hedgewar-phase revolved around laying the foundations and starting the schedule of *shakha* or branch training and pedagogy-based political discourses called *bouddhiks* (intellectual sessions). The constitution of the RSS claims that 'the Sangh, as such, has no politics and is devoted to purely cultural work'. Unlike the Hindu Mahasabha, the RSS remained aloof from active politics and concentrated on cadre-building for years.

The self-proclaimed apolitical character of the RSS was a deliberate subterfuge to stay away from the anti-imperialist struggle that was stirring the country and thereby not to antagonize the colonial powers, and to a certain extent, complement their strategy of divide and rule. Its vision of a Hindu Rashtra, as such, was itself a political statement. Kanungo rightly identifies Hindutva and the creation of a Hindu Rashtra as the politics of the RSS.⁶ This apolitical mask was to be soon discarded. After the takeover of the Sangh by M. S. Golwalkar, the new sarsanghchalak (supreme leader) after Dr Hedgewar, the RSS articulated a discernible fascist form of politics and began practising it. As Ram Puniyani observes, 'Golwalkar . . . crystallized Hindutva politics in very strong and blunt ways. His hatred for minorities and communists comes out transparently. His appreciation for the eternal relevance of the laws of Manu is a clear pointer to the status of Dalits and women in the RSS vision of India, which is that of a Hindu Rashtra. It was from the Golwalkar era that, rather than direct political activity, RSS emphasized the infiltration of its trained volunteers into bureaucracy, army and media.'⁷

It is interesting that the RSS does not recognize the national flag, the Constitution of India, or any of the state symbols, insignia or even an institution like the Parliament of independent India. Its opposition to the national flag is too well known to be mentioned. When the Congress at its Lahore session adopted ‘purna swaraj’ and called upon people to observe independence day on 26 January 1930 by unfurling the Tricolor, Dr Hedgewar as Sarsanghchalak issued a circular to all the RSS shakhas to worship the *bhagwa jhanda* (saffron flag).⁸ Even after independence when the Tricolor became the National Flag, it was the RSS which refused to accept it.⁹ Until recently, the RSS never unfurled the national flag in its office. The RSS never hid its dislike for the Constitution and wanted it to be replaced by the *Manusmriti* or Code of Manu.¹⁰ When the Constituent Assembly had finalized the Constitution of India, the RSS journal *Organizer* in its editorial of 30 November 1949 and titled ‘Constitution’ complained that there was no mention of Manu’s Laws, ‘the unique constitutional development in ancient Bharat’. It wrote, ‘To this day his laws as enunciated in the *Manusmriti* excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing’ (see also Chapter 1).¹¹ The RSS has also openly opposed the other principles enshrined in the Constitution. Democracy, secularism, federalism, and so on, which are the basic features of our Constitution, are not admissible to the RSS.¹²

Despite this, it did not have any qualms in aspiring for political power and actually have it within the same constitutional framework that it despised. In October 1951, the RSS floated a full-fledged political party called Jan Sangh (JS). It did not make any dent in politics and continued as a marginal player until the political vortex created by Jaya Prakash Narayan’s movement catapulted it to the mainstream. During the Emergency proclaimed by Indira Gandhi, it took full advantage of mass sentiment and earned itself an aura of a crusader for democracy. It became a part of the post-Emergency political formation, and tasted political power when the Janata Party formed the government at the centre. The bonhomie did not last long and soon the JS elements came out in a new avatar of the Jan Sangh called the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which also languished on the margins of national politics. Soon, however, the events moved in rapid succession—the Congress itself playing communal card in Punjab and Kashmir after the second coming of Indira Gandhi and ineptitude of Rajiv Gandhi thereafter in handling the Ram Mandir issue and the

Shah Bano case and also his overt invocation of 'Ram Rajya' in his election campaign—creating legitimate space for their communal politics which they used deftly to make rapid strides and reach the seat of power. The change in the environment after the advent of neoliberalism—crises it unleashed for the lower strata, the euphoria in the higher echelons, the spread of right wing ethos of the middle classes, and political turbulence—also helped them immensely. The BJP tested power from 1996 to 2004 with small breaks. Although it again faced electoral debacle for a decade, it resurged with full force and grabbed power in 2014, and now in 2019, that brings them closer to accomplishing their goal of Hindu Rashtra.

It is difficult to discern the economic vision of the RSS, particularly during its Hedgewar phase. It rather appeared disinterested in the material things represented by economics. Even after Dr Hedgewar's tenure, among the myriad changes that befell the RSS, none significantly related to the economic sphere. It could not articulate an alternate economic vision for its Hindu Rashtra. As Malik writes, 'Under the stewardship of Golwalkar from 1940 to 1973, the RSS saw itself as a sort of Hinduized social service league. It concentrated on issues such as rural development and uplift of aboriginal tribal people. If it had an economic view at all, it was fairly similar to Mahatma Gandhi's cottage industry doctrine. This involved the idea of the self-sufficient village, one that met its own needs and did not need to look to the world beyond. In essence, it was an anti-free trade argument, albeit in an inchoate form.'¹³ But when the BJP came to power, it jumped on to free market bandwagon and overtook the Congress by creating a special ministry for disinvestment in public sector. The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) which was floated by the RSS in 1991, apparently to oppose the Congress's adoption of neoliberal economic reforms continued to make 'swadeshi' noise. Apart from creating strategic space for itself ranging from complete capitulation to imperialist institutions to swadeshi self-reliance, this impressed people by the show of democracy within the Sangh Parivar. While its government accelerated implementation of the globalization package, SJM went on issuing its vehement critiques. It was a deliberate stratagem, quite characteristic of the RSS, to contain possible criticism arising out of accelerated privatization. As expected, it soon did a volte-face and is now cooling its heels with its cofounder Swaminathan Guruswami on the Board of Directors of the RBI monitoring the facilitation of Modi's ultra-neoliberalism.

NEOLIBERAL ORDER AND FASCISM

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is an intellectual hodgepodge devised out of desperation at the behest of the capitalist camp to counter the ascension of socialist ideas. Foster defined it as ‘an integrated ruling-class political-ideological project, associated with the rise of monopoly-finance capital, the principal strategic aim of which is to embed the state in capitalist market relations’.¹⁴ Its rudiments could be traced in the arguments of von Mises and Frederick von Hayek’s in the so-called socialist calculation debate of the 1920s and 1930s,¹⁵ whereby they sought to demonstrate the epistemological incoherence of socialist economics¹⁶ and stress the desirability of the market enabled form of social order. It may be difficult to precisely set out the contours of neoliberalism, but one may discern its basic premise being the autonomy of an atomized individual, striving to pursue self-interest. It is in contrast to the socialistic ideas that valorise collectivities. Human progress, it said, was the result of competition between these autonomous individuals. What followed therefore was that these autonomous individuals should be rendered free, absolutely unfettered to carry on with their enterprise in what was called the ‘free market’—a ring of wrestlers where the fittest would come out as winner and the vanquished would be doomed. Liberalization, privatization, fiscal austerity, deregulation, free trade and reduction in government spending in order to enhance the role of private sector in the economy may just be taken as corollaries of this tenet.

Neoliberalism, as the name suggests, claimed the legacy of classical liberalism; the prefix ‘neo’ referring to the new contexts and corresponding new theoretical content. This new context was the ever deepening crisis of capitalism and hence the new content reflected the more vehement and doctrinaire attitude of its tenets. Classical liberalism of the likes of John Locke and Adam Smith reflected a holistic concern; because the task before them was to provide an ideological base to support the emerging capitalist system. Neoliberalism on the contrary had begun with a defensive agenda for saving the capitalist system and did not need similar concerns. Its inherent weakness manifested into an offensive posture. The decline

of Keynesianism by the mid-sixties, and the series of crises capitalism had to face thereafter with increased frequency created an urgent need for it. It was first experimented in Chile in 1973 after the CIA sponsored coup dislodged the Allende government, installed Augusto Pinochet as the dictator, and handed over Chile to a team of Chicago school economists under the supervision of Milton Friedman, an extreme proponent of the free market, to 'rebuild' the Chilean economy. The economic blueprint that was implemented in post-Allende Chile came to be forerunner of the neoliberal policy package of the IMF and the World Bank.¹⁷

The growing mismatch between crises and possible response further hardened the attitude of the neoliberal creed. It came to devise and uphold unbridled Social Darwinism, which does not have any consideration for people who are weak, poor and powerless.¹⁸ It does not have any place for 'incompetent' people. Neoliberalism's definition of incompetence, of course, relates not with any productive domain but with the domain of exchange in the market. It upholds the liberty of enterprising individuals but condemns equality as unnatural. All its patron saints, right from Ludwig von Mises to Friedrich Hayek to Milton Friedman are vehement in claiming inequality as the catalyst for human progress.¹⁹ They condemned the struggles for equality as ill-advised and rather advocated struggles against it, as inequality alone brought humans progress. Fraternity, being a moralistic value based on compassion which neoliberalism rejects outright as unnatural, was not considered even worth talking about. Of course, there cannot be any fraternity among the perpetually combating unequal individuals!

Neoliberal Order

The neoliberal order is essentially the latest avatar of capitalism, late imperialism.²⁰ It is administered by a set of international institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO on behalf of the US and British governments who been its main promoters and designers. The US government acts as the supreme enforcer of the new order, based on its overwhelming military power. After the collapse of Soviet Union, the neoliberal order has become the default world order.

The neoliberal order differs from the previous order characterized by regulated welfarestate capitalism of the post-World War II decades in many ways. The main features of the global neoliberal order include the following: (i) a high degree of global economic integration including trade, production, and finance; (ii) deregulation and privatization of large transnational corporations and banks; (iii) strengthened enforcement of the 'rights' of large transnational corporations and banks, such as in the area of so-called 'intellectual property rights'; (iv) reductions in, or elimination of, state social programmes that benefit the working class and other popular groups. The neoliberal order tends to weaken and marginalize all the institutions through which popular groups previously expressed their voice. Ordinary people world over have experienced worsening conditions in practically every aspect of their lives. These include the following:

- (i) Growing inequality within countries, with a small minority of the rich becoming rapidly richer while middle layers barely maintain their living standard and the majority experience a decline in living standard.
- (ii) Growing inequality between countries, with a significant number of countries experiencing gradual or rapid economic decline.
- (iii) Increasing insecurity among workers, small farmers, and small business.
- (iv) Increasing instability in the economic and financial system.
- (v) Growing penetration of commercial values in every sphere of society.
- (vi) Increasing direct and indirect domination by transnational corporations and wealthy individuals over states.
- (vii) Mounting threats to the environmental sustainability of the economy and human society.
- (viii) An increasingly open policy of aggressive imperialism by the leading capitalist powers, specifically the USA and Britain, with the likelihood of increasing armed conflict in the world.²¹

The instability of this order manifested by long spells of recession and endemic crises has greatly imperilled neoliberalism in giving rise to authoritarian structures everywhere.

Integral with the neoliberal order are the geopolitical interests of the USA. The most basic post-Cold War geopolitical aims of the USA can be identified as controlling Eurasia as well as the energy resources in the Middle East and Central Asia; containing China; and suppressing the rise of local powers in regional subsystems, especially if they are hostile to American interests.²² The USA perceived India as a potential partner in maintaining stability in the Indian Ocean region, particularly in fighting Islamic fundamentalism and checking Chinese ambitions. Historically, it considered India under the Congress as socialist, even though the latter displayed enough congenial behaviour by 1980s, in relation to the confirmed rightist and pro-America Hindutva formation, the BJP clearly came as the preferred party in India. The BJP's enthusiastic somersault in economic policies from its confused (or strategic?) Swadeshi rhetoric soon after it came to power; its desperate behaviour to secure Israel-like gendarme role in South Asia and general pro-US demeanour justified this preference.²³ The implications of these pro-imperialist proclivities of the Hindutva party to the indigenous people like Dalits can only be injurious.

FASCIST STRUCTURES

Paradoxically, the neoliberal order cannot be sustained without centralized power. As free markets need a regulator to maintain their freedom, so does the neoliberal world order need military might to maintain it. Neoliberalism thus begets fascist structures for its spread as well as sustenance. Fascism in terms of its basic tenets appears opposed to neoliberalism. Whereas the latter swears by individual autonomy, the former rejects it and makes individuals subordinate to a corporate state. This contention of Fascism, however, needs to be read together with its glorification of the leader, endowed with superhuman powers far distinct from the ordinary person. In its formulation, all theoretical considerations are subservient to the 'inexorable dynamics' of the factual situation, which only the leader masters; it is he who knows that the 'iron logic of nature' will make the strong prevail over the weak.²⁴ The unchallenged centre of power that Fascism creates is what the neoliberal order also wants to stave off the possible free enterprise of the masses of victims (in terms of agitations and revolts) against those of a few capitalist entrepreneurs.

Thus at one level, though enunciated in contrary language, neoliberalism becomes a complementary creed to Fascism; the former needs the latter. In contrast to Marxism, which expounds the rational logic of history that may lead to the final triumph of the weak in an act of universal salvation, there is no fulfilment of history in Fascism. Instead, all history is incessant struggle, and the struggle itself is welcomed for its own ethical value, accelerating technological evolution and making technology—not class struggle—as the pragmatic motor for social development. For war and technical expansion alone, as it contends, brings up to their highest tension all human energies and puts the stamp of nobility upon the people who have the courage to meet it. Fascism carries this anti-pacifist struggle into the lives of individuals. It is not essentially different from the neoliberal dictum of competition that impels individuals into incessant struggle against everybody else in the world.

Although couched in different languages, neoliberalism and Fascism are complementary to each other; the former needing the latter for its actual realization and the latter leading to the former as its fruition. In India, neoliberalism and Fascism have an ally in Brahminism—the fountainhead of Hindutva—which is in the psyche of the ruling elite since prehistory.

NEOLIBERAL-FASCIST HINDUTVA AND DALITS

There can be a reasonable debate over whether the paradigm created by the political ascendance of the Hindutva could be called fascist. In absence of an established theory of Fascism, two approaches, Marxist and non-Marxist are generally considered to assess whether any movement or state is fascist. The major difference between these approaches is in terms of their focus; while the Marxist approach has a focus on the characteristics of the fascist state,²⁵ Fascism in its matured form, the non-Marxist approach has focused on movements²⁶; they are much more strongly pivoted on the elucidation of Fascism's distinctive ideological themes and organizational principles.²⁷ Apart from its insistence that Fascism can only arise in specific conditions (capitalism in crisis in the era of imperialism), Marxist approaches consider ascension of fascist forces to full state power represents the culmination of the logic of Fascism, not just an early transit point on a political

dynamic. They may compromisingly call it as authoritarian, reactionary and anti-secular, and even as potentially fascist, but not fascist as yet.²⁸

A movement can be better assessed through its ideology and aspirations than its practice because the latter necessarily involves compromises. With such insights, we can use a framework²⁹ that outlines certain 'fascist minimum' to assess the character of the Hindutva forces. Vanaik used the framework based on a three-part model by Stanley Payne, which comprises: (a) fascist negations (anti-liberalism, anti-democracy and anti-Communism); (b) generic ideological motifs and goals (state as an 'absolute'), expansionist foreign policy, subsuming individual autonomy, some collective 'Other' as the enemy, extreme authoritarian nationalism, an apocalyptic perception of deep 'civilizational crisis'; (c) special and common features of style and organization (charismatic leadership, exaltation of youth and youthfulness of fascist leaders, violence is glorified, mass emotions through evocative symbols, and masculinity).³⁰

While on each of these criteria Hindutva scores quite highly; its fascist proclivities come out more clearly in its genesis and growth. Indeed, Hindutva's fascist character comes with its birthmark. After the fall of the Peshwas, the Brahmin rulers of Pune, the entire Brahmin establishment in Maharashtra was agitated to regain its lost rule. The spurt of rebellions by Pune Brahmins against the British can be easily traced to this motive. Although they were glorified as the anti-colonial revolutionary struggles by their caste, their socio-political content could only be classed as conservative. History shows that the Brahmins from Pune and later all of Maharashtra were in search of an example of conservative revolution. They got it in the form of Fascism which had developed in Italy. The glee with which they received it was expressed fulsomely during the 1930s and the 1940s in the Marathi press which was totally in their control.

Generally, the origin of Hindutva is credited to Savarkar, who had provided its definition in 1923³¹ but at a conceptual level it goes back to Lokmanya Tilak,³² who not only saw the potential of religious ideology in political mobilization for the first time but effectuated it by starting public celebrations of Ganeshotsava and birth anniversaries of Shivaji as the protector of cows and Brahmins. The basic reason was to win back the celebration-loving masses of lower castes that had drifted

to observe Islamic festivals under the Sufi influence. Tilak had also propounded the intellectually juvenile 'Aryan theory of race' that claimed a white racial stock for upper caste Indians and accepted the Vedas as their core literature—an illusion shared by many upper caste people those days. Essentially, Tilak thus represented the contemporary Chitpavan struggle to revive the lost glory of Brahminism that had nothing for the lower castes other than their assigned caste rung. From 1924 to 1935 *Kesari*, Tilak's paper, regularly published editorials and articles about Italy, Fascism and Mussolini. It described the passage from liberal government to dictatorship as a shift from anarchy to an orderly situation, where social struggles had no more reason to exist.

As Marzia Casolari tells us, 'by the late 1920s, the fascist regime and Mussolini had considerable popularity in Maharashtra. The aspects of Fascism which appealed most to Hindu nationalists were, of course, both the militarisation of society and what was seen as a real transformation of society, exemplified by the shift from chaos to order. The anti-democratic system was considered as a positive alternative to democracy which was seen as a typically British value.'³³ The first Hindu nationalist who came in contact with the fascist regime and its dictator, Benetto Mussolini, was B. S. Moonje. An associate of Tilak and a mentor of the RSS founder, Hedgewar, Moonje had specially visited Italy in March, 1931 to study Fascism and had had a personal audience with Mussolini on 19 March at 3 pm. His exalted impressions of this meeting are well documented in his diary. He is on record stating that 'every aspiring and growing nation needs such [fascist] organisations'. He records in his diary his resolve to spend balance life in shaping RSS along the lines of Mussolini's fascist youth organizations, Balilla and Avangadist.³⁴ Moonje played a great role in moulding the RSS into a nationwide fascist organization.

V. D. Sawarkar, a father figure of aggressive Hindutva, was also inspired by Italian Fascism. His secret society 'Abhinav Bharat', which he founded in 1904 was just an Indianization of 'Young Italy' of Giuseppe Mazzini, who is credited with a fascist idea of the 'unity of thought and action'.³⁵ He also had a great liking for Hitler's Nazism and the Fascism of Mussolini. He had chided Nehru for opposing them in India and openly endorsed them before and during World War II. M. S. Golwalkar, the RSS supremo after Hedgewar, is also well known to be a Hitler-fan and does not require elaboration. He often eulogized the Hitlerite model of racial cleansing and even adopted

it as his own. He unhesitatingly wanted to model his Hindu Rashtra on Hitler's totalitarian and fascist pattern. His book *We or Our Nationhood Defined*³⁶ is replete with idealization of the Nazi cultural nationalism (the phrase being used lately to describe the strategy of the BJP) of Hitler. Savarkar had supported Hitler's anti-Jewish pogroms and almost hinted at a solution for the Muslim problem in India when he said: 'A Nation is formed by a majority living there-in . . . They [Jews] being in minority were driven out from Germany'.³⁷ The Sangh Pariwar's slogan 'one nation, one culture, one religion, one language', clearly resonates the Nazi slogan 'Ein volk, ein Reich, ein Fuehrer' (one people, one State, one leader).

After independence, the RSS spread its tentacles through a host of mass organizations and created a Sangh Pariwar that variously followed the fascist dictums in its virulent anti-communism, organized terror against 'internal enemies' (minorities in India in place of Jews in Germany), rumour-mongering and whipping up mass frenzy. The Fascism of the Sangh Pariwar is also manifest in its revivalism (revival of Vedic glory like fascist revival of the ancient traditions of the race—of imperial Rome—of 'Aryan pride'),³⁸ absolute statism, expansionist foreign policy (Akhand Bharat that includes not only Afghanistan, Pakistan and entire South Asia but also beyond like Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia in the far East!). As the Nazi slogan provided motivation for the most inhuman forms of destruction, the Hindutva slogan has already succeeded in symbolically incapacitating the Indian state when it demolished the Babri Masjid and enacted an unprecedented carnage of Muslims in Gujarat.³⁹ As in fascist Germany, the Sangh Pariwar has effectively created a 'we-ness' identity, based on Hindu tradition and rituals and in corollary created the Other, apparently comprising Muslims, Christians, Communists (In his *Bunch of Thoughts*, Golwalkar categorized them as India's 'internal enemies'⁴⁰ and those who are in apparent disagreement with them like Ambedkarite Dalits.

Couched in a progressive idiom, Hindutva, of late, is presented as a sans caste construct to attract Dalits who have always wanted a Hindu society without castes. After all, every anti-caste movement, including one led by Dr Ambedkar, initially aspired for this modest reform in Hindu society. It is only when they realized that castes were an inalienable part of Hinduism and hence abolition of castes was not possible within its framework, did they tend to distance themselves from the Hindu fold. Therefore, when Hindutva creates an illusion of

abolition of castes, it becomes an attractive proposition for the majority of Dalits who are not well versed, either with their own history or the dubious character of the Hindutva forces. If one looks beyond the dust storm raised with the assimilative slogan by the Hindutva forces, one can easily see the truth that the RSS's stand on caste is deliberately nebulous. An exclusive Brahmin club, it realized its folly and admitted the lower castes, required as foot soldiers. Since then it has feigned 'caste neutrality' but never spoke unequivocally about 'annihilation of castes'. It only reiterates that it does not observe caste discrimination, not understanding that discrimination is integral with the caste system that it extols as the civilizational feature of ancient India.

What Hindutva abolishes is what is already abolished. The abominable practice of Untouchability that Hindutva shouts against is already done away within the law. Every committed Hindu from Vivekananda to Mahatma Gandhi wanted Untouchability to be abolished but at the same time struggled to justify the caste system. Hindutva never reflects the gravity of the vexatious problem that caste has been. Castes become a virtual reality for Hindutva. They just need to be assumed away and do not need to be struggled against! Hindutva therefore does not need to understand them, does not need to see material contradictions underneath them, does not require any programme to fight them, and does not believe in annihilating them. By implication, all the anti-caste movements in history down to those of Phule, Periyar and Ambedkar are considered as misconceived and are made redundant. If castes could be cast away simply by wishing for it then why does one need to wage battles against them! Paradoxically, the trap is embellished with a high pitched rhetoric of adulation to the icons of Dalits such as Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar and also with the allure of Sanskritization and even material benefit to the Dalits.

There is no doubt that many Dalits are falling prey to the Hindutva misrepresentations. Initially, it was the upwardly mobile Dalits that the Hindutva forces targeted in their co-optation strategy launched with the platforms like Samajik Samarasata Manch but these days, they are aiming at the Dalit masses. The large scale participation of Dalits on the side of Hindutva in the pogrom of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 testifies to the success of this strategy. For instance, Bal Thackeray is known to publicly differentiate between Dalits as Naubauddhas (Ambedkarites) and others who have significantly

populated his Shiv Sena. Though not so loud and demonstrative, it is largely the story of other Hindutva organizations too. Contrary to the expectations of many analysts, of late Hindutva appears to be making inroads into the bastion of Ambedkarite Dalits as symbolized by the Bhimshakti-Shivshakti syndrome in Maharashtra.

HINDUTVA AND NEOLIBERALISM: STRANGE AFFINITY

During the past four decades of globalization, the trend of religious fundamentalism, obscurantism, growth of right reaction, and so on, is clearly seen to be growing all over the world. This trend may be attributable to two types of factors: intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic factors refer to the internal drive of neoliberalism that creates situations which in turn give rise to certain kinds of cultural patterns and ideological trends in society. The extrinsic factors refer to the cultural and ideological forces inherent in certain societies that with support from neoliberalism reach resonant levels of these patterns. Looking at the euphoric welcome that neoliberal globalization received from the elite castes and classes in India, within as well as abroad, one tends to see India as possessing both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors. Since Hindutva is the cultural and ideological expression of the elite castes and classes, its inherent congruence with neoliberalism can be easily hypothesized for explaining the special affinity between them.

It may sound odd and a little anachronistic to see the ideological essence of neoliberalism entrenched in the core of Hinduism but there appears to be ground to do so. Contrary to the commonplace notion, the ideological essence of Hinduism is predicated on individual and not the collective. The self-regulating exploitative social (caste) structure ordained by it is also based on an individual internalizing the logic that one has to observe one's jati dharma in the hope of earning merit so as to deserve better state in the next birth. Savarkar, the official progenitor of Hindutva defines it in relation to the consciousness of India as *Pitru Bumi* and *Punya Bhumi*. It is only an individual who can have this internalization, a consciousness of a kind. The Hindutva discourse of cultural nationalism that rings with Fascism is also based on individualism that provides a discursive bridge between universalism and particularism which Hindutva aspires for. While the Sangh Parivar shows itself to be against the West for its individualism, its critique, if at all, could be construed as the assertion that it is a social evil that

leads to alienation, family and community breakdown. If one takes a closer look at their historical narrative, social theories and proposed policies one finds that they are all predicated on the existence of autonomous individuals. Essentially, Hinduism is a religious and philosophical teaching, and thus individualistic. People may follow their own individual beliefs and interpretations of scripture and religious practices. A person adapts his own *Ishta* which may or may not be those of his family. It is the individual who gets *moksha* (deliverance):

Individualism also reveals itself in the common theme that a nation's upliftment is tied to the masculinity of the people. In keeping with the RSS tradition, Dattopant Thengadi, one of the Sangh stalwarts, links national progress with the transformation of the character of every man, on an individual basis. The assumption is that if each man takes on these masculine characteristics, the nation as the sum total of these men will also become 'manly'. The 'collective' is seen as a conglomeration of individuals. Each distinct, discontinuous person has the qualities of the nation within him. This is the discursive space for transferring the discourse of the self from the individual to the group. Once the group is equated with its constituent members it is possible to conceive of each individual as a mini-nation, and each nation a macro-individual. . . . [T] religion of an individual becomes the religion of the nation and vice versa. It is thus that Hindutva can make universal claims to modern science and reason while claiming Hindu nationalism as the universal for all of India.⁴¹

Once seen that individualism is the basic unit of Hinduism, it may not be difficult to establish the attitude of Hindutva towards competition. For to some extent competition can be seen as a corollary of individualism. Hinduism is ostensibly based on the ethos of competition-competition in masculine valour, competition in feminine sexuality, competition with and within castes, and so on. It is reflected in the unique feature of Hinduism whose gods are always armed with bloody weapons. The underscoring point is that the victors are always worshipped. The Hindu mythology is replete with stories celebrating the competitiveness of a person from childhood to death. A human

being does not have any inherent value; he or she has to establish it in competition. The caste in that sense is nothing but the representative of one's competitive status; the Brahmin being the most competitive and the Dalits its opposite. One may argue that caste creates barriers to open competition, but then it is also the case with neoliberalism that swears by unbridled competition; does not the endowment of a person create a barrier in open competition? The market can well be analogized by the battleground that is so glorified in Hinduism.

Similarities between neoliberalism and Hinduism can be seen even beyond the conceptual realm. For instance, as discussed earlier, both neoliberalism and Hinduism are not interested in equality. In fact both consider inequality as natural, the catalyst of human progress. As regards liberty, neoliberalism appears to swear by individual liberty whereas Hinduism on the face of it seems to constrain it with caste confines. But it is not true. Both neoliberalism as well as Hinduism do have similar measures of liberty but is meant only for a select few. The liberty in neoliberalism is a commodity that you buy with money. You are at liberty to do anything provided you pay the price. If you do not have money, you do not have liberty; you do not exist. Thus the liberty of neoliberalism is not its intrinsic value; its intrinsic value lies in money. It grants you liberty in proportion to the money in your wallet. Hinduism is not known to have liberty; but again it is not true. It gives enough liberty to the people of *dwija* or twice born (the second time being the sacred thread investiture for males) varna, that is, Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya. The lower Shudra varna which is supposed to serve the *dwija* varna with its labour does not have it. The amount of liberty it grants to people is according to the placement of their varna in the varna hierarchy. Even the Shudras, who seemingly did not have liberty, could claim liberty in relation to the *avarna* people. When *varnas* evolved into castes and lost their strict significance, liberty could be purchased. With regard to fraternity, both neoliberalism and Hinduism do not seem to care for it. Fraternity cannot be a value to neoliberalism that privileges unbridled competition between people and likewise it cannot be a value to Hinduism which ordains brutalization through caste. In this way, we can observe the striking similarities between neoliberalism and Hinduism on possibly any and every parameter. This astounding ideological affinity between the two accentuates the existential orientation of people towards the occult of Hindutva and Social Darwinism.

DALITS UNDER HINDUTVA-NEOLIBERAL ORDER

The impact of neoliberal globalization on Dalits can be assessed with a heuristic: the adverse impact of globalization shall be inversely proportional to one's standing in the socioeconomic scale. Dalits being the lowest in the scale, they shall be most badly hit. Empirically also it has been established that globalization had a calamitous impact on Dalits.⁴² The basic premise of neoliberal globalization that it entails economic growth has not come true. If it were true, globalization envisaged that the economic growth would trickle down to the lowest strata and thus benefit everyone, albeit in differential terms. The dictum of political economy can tell us that growth in economy does not automatically trickle down to the poor but the entire burden of its decline is necessarily borne by them. Thus decline in the global economy during the globalization era has certainly impoverished the poor people of the world. The statistics on galloping inequality in the context of declining economy indicates that rich are getting richer at the cost of poor. Dalits in India being at the bottom most layer of the social scale they have been its biggest victims.

While the adverse impact of globalization on the poor has become an established fact, its impact on people like Dalits who bear the burden of social oppression is not as widely acknowledged. This sphere of exploitation of Dalits is duly noted in the Constitution. It provides them certain safeguards like reservations in educational institutions, employment in the government and the public sector and certain other measures to restrain the exercise of social prejudice against them. This constitutional space also has been either significantly eroded or rendered meaningless under globalization. The rampant commercialization of education is slowly barricading the Dalits from the field of education. The tremendous growth of class-orientated schooling system, all pervading expensive coaching classes, increasing numbers of competitive examinations and expensive inputs therefore, increasing corporatisation of the training in frontier areas (like IT, Analytics), through, growing numbers of private colleges, deemed universities, new generation of the foreign-affiliated institutions are directly attributable to globalization paradigm and are having debilitating effect on the educational prospects of Dalits. General decline in developmental expenditure due to fiscal deficit fundamentalism, the drive towards privatization of the public sector and the ethos of global

competitiveness have practically rendered provisions of reservations for Dalits meaningless. The loss of hope of getting jobs is further dissuading Dalits from investing in education, setting into motion a vicious cycle towards ruination of Dalits. Globalization has reversed the declining trend of school drop out of Dalit students over the last six decades and has created an alarming situation where Dalit students feel hopeless and are getting out of schools.

Globalization, beyond the existential imperatives, has eliminated the hope of Dalit emancipation. Education, land reform, democracy and modernity, the four parameters that can best proxy for the measures of personal, socioeconomic, socio-political, and socio-cultural empowerment of Dalits respectively, and maybe collectively conceived to map Dalit emancipation, are all getting obliterated under the impact of globalization. Education, as just discussed, is becoming the exclusive preserve of the rich and traditional elites as it was for millennia under Manu's Code. Land reforms, that was spoken by one and all as the key to the caste question, at least the economic aspects of it, is totally eclipsed and in its place corporatization of farms is being inaugurated to integrate India into world agro markets. Democracy, as the enabler of dissent, agitations, struggle and thereby a hope for change is also getting fast eroded under the onslaught of neoliberal globalization, which is essentially anti-democracy. Contrary to some expectations that globalization will entail modernization in countries like India, and thereby erase the vestiges of caste feudalism; globalization has struck compromise with the local feudal apparatus that can bring in fascistic elements into the society fast. World over, spread of neoliberalism has been accompanied by the growth of religious fundamentalism akin to Hindutva. As for Dalits, there cannot be bigger evidence of this fact that the striking correlation between neoliberalism and the incidence of atrocities.

As neoliberal globalization accentuates the crisis of living for the people, the Hindutva Fascism also will grow. Basically, the latter serves two purposes: one, it deflects the attention of the masses from the real issues and two, it reinforces conformism in them. Both facilitate globalization. For Dalits who have been the victims of the religio-cultural system that Hindutva wants to proudly revive, the spectre is particularly ominous. Notwithstanding the lofty statements issued from various segments of its cohorts, the fact remains that anything Hindu is inconceivable sans castes. Savarkar, who is also credited with

the efforts towards eradication of Untouchability, writes: '*Manusmriti* is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu Nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on *Manusmriti*. Today *Manusmriti* is Hindu Law.'⁴³ Does one need to look for the Hindutva vision elsewhere? The spread of fascist Hindutva is bound to impact the interests of Dalits in terms of the demolition of their social agenda, subjugation of their identity, suppression of culture, their deployment as cannon fodder to further Hindutva agenda, inviting spectre of slavery and increasing atrocities.⁴⁴

We have indeed traversed a long distance from the time since the faint flicker of Fascism two decades ago along the experiential track to see the spectre of Fascism materialising before our eyes. The BJP's spectacular victory in 2014 elections and its ride thereafter opened a text book case of Fascism before us. Its victory in the last (2019) elections, contrary to wishful expectations of progressives, was a foregone conclusion. BJP has ahistorical opportunity to accomplish the goal of its parents to make India a Hindu Rashtra, which may offer a new model to the history as cross between Fascism and Brahminism.

CONCLUSION

While, the existential trend towards fascization of the state, and spiritualization of people could be observed everywhere in the world in the era of globalization, the situation in our country presents a different picture. Here the native creed of Hindutva provides an astoundingly congruent ideology as well as the well developed fascist infrastructure required for neoliberal globalization. This unholy nexus is of paramount importance for strategizing the Dalit struggle against social oppression and material exploitation. Globalization is seen as a process of weakening the nation-state and therefore the struggle against it is imagined only at the global level. This is certainly one of the reasons for the lack of resistance against globalization commensurate with the devastation it has caused. While it is true that the nation-states are weakened under globalization as far as their obligation towards people is concerned, they are made much stronger in their essential role of a coercive instrument of the ruling classes. The spread of

surveillance network around people with aadhar-like instrument, multiplication of draconian laws, erosion of institutional autonomy, and spread of security infrastructure has reduced democracy to its relic that lends legitimacy to the processes of fascization.

Since globalization essentially relies on the conduit of a nation-state, it necessarily becomes the site for anti-globalization struggles. In our country, Hindutva is the face of Fascism as well as the conveyer of the neoliberal ideology. Therefore, the anti-globalization struggles may have to be directed against Hindutva. The nature of this battle also needs to be clearly understood. Many people identify Hindutva with Hinduism and mistake it as a religious movement. Some see it just as a communal force which is against the religious minorities. While it is not untrue, Hindutva is far more sinister than this characterization. While it certainly invokes Hindu religious symbols, and Hindu cultural mores, it is neither a religious nor a cultural movement; it is essentially a political movement. Similarly, it is not just a communalist outfit out to butcher Muslims; it is a force to subjugate spirits of people into conformism, it is against dissent; it is against all who question, who raise their voice. In its essence, it is a fascist movement. It cannot be countered merely by anti-communal secular programmes. It can only be resisted with appropriate strategies for the anti-fascist battle by the masses. For instance, Fascism relies on lies, creating mass hysteria, employing terror tactics, and waging street fights through mobilization of lumpen elements. It therefore may demand commensurate responses on the streets.

Dalits as the biggest victims of this hydra-headed monster are the most critical constituents of this struggle. This monster has not only devastated their livelihood but also destroyed any hope of their emancipation. Unfortunately, they are yet to realize the magnitude of the damage done and the gravity of the impending calamity. The vested interests among them have significantly misled them into believing that globalization holds emancipatory promise for them or Hindutva seeks to accept Dalits into a society sans caste. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Neoliberal globalization neither believes in any such thing as emancipation nor does it have any capacity to provide relief to its harassed victims. Likewise it is impossible for Hindutva to abolish castes without discarding its religio-cultural structure. Moreover, there is no evidence whatsoever that it intends to do it. A spate of atrocities represented by Jajihar (2002) and

Una (2016), which are directly attributable to the wave of fascist-Hindutva, should serve as the reminder for Dalits what Hindutva has in store for them.⁴⁵

Notes

- ¹ V. D. Savarkar: *Hindutva, Who Is Hindu?* (New Delhi: Hindi Sahitya Sadan, 2012); p. 116.
- ² Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva, Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Kolkata: Samya, 1996; New Delhi: SAGE-Samya, 2018); also *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004; New Delhi: SAGE-Samya 2018).
- ³ Shramanism is a compendium term for the sects which were opposed to Brahminism's beliefs and practices. They included Buddhism, Jaina, Lokayata and Ajivika and many other sects that struggled against Brahminism. It is only by A.D. 1000 that Brahminism overpowered Shramanism which far from disappearing has survived in other forms like Puranic religions, Bhakti, Vaishnavism, Shaivism. See Romilla Thapar, 'Imagined Religious Communities? Ancient History and the Modern Search for a Hindu Identity', *Modern Asian Studies* 23 (1989).
- ⁴ 'Caste mainly exists and functions as a regional system'. See M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change and Modern India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969): 3.
- ⁵ Romilla Thapar, 'Syndicated Moksha', *Seminar* 313 (Sept 1985).
- ⁶ Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002): 14.
- ⁷ Ram Puniyani, Review of *RSS's Tryst with Politics* by Pralay Kanungo. 'From Culture to Politics: RSS Bares Its Fangs.' *The Milli Gazette*, 19 Sept 2003; available on milligazette.com/Archives/1511200218.htm.
- ⁸ Shamsul Islam, 'Call off the RSS Bluff', https://www.academia.edu/2491834/CALL_OFF_THE_RSS_BLUFF. Last accessed 28.09.2019.
- ⁹ *ibid.*
- ¹⁰ Golwalkar wrote, 'Our Constitution . . . is just a cumbersome and heterogeneous piecing . . . from various Constitutions of western countries. It has absolutely nothing which can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles as to what our national mission is and what our keynote in life is? No!' *Bunch of Thoughts* (Part 3, *The Path To Glory*), the digital edition available at <https://www.thehinducentre>.

- com/multimedia/archive/02486/Bunch_of_Thoughts_2486072a.pdf (accessed 28 September 2019).
- ¹¹ See Shamsul Islam, 'India's Constitution: When Nation Celebrated Its Adoption, RSS Mourned It', <https://countercurrents.org/2017/11/indias-constitution-when-nation-celebrated-its-adoption-rss-mourned-it> (accessed 28 September 2019).
- ¹² 'Does RSS Have Faith in Democracy, Secularism and Federalism?' In Shamsul Islam, *RSS Primer: Based on Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Documents* (New Delhi: Pharos Media, 2010): 14.
- ¹³ Ashok Malik, 'The BJP, The RSS Family and Globalization in India', *Harvard Asia Quarterly* (16 Sept 2003).
- ¹⁴ John Bellamy Foster, 'Late Imperialism', <https://monthlyreview.org/author/johnbellamyfoster/> (accessed 28 September 2019).
- ¹⁵ R. Cochet. *Thinking the Unthinkable: Think-Tanks and the Economic Counterrevolution, 1931–1983* (London, UK: Fontana Press, 1995); W. Davies. *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (London: SAGE, 2014).
- ¹⁶ N. Gane. 'The Emergence of Neoliberalism: Thinking through and beyond Michel Foucault's Lectures on Biopolitics'. *Theory, Culture, and Society* 31, 4: 3–27 (2014); Rodolfo Leyva. 'No Child Left Behind: A Neoliberal Repackaging of Social Darwinism'. *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 7(1): 364–381.
- ¹⁷ D. Harvey. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); N. Klein. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).
- ¹⁸ Rodolfo, 'No Child Left Behind' 7, 1: 364–81.
- ¹⁹ For example, consider this famous quote from F. Hayek: 'From the fact that people are very different it follows that, if we treat them equally, the result must be inequality in their actual position, and that the only way to place them in an equal position would be to treat them differently. Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either one or the other, but not both at the same time.' Friedrich Hayek, in *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978): 87.
- ²⁰ John Bellamy Foster, 'Late Imperialism'.
- ²¹ David M. Kotz, *Socialism and Global Neoliberal Capitalism*, www.nodo50.org/cubasisgloXXI/congreso/kotz_10abr03.pdf, p. 4, accessed on 28 September 2019.
- ²² Constantine Arvanitopoulos, 'Systemic Changes and Their Impact on Local Conflicts,' *Journal of Foreign Policy Issues* <http://www.hri.org/MFA/thesis/spring99/systemic.html>, accessed on 28 September 2018.

- 23 Anand Teltumbde, 'Hindu Fundamentalist Politics in India and Its Intersection with the Concerns of American Empire in South Asia,' paper presented in the workshop on 'The Post-Cold War International Order and Domestic Conflict in Asia,' National University of Singapore, 29–30 July 2004, <http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/soc/conf/> accessed on 28 September 2019.
- 24 Robert Meyer, What Is Fascism, http://www.geocities.com/bobmeyer_us/meyer01.html, accessed on 28 September 2019.
- 25 I. Frolov. *Dictionnaire Philosophique* (Moscow: Editions du Progres, 1985); also see Marxists on Fascism (web resources), <https://www.marxists.org/subject/fascism/index.htm> (accessed on 28 September 2019).
- 26 P. M. Hayes. *Fascism* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1973); J.J. Linz, 'Towards the comparative study of Fascism'. In W. Laqueur, *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979): 28–29; Z. Sternhell. 'Fascism.' In *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, David Miller, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987): 148; S.G. Payne, 'The Concept of Fascism'. In S.U. Larsen, B. Hagtvet, J.P. Mycklebust, *Who Were the Fascists?* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1980): 7.
- 27 Achin Vanaik, *Communalism Contested: Religion, Modernity and Secularization* (Delhi: Vistaar, 1997), p. 238.
- 28 Ibid.: 278.
- 29 Vanaik, *Communalism Contested*: 238–39. For 'fascist minimum', see Roger Griffin. *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993): 13.
- 30 Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995): 5.
- 31 V. D. Savarkar first time synthesized the term 'Hindutva' as racial, cultural, religious-spiritual unity, a unity of culture and territory in pamphlet called *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* in 1923.
- 32 Tilak always believed in nationhood on the basis of Hindu religion: 'The common factor in Indian society is the feeling of *Hindutva* . . . We say that the Hindus of the Punjab, Bengal, Maharashtra, Telengana and Dravida are one and the reason for this is only Hindu Dharma', quoted by Amlesh Tripathi, *The Extremist Challenge* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1967): 61.
- 33 Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Fascist Heritage', *Communalism Combat*, March 2000. At this time in Britain, there was a lot of admiration by the aristocracy and the middle classes for Fascism. Many upper class Britons admired Hitler. They were not enamoured of democracy because of the fear of the masses. At this time in India it was also 'patriotic' to admire the Germans vs. the Brits and make use of them, e.g., Subhas Chandra Bose.

- ³⁴ Marzia Casolari. 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s', *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, 4 (22 January 2000): 218–28.
- ³⁵ Giuseppe Mazzini (1805–1872), an early idealistic revolutionary who was one of the leaders of the *Risorgimento*, the movement for getting rid of the Austrian rulers of Italy and to unite all the states under a republic. He was part of the revolutions of 1848 in Europe against aristocratic autocracy. Italian Fascism, as admitted by Mussolini, had multi-faceted influences. Fascism was touted by Mussolini as a unique combination of thought and action, and Mazzini is identified as its source. This discussion is well covered in J-Lucien Radel. *Roots of Totalitarianism: The Ideological Sources of Fascism, National Socialism, and Communism* (New York: Crane, Russak, 1975); See Prakash Louis, *The Emerging Hindutva Force: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism* (Indian Social Institute, 2000): 39. See also James Whisker, 'Italian Fascism: An Interpretation,' *Journal for Historical Review* 4, 1 (Spring 1983): 5.
- ³⁶ Marzia Casolari. 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s'. *Economic and Political Weekly* 35, 4 (22 January 2000): 218–228.
- ³⁷ Savarkar said in his presidential address to RSS members in Nagpur on 28 December 1938, 'If we Hindus in India grow stronger in time these Moslem friends of the League will have to play the part of German-Jews.' (*Indian Annual Register* 1939, vol. 2, Calcutta, quoted in Partha Banerjee, 'In the Belly of the Beast,' see excerpts @<http://www.foil.org/politics/Hindutva/partha.html#6> (accessed 12 March 2004).
- ³⁸ Arindam Sen, On Fascism, Communal Fascism and United Front, http://www.archive.cpmi.org/liberation/year_2002/september/special%20article.htm (accessed 28 October 2019).
- ³⁹ From 2014, quite like the Blackshirts in Mussolini's Italy the Hindutva forces have unleashed lumpen gangs to lynch hapless Dalits and Muslims with tacit support from the state machinery. Anand Teltumbde. 'Hindutva Agenda and Dalits', in *Religion, Power and Violence: Expression of Politics in Contemporary Times*, Ram Punyani, ed. (New Delhi: SAGE, 2005): 213.
- ⁴⁰ Prakash Louis, 'Janata Omar Kutty, Party', *The Emerging Hindutva Force: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2000).
- ⁴¹ Kutty, Omar, Sources of Intolerance: The Modern Discourse of the Bharatiya Janata Party, *Sagar- South Asia Graduate Research Journal*, 4, 2 (Fall 1997); available at <http://inic.utexas.edu/asnic/pages/sagar/sagar4.2.html>. accessed 13 March 2004.
- ⁴² Anand Teltumbde, 'Gujarat Carnage, Fascist Hindutva and the Role of Dalits.' In *Lessons from Gujarat*, edited by Sandeep Pendse (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2003): 115–136.

⁴³ V. D. Savarkar, 'Women in *Manusmriti*'. In *Samagra Savarkar Wangmaya: Hindu Rashtra Darshan*, 6 vols (Pune: Maharashtra Prantik Hindusabha, 1963): 416.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 1, n36.

⁴⁵ See Chapter 1.

The Dalits and Hindutva: Gainers and Losers

Sandeep Pendse

Two occurrences sparked off the current debate on the *new* relationship between Hindutva (which I define as the political and social programme of militant communal Hindu organizations—not to be confused with Hinduism, the approximate name for the Hindu religion) and the Dalits. The new relationship is one of apparent cordiality and of convergence of at least *political* interests. The first occurrence was the much publicized, apparently clearly visible participation of the Dalits en mass in the carnage of Muslims in Gujarat—particularly in Ahmedabad city—in March/April 2002. The second occurrence was the apparently positive, at least partially, response to the call for unity of *Bhimshakti* (followers of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, obviously the Dalits) and *Shivshakti* (followers of Shiv Sena [SS], ostensible votaries of militant, read violent Hindutva) by the chief of the Shiv Sena, Mr Uddhav Thackeray (son of the SS founder Mr Bal Thackeray), by Dalit masses and their representatives. There are, of course, less dramatic occurrences. These mainly concern efforts by the BJP and by the core/parent organization the RSS to court and woo Dalit leaders, individuals, ‘intellectuals’, leaders, and masses. These include the inclusion of Dr Ambedkar in its list of *prathasmaraniya* (‘venerated at daybreak’) personalities, the earlier appointment of a Dalit president of the party (the only scapegoat sacrificed at the altar of the Tehelka sting operation), the formation of a Samajik Samrasata Manch (Social Assimilation Platform), and so on.

The debate is slightly peculiar. It reeks strongly of a moral outrage. It has a strong ‘You, too. Brutus?’ character to it. In so far as it does so, it is also a very casteist response and reaction. It *ascribes* socio-political positions to Dalit individuals and masses—a priori—based on their birth and situations/locations/positions in caste terms.

It privileges caste identities over all others. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the apparent reality and look at the situation objectively.

A few points nevertheless must be noted. For many decades Dalit masses, individuals, leaders, and above all organizations and movements have indulged in a strident criticism of the Hindu religion that heaped upon them the inhuman institution of Untouchability. The critique was both theoretical and practical. In the most *radical* form, the critique questioned the caste system itself and as a revolutionary social programme called for its abolition. It was always understood that unlike other non- or anti-Brahmin caste masses the Dalit community was not interested in *caste consolidation*, in keeping caste barriers and identities alive. Its interests lay in the total abolition of the caste system. The dissolution necessarily had to be of the ideology of 'purity and pollution', which is the ideological/philosophical base of Brahminism—the programme of Brahmin superiority and domination that manifests as the prescription and project of chaturvarna or *varnashram dharma* (the system of division of society into four hierarchical strata based on occupations decided by birth). The Dalits did not consider cosmetic changes or 'reforms' within the framework either possible or even desirable. That is precisely why the Hindu efforts to 'mitigate' or even 'abolish' caste oppression/discrimination/differentiation did not excite Dalit masses or evoke a Dalit following. The ideologically and philosophically very different efforts of both Mahatma Gandhi and Savarkar, hence, left Dalit masses quite cold. Dalit critiques of the Hindu religion found practical expression in an abandonment of or 'walk out' from the Hindu fold. The non-vocal, non-organized format was of mass or molecular conversions over the centuries to religions that did not sanctify or recognize the caste system (at least formally and/or theologically): Islam and Christianity. The dramatic and politically visible vocal form, of course, was the mass conversion to Buddhism under the leadership of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar in the 1950s.

The conversion to Buddhism was a social and political act. It was the step of a mass movement. It did not leave any space for accommodation, for compromise. It was a total rejection of the Hindu religion, the caste system and the ideologies of purity and pollution.

LOSS OF CULTURAL VISION

The conversions to Buddhism, though massive and spectacular, were confined to the active followers of Dr Ambedkar and to the state of

Maharashtra. The rejection of Hinduism was not a programme of the entire Dalit community all over the country. Members of a number of Scheduled Castes remained Hindu. They continue to be within the Hindu religious fold even today.

The Dalits nevertheless did not support Hindu political organizations. A few individuals did join the Shiv Sena and even obtained legislative positions as its members. The RSS and its various front organizations never managed to obtain the support of the Dalits. The Hindu organizations too by and large ignored the Dalits. They were till recently generally critical of Dr Ambedkar and his positions. They did not appreciate or approve of the Dalit critique of the Hindu religion. They generally did not support any of the demands of the Dalits. They rarely if ever condemned atrocities against the Dalits. In fact, their supporters or even members were often involved in such atrocities. The Shiv Sena in particular has opposed any Dalit agenda quite vehemently and at times even violently. The attempts to include the Dalits in Hindu organizations were not sparked by any genuine criticism of the caste system. They were generally efforts to avoid internal divisions within the Hindu fold and to present a united face to the 'outside' opponents like Muslims and Christians. Yet another consideration was the numbers of the Dalits in the country. Wooing the Dalits was thus a political necessity for the Hindu organizations.

The BJP since 1989 has increased its parliamentary presence to one of overwhelming dominance in 2019. It won elections to some state assemblies in the early 1990s. In the 1998 and 1999 elections it became the single largest party in the parliament and along with some allies could form a government at the centre. Despite this success, its share of votes remained around 20 to 24 per cent, which was not enough to form a government on its own. This forced the BJP in particular to take the Dalit masses—at least as voters—seriously. The limits of the electoral success—continued narrow share of votes—made it seek new constituencies. The Adivasis and the Dalits are the natural social constituencies that it now attempts to cultivate. These efforts are a part and parcel of its attempts to break out of its traditional support base in the Hindi-speaking belt, the middle classes, and the upper castes. Socially there was the genuine fear that the Adivasis and the Dalits provide fertile ground for the 'conversion' activity of particularly the Christian missionaries, thus weakening the Hindus through numbers and orientation. A political spectre also haunted the Hindu organizations, that of the political unity of the minorities, particularly the Muslims, the Dalits, the Adivasis, and

other groups (castes) oppressed by brahminical Hinduism. Such a unity could completely topple the apple cart of the Hindu organizations and their programme of Hindutva: the transformation of India into a Hindu state.

The BJP along with the RSS has systematically tried to penetrate the Adivasis, the Other Backward Classes (OBC) as well as the southern and the eastern states in general in the past few years. The efforts have been at least partially successful. The attempts to attract the Dalits are of the same kind. One recent form has been an attempted appropriation of Dr Ambedkar. The efforts are not exactly new. *Hindu* interpretations of Dr Ambedkar have been around for some time. They essentially were directed at the Dalits—to convince them that Dr Ambedkar was not anti-Hindu. Even his choice of Buddhism over Christianity or Islam was explained as a basic softness towards Hinduism. (There have been efforts for a long time to portray Buddha and Buddhism as essentially Hindu!) Currently the attempts have become political (as against intellectual interpretative). Dr Ambedkar is now portrayed as anti-Muslim and hence by implication a supporter of Hindu organization, Hindu consolidation, and perhaps Hindu supremacy. In this interpretation, he is painted as a person who might as well have been a supporter of the politics of the Sangh Parivar by projecting (fraudulently) a convergence if not unanimity of views.

It would of course be foolish to imagine that all Dalits at all times would hold the same views or have exactly the same political position. It was never so. Dalit individuals and masses have followed parties and organizations other than the exclusively Dalit ones. Significant sections outside Maharashtra followed the Congress. In Maharashtra too, some of the Scheduled Castes never truly accepted the leadership of Dr Ambedkar. After the death of Dr Ambedkar, even his followers have faced numerous crises—social and political. Only a few mass leaders attempted to chart an independent course for the Dalits and raised basic demands relating to land and other means of livelihood. Others have only raised demands related to the issue of reservations in jobs and sometimes symbolic ones relating to ‘emotional’, cultural issues.

The substantive issue was really the number of seats allocated to specific leaders of the Republican Party of India (RPI)—the political outfit that the Dalits inherited from Dr Ambedkar. In addition, the RPI is fragmented into many sections, which unite periodically under the pressure of the masses and activists but break up again into

leader-centred formations. The repeated splits appear to be caused by tactical differences over alliances—electoral alliances and personal ambitions of leadership. The once very militant and radical organization, Dalit Panthers, too is now fragmented in a similar manner.

The followers of Dr Ambedkar were confined mostly to one particular caste amongst the Dalits. Dr Ambedkar obviously wanted to create an organization of all the oppressed—the names of two of the organizations he created, Independent Labour Party and Republican Party of India—make this very evident. This was sadly not to be. The Dalits from other castes in Maharashtra do not have equally vocal or visible political organizations. They do not even have the numbers to form such organizations.

In other states, some political organizations of the Dalits do exist, somewhat outside the Ambedkarist fold, though all now invoke Dr Ambedkar as the main source of inspiration. Amongst these, the most important is of course the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). It has bases of support in some states, particularly in the Hindi-speaking belt. Dalit masses in these areas do look upon the BSP as their messianic saviour, representative and hope. The policies and politics of the BSP, however, often defy comprehension, being fathomable only to the two supreme leaders of the party. There are reasons to believe that its once well-knit and widespread matrix of organizations and support structures is weakening. A charismatic-populist politics has instead set in and settled down.

Currently another organizational expression, if one can term it such, has to be taken into account. 'Dalit' NGOs provide this expression. Their publicity mechanisms (national and, far more important, international), all too visible and loud presence at most events and occurrences, and dramatic capacity to throw up issues create a formidable aura. Their ground level strength, mass bases, and capacity to really take up the Dalit cause, as well as ideology remain untested. The agenda too many times seems driven by funding and international publicity.

It is necessary to note one more phenomenon. A class of Dalit professional intellectuals has now emerged. A large number of them are independent and 'autonomous'. The 'autonomy' in many cases is not only from social and political organization but also from Dalit masses. The distance between the masses, their day-to-day life and reality, and the world (of ideas and practice) of the intellectual and political spokespersons and representatives (mostly self-appointed) are quite striking.

There is a similar distance now between the life and realities of the rural and urban Dalit masses. This is particularly significant in the case of the youth who now have no real experience of rural situations and experiences.

POLITICAL TRAJECTORY OF THE DALITS

The *politics* is confined to an iconization of Dr Ambedkar and insistence on non-substantive symbolic apparently cultural demands. This agenda is extremely convenient to the upper castes and to the ruling class. Positive action through reservations in (government aided) educational institutions, representative bodies of government, and government employment periodically evokes nasty comments from the upper castes but is not seriously challenged. Some violent incidents have of course taken place on the issue of reservations. These have not reversed the policies. The reservations become irrelevant in a molecular and almost invisible fashion today as under the new economic policies government employment shrinks and educational institutions are privatized. No dramatic opposition to reservations is necessary in such conditions. The concession-seeking political organizations are in no position to challenge or reverse these conditions. They become mostly irrelevant in such cases. The leaders and activists of these organizations increasingly grow distant from the experiences and hence also the perceptions and aspirations of the Dalit masses—particularly the rural masses. (These conditions also create the backdrop for the relative success of BSP that charts a different agenda and course of action than the traditional Dalit parties, principally the RPI.) The Dalit masses then find themselves without genuine representatives, though the intellectual activity of the Dalits, and around Dalit issues, is widespread, intense, and deep over the past few years. Even formal academic activity focussed on Dalit issues has tremendously increased. The new theorization and intellectual advances have by and large not reached the Dalit masses who have not been empowered with new ideas or strategies.

The problem extends to the cultural sphere. The Dalit movement in many parts of the country, including Maharashtra, was marked by intense cultural innovative activity—mainly in the spheres of poetry and literature, and to some extent the performing arts. There is now perhaps more theorization about Dalit culture and a genuine investigation of the cultural traditions and praxis of the Dalits, but

little mass cultural activity or attempts to create alternate radical rationalist democratic culture. The radical cultural initiative of conversion to Buddhism has also run out of steam.

The Dalit masses thus were in a kind of vacuum—ideologically, politically and culturally—when the forces of Hindutva initiated the efforts to recruit them to the Hindutva cause. That of course cannot explain the relative success—if it is that—of the forces of Hindutva to woo some sections of the Dalit masses. One of the factors was perhaps the ‘change’ in the forces of Hindutva. Commentators on the RSS have often noted and described its transformation under the leadership of the third chief of the organization—Mr M. D. Deoras. The change has been termed by some as cosmetic and treated as a façade. It probably was more substantive than that. The ideology remained the same but the programme probably changed. The programme of *narrow* brahminical superiority and domination was replaced by a *new* understanding of Hindutva. It now became a programme of national rejuvenation and national rebirth for a global superiority and domination or versions of that. This required that the RSS break out of its narrow folds and directly or through fronts acquire mass support and mass base. This also meant it had to break language, caste and class barriers.

This was the transformation of the Sangh Parivar from a fringe right wing outfit to a truly fascist organization capable of attempting to implement the fascist programme in social, cultural, economic, and political aspects. The Sangh Parivar then seriously wooed and accommodated castes it had hitherto not touched. It also made efforts to get a toehold in the intellectual life of the country. Some of these efforts were not to succeed immediately. The Sangh Parivar was prepared to wait—even for generations. It seized whatever political opportunities and chances it got to insert itself firmly in the social and political spheres. Some of the efforts started then bore fruits only after two decades!

Some elements may be enamoured with the idea of immediate access to governmental power. They may lose heart impatiently if they lose power. The RSS itself has a far more pernicious and profound agenda. It wants to transform the society and the polity. It has also shown itself capable of differentiating between the essential and contingent elements of the agenda. It has also shown enough flexibility to jettison the peripheral and accidental elements when they hinder the realization of the core programme and the grand vision. Seen in this light, the efforts to attract and accommodate the Dalits along with

the Adivasis in the Sangh Parivar fold are neither fraudulent nor cosmetic. They are 'genuine'. The question remains what will be the RSS vision for the Dalits and whether the latter would at all be helped by it. That however must remain a task for another article. The task for this one is to look at the *material base* of the new relationship.

Here again two facts need to be noted. Firstly, Dalit individuals may have been drawn even in the past to ideologies of Hindu communalism. There are reports that the RSS in some places quite consciously recruited Dalits. One of the founders of Dalit Panthers, who leads one faction of the organization to date, has been a close ally of the Shiv Sena for some years. Secondly, some Dalits have participated in violence against the Muslims even in the past. The Shiv Sena—in its initial years, prior to the formation of Dalit Panthers—did attract Dalit youth who should have been part of the Ambedkarist movement. It was reported in 1992–93 that Dalits in some parts did attack Muslims. Thirdly, the current support of the Dalits to Hindutva forces seems to be larger, widespread and persistent as never before. A few factors make the current situation different and thus spark the current debate. The individuals who appear on the platforms of the right wing organizations now claim to do so as representatives of the Dalit community and not merely as individuals. The alliance is projected as a social and political position of the community—not merely as ideological 'enlightenment' of some individuals. The general feeling—perhaps purposely created—also is that Dalit leaders and activists are aligning with the forces of Hindutva all over the country, in increasing numbers.

The response to the call for the unity of Bhimshakti and Shivshakti was not outright contemptuous rejection. Some activists and leaders welcomed the idea. Some dithered. One prominent leader said the unity was possible if the Shiv Sena abandoned its stand of militant Hindutva. It seemed that these people had either forgotten or at least forgiven the involvement of elements of the Shiv Sena in a number of incidents of violence against the Dalits, including the massive violence in Marathwada in 1978. This involvement is not an accidental occurrence of the distant past. It is a continuous trend. The involvement of the Dalits, though not in an organized manner, in the carnage of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002 was also somewhat different. It did not seem accidental. In Ahmedabad it looked like a conscious acceptance of the position and leadership of the Hindu communal organizations. It is necessary to ask what material conditions propel Dalits to the

new attraction of Hindutva. It is also necessary to ask why Hindutva makes these overtures and which Dalits feel attracted by these. Who gains and who loses in the new alliance?

MATERIAL CONDITIONS AND BASE

The contemporary situation of the Dalits is quite contradictory. Caste discrimination persists to date in most parts of the country. It is particularly severe in the rural areas. Untouchability is officially banished but exists—for most rural Dalits—at the level of day-to-day almost subterranean practices. The names of the localities have changed but the residential quarters of the Dalits are still in isolated enclaves on the outskirts of the villages. Discrimination often takes violent forms. Crimes against the Dalits, in essence, caste atrocities, are rampant. Killings, mutilations, physical assaults, rapes, public humiliation, attacks on their houses and localities, burning down of houses and crops, social boycotts occur with a fair amount of regularity. Incomes in rural areas are abysmally low, poverty is intense—way above the national figures for the entire population—even in the most developed and advanced states. Landlessness is massive, underemployment or unemployment is quite common. The rate of dropouts after primary school is quite high. A duality in education exists in practice. Of the Dalits, a very few actually pursue careers in streams that are considered lucrative today—science and technology—at an advanced level. They are still largely confined to the humanities, languages and social sciences. These streams are not particularly efficient in the job markets. In the urban areas, a vast majority live in slums, work in insecure generally unskilled jobs in the informal sector and eke out a precarious living. They are repeatedly forced into traditional jobs, as sweepers and scavengers in the conservancy departments of municipalities and varied housing estates. The jobs in the public sector and organized sector have almost dried up. In industry too, the skills and grades structure parallels the caste hierarchy.

On the other hand, definite changes *have* taken place. Despite the tardiness education has spread. There is now a pool of Dalit academics across the country. A number of them have acquired steady jobs in the teaching profession, in government services, and in public enterprises. A middle class has thus come into existence. The middle class is also not a first generation middle class. It has thus stabilized in its class locations and in its social attitudes. The Dalits, maybe from

some specific castes, have also embarked on business ventures. Many have reached non-ceremonial important positions in public offices and bureaucracy. The percentage of the Dalits who have made good is very low, but the numbers are now not insignificant. They matter.

Changes have also taken place in the rural areas, though they are tardy and insufficient. The number of Dalit cultivators, the area they cultivate, and the size of their operational holdings is low compared to the average for the rural population of the country or any particular state. It is common knowledge that land reforms and land redistribution in India is at best patchy and in many cases only a paper entry. Some lands have nevertheless come to the Dalits, at least in some states. Pasture lands and village common lands in particular have been distributed. They have also made some small gains through various government schemes. Some have received training and some seed capital for related occupations. Some have received some animals. Some have obtained houses. The proportions and absolute numbers are extremely low. The changes have however occurred. Some agricultural labourers have derived benefits from various schemes and legislations. The data regarding these facts are easily available from official and semi-official sources. It is therefore not necessary to load this essay with tables.

There has also been a change in attitudes. Dalit youth—particularly ones with urban experience and upbringing—are defiant and assertive. They refuse, even on occasional trips back to the village, to take the traditional attitude of subservience to the upper castes/classes. Aware of their formal rights they insist on their fulfilment. They are often prepared to incur a confrontation to protect their rights—symbolic and substantive. Changes have not only been internal to the Dalit community. There have been numerous changes in the economy of the cities and villages as well as their social compositions. These also inevitably have an impact on them. To understand the political attitudes—particularly towards Hindutva—it is necessary to look at the impact of these changes.

THE RURAL/AGRICULTURAL SCENE

The causes of violence against the Dalits in the current phase indicate something about the reality of their situation and conflicts in the rural areas. The violence is caused by issues relating to wages, land, water use, political participation (particularly where the panchayat has

reserved seats/posts for them, social assertion, and inter-caste marriages (specifically of a Dalit boy with an 'upper' caste girl).

The conflict is now with farmers, those who personally cultivate or supervise the cultivation of their lands. These farmers in most areas are not the traditionally *dominant* castes, broadly Brahmins and Rajput-Kshatriyas, but middle and upper-backward *cultivating* peasant castes. The situation of these farmers is quite peculiar. They are the new entrepreneurial groups in agriculture as also the new economically dominant group—being the capitalists and petty capitalists in agriculture and related activities. These groups have made rapid economic progress. The political clout of these groups is uneven and comparatively new. They do not wield the same traditional ritual and ideological social power that the earlier dominant groups did. They need and demand greater democratization of access to political power and to resources. They also need to assert their position socially. This involves challenging the domination by the Brahmin and Rajput-Kshatriya combine on the one hand and subjugating the other 'lower' castes on the other hand. The rhetoric is thus of equality and egalitarianism while the practice is of domination. The hegemony of these groups is weak, probably still in formation. It is also likely to be ever incomplete since their presence is restricted to agriculture and related activities, forever, and particularly in the age of globalization under a constant threat. They thus present two faces, broadly secular and democratic on one side while casteist and militantly oppressive on the other.

The traditional, feudal oppressors were in some senses *once removed* from the immediate scene of rural production. The new entrepreneurial groups are very rooted and inserted in the rural reality. As cultivators, they are in day-to-day command of the operations. The relationship with the Dalits—the marginal farmers, and far more the agricultural labourers in the same areas—thus is immediate, day-to-day, and essentially antagonistic.

It is, of course, naïve to imagine that capitalist operations in agriculture lead to secularization and democratization of all social relations in the rural areas. Capitalism does not do so anywhere in any sphere. It needs and attempts to generate producers and consumers with predictable, steady commonalities and least possible specific variations. It does not, however, automatically dissolve traditional identities, differences, discriminations. These often get interwoven and included in the capitalist social structure, which get utilized to create

specificities of products and markets; and, more important, to maintain divisions amongst the workers. Ideological and social domination of the principal group of workers—for the sake of continued exploitation and compliance with supremacy of ruling class—is usually based on these traditional primordial differences and identities. Race, ethnicity, language, geographical origins, nationality, and caste as well as gender are utilized in a similar manner. Oppression of the traditional ‘outsider’ or ‘lower’ groups often acquires social acceptance or at least prevents general outrage and an effective unity of all oppressed.

The levels of violence thus may even be more intense now than they were in the past because in a number of areas the Dalits no longer obediently accept upper caste dictates. There is another marked difference. The Brahmins and the Rajput-Kshatriyas were and were seen as the carriers and spokespersons of traditional religious Hindu domination. They also represented the Hindu political forces in many areas. The middle and backward castes are not seen necessarily as representatives of the forces of Hindutva, though their attitudes are casteist. Politically, thus, the Dalits find themselves in conflict with organizations that represent the middle and backward castes that formally take a ‘secular’ stand, rather than with the Hindutva organizations. The latter have used this situation to appeal to the Dalits—to attempt to set them up against these social and political opponents—and promise protection and progress under the Hindutva umbrella. The disputes are both economic and social. In fact, the social atrocities are utilized to subdue the Dalits economically and keep them in bondage. The specific stands taken by the political and social organizations of the middle and upper-backward castes obviously influence the overall scene in different areas. These organizations are however by and large silent or in practice inactive about the situation of the Dalits.

The Dalits generally have no conflict with the Muslims in the rural areas. Only in small specific pockets, there may be competition or sometimes antagonism. The Dalits thus did not participate in the violence against Muslims in rural areas to any great extent even in Gujarat in 2002. In fact, in some villages they silently protected the Muslims. Similar incidents were also reported in 1992–93. The Dalits on rare occasion participated in the violence under compulsion or under ideological sway.

THE URBAN SCENE

Industrialization and urbanization changed the nature of caste but did not abolish it. The discrimination became indirect and less visible but did not disappear. The Dalits were and are mainly workers, and thus constitute part of the working class. Over the years, however there has been a segregation and confinement to specific industries and particular kinds of jobs. The case of the textile industry in Mumbai is well known. Segregation seems to exist in departments, in pieces of equipment (machines to be operated), as well as in tables in the canteen. The residential areas are clearly marked out, as localities, buildings or sub areas even within slums.

The shrinking job market has meant a large-scale unemployment of Dalit youth. The unemployment creates lumpenization and thus recruits for both the lower ranks of the underworld and militant organizations of different varieties. Many scholars¹ have attributed the participation of the Dalits in the violence against Muslims, in particularly Ahmedabad in Gujarat in 2002, to this large-scale unemployment and lumpenization along with a competition with the Muslims for similar employment and occupational opportunities. This explains a part of the reality. The unemployment may not be an adequate reason for the appeal of Hindutva to the Dalits but it certainly constitutes an important factor. Its salience depends upon the general social and political situation. The prevalence of Hindutva ideology in a particular society is a significant factor in this regard. It occurs in conditions where the secular and Left movements and ideologies are weak. It reveals the reasons for participation in riots and in violence. It does not say why Hindutva holds sudden appeal for them.

CONTEMPORARY CAPITALISM, THE DALITS, AND HINDUTVA

The era of globalization has restructured the economy. The organized industrial sector has dwindled. There is large-scale unemployment. There is also no hope of employment in the foreseeable future. Production is diverted to small units in the unorganized sector that offers no security of employment or wages. There is a constant and permanent drift. The competition for jobs is also intense. Increased migration from rural areas further intensifies the competition. Petty self-employment has forced many former and potential workers into

insecure, marginal existence. Collectivities are breaking down at all levels. The broad picture is of constant insecurity, the precarious existence, the invisibility of the system, shrinkage of social welfare and security nets, loss of hope and absence of genuine organizational representation. This leads to restlessness, unfocussed anger, a search for genuine or imagined palpable assailable enemies, and a hankering for direct action for immediate redress of grievances.

The background is the weakness of radical Dalit and secular organizations. In Ahmedabad, they are almost absent. There is no real tradition of working class, radical movements. The centrist movements have now become ineffective. Elsewhere too Dalit and Left organizations are mostly weak and in a defensive mode. They have very few actions at the civil society level. They have been unable to create radical, democratic, secular, non-commercial cultural alternatives. The organizations were based on the premise of a vigilant, interventionist, responsive and active state, whatever its ultimate class and caste character. The shrinkage and withdrawal of the state also leaves the organizations without a clear agenda. They lose their potency to represent, protect and advance the interests of Dalit masses. Historically the Dalit organizations were unable to make the transition to a revolutionary ideology, programme and action. This too makes them vulnerable in the contemporary phase of capitalism.

The Dalit masses then are at a loss. They also search for an identity and through that community support and collective action. The role of assertion of Dalit identity was revolutionary. It brought together the most oppressed people. It gave them a sense of dignity and personhood. It clearly identified the reasons for their oppression and terrible status in the system of caste and in vile sinful acts of commission of the upper caste ruler-managers of Hindu society. It gave them a basis to resist and fight against the oppression. It also laid the foundations for a vision of a future society free of any exploitation, discrimination, and oppression. It provided the nucleus for a search for new culture that also was expressed through the Buddhist tradition. Practically it provided a focus for organization that could negotiate concessions and protective legislation. The identity that at least a section of the mass now needs is an assertive identity—however illusory it may be—not one that encapsulates and identifies oppression and degradation. Hindutva in the current stance creates the illusion of that identity for the Dalits, and at least some of them fall a prey to the invitation by the spider into its parlour!

The major support base of Hindutva comes from the middle class. The diaspora plays an equally important role. The majority of the middle class—resident Indian and NRI—finds that forces of Hindutva represent its interests and articulate an ideology that suits it, and is a vocal and active supporter. It has no interest in the Dalit masses or cause. It only wishes to include the the Dalits firmly in the Hindu fold. It may not have overcome its casteist attitudes but no longer needs to actively exhibit or parade them. It practices its casteism silently and subtly. It therefore is not opposed to some marginal reforms even in the ritual sphere. It is not in real competition with the Dalit middle class. The educated middle class Dalits only take up positions and occupations that the ‘upper’ caste middle class no longer wants.

The capitalist class as a whole has no conflict with the economic and social policies of the BJP. Its response to aggressive communalism and to the agenda of Hindutva is however not uniform. The trading lobby as well as the up-start speculators have generally supported the agenda of Hindutva. The industrial lobby has not been happy with policies that lead to communal violence. This contradiction is reflected in the tension (however superficial) between different organizations within the Sangh Parivar and between its ‘moderate’ and ‘hard-line’ faces.

DALIT MIDDLE CLASS

The discussion cannot be complete without a discussion of the Dalit middle class. As mentioned earlier, it is now at a distance from the experiences, grievances, and aspirations of the Dalit masses, both urban and rural. It has now come into its own and developed distinct interests. It now aspires not for a distinct and separate identity but for assimilation and acceptance within the mainstream, including the Hindu fold. It no longer even promotes any democratic, radical cultural expressions. It wishes above all for integration.

CONCLUSION

The questions can now be asked again. What material interests propose inclusion of the Dalits within the Hindutva fold? Which section does the proposal attract? The answers as argued are not very simple. Complex mechanisms are at work. The political and social forces of Hindutva wish to prevent any opposition to Hindutva by the Dalits

in unity with other oppressed sections including the religious minorities. They also need the numbers of the Dalits for electoral purposes and for extra-parliamentary actions, including violent communal outbursts. The Dalit middle class is partially in grip of the desire for integration and acceptance. The Dalit masses are mostly rudderless without any effective leadership. They are unwitting victims of the fraudulent promise of inclusion as equals within the mainstream.

Note

- ¹ See, for instance, Anand Teltumbde, *Damning the Dalits for the Bania-Brahmin Crimes in Gujarat*, available at <http://www.countercurrents.org/dalit-gujarat.htm>. Accessed 19 July 2019.

Hindutva's Social Engineering: Dalits' Participation in the Anti-Muslim Pogrom, Gujarat 2002

Ram Puniyani

The rise of Hindutva politics has brought to the fore a very complex phenomenon. Hindutva as the politics of the elite upper caste/class Hindus aims to maintain the status quo of caste and gender relationships; manifests its politics by propagating hate against the minorities in general and the Muslims in particular. The rights of Dalits in particular are the main targets of Hindutva politics. While this is the core phenomenon, what appears at the surface is the 'Hate Minority' campaigns, which in turn creates a social hysteria, violence and an intimidating atmosphere. In this atmosphere, the core issues of society relating to bread, shelter, employment and the like get undermined. At the same time one is witnessing the political alliance between the Hindutva party, the BJP, and the 'Dalit' party, the Bahujan Samaj Party.

Similarly, one witnessed that the same Dalits, whose rights are on the chopping block of Hindutva, being mobilized as the foot soldiers of this politics. The Gujarat carnage showed in a crystal clear fashion how the politics of Hindu communalism could use its prime target, its prime victims, to browbeat Muslims, who are projected as the main threat to Hindu unity. In a way the majority of Indian Muslims are ex-untouchables. The present events are turning them into new untouchables. In this game the Dalits are the handmaidens for achieving the agenda of the Sangh Parivar, the goal of Hindu Rashtra, a concept that is the polar opposite to the concept of secular democratic India. Hindutva, or the politics aiming to bring about a Hindu Rashtra, is the new edition of *Manusmriti* in the modern context. It is interesting how social engineering and politics can be manipulated to use prime targets to be unleashed upon the secondary

targets in order to bring back the birth-based hierarchies in a refined and modern garb.

INDIAN SOCIETY: CASTE SYSTEM

The caste system has been the basic hallmark of Indian society. There are various theories about its origin. The original myth describes primeval sacrifice and the emergence of four groups, 'Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, which were subsequently called the four varnas. Jatis [castes] are not mentioned until the later part of the corpus.'¹ 'The Aryans were the dvija or twice born castes (the first being the physical birth and the second being initiation into caste status), consisting of Kshatriyas (warriors, aristocracy, the Brahman (priests) and the Vaishya (cultivators), the fourth caste, Shudras, were *dasas*, and those of mixed Arya *Dasa* origin.'² A late hymn of the Rig Veda provides a mythical origin of the castes:

When the gods made a sacrifice with the man as their victim, when they divided the man, into how many parts did they divide him? What was his mouth, what were his arms, what were his thighs and his feet called. The Brahmin was his mouth, of his arms were made the warrior Kshatriyas. His thighs became the Vaishyas, and of his feet the Shudras were born.³

By making caste as the system devised by Lord Brahma, it was put beyond the pale of questioning or being challenged. This way the social organization was able to sustain the production and exploitation of the low castes. The tyranny of the upper castes was dual: economic and social and political. Over a period of time strict rules of marriage were enforced; this was always within one's caste, in other words, endogamy was followed, which reinforced and perpetuated caste. By and by the caste-based hierarchy became rigid and the Shudra castes were excluded from inter-dining as well as inter-marriage. This found reflection in the rigid theories of Manu, whose *Manav Dharamashatra* (Human Law Code), known as the *Manusmriti*, codified these practices into laws.

ISLAM IN INDIA: CONVERSIONS

Despite popular belief, the conversions to Islam were not due to the influence of Muslim kings. It was a miniscule minority, which took

to Islam due to the intimidation of Muslim kings or lure for power. The majority of conversions to Islam took place from the low caste Shudras who were won over by Islam primarily because of its intrinsic egalitarian attitude and the influence of the humanistic teachings of the Sufi saints. Shudras, despite being the formal part of the Hindu fold were under the severe oppression and repression of the upper caste Brahmins and Brahminism. To quote Vivekananda 'Why amongst the poor of India so many are Mohammadians? It is nonsense to say that the sword converted them. It was to gain liberty from Zamindars and Priests.'⁴ Later the converts swelled in number due to the impact of the Sufi saints, who used local customs and rituals to propound the humanistic aspects of Islam. The major converts to Islam do come from the Shudras, and rough estimates will show that 95 per cent of Indian Muslims came from this category. During the Mughal rule, though the Muslim aristocracy came from some descendents of the invading Muslims, in due course, many a Hindu raja and landlord allied with the Muslim kings. Akbar's court had Raja Mansingh, Raja Birbal and Raja Todar Mal in high places. 'Hindus formed roughly 24 per cent of the nobility under Shah Jahan, they accounted for about 33 per cent of nobles during second half of Aurangzeb's reign, while their total number rose to one and a half times.'⁵ Barring the aristocratic sections of Muslims, the majority of Muslims shared their plight with the low caste Shudras. The caste system started affecting the Muslims also, though in a mild manner, and the Muslims came to be divided into two main groups, *Ashraf* (*Sharifjate*) and *Ajlaf* (*Kaminjate*).

Both low caste Hindus and the majority of Muslims shared a common cultural and social life. Their spirituality was expressed more in the Sufi movement and the Bhakti movement rather than through ulema or Brahmins. As such Dalitbahujans and Muslims shared a great deal of social and cultural life, 'With the Turukoollu [Muslims] we shared several cultural relations . . . We both celebrated the Peerila festival. Many Turkullooo come with us to the fields. The only people with whom we had no relations, whatsoever, were Baapanoollu [Brahmins] and Koomatoollu [Baniyas].'⁶

BRITISH PERIOD: SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

The social and political hierarchy prevalent in this country started breaking with the changes brought in by British rule and more so by their plunder project. The necessity for workers in the newly set up factories, the introduction of modern education, which was made

accessible to all sections irrespective of their castes, started the process of erosion in the centuries old caste structure. Mahatma Jotiba Phule's recognition of the needs of the low castes was very apt. He worked for the education of this section of society. 'This social mobility also made these upcoming men from the lower strata painfully aware of the need for acquisition of literary skills to secure employment.'⁷ In due course it started to break the gender hierarchy as well. The middle and late nineteenth century was a period of great turmoil. It saw multiple aspirations being articulated. On the one hand there was emergence of the Indian National Congress (INC) as a representative of the newly rising classes, which was amongst its Hindu adherents, mostly an upper caste phenomenon. One also witnessed the movements initiated by Phule. He elaborated the deeper mechanisms of the Brahmin rule. According to him, it was a regime that used the state power and religious hegemony to maintain exploitation. His contribution to the renaissance movement is yeomen, as today he is regarded in the highest esteem not only by the Dalit movement but also by the women's movement. In his book *Sarvajanik Satyadharma*, he propounds a religion of the same name, calling for gender equality in the strongest terms. He condemns the then prevalent brahminical Hinduism as the perpetuator of superstition, a bag of tricks, and a weapon of domination. Very interestingly, in this book, he refers to an ideal family in which, the father becomes a Buddhist, the mother a Christian, the daughter a Muslim and the son a Satyadharmist. He does not put Hinduism in this scheme of things and puts the condition of it being recognized only if its upholders, the Brahmins, give up the claim to be 'earth-gods'.

This period saw the early simmering of the process, which had the elements of breaking birth-based hierarchies. At this juncture, three main movements are discernible. One, those related to the national movement, the one around the INC. This movement asked for more facilities for industrialists, more scope for educated classes and for land reforms. Two, the Dalit movement emerged in the form of the pioneering work of Jotiba Phule. The third one was the one of women's emancipation which laid the base for women coming to social space and later strive for equality. The Hindu elite class, the declining classes of the landlords, did react to this situation. The Brahmin-zamindar nexus felt a double threat. Firstly, it perceived that the rise of the INC was going to eclipse their political power based on divine right. Secondly, they perceived the threat from the movement

of the Dalits, untouchables, who were getting some education and aspired to move to the cities to work in the factories, thus breaking the shackles of brahminical ideology. In practice it would mean that the Dalits would escape from the hegemony of the landlords.

HINDU NATIONALISM: EARLY FORMULATIONS

This process was also accompanied by various reforms and this posed a challenge to the existing social structure. 'As a response to this threat a number of high caste Hindus, mostly Brahmins, undertook to reform their society and its religious practices in order to adapt them to Western modernity while preserving the core of Hindu tradition, which they defined mainly in brahminical terms.'⁸ The embryo of Hindutva can be discerned in Swami Dayanand Saraswati's formulations. These were the basis of the Arya Samaj. Saraswati rejected the social system, jati or caste, and called for preservation of varna at the same time, 'his reinterpretation enabled him to rehabilitate a social system of ritual hierarchy, in the guise of the so-called ancestral varna system. Even though he considered Brahmins to be for the development of suppression and the decline of Hindu society, the alternative social model he proposed was based largely on traditional—mainly brahminical—worldview, as his strict endogamy of the varnas indicates.'⁹ These were broadly the ideas, which underlined Hindu nationalism all through.

Among the landowning elite (landlords, nawabs, rajas) response to this phenomenon came in the form of United India Patriotic Association, which opposed the politics of the INC and called for the loyalty of Indians to the empress of Britain. Later the Hindu communal elements were to separate from this association to form the Punjab Hindu Sabha, the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, joined by some from other organizations including the INC.

It was difficult for the Brahmin-zamindar alliance to oppose the social changes that were taking place among the Dalits. Instead, they focused on the opposition to Muslim communal politics, the Muslim League, which was mainly formed by the Muslim elites. This Hindu elite came up with the formulation of Hindutva, which was properly articulated by Savarkar in 1923. While the primary opposition was to the rise of Dalits and also of women, who were giving up seclusion to participate in national politics, the reaction manifested in the form of opposition to the Muslims as a whole. This was the process of

deflection, in which the primary goal is kept under wraps for reasons of logistics and the whole debate is focused on the non-issue and another target is manufactured and projected as the primary enemy. The opposition to Muslims, projection of the Muslims as a threat, falls in this category. As such, Muslim and Hindu landholders and rajas had nothing to fear from each other. They had their separate territories to rule and exploit. But this religion-laced language and politics could act as a good handle to mobilize the middle sections of society for political goals.

Along with the emergence of Dalits, that is, their coming to avail of modern education and migrating to cities for employment, the embryo of the Hindutva movement came up with rabid anti-Muslim rhetoric. One recalls that the Hindu landholders had no obstacles during the Mughal rule. One also recalls that the Brahmins had no problems during the Mughal empire as such; overall Hindu landlords and Brahmins, who formed a nexus, did not suffer during Mughal rule. The British, in pursuance of their divide-and-rule politics, brought in the communal view of history and projected themselves as the saviours of the Hindus from the tyranny of the Muslim rulers' atrocities. Trying to be loyal to the British, this section fully accepted the British view, which also served as a good cover to hide their opposition to the process of caste and gender transformation which had began in a small way during the mid and late nineteenth century, as mentioned earlier. This clever ploy was to underline Hindutva politics all through: 'From the 1870s, a section of Hindu zamindars, moneylenders and middle class professionals began to arouse anti-Muslim sentiments. Fully accepting the colonial view of Indian history, they talked of "tyrannical" Muslim rule in the medieval period and the liberating role of the British in "saving" Hindus from Muslim oppression.'¹⁰

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: HINDUTVA CRYSTALLIZES

Hindu communal politics began to intensify gradually with the formation of the Hindu Mahasabha. Its agenda was to oppose the process of social transformation whereby the low castes were trying to come out of the grip and tyranny of the upper castes. As it was not possible to oppose social transformation in a blatant way, they resorted to preserve the brahminical order by calling for the need for Hindu unity vis-à-vis the outside enemy, the Muslims. While the national movement had the agenda of opposing British rule, the early Hindutva ideologues

aimed at being in the good books of the British, to neutralize them so that they could act against the enemy (the Muslims). Lal Chand, a Hindu nationalist ideologue, in his book *Self-Abnegation in Politics* pointed out that 'Hindus should try to neutralize the third party, the Government, in their fight against Muslims.'¹¹

Dr Moonje one of the major ideologues and later one of the founders of the RSS, wrote,

If the Chaturvanya [the system of the four orders], which is a distinctive feature of the Aryan civilization in the world, is to be maintained and to prosper, as I believe it should, and yet union and solidarity is to be evolved, it must give up its system of water-tight compartments of caste and bring about a real organic unity between the four sections which can be done by again bringing into vogue the system of marriages of what are called *Anuloma* (higher caste man marrying low caste woman) and *Pratiloma* (low caste man marrying high caste woman) *paddhti* (tradition) as provided in our Dharmashastras with a view to bind the four sections of society in blood connections and thus bring out the organic unity out of the very diversity of sociological functions allotted to these four original varna and caste.¹²

Christophe Jaffrelot points out,

The Hindu Nationalist eulogy of the varna system must also be reinterpreted in the social context of the majoritarian community itself: in Maharashtra in 1920s there arose an anti-Brahmin movement and then an agitation of untouchables led by Dr Ambedkar. Hence the attempt by high caste reformers to promote hierarchical but prestigious social models such as the varna system . . . in 1923 the Hindu Mahasabha voted in favour of resolution calling for untouchables to enjoy access to roads, schools . . . However this egalitarianism was presented in an organist model of society in which social hierarchy was merely relaxed through reinterpretation of the varna system. This hierarchical model remained in effect a mainstay of identity and the caste system was to be reformed largely in order to legitimize it.¹³

This fear of cracks in the caste hierarchy were linked with the conversions of low castes to Islam and other religions. In the wake of the Khilafat movement at the end of World War I, these stereotypes against Muslims coalesced with an emerging Hindu nationalist ideology. Rather than doing away with the caste system, Hindu nationalism projected the fear of Islam and Muslims and made it a part of Hindu communal common sense. The real agenda of the preservation of the caste system was hidden and an external enemy was projected with full vigour to camouflage its agenda.

The introduction of separate electorates played the role of intensifying the projection of Muslims as the 'enemy': 'The colonial authorities and the communalists together evolved another power instrument for the spread and consolidation of communalism in separate electorates which were introduced in the Morley-Minto reforms of 1909. Under this system Muslim voters and (later Sikhs and others) were put in separate constituencies from which only Muslims could stand as candidates.'¹⁴ It led to strengthening of communal identities, which was what intended by the 'divide and rule' policy of the British.

As the concept of Hindutva evolves, there is a gradual transition from the possibility of collapse of the caste and gender hierarchies to the threatening Other, who is accused of trying to destroy Hindu unity and the Hindu Nation. Savarkar emerged as the major ideologue of Hindutva who coined this word and the concept in a clear way. The threatening Other is the mainstay of this ideology and internal inequalities are glossed over while subtly glorifying the era when these hierarchies were the major markers of society:

O Hindus, consolidate and strengthen Hindu Nationality; not to give wanton offences to any of our non-Hindu compatriots, in fact to anyone in the world but in just and urgent defence of our race and land; to render impossible for others to betray her or to subject her to unprovoked attacks by any other 'Pan-isms' that are struggling forth from continent to continent.¹⁵

Savarkar further identifies the territory from Sindhu to the seas as the home of Hindu culture and Hindu people (see also Essay 2). 'The mix of brahminical Hinduism with nationalism reflecting the interests of the upper castes and part of the upper class was defined and later

refined on the exclusionist principles, which are so basic to the Brahminism.¹⁶

SOCIAL CONTENT TO HINDU RASHTRA: THE RSS

The inspirations behind the formation of the RSS show the agenda of Hindutva. From the 1920s, Gandhi's arrival on the political scenario resulted in the reduction of the Brahmin influence in the Congress. Gandhi, a devout Hindu, was closer to the Bhakti traditions of Hinduism as opposed to the brahminical values, which were the foundation of Hindu nationalism. The RSS was to continue this *deflection* further, 'however its dominant mission as an ideological akhara, was clearly directed against the Muslim, as the events of 1927 in Nagpur reveal. RSS volunteers were involved in a riot during the procession of Mahalakshmi (the festival of Lakshmi, goddess of prosperity).'¹⁷ 'The centrality of Maharashtra in the formation of ideology and organization of Hindutva in the mid-1920s might appear rather surprising, as Muslims here were a small minority and hardly a threat, and there had been no major riots in this region at that time. Maharashtra had witnessed a powerful anti-Brahmin movement by the backward castes from 1870s onwards, when Jotiba Phule had founded Satyashodhak Samaj. By the 1920s the Dalits had started organizing themselves under Ambedkar. Hindutva in 1925, as in 1990–1991, was an upper caste bid to restore the slipping hegemony.'¹⁸

Gandhi's arrival on the centre stage of Indian politics in 1920 came as a big setback to Hindu nationalism. Ashis Nandy points out that Gandhi was resented by the upper caste Hindus because he posed a real danger to their social position. His mobilization of lower strata of society 'threatened to alter the basic characteristic of Indian society by making its cultural periphery, its centre'.¹⁹ 'Furthermore Gandhi antagonized many a Maharashtrian Brahmin who joined the RSS because of his [Gandhi's] Hinduism, largely influenced by Bhakti, excluded many brahminical values.'²⁰

HINDUTVA FLEXES MUSCLES

The Hindu Mahasabha-RSS movement remained on the margins for a long time. The process of industrialization and the growth of educational facilities were the major markers of independent India, and Dalits and women also started benefiting from this in some ways.

The constitutional safeguards of reservation supported the entry of Dalits into the social space in large numbers. The RSS family never came into the open to oppose the reservations for tactical reasons but implicitly and by word of mouth it kept attacking the low castes as the 'sons-in-law' of the government, the undeserving privileged people. It did not bring this anti-Dalit bias out in the open till the early 1980s when the first anti-Dalit riots were unleashed in Gujarat in 1980 and then in 1984. These riots were aimed at the Dalits who were beneficiaries of the reservation system, which gave them access to medical and engineering colleges. The 1984 one was against the job quotas for the backward but not untouchable castes. 'During both these agitations, the Brahman, Bania, Patidar combine acquired savarna [caste Hindu] unity. In both the agitations, the Sangh Parivar directly or indirectly supported the savarna.'²¹

Nandy and his co-editors point out that after the 1981 agitation, the national leadership of the BJP became conscious of the growing resentment that the Dalits felt for them. By the mid-1980s they had systematically started co-opting the Dalits and the Adivasi communities. Nandy and his co-editors explain this disturbing trend as being due to the apparent capacity of the Parivar to provide an easy channel of upward mobility to the Dalits within Hindu society. 'It seems that a sizeable number of Dalits, despite popular stereotypes, have been looking for such an alternative model of Sanskritization. In this model, a violent or heroic defence of Hinduism allows one to transcend one's lowly caste status, at least temporarily.'²² The process of social engineering came to the fore during the early 1980s. 'Earlier the ultimate symbolic target of hate was the Dalit, now it was the Muslim.'²³

The complex process of social engineering was consciously carried out by different wings of the Sangh Parivar.

These anti-reservation agitations played a key role in consolidating the base of upper castes and upwardly mobile middle classes. The Sangh Parivar stood by to support these upper caste onslaughts. By using clever strategies the Sangh Parivar was also able to give an upwardly mobile channel to a section of Dalits, who were aspiring for a better place within Hindu society. In Gujarat one can clearly see the social functionality of creating the 'other' (Muslim). Here, earlier the ultimate object of hate was the

Dalit, by a clever manoeuvre, the Muslim was substituted for that, the Dalit has been unleashed upon the 'other', an atmosphere of terror was created, which helped to maintain a 'status quo' of social hierarchy . . . (Muslim). Various Yatras and campaigns by the VHP gave cohesion to this social base.²⁴

MANDAL-MANDIR AND ASCENDANCE OF HINDUTVA

The BJP at the national level was a marginal force till the mid-1980s. Its social base, the affluent middle class, the rich peasant and the petty industrialist, was coming into being by the early 1980s but the BJP as a political party was a non-phenomenon. The compulsions of the Janata Dal politics led V. P. Singh to announce the implementation of the Mandal Commission, a 27 per cent reservation for the 52 per cent Other Backward Classes (OBCs) of the country. The response to Mandal in a way was the litmus test for different parties. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena opposed it in a very vocal fashion but the BJP's response to this was ambivalent, as Manini Chatterjee says, 'though it cautiously supported it, and only asked for inclusion of economic criterion, the party's rank and file were virulently opposed to it . . . By September 1990, when the anti-reservation movement led by the upper caste students was setting the country aflame, the entire RSS combine decided to unleash the Ramjanmbhoomi movement with all the strength at its command.'²⁵ Chatterjee goes on to state,

The upper castes and urban middle classes who formed the core of the BJP were angered by party's equivocal stand to the Mandal issue. But at a more basic level, caste conflict was anathema to the RSS. Right from its inception in 1925, the RSS had sought to gloss over the deep intra-Hindu conflicts that threaten its upper caste base by making out Muslims as the enemy. The entire Ramjanmbhumi movement acquired a new consciousness among the Dalits and backward castes that was slowly gaining ground.²⁶

The Rath Yatra was the most symbolic of Hindutva politics. It aimed to demolish Babri Masjid, at surface an anti-Muslim programme. The date chosen to demolish the masjid was also symbolic, 6 December,

the death anniversary of Dr Ambedkar. The BJP's action was primarily a response to the Mandal, a pro-Dalit move threatening to disturb the caste equations in society.

The post-Babri Masjid demolition phase saw the continuation of the same processes at the social level. The fragmentation of the Dalit movement gave an opportunity to the Hindutva politics to keep co-opting a section of Dalits looking for upwardly mobile channels, and many of the other sections being socially engineered by the conscious mobilization of the Sangh Parivar, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in particular. Similarly, the RSS has also floated an organization called Samajik Samrasata Manch (Social Assimilation Platform) to attract sections of Dalits for the purpose of developing 'Hindu unity'; the main feature is that the material problems are not addressed and an assertive cultural identity is brought to the fore. Amongst the Dalits, the new middle class aspired for higher status within the Hindu social fold. The Sanskritization process made them imitate the upper caste and to ignore and forget the material plight of their deprived brethren. The deprived ones amongst them got swept into the cultural whirlpool of Swadhyay, Asaram Bapus, Swaminarayan type sects and Pandurang Shashtris, which are dime a dozen by now. They are bringing in the traditional brahminical values in a modern garb, laced in the sugary syrup of cultural identity. These outfits have spread the idea of Hindutva and the pride in being Hindu, based on Hindutva ideology, cutting across different communities. Joseph Macwan points out that 'enamored by their wealth and power the Ambedkerite Dalits turned towards the BJP. Those who aligned themselves with the RSS also managed to acquire power.'²⁷

The core of the RSS project through all these mechanisms has been to turn all castes against Muslims and Christians. A dagger in the velvet cloak was pierced through the material aspirations of the Dalits. The ideology of the status quo at the level of pre-industrial norms; Hindutva, has been imposed in a most respectable form. The Sangh Parivar has also used different social facilities like night schools and youth camps to subsume the Dalit identity into a pan Hindu identity. As Anandi has said, 'Many Dalits have subordinated their caste identity and claimed themselves as Hindus.'²⁸ The degeneration of the Dravida Munetra movement into the AIDMK and the capitulation of the DMK to the brahminizing influence need no recounting. The upwardly mobile aspirations of sections of Dalits have given the Sanskritization process a boost.

This onslaught has operated at three levels. At the level of ideology the BJP has been saying that it does not believe in the caste system. Further the origin of the caste system itself has been shifted from the original codes of Manu to the influence of 'foreign' religions! Apparently, the invading Muslim kings wanted to convert all and sundry by force. And those who defied this had to face lots of ignominies and had to flee. The RSS on the caste system has similar views. Here, in a clever move, the polar opposite nature of what the BJP and the RSS believe is hidden from the people. Dr Ambedkar burns the *Manusmriti* and presides over the drafting of the Indian Constitution. The RSS upholds the *Manusmriti* and asks that the Indian Constitution be rejected.

CONCLUSION

We can recount that the primary aim and goal of Hindutva has been an opposition to caste and gender equality. Hindutva began in the last decades of the nineteenth century in the wake of cracks developing in the brahminical social order. The reaction was expressed in the anti-Muslim formulation. In the early twentieth century as the process of anti-Brahmin movement gained strength, the consolidation of Hindutva into the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS took place and the anti-Muslim rhetoric has been heightened. By now the duo developed a language whereby the aspirations of the lower castes are deflected. An imaginary Hindu unity is projected and the manufacturing of an external enemy is intensified. Ambedkar's movement bases itself on the material and the Shudras. Hindutva has made Ambedkar an icon and focused on anti-Muslim campaigns as a clever ploy.

The early part of the 1990s saw the blatant anti Dalit pogrom led by Sangh Parivar outfits. The conscious planning on the part of Hindutva ideologues has resulted in co-opting the Dalits. It had taken up an anti-Muslim campaign in the form of the Babri Masjid dispute. The anti-Muslim hysteria has been intensified in the wake of growing terrorist attacks, particularly after the attack on World Trade Center and the US attempts to present Islam as the threat to civilization.

Some historical parallels may guide us to the role of *deflection* in the repressive politics of Hitler's Nazis and Mussolini's fascists. In the case of Germany the basic problem was the crisis of the economic order, the problems were deflected onto the Jews in an attempt to save the interests of capitalists, and Jews were put to the gas chamber.

In the process, the hysteria, which was created, ensured that democratic norms were suppressed and the human rights of weaker sections were put on the chopping block. There is an interesting difference however. Many wealthy capitalists were Jews, many of the leading intellectuals were Jews, that is, a cultured elite; no doubt there were poor Jews, but the high profile came from those who were financiers, artists, intellectuals. In India, the target is people who are most culturally and educationally deprived. In India today the weakening caste (and also gender) hierarchy is the real issue. Muslims and partly Christians are the collateral victims of the onslaught of Hindutva. The wickedness of this politics comes to the fore when one sees the Gujarat carnage where the real victims of the Hindutva agenda are used as the weapon to do away the constructed 'external' enemy.

Notes

- ¹ Romila Thapar, *Penguin History of Early India* (Delhi: Penguin-India, 2002): 63.
- ² Romila Thapar, *History of India*, vol. 1 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966): 38.
- ³ Ibid.: 39.
- ⁴ Swami Vivekananda, *Collected Works*, vol. 8 (Kolkata: Advaita Ashram, 1907, continuously reprinted): 330.
- ⁵ Satish Chandra, *Medieval India* (Delhi: NCERT, 1990): 202.
- ⁶ Kancha Ilaiah, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Kolkata: Samya, 1996), rpt, SAGE-Samya, 2018.
- ⁷ Mahesh Gavaskar, 'Phule's Critique of Brahmin Power. In *Dalits in Modern India*, edited by S. M. Michael (Delhi: Vistaar, 1999): 85.
- ⁸ Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics*, (Delhi: Penguin, 1996): 14.
- ⁹ Ibid.: 15.
- ¹⁰ Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence* (Delhi: Penguin, 1989): 417.
- ¹¹ Ibid.: 418.
- ¹² Dr B. S. Moonje, 'Dr Moonje's Report, Forcible Conversions in Malabar', Moonje Papers, Nagpur 1923, Sub File 12 (1 922-23) Nehru Museum Memorial Library, New Delhi (section of mss), p 16.
- ¹³ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*: 21.

- ¹⁴ V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Mumbai: S. S. Savarkar, 1969): 140.
- ¹⁵ V. D. Savarkar, *Essentials of Hindutva* (Digital Edition), http://savarkar.org/content/pdfs/en/essentials_of_hindutva.v001.pdf (accessed on 28 September 2019).
- ¹⁶ Ram Puniyani *Fascism of Sangh Parivar* (Delhi: Media House, 2002): 45.
- ¹⁷ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*: 39.
- ¹⁸ T. Basu, P. Datta, S. Sarkar, T. Sarkar, and S. Sen. *Khaki Shorts Saffron Flags* (Orient Longman, 1993): 10.
- ¹⁹ Ashis Nandy, *At the Edge of Psychology: Essays on Politics and Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980): 78.
- ²⁰ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalist Movement*: 46.
- ²¹ Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedi, Sail Mayaram, and Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995): 103.
- ²² Ibid.: 103.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ Ram Puniyani, 'Dalits and Adivasis, Hindutva's Foot Soldiers', *The Dalit*, May-June 2002: 24.
- ²⁵ Manini Chatterjee, *The BJP and Political Mobilization for Hindutva*. In *Religion, Religiosity and Communialism*, edited by Praful Bidwai, Harbans Mukhia and Achin Vanaik (Delhi: Manohar, 1996): 98.
- ²⁶ Ibid.: 99.
- ²⁷ Joseph Macwan, 'Society under Siege', *Seminar* (May 2002).
- ²⁸ S. Anandi, *Contending Identities* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, Delhi, 1995): 10.

Between Her Legs: Hindutva and Dalit Women

Meena Kandasamy

To write about that gross social disorder which goes by the popular name of Hinduism, from the perspective of a Dalit feminist, is to write on an old enemy, the undeniable oppressor. On a normal day, I would have thought of cognizant and carefully constructed sociological theories, I would have theorized, particularized, contextualized, or to put it the way I see it, presented a reader with an overdose of multi-syllable words that beleaguer understanding. On such an academic-yet-normal day, I would have attempted a clinical depersonalization and completed an article with a multitude of crawling footnotes in crazily small fonts. But today has been different: I woke up and what I got to read were highly distressing interviews with a section of Dalit women in Gujarat who continue to toil as manual scavengers, and carry on their heads what is so evasively called night-soil.

Shit. Yes, I have even said that word now.

It sparked a deluge of emotions, but what I am left with right now is just the awful silence of betrayal. And a bare rawness of expression that wants to scream and shout. It rendered the last of my beliefs hopeless, it exposed that India: so eloquently advertised as India Shining, is in fact an India Stinking.

Today, while India continues to stink and rot, Manudharma dictates our daily life and as designed by the caste system, at the lowest strata of this maniac hierarchy are my sisters, the Dalit women: voiceless and victimized. The Hindutva enclave that chooses to call itself the Sangh Parivar was founded to foster the political and fascist aspirations of the Aryan upper-caste male—who heads this crude-yet-critical hierarchy—and is the striking anti-thesis of the Dalit women. Hindutva and Dalit women are nothing but contradictory factions, diametrically opposed groups of the maximum oppressor and the most oppressed. And

between these extremes there exists a series of elastic hierarchies and segregated oppressions, each so specific and yet so inter-connected.

Before I begin to write of these anti-theses, before we attune our understandings to explore this couple of extremes, we can take a look into the reactionary family of the Sangh Parivar, in order to understand how casteist and feudal arrogance occur and are always coupled with male domination.

Welcome now, to the world of women who are stuck in the patriarchy of the Parivar.

THE FLIMSY PARIVAR

The Sangh Parivar, as if to incorporate its dissent over birth control, has expanded its family to such proportions that one might possibly avert keeping count. A modest estimate would peg the number of members to a dozen-and-a-half, but let us leave that to the analysts. Because it would not be possible to reprint here the genealogy and origin of how women came to be inducted (indirectly so, in the beginning at least) into the Sangh, here is a concise version: Women were denied membership in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the oldest and core organization of the nine-decade-old Sangh Parivar. It was only in 1936, eleven years after the formation of the RSS was the Rashtriya Sevika Samiti born. Women from the families of the RSS members were enrolled in this organization that is modelled as a *dharmapatni* or wife to the male controlling body, the RSS. The Rashtriya Sevika Samiti since its days of inception has been exclusivist and maintained a low profile. Like the RSS, its membership comes from upper/middle-level oppressor castes with middle-class income backgrounds.¹

Now, about its dogma of existence. *Matrishakti* (mother power) is the vainglorious term 'bestowed' on the organization, highlighting that what matters is not womanhood but motherhood: it is no celebration of femininity; instead it is a capitalization of the womb. *Matrishakti* or these unabashed sets of womb-bearers have their individualized shakhas, their *bouddhik* (brainstorming) sessions and weapons training: swordplay and such like. Women here are taught that they are different and not equal, an indoctrination that is so entire and consuming that it allows the least space for what contemporary feminist theories aim at. The Samiti, being the *dharmapatni* or wife it

was meant to be, sticks faithfully to 'Guruji' Golwalkar's dictum—'Disparity is an indivisible part of nature, we should live with it. Harmony and not equality should be the organizing principle of society'—a devious statement that is at once anti-Dalit and anti-women. Or as is the case: entirely anti-Dalit women. Understand the temerity of this regressive Sangh when it says that we should live with disparity. And the reason that Golwalkar professes? Because disparity is a part of nature. Part of whose nature, Mr Golwalkar: yours, the oppressor caste Aryan males', or is this the bunch of thoughts that was transferred to you? And could any khaki short-sporting swayamsevak come forth to answer as to why *we* should live with it?

The Sangh Parivar's ideology is nothing new; there is nothing ground-breaking or earth-shattering in all the saffron claptrap that is so ceremoniously written and ritually propagandized. It is a repeated rendering of the *Manusmriti*: in its entirety, or sometimes, in bits and parts. The evidence is for all to see: in the casteism that is the nerve-centre, in the obsession over women's sexualities; in the stress on divinely ordained disparity, in the imposition of a you-we-all-should-live-with-it code. Not always is Manu acknowledged though; two-thousand-year-old traditions have fallen out of copyright but, devastatingly, not out of practice. Golwalkar—famous for his theory that present day Bihar and Orissa were part of the Arctic region where the Aryans originated and that while the region shifted but not the Aryans—said of Manu that he was the greatest law-maker of mankind, not only for his time, but for all the times to come. The metamorphosis from the *Manusmriti* has been swift: only it has been moulded a little here and there, possibly to enact it in a post-colonial world, to carefully preserve all the self-indulgent inequalities in an era of egalitarianism.

When the Sangh Parivar so blatantly derecognizes the democratic need for equality, we understand not only its fascist mindset, but also its fundamental craving to preserve the coziness of hierarchy. Viewed in this manner, it becomes clear why the Parivar doesn't stress on the need for corrective discrimination to the historically disadvantaged and subjugated sections of society. It is exactly this kind of brainwashing that Brahmin and neo-Brahmin women of the Sangh learn, and this prevents them from challenging the manipulation of their sexualities and from contesting existing power-relationships within their own limited circles. To understand the fundamentalist essence of the Sangh Parivar, we need to look at their aspects on topics pertaining to gender in the light of John Stratton Hawley's argument that 'fundamentalist

perspectives on gender cast a uniquely revealing light on the nature of fundamentalism as a whole'.² Sample this excerpt from *Our Women*, a Hindutva tract that liberally quotes Swami Vivekananda on women: 'Chastity is the life of a nation. Do you not find in history that the first death-sign of a nation has been unchastity? When that has entered, the end of a race is in sight.'³ The Sangh not only makes it mandatory for women to remain chaste, but also links their unchastity with the ruin of a nation, the end of race. So, the intention does not merely end with the attempt to bulldoze women into chastity. It goes further into blackmail. And to buttress this strangulating male-domination, history is also roped in.

For the Samiti, history is a hand-me-down. Women here, like the oppressed caste male members of the Sangh, are taught that their 'low' and 'pitiable' status is because of the invasions that took place on the nation. This most eloquent conspiracy, the pathetic externalization of the problem is the attempts of importing imagined *videshis* (foreigners) to absolve the bigotry of the *swadeshi* (Indian) caste and patriarchal structures. This externalization makes it easier for them to portray Muslim men in very derogatory shades and it ensures that they become the objects of hate for the Hindus.

ENDOGAMY

The same people who say in the open: 'Hindu girls beware of Muslim men' in order to 'protect their women' from 'other' men and the ensuing possibility of inter-religious marriages, have no different stands when it comes to caste. Only caste is talked about in a closeted manner in the privacy of the saffron homes. Given the Parivar's deliberate silence on caste, another angle in which we can understand the stand of the Sangh on caste 'purity' is by learning its stand on racial purity. Golwalkar exalted the Nazi anti-Semitism and wrote:

To keep up the purity of its race and culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races, the Jews. Race pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also shown how well high impossible it is for races and cultures having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by.⁴

Substitute race by religion, and race by caste, and you will know the lesson that Golwalkar wanted everyone to learn, on the importance and pride and purity of maintaining exclusivity and homogeneity. There are many, many stories that have been propagated by the Sangh decrying Hindu-Muslim unions, more specifically, Hindu women marrying Muslim men. In this attempt, Muslim men have been depicted not only as ultra-masculine, but also as agents acting on petro-dollars, and as seducers of kafir women. The Sangh Parivar is vocal on this inter-mixing in marriages (and consequently progeny) only when it comes to Muslims, who are easily portrayed as foreigners; it is silent when it comes to caste.

In the perverted Parivar lobby, what applies for Muslim men and Hindu women, will it not apply for Dalit men and Brahmin women too? What would be the silent diktat on inter-caste marriages? Will this not be applied to castes too, especially because caste-identities in India are as concrete as religious identities? To consolidate the larger Hindu identity, the Parivar indulges in the projection of Muslim men as the Other. For the firmer (and banally secret) construction of jati and caste identities, there goes on the projection of you-know-who as the Other.

Was it not the very same Hindu nationalism that fiercely opposed early attempts to legalize inter-caste marriages on the grounds that it would spoil the honour of families and lead to a mushrooming of half-castes? Is this also not one of the major reasons why an almost maniac obsession over the chastity of Hindu women is maintained? It was this burgeoning importance accorded to the chastity of women that could ensure the continuation of the caste system for over 2000 years. Listen to this same concept packaged in the words of the Sangh Parivar. In *Hindu Rashtra: Interpretations-Misinterpretations*, Shriram Sathe writes 'One is often astonished at the continuing stability of Hindu homes in spite of the most trying circumstances over the last one thousand years of endless struggle, first against the Islamic and later against the British invaders. But one cannot understand *the secret of this immortality of the Hindu home unless one realizes the vital role of women in the entire Hindu social structure.*'⁵ Along with stressing on the fundamentalist concept of home-is-where-the-woman-is, side by side, the author also places the 'vital role' of women in the entire Hindu social structure and holds them responsible for the secret of immortality of the Hindu home. This is the precise reason why the Sangh Parivar, with its view to safeguard the Hindu social structure (read caste

system), lavishes enormous importance to the chastity of women and the purity of homes.

Dr Ambedkar also hinted at the crucial role of women in the Hindu caste system when he said that 'women are the gateways to the caste-system' and that the closed nature of the caste system is maintained through the sexual exploitation of women. This was why he said that the annihilation of Untouchability was more an issue for women than for men. It was in this context that he defined the absence of inter-marriage to be the one characteristic that can be called the essence of castes.

Endogamy, the system of marriage within the caste/sub-caste/gotra has been the preserver of the caste system. On the other hand, exogamy (inter-caste marriage) destroys the very foundations of this caste structure. What is the Sangh's stand here? How many times has this been debated in shakas? How many times has it been condemned in the bouddhik sessions? Why is there a political silence on inter-caste marriages? The nearest the Sangh has ever got to tackling the caste problem is by saying, 'Let us *forget* caste'. Note the keyword: 'forget'; as though it were temporary amnesia. And, above all, a cheap-trashy-temporary forgetting, unlike what Ambedkar said: Annihilate caste. If the Sangh Parivar chooses to refute the view that it is casteist, let it release its white paper on inter-caste marriages within the members of the Parivar. Inter-caste, as in Dalit-Upper Caste, Dalit-Backward Caste. Not the ludicrous story of a Tamil Iyengar and a Madhava Brahmin; not some steamy one about a Shastri and a Chitpavan Brahmin. But is there any history of the Sangh having endorsed inter-caste marriages? For an organization that has the mobilization capacity of heaping lakhs of kar-sevaks at one place, of holding massive anti-minority hate-rallies, would it be difficult to conduct at least a hundred inter-caste marriages? And when I am speaking of inter-caste marriages, I do not even insist on Periyar's self-respect form of marriage that entirely removed the role of Brahmin priests from the marriage ceremony. Press the pause button there, please. Call in all your sants, sanyasis and sevaks if you need. But how about some transgression of caste for once, say, marrying Dalit men to your women. Or, vice versa. Sounds basic and elementary all right, but a change that could demolish the very basis of casteism. And the good news would be: it might create a change from this monotony of impossibly impaired inbreeds, of weak bodies and weaker whatevers.

DICHOTOMY IN APPROACH

The Sangh Parivar is not only adept at inaction as in the case of inter-caste marriages, but is also remarkable for its dichotomous approach in a wide range of issues. For an organization that mouths incredible propaganda about *Akhand Bharat* and national integration, what has it done for the divided Indias that exist on caste and outcaste lines: as villages and Dalit ghettos that are spatially apart and compulsorily segregated? Only the maps have not been prepared but of what use are imaginary lines anyway? Has it ever stood up to challenge this religiously imposed cessation that makes it mandatory for Dalits to live out of the villages? What has the Sangh, which continues to trounce and denounce Jinnah's two-nation theory that created Pakistan, done for the integration of the two distinct Indias: the 'caste-Hindu'stan, and the outcaste India?

Saffron agendas and manifestos have a two-pronged approach of action and inaction. Take for instance, the Parivar's boast of having a background of sending its volunteers to help and intervene in tragic and disastrous events. But why are they missing when the Dalit colonies burn? How many atrocities on Dalits have they condemned? How many crushed Dalit lives have they rehabilitated? I have not seen the least shade of saffron during any event of Dalit distress, but I still put forth these questions. I am asking these questions not because I seek convoluted answers. I am well aware of what happens to those who dare to question. And, I have been through the hate-mail series too, so, fine, thank you. I am asking this because every time we talk of caste we address only the Dalits and as Ambedkar pointed out, people do not question the touchables for the caste system.

Further, what would happen if we apply the Parivar's principles unto itself? The Sangh justifies the breaking down of mosques and churches and constructing new temples there on the ground that it is 'correcting history'. Can the oppressor-caste ridden Sangh or for that matter this 'caste-Hindu'stan itself survive if Dalits and other oppressed sections decided that they too wanted to correct history and settle scores? What would be the state of affairs if every massacre and carnage that was perpetrated on caste lines was returned back dutifully? If it is corrective history to demolish a centuries-old mosque based on the belief that there existed a temple; is it not justifiable if reverse and compulsory reservation be granted to Brahmins in 'taboo' areas like manual scavenging as a part of the same corrective history? After all,

these ideas are just an extension of the Sangh Parivar's. Talking of positive discrimination, the flashbacks of the Hindutva orchestrated agitations against the implementation of the Mandal Commission's Recommendations immediately come to mind. But the seeds of that 'revolt' were sowed decades ago when Golwalkar impishly wrote in his *Bunch of Thoughts*: 'Dr Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for "Scheduled Castes" for only 10 years from the day we became a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interest in them in remaining as a separate entity'⁶ Today, or on any other day in the future, can the Sangh Parivar come publicly and reissue or re-quote what its 'Guruji' had said. Can it dare to impudently repeat that the continuation of positive discrimination would create vested interests among Dalits and alienate them as a separate entity? The policies of the Parivar are most often, strictly, for private and internal circulation. The faces that the Sangh reveals in the open are mere masks; but beneath these fancy masks, there hides the dreadful oppressor caste patriarchy of the Orange order.

Let me go back and concentrate on only women-related themes. A telling example of its dual tactics came to light when the Sangh imposed its barbaric dress codes and coordinated an unbearable hullabaloo in Delhi saying that girls shouldn't wear short skirts because it would expose them, among other things, to mosquito bites. If I am inclined to argue, I might wonder why an organization, whose male members wear khaki shorts as the uniform, have great worries when it comes to the attire of women. (Recently the RSS has switched to trousers.) What prevents me from probing more on that count is the fact that I have larger concerns, greater responsibilities. Several of my activist-friends, most of them Dalit women, have told me that up to the 1980s, in some areas in southern Tamil Nadu, Dalit women were not allowed to wear blouses/upper-garments. That was the caste-Hindu diktat. Exposure now, was not an issue of liberty, it was an imposition. Where was the Sangh then? What happened to its cherished ideal of dear old modesty? After all, when the Sangh could find the blind rage to adamantly criticize dressing down, it could have well-nigh opened its eyes and spent a little of its energies in dressing-up.

On a larger canvas, two major legislative measures defined the year 2003: the repeated defeat of the Women's Bill and the attempt to bring in a Uniform Civil Code. While the Parivar's stand on the Women's Bill was all too evidently against the marginalized sections,

its position on the Uniform Civil Code needs a lot of analysis. Mridula Sinha, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Mahila Morcha leader wrote: 'It is a tragedy that in the eyes of the law, the concept of Indian womanhood is non-existent. There are Hindu women, Muslim women, and Christian women.' She proceeded to argue, 'The emancipation of Indian women will remain a far off cry as long as a Uniform Civil Code is not passed.'⁷ The issue of the Uniform Civil Code—like the feminist issue of discrimination against Muslim Women—has been hijacked by the Hindu Right. While it is certainly regrettable that minority women suffer for lack of reform in their personal codes, it is downright condemnable that Hindutva forces emerge as their unwelcome spokespersons. The politics of supremacy has ensured that under the guise of bringing about equality in the personal codes, there could be a blatant imposition of Hindu norms and practices on the minority communities. Paradoxically, equality would correspond to subordination and enslavement. The politics surrounding Sinha's yearning for a unified identity of Indian women is understandable. But why do the members of the Sangh Parivar not realize that Indian women move and mix not only along their religious identities but along their caste identities as well. Now that all religions have ingrained their versions of the caste system, why could not the Mahila Morcha bother about abolishing caste? Would it not have given all women an entirely Indian women identity?

The sanitized Sangh Parivar, despite its obsession and maniac control over women's sexualities, projects the view that sex is supposedly a taboo and thereby prevents all discussions taking place in its name. Within the Parivar precincts, it remains an unutterable word. This intolerance can extend to enormous proportions, as witnessed by the nation during the screening of the movies *Fire* and *Water*, when vandals of the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal ensured that no one had the right to explore these themes.

SAFFRON ON SCREENS

The Sangh Parivar displays such an extent of hooliganism and reactionary attitudes towards counter cultures. And, yet, for the Saffron Brigade, mass media has become yet another route to a recruitment drive. In its obsessive endeavour to present the nation as a mother (land) that needs to be 'protected,' the Sangh Parivar lays a great insistence on the concepts of 'security' and 'honour.' This is visible

not only in the spew of nuclear tests and rocket launches and warships and military parades and other choreographed extravaganzas, but also in the sudden spate of war-films that have been released during the first five-year term of the BJP.

Agreed: Bollywood's obsession is with profit, not propaganda. Firstly, let us take a look at the numbers. There are only four major war-films that Bollywood churned out in a span of over two decades: Chetan Anand's *Haqeeqat* (1964; following the 1962 war with China) and *Hindustan ki Kasam* (1973; following the 1971 war with Pakistan on the issue of Bangladesh), Manoj Kumar's *Upkar* (1965; after the Indo-Pak war) and Ramanand Sagar's *Lalkaar*. But in a post-BJP-in-power India, the number of war-films getting released has been growing exponentially. In my limited knowledge there has been Anil Sharma's *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*, its sequel *Hero* (both of them filled with Pakistan-bashing), *Sarfarosh* with its ISI agent, *Pukar* with its anti-Pakistan slogans and finally J. P. Dutta's *Refugee*, *Border* and *LOC-Kargil*. Film historians could perhaps shed light on why the release of so many Bollywood war-films has overlapped with the increasingly militant posturing of the Hindutva brigade. While critics have suggested that patriotism was the last resort of the scoundrel, one gets to feel that either the industry is taking its dictates from somewhere, or, in its seemingly typical innocence, capitalizing on the prevailing sentiments of tear-jerking, chest-thumping nationalism to rake in the moolah and ensure good Fridays. Whatever the reason behind this, it has helped the Sangh Parivar to take advantage of the medium of cinema to perpetuate its favourite stereotype: the Other (here, the Muslim male) under the guise of lambasting Pakistan. Even the then Pakistani foreign minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri had expressed his displeasure over Bollywood's war movies. As these films sublimate and divert all hatred towards a particular and well-defined enemy, the vast majority of the viewers are indoctrinated subconsciously; not only do they lose attention in the pressing issues that need to be challenged but also they become transformed 'patriots' whose potential for violence can be tapped with a next call to arms.

And then there is the second type of films that finds favour with the right wing. These films shot in picturesque locales, with captivating lavish weddings and large bungalows, are modelled after the perfect Hindu family. Such movies, usually produced with enormous budgets, encourage a palpable nationalistic sentiment coupled with an extravagant consumerist culture. Add the NRI (Non-Resident Indian)

phenomenon to this saffron picture, and then you could understand why the Parivar is floating in its feel-good factor. For NRIs, the need for a distinct, ethnic cultural identity makes them go hoo-ha about *anushasan* (discipline) and *parampara* (tradition) and *sanskriti* (culture) and the whole Hindutva boogie-woogie that they get to see on the silver screen. In their yearning to Be Indian, they are led to Being Hindu. Actor Nandita Das, in an interview with *Nukkad*, explains this concept:

In *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* where a girl who is very modern, wearing short skirts, etc., when asked to sing a song in Hindi sings 'Om jai jagadish hare'. This has an appeal in London and in Jhummri Talayya. The NRI phenomenon is scary. I have travelled with my films *Fire*, *Earth* and *Bavandar* to places where I met NRIs. I had a very interesting discussion with some top doctors of London. They feel rooted and said their nationalistic feeling was stronger. I asked them what they wanted to do for their country. They said they wanted to propagate Hinduism. And though we were talking about India. I think this juxtaposition of Hinduism for Indian is the most scary thing.

Sadly, this juxtaposition keeps going on and on. In between this filmi masala, the Sangh Parivar goes lamenting about the predominance of 'Khans' (read Shah Rukh, Salman and Aamir) as heroes. Some other Hindu actor meanwhile gets endorsed by the RSS as the Hindu hero who shall put an end to the 'Khan' culture. Contrast all this mischievous and high-energy behaviour of the Sangh with its delay in even releasing in theatres all over the nation a film on Ambedkar directed by Jabbar Patel. All these days, the film sat gathering dust (it was released only in Maharashtra). On the eve of the polls, it is picked up and dusted and plans are made for its screening across India. No prizes for guessing why; Dalit votes remain to be sentimental, take-it-for-granted affairs.

If this is the manner in which saffron has permeated Bollywood, then its perpetuation into the small screen is no small matter, either. In this vast nation of millions of TV sets, soap operas have an extremely high potential for outreach. The most classic instance of the power of television came to be seen with the screening of Ramanand Sagar's serial *Ramayan* on Doordarshan. *Ramayan* served as a quintessential

pre-cursor to the Ramjanmbhoomi movement. First, it transformed the *Maryada Purush* (so far beheld only in imagination) into a living, breathing man. Gradually, the whole monkey-army nonsense and kitschy valour that characterized *Ramayan* were tapped by the Hindutva forces to represent Hindu militancy. The serial gave fruit to the dreams of a puritanical golden age set in a patriarchal, patrimonial state.⁸ This was followed by other productions like *Mahabharat*, *Jai Vir Hanuman*, and *Om Namah Shivaih*.

Hindu nationalism has emerged successfully in politics because of its careful machinations and permeations into the public culture. For the Sangh Parivar, media mobilization and tapping all those with the 'right sentiment' has increased its conditions of growth. Now, daily, spread across many, many TV channels there continue to be screened the soap operas that hard-sell Hindutva. Marketed over satellite beams and dish antennas, the Parivar has ensured that there is a round-the-clock celebration of caste-Hindu patriarchy. If devotional or religious-themed serials end up magnetically attracting the first-level of people who are vulnerable to the Hindutva cultural onslaught, the second-tier people shall be glued into the current Hindi (and of course, similar regional language) serials like *Kyunki Saas bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* or another in that ilk which propagates patriarchal concepts.

Packed to capacity with the height of oppressor caste, exploiter class consumerism—these serials and soap operas also prominently place importance on conservative culture, pit women against women, and yet, within their capacity encourage 'filmy' lifestyles where the only thing the men are capable of, are extramarital affairs. The situation in the Tamil context is no different; in fact, one of the top-rated serials provided an elaborate and complacent justification of bigamy. Further, women in these serials depict a petty bourgeoisie lifestyle; and at their best speak the Brahmin dialect, and portray brahminical cultures and superstitions. The soap operas present a noteworthy situation because in the life depicted on the small screen, the caste issues and class struggles are not just brushed to the margins, but even brushed away entirely.

We have to understand the profound cultural impact of such soap operas on Dalits and other marginalized sections. Through such media of dissemination, the brahminical patriarchy shall only uphold its culture. While the stress is on tradition, there is a silent and indirect stress on caste. Besides, the serials present skewed worldviews to the Dalits, apart from encouraging conservative and consumerist cultures.

Already, the blatant cultural invasions of the Sangh Parivar itself have been cause for worry. There have been documented instances of tribal and Dalit women in areas like Gujarat and Jharkhand who have been forced by the Hindutva forces to wear mangalsutras and *sindoor* as symbols of marriage. Now, when cultural invasion flows from the visual media, the conquering seems complete.

CONTESTING BEAUTY AND THE HINDUTVA HYSTERIA

On the one hand, the Sangh Parivar, directly and indirectly, engages in the glorification of brahminical traditions and imposes the same on Dalit and other oppressed caste women. Traditional feminists might like to skim over the threats of Hindu majoritarianism to Dalit women. However, it would also be worthwhile if they understood that gendered oppression has other shades as well, including caste, class and ethnicity. Besides, one has to understand that feminism in India has been fostered with protectionist discourses and conservative ideologies: a direct fallout of the patriarchal Hindu revivalism that formed a portion of opposition to the Raj. In this context, the increasing importance of a radical Dalit feminist approach for our times becomes all too evident. And the urgency for this approach is necessitated, because Hindutva is a force that is potent enough to reverse all that the women's movement has achieved in India. The BJP had, when it was earlier in government, planned to rename the Women Studies Centres across the nation as Family Studies Centres; substitution of the word 'women' with the word 'family' shows the grotesque patriarchal aims of the Parivar to convert and convolute the agenda of Women Studies.

Also, for some time now, feminist-scholars like Indu Agnihotri have been worriedly pointing out about the appropriation of the terminology of the feminist movement by the Sangh Parivar.⁹ This has been further enunciated by researchers debating on the protest against the beauty contests: which in many ways won a great deal of media publicity for the Sangh's women chapters. In the protest against the Miss World contest held at Bangalore in 1996, the Left and the Right wings become mutually-embarrassed and thrown-together allies, each opposing the same issue on different stands. The Sangh's massive hysteria against high-flying fashion and beauty contests stems from its need to resist western cultural imperialism. For the Sangh understands things in terms of tradition and Indian culture, versus modernity and western culture. Further, at no point of time does the Sangh seek to

criticize the economic imperialism that is entwined with such a cultural imperialism. Moreover, the Sangh Parivar which opposes western cultural imperialism that is being thrust on India has no qualms about being a cultural imperialist by itself. These can be viewed from the cultural policing that its various organizations indulge in.

VANDALISM ON ST. VALENTINE'S DAY

The St. Valentine's Day celebrations have been a major target of the right wing. One year, not just stopping with attacking shops in its customary style, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Bhopal also vowed to blacken the faces of couples with soot if they celebrate what is known as Lover's Day in India. True, there is a 1500 crore industry subsisting on the celebrations surrounding Valentine's Day. And, it is widely agreed that blowing up Lover's Day is a major marketing strategy: but that's the Left argument. The sad thing is that Hindutva forces use the very same premise of Valentine's Day to spread their ideology, not by the traditional celebration, but by providing a fierce resistance in the form of continued, malicious propaganda, moral policing and uncalled-for agitation. Firstly what gets challenged is Lover's Day. Then, Love. Slowly, what they aim to put a full stop to is love marriages. More specifically, inter-caste, inter-religious, love marriages. It is this bunch of culture police and macho vandals of the Sangh who ensure that Valentine's Day does not get celebrated. In Tamil Nadu, RSS weekly magazines extol that celebrating Valentine's Day is not part of Indian culture.

And there is the second level of argument, that Love is divine. So, dear reader, it is out of bounds of you, and me, and the women and the men on the street. Divine, as enjoyed by the Devas. Love, as mandated by the Hindutva. Love, as chronicled by Kamban and Kalidas (and no, let us all maintain a steady silence on the *Kamasutra* anyway). Love, is given a lucid redefinition and our nation gets to be straitjacketed as the land that knew of such examples of divine love as Mira and Andal. So there, over to one-sided unattainable love over non-existent playboy gods. Teenage girls shall strut around singing Krishna, Krishna. And if your first impulse over your daughter's obsession with a charming god is any problem, don't fret. Blame it on *Bharateeya Sanskriti*: force-fed and fundamentalist.

My obvious squirming over the Sangh Parivar's attack on Valentine's Day is not out of place. I am not bothered about the removal of a western cultural influence as much I am bothered about

what the Hindutva chooses to substitute in its place. It is this substitution, rather this chauvinistic retrieval of a culture of patriarchy and casteist hegemony that shakes the ground beneath our feet.

In the typical style of the Sangh Parivar, there is this idea of a compromise floating around. An article in the latest issue of *Vijaya Bharatam*, an RSS weekly magazine in Tamil, after rehashing and re-insisting on the stand that love comes after marriage, and that love is a mutual feeling between a man and woman of similar backgrounds (there, that's caste and class ensured in a nutshell), suggested that there could be an alternative date for celebrating Lover's Day: and this date, should be from the Hindu calendar because the Christian traditions associated with Valentine's Day were not fit. And this alternative day was to fall on *Panguni Uthiram* (in the final month of the Tamil calendar: falls sometime in mid-April) when all the god couples married, who included the famous Murugan and Valli, Krishna and Radha, Rama and Sita, Shiva and Parvathi, and so on. And the command was that couples in love could celebrate at temples by praying to god. All this clearly reflects on the Brahmin paradigm: assimilate what you cannot annihilate.

HINDU NARI

The Sangh Parivar, apart from giving its timely sound-bites on conforming to control in view of a good society, also stresses on a code for how Hindu women should live. The manipulations of the Hindutva forces mandate that the Hindu woman must be chaste forever and ever. Chastity translates into life-long monogamy. Indirectly the Parivar members attack the concept of widow remarriage on the ground that the Hindu union, that is, the affirmation and the solemnization of marriage is a pact made not just for a lifetime, but for seven births. For these desi Nazis, sati is about the virtuous wife's enduring love for her husband. (Alas, there is no corresponding ritual in which virtuous men with enduring love for their wives climb into the funeral pyres of their wives.) At one point of time, a prominent woman of the saffron order, Vijayaraje Scindia exalted sati as 'our cultural heritage'. With the Parivar working overtime and the judiciary acquitting those accused in the historical Roop Kunwar sati episode; it might not be surprising if few years down the line, the Sangh might put back sati into practice.

Now that the Hindutva force has female faces on its leaders list does not dilute the fact that the Sangh Parivar is an anti-women, casteist, patriarchal organization. One has to recall that the saffron-clad sanyasin Uma Bharti, who once sat pretty as the chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, had to publicly proclaim her chastity when there were rumours floating around which alleged that she had an affair with a colleague in the Parivar. The burden of proof is on the women, and like the trembling Sita in the *Ramayana*, it is the woman who has to prove chastity, it is the woman who has to undergo the *agni pariksha* or ordeal by fire. Although women of the Parivar have been prominently placed in the public sphere and also serve as kar-sevikas and members of semi-militant factions of the Parivar-like Durga Vahini, they are all made to conform to the stereotype of the Hindu Woman. No matter what their positions of power, the women of the Sangh are only instruments of upper caste patriarchy.

THE SANGH ON PATRIARCHY: OH, WELL, THAT IS
NO PROBLEM . . .

The problem of patriarchy and male domination is never tackled within the Sangh Parivar. By refusing to acknowledge even the very existence of the problem, the Hindutva forces succeed in totally ignoring the need for feminism. Tanika Sarkar brilliantly summarizes the construction of the Sangh's concept of motherland vis-à-vis its stands on caste and class. She writes:

Internal divisions of class and caste are seen as forms of divisiveness that desecrate the wholeness of the *desh*. These divisions, therefore, are not to be interrogated but submerged under a political piety that suspends all manner of criticism which might expose social hierarchies. Such criticisms, whenever encountered, elide into the metaphor of a divided and mutilated yet sacred body which is to be reconstructed as non-stratified so that it can continue singular and integrated. The sacrality of an integrated and aggressive yet perpetually threatened female body is the organizing principle that holds the edifice together. The argument loses its power, its charge, if the country is allowed to be seen as a piece of land with flesh-and-blood

people living within it. The power of this vision is further undone if the mystical description of people as soldiers in a holy war lapses into one in which they are social beings with very real social problems. Rithambara warns untouchable Dalits against violating the sacred unity of Hindus by the lure ('candy') of the Mandal issue. The problems of territorial diversity and social division require endless transcendence; a reply on many registers of the long history of past mutilations and desecrations of an inviolable, sacred body. The loss of Ramjanmabhoomi, Partition, Hindu disunity, lower-caste protest—all these are ranged together as enactments of the same terrible sin.¹⁰

Note here that the internal divisions of caste and class are seen in contemporary Hindutva theology as divisiveness, whereas the largest problem—of gender as the basis of subjugation—is easily given the go-by. As a further elaboration of Sarkar's thesis I feel that it has to be also observed that there is a questionable silence on the issue of feminism, and of women uprising against patriarchy. The Sangh Parivar doesn't even mention this, because unlike other hierarchies that might come under challenge, the saffron brigade deems that this patriarchy must always remain status quo; and that the supremacy of men must never be challenged. All the while their call to arms is built around the nation as a 'perpetually threatened female body' metaphor, and yet the problems of womankind do not seem to press the Parivar. A careful comprehension of the Parivar's approach highlights their perspective that Ramjanmbhoomi *should not* have been lost, Partition *should not* have take place, Hindus *should not* be non-unified, 'lower' castes *should not* protest. Yet, when it comes to the question of the women's struggle, they exhibit the mindset that women *should not* rebel against patriarchy. By theoretically setting women on unreachable high pedestals and portraying them as worshipful mothers, the question of gendered oppression and sexual exploitation is never addressed.

UNUTTERABLES AND THE UNTOUCHABLES

The conspiracy of silence that the Sangh Parivar maintains on casteist atrocities of sexual violence needs special mention. Rape, so commonly used in the context of Dalit women, becomes a tragedy of disgrace and defilement where the 'honour' of 'upper' caste women is

concerned. In order to avert 'their' [read 'upper' caste] women from becoming victims they are empowered with self-defence techniques. And even in these seemingly open-and-shut decrees, casteism remains. Take the case of self-defence techniques and weapon's training imparted to oppressor caste women within the Parivar, whereas in reality, the women who need these the most are the Dalit women. Why is it so wary in doing anything for the Dalit women? Moreover, all this breast-beating terms about rape being an 'outrage of modesty' and 'loss of honour' is not liberatory feminist thought, rather these are protectionist discourses. One has to understand that when the Sangh says it is a [upper-caste] woman's modesty being outraged they indirectly speak from the pedestal of the Hindu patriarch.

Women in the Sangh are also constantly fed the patriarchal notions about purity, chastity and related bunkum. A glaring example of this inane brainwashing is the examples the Sangh glorifies; of women who committed suicide because they were raped and of women who committed suicide because they would be raped (*jauhar*). Publications of the Sangh Parivar paint halos for incidents of *jauhar*. Sometimes, their exaggeration reaches unimaginable levels: the book *Partition-Days: The Fiery Saga of RSS*,¹¹ cites more than a dozen instances of mass self-immolations of women who killed themselves to 'save their honour.' While one of the earliest reported 'incidents' details the mass immolation of 107 women,¹² other 'incidents' include stories of women consuming poison, and women being willingly beheaded by their kinsmen in order not to be 'dishonoured by beasts in human form'¹³ or in some cases, the heads of 28 girls being broken with bricks to save them from dishonour¹⁴ or 1700 women in Rajouri taking poison that the Swayamsevaks distributed in packets on Diwali day.¹⁵ These are lauded: 'Has any country in the world been able to present examples of such stern calls of honour?'¹⁶ and 'The history of *Jauhar* of Chittor was repeated, A glorious history of self-sacrifice was created.'¹⁷

By this covert propaganda and constant glorification of such women does the Parivar intend to suggest that suicide is the solution to being raped? When the premium on chastity for women is exaggerated to such limits, what is the practical solution that the Sangh Parivar gives to Dalit women (who form the greatest percentage of the women subjected to sexual atrocities)? Do not these stories that epitomize women who committed suicide following rape, silently show contempt on the lakhs of women who continue to live post-trauma? Significantly, while Dalit women increasingly become victims

of violation, subordination and exploitation the Sangh Parivar continues to maintain its deafening silence on issues of gender, caste and class.

PHULE—PERIYAR—DR AMBEDKAR

To gain an understanding of how extremely casteist and anti-women the Parivar is, one has to compare and contrast its silence and shoddiness on Dalit and women issues with the vehement and strong actions of revolutionaries like Phule, Periyar and Dr Ambedkar. All these three stalwarts believed in liberating women to put an end to the caste system. Mahatma Jotiba Phule championed the movement for the education of Shudra and Ati-Shudra women and men for he believed that it had immense emancipatory potential. He was firm in his view of challenging caste and gender issues simultaneously, because only that would lead to an egalitarian society. Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, the founder of the Dravidian movement, was not only a fierce anti-caste proponent and rationalist, but he was also one of the foremost radical leaders who took up the matter of women liberation with vigour unparalleled in Indian history. He lashed out that 'if slavery has to be abolished in society, the male arrogance and wickedness which leads to the enslavement of women must be abolished first.' He emphasized that 'only when this was achieved, the tender sprouts of freedom and equality would register growth'.¹⁸

In the same manner, Babasaheb Ambedkar, messiah of the millions of Dalits, declared that castes continued to be maintained through the sexual exploitation of women; and therefore, as mentioned earlier, women were gateways to the caste system. According to Ambedkar, the control on women's sexuality could alone ensure that the closed character of the caste-system would be maintained. In his early years, he burnt the *Manusmriti*, not only because this codification of crude laws was anti-Dalit, but also because it was anti-women. Incidentally, it is a matter to be rejoiced that the Indian Association for Women's Studies have started to celebrate *Manusmriti Dahan Divas* (25 December; the day on which Ambedkar burnt the *Manusmriti*) as the *Bharatiya Stree Mukti Divas*. Ambedkar repeatedly laid stress on the fact that the lower the position of the woman in the hierarchy the more intense her exploitation: a statement that serves as the foundation for the necessity of Dalit feminism. His resignation from the post of independent India's first Union Law Minister, because the Hindu Code Bill that challenged

casteist patriarchal laws was not passed, is one of the defining movements in the history of the struggle against brahminical patriarchy.

Moreover, another common thread running through all their challenge to Hindutva is that they vehemently attacked its major icon, Ram. In the hands of Phule, Periyar, and Ambedkar, the character of Ram was exposed; he was portrayed as the original anti-Dalit, anti-shudra, and anti-women villain. Be it Phule's call for Bali Raj and rereading of the *Ramayana* story, Periyar's counter-epic *Keemayana* and the subsequent holding of Ravana lilas, and Ambedkar's scathing criticism on Ram in the *Riddles of Hinduism*, the publication of which sparked widespread rioting—at no point of time have our leaders failed in revealing the truth about this image of Hindutva. But the Sangh lauds this same Ram, its politics of the Parivar revolve around him, he is their axis, their vote-bank consolidator. This duality of approaches displays the duality of attitudes.

If we go about such a comparison we are faced with a resounding emptiness: the Sangh Parivar's absolute and well-conceived absence of emancipatory ideology relating to Dalits and women. The Parivar's aims are clearly exploitative and smack of the fascist idea of maintaining the subjugation of both Dalits and women. What has the Sangh Parivar done to the Dalits other than imposing the false and oppressive Hindu identity and recruiting them, in large numbers, as foot soldiers against the Muslims? Except that the Sangh 'worshipfully' continues to treat women as bearers of the womb and as begetters of militant sons what is the contribution of the Parivar to Indian womanhood?

HINDUTVA IN PERIYAR LAND

If the Sangh Parivar has vigorously worked its way into an Ambedkarite bastion like Maharashtrian Dalits and put forth its *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* campaign—which resembles unfortunately, an ad for a popular detergent—a Hindutvaization, that is even more shocking has been taking place in the land of Periyar, Tamil Nadu. The Sangh Parivar which currently uses the religion of the majority as its mobilization potential has no qualms about using caste in the same manner. As long as there is the possibility of a vote-bank involved, one can expect the Sangh to stand at the forefront. Recently, human rights organizations in the state had to work hard to prevent the VHP International general secretary Praveen Togadia from participating in a Thevar

(a land-owning OBC oppressor caste in Tamil Nadu) conference in Madurai where he intended to distribute trishuls apart from delivering his customarily hateful speeches. Look at who the natural allies of the Sangh Parivar are: oppressor castes who have a documented history of sexually exploiting Dalit women and have been the cause for a great number of caste-clashes in the southern districts in the state.

Or, take for instance one of the most anti-Dalit Hindutva measures of our time: The State Government of Tamil Nadu, ruled then by a so-called Dravidian Party, the AIADMK, promulgated the Prohibition of 'Forcible' Religious Conversion Act in October 2002. In theory this Act, enshrined with stringent penalty measures prohibits anyone from 'forcibly' converting Dalits and women; those doing so would be fined up to one lakh rupees and face up to four years of imprisonment. In practice, sections of this law can be twisted to penalize anyone who converts from Hinduism. Leaders like Ambedkar and Periyar declared that the only solution to the problem of Untouchability was to quit the Hindu religion and embrace another religion. As per his declaration, Ambedkar along with millions of his followers converted to Buddhism on 14 October 1956. But today, in Tamil Nadu, Hindutva has permeated to the extent that Dalits have even been denied the right to quit the religion that subordinates and oppresses them.

Now, it becomes clear that what is scintillatingly masqueraded as Hindu revivalism is in fact a Hindutva imposition. These anti-conversion legislations of the state governments (Gujarat government followed the Tamil Nadu example), are a bid to keep the Dalits forcefully and legally within the Hindu fold. This is done as a next step to the already existing practice where Dalits lose their reservation benefits when they leave the Hindu religion. Further, patriarchal and tyrannical Hindutva, not being pleased with just restraining Dalits and ensuring the continuation of their slavery; has also taken the diabolical step of clubbing together women. There are chances that sections of this act could be misutilized to prevent Hindu women from marrying those outside their religion and which could transform into a surefire way to guarantee the end of inter-religious love marriages. Thus, it has to be noted that the anti-conversion laws specifically target not only Dalits, but also women. As a result, one needs to lay emphasis that combating Hindutva—whose primary aim (as in the ancient times) harbours on the preservation of purity—requires not only a secular and Dalitist/anti-caste approach, but also a feminist understanding.

This consolidation of Hinduism in the state was followed by a government direction that banned animal sacrifice in temples across the state, and therefore paved the way for the brahminization of all the temple rituals. This act of banning of animal sacrifice in temples, removed the non-vegetarian (and consequently, non-Brahmin elements) out of worship. With a single stroke of legislation, the pro-Hindutva government of Tamil Nadu decreed and converted the diet of the gods. Overnight blood-thirsty and malevolent gods and goddesses were forced into becoming timid vegetarians. Maariamman and Karuppu, and a host of village gods could no longer demand roosters and goats. The Madras High Court, to add hunger and insult to injury, suggested that as substitute rituals to animal sacrifice, pumpkin could instead be smashed and lemons be cut. Now, in the anti-Brahmin heartland, there goes on a catastrophic brahminization on the fast track. With the worst ever electoral drubbing in its history, the AIADMK that lost all the forty seats in the 2004 General Elections has withdrawn the anti-conversion and anti-animal slaughter acts, as tempestuously as these were introduced

In a state known for its rationalist self-respect movement, the rise of the Hindutva forces is due to the degeneracy of the Dravidian movement. The opportunist tendencies of the Dravidian parties have opened the state for an infiltration by Hindutva forces. The percolation of this slow poison is having its consequent effects. As in other states, the Hindutva forces have registered a partial victory, in mobilizing and recruiting Dalits, by making use of the splits and factions within the Dalit movement itself. Here is an example of what Hindutva's divide and rule policy could orchestrate: After the bill banning conversions became law, a Dalit organization based in Chennai planned a campaign tour all over Tamil Nadu to protest against the law and to bring awareness among the Dalits that they were not Hindus at all. Infuriated by this, the very Hindutva forces that were instrumental in bringing about the ban, funded some breakaway faction of Dalits, and this faction, with the 'blessings' of the Kanchi Shankaracharya, embarked on a simultaneous tour propagating to the Dalits that the 'need to return to their *thaimadham* [lit. mother religion]: Hinduism'!

I want also to record another instance that my activist friends and I have been discussing. Hindutva forces in the state, shaken and agitated by Dalit awakening and assertion, have started to undertake counter-campaigns in all possible ways. Because the Hindutva gang felt that the Tamil Dalit leader Thirumaavalavan's name had found

its way on too many walls, it funded opportunist and breakaway Dalits to whitewash those walls and instead inscribe their names there. The climax of this narrative is that these opportunist and ideology-lacking Dalits have been asked to paint '*Swamiji Varugirar*' [lit. the 'Swamiji Is Coming'] on the walls in Dalit localities and ghettos. For centuries, no Shankaracharya has ever ventured into any Dalit ghetto, because it would be 'polluting' to him. Though it is written so, when shall this celibate monk, the Kanchi Shankaracharya, finally come? What the Hindutva has partially succeeded in doing is to exploit every single avenue of encroachment in order to saffronize Dalits. Such political and ideological manipulations of the Dalit movement, has its consequent repercussions on the Dalit women too.

SAFFRON PATRIARCHY AND DALIT WOMEN

This infiltration of Hindutva into Tamil Nadu—a state renowned for its anti-Brahminism and secular identity—is indescribably dangerous to Dalit women. Patriarchal dominance and caste homogeneity, both of which were implemented by controlling the sexuality of women, is now out on the rampage here. And, for your information, with state-support. It is no longer a closet deal. And that renders it all the more dangerous. Worse, this phenomenon is not restricted to the southernmost state alone. Having conquered the cow-belt and Gujarat and Maharashtra, the Sangh Parivar is slowly making inroads into every available sphere.

The increasing momentum of globalization has only added to the vitalized and alarming spread of Hindutva, which is, on the tango with the new economic policies. So, the more aggressive the neo-liberal economic policies, the more aggressive Hindutva forces get. It has to be noted with a lot of anxiety and distress that the processes of economic liberalization, globalization and privatization have all been coincident with the growth and rise of the Hindutva. Dalits supporting misconstrued nirvanas of globalization have got it all wrong. There exist a lot of deeper links, and what appears like a shady twilight frolicking isn't so. Hindutva forces, under their self-imposed Gandhari-like blindfolds need the new rich just as they need the feel-good factor. And what must be remembered is that both Hindutva and imperialism, behind the masks of their many ideologies, militantly support oppression and exploitation. With relevance to Dalit women, Hindutvaization and globalization receive

new dimensions because in the world according to the Sangh Parivar there is no category like the female workforce. The Bharat Mazdoor Sangh is an entirely male preserve, anyway. The great bulk of the female labour is in the huge and unorganized informal sector: this has left them devoid of any protection and most severely hit by the vagaries of globalization. This combination of oppressive forces and the protagonists of hierarchy shall only intensify the exploitation and extraction of female labour: a move that shall affect Dalit women to the greatest extent.

While recruitment and enrolment of Dalits as foot soldiers of the Sangh Parivar is taking place in full swing, these same channels are also indoctrinating Dalit women. While it could impose on them new identities, it would also make the Dalits, as a whole, be 'convinced' about caste, about their own outcasteness, and thus render them in a position of perpetual slavery. After all, they would bring in bogus theories of karma here, and incorporate a blame-game where Dalits shall be held responsible for their degraded positions. This way they shall ensure that caste flourishes in this 'karmabhoomi'. Among the Dalit women, this simultaneous imposition and aping of values would corrupt their egalitarian proletarian lives. Dalit women, are now being relegated to the inner spheres. This taming of the shrew, this domestication of Dalit women, robs subaltern society of the very liberty and equality that it possesses. This construction of approved identities of 'subordination', the larger and centralized Hindutva, the saffronization and Sanskritization at work, all form the blueprint that manipulate Dalit lifestyles. For Dalit women, the victims of triple injustices and dual patriarchies, this cast(e)rated encroachment of their cultural avenues causes the sum of net risks due to Hindutva grow exponentially.

The fascist Sangh Parivar's twin agendas, of maintenance of Brahmin supremacy and male domination, culminate in their manipulation of the women's sexuality, a two-in-one project that enables them, as we have seen, to ensure the continuance of both the caste system and patriarchy. While for us, as women, the Hindutva dreams of a sacred thread-sporting hegemonic masculinity come alive as grotesque nightmares; the Sangh Parivar continues its old invasions, the unfamiliar encroachments. This aggression by her anti-thesis would further subjugate every Dalit woman. The war is now, between her legs.

Notes

My thanks is due to my dearest friend the late Dr Sharmila Rege for all her help and kindest support in the preparation of this essay. I also deeply thank the editor of this volume, Dr Anand Teltumbde, for his encouragement and advice in elaborating this essay.

A CAVEAT: A KIND OF BRIEF

Although it is very clear, I had this nagging feeling that the title was too stark and too direct. Something discreet might have helped, I thought. But later, I was convinced of the aptness of the title when I recently got to read a Hindutva publication called *RSS: A Vision in Action*. In between rabid displays of Fascism and repression, fundamentalism and perversion, the 400-odd page book had earmarked five pages for the issues of women, and mostly held information about the Rashtrasevika Samiti. Of the five pages, three were consumed with leggy themes. I have sincerely reproduced here two relevant extracts:

Here is a telling instance of how even one single vigilant Hindu lady can effectively put an end to certain revolting practices in Christian schools. When a P.E. Teacher of a girls' convent ordered that girls shall thenceforth attend the school wearing skirts (above the knee) the mother of a student—a Sevika of the Samiti, protested against this to the teacher. However when the teacher arrogantly replied that she can take her girl from the school if she did not like her girl to obey the order, the mother took it up as a challenge. The Karyavahika of that Shakha mobilized about 80 mothers of the students and met the Christian principal and bluntly told him that they would not tolerate such insults to the traditional Hindu modesty. They even threatened that in case the order was not withdrawn forthwith, protests by hundreds will follow suit. Evidently, the principal was prudent enough and the order was withdrawn. When the principal came to know about the work of the Samiti, he admired the Samiti workers for their organizing capacity at such short notices. (p.173)

On a Raksha Bandhan day, the Jilla Pramukh of the Rashtrasevika Samiti at Sholapur met the District Collector

and tied the Rakhi on his wrist. He reciprocated the gesture in the traditional manner by offering her a token amount. But she refused it saying: 'I would rather appreciate your help in the capacity of your high office.' A bit surprised, the Collector asked, 'Do you require employment for any of your relatives?' 'No, no, far from it. I am pained to see the modesty of womanhood being slighted by the manner in which they display the undergarments of women in the cloth-shops. It is so appalling. Kindly do something about it.' That was the first time the Collector had come across an appeal not concerned with any personal benefit. Of course he promised to do whatever was in his power. (p.174)

One of the chief issues is about covering the knees of adolescent girls, and the other is about, hmm, female underwear. This quite sums up something about the 'vision' and the 'action' of the RSS. Now, 'Between Her Legs' doesn't sound anything other than appropriate. Before long, I had a vague feeling of contentment for choosing a title which reflected the position of the Parivar.

- ¹ Tanika Sarkar, 'Heroic Women, Mother Goddesses: Family and Organization in Hindutva Politics'. In *Secular Challenge to Communal Politics*, edited by P. R. Ram (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 1998): 174.
- ² John Stratton Hawley, *Fundamentalism and Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).
- ³ *Our Women* (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2003).
- ⁴ M. S. Golwalkar, *We or Our Nationhood Defined* (Nagpur, 1923): 27.
- ⁵ Sriram Sathe, *Hindu Rashtra: Interpretations-Misinterpretations* (Hyderabad: Itihasa Sankalan Samiti, Hyderabad, 2003): 76, emphasis mine.
- ⁶ M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Sahitya Sindhu Prakashana, 2000): 356.
- ⁷ Mridula Sinha, in *Dashak ke Jharokhe Main* (Delhi: Mahila Morcha, BJP, 1991): 5.
- ⁸ Interestingly, the screening of the *Ramayana* on Doordarshan has spawned studies on that phenomenon on a wide scale; some of the more interesting titles include: Ananda Mitra's *Television and Popular Culture in India* (Delhi: SAGE, 1993); and Nilanjana Gupta, *Switching Channels: Ideologies of Television in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998); and Arvind

- Rajagopal, *Politics After Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- ⁹ Indu Agnihotri, *Whose Life Is the Sangh Parivar's Adarsh Hindu Ghar Based On: A Comment on Hindutva's Attempts to Appropriates the Vocabulary of the Women's Movement* (Nukkad Janam Samvad, July-December 2001): 32–42. Agnihotri presents her conclusion of how 'the Sangh attempts and achieves a classic doublespeak: it decries the patriarchal mind-set even as it upholds and wishes to strengthen the structures in which patriarchy is rooted in India, both within the family and in society.'
- ¹⁰ Tanika Sarkar, 'Aspects of Contemporary Hindutva Theology'. In *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2002).
- ¹¹ Manik Chandra Vajpayee and Shridhar Paradkar, *Partition-Days: The Fiery Saga of RSS*, trans into English by Sudhakar Raje (Nagpur: Suruchi Prakashan, 2002); digital version (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2008).
- ¹² Ibid.: 126–28.
- ¹³ Ibid.: 164–65.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.: 192.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.: 298.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.: 157.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.: 299.
- ¹⁸ *Periyar on Women's Rights*, translated by R. Sundara Raju (Chennai: Emerald Publishers, 1994).

Hindutva: Historicity of Dalit Connection

Prakash Louis

In the recent past, there have been greater conflicts and seeming convergence between the right wing Hindutva forces and various segments of the Dalits. On the one hand, Maharashtra produced right wing men who gave birth to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh which ultimately grew into the Sangh Parivar (SP),¹ on the other hand, it was also the genesis of one of the staunch critics not only of Hinduism but also of the entire Hindu social order. Maharashtra gave us Mahatma Phule, Dr Ambedkar and in the post-independence period the Dalit Panther movement as a challenge to the Hindu social order.² Interestingly, it is in Maharashtra too that a slogan of *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* gained grounds (see also Essays 2, 3, 4 and 5). That is, there was an attempt once again by the brahminical forces to rope in the Dalits to become street fighters and vote bank for the Shiv Sena. One could brush this slogan aside saying that this was only a passing phenomenon. But political sociologists would state that this alliance could do serious harm to Dalit assertion and Dalit movements.

During the Gujarat pogrom of 2002, it was regularly reported that the Dalits were 'used' by the Sangh Parivar to engage in violation of the rights of the minority Muslim community (see also Essays 1, 3 and 4). Later, when the Dalit youth went to participate in the festival celebrations they were told 'You are untouchables and you cannot dance with us', and chased away. This was a crude shock to the Dalit youth, who during the Gujarat communal cleansing were mobilized to engage in violence under the scheme of 'Hindu identity'. It is significant to note that this Hindu identity formation was cleverly undertaken without disturbing the caste system.³ It is this process of subjugation at times and cooptation at other times which has been the process of interaction between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces.

The lynching of five Dalits in Jhajjar who were engaged in their traditional occupation of skinning dead animals and transporting the hides has once again highlighted the historical antagonism that exists between the Hindu fascist forces and the Dalits. It has been reported that the police, the ones who are supposed to uphold 'law and order' engaged in murderous assault on the Dalits who refused to grease their palms.⁴ To hide their crime, the police created the myth that the Dalit youth were killed by the 'Hindutva mob' since they were engaged in skinning a living animal. The killing of the Dalits once again provided the scope and space for the Hindu fascist forces to gain grounds in the region, where they did not have presence in the past (see also Essay 2). In spite of the fact that the Dalit men possessed a valid document to engage in their hereditary occupation they were tortured and murdered. This too goes to state that there are different laws for different caste groups.

The alliance between the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh for the third consecutive time also came under scrutiny.⁵ Dalit political activists believe that this alliance has enabled the BSP to move from strength to strength. But there are others who are cautious of the fact that a fascist party like the BJP has found stability at the national political scenario due to the support of the BSP. It is undeniable that the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh provided scope and space for Dalit assertion at the political realm. Without any hesitation it can be stated that this has raised the aspirations of the Dalits. But whether the political assertion riding on the shoulders of a fascist party led to social, economic and cultural liberation of the Dalit masses in Uttar Pradesh remains a crucial question. Thus, the short-term and long-term consequences of these types of political alliances also have come under severe scrutiny.

Another crucial fact is that the Hindutva forces and the Dalits constitute two opposing ideologies, ways of life, existence and processes in this country. The Hindutva forces engage in hegemonizing, homogenizing, manipulative, and destructive practices as far as the Dalits are concerned. In contrast, the Dalits are the creative, accommodative, non-owning but producing class. Irrespective of the fact that the Dalits were and are subjected to unprecedented and unparalleled cruelty and oppression, they continue to uphold Indian polity and society. Whether it is the Chakwara incident where the Dalits were denied the right to enter the village pond (see also Essay 4) or the Jhajjar incident, just mentioned, all seem to reiterate the historical fact

that the Dalits can be disposed of by the dominant castes. The most intriguing fact is that the Hindutva forces exploited these incidents to establish their base in these regions.⁶

All these events, processes, historical evolutions and present state of affairs raise questions on the very politics of Dalit assertion. These processes are calling for a deeper understanding of the historicity of the Dalit connection with Hindutva. Though the emergence of the Bharatiya Janata Party as a political face of the Hindutva forces is comparatively recent, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh only nine decades old, there has been interaction between the Hindutva forces or brahminical forces and Dalits in terms of the Hinduization of the Dalits, reducing the Dalits to the most dehumanizing state of Untouchability, depriving them of access over resources, denying them control over livelihood and labour, and so on.

It is these historical and social processes that need to be seriously examined to understand the historical disjuncture that exists between the fascist Hindutva forces and the Dalits. I shall try to identify some of the interactive processes between the Hindutva forces and the Dalits as they unfold. A caveat must be presented here. Since the interaction between the Dalits and the right wing Hindu forces are historical and contemporary it is not easy to enlist a clear and categorical mode of operation. One can only identify some broader areas of disjuncture.

HINDU FASCISM: A HEGEMONIC IDEOLOGY

Many social scientists and activists viewed the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 as a watershed in the political makeup of India. Some brushed aside the emergence of fascist Hindutva forces, which were using religion as an electoral weapon, as a passing phenomenon. They made themselves believe that in a multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-ethnic country like India communalism does not have a future. But they were in for a rude shock when they realized that the demolition of the Babri Masjid was only one aspect of the fascist forces. Interestingly, the Congress Party, which swears by secularism, was in power at the centre, which could certainly have thwarted the BJP-game around Ayodhya and saved the Babri Masjid, which then had become a live symbol of secularism. Its failure to do so exposed the fact that all the ruling classes rear fascist aspirations albeit in varying degree. The demolition of the Babri Masjid had clearly signalled the coming of the fascist forces to the centre stage. The introduction of the New

Economic Policy in 1991 was also another attempt to open up our markets to predatory global forces and expose our people to their unbridled exploitation. It was again the Congress that initiated these economic policies as it did in the case of Babri Masjid by opening the locks of the Ram Lulla temple in 1980s. The BJP, that openly dons the right wing robes and claims ownership of Hindutva, just differs in degree. An examination of major acts and policies enacted by the ruling establishment of this country in the 1990s, reiterates this fact that most of them are anti-people in principle and in effect.⁷

The 1996 election manifesto of the Bharatiya Janata Party, which is the political face of the Sangh Parivar, promised to work 'For a Strong and Prosperous India', spelling out the agenda of the Hindutva forces:

Hindutva or cultural nationalism shall be the rainbow which will bridge our present to our glorious past and pave the way for an equally glorious future; it will guide the transition from *swarajya*, that is, self-rule to *surajaya*, that is, good-governance ... Hindutva is a unifying principle, which alone can preserve the unity and integrity of our nation. It is a collective endeavour to protect and re-energize the soul of India, to take us into the next millennium as a strong and prosperous nation.⁸

Though self-rule and good governance are spoken of as desirable ends, the ultimate aim is to build a monolithic, hierarchical and unequal Hindu nation. The spread of Hindu fascist ideology was cleverly crafted with the slogan 'One nation, one culture, one people and one leader'. This is not just a slogan or any catchphrase of a political party; it indicates the hidden agenda of the Hindutva forces. On face value this slogan appears to be a sober attempt by the proponents of 'Hindu Nationalism' to unify various segments of the Indian population. This is also presented as the most urgent business today so that the nation can be saved and protected from some imaginary enemy. The champions of one-nation theory always take recourse to history and warn the citizens that there are 'hostile forces' or to state it in their own words a 'foreign hand'⁹ within and outside the country who is all out to destroy national unity and pride. Hence, all should be united to face this threat. In this thought pattern the 'enemy Other' is projected

as ready to devour the entire nation, culture, economy and society and thus various segments need to be mobilized to counter this 'threat'.¹⁰

Here it is expedient to unravel briefly the features of a fascist regime. 'The divergence between precept and practice is the common feature of all fascist organizations. Having their eye on the seats of power, they try to extend their influence by promising various people various things. The Nazi Party of Germany was nationalist and socialist at the same time. It promised strength to the common man, prosperity to the poor, honour to the German race and thus tried to appeal to every section. Its greatest appeal was to the youth who were attracted by the army discipline, parades and uniform.'¹¹ Similarly, it is by presenting an alternative agenda or ideology that the Sangh Parivar managed to grow from strength to strength.

Sumit Sarkar in his perceptive analysis argues that Fascism had come to power in Italy and Germany through a combination of street violence, carefully orchestrated from above but still undeniably with great mass support, deep infiltration into the police, bureaucracy and army and the connivance of centrist political leaders. Crude violations of laws and constitutional norms consequently had alternated in fascist and Nazi behaviour with loud protestations of respect for legality. Examining the Indian scenario during the post-Babri Masjid demolition riots, he states that there was a combination of street violence with administrative collusion. The fascist forces engaged in communal riots in various parts of Delhi also disrupted the communal harmony initiatives.¹²

According to Jayant Lele, the Hindutva project has three essential characteristics of all its past manipulations: Firstly, it is hegemonic, in the sense that it seeks to create a political constituency that can be regularly mobilized into an ongoing structure of support for electoral and other political activities. The leaders of the BJP in particular know that the managing institutions of the global economy will actively cooperate with the Hindu nation if and only if it fulfils some basic requirements. These requirements according to Lele are creating and sustaining an internally and regionally stable geo-political order, with a demonstrated superior military-industrial capability compared to its neighbours. Secondly, the second feature is homogenizing. The political community that emerged under Gandhi and was nurtured by Nehru had taken into account the enormous diversity of the emerging

nation that was challenged by the majoritarian Hindu construct. The colonial rulers had nurtured all of these as politically 'equal' interest groups. But from 1980s onwards there was an attempt by the Hindutva forces to create a new hegemony. It aimed at a national consensus based on a homogenized Hindu identity. This is similar to the earlier project of brahminization, that is, of homogenizing the diverse creative and critical impulses in the Indian tradition. Thirdly, the Hindutva forces have followed the pedagogy of recapturing and releasing the power of symbols and deities that have lived this dual, pan-Indian and local existence in the memories and aspirations of the people. This fabrication is aimed at bringing in an illusion of security and trust and a sense of historically persistent solidarity, into a world that is increasingly characterized by anxiety, uncertainty and disorder. The selection and the use of these symbols, events and actors are also associated with pedagogic violence.¹³ Thus, in the ultimate analysis, the agenda of Hindutva forces is to continue to maintain the dominance of the caste and class elite. Further, the ascent of Hindutva forces is directly related to fear psychosis of the dominant castes who were threatened by the emergence of the masses that had been subjugated for centuries. Hence, Hindutva forces functioned as the repressive arm of the Indian caste system.

The Hindu social order or the brahminical caste order hitch-hiked on the shoulders of the toiling masses, the Dalits and the downtrodden of this country. As long as these masses bent backwards and provided 'service' to those higher in the caste hierarchy, everything was fine. But the moment, they challenged the skewed social order which provided power, privilege and high position to a few and denied rights to the majority, the resurgence of Hindu nationalism became a war cry. While this process seems to be apparent, the manner in which this reconstruction of Hindu nationalism is undertaken needs careful examination.

Lele goes on to state, 'Once again there is a need to recognize and yet subdue, if not submerge, diversity. The success of this project is predicated on persuading people to believe in two main premises: (i) the anxiety and uncertainty that engulf their lives today is not a highly specific and local manifestations of the global disorder but a product of a conspiracy of subtle and overt enemy forces which have been at work internally, regionally and globally; (ii) that these forces have emerged not just in the recent past, but have been active for

centuries, and against which the Hindu nation has waged heroic battles through its many heroes'.¹⁴

Thus, the double-edged agenda of the Hindutva forces has two implications; they have managed to engage in the identity formation of the majority community under a unified 'Hindu fold' and on the other hand these forces have projected the minority religious communities as the enemy Other and have spread conflict and strife. Once conflict and violence spread, they appear on the scene as the sole defenders of majority interests and rights. While this open game goes on in the national scenario, their hidden agenda to uphold the hegemony and monopoly of the brahminical social order has got ratified and strengthened. This is not the end of the story; the fascist forces have also systematically resisted the assertions that emerged from the Dalit, tribal, women, minority and most backward caste communities. Further, it is the congruence between the Brahmins and the Banias or what Phule terms as Bhattji and Shetji or the combination of brain and the business which has usurped religious principles to continue their dominance and superiority.

HISTORICAL DISJUNCTURE BETWEEN THE DALITS AND HINDUTVA FORCES

There are many social and historical factors which continue to contribute to the antagonism and hatred that exists between these diametrically opposed communities. From the point of view of the Dalits, social mobility has become a reality and there is a leadership demanding restructuring of the social order. Due to this the Dalits no longer lie low and take things as imposed on them but assert their right to be equal citizens. The demand for access over resources and control over labour also has become the agenda of the Dalits. This goes directly against the economic monopoly of the dominant castes who are the central constituency of the Hindutva forces. Moreover, the demand for social dignity by the Dalits has challenged the till now taken for granted caste order. The attempt to appropriate Dr Ambedkar has triggered reactions among the Dalits. Above all, there is structural and ideological opposition between the two segments of the Indian population.

The barbaric and beastly behaviour exhibited towards the Dalits and the downtrodden by the dominant castes could be directly

understood from the glorification of caste by the proponents of Hindutva. Savarkar's views on caste expresses this in a telling manner.

And thus we find that the institutions that were the peculiar mark of our nation were revived. The system of four varnas which could not be wiped out even under the Buddhistic sway, grew in popularity to such an extent that kings and emperors felt it a distinction to be called one who established the system of four varnas . . . Witness the definition that tries to draw a line of demarcation between foreigners and us—The land where the system of four varnas does not exist should be known as the *Mlechcha* [impure] country. Aryavarta lies away from it.¹⁵

Since Savarkar and his followers are the direct beneficiaries of the inhuman caste system; it is not a surprise that he and the others glorified it, which in turn also provided justification to this social formation. Further, for Savarkar,

Hindutva embraces all the departments of thoughts and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race . . . the quaint customs and ceremonies and sacraments they involve, observed by some as a religious duty by others as social amenities, impress upon each individual that he can live best only through the common and corporate life of the Hindu race . . . We Hindus are not only a *Rashtra*, a *Jati*, but as a consequence of being both, own a common *Sanskriti* expressed, preserved chiefly and originally through Sanskrit, the real mother tongue of our race. Everyone who is a Hindu inherits this *Sanskriti* and owes his spiritual being to it as truly as he owes his physical one to the land and the blood of his forefathers. A Hindu means a person who regards this land of *Bharatvarsha*, from the Indus to the Seas as his Father-Land as well as his Holy-Land that is the cradle of his religion.¹⁶

Savarkar succeeded in driving home two inter-related points. On the one hand, race, blood, faith, cultural moorings and practices of those persons whose ancestry is beyond the borders of India cannot be part of Hindutva even if they have adopted themselves to Hinduism. Thus,

the Muslims and Christians are kept out of this grand design of the race and rashtra. Once, this is done, it is easy to mobilize the masses to treat these communities as the enemy Other. On the other hand, there is an attempt to bring through the backdoor, as it were, the Dalits and the tribals to the nation-building exercise. What place and role would be assigned to these subjugated communities is not hidden from anyone who cares to read Indian reality. What is most important is that Savarkar and his followers have managed to utilize this double-edged weapon and have succeeded in pitting the Dalits and the minorities against each other.

At this juncture it is legitimate to raise the question, why do the Dalits allow themselves to be hoodwinked by the dominant castes in general and the fascist forces in particular? One of the most dominant reasons behind this is that the Dalits are economically dependent upon the dominant castes. Economic dependence in turn leads to other forms of dependence and finally ends up in servitude. The iron grip of the caste system does not allow the Dalits to have independent minds or to take independent action. Even if some individuals try to develop a sense of independence, they are either ridiculed, stigmatized or kept out of the system. Not only individuals but collective assertion of the Dalits is also denied existence. This is done by the dominant castes by coopting some of the leadership and, thus, assertion and resistance are thwarted once for all.

Writing about the cooptation of the Dalit cultural and political activists and its impact on the Dalit movements in Maharashtra, Gopal Guru is of the opinion that the decline of the cultural movement is contingent upon the overall decline of Dalit political movement in the state. The decline of the Dalit political movement as well as the Dalit cultural movement can be accounted by the cooptation of motivated Dalit political and cultural activists by several pacification structures including the state. The net result, according to him, is that it diverted these otherwise true agents of history from transformative politics to the politics of manipulations and creating illusions.¹⁷ It is the projection of illusionary liberation which hoodwinks the Dalits and they become the flag bearers and street fighters of the fascist forces. Thus, on the one hand, the fascist forces rope in the support of the Dalits for carrying out their agenda and on the other hand these forces ensure that exclusion and discrimination continues.

A careful examination of how the founders of Sangh Parivar saw the caste system unravels the real intention of these fascist forces.

Speaking on the caste system and the special provisions, Golwalkar writes,

To our bitter experience, we know how the British used to set up one caste or sect against the other, as for example the 'non-Brahmin' against the 'Brahmin' and play the game of divide and rule, and how our own people—even the so-called leaders—fell a willing prey to it. We should take a lesson from that, and beware of similar designs even now of foreign powers and their agents inside our borders ... It goes without saying that if anyone is suffering from any disability, social or political, on account of what is called caste, that must be removed completely. Dr Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for Scheduled Castes for only 10 years from the day we become a Republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interests in them in remaining as a separate entity. That would harm their integration with the rest of the society.¹⁸

Golwalkar's argument manages to communicate two messages: on the one hand, by stating that the Sangh Parivar is for the integration of the Dalits into the national mainstream, he wants to project that the Dalits can become part of 'a unified Hindu fold'. Golwalkar does not raise the basic question as to why the Dalits are not integrated because it would expose the unjust Hindu social order. On the other hand, by taking the name of Dr Ambedkar he wants to justify the other argument, which was doing the rounds, that the constitutional provision of reservations for the Scheduled Castes should come to an end. It is this ability to use every argument as a double-edged weapon which exhibits the fascist character of the Sangh Parivar.

The Sangh Parivar's game plan to bring the Dalits into the Hindu fold is clearly expressed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's former leader Ashok Singhal, 'For us Hindu means all those religions which have come up from this soil of Hindustan. Dr Ambedkar upheld the spirit of this country when he stopped the flow of Dalits into foreign religions like Christianity and Islam by propagating the ideals of Buddhism. That way he contributed greatly to the Hindu Dharma. And that is why we consider him one of the pioneers of our ideology and our movement'.¹⁹ By this statement, the VHP leader has achieved more

than one goal. He has tried to co-opt Ambedkar too into the brahminical fold. This can be called the 'brahminization' process.²⁰ He has also made it appear that there is no antagonism between Brahminism and Buddhism. And above all he has established this myth that except the Christians and Muslims all the rest belong to the Hindu fold, thus keeping intact the VHP's constituency.

Another strategy of the Hindutva forces is to strike both spatially and temporally at the root of alternative assertions. Pralay Kanungo in his observant analysis presents the reason why Nagpur became the centre of the RSS. Nagpur had many educational institutions and hence made an impact. Newspapers like *Hitavada* and *Maharashtra* were published from here. One fourth of the educated students in the province were from Nagpur and all of them were Maharashtrian Brahmins. Nagpur was the seat of political power under the Bhonsles and these Brahmins had a dominant position. Their position however began getting challenged by the assertion of the lower castes from the early years of the twentieth century. The All India Depressed Classes Conference at Nagpur on 30–31 May 1920 and Ambedkar's emergence as a militant leader shook the foundation of the structure of Brahmin domination. In this background, Hedgewar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, founded the RSS at Nagpur.²¹ Thus it can be argued that cultural nationalism is another name for continuing the culture of dominance.

Going further, it needs to be stated that the Hindutva forces not only upheld the anti-human, exploitative and oppressive caste system but also engaged in cultural manipulations of the weaker sections. It is expedient at this juncture to present briefly the various game plans employed by the Sangh Parivar to maintain its hold over the Dalits. To cite an example, the RSS has initiated different educational and developmental activities in the slums of Chennai. A youth of Munnusami Nagar of Chennai stated, 'the RSS introduced North Indian ceremonies like Rakshabandan and Ramnavami in our slum to show that we are all Indians; our Ambedkar Night School was renamed into *Hindu Samrajya School*, where classes would begin with the slogan of "*Jaybheem*" and end with abusing the Muslims. They taught us to say that RSS is our mother and the BJP our father. They also claimed that Ambedkar was a RSS activist and distributed key chains bearing the image of Ambedkar.'²² These activities are undertaken under the scheme of cultural deprivation of the Dalits so that they would be forced to follow the principles and practices propagated by the fascist forces.

There is also an attempt to control the thought pattern by calling for unity and oneness and at other times claiming one's superior status in the caste order. A Dalit youth of Triplicane, another slum in Chennai, asserted that 'Brahminical oppression is pervasive in all fields. They still control the cultural sphere. But above all, to divide the Dalits they have corrupted our leaders. Despite political differences, the Brahmins keep their caste unity intact. Our Chief Minister [Jayalalithaa] takes pride in stating her caste in the Legislative Assembly. It is their unity and pride of belonging to an upper caste which give them the strength to hold on to power and deprive us of our right to organize and assert.'²³ Since, the Dalits are deprived economically, politically, socially and culturally they cannot adequately counter the move of the Hindutva forces. The Dravidian movement that emerged as a very powerful anti-brahminical movement in Tamil Nadu degenerated to be just interested in seizing political power to the detriment of its earlier mission of cultural and social reforms. It thereby enabled Brahminism in the state to reassert its cultural dominance and created a paradox by catapulting up a Brahmin woman to be its torchbearer to the seat of power.

Christophe Jaffrelot argues that the Hindu nationalists displayed anti-Muslim prejudice, which was nourished by the sentiment of upper-caste superiority. For instance, Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the founder of the Jana Sangh, used revealing arguments while resigning himself to the Partition of Bengal in 1946, 'If Bengal is converted into Pakistan . . . Bengal Hindus are placed under a permanent tutelage of Muslims. Judging from the manner in which attacks on Hindu religion and society have been made, this means an end of Bengali Hindu culture. In order to placate a set of converts from low caste Hindus to Islam, very ancient Hindu culture will be sacrificed.'²⁴

That the fascist forces hate and despise anyone who emerges as leader from the lower castes can be understood from the perception of intellectuals who represent the Hindu fascist ideology. M. V. Kamath in his analysis of the emerging caste relations in India is extremely critical of the politicians from the backward caste and the Dalit communities. According to him, people like Mulayam Singh Yadav, Laloo Prasad Yadav, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati are making massive efforts to condemn the so-called upper castes as the ones who kept the so-called backward castes suppressed all these centuries. He states that the upper castes are not responsible for oppressing the lower

castes; the lower caste leaders are ignorant of history and sociology. Though the lower castes accused the upper castes of oppressing them, the upper castes are ready and willing to help them. His fascist mind then conjures up a trick of reversing the balance on the lower caste leaders by arguing that by denying the role to upper castes, these leaders are retarding the process of annihilation of caste system. A casteless society can only be established by the exertions of the upper castes and not by the hate mongering of the likes of Kanshi Ram. SCs, OBCs and others need the help of upper castes. Putting the latter down in an act of vengeance will only retard the process to eliminate caste from our society and the country. We need cooperation, not confrontation for India to grow rich once again.²⁵

Against this myth of establishing a casteless society under the benevolence of Hindu social order, Ambedkar presents the following facts about the degraded and deprived state of the Dalits. In his essay, 'The Indian Ghetto: the Centre of Untouchability', he argues: 'In every village the Touchables have a code which the Untouchables are required to follow. This code lays down the acts of commissions and omissions, which the Touchables treat as offences.

1. The Untouchables must live in separate quarters away from the habitation of the Hindus. It is an offence for the Untouchables to break or evade the rule of segregation.
2. The quarters of the Untouchables must be located towards the south, since the south is the most inauspicious of the four directions.
3. The Untouchable must observe the rule of distance pollution or shadow of pollution as the case may be. It is an offence to break the rule.
4. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to acquire wealth, such as land or cattle.
5. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to sit on a chair in the presence of a Hindu.
6. It is an offence for a member of the Untouchable community to ride on a horse or a palanquin through the village.
7. An Untouchable must conform to the status of an inferior and he must wear the marks of his inferiority for the public to know and identify him such as: (a) having a contemptible name; (b) not wearing clean clothes; (c) not having tiled roofs; (d) not wearing silver and gold ornaments.²⁶

Even a reformist movement like the Arya Samaj could not totally break away from the sway of the caste system, from the Hindu social order, and ultimately from brahminical hegemony. J. L. Brockington argues,

Although the Arya Samaj was hesitant in advocating reform of the caste system, being anxious to remain within the mainstream of Hinduism, it was on this issue that its characteristic development hinged. For another of Dayananda's prime concerns was to counter what he saw as a menacing stream of conversions to Islam and Christianity, especially among low caste Hindus. The rite of purification for the readmission of such converts to Hinduism was a major weapon in this field, an innovation to placate orthodox opinion . . . Nevertheless, the success enjoyed by this new campaign gradually involved the Arya Samaj more and more in communal agitation and into alliance with the Hindu Mahasabha, an ultra-orthodox political group, despite the Arya Samaj claims that it did not take part in politics.²⁷

In the ultimate analysis even these reformist trends contributed to the maintenance of the Dalits at the lowest place in the social order. Mark Juergensmeyer in his analysis of interaction between the Dalits of Punjab and Arya Samaj highlights the fact that the Dalit leaders saw in the spread of Arya Samaj among the Dalits another attempt to keep them outside the system. He stated that Arya Samaj was a reform movement dedicated to returning Hinduism to a purer form in which the more unpleasant features of caste prejudice would be alleviated. The author goes on to point out that the *Samaj in a gesture of benevolence* (emphasis mine) to the lower castes started organizations for them and also allowed them to participate in *shuddhi* so that they could be admitted in to Hindu fold. But to the leaders of the Dalits this generosity seemed to be deviousness of the worst sort, seducing the Untouchables into accepting, a religious tradition that would always, whatever the guise, relegate them to a lower status.²⁸ Thus, even in the attempt by the religious reform movements the attitude and behaviour of the dominant castes to subjugate the Dalits continues to operate.

Lakshmi Narasu in his analysis of the Indian caste system presents the centrality of brahminical hegemony and its debilitating effect.

The caste system is essentially brahminical and it has spread with the spread of brahminism. Where the Brahmin is, there is inevitably the system of castes and the pariah. With a view to keep the lower castes in perpetual childhood and slavish mentality, brahminism checks the development of intellect and encourages all appetite for the monstrous and the absurd. If caste, untouchability, social barriers, pollutions, idolatry, distinguishing myths were removed, would there be any Hinduism left? The so-called educated Hindus are slaves to the unreason of their benighted ancestors. Over a great mass of irrational predisposition there is only a veneer of culture which sways influence in the hour of fear and excitement.²⁹

One of the most intriguing aspects of the Hindu fascist forces is the predominance of the brahminical elements in the Sangh Parivar. According to J. A. Curran, ‘Many persons who were acquainted with the RSS in its first years have suggested another motive for the decision to founding of the Sangh, namely, a desire, common to many Brahmins of the Maharashtrian region inspired by the Shivaji tradition, to restore Maratha Brahmin eminence. It is true that Hedgewar and those around him were affected by the martial traditions of Maharashtra and influenced by the Shivaji cult, but the evidence seems to indicate that their Maharashtrain loyalties were subordinate to their national loyalties. The Hindu “Nation” as a whole was their concern.’³⁰

Curran goes on to argue that the reason that all of the chief leaders of the RSS have been Maharashtrian Brahmins is that in the first years of the Sangh, Hedgewar restricted its activities to Nagpur and the immediate vicinity. The membership was kept small. In those circumstances it was natural for most of the recruits of this period to be of the same caste as Hedgewar and his co-founders—Maharashtrian Brahmins. Hedgewar trained those first volunteers to be his chief assistants, and this explains the predominance of Maharashtrian Brahmin leadership throughout the history of the RSS. With the commencement of recruitment operations on a large-scale membership was drawn from all social groups among the Hindu community. There

are still many Maharashtrian Brahmins in the organization, but they are a definite minority. All castes and some outcastes are beginning to have representatives in the higher echelons of the hierarchy; in time the composition of the high command will be affected by this process.³¹ But Curran's forecast has been proved wrong.

It is of seminal significance to note that Curran's later writings contradict his own argument. 'In all probability the imprisonment of approximately 1,700 of the most important RSS members until August 1948 saved their lives. Many members and sympathizers of the RSS as well as those of the Hindu Mahasabha who were not in custody, were given rough treatment by the infuriated mobs, in the Maharashtrian area. These anti-RSS, and anti-Mahasabha mob actions had an additional anti-Brahmin tinge. Many Brahmins unconnected with the Sangh or the Mahasabha were attacked and severely beaten.'³² This goes to reiterate the historical fact that the RSS's total force at the higher echelon comes from the Brahmins. The appointment of Mr Bangaru Laxman, a Dalit, as the President of the BJP, is an indication that the Hindutva forces are willing to 'share power' in their front organizations. This strategy helps them in two ways: (i) They can project this myth that they are not averse to have even a Dalit or a tribal at the helm of affairs; (ii) but the Sangh continues to remain the bastion of the Brahmins.

The most intriguing point of the matter is that not only the RSS but the BJP also suffers from this image of being a Brahmin outfit. Arvind Lele, the former MLA from Pune and treasurer of the BJP in Maharashtra explained, 'Congress had the power, strong economic networks, muscle power, caste appeal with the Maratha-Kunbi and bahunjan samaj. It was a major factor that we were branded as a Brahmin party, though Uttamrao Patil, a Maratha, and so many bahunjan samaj people were with us. Uttamrao Patil was our president for so many years. Motiramji Lahane was our president. All our presidents were from the bahunjan samaj. But the bahunjan samaj image is more for Congress and not for us. Because a certain tradition in the state, right from Satyasodhak Samaj and Mahatma Phule, is with Congress and against us. Therefore we are branded as Brahmin party, as a 'new avatar of Hindu Mahasabha'. In Maharashtra this non-Brahmin feeling was always a major obstacle. It is still so even now.'³³ Maharashtra Hindutva could be called the Brahmin cocoon Hindutva.

Though the Sangh Parivar is the creation of Brahmins, it has the ability to adapt itself in different circumstances. Rob Jenkins labels

the Hindutva in Rajasthan as Rajput Hindutva or martial Hindutva. Rajasthan plays an important role in the revival of Hinduism and in extension, Hindutva forces. This was so since Rajasthan always represented an assertive, self-confident and martial tradition of Hinduism. There is also a reading of history which considers that in other parts of India, the martial traditions of Hinduism was lost to Muslim and western influence while Rajasthan kept up the tradition. Rob Jenkins is of the view that the Hindutva forces saw in Rajasthan the sacrificial fire which protects Hindu interest which can also reinvigorate other regions into this flame.

In other regions the martial tradition of Hinduism has been lost under the influence of Muslim and western rule but in Rajasthan 'the flame of honour has not yet been snuffed out. It is the "sacred fire" from which the rest of India can reignite its sense of lost strength and vitality.³⁴ It is in this region of martial Hindutva that the Dalits are subjected to the most cruel forms of oppression and discrimination. There are over 17.29 per cent of Dalits in Rajasthan. Out of this only 25 per cent of them are literate. The deplorable fact is that even an educated Dalit who is employed as teacher in a government school cannot drink water from the same pot from which the dominant caste children drink.

At regular intervals there have been attempts to rope in Sikhism into the brahminical fold. Gurharpal Singh is of the view that for the BJP and its sister organizations, Sikhism is essentially a militant Hindu sect, a 'martial face' of Hinduism. At the height of the troubles in 1984, a BJP resolution declared: 'The Sikh Panth was born to protect Hinduism and the venerable Gurus sacrificed themselves and their dear children to protect Hindu honour. The Sikh contribution to the strength and prosperity of India is magnificent, and the nation is truly grateful.'³⁵ This notwithstanding, the RSS founded the Rashtriya Sikh Sanghat, that is, National Sikh Front, in the same year to attract the Sikh community who were wounded by Operation Blue Star.

These attempts and propaganda have been countered by some of the Sikhs and Sikh organizations, who repeatedly asserted that they are not part of the Hindu fold. But a political party like the Akali Dal has an electoral alliance with the BJP which is contradictory to the principles of Sikhism. Hence, in the 2002 Assembly elections this alliance was defeated and Congress came back to power. Further, the refusal of the Jat Sikhs to allow representation of the Ad-dharm Sikhs in the Baba Nihal Singh Smadh-Gurdwara in Talhan Punjab is

another instance of this historical denial of equality and rights to the Dalits. Though Sikhism is based on the principles of *sangat* (community) and *langar* (common kitchen) and Sikhism posed one of the serious critiques to Brahminism in Punjab, in reality Sikhism also practices Untouchability when it comes to the Dalits.³⁶ It is this contradiction Sikhism will have to face squarely if it has to pose challenge to Brahminism which is threatening to assimilate them.

Taken together, the social seclusion that the Dalits were subjected to by the brahminical forces was not limited to the denial of the right to interact with the dominant castes, inter-dining, inter-marriage, entry into temples, be represented in socio-religious organizations as some social scientists would argue, but it also resulted in the denial of right to own and operate resources. Further, this oppressive social process deprived them of the right to appropriate the fruits of their labour. Thus, the Dalits were reduced to being just a producing class for the betterment, enjoyment, and development of the non-producing dominant castes.³⁷ It is this deprivation, which ultimately leads to cultural deprivation and thus sealed their fate as the most discriminated beings on this subcontinent.

Even as early as in the 1881 Census enumeration, a bias against the lower castes was recorded. The Census enumerators could not situate the low castes and the tribals in relation to religion. It is reported, 'Many of the more bigoted high caste Hindoos employed as census enumerators or supervisors objected to record such low persons as of the Hindoo religion. This was illustrated by numerous instances brought to my notice of such persons having been recorded as of the Dher, Mang or Chandal religion by mere repetition of their caste in the column for religion. Possibly some in their humility and ignorance may not even have claimed to be of the Hindoo religion. More probably they were not even asked.'³⁸ This goes to establish the fact that for the so-called dominant caste Hindus, the lower castes did not matter except as labouring and service providing organism. The antagonism expressed towards the Dalits by the right wing Hindu forces today finds echo in the past principles and practices.

ALTERNATIVE DALIT IDEOLOGY

Having examined the historical discontinuities that exist between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces it is essential to explore some of the salient features of alternative Dalit ideology which would provide pointers for Dalit liberation and emancipation.

The most important fact that has emerged among the Dalits for their liberation from the onslaught of the fascist forces is to understand the game plan of these forces. One of the often repeated game plan of the dominant castes is in the name of protecting the common interest or greater good of the country, the Dalits have been enlisted to sacrifice their specific interests and rights. This is clearly expressed in the final settlement of the Poona Pact, which was the result of an adamant stance taken by Gandhi to block the demand of Dr Ambedkar for separate electorates to promote the legitimate political participation of the Dalits. In this regard Ambedkar wrote,

This fast unto death was a great gamble on the part of Mr Gandhi. He perhaps felt that the mere threat to fast unto death would make me and other Depressed Classes who were with me just shiver and yield. But he soon found that he was mistaken and that the Untouchables were equally determined to fight to the last for their rights. No one except his own followers was convinced that Mr Gandhi's fast had any moral basis and if Gandhi got a second lease of life, he owes it entirely to the generosity and goodwill shown towards him by the Untouchables.³⁹

Understanding this game plan of the right wing Hindutva forces would enable the Dalits to be cautious not to be hoodwinked by them anymore.

There is an emerging awareness that the Dalits have to chalk out a liberation path of their own.

The Dalits have never been charmed by the Sangh Parivar. They have too often and too regularly been victims of the forces of aggressive Hindutva and Brahmanism to harbour any illusions about these forces. The attitude of the Hindutva forces towards the Dalits is almost a replica of their attitude towards the minorities: the Muslims and the Christians. Stay in the country in peace and security at our pleasure and sufferance is the 'promise' to these sections. We may grant you some concessions and rights but do not dare to agitate for them, and above all do not ever hurt the sentiments of the majority by even mentioning caste, caste oppression, untouchability and caste atrocities. In every instance of atrocity against the Dalits the Hindutva forces

in one way or the other have blamed the Dalits themselves. This is the same attitude that says, 'The Muslims in Gujarat got the treatment they deserved'. The Dalits nevertheless have to be won over, first as voters and then as street fighters in implementing the Hindu Rashtra agenda.⁴⁰

It is this awareness that the Dalits have been and are used as vote bank and street fighters for the well-being and progress of the Hindutva forces which has generated power to oppose this sinister plan. Ambedkar's embracing Buddhism led to a mass movement, both spatially and temporally:

Even the poorest, came clad in the spotless white shirts and saris that had been prescribed for the occasion by their beloved leader. Some families had had to sell trinkets in order to buy their new clothes and meet the expense of the journey, but they had made the sacrifice gladly and set out for Nagpur with songs on their lips and the hope of a new life in their heart . . . Some stayed with the relations in Mahar ghettos. Many simply camped on any patch of waste ground they could find . . . By the end of the week 400,000 men, women and children had poured into Nagpur, with the result that the population had nearly doubled and the white clad Untouchables had virtually taken over the city. The Caste Hindus ... gazed with astonishment at the spectacle of tens of thousands of clean, decently dressed, well-behaved and well-organised people in whom they had difficulty in recognizing their former slaves and serfs.⁴¹

These acts of defiance and assertion need to be carried out at all levels possible. Dalit masses should continuously monitor the co-opting and discarding strategies of the brahminical forces. In this regard Anand Teltumbde presents a historical caution. 'Initially, the Hindutva forces grudging Ambedkar's virulent criticism of everything Hindu and sulked over his forsaking Hindu religion and embracing Buddhism. But when they realized that Ambedkar represented the aspirations of the vast majority of Dalits in the country, who constituted at least 16 per cent of the total population and hence any criticism of Ambedkar would

mean alienation of the entire Dalit-mass from the Sangh Parivar, they adapted a strategy of co-opting Ambedkar (see also Essays 2 and 4).

Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd is of the view that Dalitization of civil society, state and administration apparatus is not going to be an easy task.

The Dalitbahujans want that it should be achieved as peacefully as possible; they have never been lovers of violence. But the enemy forces have survived only through violence . . . the Dalitbahujan movements, should be aware of the hurdles and complications that modern brahminical intellectuals are going to create . . . the only way to historicize the past and safeguard the future is to create an army of organic intellectuals—men and women—from Dalitbahujan forces. Dalitbahujan organic intellectuals must work out a long-term strategy, both political and economic to restructure social relations in a massive way. If the Brahmins shout from their rooftops ‘Hinduize India’, we must shout from our toddy palms, from the fields, from treetops ‘Dalitize India’. We must shout, ‘We hate Hinduism, we hate Brahminism, we love our culture and more than anything, we love ourselves.’⁴²

Finally, Ambedkar’s prophetic words provide pointers for a long drawn-out struggle.

How to bring about the reform of Hindu social order? How to abolish caste? Inter-dining and intermarriage seems to be a solution. Yet to agitate for and to organize inter-caste marriage is like forced feeding brought about by artificial means. Make every man and woman free from the thralldom of the Shastras, cleanse their minds of the pernicious notions founded on the Shastras, and he or she will inter-dine and inter-marry, without your telling him or her to do so . . . You must take the stand that Buddha and Nanak took. You must not only discard the Shastras, you must deny their authority, as did Buddha and Nanak. You must have courage to tell the Hindus, that what is wrong with them is their religion—the religion which has produced in them this notion of the sacredness of caste.⁴³

The movement of the untouchables against the injustice of the Hindu social order has a long history behind it, especially in Maharashtra. This history falls into two stages. The first stage was marked by petitions and protests. The second stage is marked by open revolt in the form of direct action against the Hindu established order. This change of attitude was due to two circumstances. In the first place it was due to the realization that the petitions and protests had failed to move the Hindus. In the second place the government had declared that all public utilities and public institutions are open to all citizens including the Untouchables. The right to wear any kind of clothes or ornaments are some of the rights which the British Indian Law gives to the Untouchables along with the rest. To these were added the rights to the use of public utilities and institutions, such as wells, schools, buses, trams, railways, public offices, etc., were now put beyond the pale of doubt. But owing to the opposition of the Hindus the Untouchables cannot make any use of them. It is to meet the situation, the Untouchables decided to change the methods and to direct action to redress their wrongs. This change took place about 1920.⁴⁴

Since the ramifications of the Hindutva forces are unfolding slowly it is difficult to define it. But some of the consequences especially from the perspective of the Dalits provide scope for understanding. The emergence of Hindutva forces is a means to perpetuate the institutionalization of exclusion. Dalit-tribal assertion and people's movement sounded a warning to the brahminical forces. Hence to continue their hegemony they have come up with a new slogan 'Hindu Nationalism'. Continued deprivation of the Dalits once again reinforces their dependence on the dominant castes. It is this reality which reduces the Dalits to do 'begari', become vote bank and now street fighters for the aggrandizement of the brahminical forces. The ability of the Hindutva forces to propose alternative ideologies, agendas and slogans also has a role in the subjugation of the Dalits. It is at this juncture the Dalit activists, intellectuals, politicians are called upon to build parallel institutions, alliances, and so on, for the liberation and emancipation of the Dalits from the clutches of Hindutva forces.

Notes

- ¹ Many terms are used to refer to the right wing Hindu communalism. They are Hindutva forces, Hindu Fascism, majority communalism, and so on. The men who propagate the right wing Hindutva ideology operate under various forums and organisations like the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal, BJP, ABVP. These organizations are clubbed under the generic term 'Sangh Parivar'. The term 'Sangh' refers to the RSS. Since the RSS gave rise to many of these frontal organizations and continues to operate as the central, coordinating agency these frontal organizations are placed within the Sangh Parivar.
- ² Gail Omvedt, 'Dalits and the Democratic Revolution'. In *Dr Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India* (Delhi: SAGE, 1994); and Lata Murugkar, *Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1991).
- ³ Ghanshyam Shah, 'Caste, Hindutva and Hideousness.' In *Fascism in India: Faces, Fangs and Facts*, edited by Krishna Chaitanya (Delhi: Manak Publications, 2003): 304–312.
- ⁴ Prakash Louis, 'Dalit Utpeedan: Chakwara se Jhajjar tak'. *Hindustan*, 29 October 2002.
- ⁵ This alliance also was a short time honeymoon between diametrically opposed political parties, but now the alliance has been terminated. Whatever has been the consequence of this short-lived alliance only history will bear witness. But the way in which the Mayawati the leader of BSP in Uttar Pradesh has been subjected to witch hunting not only by the former alliance partner BJP and Samajwadi Party goes to bear testimony to the fact that the dominant castes ultimately take control over the situation. It appeared that Mayawati would wrest some benefits for the Dalits of Uttar Pradesh this time but the powerful dominant castes in alliance with the upper backward castes brought down the government even before any programmes could be undertaken.
- ⁶ Louis, 'Dalit Utpeedan.'
- ⁷ Prakash Louis, and R. Vashum, eds., *Extraordinary Laws in India: A Reader for Understanding Legislations Endangering Civil Liberties* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2002); Prakash Louis compiled *Policy Documents of the Government of India: A Reader for Understanding Policies that Determine the Lives of Millions of Citizens* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2003). A careful reading of these policies unravels this fact that the well-being and rights of the citizens of this country are relegated to the background. In the name of growth,

development, national unity draconian laws are being enacted at regular intervals.

- ⁸ T. B. Hansen, and C. Jaffrelot, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998).
- ⁹ Interestingly, former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi whenever she felt that her 'authority' was threatened engaged in this type of sloganeering. Whether it is to accuse her political opponents or to justify the imposition of emergency, she often took recourse to projecting an 'external hand' in disturbing the stability of the country. For more on this refer to Ram Avatar Sharma, *Indira Gandhi's Leadership* (Delhi: Raja Prakashan, 1986).
- ¹⁰ Prakash Louis, *The Emerging Hindutva Force: The Ascent of Hindu Nationalism* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 2000).
- ¹¹ 'RSS: How It Functions?' All India Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, Delhi (nd): 8. While the political face of the Sangh Parivar came to the political arena in a potent manner only from late 1980s, its various branches were operative over seven decades or more. In the same manner, opposition to the sinister plans of the fascist forces has also been erupting at regular intervals. Sampradayikta Virodhi Andolan is one such attempt.
- ¹² Sumit Sarkar, 'The Fascism of the Sangh Parivar', *Economic and Political Weekly* 28, 5 (30 January 1993): 163.
- ¹³ Jayant Lele, *Hindustan: The Emergence of the Right* (Chennai: Earthworm Books, 1995): xvii.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.: xviii–xix.
- ¹⁵ V. D. Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who Is a Hindu?* (Mumbai: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, 1989): 27.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 27.
- ¹⁷ Gopal Guru, *Dalit Cultural Movement and Dialectics of Dalit Politics in Maharashtra* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 1997): i.
- ¹⁸ M. S. Golwalkar, *A Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore: Jagaran Prakashan, 1980): 465–466.
- ¹⁹ Ashok Singhal. Interview in *Frontline*, 31 December 1993. This type of shifting one's discourse from being a staunch critic of a person, ideology, value or issue to engulfing these and drawing marrow for one's argument is one of the game plans of the fascist forces. Singhal and supporters who prefer cattle to a Dalit have become adept at turning even the most contradictory features to their advantage.
- ²⁰ By Brahminization what is indicated is the attempt of the brahminical forces to coopt any one leader who was in the other end of the spectrum and posed challenge to the very hierarchical brahminical order. When the person is alive or dead the brahminical forces coopt them so as to bring to

- the mainline those who followed the leader of the opposing camp. This is also being done with Ravidas and now with Dr Ambedkar.
- ²¹ Pralay Kanungo, *RSS's Tryst with Politics: From Hedgewar to Sudarshan* (Delhi: Manohar, 2002):39–40.
 - ²² S. Anandhi, *Contending Identities: Dalits and Secular Politics in Modern Slums* (Delhi: Indian Social Institute, 1995): 37.
 - ²³ Ibid.: 47.
 - ²⁴ Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics*: 24.
 - ²⁵ Ibid.: 26.
 - ²⁶ B. R. Ambdekar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 20: 21–22.
 - ²⁷ J. L. Brockington, *The Sacred Thread* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996): 179–180.
 - ²⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer. *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement against Untouchables in Twentieth-Century Punjab*. Berkeley: University of California Press: 1982): 64.
 - ²⁹ Lakshmi Narasu, *Religion of the Modern Buddhist* (Delhi: Wordsmiths, 2002): 38.
 - ³⁰ J. C. Curran, *Militant Hinduism in Indian Politics: A Study of the RSS* (Delhi: All India Quami Ekta Sammelan, 1979): 15.
 - ³¹ Ibid.: 16.
 - ³² Ibid.: 27.
 - ³³ Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics*: 126.
 - ³⁴ Ibid.: 105.
 - ³⁵ Ibid.: 230.
 - ³⁶ Prakash Louis, *Political Sociology of Dalit Assertion* (Delhi: Gyan Publishing House, 2003): 335–359.
 - ³⁷ Ibid.
 - ³⁸ Report on the Census of British India taken on 17 February 1881, vol.1 (HMSO, London 1883) as quoted in John Zavos, *The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000): 14. While it is the census enumeration or school enrolment, the Dalits go through the stigma of being Untouchables. Even if one over comes this hurdle, they are ridiculed in their work place. The terms of address like 'sarkari mehman' or similar terms go to express the deep-seated hatred and antagonism that exists in the minds of the dominant castes. The Hindutva forces have further provided sustenance to this practice by opposing reservation arguing that this divides the Hindu society.
 - ³⁹ Dr B. R. Ambdekar, *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 5 (Mumbai:, Government of Maharashtra, Education Department, 1990): 39–40. This collection of Dr Ambedkar's Speeches and Writings have become one of the powerful source material for Dalit awareness, mobilization and struggles.

- ⁴⁰ Anand Teltumbde, *Ambedkar on Muslims: Myths and Facts* (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2003): 15.
- ⁴¹ Gail Omvedt, *Buddhism in India: Challenging Brahminism and Caste* (Delhi: SAGE, 2003): 261.
- ⁴² Teltumbde, *Ambedkar on Muslims*, 19.
- ⁴³ Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, *Why I Am Not a Hindu: A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy* (Kolkata: Samya, 1996; New Delhi: SAGE Select—Samya 2018).
- ⁴⁴ Dr B.R. Ambedkar, *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches*, edited by Vasant Moon, vol. 1 (Mumbai: Government of Maharashtra, Education Department, 1979): 67–69.

Dalit–Hindutva Alliance and the Dynamics of Dalit Politics

Ramesh Kamble

Since the 1980s and the 1990s, the rise of the Hindutva movement set in motion by the brahminic Hindu rightist outfit, the RSS, has led to unleashing of forces that have tried to present a monolithic notion of culture, history, society and identity in India. The notion of Hindutva including the project of a brahminic Hindu Rashtra has existed for some decades. It occupied for most of its life the fringe of right wing and reactionary ideology. It became a potent social and political force only in the past four decades or so thanks mainly to the systematic, planned, and persistent work of the RSS. The hegemony of monolithic brahminical perspective on India's culture, history and society, realized by harbouring fanatic religiosity, has led to attempts at 'rewriting' of history and production of a particular kind of knowledge on the one hand, and the most violent and ghastly events in recent social history on the other. Moreover, making the monolithic brahminic view of culture and history essential components of nationalism has further led to privileging unconditional loyalty to the brahminic notion of nation and condemnation of the Other who does not abide by this view. Thus with the tool of Hindutva, Brahminism has assumed the power to 'discipline and punish' the Other who asserts the different multi-cultural and non-brahminic view of India's culture, history and society.

Hindutva's relationship with the Other is characterized by three, not necessarily mutually exclusive, approaches: constituting and containing the Other; its marginalization; and finally, its elimination. This has happened in three ways: The first is the accommodation, re-interpretation, and then appropriation of religiosity and traditions of non-brahminic groups within the 'mainstream' Hindu fold—of

course, in a subsidiary manner—to enlist their support for the brahminic Hindutva project. The second is the ‘advice’ to non-Hindu communities that assert their difference: accept the brahminic notion of nationalism or run the risk of being termed anti-national and hence, become liable to be punished. The third is the cooptation of the Dalit struggle that seeks to advance a counter articulation of self and society, in order to contain it and ultimately to marginalize it; this of course is attempted to bring the Dalits under the total sway of brahminic hegemony. This is seen in the simultaneous efforts to absorb Dalits into Brahminism and at the same time to condemn the Dalit movement as sectarian and ‘pro-British’ in orientation before independence. Thus, Brahminism has assumed the right to centre the centre and define and constitute the Other.

Of course, despite being defined, constituted and objectified by Brahminism, Dalits, adopting the Ambedkarian worldview, sought to redefine their status and as an essential part thereof strove to restructure Indian society on the basis of justice, equality and liberty. The concern for reconstructing society, a quest for egalitarian social order, has led Dalits to engage in an active critique of Brahminism, advocating the need to dismantle it. These attempts are best represented by the Dalit movement under the leadership of Dr Ambedkar. It was in this movement that a broad category of the oppressed—Dalits, marginalized peasantry and working classes—had come together and effectively interrogated the structure of brahminic knowledge/power. Ambedkar provided a clear vision for dismantling Brahminism and for reconstructing Indian society.

However, in post-Ambedkarian times, barring some expressions of radical Dalit assertion for dignity and some providing possibilities of engaging with broader emancipatory struggles of the marginalized, the educated leaders of the Dalit movement pursued the dream of political power as a panacea for addressing the Dalit question. They deliberately vulgarized Ambedkar who had exhorted them to be the ruling community in the particular context of emphasizing the importance of political power as ‘a key to all problems’. Running after the mirage of political power through electoral process, necessarily led the Dalit leaders astray from meaningful emancipatory politics of the oppressed and trapped them into the ruling class net. Dalit politics and the Dalit movement were thus largely subsumed by ruling class politics.

Recently, electoral efforts of the Bahujan Samaj Party that had carved out itself from the organization of all Dalits, OBCs and religious

minorities met with considerable success in the northern states. For the first time a Dalit party catapulted to the political mainstream and captured political power in the most populous state of Uttar Pradesh, albeit with support from a party that claimed to share its constituency in BCs and Muslims. While this success enthralled Dalits in the state, it emboldened the BSP to pursue political power with utter ideological impunity. This has further reinforced the notion of political power (rather, electoral success) being a panacea for addressing the Dalit question. This reckless pursuit of political power, led the BSP to ally with the very same *Manuwadi* and castiest forces, the fight against whom was its declared *raison d'être*. The BSP politics in Uttar Pradesh shows that Dalits and brahminical forces have developed a fluid configuration of 'accommodation and resistance' towards each other. This experiment of a strange alliance is seeking to take place in Maharashtra in the form of unity between *Bhimshakti* (Ambedkarite forces) and *Shivshakti* (forces of the Shiv Sena).

With this background, it is important to understand the dynamics of the Dalit movement that brought it to the point where the relationship of the BSP-BJP kind became a reality or *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* type is more or less seriously attempted. It is also necessary to understand the implications of such formations for the broader Dalit struggle aimed at emancipation of the oppressed. The dynamics may be understood by mapping the journey of the Dalit movement in terms of the broad phases of Dalit politics: 'politics of identity', 'politics of issues', 'politics of accommodation' and 'politics of interests'. It attempts to argue that the imbalance between these four components essentially created the space for the Hindutva overtures. Hindutva on the other hand needed to neutralize the Dalit challenge for its Hindu Rashtra project. I contend that despite the confounding developments in contemporary politics, the marriage of convenience between the Dalit movement and Hindutva can never be consummated. The contradictions between Hindutva and Dalits are of antagonistic nature and cannot be easily glossed over by some slogans and deceptive apparitions. Unless Hindutva forsakes its essential Hinduness, snaps its umbilical cord with its canons and aligns itself to the worldview symbolized by liberty, equality and fraternity; an impossible proposition, this alliance is not possible. On the other hand, unless Dalits give up their emancipatory aspirations, accept to live as they have lived in their preordained slots of the brahminical social order, again an impossible proposition, this alliance is unthinkable. Thus, though

in the short term the Dalit leadership may mislead the Dalits, it cannot do so for long. Lastly I would suggest that the long term viability of Dalit politics lies in its alliance with the forces articulating concerns of the marginalized such as peasants, workers and women.

DALIT MOVEMENT AND POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Dalits were defined and objectified by Brahminism as 'Untouchables'. Born with the stigma of Untouchability, Dalits suffered the worst forms of discrimination, various civic and religious disabilities and exploitation forcing them into dirty, demeaning, and unpaid or ill-paid forms of work. Despite this imposed designation, Dalits have sought to redefine their social status and transform the character of Indian society. The century-old Dalit movement thus exhibits this concern.

The initial concern of the Dalit movement for securing dignity and justice was expressed as the Dalit assertion for human rights. Dalits sought to enter Hindu temples in order to assert that as human beings they too had equal rights to temple-entry, denied to them through the system of Untouchability. Another expression came in the form of assertion for Dalit identity, sought to be constructed defiantly outside the framework of Brahminism through a rediscovery of Dalit history and culture located in an egalitarian order, real or imaginary, as opposed to the iniquitous brahminical social order. Thus various 'adi' movements in India, namely, 'adi-Dharam' movement in Punjab, and 'adi-Dravida', 'adi-Andhra', 'adi-Kannada' movements in South India advanced an ideological claim that Dalits were the original inhabitants of this country—*a la* sons of the soil—and belonged to a superior egalitarian cultural tradition. In Uttar Pradesh, for instance, Dalit groups such as Mehtars, Bhangis, Chamars, Doms, and Jatavs claimed that they were Buddhists, questioned caste discrimination against them and asserted that they were the original inhabitants of India who were conquered by deceit and manipulations by the Brahmins coming from outside. Of course, apart from this assertion of human identity in the traditional and religious framework, rediscovery of traditions and religiosity, the Dalit movement in later years approached the question of justice in the modern secular context.

DALIT MOVEMENT AND POLITICS OF ISSUES

The Dalit movement in the 1930s saw a shift from temple-entry satyagrahas to rights to education, employment and political

representation as necessary prerequisites for securing justice. Concluding the temple-entry satyagraha, Ambedkar pointed out that Dalits were not interested in entering temples of a religion that teaches inequality and injustice as part of religious duty, that they carried out temple-entry satyagrahas only to assert their equal humanity. He also pointed out that justice can be ensured only through struggle for education, employment and political representation. Thus the Dalit movement articulated the question of justice and dignity in the context of a modern secular framework, rather than the traditional religious mode. In terms of identity, this shift from traditional to modern can be seen also in the conversion of many Dalits to Buddhism in 1956. Buddhism, as Ambedkar conceptualized, was in consonance with the modern, secular worldview that simultaneously presented a critique of iniquitous social orders. Thus Dalits campaigned for education of Dalit children, and had to struggle to end discriminatory attitude of teachers and school authorities. However, the question of political representation, the question of separate electorate for Dalits, brought Ambedkar to the bitter and well-known controversy with Gandhi and the Congress. This also shows that perhaps caste Hindu hegemony would have 'tolerated' Dalits entering temples, and occupying a designated space in religious structures, but Dalit assertion for a share in modern resources capable of initiating social change and thereby undermining the authority of Brahminism was visualized as a real threat to brahminical hegemony.

Thus the politics of issues, a concern for a share in the resources in modern structures (not mere acceptance and benevolence) as possible mechanism of empowerment and change was the focus of the Dalit movement. Of course, the Dalit concern for politics of issues also saw the other oppressed such as marginalized peasantry and unorganized working class as victims of exploitation and oppression. It is important to note that while other working class struggles, especially in Bombay, were campaigning for concerns of workers in formal organized sectors, Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party (ILP) focused on unorganized sector working classes. Thus with the formation and struggles led by the ILP, the Dalit movement exhibited a concern for politics of the issues of the larger marginalized constituency, which also presented a possibility of the broader conception of politics of emancipation.

POLITICS OF ACCOMMODATION

Despite these early concerns with the politics of the issues of the broader marginalized constituency, the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, with

an exception of the Dadasaheb Gaikwad led satyagraha of landless agricultural labour, came to be entrapped in the politics of accommodation. Absorbed in the Congress politics of accommodation, the Dalit movement lost its edge as a possible vehicle of the politics of the marginalized. Thus the Republican Party of India, with a tie up with the Congress, resulted in both accommodation of Dalit politics and marginalization of Dalit politics from its larger focus. This continues to be one of the faces of Dalit politics even today. Indeed, the emergence of Dalit Panthers led to a resurgence of the Dalit consciousness. Dalit youth, inspired by Dalit Panthers, criticized 'accommodated' Dalit leadership that was ineffective in addressing the atrocities the Dalits encountered. They sought to damn the brahminical social order and dreamt of radical change leading to a just India. Moreover, Dalit Panthers attempted to provide a broad content to the category Dalit by articulating the concerns of Dalits, landless agricultural labourers, marginalized peasantry, toiling working masses and women, as represented by the term 'Dalit', and attempted to provide a broader conception of struggle.

Despite this, Dalit Panthers too were soon trapped in the politics of accommodation. Thus, though Dalit Panthers presented an ideologically conscious Dalit rebel, who challenged the existing Dalit leadership for being ineffective in arresting growing atrocities on Dalits and also succumbing to politics of accommodation, they themselves were soon to be accommodated and contained in the gamut of politics of interest. Moreover, despite contributing to the resurgence of Dalit consciousness that gave rise to Dalit revolt in other parts of India, in terms of acquiring political power through electoral politics, Dalit Panthers too were unsuccessful. This marked the shift in the Dalit agenda: from social movement of the marginalized to political formation to achieve political power through electorates for some Dalit castes. Further, this also marks the beginning of politics of interest in Dalit politics. The political power is controlled by dominant political parties that also represent dominance of the upper and dominant castes even in the democratic set up and have also appropriated Dalit votes. Hence, it was felt that Dalits should politically consolidate their votes and also articulate *Bahujanwad* in the realm of electoral politics. Furthermore, it was felt that only through political power of seats in assemblies and parliament could the Dalits hope to change the oppressive order of Manuwad.

POLITICS OF INTERESTS AND POLITICS OF ISSUES

Such a formulation became successful in the form of the Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. From an interest group of Dalits working in government and public undertakings, the BSP gradually moved to become a political party with the capacity to achieve electoral success, and assumed political office in the largest state of India. The BSP's success in elections gave Dalits the panacea of political power: it is through success in electoral politics that Dalits would emerge as a ruling class; and that it is through such a success alone that Dalits could campaign against their socioeconomic marginalization and also fight oppressive Brahminism. Indeed, these formulations have been successful in installing the first Dalit woman chief minister in India, in one of India's highly feudal and caste-conscious states. It has also led to the creation of certain structures named after leaders like Dr Ambedkar and Jotiba Phule and Shahu Maharaj. However, change initiated by these efforts has largely been limited to symbolic spaces, that has not altered the oppressive character of the social order, neither has it brought a change in the socioeconomic status of the marginalized Dalits. Moreover, the political office too has proved to be elusive in nature.

Certainly, the BSP has emerged as an important player in Uttar Pradesh politics. However, the BSP's holding of political office in the state has depended on the support of the traditional ruling castes and classes (represented by the SP or the BJP). The latter joined hands with the BSP insofar as it served their own interests. Whenever it did not, they have not hesitated to pull down the BSP-led governments in the state. Indeed, the political developments in Uttar Pradesh have led social analysts such as Christophe Jaffrelot to call it a silent revolution from below.¹ A Dalit woman leading the government of one of the most feudal and caste-ridden states, the transfer of political and bureaucratic power from the upper castes to Dalits, and the consequent psychological boost to them, indeed provides a basis for such a celebration. However, these developments have not helped in substantially lessening the social-economic marginalization of Dalits, nor have they altered the oppressive character of the social order. The common Dalit masses continued to suffer atrocities, marginalization and also had to dampen their struggles under political compulsion.

The emergence of the BSP is also paralleled by the political prominence of the fundamentalist formation—the BJP—that also is hegemonic and appropriating. By harbouring fanatic religiosity, the brahminic outfit, the RSS, finally succeeded in assuming the highest political office in India, when the BJP and the NDA were in power at the centre, and thereby attempted to provide a brahminical character to society and culture in the country. The political prominence of the BJP, apart from leading to fundamentalism, communalism and casteism as markers of Indian society, has also posed a challenge to both centrist (Congress) and leftist ideological persuasions. These political outfits (that are also dominated by the upper castes and upper class groups) are threatened by RSS fundamentalist and communalist politics and are seeking new alliances. Thus Congress, which earlier practised politics of accommodation, now seeks the support of Dalits to fight communalism; and Left ideologues, who refused to see beyond class, have become aware of caste as a marker of oppression and exploitation in India. Hence, this has resulted in formulation of politics of *collective* interest.

Another form of politics of collective interest is witnessed in the BJP and the Shiv Sena enlisting support of some Dalit caste groups, especially in Maharashtra. Dalit groups such as Charmkars and Matangs, with the feeling of being ignored if not rejected by the leadership of Republican parties, and with the view of getting a share in political power, have joined these forces. This has resulted in some members of these communities being elected to legislatures and even occupying ministerial berths. Further, apart from the possibility of a share in political power, the BJP and Shiv Sena's occupation with Hindutva too found ready association among some of these Dalit castes. Thus, this too has led to formation of politics of collective interests.

POLITICS, INTERESTS AND WAVE OF UNITY OF SHIV SENA

In addition to the politics of collective interests, the politics of individual interests too has found a space in this formation. Often in political parties such as the BJP, Congress, Left parties and even Shiv Sena, political activists either come from stable independent economic background, or the parties create sources of empowering political activists. Some of these parties even have full-timers whose day-to-day needs are taken care of. As a result, activists are not all the time pressed for day-to-day survival, and are free and committed to work for the

party's ideological persuasions. Compared to this, activists in Dalit politics have been drawn from the Dalit movement, many are from Dalit Panthers, and have generally been drawn from very humble economic background. As youth inspired by Ambedkarist consciousness, and participating in struggle against Dalit atrocities, these activists left college and other professional education incomplete, and hence are without any source for day-to-day existence. Further, activists in Dalit struggles have often been elder sons of homes that have spent meagre family earnings on their education. When dreams of changing the order become more distant and inability to help even their families that need them is an immediate and continuous experience, these activists tend to get frustrated. In addition to this the lack of any political recognition, despite long participation in the struggle leads them to feeling of dejection. The author personally knows many such activists who have undergone this experience. On the other hand, like other political formations, Dalit politics too has attracted people who harbour the wish to pursue political careers. When, despite working for the party for long time, they become unsuccessful in getting elected to a political office, they tend to look for new areas of political habitation. The recent wave of the unity of Bhimshakti and Shivshakti has roots also in these feelings and concerns.

Though the move of unity of Bhimshakti-Shivshakti sounds alluring to 'dissenting' and politically 'eager' voices among Dalit communities, its implications for long-term politics are full of perils rather than promises. For, though 'empowering' some with political office, it has dangers of new patron-client formation, ironically, emerging even in urban and modern conditions. Moreover, it also has serious implications for recovery of Dalit subjectivity and autonomy, not only in the realm of the politics but identity, culture and economy. Further, since the unity with Bhimshakti is the need of the 'hour' for Shiv Sena, it is Shiv Sena's project that decides the nature, development and outcome of this project. Such a move is dictated by the compulsions of politics of numbers by the Shiv Sena and the BJP, and it is these forces that determine and direct the discourse and the agenda. Thus, not only is the autonomous voice of the Dalit critique lost in such formulation, there is a danger of the Dalit remaining a perennial marginalized Other of the brahminic centre. Hence, the Dalit movement asserting for autonomy of the Dalit voice in the socio-political sphere cannot be a long-term ally to the BJP and Shiv Sena forces.

At this juncture, let us try to understand why the developments within the Dalit movement have led to attempts of collaboration with ideological adversaries such as the BJP and Shiv Sena. It is also necessary to note that the political aspirations of Dalit communities outside the Ambedkarist fold, the perception of the Dalit question shared by forces advancing politics of issues such as the Left, and the feeling of loss of possibilities of sharing political power among Dalit activists, will have to be seen as factors contributing to the attempts of alliances with the ideological adversaries like the BJP and the Shiv Sena.

Earlier, we noted that the Dalit assertion in the beginning of the twentieth century was expressed in the form of assertion of Dalit humanity in terms of the right to dignity and equal humanity. Thus, various ideological 'adi' movements sought to recover Dalit history as rooted in non-brahminic egalitarian framework (see also Essay 6). However, the rise of Ambedkarism saw the question of Dalit humanity as rooted in the oppressive and exploitative structures of domination; hence, the Dalit movement during the Ambedkarist phase pursued the politics of issues, and attempted to extend this concern to the politics of issues of the larger marginalized categories. However, in the post-Ambedkar phase the focus of the Dalit movement came to be restricted in achieving spaces of political offices and issues of identity. As a result, the Dalit movement lost connections with the issues confronting both Dalit masses and other marginalized sections. Here it should be highlighted that the efforts and strength of the Dalit movement was spent on struggling with the traditional issues of the practice of Untouchability and caste discrimination. The growing consciousness among Dalit masses, both in rural and urban areas, and assertion against the oppressive caste system gave rise to further cases of atrocities, caste discrimination and social boycott. Thus the Dalit struggle was forced to engage with the issues of discrimination resulting from the traditional social order. This is also a telling comment on the nature of caste rigidities and prevalence of caste consciousness even in Maharashtra that is seen as a land of rationalist, reformist and even working class movement and consciousness. Indeed the Dalit Panthers did try to infuse a new consciousness and attempted to provide a broader content to the category 'Dalit'. However, in the absence of a stable organized structure, the Dalit Panthers also become willing victims of tactics of the politics of appropriation. Some of its leaders tried to share political space with the Congress, whereas others, that

too leading ideologues, have ironically, seen possibilities of politics of masses in formations such as Shiv Sena. Political parties such as Congress, Shiv Sena and BJP are keen to share a political space with the Dalits. Such a concern however, emanates more from claiming Dalit votes rather than commitment to annihilate the traditional caste order and ushering of progressive social change. Moreover, it has contributed to creation of claimants for political power among Dalit communities, which in turn has led to further fragmentation of the Dalit movement and the weakening of the possibility of the politics of issues.

On the other hand, political formations claiming allegiance to left ideology and attempting to articulate the politics of issues have shared a problematic relationship with the Dalit movement. Though many Dalit youth are active in Left political formations and Left ideologues have now 'recognized' caste as context of oppression, Left politics have traditionally seen Dalit movement as sectarian, pro-British and divisive in character. Moreover, ideologically Left parties have privileged the category of class over that of caste as sites of exploitation and oppression; and also as a source of revolutionary politics. Thus Left formations saw class as a subsuming category and held that the class struggle alone would lead to revolutionary emancipatory politics. There is ground to believe that such a denial of caste as a site of oppression and exploitation was a result of the Left ideologues' social location. On the other hand, Dalit activists encountering discrimination ignored the fact that such discrimination also emanated and reiterated in exploitative and oppressive structures of economic domination. In this situation, there is a need to reinvent the politics of emancipation.

REINVENTING POLITICS OF EMANCIPATION

Let me end by attempting to articulate the concerns of Dalit politics in the times to come. In 1938, while speaking before G.I.P. railway workers in Manmad, Dr Ambedkar had pointed out that Dalit and marginalized sections of this country would have to fight against two adversaries: Brahminism and Capitalism. Ambedkar's attempts to articulate and campaign for these issues through the Independent Labour Party indicated the possible emancipatory politics Dalits ought to engage with. What is more, in contemporary times both these adversaries have emerged as formations threatening life with minimum human dignity in social, economic, political and even cultural spheres

and have contributed to the process of disenfranchising. The economic changes that have taken place under the process of globalization are adversely affecting lives of agricultural labourer, marginal peasants, workers in unorganized sectors in urban areas and women. As a result of the withdrawal of the state from key social sectors and growing erosion of state support structures from these areas marginalized people have little hope in managing survival, let alone the possibilities of positive change.

The Dalit population comprises the bulk of these categories. Hence Dalit politics of today too has to be focused on the issues of the marginalized sections such as landless agricultural workers, poor peasantry, unorganized sector workers, urban poor and women, and specifically on the issues confronting Dalit women, who have been victims of intersecting ideologies and structures of patriarchy, gender and caste. Though Dalit women have participated in the Dalit movement, issues confronting them have not become central to the Dalit struggle. These ought to be the priorities of Dalit politics in contemporary times. Similarly, like the oppressive processes of globalization, the emergence of Hindutva has led to a cultural hegemonic formation assuming the centre that dictates and polices the Other. This presents a threat to the social and cultural autonomy of the religious minorities and the lower castes. Again, Dalit critiques of asymmetrical formations and contributors to the alternative egalitarian culture have engaged with hegemonic Hindutva. The concern with politics of emancipation could be seen in the Ambedkarian conceptualization of culture of resistance and reconstitution. Through his re-articulation of Buddhism as located in a critical space and ethical reconstruction, Ambedkar sought to recover the subjective agency of the subjugated in critiquing the ideologies and structures of domination on the one hand, and in reconstructing of social order on the foundations of justice, reason and autonomy on the other. In an atmosphere of growing disenfranchising—of losing voices, being silenced and made invisible—the critical space that ‘modernist’ Buddhism offers provides a context for emancipatory politics. Certainly, such a concern warrants a perspective of Buddhism as rooted in ‘materiality and ethicality of human life’, as rooted in the ‘real’ conditions that characterize human existence.

Such an emancipatory agenda cannot be realized unless those offering the politics of issues affecting the marginalized sections, for instance, the Left and other progressive forces, become sensitive to

the specificities of oppression and exploitation resulting from the structure of caste. They need to realize that social locations dictated by caste not only influence identities and culture but also the economic, social and political dimensions. Caste thus is not mechanically located in the superstructure, but this superstructure often interacts with, and influences, the base. Often those who voice the issues of the marginalized from class and patriarchal (feminist) axes exhibit an ideological arrogance, a sense of superiority in articulation and legitimization of issues. However, the very fact that issues of identity, ethnicity and communalism have assumed a central place in social discourse prove that homogenized and unproblematic views of class and patriarchy as social markers have been untenable in understanding social processes. The same perhaps holds true in regard to the environmental politics in India, which often is blind to politics and relationship of caste and resources. Thus, broader and collaborative politics based on issues, commitment to the concerns of the marginalized rooted in genuine democratic ethos, a genuine, not procedural, democracy that privileges the issues of justice and human dignity will contribute to the politics of emancipation.

Note

- ¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (London: Hurst, 2003).

PART II

HINDUTVA IN OPERATION

Subverting the *Shudra–Ati-Shudra* Revolution: The Uttar Pradesh Way

Subhash Gatade

INTRODUCTION

Politics in Uttar Pradesh presents a kaleidoscopic picture to close watchers. It could be said that the 1980s and early 1990s have been harbingers of change in the state's polity. This period, after the fall of the Congress majority government in 1989, is marked by the emergence of new social forces and formations on the scene and the various permutations-combinations they engaged in supposedly to provide a stable ruling arrangement. A coalition government led by Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party, the dominant constituent of the coalition, held power in 1989–91, 1993–95 and 2004–07. The first time, it had succeeded the coalition government of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Bharatiya Janata Party led by Mayawati. Indeed, the replacement of this government in Uttar Pradesh led by the 'Dalit ki Beti', Mayawati, by the one led by the 'Dharti Putra', Mulayam Singh Yadav, had not been a smooth affair.

The abrupt end of the third experiment in cohabitation between the party of Hindutva and the Bahujan formation, precipitated by the alleged irregularities committed in the 'Taj Corridor Case', had definitely given rise to bickering between the two. The party of Hindutva had declared that it had been betrayed by the Bahujan formation and hence it would teach a lesson to their erstwhile ally. The General Elections of 2004, however, proved Mayawati, the indomitable leader of the Bahujan formation, right; BJP was nearly routed in the state. Mayawati had announced that she would not rest till she had dethroned the Hindutva formation from the citadels of power in Delhi.

It is worth noting that within a span of just eight years the Bahujan formation has entered into a power-sharing arrangement at the state level with the Hindutva formation three times. The first experiment lasted for a period of four and half months, the second experiment went on for a period of six months, while the third experiment lasted the longest, for a period of one year and three months. The complex interplay of both the formations can be understood also from the fact that it is in the same period that the Bahujan formation played a key role in the defeat of the Hindutva party at the centre.

The alliance of both these formations and its convoluted trajectory has led to many theories from analysts. While scholars like Christophe Jafferlot seem to be looking more sympathetically towards this experiment, another close watcher of the whole scenario, Gail Omvedt, seems to be unspairing in her criticism. Can it be called a 'tactical alliance', to quote Christophe Jafferlot,¹ on part of the Bahujan formation or is it a sheer 'opportunistic alliance' if one refers to Gail Omvedt,² with the sole purpose of power sharing? Definitely no simple answers are possible. It is time to take a look at the genesis of the Bahujan formation, the rationale provided by it to further its alliance with one of those *Manuwadi* organizations, the way it has helped or hampered the Hindutva combine and also the way in which it has impacted upon the short-term and long-term prospects of the project of Dalit emancipation.

ENTER THE BAHUJANS!

The term 'Bahujan' (literally 'broad masses') had been coined quite earlier but was brought into fresh circulation by one of the lesser known social reformers from Maharashtra, namely, Vithal Ramji Shinde, whose work spanned the early part of the twentieth century. It is a fact that this formulation is an extension of the way in which the great social revolutionary of the nineteenth century, Mahatma Phule, differentiated the broad masses of the Shudras and Ati-Shudras from the Shetjis and Bhattjis (the moneylenders and the Brahmins). Certainly V. R. Shinde would never have envisaged that the term popularized by him would one day come to define the grammar of the Indian polity. It is also true that even in post-independence India; the term remained dormant for decades. But with the arrival of new social forces on the scene during the last three decades there has been a revival of its usage. Rather, it can be said that the term has returned with a vengeance.

Ranging from the political establishment, to civil society or from media to academia, its relevance is being acknowledged everywhere. The concerns raised by this section of the population have suddenly gained acceptance. Formations on the political arena are vying with each other either to reformulate their agendas to co-opt this new understanding of the realpolitik or are desperately in search of alliances with similar formations so that these are able to expand their influence from their traditional bases. Today we are witness to a party bearing this name catapulting onto national politics and becoming the fourth largest political party in Indian politics. There is, however, no denying the fact that the abrupt end of the BSP's power-sharing alliance with the BJP in Uttar Pradesh precipitated by the alleged irregularities committed in the 'Taj Corridor Case' has put brakes on its forward march.

Gone are the days when political pundits looked on with ridicule, as happened in the mid-1980s, when its rumblings were witnessed on the streets when people carrying blue flags on their cycles toured the whole country with the apt slogans: '*Vote Hamara, Raj Tumhara, Nahin Chalega*' (our votes and your rule, will work no more); '*Jiski Jitni Sankhya Bhari, Uski Utni Bhagidari*' (as your numbers, so your share); or raised slogans like '*Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, Inko Maro Jute Char*' (see n14). It is worth underlining that with the bloody communal and fascist politics of the Sangh Parivar acting as a backdrop and the neo-liberal economic policies further accelerating the process of marginalization of the people, this whole phenomenon of Dalit assertion under the discourse of Bahujans has added a new vigour/vitality to the otherwise grim scenario and definitely added a new dimension to the unfolding political transformations at the fag end of the twentieth century.

The phenomenon of the rise of the Bahujans in a span of less than 10 years and its ability to redefine the grammar of Indian politics has also brought in its wake fresh doubts, questions, apprehensions about the future direction of the Ambedkarite movement in post-Ambedkar times. Concern is also expressed over the fact that whether the radical transformatory potential of the Ambedkarite vision would then get dissipated in the morass of electoral politics. It is also being asked whether getting political power by any means whatever can really bring about Dalit emancipation. Recounting Ambedkar's constant refrain about the possible negative impact of 'Hindu Rashtra/Raj' on the Dalit scenario, doubts were also being raised over the 'necessity'

of the 'tactical alliance' with the party of Hindutva albeit for a short period. It was noted that lack of interaction with Left politics ingrained in this Bahujan phenomenon had for the time being scuttled all possibilities of dialogue between the various shades of the Left formations and the rising tide of Dalit assertion.³

Of late, Uttar Pradesh had emerged as a key centre of the unfolding dynamic of Bahujan politics. It is also worth noting that it was in the same period in which Uttar Pradesh evolved as an epicentre of the movements led by the Hindutva Brigade for the 'liberation of Ram Janambhoomi' that the state also became a fertile ground to what is known in popular parlance as the 'forward march of the backwards'. It is high time that one took a dispassionate look at what happened in this state over the unfolding juggernaut of *Bahujanwad*, its critical engagement with the polity and society in general and with the forces of Hindutva in particular. But before we come to the actual unfolding of Bahujanwad, it would be opportune to understand the short-term and long-term agendas of the Hindutva forces which had been served by its engagement with the Bahujan phenomenon.

FEAR OF THE SHUDRA REVOLUTION?

The measure of its success in uniting such victims of Brahmanism can be assessed from the fears of the RSS. The annual reports of the RSS released on 15 March 1985, devoted a full para to such a success of the BSP in uniting the oppressed and exploited caste groups and securing brotherhood against them . . . In the eyes of the RSS such a success of the BSP is the greatest danger to the Hindu fundamentalist. Kanshi Ram (*Oppressed Indian*, April 1985).

Bahujan Samaj Party, one of the real problems for RSS in north India. Balasaheb Deoras (Quoted in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 14 Aug 1988).

There is today an urgent need to build up moral and spiritual forces to counter any fall out from an expected Shudra revolution. M. V. Kamath, *The Organiser*, 1 May 1994, p.6 (commenting on the SP-BSP victory in UP elections).

Hindutva has an uncanny similarity to brahminical Hinduism, which holds together under its canopy a plethora of sects, opinions with a system of graded inequality based on purity and pollution properly in place and keeping the core values/agendas intact. Hindutva has also

demonstrated tremendous flexibility and innovativeness in cobbling together an alliance of outfits which may be working at cross purposes with each other but have no qualms in sticking together. While at the level of its own organizations, it has evolved a plethora of formations from the ‘missionary’ RSS to the ‘lunatic fringe’ Bajrang Dal, it has skilfully extended this experience to the field of politics. It will be a study of sorts to unravel how Hindutva has been able to rope in the ‘secular’ Chandrababu Naidu on the one hand and the ‘fascist’ Shiv Sena on the other, thereby expanding its political influence and widening the appeal of its agenda. The party of Hindutva has similarly maintained a love-hate relationship with the party of the Bahujans, namely, the Bahujan Samaj Party.

As far as the last and the recently ended alliance with the Bahujan formation was concerned, in the unfolding Uttar Pradesh scenario which emerged after the assembly elections in 2002, a hung assembly provided a unique opportunity to arrest the BJP downslide and simultaneously to gain further stability for the coalition government at the Centre. And thus despite opposition for such an alliance from an influential section within its party at the state level, it preferred to become a junior partner in the Bahujan-led government. But apart from the short term power-sharing benefit and a possibility of reaping electoral dividends in the forthcoming elections, there were few other important considerations which had less serious import immediately. It is clear that the Hindutva forces have never ascribed any importance to the subaltern classes, especially the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras. They have demonstrated their admiration for the *Manusmriti* (the Laws of Manu), the religious code of conduct revered by the upper caste Hindus which legitimized and sanctified the inhuman status accorded to the Shudras and the Ati-Shudras. They have displayed utter disdain for any kind of independent Dalit movement. It is interesting to note that the mouthpiece of the Sangh Parivar had even opposed the formulation of the Constitution on a secular basis and had even advocated the acceptance of the *Manusmriti* as India’s Constitution (see Essay 1). It needs to be noted that the hatred towards any independent movement of the Dalits was one of the causes which prompted the founders of the RSS to establish the organization.⁴ Their diabolical game vis-à-vis rising Dalit consciousness is apparent in the way the treatment they meted out to Ambedkar, one of the greatest leaders of the oppressed and exploited and a pioneer of the independent Dalit movement.

It is a fact that during his lifetime and even after his demise, Ambedkar was anathema for the Hindutva forces. Their ideologues

never felt comfortable either with Ambedkar's uncompromising struggle against the graded inequality legitimized and sanctified by Hindu religion or with his call to the oppressed and depressed to come forward to 'capture' political power. The very fact that Ambedkar announced his decision to renounce Hindu religion in the 1930s, which he ultimately implemented by embracing Buddhism in the mid-1950s could never be digested by the Sangh fraternity. The Hindutva forces never lost an opportunity to denigrate him and his politics even during his lifetime. Their joining hands with other reactionary elements in opposing the Hindu Code Bill which Dr Ambedkar piloted and their attempts to remove the protective discrimination granted to the Dalits and tribals in the Constitution have been noted and are two glaring examples which show the real intentions of the Hindutva brigade.⁵ A change in the approach of the Sangh Parivar towards Dalits and Ambedkar came about during the reign of Sangh Supremo Balasaheb Deoras. An event signifying this change was the first ever visit by Deoras or any other top functionaries of the Sangh to the Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur where Dr Ambedkar had embraced Buddhism way back in 1956. It was in continuation of this changed approach that a Dalit was asked to conduct the 'shilapujan' ceremony during the Babri Masjid 'liberation' movement. The programme organized in Ayodhya by the Sangh Parivar on the first anniversary of the Babri Masjid demolition day also witnessed a large portrait of Ambedkar apart from other stalwarts of the Hindutva Brigade adorning the stage.

The Hindutva ideologues have rightly perceived that a broader anti-upper caste front comprising of the backwards, Dalits as well as the minorities could prove to be their nemesis. Such an alliance not only explodes the myth of the 'monolithic Hindu identity' but has also the possibility of becoming so formidable that it could marginalize their well-cultivated Hindutva project once again. Their statements, quoted earlier, tell us about their fear about the future of the Bahujan project. Their fears were really vindicated when they found that the SP-BSP alliance won power in Uttar Pradesh in 1993 despite the biggest post-independence communal mobilization, centred on the Babri Masjid undertaken by them. And from day one their sole attempt was to drive a wedge between this alliance.

The third consideration pertained to further consolidation of the unity of the Dalits with its own, mainly upper caste, base against the resurgent middle castes or backward castes (a repeat of the truncated Brahmin-Harijan-Muslim axis forged by the Congress in its heydays).

The idea was that if it worked in Uttar Pradesh then the experiment could be extended to other states as well. Their alliance with a party with Dalit concerns as its core was also an attempt to present itself in a 'positive light' before the Dalit masses. This would help remove the 'label' of the 'A' team of Manuwadis which was peddled by the leaders of the Bahujan formation. It also was an endeavour to co-opt the rising Dalit assertion and also to Hindutvaise militant Dalit consciousness.'

TOWARDS A 'BAHUJAN RAJ'

Kanshi Ram's strategy and his larger understanding of social change are now considerably evolved. He no longer believes in the primacy of social reform. Rather, expenditure of effort on any object other than the capture of government power is seen to be superfluous. It is administrative power that will bring about desired social change.⁶

Before coming to the details of the alliance of the Bahujan formation with the forces of Hindutva and its overall impact on the politics of Dalit assertion, it would be opportune to take a look at the way the intervention by Kanshi Ram has impacted the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement. The ups and downs through which Dalit politics passed after the death of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar can be broadly divided into three phases: (i) the rise and fall of the Republican Party; (ii) the emergence of the Dalit Panthers; and (iii) the growing assertion of Dalits for political power and their consequent refusal to remain satisfied merely with education and job opportunities arising out of reservations. The impressive intervention of the BSP under Kanshi Ram in national politics underlines this third stage. It is noteworthy that while in the earlier two stages in the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, the aspect of 'social-cultural movement' and the unfolding Dalit politics in Maharashtra guided its orientation, its role has been increasingly marginalized in the third stage. The success achieved by the BSP has certainly encouraged the emergence of similar experiments in different parts of the country.

For Kanshi Ram, the term 'Bahujan' comprises the entire 85 per cent of the population ranging from the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and religious minorities who are being oppressed by the 'Brahminical Social Order' (BSO).

It is noteworthy that to quote Kanshi Ram, it was by strongly denouncing the 'era of stooges' and those 'who were enjoying at the feet of the Brahminicals'—his description of the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement—he charted a path with an aim to 'make the Bahujan Samaj a ruling Samaj of India'.⁷ According to Kanshi Ram, unless and until 85 per cent people become the ruling samaj, atrocities against them cannot be stopped. One could easily dispute this simplistic arithmetic that attempts another kind of homogenization of all the non-Brahmin castes against Brahmins as though there were no contradictions between them. The empirical evidence goes contrary to this formulation; the OBCs—the powerful section of the bahujan component of the BSP—are the main perpetrators of atrocities on Dalits all over the country and veritable baton holders of Brahminism.⁸ But, that is beside the point; Kanshi Ram and the BSP have demonstrated the viability of their constituency at least in Uttar Pradesh.

At the social level, the whole concept of Bahujanwad has evolved in such a manner that it has tried to weave an alliance of the people oppressed under the Brahminical Social Order, keeping the Dalit assertion at the core and has made itself a sizeable force, at least in Uttar Pradesh. At the political level, the pioneer of Bahujan politics has worked out electoral alliances with forces which were not favourably disposed towards it.⁹ A cursory glance at the political developments in Uttar Pradesh in the decade gone by would make it clear that it entered into pre-poll/post-poll alliances with three different formations. It formed a pre-poll alliance with the Samajwadi Party and thus could enjoy fruits of power albeit for a short time (1993–95). With the fall of this government because of withdrawal of support by the BSP, emerged the possibility of a government led by Mayawati herself with support from the BJP. The first experiment in government formation with the BJP lasted, as mentioned earlier, for four and a half months.

When the elections to the next assembly were held the BSP entered into a pre-poll alliance with the Congress where it was the senior partner of the alliance (1996). After the elections the BSP entered into an alliance with the BJP for a second time when Mayawati was made a chief minister for a period of six months and it was decided to put the post on rotation. After her turn as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh was over, the BSP withdrew its support to the Kalyan Singh ministry

on charges of soft pedaling the SC/ST Act. The BSP's third alliance with the BJP for sharing power in Uttar Pradesh resulted in Mayawati occupying the chief minister's chair for the third time till the alliance ended abruptly in August 2003.

Neither the BSP's alliance with the Samajwadi Party nor its pre-poll alliance with Congress in 1996 was repeated again. However, the BSP opted to go in for an alliance with the BJP at the state level three times. The same BSP had earlier played a key role in the defeat of the Vajpayee-led government at the centre when the no confidence motion against the government was moved by the combined opposition in the Twelfth Lok Sabha in 1998. What can be said to be main consideration of the BSP in forming an alliance with the A team of Manuwadis, namely, the BJP?¹⁰

As mentioned earlier, the key aim in BSP politics is accession to power. Ambedkar's call that 'Dalits will have to become the ruling community' is literally used by the BSP and its then supremo, Kanshi Ram. Bahujanwad for the BSP is an attempt to build a counter-hegemony to the Brahminical Social Order with the perception that only through political power could a qualitative change be brought about in the lives of the Bahujans. And as Kanshi Ram had underlined time and again, he had no hassles in forming and breaking alliances even with Manuwadi formations if it served the purpose of installing a Bahujan regime albeit for a short period.¹¹ It would be necessary to look into the short term and long term impacts of such an alliance on the Dalit consciousness in particular and the Dalit liberation movement in general.

UNLEASHING THE DALIT AGENDA

Ladke Lenge PM, CM; Arakshan se Lenge SP [Superintendent of Police], *DM* [District Magistrate].

—Slogan raised in BSP rallies

It needs to be remembered that the first experiment in cohabitation of the BSP with the BJP ended in four and half months because of the supposedly aggressive pushing of the Dalit agenda by the BSP which started ringing alarm bells in the BJP camp. The second experiment of cohabitation lasted just six months when the BSP itself withdrew support to Kalyan Singh for soft-peddalling on the Dalit Atrocities Act,

and the third experiment in cohabitation had an abrupt ending within a span of a year and a few months. A brief analysis of all these experiments in cohabitation would give one an idea of the way the agenda of 'Bahujan Raj' with core Dalit concerns unfolded itself in Uttar Pradesh. One can classify the measures undertaken by the BSP while in power in three broad categories.

Legal measures

Strict implementation of the law, especially focusing on Dalits with special attempts to put an end to the atrocities on Dalits; help distribute land to the Dalits due to them, and broadening the ambit of reservation.

Social-Cultural measures

Launching of the Ambedkar Udyan project, installation of Ambedkar's statues, holding of fairs in the name of Bahujan warriors and saints, and so on.

Strict administration

Mayawati has cultivated the impression of a no-nonsense, tough administrator through frequent postings of bureaucrats and promoting her supporters in the bureaucracy to replace upper caste officers. Incidentally the assumption of power by Mayawati in 1995 with BJP's support had many firsts to its credit. It symbolized not only that a Dalit woman had become chief minister of the largest state for the first time but also that she was a member of a political party which was not dominated by upper castes and had a Dalit agenda at its core. Till then, in the long span of more than 50 years of Indian democracy, Dalits had occupied the chair of chief ministership only thrice. The earlier three chief ministers, namely, in Andhra, Rajasthan and Bihar, all belonged to parties which were more or less dominated by the upper castes or the rising middle castes. Ironically, it was also for the first time in the history of independent India that a party proclaiming Ambedkar's legacy had entered into an alliance with a Hindutva fascist party which had consistently opposed independent assertion by Dalits and had tried its best to 'stall the Shudra revolution'.

Her first stint of power demonstrated the 'distinctness' of the intervention of the Bahujan formation in the overall polity. Carving

out of new districts and renaming them with names from the Bahujan legacy or renaming of universities, holding *melas* in the name of Periyar—(a persona non grata for the Sangh Parivar), special emphasis on the development of Ambedkar villages where the population of the Dalits was around 30 per cent, creating grants for Dalit children to attend classes, allocating 27 per cent of the state budget for the OBCs and permitting the benefit of reservations for low caste Muslims—these were some of the measures taken by her regime. It was also during this period that the Mayawati government did not allow the VHP to organize an important function at Mathura in September 1995 which would have precipitated communal tensions further, despite the fact that it was receiving support from the BJP.¹² Interestingly, the installation of Ambedkar statues all over the state which received a new impetus with Mayawati's assumption of the chief minister's chair had started like a movement with the coming into power of the first SP-BSP government itself. The growing Dalit assertion which manifested itself through this symbolic action led to conflict at various places between the Dalits and the upper or dominant castes. According to *India Today* (10 April 1994, p. 56) over a period of four months 60 incidents linked with the installation of statues led to 21 casualties among the Dalits. Mayawati's assumption of power as chief minister gave a fillip to all such efforts with the announcement that a Ambedkar Udyan would be built in an area of 28 acres in Lucknow which would be dedicated to Bharat Ratna Dr Ambedkar.

The second experiment in cohabitation with the BJP started in the year 1997 when no party won a clear majority in the assembly elections. The state of Uttar Pradesh was under President's Rule for six months. The BSP-BJP shared power for the second time with an agreement that the chief ministership would be rotated between the two parties. In many ways it was a continuation of the BSP's efforts to strengthen its base and the BJP's effort to retain its dwindling support. The BSP continued from a point which it had left off when it was last in power and restarted those projects which it had earlier undertaken and further gave a fresh impetus to new projects by implementing schemes, enforcing laws which would benefit its core base of Dalits. An interesting feature of this period was the way special attention was paid to the land rights of the Dalits.¹³ Attempts were made in this period to give *pattas* which had earlier been allotted to Dalits; there were 1,58,000 beneficiaries among whom 1,20,000 acres of land was distributed. A special campaign was taken up to give new *pattas*

to 81,500 more Dalits with 52,379 acres of land. Two additional features of this campaign were: to stop the eviction of 20,000 Dalits from 15,000 acres of village land they had previously occupied and also to regularize those *pattedars* who were occupying for more than 10 years.¹⁴

The third period of cohabitation with the BJP which started in 2002 and which ended abruptly in August 2003 was initially marked by eagerness from both sides to cater to each other's interests with the aim of continuing the alliance and not to take any precipitate action. Taking into consideration the apprehensions of the mainly upper caste core constituency of the BJP, the government had in a G.O. (Government Order) directed that the SC, ST Act should be used only in cases of rape and murder of Dalits. It is worth noting that the earlier two experiments were marked by strict implementation of this very SC/ST Act and its non implementation had become a ground for Mayawati to withdraw support to Kalyan Singh when he became a chief minister for a period of six months. The BSP's by and large soft-peddalling of the activities of the 'lunatic fringe' of the Sangh Parivar to buy peace should also be noted.¹⁵ It was during this period that Mayawati invited Advani to participate in a BSP rally and instead of issuing a fresh notification in case of the Babri Masjid demolition case, she had the case transferred to Rae Bareilly Sessions Court. And thus Bajrang Dal was freely engaged in giving arms training to the 'militant Hindu Youth', Praveen Togadia the International general secretary of VHP was not prohibited from organizing 'Trishul Deeksha Samarohs' and the incidents of the terrorizing of the Christian missionaries went on unabated. Instead of taking any stringent action against Hindutva forces, the government focused action on the activities of gangs/groups associated with the oppositional formations. While there were no restrictions on the activities of the lunatic fringe of the Hindutva brigade, every attempt was being made to stifle the voice of the secular and democratic forces.¹⁶ It cannot be denied that all these moves were part of a well-thought out strategy which the BSP had planned in advance. Mayawati's giving a clean chit to Narendra Modi after the Gujarat genocide or her campaigning for him in Gujarat in the last assembly elections of 2002 acted as a 'curtain raiser' for things yet to come.

Apart from its soft dealing with the communal groups, the Bahujan formation was also engaged in slowly de-emphasizing its Bahujan identity and the Kanshi Ram and Mayawati duo had been emphasizing its *sarva jan* line and had slowly and subtly put its Bahujan agenda on

the backburner.¹⁷ In the last elections to the Uttar Pradesh assembly, a slogan raised by the BSP demonstrated its eagerness as well as its compulsion to break out of its Bahujan mould: *Hathi Nahin Ganesh Hai! Brahma Vishnu Mahesh Hai!* (which literally translated means: that the hathi or the elephant, the BSP's symbol, is not simply an elephant but the Hindu elephant god Ganesh along with Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh—the Hindu triumvirate symbolizing Creator, Defender and Destroyer).

One can notice the way in which a concerted attempt was being made to win over the Hindus, especially the upper castes, and also to communicate to them that the BSP was a formation which can accommodate everyone. In tune with de-emphasizing its 'Bahujan' agenda, it distributed more tickets to the upper castes in the last assembly elections in 2002. The electoral outcome also vindicated this change in emphasis because only a quarter of the successful candidates were Dalits. At this juncture it was difficult to say what will happen next in the relationship between the BSP and the BJP. Apparently the acts of commission and omission committed during the controversial Taj Corridor project precipitated the then present low in the relationship between these two allies. It was also true that a vocal section within the state BJP had consistently opposed the alliance with the BSP and this viewpoint prevailed in precipitating the crisis. But there were strong currents within the BJP which were keen to bring the BSP back to their fold. And that is why despite the formal posturing from both the sides, it will not be proper to say that it is the 'end of the road' for such an alliance to emerge for the fourth time.

LOOKING BACK

How does one evaluate the nearly two-decade-old trajectory of the Bahujan formation in Uttar Pradesh? How does one look at its alliance with the forces of Hindutva which it formed supposedly to further its agenda? As already mentioned, the advent of the BSP on the national scene in general and in Uttar Pradesh politics in particular has become a harbinger of a 'new phase' in the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement. It is a fact that it has not only helped reinvigorate the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement but has simultaneously widened its ambit in a qualitative manner. It is history that with the growing 'fractionization' of the Dalit movement after the demise of Ambedkar, the whole movement had landed itself in such a sorry state that Dalit politicians

or Dalit parties were content with playing (in the words of Professor Gopal Guru) 'guest actor' roles in the upper caste dominated parties. It had not only successfully tried to get out of the 'single caste' status of the earlier Dalit formations experiments or their 'guest actor appearances' on the political scene, but it had also skilfully tried to weave together a formidable alliance of 'oppressed castes and religious minorities' trying to keep the core agenda of Dalit assertion intact.

A significant achievement of the unfolding juggernaut of Bahujanwad has been that it has ably demonstrated that the whole idea of the homogenized Hindu majority which the Hindutva fascists want to peddle for their immediate as well as long term ends is a myth. The project of Hindutva which not only wanted to hegemonize the many forms of Hinduism in practice or homogenize the many 'little traditions' in existence has been challenged effectively. It has also demonstrated that if the need arises the Hindutva mythology can be burst asunder if proper coalitions of castes take place. It is also a fact that it has broken the stranglehold of the upper castes on Uttar Pradesh politics which were ruling the roost till the late 1980s. The changed ambience in the state's politics can be gauged from the fact that the BJP and the Congress, two upper caste-dominated parties, at that point found themselves in a blind alley and were still struggling to find their new bearings in the changed circumstances. It is not for nothing that both these parties had sent feelers to the backward caste leader and ex chief minister, Kalyan Singh, to join their parties. It is another matter that ultimately the BJP, the party which wears discipline on its sleeves, succeeded in roping this one time rebel back to its fold.

As already discussed, the political ascendance of a formation with Dalit agenda has not only helped raise the self-esteem and self-respect of the most downtrodden in Indian society, it has also given a new momentum to the processes of their empowerment at the grass-root level. Redefinition of the relationship between the erstwhile dominated and the dominant castes has taken various forms, ranging from the struggles over putting statues of Ambedkar in public places to the fight over illegal occupation of lands allotted to the Dalits by the dominant castes. There is also no denying the fact that the practice of going in for pre-poll or post-poll alliances has been successfully used by the BSP to its advantage. In a span of just ten years it had formed alliances with three altogether different formations and had seen to the expansion of its own mass base. It is worth noting that its alliance with the BJP had benefited it in no uncertain terms—not only in electoral terms but

also at a broader level whereas in contrast the BJP's situation had gone from bad to worse.¹⁸

The story of the unfolding dynamic of Bahujanwad or its engagement with Hindutva does not end here. Apart from the significant achievements to its credit, there are a few issues over which the Bahujan formation has either followed the beaten track or has failed to show the necessary vision to address them or has kept itself confined to 'opportunistic manoeuvrings' supposedly for its short term interests. A key question concerns the whole concept of 'Bahujan' itself and its getting established at the social level. Definitely the idea of 'Bahujan' has proved politically sustainable but it has not taken roots nor seems to be taking roots at the social level. For any such concept to take root there would be a need for reinvigorating the social-cultural aspect in the movement with a special focus on the anti-caste struggle. Unless and until the caste barriers are broken and the structured hierarchy legitimated and sanctified by religion is not done away with, it is difficult to carve out a Bahujan identity from the multiplicity of oppressed identities.

But it is also true that at another level, this new phase has proved to be yet another 'opportunity lost' for a resurgent Dalit movement. Indeed, it has proved to be the most unscrupulous game played on Dalits and can be seen as the worst vulgarization of Ambedkar's vision. An independent political observer would conclude that the way the 'Taj Corridor Case' unfolds itself is going to prove to be a dividing line for the future of the Bahujan party. It can also be said that the proceedings in this case are going to prove to be the nemesis of the BSP from which it would be difficult for it to recover. With the passing of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati's game for power and money getting exhausted, it has definitely lost the initiative which it had in the 'pre-Taj Corridor' period. And if it survives it will be only as a supporter of some or the other party in power. With no organizational structure worth the name and a second line of leadership absent, it would be difficult for the party to move ahead with the same vigour, especially if a few BSP leaders are indicted in the Taj Corridor Case.

It can easily be seen that while the alliance for power-sharing with the BJP has brought electoral dividends to the Bahujan formation and it had been able to widen its base, this had also affected its long-term prospects of continuing its struggle against Brahminism and had made it an ally with a communal fascist formation whose hands are soaked with the blood of the minorities and Dalits. As already pointed out, it has helped legitimize the most brutal force in Indian politics, namely,

the Hindutva brigade, which ruled the country for a number of years till it was dismissed by the electorate in the 2004 General Elections, coming back with renewed vigour in 2014 and with an overwhelmingly crushing mandate in 2019. The most disturbing fallout of such a political alliance then was that it had willy-nilly made the Dalits appear as allies of the Hindutva brigade. This has serious ramifications for the movement for social change in this country. Putting aside all those warnings which Dr Ambedkar gave regarding the prospects before the Dalits and other oppressed section in case a 'Hindu Raj' becomes a reality, putting aside all those struggles which he and the other leaders of the movement for Dalit emancipation waged against Brahminism, an outfit which did reinvigorate the Dalit movement in critical times, has had no compunction in embracing the same forces of Brahminism under the compulsions of realpolitik. It is also clear that the 'short term successes' achieved by the Bahujan formation through the skilful utilization of alliance making and transfer of 'vote bank' have instead created illusions among the oppressed sections about the effectiveness of the electoral path.

It is worth noting that a few intellectuals have claimed that the Ambedkarian legacy has provided theoretical justification for the unity of the BSP and the BJP, and also claimed that for the Dalits 'social Fascism' of the backwards is more dangerous than the 'communal Fascism' of the Parivar. According to them, the upper castes, which the BJP represents, are a declining force in rural areas and for the Dalits, a majority of whom are still village-bound, an alliance with them would provide immediate security. Of course, a few Dalit activists have debunked the rationale provided for the BSP and BJP alliance and they have produced statistics which show that during the last decade, the Dalits were under attack more at the hands of the upper castes, especially the Rajputs, as compared to the backwards. They also debunk the theory of social Fascism (implicit violence against the Dalits by the upper castes) being more dangerous than communal Fascism (explicit violence against the minority communities) as just a 'post-facto justification' for a basically opportunist alliance which does not take into consideration the divisions within the ranks of the backwards as well as the Dalits.

WHAT NEXT?

It can be said that the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement is passing through one of its most crucial phases since the death of Ambedkar.

It can be said with a sense of achievement that today there is a broader acceptance of the ideas of Phule-Ambedkar, even in the mainstream. It can also be said that even in the broad spectrum of the Left movement there is greater appreciation of the struggle against Brahminism as well as patriarchy and a sincere attempt is underway to review and reconsider the earlier mechanical understanding around caste and gender. On the other hand, the successors of the legacy of Dr Ambedkar are finding themselves in a vortex for which they themselves are partially responsible.

The central question which needs to be understood is that there has been a ‘vulgarization’ of Ambedkar’s method in the Dalit movement which clearly manifests itself in the way interconnections between political struggles and struggles on socio-cultural questions and economic struggles are understood and implemented. While it is true that Dr Ambedkar emphasized the need for making the Dalits the ‘ruling community’ and that he underscored the need to tackle the question of Untouchability as basically a political question, it must be remembered that throughout his life he never drew a fictitious Chinese wall between political struggles and other struggles. For him, all these struggles formed part of the transformation he wanted to bring about with this holistic understanding of politics and society.

In contrast to Ambedkar’s period, in the ‘Republican phase’ of the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement, the pendulum had swung more towards socio-cultural movements. In its ‘Bahujan’ phase, the movement has swung towards capture of political power through whatever means. It is true that while the earlier one-sided emphasis on socio-cultural movement has been rectified, under the agenda of capturing political power, it has not been possible for it to sustain the momentum on the social plane. It is also worth noting that various other aspects internal to the movement, especially the gender question or developing proper organizational mechanisms have been left unaddressed.

Will it be possible for them to come out of this predicament and retrieve the radical legacy of the Ambedkarian project once again? Will it be possible for the true inheritors of the goal of Dalit emancipation to unleash a storm of political and social movements which would once and for all throw the forces of Hindutva into the dustbin of history?

As things stand today, it is definitely difficult to predict the answer.

Notes

This essay was first presented at a seminar on 'Hindutva and Dalits' organized by Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Dalit Intellectuals Collective, held at Mumbai, 20–21 September 2003.

- ¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution : The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics* (Delhi: Permanent Black 2003): 417.
- ² Gail Omvedt considers that 'short term gains from an opportunist alliance with the Bhartiya Janta Party yielded little in the end.' (Gail. Omvedt, Dalit Politics, *The Hindu*, 1 April 1998.)
- ³ The apt description for the same can be had from one of Kanshi Ram's famous quotes: The Congress and the BJP can be compared to white snakes in the green grass whereas communists can be compared to green snakes in green grass.
- ⁴ In his 'official' biography of the RSS *Sangh Vriksha ke Beej* (Nagpur: Prabhat Prakashan, 2017), C .P. Bhishikar talks about the genesis of the RSS, providing the reasons in his interactions with Mr Hedgewar.
- ⁵ The disdain for Ambedkar was so ingrained in the RSS that none of the stalwarts or its activists bothered to even visit the Deekshabhoomi situated in Nagpur itself till the early 1980s. It was in the early 1980s under the supremoship of Deoras that the RSS had a rethinking on this matter and reviewed its earlier policy in which it decided to co-opt him in its list of *prathasmaraniya* (worth remembering in the morning). But the strategy for co-optation was manifold. Ranging from attacking his thoughts (*Riddles in Hinduism*) to projecting him as a 'stooge of the British' to portraying him as 'anti-Muslim' it adopted many tactics from its kitty to present Ambedkar as a Hindu icon who was opposed to Muslims.
- ⁶ Oliver Mendelssohn and Marina Viczrany, *The Untouchables : Subordination, Poverty and The State in Modern India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 223.
- ⁷ Kanshi Ram has written a monograph on the same theme *Chamacha Age: Era of Stooges* (Delhi, privately printed, 1982) wherein he has given details of the compromising nature of the post-Ambedkar Dalit leadership.
- ⁸ See oppression by Tyagis (OBCs) on the Chuhres (SCs) in Uttar Pradesh in Omprakash Valmiki, *Joothan: A Dalit's Life*, trans by Arun Prabha Mukherjee (Kolkata: Samya, 2003); and oppressions by Thevars (OBCs) against SCs in Tamil Nadu in Thirmaavalavan, *Talisman: Extreme Emotions of Dalit Liberation*, trans by Meena Kandasamy (Kolkata: Samya, 2003).
- ⁹ It can also be said that Kanshi Ram is the only politician in mainstream politics who likes to go in for 'frequent elections' and who has publicly

declared that he has no qualms in entering 'opportunistic alliances' if it strengthens the Bahujan's ascendance to power.

- ¹⁰ For the BSP, the BJP and the Congress were the A team and B team of the Manuwadis respectively.
- ¹¹ 'My aim is that BSP should move forward. At any given point, I'll enter into a tactical alliance with another party if I feel it will strengthen the BSP. And it is what I have done in the past. I did not enter into an alliance with the BJP because of any ideological common ground- in fact we are poles apart. We entered into an understanding with the BJP last year to increase the base of the BSP and when we feel we are not benefiting any longer, we'll end it . . . I'm only looking for suitable ladder. Cited in the *Times of India*, 21 August 1997, quoted in Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*.
- ¹² For more details see Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution*; also, Vivek Kumar and Uday Sinha, *Assertion and Bahujan Samaj Party: A Perspective from Below* (Bahujan Sahitya Sansthan, 2001; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2007).
- ¹³ All references in this section are from Mohammad Jameel Akhtar, 'Iron Lady: Kumari Mayawati' (Delhi: Bahujan Sangathak, 1990): p. 88.
- ¹⁴ Sudha Pai and J. Singh, 'Politicisation of Dalits and Most Backward Castes', *EPW* (7 June 1997): 1358, also give details about the way the Bahujan effect was unfolding itself especially vis-à-vis land rights while focusing on the developments in and around Meerut district in Uttar Pradesh.
- ¹⁵ A significant exception to this practice came and relations between the two formations were at a breaking point when Mr Togadia was not allowed to enter Bareilly in the middle of August 2003.
- ¹⁶ It was quite symptomatic that the Student Youth Convention organized under the auspices of AISA-AIYA at Faizabad on 10–11 May 2002 to commemorate the '1857 struggle for India's Independence' underlining communal harmony was not allowed to take place and hundreds of its activists were jailed for weeks together. While there was no reining in of the Togadias, noted Gandhian and Magasaysay award winner Sandeep Pandey is facing charges of sedition for holding a fast for communal harmony in Ayodhya. It is in tune with this new approach that despite early warnings from many quarters the state did not take any decisive steps against the activities of the 'rebel' BJP MP from Gorakhpur, Mr Aditya Nath, which in turn cost it badly because the city witnessed communal riots for the first time in post- independence Indian history.
- ¹⁷ It can be said that the process of 'sarvajanization' of the Bahujan formation started only in 1998. During the 1998 and 1999 parliamentary elections the party distributed audiotapes welcoming the savarnas and also promising

them due respect. According to *The Pioneer*, 20 Feb 1998, in a public meeting held at Basti, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati clearly said, 'BSP is no more a caste-based party because it had adapted the policy of *Sarvajan Hit* (welfare of all the castes). The party now wanted to take the help of all to remove the disparity prevailing in the society.'

Gone were the days when before starting any meeting the 'savarnas', if any, were asked to leave the place immediately and slogans were raised denigrating them '*Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, Inko Maro Jute Char* (One who is familiar with the north Indian lexicon can see that in this slogan itself *Tilak* stands for Brahmins, *Taraju* stands for the Banias and *Talwar* stands for the Thakurs/Kshatriyas).

- ¹⁸ The BSP's progress in the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections 1989–2002 can be seen in the table below. In the 2017 elections it won 3.7 per cent of the votes and 19 seats; whereas the BJP got 24.7 per cent of the votes and 312 seats.

Year	Seats contested	No. of Seats won	Percentage of Votes secured
1989	373	13	9.83
1991	386	12	9.20
1993	166	67	11.20
1996	299	67	20.06
2002	403	98	23.00
2007	403	206	30.43
2009	403	80	25.95
2017	403	19	22.24

Source: Chief Electoral Officer, Lucknow, UP.

Maharashtra: Dalit Politics in the Hindutva Trap

Suhas Palshikar

The radical legacy of Dr Ambedkar is one of the most precious legacies available for thinking about the reconstruction of Indian society. Therefore, it is no wonder that there are attempts to de-radicalize this legacy, appropriate Ambedkar for purposes of legitimization of existing power structures and lure the Dalit activists to more mundane attractions of formal power. The alliance of the Bahujan Samaj Party with the Bharatiya Janata Party is one dimension of this process of 'social engineering' whereby the Dalits are co-opted as proponents of political Hindutva. It may intrigue an outside observer that this process is taking place in Maharashtra as well. Notwithstanding a history of Dalit consciousness for almost a century now, Hindutva forces are trying to win away Dalit masses of Maharashtra and this attempt has not been entirely unsuccessful. Locating these efforts within the context of politics and society of Maharashtra, I argue that while being critical of political Hindutva, one must also reexamine Dalit politics in the state and develop a robust critique of both the ideology and practice of Dalit politics not only in Maharashtra but elsewhere in India also.

DALIT MOVEMENT AFTER INDEPENDENCE

The Ambedkar movement evolved in the pre-independence period without cooperating with the mainstream political movements in those years, such as Congress, communist or socialist. Although it derived some support and sympathy from sections of the non-Brahmin movement¹ Ambedkar preferred to chart a separate course for his movement since he believed not only in the principle of self-help and self-respect, but also because he was somewhat doubtful about the

commitment of the non-Brahmins to the cause of uplift of the ex-untouchables. Strategically, this isolation helped Ambedkar and his movement take independent and at times 'unpopular' stand on many issues. Ambedkar could thus, project the Dalits as a 'minority' deserving political reservations and safeguards. As the political dynamics unfolded, Ambedkar chose to cooperate with the Congress, albeit only briefly. This cooperation was only on the national issue of framing the Constitution and did not involve any political cooperation.

His followers, however, could not stick to this position in the changed scenario in the post-independence period. Their first move was to join the popular movement for the formation of the linguistic state of Maharashtra. Participation in this movement catapulted the Dalit politics of Maharashtra to the centre-stage of state politics. Though the advantage did not last long, it opened up possibilities of cooperation between Dalits and socialists and communists who were both in the forefront of the movement. Then came a painful but unavoidable stage of cooperation with the Congress around the late 1960s. Since then, some faction of the Republican Party of India (RPI) has always been in alliance with the Congress Party, while some other factions have been in the anti-Congress camp. The 'parliamentarism' involved in these moves was resisted by radical activists including those persuaded by Marxist-Leninist ideas. The late 1960s also witnessed the rise of 'non-party' political formations which encouraged and enticed Dalit youth activists to move away from the Congress-led party politics in the state and get involved in people's struggles of a more radical nature. This churning gave rise to the famous Dalit Panthers movement in the early 1970s. The Panthers had a good equation with the socialist and communist political parties and movements and it seemed as if Dalit politics was finally headed towards a broader based and radical social agenda. However, the Panthers split (apart from on the leadership issue) on the issue of interpretation of Ambedkar's thought and strategy. One group believed that Ambedkarism was opposed to Marxism and, therefore, it was wrong to be influenced by Marxist formulations and it was also reprehensible to cooperate with the Marxist parties and groups. However, what the Panthers achieved was perhaps more important. They created awareness about the radical potential of Ambedkar's legacy and prepared the Dalit activists for a long drawn battle against the forces of Hindu orthodoxy. The early 1970s witnessed pitched battles between

the Panthers and the Shiv Sena activists in Mumbai. Thus, for the first time since independence, Dalits were physically assaulted by political opponents. Soon, this rivalry was pushed aside by the tumultuous events of anti-Indira Gandhi agitations in the country, the imposition of national emergency in 1975 and new political configurations evolving in the post-Emergency period. Many Dalit groups including most Panthers activists directly or indirectly sided with the anti-Congress parties in the post-1977 period. The issue of 'namantar'—naming of the Marathwada University after Dr Ambedkar—and the stiff opposition it faced from many sections of Marathwada proved another turning point in the relationship of Maharashtra's Dalit groups with various political parties.

This brief narrative cannot be complete without mentioning that since 1958, Dalits in Maharashtra have never had a united political organization. The RPI underwent splits periodically and there have usually been at least three RPI factions at any given point. However, the emotional bond with the label 'RPI' has been so persuasive that all factions call themselves the 'true RPI'. The Panthers tried to make a departure but they too became factionalized. This provided an opportunity to the political establishment to play one faction against the other and dissipate the political energy and radical potential of Dalit politics in Maharashtra. Apart from factionalism, one must also keep in mind the overall Dalit situation in the state. Large-scale migrations have meant that Dalit politics in Maharashtra is mostly centred on cities, especially Mumbai, Nagpur and Aurangabad.² Intra-Dalit caste differences are also very pronounced. Mahars, who converted to Buddhism on a large scale, are seen as the more advanced and politically more conscious caste among the Dalits as compared to the other two major Dalit castes of Maharashtra, Charamkar and Matang. Even during Ambedkar's lifetime, there was some discomfort among the non-Mahar sections, and he drew most of his following from the Mahar community. Occasionally, he had to assuage the feelings of non-Mahars by explaining that he was not partial towards the Mahars and he would also have to explain why only Mahars were in the forefront of his conversion move. This unease among the various Dalit communities spilt over to the post-independence period as well. The RPI has never been successful in attracting the Charamkar and Matang communities and its leadership has also been virtually a single caste leadership. This has further added to the distance between ex-Mahar and the other two Dalit communities. Many ex-Mahar activists are

very insistent about conversion to Buddhism as a mark of real radicalism and proof of faith in Ambedkar's ideas. Since the Charamkar and Matang communities have not opted for conversion on a large scale, these communities are derided for their Hindu partisanship by the Buddhist activists. Till the 1990s, RPI activists did not bother to respect the symbols of the Charamkar and Matang communities. The Saint Rohidas Jayanti celebrations would be a Charamkar affair as the commemoration of Annabhau Sathe would be a Matang one. These communities would be less enthusiastic at Ambedkar Jayanti celebrations. Moreover, the Buddhists normally keep away from the Ganesh festival and the Shivaji Jayanti celebrations which the Charamkar and Matang people do participate in, which causes them to be suspected of being sympathetic to Hindu ideas and culture.³ These developments have meant an undercurrent of schism within the Dalit community as a whole, which not only impedes its unified political action but also provides spaces for Hindutva to intervene in Dalit politics.

ELECTORAL POLITICS

Ever since the RPI was formed, a section of the Dalit community developed emotional bonds with it as a political instrument conceptualized by Ambedkar himself, and the RPI was also seen as the culmination of the political struggle of the Dalits. As the Congress was the dominant political party in the state, Dalit votes traditionally got divided between the RPI and the Congress. As different RPI factions continued to align with the the Congress, the latter became the main beneficiary of Dalit votes. Politics in Maharashtra evolved in a framework of Congress domination and except in 1957, when all the non-Congress parties allied against the Congress on the issue of formation of the state of Marathi-speaking people, no political party was in a position to challenge the Congress in the electoral arena. As the electoral politics in the state became intensely competitive since the late 1970s, the strategic importance of Dalit votes increased and the competition for Dalit votes intensified. However, when the Shiv Sena and the BJP arrived on the political scene of the state, they did not benefit from the intensified competition for Dalit votes. These forces were seen as anti-Dalit and anti-Ambedkar. They were also seen as opposed to social transformation, which was supposed to be the hallmark of the Dalit movement then. In the state assembly elections

of 1995, when the Congress was defeated by the Shiv Sena and the BJP, 7 per cent Dalit voters voted for the BJP and about 6 per cent voted for the Shiv Sena, as opposed to over 31 per cent who voted for the Congress.⁴ But these elections also witnessed the decline in the effectiveness of the Dalit vote as a result of its fragmentation among different parties and factions. In 1995, for instance, 55 per cent of the Dalit votes were divided among RPI factions and parties other than the main players in state politics, that is the Congress or the Shiv Sena and the BJP.

This trend continued throughout the 1990s. In the Lok Sabha elections of 1996, only 28 per cent Dalits voted for the Congress and both the Shiv Sena and the BJP received votes from more than 8 per cent Dalit voters, again, over 55 per cent Dalit votes going to other parties. The elections of 1999 saw a reversal of this trend to some extent as a result of a pre-election alliance between two RPI factions and the Congress and one RPI faction and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP). In 1999, the BJP could get only 3.5 per cent Dalit votes while Shiv Sena retained 7 per cent Dalit votes and the Congress garnered 50 per cent and NCP another 21 per cent Dalit votes.⁵ Another interesting aspect of electoral politics is that in spite of lack of support for the Shiv Sena and the BJP among Dalit voters, these parties have managed to win the majority of seats reserved for the Scheduled Castes (SC) in the state assembly. In 1995, the Shiv Sena had five SC MLAs and the BJP had as many as eight SC MLAs against three of the Congress.⁶ In the 1999 legislative assembly elections, the BJP had six SC MLAs and the Shiv Sena had five.⁷ It must be frustrating for the Dalit activists as well as the ordinary voter to have voted for someone else and being kept out of power through clever electoral arithmetic. The MLAs elected on the BJP and the Shiv Sena tickets are invariably non-Buddhists and particularly from the Charamkar and Matang communities. The BJP had inducted a Matang in the ministry and Shiv Sena had given cabinet berth to a Charamkar when these parties were in power in 1995. This 'social engineering' of the Shiv Sena and the BJP had already created unease among the Dalit political activists.

With this background, the Shiv Sena leader, Uddhav Thackeray, appealed to the Dalits at a small function in Mumbai in February 2003 to think positively about the alliance between *Shivshakti* (meaning either the Shiv Sena or the caste Hindus) and *Bhimshakti* (meaning the followers of Ambedkar; again, implying either all Dalits or Buddhists) (see also Essays 2, 3 and 5). It may be noted that this offensive of the

Shiv Sena came close on the heels of the appointment of Sushil Kumar Shinde, a non-Mahar Dalit as chief minister of the Congress-led ministry in the state. The Shiv Sena's strategy has upset the political equations in the state because since the 1999 elections, major RPI factions are in alliance with either the Congress or the NCP. An alliance with the Shiv Sena would mean that the Congress and the NCP could not return to power if the Dalits deserted them. But it also has a larger implication of the realignment of social forces in the state and redefinition of the stand of the Dalits regarding Hinduism, Hindutva and social transformation. Even before the Shiv Sena offered the Dalits an olive branch, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) had attempted in the early 1990s to woo the Dalits by upholding Ambedkar as an icon.

APPROPRIATING AMBEDKAR

We shall first look at the attempts made by the Hindutva forces to co-opt the Dalits by appropriating the legacy of Ambedkar as being supportive of Hindu organization. It is well known that under the leadership of Golwalkar Gururji the RSS often followed an orthodox traditionalist position. Its Hindutva was also non-reformist and based on eulogization of chaturvarna or the fourfold varna division that signified the caste system. In the 1970s, the RSS shifted its stand on the caste system and started saying that it does not believe in caste. It actually made efforts to give itself a reformed outlook. Even then, radicals like Phule and Ambedkar were kept at a distance by the RSS. In the early 1980s, the names of Phule and Ambedkar were included in the daily morning prayer of the RSS (see also Essays 2, 3, 4, 5 and 8).⁸ In 1983, the efforts to appropriate Ambedkar began in right earnest. A platform was floated by the RSS in that year, named as the Samajik Samrasata Manch. The ostensible reason for forming this platform in 1983 was somewhat frivolous: in the year 1983, according to the Hindu calendar, the birth anniversary of Hedgewar, the founder of the RSS fell on 14 April. This coincidence was turned into the exercise of synthesizing Hedgewar and Ambedkar.⁹ Since then, some organizations within the RSS family began celebrating 14 April and 6 December in order to associate themselves with Ambedkar and his followers. The activities of the Samrasata Manch remained on a low key during the period 1983–90. The effort was not in fact to win the Dalits but to convince the non-Dalits of the importance of accepting Ambedkar as one among the

pantheons of Hindutva. As one senior activist of the Manch and the RSS put it, the effort was to recontextualize Ambedkar in a manner which would be acceptable to the upper caste Hindus and at the same time to erase the stamp of being anti-Dalit. He candidly stated that the ordinary RSS worker did not see Phule or Ambedkar in a very reverential or affectionate manner. The Samrasata Manch was an effort to change this negative predilection towards the Dalits and Ambedkar.¹⁰

Much can be said about the semantics involving the term 'Samrasata' that deftly avoids the use of the term 'samata' meaning equality. Samrasata, instead, underscores unity rather than equality. The RSS wanted to consolidate its image by upholding Ambedkar and at the same time did not wish to lay claim to the radical transformative legacy of Ambedkar. This it did through the following manner:

- (a) To begin with, the RSS conceded that Ambedkar was a national symbol and an icon of national stature (not just a leader of Dalits). It was stated that Ambedkar was important as a proponent of social unity and thus could not be opposed to national unity (the goal dear to the RSS). (It is another matter that many in the RSS would still have doubts about Ambedkar's nationalist credentials. Arun Shourie's book *Worshipping False Gods* testifies to this tendency.¹¹)
- (b) Secondly, Samrasata Manch sought to project Ambedkar as being favourable to Hindu interests and Hindu unity. While the RSS and the Hindutva forces had been rattled by Ambedkar's decision to adopt Buddhism, now, it was argued that the decision to adopt Buddhism rather than any 'alien' religion was proof that Ambedkar was soft on the Hindu society and it was further pointed out that in any case, Buddha is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu! This of course involved considerable falsification and distortion since one of the oaths stipulated by Ambedkar at the time of Dhammadiksha, was to affirm that the person concerned would not accept Buddha as the incarnation of Vishnu. But the RSS has not been known either for intellectual capability or for probity and honesty in the field of ideas. Thus distorting Ambedkar to suit their purpose would not be a serious issue for them.
- (c) Having once asserted that Ambedkar was interested in the welfare of Hinduism, the Samrasata Manch further sought to

depict Ambedkar as the religious reformer within Hinduism. Not that the RSS is particularly in love with reformers, but this formulation lays the foundation for the argument that Ambedkar was part of the Hindu religious discourse. In the last century and a half, Hinduism has been discussed in four different discourse frameworks: the reformist, the Christian framework, the modernist-rationalist framework and the transformative framework entrenched in the values of justice and morality. Ambedkar, I would argue, belonged to the last discourse framework and pushing him into the reformist discourse effectively deradicalizes his thought and ideas.

- (d) Having pushed Ambedkar into the Hindu reformist framework, the Samrasata Manch further strengthened Ambedkar's place as a 'Hinduist' (pro-Hindutva) thinker by projecting that he was anti-Muslim. (Although Ambedkar's analysis of the Muslim question left much to be desired, his position was still different from that of the RSS and the Hindutva organizations. I have discussed this at some length elsewhere.¹²)
- (e) In order to lend authenticity to its exercise, the Samrasata Manch made efforts to build acceptability to its activity among Dalit intellectuals. This has always created a bitter controversy among Dalit activists and intellectuals. The fact that an orthodox Hindu organization was out to uphold Ambedkar excited quite a few intellectuals from the Dalit community. The language of Samrasata also attracted many. A veteran Dalit intellectual, Gangadhar Pantawane, was among those who initially endorsed the Samrasata Manch by inaugurating their conference in Pune (4 December 1988). His speech was published in a magazine brought out by the Manch. Pantawane anticipated the criticism of his action and argued that even Ambedkar himself used to deliver speeches at the Ganesh festival. Pantawane completely misses the difference between the Ganesh festivals of Ambedkar's time and the political agenda implicit in the activities of the RSS. Such a political position leads him to welcome the RSS' stand refuting Untouchability.¹³ Many other Dalit intellectuals similarly failed to appreciate the political import of the activity undertaken by the RSS and naively believed that the language of Samrasata was nothing but liberty, equality and fraternity. For a movement known for the participation of the intellectuals this naivety is somewhat surprising!

The efforts of the Samrasata Manch were aimed firstly at appropriating the legacy of Ambedkar and showing both to the caste Hindus and to the Dalits that Ambedkar was not a revolutionary but a Hindu social reformer. Therefore the Dalits and caste Hindus do not have any reason to bicker over Ambedkar's legacy. Secondly, the message was about Muslims. By trying to project Ambedkar as being opposed to Muslims, the Hindutva forces sought to unite the Dalits and caste Hindus on a common platform of an anti-Muslim offensive. Support to this formulation of Ambedkar came from outside the RSS as well. Two Savarkarite intellectuals came forward in the nineties to interpret Ambedkar as supportive of Hindu interests and as suspicious of Muslims.¹⁴ These writings have become reference points in the Hindutva arguments about Ambedkar. They are interesting not for their intellectual rigour, but at least for revealing the main concerns of contemporary Hindutva. The RSS and the Hindutva organizations have now adopted the ideas of Savarkar regarding Hindutva. It is a militant, anti-Muslim Hindutva, which seeks to derecognize caste inequalities in order to construct a strong Hindutva force. This is a major departure from the brahminical composition of Hindutva. Now the lower castes are seen as the 'sergeants-at-arms' for a militant political Hindutva.¹⁵

This neo-Hinduism requires not only the numerical strength of the lower castes and Dalits but it also requires legitimization, and situating Ambedkar among the pantheons of Hindutva serves this purpose admirably. As Gopal Guru described it, this is the strategy aimed at 'Hinduization' of Ambedkar.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that few Dalit intellectuals or groups actually bothered to counter this Hinduist interpretation of Ambedkar. Dalit groups were confident that whatever the Hindutva forces may do, Dalits are and will remain opposed to Hindutva because of Ambedkar's trenchant critique of Hindu religious philosophy. Therefore, no efforts were made to warn Dalit masses against the Hindutva penetration. Secondly, Dalit politics turned Ambedkar into a meaningless icon, thereby neglecting the task of reinterpreting Ambedkar and consolidating his radical legacy. Apart from a few exceptions, Dalit intellectuals did not contest the interpretations of Ambedkar that were being circulated by the RSS or by Hindutva intellectuals like S. H. Deshpande or Sheshrao More. This inability to intervene in the debate about Ambedkar must have contributed to the confusion among the Dalit masses about the issues involved. Also, the same period (1990s) was a period of political

turmoil and factionalization of Dalit politics. The Dalit movement had come to a standstill, and the masses were left to look after themselves while the leadership was busy in political negotiations.

THE LOGIC OF POWER

There is a difference between the efforts to dilute and distort the legacy of Ambedkar and the efforts to bring together the Dalits and caste Hindu supporters of Shiv Sena. The former has a long-term design to appropriate the legacy of Ambedkar while the latter is attempting to drain the Dalit leadership of its following and make it ineffective in the politics of the state. The former aims at wiping out the space occupied by the progressive and anti-caste ideas while the latter seeks to snatch away the political space available to the Dalits in contemporary Maharashtra. At the moment, Dalit politics in Maharashtra is divided among three major factions: the Athavale faction, the Gavai faction and the faction led by Prakash Ambedkar. The Athavale faction has a considerable following in Mumbai and parts of western Maharashtra. In the Lok Sabha elections, Athavale, supported by the Congress, was elected from a prestigious Mumbai constituency seen as the bastion of the Shiv Sena. Western Maharashtra is the region where the Shiv Sena and the BJP are trying hard to weaken the Congress electorally. Given the fact that Athavale has been consistently arguing for an alliance with Congress (and NCP) against 'communal' forces, an erosion of the base of his faction would help the Shiv Sena and the BJP. However, the real story is not that Shiv Sena seeks the support of Dalits, but that a large number of activists are in fact sympathetic to the idea of joining hands with the Shiv Sena. One needs to pause and find an explanation of this development. It is being argued not only by activists but also by some intellectuals that the Congress does not give Dalits an adequate share of power and therefore some understanding with the Shiv Sena may be advantageous for the Dalits.

Raosaheb Kasabe, an influential intellectual who has been associated with progressive movements has in fact come out with an elaborate defence of this trend. Kasabe argues, firstly, that in any case, Sena workers are somewhat removed from the discourse of Hindutva and, therefore, an alliance with it need not be seen as a compromise with Hindutva forces. Secondly, now there is a phase of non-ideological politics, so it does not matter what your political ally's ideology is. Thirdly, Congress and the NCP are averse to sharing power honestly

while the Sena is usually known for keeping its promises. Fourthly, the Congress and the NCP are associated with the Maratha caste while the Shiv Sena is associated with the OBCs. Therefore, an alliance with the Shiv Sena indicates the alliance with the OBCs, which may be socially more progressive. Most important, he argues that the fact of Muslim fundamentalism in places like Mumbai is often ignored by the progressive forces and as such they (progressives) cannot stand up to Muslim communalism. Only the Shiv Sena can fight the communalism of the Muslims and this fact will certainly weigh in the minds of Dalits in allying with the Shiv Sena.¹⁷

This entire formulation is amazing to say the least. But coming from a senior Dalit intellectual, it assumes significance in terms of the trends within Dalit politics. Kasabe expresses doubt about whether an ordinary Sena activist realizes what is meant by Hindutva but later on clearly accepts that the Sena is anti-Muslim and in fact distinguishes between the straightforward Hindutva of the Sena as opposed to the sedate and puritanical Hindutva of the RSS (although this assessment too, is seriously flawed).¹⁸ Thus, Kasabe certifies that the Sena is not truly Hinduist and then asserts that it is indeed Hinduist. This self-contradiction apart, he seems to endorse the 'non-ideological' manner in which politics are allegedly conducted contemporarily. Again, here too, Kasabe is oblivious to the fact that the politics of the RSS and the BJP are essentially ideological. As far as Kasabe's assertion about the Sena being firm on its word, we shall let it go uncontested since we do not have an experience in this regard nor do we know about Kasabe's source of information. But Kasabe's argument that Shiv Sena represents the OBC force is simply inaccurate. Both in terms of the number of MLAs from different communities and in terms of support from different communities, the Shiv Sena mostly replicates the Congress. It has a large Maratha component supplemented by the OBCs. Secondly, its large base in Mumbai gives the impression that it is a party of the OBCs. But data suggest clearly that it is difficult to describe Sena as the party of the OBCs.¹⁹

As far as Kasabe's assessment of the Muslim community is concerned, it is merely a restatement of the charges often made by the forces of Hindutva. These charges seek to generalize on the basis of selective examples from the Muslim community and it is unfortunate that Kasabe should fall for this type of propaganda. However, Kasabe's argument is not less important because of these defects. Rather, in spite of these defects, it is important for what it implies and indicates.

Firstly, Kasabe is probably arguing that in the game of power, it is important to gain power and considerations of ideology need not come in the way of the pursuit of power. Secondly, Kasabe is also endorsing the prevalent trend of sharing power on the basis of caste or community. On these two counts he is perhaps very much in tune with the ordinary activists. The compulsions of electoral politics and the skilful use of these by the BSP have altered the approach of the activists to the question of power. Dalit youth are enamoured by the aura that surrounds Mayawati and Kanshi Ram. Since they arrived on the scene, the understanding of Ambedkar's writings has also changed. It is now believed that Ambedkar exhorted the Dalits to become 'rulers' and state power was all that Ambedkarism stood for. Even before the RSS appropriated Ambedkar, the BSP had done enough damage to Ambedkar's legacy and prepared Dalit activists for non-ideological and ad hoc alliances irrespective of the anti-caste implications. The BSP contributed to the trivialization of Ambedkar.²⁰

THE IMPLICATIONS

In a sense, the contemporary developments need to be seen as a part of the trajectory of the Dalit movement in Maharashtra in the broader context of national politics. After the failure of the Panthers' movement, the Dalit movement in Maharashtra has declined considerably. This decline is twofold: on the one hand, the democratic transformation visualized by Ambedkar has been lost sight of. On the other hand, workers have not been trained adequately about ideological issues. This has exposed them to a politics of power for the sake of power. The instrumentalist tendency is exacerbated by the compromises made by leadership for *personally* sharing power. While the game of power was unfolding, the ordinary Dalit activists in Maharashtra remained on the margins of power. Leaders would become ministers and MLAs as a result of their 'fight against communalism' while at the local level workers have had to continue to play the role of a powerless opposition. In zilla parishads and other local centres of power, the Dalit activists did not find a place for themselves. This gap has frustrated the ordinary Dalit worker. When such workers look at the Mayawati experiment of Uttar Pradesh, the logic of power defies all other considerations. Instead of taking the long route to power, workers are tempted to turn Ambedkar into an icon rather than a beacon. When the Shiv Sena made the appeal to Dalits to join hands

with Shivshakti the logic of power produced an almost collective amnesia among activists and intellectuals like Kasabe alike, about the fact that the same Shiv Sena was in the forefront of opposition to changing the name of Marathwada University after Dr Ambedkar. It was also forgotten that the Shiv Sena has been opposed to reservations on caste basis and that it opposed the decision of the state government to publish Ambedkar's writings critical of Ram and Krishna (*Riddles of Hinduism*). Over the last two decades, the Sena chief Thackeray has stated a number of times that the Sena was opposed to the domination of three Ms: Marathas, Muslims and Mahars. This was also forgotten. Nor did any one mention that the Shiv Sena stands for the equation that Hindutva is nationalism. These details suggest that the alliance of Shivshakti and Bhimshakti is supposed to take place as if in a vacuum and the only point of reference is the logic of power. This may sound absurd but even before the appeal was made; local alliances were struck without much ado. The faction led by Prakash Ambedkar, for instance, entered into an alliance with the Shiv Sena in the Aurangabad corporation. Interestingly, when the Athavale faction was targeted by the Shiv Sena recently, Prakash Ambedkar and his colleagues chose to remain quiet as if the issue did not concern them at all. Such a myopic approach reveals the lack of concern for broader issues.

Dalit politics in Maharashtra is already a weak force politically and ideologically. In fact this reality has encouraged the RSS and now the Shiv Sena to make dents in the ideological and political space so far claimed by progressives. In conclusion, one needs to look at the whole issue beyond mere electoral calculations. If the Shiv Sena succeeds in winning over Dalit youth in parts of the state, it may be able to consolidate its position vis-à-vis the Congress. But more than that, the phenomenon of Dalits aligning with the forces of Hindutva has deeper implications: since the late 1980s we are witnessing an offensive from the Indian establishment. The main aim of this offensive is to sharpen the hegemonic hold over the society. This requires decimation of the ideologies of democracy and justice. The appropriation of Ambedkar and the Dalit movement can perform this task for the establishment. Projecting Ambedkar's thought merely as the quest for Dalit power is most convenient to the establishment. Also, sharing power (which has now lost any real control over policy making) with the Dalits does not harm the interests of the establishment anymore. The question before the forces interested in democracy and justice is simple: in times of the march of Fascism, can we afford to

lose the ideological beacon called Ambedkar thought and also lose the masses which uphold that beacon?

Notes

- ¹ Following Jotirao (also known as Jotiba) Phule's Satyashodhak movement, the non-Brahmin movement arose in Maharashtra against Brahmin domination in general and against caste inequalities. Along with the peasant Maratha community, the lower peasant sections also participated in this movement. In Maharashtra, this non-Brahmin movement is often distinguished from the Dalit movement. For more details of this, see, Gail Omvedt, *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society* (Bombay: Scientific Socialist Education Trust, 1976).
- ² Padma Velaskar, 'The Politics of Untouchability and Social Change: A Study of the Scheduled Castes of Maharashtra', *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy* 1, 12, 3 and 4 (2000): 473–500; 475–76.
- ³ Suhas Palshikar, Report for UGC, 'Politics of Marginalized Groups', Dept. of Public Administration and Political Science, University of Pune, 2000: 44–78.
- ⁴ Rajendra Vora and Suhas Palshikar, *Maharashtratil Sattantar* (Mumbai: Granthali, 1996): 105.
- ⁵ Suhas Palshikar and Rajeshwari Deshpande, 'Maharashtra: Competitive Party System and Structures of Domination', *Journal of the Indian School of Political Economy* 15, 1 and 2 (Jan-June 2003): 97–122.
- ⁶ Vora and Palshikar, *Maharashtratil Sattantar*: 92.
- ⁷ Suhas Palshikar and Nitin Birmal 'Fragmented Marathas Retain Power'. In *India's 1999 Elections and Twentieth Century Politics*, edited by Paul Wallace and Ramashray Roy (Delhi: SAGE, 2003): 206–232.
- ⁸ *Vicharyatra: Dr Hedgewar te Dr Ambedkar: Ek Samajik Pravas* (Pune: Ramabai Auti Vikas Pratishthan, nd): 54.
- ⁹ B. P. Sabale, 'Samajik Prabodhanacha Pravas', In *Vicharyatra* (RSS publication): 126.
- ¹⁰ Ramesh Patange, *Me, Manu ani Sangh* (Dombivli: Moraya Publications. 1996): 64–65.
- ¹¹ Arun Shourie, *Worshipping False Gods* (Delhi: Harper Collins, 1997).
- ¹² Suhas Palshikar, *Dr Ambedkaranchya Hindukaranachi Chikitsa* (Satara: Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Academy, 1994).
- ¹³ Gangadhar Pantawane, 'Vishwas Watayala Hava.' In *Vicharyatra*: 61–64.

- ¹⁴ S. H. Deshpande, *Te Bhajap—Hindutvavicharacha Chikitsak Alekh* (Pune: Rajhans, 1992); Sheshrao More, *Savarkaranche Samajkaran: Satya ani Viparyas* (Pune: Rajhans, 1992); and Sheshrao More, *Dr Ambedkaranche Samajik Dhoran: Ek Abhyas* (Pune: Rajhans, 1998).
- ¹⁵ See, Rajendra Vora and Suhas Palshikar, 'Neo-Hinduism: A Case of Distorted Consciousness', In *State and Society in India*, edited by Jayant Lele and Rajendra Vora (Delhi: Chanakya, 1990): 213–243, for a detailed argument about neo-Hinduism.
- ¹⁶ Gopal Guru, 'Hinduization of Ambedkar in Maharashtra,' *EPW* (16 Feb 1991): 339–41.
- ¹⁷ Raosaheb Kasabe, 'Bhimshakti-Shivshakti: Kahi Nirikshane,' *Parivartanacha Vatsaru* (1–30 April 2003): 14–16.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.: 16.
- ¹⁹ Suhas Palshikar, 'Shiv Sena : An Assessment,' Dept of Politics, and Public Administration, University of Pune, 1999.
- ²⁰ Suhas Palshikar, '*Dalit Rajkaranapudhil Pech*,' *Parivartanacha Vatsaru* (1–30 April 2003): 25–29 and Suhas Palshikar, '*Ambedkari Vicharanche Mamulikaran*,' *Parivartanacha Vatsaru* (1–15 Sept 2002): 3, 4, 15.

No Exit? Dalits, Hindutva and the Dravidian Movement

V. Geetha

I

On 14 April 2001, several Dalit activists, community leaders and anti-caste radicals gathered at the Ambedkar Memorial in Chennai city to recite a pledge which proclaimed: 'We are not Hindus'. The pledge signified two things: a public rejection of Hinduism and a political challenge to Hindutva. Speaker after speaker spoke out against the sinister attempts of the Sangh Parivar to include Dalits within the Hindu fold, and declared that this would never come to pass, since Dalits clearly did not see themselves as Hindus; and besides, they stood to gain very little from being forcibly enfolded into a religion that held them as untouchables.

The pledge was a quiet and moving affair—a tribute to the memory of Dr Ambedkar and his sustained distrust and ultimate rejection of Hinduism. In the following year, a Dalit group, Rettamalai Srinivasan Peravai, undertook a march throughout the state to popularize the pledge and explain its significance to Dalit communities and such others as would listen to them. The march received very little public attention—the media, including the vernacular papers and television, more or less ignored it. However, Hindutva groups in the state such as the hate-filled Hindu Munnani and religious leaders, including the Kanchi Shankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswathi, objected to this defiant campaign. They declared that the march was calculated to belittle Hinduism and an affront to Hindu pride and dignity. The marchers were not provoked, rather, as they remarked later, they felt vindicated in their choice of phrases and slogans, and the meanings they had invested in these. For after all, the Hindus must feel angered, and be

made to come to terms with their own insensitivity to Dalit lives and concerns.

Interestingly enough, the two major Dalit political parties in the state, the Dalit Panthers and Puthiya Tamizhagam, did not appear to be—either at the time of the event or subsequently—entirely comfortable with the ‘We are not Hindus’ campaign. While they did not reject it outright, they were guarded and rather equivocal in their responses. As far as other political parties in the state were concerned, they could afford to believe that the campaign never happened.

What did the marchers hope to achieve, then? Their concern was not political, in the instrumental sense that the term has come to exist in public discourse. Rather, they wished to begin a process of questioning—of faith, caste status and identity—that would challenge the attractions held out to Dalits of incipient yet systematic Hindutva ideologies and practices. They wished to revive the tradition of challenging orthodoxy which they believed had gone out of fashion.

The march was orderly and civil—police permission was requested for and secured. The marchers confined their street corner meetings and pamphleteering to the main bazaar areas in whatever town or village they visited and then went on to Dalit neighbourhoods. Here, they found the young and the old interested in what they had to say. Young people were enthused by what they perceived as radical daring ideas—while for the older folk the marchers and their ideas revived memories of another time, when a vigorous Dravidian movement championed the cause of atheism and addressed the horrors of Hindu superstition and priestcraft. Those who gathered around the marchers were politically diverse—supporters of different parties—but this did not matter, since they were all equally interested in issues of social and religious identity and power and powerlessness that the ‘We are not Hindus’ slogan raised for them.

Significantly, the marchers did not seek to impose their slogan on their listeners; for one, they steered clear of everyday Dalit religiosities—the worship of *kula devams* or local gods and goddesses—which, in any case, was closely linked to existential issues of survival, illness, fear, well-being, healing and sorrow. Rather they chose to explicate on the everyday manifestations of brahminical Hinduism, which disallowed Dalits from entering temples, sanctioned Untouchability and which filled the upper castes with false pride and fostered a false belief in their superiority. To questions from the audience, ‘if Dalits are not Hindus, then what are they?’ the organizers explained

that Dalits were originally Buddhists. Some wondered what this meant, others felt Buddhism was an attractive option but were curious about its ritual aspects and anxious that it provide them with spiritual rites of passage, festivals and prayer.

Elsewhere, on the main streets, the marchers attracted random interest—people politely took their pamphlets but very few asked questions. Generally, they were quietly ignored—even dominant caste groups and parties did not appear to have much to say, or were clearly indifferent.

It seems to me that the march, a brave, though, isolated attempt at articulating a different sense of politics is historically relevant in diverse ways—this is why I chose to begin this essay with a reference to it. It helps me raise a set of questions with respect to that tangle of politics, religion, economics and culture within which Dalit and anti-caste radicals are constrained to function at the current moment.

II

Ideologically and culturally, this past decade had witnessed many a denunciation of Hinduism from Dalits in Tamil Nadu. The reasons are not difficult to understand. For, a significant number of Dalit scholars and leaders have both understood Hindutva for the compact of lies and hate that it is, and for the death-dealing cynicism of its leaders, and also clearly wish to battle its politics. There is also another factor at play here; the growth of Hindutva in Tamil Nadu has taken place in a conjuncture that also witnessed a complete turnabout of Dravidian radicalism. Not too long ago, in fact until the parliamentary elections of 2004, leaders of the Dravidian movement found it worthwhile to consort with Hindutva in one way or another—and for many this appeared as much an indication of the movement's self-betrayal as it was of the power and attractions of Hindutva ideologies. While there is, as yet, no clear consensus on how this happened, very few Dalits dispute the fact that the Dravidian movement has reneged on its own glorious past (there are some who question whether the past was not tainted as well).

The persistence of violence against Dalits and the hatred that the latter have had to confront this past decade in parts of Tamil Nadu are the reasons why Dalits today point to Dravidian self-betrayal. Some read this self-betrayal in terms of the Dravidian movement having enabled the upward mobility of backward castes, while

simultaneously disenabling the claims of Dalits. Others see in it unease rather than triumph, fear of Dalit militancy, which takes refuge in hidebound practices of oppression and humiliation, rather than an assertion of resurgence in caste pride. Yet others view the Dravidian movement's failure to be a consequence of electoral politics—given the facts of caste demography and the need to build support blocs which would win votes, no party, even one with radical pretensions, could afford to alienate regionally dominant castes. Ideological pressures have thus come to be necessarily subordinated to political imperatives, and, as a consequence, radicalism remains writ large in slogans and rhetoric, while in actual practice, very little, beyond the populist and the electorally permissible, is achieved.

This question awaits serious interrogation, but for now, it would appear important to map the field thus: almost four decades of Dravidian rule in the state has resulted in marginal benefits for almost all castes—including the Dalits. The relative success of the reservation policy in the state, the expansion of technical education which gave several thousands of lower caste students an access to higher education and enabled the evolution of a widely available public health service whose beneficiaries were the poor, have resulted in a measure of progress for all concerned. It is, however, important to note here that consistently Dalits have benefited less than other communities, and there remains a substantial gap between even the most backward castes (MBCs) and Dalits, in matters of health, education, wages, presence in government jobs and positions.¹

Most important, progress has not come easy to Dalits. Caste Hindu society has been grudging of Dalit progress and, worse, done its best to impede it. This is evident from the personal histories of Dalits, all of which narrate, with a greater or lesser degree of wry anguish, the inevitable 'testing' of Dalit identity, the subtle scorn that Dalit students or young officials in government endure as they fight to push the limits of their bounded existence.² Thus Dalit attempts to affirm and secure their rights have exacted from them enormous fortitude, tact and courage—and this has been the case in both political and civil society.

Dalit anguish in these and other related instances is poignant since, all along, Dalits have been supporters of Dravidian radicalism, from its earliest 'self-respect campaign' days and had always sought to 'own' the movement as their own. It is not surprising then that Dalits today are bitter towards their own radical past, and some of them are busy disowning it. They are especially unhappy that regionally dominant

caste groups, which today exude caste pride and self-confidence, and are the chief social and political beneficiaries of several decades of Dravidian rule, appear unrepentant in their caste pride. Angered by Dalit militancy and beset by an entirely misplaced sense of having an insufficient share of social welfare benefits, and convinced that the Dalits have more than their share, these groups have sought to punish the Dalits for their attempts to better their lives.³

For Dalit thinkers and ideologues, the viciousness with which Untouchability continues to be re-affirmed on a daily basis, is emblematic of a historic national—and local—failure to successfully eradicate the practice out of existence. Feeling bereft and burdened at the same time, it is not surprising that some of them—for instance, the ideologues of the Rettamalai Srinivasan Peravai—have returned to older, ‘self-respect’ themes of systematic humiliation and religious oppression, that is, to opposing Hinduism, as such. These themes which held civic attention even until the 1970s—the last decade of E. V. Ramasamy Periyar’s life—had since come to be subsumed within the terms of a new political category: the atrocity. All crimes against Dalits are now viewed as ‘atrocities’, which casts them into the category of the exceptional. But the point is, as Dalit intellectuals argue, crimes against Dalits are really ‘normal’ outcomes of everyday Untouchability and the challenge therefore is to find out how injustice and humiliation are ‘normalized’. That is, we need to ask: what makes it possible for the caste Hindu to practise inhumanity so often and so easily?

The fact that this question is seldom posed points to a failure of not only the Dravidian movement, but our collective social imagination and signifies a dismal shrinking of our public conscience. Dalit thinkers who wish to raise such issues clearly wish to stretch and ultimately break the constraints of a cruelly inert and ideologically sterile political and public culture. Significantly, Dalit political parties in Tamil Nadu too have been trapped within the politics of the atrocity. From the late 1980s and well into the mid-1990s, Thirumaavalavan of the Dalit Panthers and Dr Krishnaswamy of the Puthiya Tamizhagam have mobilized thousands of Dalits around a variety of issues: for reprisals against caste Hindu violence, campaigns against a violent and biased police force, better wages in plantations for Dalit workers, against blatant discrimination in public places such as the ‘two glasses’ system still prevalent in certain villages. Often, though, these struggles have remained captive to a discourse of ‘rights’, both in the formal and legal sense of the term, as well as in terms of conceptualizing the nature of Dalit oppression. Also, much of the propaganda and persuasion used

to mobilize Dalits are constrained to remain largely local in character, given the fact that they have to address local tyrannies for the most part. Thus it has not been possible for Dalit groups and parties, except when they declaim against Hindutva, to systematically indict Hindu society and the faith and customs which animate it. In the opinion of some Dalit intellectuals, this, combined with the failure of Dravidian radicalism, has contributed to a state of mental and political anomie in Dalit political and social life.⁴

What would an indictment of Hindu faith, customs and society achieve in pragmatic terms? Dalit intellectuals argue that it would render visible a critical perspective on faith, an option that is almost non-existent for most people, and besides, in the current context, demonstrate to Dalits the extremely dubious politics of Hindutva, in particular, the nature of its interest in the Dalit cause.

III

The indictment of Hinduism that some Dalit intellectuals propose assumes that Dalits have a stake in rejecting the religion that they are born into. But is such an assumption tenable at all?

Dalit Hindu sacrality is not singular—though distinctive, it partakes of a religious commons, which is available to all lower caste groups. But a Dalit is not Hindu in quite the same way as a lower caste non-Dalit Hindu is: apart from specific rites and rituals, Untouchability separates them from others, and thus their sense of being 'Hindu' is almost always incomplete. They cannot expect to do certain things, such as garner privileges in village temple festivals, or insist on their equal rights to pulling the temple chariot. And even if they do succeed in affirming these claims, they realize, sooner or later, that their hard won rights are neither transferable nor universal. For instance, they might succeed in asserting their right to contribute to the village temple festival, but they cannot therefore expect to be allowed the right to offer worship before the upper castes have said their prayers. Yet, very few Dalits would consider themselves as anything but Hindu. This is where we encounter a paradox that lies at the core of the caste system. What is denied also becomes the measure of what is most valuable. But a Dalit can never hope to realize that value, since, given his or her location, it is always placed out of reach, always deferred.

The paradoxical position of Dalits within and outside Hinduism could either lead to a wholesale rejection of the Hindu order, or an affirmation of it, in the belief that this would enable Dalits to claim

their due in matters of both faith and social status. While Dalit intellectuals and activists are drawn to the first option, Hindutva ideologues have found the second useful and productive. They have attempted to persuade Dalits to view themselves as full-fledged Hindus and assured them that Untouchability is an aberration that will not be observed in a Hindu rashtra.

This persuasion works in complex ways. In Tamil Nadu, since the late 1980s, Hindu political groups aligned to the Sangh Parivar in one way or another have attempted to, and partially succeeded in, recruiting Dalit youth to their ranks. This has been the case with groups in Chennai that have looked to swelling their ranks during the annual Ganesh Chaturthi processions with a posse of young Dalits from the city's various slums. The promise of liquor, money and a 'good time', a chance to be in the public eye and to take advantage of the prevailing carnival mood have proved immensely attractive to young men. It is difficult to ascertain though, whether these youth remained with the Hindu groups thereafter.

Chris Fuller's research into the Ganesh Chaturthi processions in Tamil Nadu notes that Hindu groups linked to the Sangh Parivar have to contend with local big men, party notables (DMK and AIADMK men have been part of local festival committees) and other heavy-weights, who, anyway, are involved in these processions. In some instances, the latter would cooperate with the Hindu group in question, while in other instances they would prefer to do things on their own. Caste could be a deciding factor in such cases, notes Fuller, especially in smaller towns, where caste Hindu identities are proudly affirmed. And this of course means that Dalit presence, whether as storm troopers or co-participants, is not welcome.⁵

An approach that does not successfully address or at least appear to address Untouchability will of course not work, and Hindutva ideologues have been conscious of this. Since the last decade, they have sent out service brigades to work in Dalit colonies—operating under the aegis of the Kanchi Shankaracharya's Jan Kalyan programme—which engage in a range of activities, including the arranging of free marriages, feeding the poor, free medical camps, and so on. Interestingly, the Sangh Parivar did not have to bring in its own institutional support systems to accomplish this endeavour. It could instead, count on the existing networks of Hindu faith and charity. More recently, Sangh Parivar enthusiasts have taken to visiting Dalit colonies in villages—with offers to repair temples or to build new ones;

by supporting a local Dalit leader in matters of business or education; and by organizing self-help groups or savings groups for women. Dalit activists in southern Tamil Nadu point out that the sudden spurt of temple renovation and building in parts of the state has been entirely due to the efforts of these Hindutva groups. They also point out that in some villages, where traditional animistic practices and animal sacrifices have almost all but disappeared, Dalits proudly affirm themselves to be 'clean' and 'progressive' Hindus.

As if to underscore the Sangh Parivar's determination to abolish or at least overlook Untouchability, Hindu leaders, most notably the Kanchi Shankaracharya, have publicly announced that Dalits are part of the great Hindu family and cannot be considered aliens or outcasts. The Shankaracharya has even condescended to visit memorials of Dalit leaders, though, as one Dalit journalist wryly noted, he made sure that his saffron robes did not so much as brush against the modest grave of the late Kakkan, a Congressman who worked closely with the much-loved chief minister of Tamil Nadu, K. Kamaraj. The point is that such gestures have had their desired effect. Some Dalit leaders have taken the Shankaracharya at his word and affirmed their Hindu status.

Here again, as with the Dalit youth who participate in Ganesh Chathurthi processions, it is not easy to identify the reasons as to why a Dalit leader would want to consort with the orthodox arch Hindu leader. But, whether drawn by promises of power or the aura of spiritual authority, or for more material considerations, some Dalit leaders have had no qualms about displaying their Hindu status in public.

It must be remembered here that in the late 1990s, some Dalit groups understood the attempts of Hindutva ideologues to woo them as part of their grand strategy to create a Hindu vanguard against Muslims and Christians. Thus the Puthiya Tamizhagam, along with the Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (a Muslim group committed to a vision of Islam that includes a radical understanding of social justice) held a Dalit-Muslim unity conference in Ramanathapuram. The doyens of Hindutva got the message. In the reprisals that followed Muslim shops were targeted, in addition to the usual burning of Dalit homes. However this unity is yet to be consolidated, though there have been other instances of Dalits and Muslims working together, especially in criticizing and responding to Hindutva. Secular-minded groups and intellectuals have endorsed such efforts, but as a Dalit activist put it, the point is not to rail against Hindutva from a common forum, but

to carry forward criticisms of Hinduism and caste into forums which, otherwise, would not wish to discuss them. Secular intellectuals ought to therefore address the question of Untouchability in their own contexts, whether these are political parties or informal organizations and, likewise, Muslims ought to be able to discuss casteism amongst the faithful.

IV

Radical Dalit youth read the failure of Dalit leaders to rise to the historic moment, defined by Hindutva, as an instance of their timorous equivocation with regard to Hinduism. They point out that the older generation of Dalit leaders—Y. Balasundaram of the Republican Party of India and Ilayaperumal of the Human Rights Party—did not hesitate to affirm their Hindu status. Though contemporary Dalit leaders would desist from doing so, they are still unwilling to concede that it is Hinduism that is the problem. Perhaps they do not wish to alienate themselves from the broad masses of the people, or perhaps they are mindful of the fluid nature of political alliances and misalliances and wish, therefore, to keep all options open. Or it may even be that they understand only too well the insidious designs that Hindutva has on Dalit politics, and prefer to play along, hoping to notch up strategic gains for themselves in electoral terms.

To these young activists, that it has defined political debate and options on its terms in itself is an index of Hindutva's success. This leaves other parties only an illusion of political choice. Again, to them and all else who follow Tamil Nadu politics, it is clear that the narrowing down of political possibilities is not only an effect of Hindutva—it also signifies the collapse of the Dravidian political imagination. Self-respect, anti-caste campaigns, secular atheism, anti-Brahmin critique, gender justice have all, for various reasons, dropped out of political discourse and public memory, or exist merely as rhetoric. Tamil nationalism has survived, but it is a ghostly presence whose energies are clearly spent—even in those instances where it lives an active political life, as in those nationalist groups which support the LTTE—it seems out of step with the politics of the present moment. Yet, its emotive power is strong and the responses it evokes are eloquent.

However, contemporary expressions of Tamil nationalism—dissociated from radical social thought and practice—hold no attractions for Dalits. For one, as M. S. S. Pandian had pointed out

in an article, 'Tamilness' has become a trope in Hindutva discourses as well.⁶ Besides, there is no inherent necessity for a Tamil nationalist who opposes the hegemonic claims of brahminical Hinduism and Sanskrit to be sensitive to the politics of Untouchability. Tamil Saivites, many of whom are 'clean' caste non-Brahmins, were beside themselves with rage when the Kanchi Shankaracharya proclaimed that Sanskrit alone could serve the purpose of worship and prayer. But in another instance, with respect to the anti-conversion bill, many amongst the Saivites were eager to endorse the Shankaracharya's support of it.

There is a long and tortuous history to the waning of radical thought in the state, the writing of which, as I mentioned earlier, is yet to be undertaken. I will attempt a short summary here, recapitulating arguments I have made earlier and adding others to these.

We have proof of Dravidian radicalism fading away in the manner in which Dravidian leaders, as distinct as K. Veeramani of the Dravidar Kazhagam and M. Karunanidhi of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam define their respective political positions. The former, until recently, was a faithful supporter of the anti-democratic and resolutely pro-Hindu government of J. Jayalalithaa, while the latter until the 2004 elections decided to overlook and deliberately downplay Hindutva and chose to form political alliances with it. While both these leaders have since re-defined their politics their sustained equivocation with respect to the politics of the Hindu Right has fudged their credibility.

As for J. Jayalalithaa herself, there was a measure of historical vengefulness in the systematic manner in which she had set about destroying the political confidence enjoyed by those social constituencies that have traditionally nursed and upheld the ideologies of the Dravidian movement—the urban poor, government employees, students, minority communities. Besides this she had deliberately cultivated and groomed those sections of the populace which had, all along, found Dravidian politics anathema. The latter would include the rural poor, especially in the southern reaches of the state (many of whom are Dalits), who were ardent supporters of the late M. G. Ramachandran, resurgent caste Hindu groups, such as the Thevars, and now a section of the powerful Nadar community, who are deeply 'Hindu' and therefore willing to go along with a party that enjoys the Sangh Parivar's confidence, though traditionally, many of them were either with the Congress or the Dravidian movement.

The death of Dravidian politics is perhaps exemplified best by the changes in the nature of the state in Tamil Nadu. In the discourses in Dravidian thinking, the state was considered the guarantor of the

commonweal. Through legislation and governance, the state was meant to enforce social justice, ensure economic equality and usher in a rational, modern worldview. In common public perception though the state came to be viewed as a resource basket to which everyone, notionally at least, had access. When the state could not redeem its promises of plenty, this led to disaffection, as happened with the Vanniyar agitations of the 1970s. But the state did not appear illegitimate on that account.

In the present context though, through deliberate acts of dismantling and re-engineering, the state has managed to renege on its promises, especially to the Dalits, whereby the legitimacy it is claiming for itself is dubious, to say the least. One has only to consider the following to comprehend the gravity of the situation: reserved posts in government jobs are not being filled, educational support to Adi-Dravida (Dalit) schools in the form of special institutional support grants is being limited, the Dalits' right to a religion of their choice had been threatened by the anti-conversion legislation (this has been repealed following the AIADMK's electoral rout in the 2004 parliamentary election. But the cavalier manner in which the matter has been handled exemplifies the state's constitutive arrogance), the ordinance on handing over waste land or the village commons for private enterprise has affected the livelihood of Dalits. On the other hand, the powers of the state, especially of the police, are extensive and are growing. It is no surprise that in such a context some Dalit intellectuals are suspicious of a politics that relies on a 'rights' approach alone, for what justice can one expect from a state that is increasingly becoming distant and unaccountable to its citizens?

V

What does all this add up to? Firstly, in a context where Dalits perceive anti-caste radicalism, once characteristic of political debate and practice in the state, to be more or less dead, their political and social status has become even more vulnerable. On the other hand, given the nature of political demography in the state, Dalits cannot hope to unite into a single party and resist all other social and political formations. Secondly, there does exist a gap between the self-conscious rejection of Hinduism by radical Dalit thought, and its affirmation by masses of Dalits, either because it is given to them, or because they are not Christians or Muslims, and because they do hold that securing

a position within the Hindu order would vindicate their struggles for dignity and acceptance. Thirdly, with the collapse of anti-caste radicalism, the Dravidian movement has lost its imaginative prowess and necessarily has to court other ideologies and align itself to a politics of the possible. This has led the Dravidian parties to do a complete political turnabout and more important, granted Hindutva a legitimacy that it did not possess earlier.

Fourthly, with the retreat of the state from its position as the guarantor of the common wealth and its deliberate arming of itself with powers that render it almost non-accountable, Dalits and other oppressed castes have been left without a means for justice or redressal. This means that they are literally at the mercy of economic and social power groups and networks that possess a greater measure of leverage and bargaining power. In this context, the only consolation the state offers is in the ideological sphere, for example, by defining the common good in cultural and religious terms, which, of course, helps to create and sustain the myth of 'an enemy' and forces the oppressed communities into belligerence, at the behest of the state or those interests which enjoy its protection. (We witnessed this in Gujarat and it is possible that in Tamil Nadu, an increasingly non-accountable state, rather than, or perhaps along with, ideological mobilization will secure victories for political Fascism.)

Yet, we must register and acknowledge here that there is dissent, opposition and anger amongst Dalit thinkers and intellectuals and local Dalit leaders. These defiant emotions though, are hungry for a context and a movement that would enable them to carry forth their ideological convictions into a struggle that would once again catapult Dalits into the centre-stage of politics for social justice.

Notes

I wish to thank S. Natarajan of the Rettamalai Srinivasan Peravai, Yakkan, and Punitha Pandian of Dalit Murasu for their observations and comments on Dalits and Hindutva and Dalit intellectual and political choices. This essay owes its founding premises to their arguments.

¹ P. Radhakrishnan, 'Sensitising Officials on Dalits and Reservation', *EPW* (16 Feb 2002) demonstrates the consistently low level of access available to Dalits who wish to avail of affirmative action benefits. However, it is also the case that not all lower castes have benefited equally or evenly from

positive discrimination. The emergence of competing backward caste blocs since the 1970s and the conflicting claims they put forth in the fields of education and service, point to a great deal of unevenness in terms of benefits reaching those at the bottom of the social heap. It is also important to note that whatever progress has been achieved has been systematically gendered—women in almost every caste continue to experience problems in asserting their claims to equal opportunities—be it in the fields of education, employment or welfare services.

- ² Several Tamil Dalit autobiographies record such instances of being 'marked'. For instance, there are instances of such a marking and rejection in Bama's *Karukku* (English translation, Chennai: Macmillan, 2000).
- ³ P. Radhakrishnan in his examination of the demands put forth by the Vanniyars, a backward caste low in the economic and social hierarchy, has observed how their claims are inexorably partisan, though they attempt to dress them up as broad and inclusive. He has also noted that they construct their demands in a manner that tacitly queries Dalit claims. Caste pride and jealousy have combined to mobilize the militant backward caste of Thevars to resist all Dalit attempts at social and economic progress, leading to a spate of punishing riots in the 1990s ('Vanniyar Separatism: Nebulous Issues', *EPW* (10 August 2002).
- ⁴ Even those efforts that were undertaken as a gesture towards a larger more inclusive politics are regarded with suspicion by a section of Dalit youth. Thirumaavalavan of the Dalit Panthers announced—in defiance of the anti-conversion law—that he and his followers would, in protest, change their Hindu names in public and call themselves by 'purely Tamil' names, that is, names which bore no marks of caste or creed, but which were linguistically and semantically secular. Non-Dalits too were invited to change their names, if they so wished. This did seem a significant gesture to many, since invocations of a common Tamil identity had, in the past, served to bring people from diverse social and cultural locations together to combat caste Hindu pride and brahminical hegemony. But some others accused Thirumaavalavan of skirting the issue: what was needed was not a change of names, but an assertion of one's right to convert. They argued he ought to have called for a grand conversion rally—ask for Dalits to convert en masse, for instance.
- ⁵ Fuller refers to one such instance in Ramanathanpuram district where a Dalit was disallowed from offering the first puja during the Ganesh Chaturthi festival (Chris Fuller, 'The Vinayaka Chaturthi Festival and Hindutva in Tamil Nadu', *EPW* (12 May 2001).
- ⁶ M. S. S. Pandian, 'Tamil-Friendly Hindutva', *EPW* (27 May 2000).

Contesting Exclusions: Dalits and Reconstructions of Religious Identities in Punjab

Navprit Kaur

INTRODUCTION

On 5 June 2003, a small village named Talhan in the Jalandhar district of Punjab witnessed a violent clash between the members of Jat and Dalit communities. The violence immediately spread to the adjoining areas of Jalandhar, leading to the death of a Dalit youth in a police firing. Rather than treating it as one of the routine incidents of caste violence, we must view Talhan as a context to understand the complex dynamics of caste relations, in the particular setting of Punjab. Never has caste violence of this kind been witnessed in the recent history of Punjab. The importance of the incident might be gauged from the fact that it forced the ruling Congress led by Captain Amrinder Singh to launch 'Operation Healing Touch'¹ in the violence ravaged areas of Jalandhar city, while the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee had constituted a five-member committee to probe the incident.²

After the Gujarat carnage of 2002, the role and position of Dalits as a counter force to the oppressive nature of brahminical powers has come to be questioned. Now that there are attempts to formulate the *Bhimshakti-Shivshakti* alliance even in Maharashtra, which otherwise is considered to be the centre of Ambedkarism, the powerful assertion by the Dalits in Punjab for representation in the management of Sikh religious shrines, the Gurdwaras, points towards a positive trend. This assertion might be understood as a part of the historical process in Punjab where religion has always been a powerful means for the lower caste assertions in the socio-cultural and political milieu of the state. In a political milieu, highly influenced by the religious affiliations of key players, the Dalits in Punjab have historically sought

to articulate their religious identity in order to undermine caste-based dominations and oppressions.

INCLUDING THE EXCLUDED: DALITS AND THE POLITICS OF INCLUSION

Punjab is one of the few states of India with a non-Hindu majority. The nature of religion and caste in Punjabi society has been markedly different when compared with the rest of the country. Furthermore, religious as well as caste structures have continuously changed through mediations by social, political, and economic forces in the region. As it is well known by now, in order to implement their fascist designs and to broaden their social base, the Hindutva forces have targeted the minority communities. In the recent past they have rather successfully invented and stigmatized the Muslims and Christians as the Other. But the demographic nature of Punjabi society itself provides a very slippery ground to the Hindutva forces to target the Sikhs. The eruption of strong nationality aspirations of the Punjabis in the form of the Khalistan movement in the 1980s and 1990s made it clear that Punjab provided a very weak ground for Hindutva's designs. The presence of militantly rightist forces within the Sikhs has proved to counter-balance the Hindutva elements in the state. In this scenario, the lower caste conversions to Christianity have provided them with an Other, which could be manipulated in order to define the Hindu 'self'. Interestingly enough, taking advantage of the presence of the rightist elements within the Sikhs, the Hindutva forces have tried to forge a common ground with them on the issue of the growing number of lower caste conversions to Christianity in Punjab. In an article 'The attack of Christianity on the Land of the Gurus', published in the RSS monthly from Punjab, a strong concern has been expressed over the lower caste conversions to Christianity.³ The RSS also published a report of the six-member fact-finding committee of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee on the Christian conversions in the border areas of Punjab. K. C. Sudarshan, the national head of the RSS (2000–09), in another article in the same issue, states that if the identity of the Sikhs is subsumed through the church, the Hindus would always be together with their Sikh brethren.⁴

Sudarshan's statement appears to suggest quite clearly that the lower caste conversions to an 'alien' faith are of such immense

importance to the Hindutva forces that they won't mind joining hands with the Sikhs on this particular issue. By projecting Christianity as dangerous to the identity of the Sikhs as well as the Hindus, the invention of the Other is complete. One must note that this is not a simple process of 'othering' the Christians. It is the physical body of the Dalit which is seen as doubly polluted; as a Dalit and as a Christian. Thus the call to both the Hindus and the Sikhs to purify and restore the Dalit body to its previous position! In the process the Dalit is projected as a silent and passive object. I will elaborate later the Dalit assertions and protests at various times and spaces which provide a counter-history to the upper caste perceptions and treatment of the Dalits. One needs to underline the fact that the objectification of the Dalits is not new, nor are the attempts by the Hindutva forces to forge alliances with the dominant communities and castes within the Sikhs in order to address the 'question of the lower castes'.

The situation is reminiscent of caste, class and religious formulations and their politics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Punjab. Lower caste conversions to Christianity took place on a large scale. It led to a fierce competition among the Hindu and Sikh leaderships and reformers to take the lower castes into their respective folds. Though historically there had been attempts to include the Dalits in the socio-political and cultural domains by the upper castes, it was only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, due to heightened communal activity in Punjab, that those in dominant caste positions began to take the lower castes seriously. After the decline of Sikh rule and with the advent of the British, the Raj and the church advanced side by side in mid-nineteenth century in Punjab.⁵ Armed with the might of the state, the British colonizers adopted a two-pronged strategy to propagate the gospel. The first was to publish evangelical literature in the vernacular and the second was the opening up of mission schools in Punjab.⁶ These attempts bore fruit as the 1891 census reported an increase of 401 per cent in the Christian population, as compared to the 1881 census report.⁷

Who were these converts to Christianity in terms of their caste identities and social status? These large scale conversions in the late nineteenth century were certainly not from the upper echelons of the society. Though originally the missionaries in Punjab were only interested in converting the upper castes,⁸ in 1873 the conversion of a Chuhra, named Ditt, led to thousands of others from the same caste following suit.⁹ Such a large scale conversion baffled as well as

embarrassed the missionaries. The missionaries in their reports from the field tried to undermine the caste identity of these converts by describing the Punjabi Christians as 'common villagers' or 'illiterate menials'. It was the lower castes who were more enthusiastic about these conversions than the missionaries themselves.¹⁰

One might inquire into the reasons that led the Chuhra to convert on such a large scale. The answers are not hard to find. The Chuhra had their own belief systems and religious practices centred on the figures of Balmiki, Lal Beg or Bala Shah, but they also tended to adopt dominant religious rituals—Hindu, Sikh or Muslim—whichever was prevalent in their village.¹¹ Nevertheless Hinduism with its ideologies of purity and pollution could not be relied upon by the lower castes as far as caste discrimination and hierarchies were concerned. Similar was the case with Islam where society became hierarchical and divided into low and high on the basis of caste. The untouchables who converted to Sikhism suffered disabilities of caste in the later period of the Sikh empire,¹² for caste hierarchies existed among the Sikhs as well. Rural untouchables generally referred to as the Chuhra, the Mazhabis or the Rangretas, were placed at the bottom of this hierarchy.¹³

These conversions of the lowest of the low were indeed a powerful and at the same time risky act of rebellion in the communally charged atmosphere of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was not the material gains primarily which led the Chuhra to adopt Christianity, rather it was the transforming power of religious acceptance which impelled the lower caste people to shift to a religion looked at with suspicion by many in their own villages and cities. Christianity provided them with a new identity that made them change their names, eating habits and provided numerous other opportunities for self-betterment. The new religious identity in fact provided a cushion for the helpless Dalits in the highly oppressive caste structure of the village. In their struggle for survival, status and gain within the village, the Dalits could now rely safely on the presence and influence of the Christian missionaries.¹⁴ But their new identities did not displace their old customs and traditions entirely. The Dalits still followed their own traditions which historically formed part of their daily lives.

Simultaneously, there was another development taking place. After it had been established in Bombay in 1875, the first branch of the Arya Samaj came into existence in Punjab in 1877. Due to historical reasons,

Hindus already were a minority community in Punjab. The large scale conversions to Christianity from among the lower castes sent warning signals to the religious leadership within both the Hindus and the Sikhs. The caste Hindus were in search of an ideology which could legitimize the traditional Hindu social system and at the same time retain in its fold the potential converts to other religions. To fulfil this need, the Arya Samaj adopted a strategy called *shuddhi*.¹⁵ It was presumed that Untouchability emanated from ritual impurity and therefore, a ritual for its removal could render the Untouchables touchables. Thus it devised a new ritual whereby the lower castes got a chance to raise their status without going outside the fold of Hinduism. It was Lala Lajpat Rai, a national leader and a staunch Arya Samajist, who gave expression to the strong need to reformulate the Hindu social order according to the demands of the nationalist movement itself.¹⁶ The upper caste leadership within Hindus and Sikhs had to address the issues of the lower castes as it redefined and rearticulated its own identities. It should not be concluded that it was the social reformers alone, and not the Dalits, who were interested in these conversions. Indeed, the Dalits too were interested in seeking new avenues which promised an elevation from their traditionally lower caste status. We may argue that by treating the lower caste people in a paternalistic manner and by considering them as subjects in need of some kind of upliftment as far as their social status was concerned, the upper caste leadership in a way recognized the fact that the social hierarchies based on caste were a fact of life for millions of lower castes.

The leaders of the Arya Samaj in 1886 turned their attention to the Mazhabi Sikhs, who despite being converted to Sikhism were considered to be lower in status to the Muslims.¹⁷ It was the educated and economically ascendant Mazhabis who pressurized the Samaj leadership to take up their cause. It clearly indicates that the Dalits were open to various measures that could help rid them of their low position in society. Similarly, the Rahitas from Jalandhar Doab areas of Punjab, weavers by tradition, appealed to their own community, the prominent Sikhs, to improve their traditional caste status, and decided to follow another path when their appeals were not taken serious note of.¹⁸ But joining the Arya Samaj did not solve the problems of the low caste Sikhs. It sent alarm signals to the Sikh leadership which was already entangled in a battle for a distinct Sikh identity

vis-à-vis the militantly religious Arya Samaj. Its reactions with regard to the Rahita Sikhs' conversions to the Arya Samaj were carried in the newspaper *Khalsa*,

We may however mention that the *Rahita* Sikhs will be losers if they take shelter with the Arya Samaj. As soon as it is known that they have parted with the symbols of Sikhism, it will be difficult for them to live peacefully in the villages inhabited by the Sikhs. There is nothing which a Sikh hates more than an apostate from his faith, and knowing this as we do, we cannot congratulate our *Rahita* brethren on their expected admission into Arya Samaj.¹⁹

Even the last minute attempts by the Sikh leadership to dissuade the Dalits from converting to Hinduism proved futile. The leader of the lower caste would-be converts, Nagina Singh, told the Sikh reformers that if they ensured them that the Sikhs would inter-marry and inter-dine with them they would not even dream of going out of the Sikh faith.²⁰ The importance of this act of the Rahitas lies not in their conversion to Arya Samaj, but in the boldness of denouncing their earlier identity as Sikhs. These converts, in fact, brought the social reality to the foreground as far as Sikhism was concerned. Their attempt to elevate their social status was met with tough resistance as had been predicted in the *Khalsa*. Even so, more Rahitas came forward for shuddhi from Lahore, Ropar and places as far west as Lyallpur.²¹ Thus Dalits were included in the mainstream, not in order to change the basic structures in caste-ridden Punjabi society but because of the importance placed on the numerical strength of a community. These conversions and re-conversions should be understood as part of a broader process of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century politics of Punjab.

In the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Punjab, social reformers from both Hindu and Sikh communities sought to redefine and rearticulate their respective religious identities, that is, what it meant to be a Hindu or a Sikh, according to the political needs of their own communities. It was the transformation of religious identities, from being fluid and ambiguous, into sharp and clearly defined religious boundaries which in turn led to competition among the upper castes from various communities to reclaim the Dalits as their own. As for the Dalits, those who converted could not be considered

independent agents fighting for their emancipation in any modern sense of the term. Through conversions, Dalits tried to create their own space with limited avenues that were available to them at the time. Thus, they, rather than rejecting caste or their old religion per se, sought to rearticulate their position within the existing structures. While the upper castes reclaimed Dalits in order to consolidate their numerical strength and political clout vis-à-vis the 'other' religion, the Dalits explored new vistas to give voice to their own discontents as far as the existing social reality of caste was concerned.

Thus it can be seen that the Dalits, by rearticulating the religion in order to elevate their socio-political status, in a way used what was a double edged weapon for creating a democratic space for themselves. During the early twentieth century, Punjab witnessed a powerful assertion of the Dalits in the form of a new movement. This assertion of the Dalits was again couched in religious vocabulary. The Dalits, rather than acting as subjects, sought to participate as agents by constituting themselves into a *qaum*, a separate religion, the Ad-Dharm. The movement was led by Mangoo Ram, an educated and prosperous Chamar from Hoshiarpur in the 1920s. As many as 4,18,789 lower castes returned themselves as Ad-Dharmis in the 1931 census.²² The central motif of the Ad-Dharm was unique in the sense that the untouchables constituted a *qaum*, as a distinct religious community, similar to those of Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.²³ The Ad-Dharm claimed a *qaumic* identity rather than a caste identity. This was done in order to undermine the notion of caste because as a caste the Dalits would not be treated on par with other religions. As a *qaum*, the lower castes could enter society as equals; equal to the other religions—whether Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims or Christians.

By coining their distinct symbols, methods and rituals, the Ad-Dharmis in a way rejected the existing religious entities and sought to create their own distinct identity as a religion. The Ad-Dharm adopted the non-theistic notion of divinity and also reclaimed the figure of Sant Ravidas, a medieval saint-poet from the Chamar subcaste. The movement was particularly strong in the areas of Doaba region of present-day Punjab. Though the movement saw its decline very early in the 1940s, it is still considered as a powerful assertion by Dalits for non-caste identity. By imagining itself as a *qaum*, a distinct religion, the lower castes again articulated religion as a powerful weapon to counter the dominance of the upper castes.

TALHAN: ARTICULATING THE SACRED AS A POLITICAL SITE

Theoretically, Sikhism, whose origins can be traced as a protest against brahminical structures, rejects the notion of caste and believes in an egalitarian social order. The first Guru, Guru Nanak, while condemning the caste hierarchies said, 'Nonsense are castes and nonsense their names'. He further stated, 'Recognize divine light in everyone. Don't enquire about caste. There is no caste in the next world.'²⁴ Similarly, by denouncing the practice of Untouchability and introducing the institution of mixed congregations, called *sangat*, where all sat together to hear the Guru's teachings and sing hymns, and by introducing the inter-dining in the *sangat* and establishing the community kitchens, or the *langar*, where all sat and dined together in one and the same order or *pangat*, the Sikh Gurus sought to establish a social order without the hierarchy of caste, creed or status in social life.²⁵ The hold of caste was loosened by the appeal of Sikhism but it failed to eradicate the institution of caste from Punjabi society.

Caste still prevails in Punjab. Punjab has the highest proportion of Scheduled Caste population in India as compared to the total population of the state; 28.3 per cent in 1991, which is 27.7 per cent as per the census 2011. At present there are about 37 Scheduled Castes in Punjab. But a large majority of them belong mainly to two castes, generally known as Chamars and Chuhras. Taken together these castes make up for about three-fourths of the entire Dalit population of the state. The followers of Sikhism constitute about 80 to 90 per cent of the population in Punjab; Hindus are numerically a minority community as far as communal identities are concerned.

Caste hierarchy in Punjab has been quite different from other parts of the country. Firstly, instead of Brahmins, as is the case in other parts of India, it is the Jats who are at the top of the caste hierarchy in Punjab. As the main landholding caste in Punjab, Jats have also been dominant as far as electoral politics is concerned. Secondly, being the first to convert to Sikhism on a large scale, Jats also occupy significant positions within Sikh religious bodies and institutions. While Sikhism has served as an alternative source of religious identity to the Dalits in Punjab, it could not eradicate the caste hierarchies. The practice of Untouchability has not been that severe as it is in the other parts of the country, still the Dalits face discrimination on the basis of caste.²⁶ Recent studies have shown that the Dalits face subtle forms of discrimination in the Gurdwaras. Though there are no

restrictions on the entry of the Dalits to the Sikh religious institutions, they are denied equal participation as far as the management and daily activities are concerned.²⁷ Dalit women are sometimes discouraged from cooking meals for the langar, the community kitchen, and the Dalits are not treated at par with the upper castes in the langar. The Dalits in Punjab, by building separate Gurdwaras, have resisted this discrimination. Almost every Punjabi village has a separate Gurdwara for the Jats and for the Dalits. In some of the Dalit Gurdwaras, a picture of Sant Ravidas, as mentioned earlier, a lower caste saint-poet of medieval times, is kept along with the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh holy book. Thus religion is transformed into a space for practising and at the same time countering caste discriminations.

In this background, the caste tensions at the Talhan provide us with a context to understand the role of religion as a political site to assert the voices of the lower castes. The total population of Talhan village is around 4,500. Numerically, the Jats are a minority of 25 per cent. Nearly 65 per cent are the Ad-Dharmis, the only Scheduled Caste in the village and the rest of the population comes from servicing castes.²⁸ A shrine of Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh, managed predominantly by the Jats, was the centre of the controversy. The shrine receives around ₹5 crore (₹50 million) annually in the form of the offerings made by the devotees. The immediate cause of the conflict was a prolonged denial of representation to the Dalits in the management elections by the Jats, which led the Dalits to form a parallel management committee.

In retaliation the Jats ordered a social boycott of the Dalits. The boycott was retracted with the realization that it might amount to a legal offence. But the informal boycott continued.²⁹ The situation turned so serious that the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had to issue notices to the chief secretary and the other higher officials of Punjab government to appear before it on 28 May 2003.³⁰ Because the government was unable to handle the situation, events took a violent turn when the Dalits came out in the streets. There was large-scale violence which then spread to areas in and around Jalandhar city. A Dalit youth was killed in the police firing and the government had to impose curfew in the violence-ravaged areas of Jalandhar.

Ultimately, the government was successful in making the leadership from both sides sign a peace agreement on 15 June 2003, which among other measures envisaged the inclusion of two members of the Dalit

community in the 'original' management committee popularly known as Nigran Committee (supervisory committee). The agreement also stated that both the Dalit nominees would have *Sikh Swaroop* (Sikh appearance). Out of these two members, one would later be included in Maryada Committee (code of conduct committee) provided he was an *Amritdhari* (baptised, according to the Sikh rituals).³¹

There are many facets to the whole issue of this violent assertion by the Dalits. Many reports have pointed out that the main bone of contention is the huge sum received in the form of offerings which the Jats wished to control. In the Doaba region there have been large-scale migrations to western countries and hence the area is sometimes called 'NRI Land'.³² In Talhan too, many of the Dalit families had one or the other members residing abroad. Thereby, the Dalits managed to be economically at par with the traditionally prosperous Jats. The economic prosperity of the Dalits has not been accompanied by any shift in their social status though, and they are still considered socially and culturally inferior by the Jats. The Jats' predominance in the state machinery, the bureaucracy as well as in the police force, has also helped them resist any challenge to their dominance. These are the additional factors that contributed to the eruption of violent protests by the Dalits in Talhan.

The insistence of the Jats that only the *Keshdhari* (wearing all external markers) Dalits could be given representation in the management is also a contentious issue.³³ The argument given by the Jat Sikhs for excluding the Dalits from the managing committee was that there being no *Keshdhari* Sikhs among the Dalits, it was not proper for them to be members of a Sikh shrine. However, research suggests that the Ad-Dharmis in their everyday practices are much closer to Sikhism, though very few of them ascribe to the bodily symbols of Sikhism.³⁴ This is not only the case with Dalits but with other communities, including the Jats. But the Jats were not willing to let the Dalits work as part of the Gurdwara management at Talhan even after the much publicized peace pact. The Jat-dominated committee directed one of the two Dalits members of the committee to either partake of *Amrit* (the Sikh baptizing ceremony) or attend the weekly meetings only after his beard grew to full length.

The insistence by Jats for the maintenance of these bodily symbols has some far-reaching repercussions for the Dalit community. It raises the issue of the communal identity of the Dalits as far as Sikhism is

concerned. Who is a Sikh? Should only those who partake Amrit and are formally initiated into Sikhism through the ritual of baptism be considered as Sikhs? Then where should one place the numerous castes, especially Dalits, who, though not initiated into the community in a formal manner and who, without wearing the bodily symbols of Sikhism, follow the Sikh tenets as far as their daily lives and rights of passage are concerned? There has always been a syncretic culture in Punjab where the numerous local religio-cultural belief-systems and practices have existed along with the mainstream religions. These local traditions, which are mainly production based, have survived till date in the mainly agrarian economy of the state. But there have been continuous attempts to undermine these local cults in the process of the formation of mainstream religions by branding them inferior.

This argument will get substantiated if we look at the contemporary vernacular literature representing this stream of thought and which espouses a distinct 'Sikh' identity. An essay in a vernacular periodical states:

A major part of the *Qaum* has become superstitious and has come under the influence of the people who indulge in useless rituals. The observance of truth and the principles of the religious norms have been forgotten by these people. Individual has become god for them and his preachings are given much more importance than the *Gurubani* [the religious teachings as given in Sikh holy book]. In its greed for material gains this section of Sikhs is under influence of superstitious practices and is not ready to follow the spiritual teachings of the Shri Guru Granth Sahib.³⁵

This statement aptly reflects the Jat discontentment with non-orthodox observances of the Sikh religious code of conduct by the Sikh masses. The author further expresses his fears regarding the growing influence of the *Deras*, the numerous sects proliferating throughout the Punjab, on the Sikh masses and argues for their management according to the tenets of the *Panth*.

Viewed from this background, Talhan provides a fine example of the intermeshing of the religious orthodoxy and caste dominance. The Jats have been successful in converting a shrine revered by all castes located in the village common area into an exclusive religious place

of worship in the hands of the traditionally dominant caste.³⁶ The Jats in Talhan have successfully used the alibi of the lack of 'purity' of the Dalits as a ploy to keep them out of the management of the shrine and to reinforce their dominance and power. This also relates to the orthodox view upheld by the *Damdami Taksal*³⁷ that only Keshdharis, wearing all the external religious markers, are the 'true' Sikhs.

The assertion in Talhan is thus a limited attempt by the Dalits to challenge the dominance of the upper caste powers. By making the Dalits agree to their definition of the 'Sikh' and thus forcing them to adopt external markers in order to reconfirm their faith in Sikhism, the Jats have been successful in dictating their own terms to the Dalits. Nevertheless, Talhan stands out as an important milestone in the struggle for Dalit assertion in Punjab where the boundaries of the sacred are both expanding and constricting at the same time. Historically too, the mass conversions of the Chuhars to Christianity in the nineteenth century or the Rahita Sikhs' conversions to the Arya Samaj in the later part of the nineteenth century, or the coinage of a new religion, the Ad-Dharm, by the Chamars in the early twentieth century, like the struggle for a substantial role in the management of a religious shrine by the Dalits in Talhan, reveal that in Punjab, the sacred has always been an important domain for exposing the fine and subtle modes of discrimination by the dominant upper castes. By politicizing this sacred domain, the Dalits have sought to contest the caste hierarchies in their vision of a just and egalitarian society for themselves.

Notes

- ¹ Tribune News Service (2003): "'Healing Touch" to Woo Dalits', *The Tribune*, 9 June 2003.
- ² Tribune News Service (2003): 'SGPC sets up Probe Panel', *The Tribune*, 8 June 2003.
- ³ Arjun Sharma, 'The Attack of Christianity on the Land of the Gurus', *Pathic Sandesh* (April 2003): 9.
- ⁴ K. C. Sudershan, 'The Question of the Crisis of Identity', *Pathic Sandesh* (April 2003): 16.
- ⁵ Harjot Oberoi, *The Construction of Religious Boundaries: Culture, Identity and Diversity in Sikh Tradition* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994): 218.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*: 220.

- ⁷ Kenneth W. Jones, 'Hum Hindu Nahin: The Arya Sikh Relations', *The Punjab Past and Present*, 11, Part 2 (1977): 22: 341.
- ⁸ Mark Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab* (Delhi: Ajanta, 1988): 184.
- ⁹ Traditionally, Chuhra are the sweepers and scavengers castes. Those who converted to Sikhism are known as Mazhabis. The term 'Mazhabi' is derived from the time when three Chuhra Hindus rescued the body of the ninth guru, Guru Teg Bahadur. These sweepers, on their return to Amritsar with the corpse, were at once baptized into the Sikh faith by the tenth guru, Guru Gobind Singh, who called them Mazhabi or the Faithful. See Ethne K. Marengo, 'The Transformation of Sikh Society.' In *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements*, edited by Joseph T. O. Connell (Shimla: Institute of Advanced Studies, 1999): 130.
- ¹⁰ Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels*: 184.
- ¹¹ See John C. B. Webster, 'Leadership in a Rural Dalit Conversion Movement'. In Connell, ed., *Organizational and Institutional Aspects of Indian Religious Movements*: 96; see also Marengo, 'The Transformation of Sikh Society': 258.
- ¹² Ibid.: 54.
- ¹³ Not only was caste present among the Sikhs, but the nature of hierarchy differed from that of the Hindu caste system. There was a struggle for supremacy in the Sikh community between the Jat Sikhs and the Khatri Sikhs. For details see Marengo, 'The Transformation of Sikh Society': 54–55.
- ¹⁴ Webster, 'Leadership in a Rural Dalit Conversion Movement': 103.
- ¹⁵ For details see Satish Kumar Sharma, *Social Movements and Social Change: A Study of Arya Samaj and Untouchables in Punjab* (Delhi: B.R. Publishing, 1965).
- ¹⁶ Ibid.: 95.
- ¹⁷ Muslims were considered to be lower than both the Hindus and the Sikhs. One could be ex-communicated from the community for marrying a Muslim. The Lahore Shuddhi Sabha in 1896, purified a group of outcast Sikhs whose common great grandfather was ex-communicated for his liaison with a Muslim woman. For more details see Jones, 'Hum Hindu Nahin': 342.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.: 346–47.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ Ibid.: 348.
- ²¹ Ibid.: 350.
- ²² Juergensmeyer, *Religious Rebels in the Punjab*: 77.

- ²³ Ibid.: 45.
- ²⁴ Ganda Singh, 'Development of Sikh Thought up to the End of the Eighteenth Century', *Punjab Past and Present*, 2, Part 1, 3 (April 1968): 13.
- ²⁵ Ibid.: 14.
- ²⁶ See Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Prejudice Without Pollution? Scheduled Castes in Contemporary Punjab', *Journal of Indian School of Political Economy* 12, 3 and 4 (2000): 381–402.
- ²⁷ Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Caste and Untouchability in Rural Punjab', *EPW*, 37, 19 (11 May 2002): 1817.
- ²⁸ Surinder S. Jodhka, 'Caste Tensions in Punjab: Talhan and Beyond', *EPW* (12 June 2003).
- ²⁹ Varinder Walia and Rashmi Talwar (2003): 'Rich Dalits' Desire for Equality Led to Clash, says report', *The Tribune*, 28 July 2003.
- ³⁰ Naveen S. Grewal, 'Was Talhan Violence Pre- Planned?', *The Tribune*, 8 June 2003.
- ³¹ Varinder Singh, 'Jats, Dalits Sign Peace Agreement', *The Tribune*, 15 June 2003.
- ³² The report of the investigative team constituted to probe the events at Talhan, *Tarksheel*, July-Aug 2003.
- ³³ Jodhka, 'Caste Tensions in Punjab': 2924.
- ³⁴ A. H. Bingley, *Sikhs* (Shimla: Government of India, Central Printing Office, 1899; reprint, Patiala: Government of Punjab, Department of Languages, 1970.): 69–119.
- ³⁵ Giani Kewal Singh, 'What to Do for the Honour of Shri Guru Granth Sahib', *Gurumat Chetna* (Dec 2001): 19.
- ³⁶ 'Talhan: A Joint Fact-finding by AFDR (Punjab) and PUDR (Delhi)', Nov 2003: 8–9. Unpublished and internally circulated report of People's Union for Democratic Rights, a human rights group based in Delhi.
- ³⁷ It is to be noted here that Damdami Taksal is considered to be the ultra-right seminary of the Sikhs.

Hindutva Winds in Andhra and Telangana

K. S. Chalam

INTRODUCTION

Andhra Pradesh came into existence in 1956 as the first state carved as per the State Reorganization Committee (SRC). The SRC was constituted in response to the death of a Gandhian, Potti Sriramulu, who had died on December 16, 1952, after a 58-day fast demanding a separate Andhra state for Telugu-speaking people (to be carved out of Madras Presidency). The SRC was then ridiculed by Ambedkar as ‘a *pinddan* to the departed soul of Mr Sriramulu, by the Prime Minister’. It was the beginning of the formation of linguistic states. The formation of Andhra Pradesh went beyond the demand of Sriramulu by merging into it the Telugu-speaking part under Hyderabad state, known as Telangana. On 7 February 2014, the new state of Telangana with Hyderabad as its capital was formed out of it, leaving Andhra Pradesh with the erstwhile Telugu speaking—coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema—parts of old Madras Presidency. Telangana, the Telugu speaking parts under Nizam, which was combined with those under the Madras Presidency, separated out after nearly six decades.

Culturally and agro-climatically, united Andhra Pradesh was not a homogeneous entity. Coastal Andhra Pradesh with the two rich deltas of Krishna and Godavari formed the old hegemonic component of the state. Though the north Andhra part of the state, which was historically the major part of Kalinga, is considered as coastal Andhra, it had altogether a different background. Rayalaseema with its culture of poligar (a form of vassal, of a feudal age) and factionalism is different from Telangana with its rich composite culture of Muslim and Hindu traditions. The Dalits residing in different parts of the unitary state have also inherited these differences in culture. Therefore, it was difficult

to project earlier its Dalit inhabitants as homogeneous, though the dominant Dalit leadership continued to do so. The reason for this is not difficult to find. Since most of the contemporary Dalit leaders came from a single region, the coastal Andhra, it perceived the entire Dalit population as homogeneous. Similarly, Hindutva culture and its spread in the state of the earlier Andhra Pradesh was not uniform. Today, with bifurcation of the state into Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, agro-climatically as well as culturally, these states are relatively more homogeneous than before.

WHAT IS HINDUTVA?

Hindutva is generally conceptualized as Hindu fundamentalism (see also Introduction and Essays 2, 3). The way in which Hindutva is perceived and explained by western scholars and unquestionably accepted by Indian scholars needs to be re-examined. Hinduism as *sanatana dharma* was propagated and to some extent supported by the English and other European scholars in the past. Even today, such theories exist which are totally misguided and to some extent mischievous. They tend to see Indo-Aryans as belonging to their own racial stock and hence superior to other natives. It was the English in the eighteenth century who revived the *sanatana dharma* of the Aryans by encouraging some of the so-called 'patrons of the Aryan myth'. It was the British who established the Asiatic Society for studies on Hindu dharma and its 'great contribution' to human civilization. They did not put Hinduism to any critical analysis and the word 'Hinduism' itself was coined by the Europeans. It was only the European Marxist scholars and not the Indian scholars who have critically examined Hinduism as a form of religion. It was scholars such as Walter Ruben who brought out the materialistic component of so-called Hinduism and tried to relate that component to the toiling masses of the country. Except for the late D. P. Chattopadhyay and a few others, no one has seriously attempted to expose the materialistic basis of Hinduism. Hinduism is now propagated by many as a way of life. But they do not qualify which way of life—Materialistic or Idealistic?

The discussion on the materialistic component of the way of life of Hindus in which the Dalits have a central role has not been put to any evaluation by the mainstream scholars. It is necessary to mention about it here because the materialistic way of life as is now interpreted by the author¹ has been practised sincerely by the South Indians,

particularly people of Andhra and Telangana for a long period of time. However, they are clubbed together with that of idealistic Hindus. In fact, some of the Christian missionaries have aimed at these practices and destroyed the indigenous culture. That is the reason why the Dalits are now groping in the dark without any cultural and civilizational roots. They are shown either as idealistic Hindus or as pagans. If we read some of the anthropological writings of the English missionaries, it will be abundantly clear that they have narrated the culture and belief systems of the indigenous people with contempt. One can notice a similarity in the missionary chronicles. (This is a serious project that independent Dalit scholars need to take up for study.) It is essential to point out here that in Andhra and Telangana the Dalit tradition is unique and quite different from that of the misguided Dalits of Gujarat and elsewhere where they are used by the Hindutva forces.

Hindutva as conceptualized by elite Brahmins is the belief system of the Vedas and the process of Sanskritization. They have not distinguished between Vedic Hinduism and other forms of Hinduism which the Brahmins have assimilated from the indigenous people into mainstream Hinduism. Indeed, the Hindutva that is practised and popularized by the Sangh Parivar is purely a brahminical conspiracy. The primary duty of Hindutva is to uphold the supremacy of the purohit (priest) and the Brahmin. This is to be distinguished from that of the hundred ways through which the Dalits and others practise religion. No Dalit or even an OBC worships Laxminarayana or Rama or Krishna every day or even once in a month. It is only the *dwija* (twice born, i.e., Brahmins and other so-called upper castes) communities and in recent times the upper Shudras who worship these brahminical gods in several parts of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The Dravidians have their own ways of worship, their own festivals like Onam, and so on, which are unique and do not form a part of Hindutva. In fact, some of the forms of worship and festivals like Onam are against brahminical Hinduism.

The categorization of Hindutva into hard and soft versions in the print media is done without any substantial theoretical analysis. It appears that the hard Hindutva is one where the policies and programmes are foisted by hardcore Brahmins. In the case of soft Hindutva, the policies and programmes are formulated in a subtler process where other castes are seen to participate along with the Brahmins to achieve the same goal of restoring power to Brahmins and the upper castes.

HINDUTVA IN ANDHRA AND TELANGANA

If we look at the Hindutva as pure Brahminism, and Brahminism as associated with Brahmins, will be clear that this Hindutva was not very much prevalent in the Telugu speaking region. It is established by scholars that the South Indian Brahmins, particularly Andhra Brahmins, came from North and Northwest India. There is a strong tradition of the Desastha and Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharashtra migrating to Andhra for centuries. Some of the Brahmins from Kasi and other religious places migrated to Andhra during the period of the Cholas. Some of them got married to native non-Brahmin women. Therefore, we can see in Andhra several divisions among the Brahmins apart from the major Vaidika and Niyoga sects. By the time the Brahmins established their hegemony with the patronage of the native rulers, more particularly in the coastal districts, the Dalits were practising their own religion. The conflict among Saivas and Vaishnavas—the Alvars—have created space for penetration of the mainstream belief systems among the Dalits. Before it was consolidated, the region came under Muslim rule in the medieval period. Most of the Muslim converts, if systematically analysed were found to be Untouchables. The demographic data of Telangana and Rayalaseema reveal that Muslims and Dalits constitute one fourth of the population. In districts and regions where the Muslim population is high, the Dalit population is lower, maintaining the one-fourth component of this population. This kept the spread of the hegemony of brahminical Hinduism in Andhra Pradesh under control. If there were any atrocities on Dalits, they were mainly committed by the Shudras. Unlike Maharashtra during the Peshwa period, no such brutal feudal Hindu rule could be seen in all parts of Andhra to implement the brahminical agenda of Hindutva. There were certainly isolated pockets of brahminical hegemony in the Godavari and the Krishna deltas. This has helped the Christian missionaries to enter the region for proselytization and they converted the majority of the Dalits into Christianity in the rich coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh. It was estimated by scholars like Forrester that 20 per cent of depressed classes in west Godavari, 32 per cent in Krishna, and 57 per cent in Guntur district got converted to Christianity by 1931.²

In the Telangana region, the Muslim rulers held sway over six centuries. There were two categories of Muslims, one native Bahamani Sultans and the other were Mughal migrants from the North. They

had quarrels among themselves. The Brahmins took advantage of this and joined the administration. Some of the Brahmins were patronized by the Muslim rulers. As they were under the control of the Muslim rulers, they could not implement their own agenda. They could do it with the help of the native Deshmukhs (police and judicial staff) or Patels (headmen or village chiefs) who by and large were Shudras of the Reddy and the Vellama communities. These zamindars used to practise Hindu rituals at home but in the company of the Nizam they would behave differently. Therefore, there was no strong foundation for Brahminism or, later, a movement like Hindutva.

The situation in Rayalaseema was however interesting. All the important temples of the state including Sri Venkateswara at Tirupathi, Srisailem, Kalahasti, and so on, are located in this region. Further, the region has a distinction of providing a large number of modern-day Babas or saints including Satya Sai Baba in Anantapur. But the situation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was different. The rebel leaders and reformists who questioned brahminical Hinduism like Vemana, Veerabrahmendra Swamy came from this region. There is also a considerable Muslim population in this region. Therefore, the region has remained an enigma of Hinduism.

North Andhra is unique in its approach to religion and way of life. As a part of ancient Kalinga, the land that taught Ashoka Buddhism, the people here have been practitioners of the simple way of life which is devoid of hard core brahminical practices. It is still a part of the way of life of the people here. This may be one of the reasons for the emergence of large number of progressive writers and thinkers of the state in the modern period including Sri Sri and Gurajada from this region.³ Thus we are left with coastal Andhra, the fertile ground for agriculture, feudal ideas and Hindutva.

DALIT, REFORM, AND LEFT MOVEMENTS

The Dalit Movement in Telangana has a proud history, as unlike most regions, it began in one of the princely states of British India where the effect of colonial modernity was minimal. Its beginning may be marked in 1906, when Bhagya Reddy Verma founded Jagan Mitra Mandali for the Dalits in Hyderabad. Like elsewhere, it also evolved through different phases. The first was the reformist phase that sought to transform the way Dalits lived. The second phase was to address the more specific caste related issues like vetti and Jogini practices.

The third phase was focused on development which mainly meant spread of education among Dalits. It stemmed from the realization that illiteracy was the main reason for the Dalits' deplorable condition and therefore, it was necessary to establish educational institutions for Dalits. And the fourth phase was the Ambedkarite phase, following Babasaheb Ambedkar, that sought to win political space for the Dalits.

Although Brahmins in Telangana were not in significant numbers, the influence of Brahminism was hegemonic and was mainly shouldered by the Upper layers of Shudra castes like Reddys and Vellama. The Dalits were the worst victims of the practices like vetti, bhagela/jeetham and jogini practices. Vetti practice was in existence from medieval period in Telangana. Under the regimes of the doras (village landlord) almost all castes were subjected to vetti. However, the Dalits were the worst victims of this practice. Each Dalit family was forced to send one person to do vetti in the houses of doras and village officials like patels, patwari, mali-patel or deshमुख. Their jobs included cleaning of their houses, carrying reports to police stations, taluk office, keeping watch on the village chavadi and the poundage, cleaning the village chavadi, and serving the officials on their visit to village. The Dalits were involved in shoe making, tanning of leather, making of leather accessories for agricultural purposes and were forced to supply these to the landlords free of cost. Other castes had paid for their services.⁴ Another practice associated with Dalits was bhagela or jeethagadu, which signified a sort of bonded labour. Every landholder maintained a number of jeethagadus depending upon the amount of land. Jogini or murali (devadasi) was another heinous practice in the Dalit communities. Unmarried Dalit girls were donated by parents to local goddess and they were being used by the caste-Hindus. Joginis lived a disgraceful life of prostitutes in the name of tradition. In 1910, Bhagya Reddy Verma founded 'Darma Prachaarini Sabha' as a branch to Jagan Mithra. Its members believed in Buddha's humanist philosophy and were against the Vedic dharma, the varna system, and offering animals to appease deities, and preached vegetarianism. Buddha Jayanti was celebrated every year on 'Vaisakhi Poornima' day from 1913 until 1938. They also organized inter-dining called 'preetibhojanam' among all untouchables. This gave a possibility for a feeling of oneness, and brought them together to fight for betterment of their brethren.⁵

Interestingly, no reform movement or progressive movement has originated from this delta region. It was only Tripuraneni Rama

Swamy who, as a contemporary of Periyar E. V. Ramasamy, started questioning the supremacy of Brahmins and the Hindu scriptures.⁶ Similarly, the first Dalit poet of modern India, Joshua, led a similar attack against Hindu scriptures.⁷ But the reform movement of Gurajada, Kandukuri, Gidugu Rama Murthy, was found to be wider and deeper and came from within brahminical orthodoxy.⁸ This had promoted several young and dynamic leaders to join the Brahmo Samaj, and the national independence struggle of Gandhi. Some of them have sincerely carried the Gandhian 'Harijan upliftment' programme. The Brahmos carried inter-caste and inter-dinning among the Dalits and upper castes. Though it was not a dominant upsurge, its impact was to convert Hindutva to 'soft Hindutva'.

The contribution of Indian communists and the Naxalabari movement in preventing expansion of Hindutva in the state appears to be very little. According to K. G. Satyamurthy, former general secretary, CPI (ML) PWG (whom I met on 20 Feb 2004 in Visakhapatnam), 'The Marxists never considered caste and religion as important issues. Theoretically the People's War Group (PWG) struggle is on economic lines and religion and caste are considered as superstructure.' He explained that he was quite unsuccessful in the party in raising the issue of caste discrimination and exploitation. He said that there is not even a single piece of writing criticizing Hindutva and caste discrimination by any of the prominent Naxalite leaders. Even the personal and family lives of topmost communists have remained Hindu.

It seems that the communist parties had not considered the danger of Hindutva as a formidable issue in united Andhra. Therefore, the parties had not developed any anti-Hindutva plank within themselves. There is not even a strong organization to promote secular values and to fight Hindutva. Though there are a few humanist, rationalist and anti-religion and anti-superstition outfits that have carried the work of communists, their contribution in preventing the onslaught of Hindutva after liberalization is almost zero. On the other hand, the CPI (M) had supported the categorization of tribals due to the problems of intra-tribal differentiation. Therefore, it is difficult to assess the positive contribution of communists to the anti-Hindutva agenda today.

The greatest contribution of Andhra to the emancipation of the poor and the Dalits, particularly the Telangana and the Srikakulam movements, is very significant in modern India. The Telangana armed struggle during the 1950s made the Dalits, Muslims and Hindus unite

to wage a war against the oppressors, the Nizam and the landlords of Telangana. There are instances where the Muslims built temples for Hindus and Hindus built mosques for Muslims. They buried their religion and caste in the process of armed struggle. There is no doubt, it was of a short duration and there were several weaknesses in it. This camaraderie did not allow Hindutva to establish itself firmly in the region. The situation made the feudal lords migrate to Hyderabad. These feudal lords became staunch supporters of Hinduism later after the reorganization of the state with the state headquarters in Hyderabad. The birthplace of strong Hindutva being Maharashtra, which borders Telangana, the revival of Hindutva became imminent in Hyderabad later. The concentration of a large number of Muslims in Hyderabad city became a bone of contention for the Hindutva forces to strengthen its hold in Hyderabad city and neighbouring districts. Hyderabad became the capital city of the old unitary state and provided opportunities of concentration of the ruling elite and the bureaucracy. Brahmins started concentrating in Hyderabad city. This helped the Hindutva forces to consolidate their position in the state. It is from Hyderabad that Hindutva started spreading to other places in the form of swamijiis, mats (ashrams or shrines), NGOs and other forms of religious organizations by the end of 1980s.

ATTEMPTS AT COMMUNAL POLARIZATION

Hyderabad, with its 42 per cent Muslim population was known for its legendary 'Ganga-Jamnatehzeeb' (cosmopolitan culture) and communal harmony for most part of its pre-independence history of 358 years, though uninterruptedly ruled by Muslim kings. The city itself, according to a legend, was founded on the basis of a Muslim-Hindu marriage between the Golconda ruler, Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah and his beloved, Bhagmathi (who was given the name Hyder Mahal). As late as the 20th century, the fifth Nizam of Hyderabad, Mahabub Ali Khan had no problems applying a tilak on his forehead and performing puja to propitiate the Musi when it was in spate in 1908. This legacy, however, was broken during the turbulent period of the late 1940s, when the seventh Nizam, Osman Ali Khan, unable to reconcile himself to a new developing situation, sent in his Razakars to unleash a reign of terror on people. Atrocities committed by his forces and the Razakars have left behind deep scars in the minds of Hindu populations. No surprise then that the Majlis-e-Ittehadul

Muslimeen (Majlis), a post-independence offshoot of the Razakars, was seen with suspicion by the Hindus. Under this circumstance, the Hindu organizations like the Arya Samaj, and later, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its political organs, Jana Sangh, and now the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rushed in. Despite it, people largely lived in harmony. The attempt to communally polarise people were made by the political parties from both sides, during the post-colonial times.

During the separate Telangana agitation, almost all the parties had orally declared that they would support the Telangana bill if presented in the assembly. But when it was presented, most of them, including TDP and Congress, backed out. The Congress government at the centre initially issued a statement in favour of a separate Telangana, but immediately withdrew its statement. In such a situation, sensing the popular support for separate Telangana, BJP and RSS grabbed the opportunity and entered the movement and oriented it towards Hindutva. By the time the by-elections came up in 2012, the conditions of the whole Telangana movement changed drastically. From the time of BJP's entry into the movement, RSS started propagating Hindutva ideology and spread hatred among the non-Muslim community in the Telangana region especially in Hyderabad. It was greatly helped by the communal politics of Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen or the Majlis party. The RSS engineered riots in Hyderabad city in March 2010 on the eve of Ram Navami and Hanuman Jayanti, which were not heard of till then. Besides, there were several minor incidents of communal hatred. The spread of Hindutva ideology and hatred against the Muslim community reached its peak level during the by-elections in A.P. especially in the Telangana region.

For instance, riots in Hyderabad have often been used for political purposes. In August 1984, when Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, who became chief minister after removing N. T. Rama Rao, faced a trust vote in the assembly; riots were used to isolate the Legislative Assembly from the legislators and thus win the vote of confidence. Even in 1990, the then chief minister, Marri Chenna Reddy went on record in the assembly to blame a group within the Congress for triggering riots to dislodge him, indirectly hinting at Y. S. Rajasekhara Reddy, who was a faction leader within the party then. Chenna Reddy was also implicated in the RSS efforts, in the late 1970s, to initiate Vinayak Chaturthi public processions in Hyderabad. He not only formally received this procession as chief minister, but also two important

landmarks of the city, Mozamjahi Market and Hussainsagar Lake, were renamed Vinayak Chowk and Vinayak Sagar for the duration of this festival.

As the BJP lost power in the 2004 elections, the Hindutva brigade actuated itself to create communal disturbance in the country. Between 2004 and 2008 at least seven bomb blast cases took place at different sites—Jalna in 2004; Malegaon in 2006 and 2008; the Samjhauta Express, Ajmer Dargah and Mecca Masjid in 2007; and Modasa in 2008. The investigations by the government agencies like the National Investigation Agency (NIA), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Anti-Terrorist Squad (ATS) as well as examination of the evidence by independent scholars like Christophe Jaffrelot⁹ pointed towards a conspiracy hatched by the key functionaries of a Hindutva outfit, Abhinav Bharat, who were in close touch with the BJP and the RSS. One Sunil Joshi, who was the most important person in the conspiracy and the main link between the RSS and the BJP, was, however, murdered just when the first arrests in these cases were being made. From a criminal justice point of view, the Mecca Masjid blast case against the Abhinav Bharat members was almost foolproof. A confession under Section 164 in the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, with all its checks and balances, corroborating evidence, witnesses and a series of documents, files, and minutes of meetings, put together strong documentary evidence of a larger conspiracy. However, on 16 April 2018, the special National Investigation Agency (NIA) court acquitted all the five accused in the Mecca Masjid blast case (*Indian Express* 2018). Immediately after the verdict, Justice K. Ravinder Reddy resigned. Once his resignation was refused, he applied for voluntary retirement, making it clear that he wanted nothing to do with the judicial profession any more.¹⁰

LIBERALIZATION AND OPEN HINDUTVA

The Telangana armed struggle and the creation of new opportunities in the urban areas made the Brahmins in the rural areas migrate to urban centres. This trend facilitated the so-called land reform movement in old Andhra mostly to help the Agraharas (Brahmin villages with fertile land donated by kings in support of a shrine) to convert their immovable property into cash. In several cases, however, court litigation did not help them. But the concentration of Brahmins, mostly those who are attached to temples, the Vaidikas in the urban

areas, resorted to their traditional occupation of priesthood. They have buried their skirmishes with their fellow Niyogi Brahmins and together they have formed cohesive religious institutions. This could be seen as a secular occupational organization as long as they were confined to their traditional ritual functions. But the situation in the urban areas has changed with the anti-Mandal movement of the 1980s against reservation for OBCs which these organizations directly and indirectly sponsored.

The triumph of the Babri Masjid demolition in which a large contingent of Andhra tribals participated along with karsevaks from Maharashtra, Gujarat, Karnataka and UP, gave confidence to the so-called Brahmin organizations to participate directly in political activity. The Sangh Parivar took advantage of the organized caste groups. In fact, the number of temples and religious establishments in the urban areas of Andhra Pradesh increased several fold during the last decade. Once a small religious establishment is set up on a street corner, an unemployed Brahmin becomes a priest and he will elicit the patronage of the local upper castes and in some cases the OBCs. This becomes a permanent asset to provide employment. He is supported by the Sangh Parivar to thwart any kind of attack on the religious establishment. This has become an important process of Hindutva formation in Andhra. North Andhra had been a region of progressive movements, including the Naxalbari movement in Srikakulam. Having considered the historical significance, the Sangh Parivar transplanted a retired official who worked in the police department to mobilize resources in the east coast with headquarters at Bhimili near Visakhapatnam. This became a centre of Sangh Parivar activities where the top RSS brass often met.

There is a total change in the perception of Kammas, the ruling caste of Andhra, today. They were the people who fought against Brahmins during the first half of the twentieth century and they have supported and even led Left parties. They were called the materialists of the twentieth century in Andhra. But after the advent of N. T. Rama Rao (NTR) as a leader of the state, there was a sudden change in the perception of progressive Kammas. The majority have started patronizing swamis, babas and even built temples. They have become deeply religious. There is almost total acceptance of Hindutva when the BJP came to power at the centre. Though it may be a convenient adjustment for economic gains, the Hindutva forces are more intelligent than the Kammas and therefore they have used this space

to strengthen their hold on the urban elite. The soft attitude towards Brahmins after 1993 (once hard posture) by the NTR parivar have created opportunities for Hindutva to strengthen its hold in the urban areas of Andhra Pradesh. The junior partners of present state power in Andhra, the Reddys, have always been feudal in their outlook and did not pose problems for Hindutva. As the cream of the Reddy leadership comes from Telangana, the Brahmins have been maintaining very good relations with them. In other words, state power has slowly converted the ruling castes to join hands with the once secular Brahmin caste organizations to absorb Hindutva ideology.

Once the powerful ruling castes are converted to Hindutva, the castes that act as musclemen of these elites, mostly the OBCs—Yadava, Gouda, Vellama, Kapu—are slowly co-opted. The Dalits have remained as a separate entity. They have remained so not because of their independent agenda and programme. It is perhaps because they are under the overwhelming control of Christianity. It is only in Andhra Pradesh; comparison with the entire country, according to some surveys the Christians continue to claim reservations as Scheduled Castes but remain as Christians in faith and customs. This is true particularly in coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema. It is slowly entering Telangana and North Andhra. As the survival of Christian identity depends upon its opposition to Hinduism, some activists are using both the platforms to oppose Hindutva. But the problem is that when the Dalits are attacked, and discriminated against, the police refuse to book cases under PCR (Protection of Civil Rights Act) as most of the victims are Christians and not untouchable Dalits. Meanwhile Hindutva forces tell the Dalits that Hinduism was never against Dalits. Some writers argue in the mainstream press that Vyasa, Valmiki, Arundhati, and others belong to the Dalit category and that Hinduism respects them. This is how they are trying to woo the Dalits.

MALA-MADIGA DIVISION AND HINDUTVA

The formation of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), popularly known as Dandora Movement in 1994, marks the split between Malas and Madigas in Telangana. The tensions between these two dominant castes within the Dalit community goes back to 1931, when Arundathiya Mahasabha, an organisation for Madigas was formed in response to the discrimination of the Madigas by the Malas. It had a backdrop of an unfortunate practice of observance of

Untouchability among Dalits. It is said that Bhagya Reddy Verma, the pioneer of the Dalit movement in Hyderabad, had opposed a Mala boy marrying a Madiga girl. Arige Ramaswamy pleaded with Bhagya Reddy Verma to treat Madigas equally with Malas but the latter did not agree. Bhagya Reddy Verma, who was then the leader of Adi Hindu Social Service League, expelled the Mala leaders Arige Ramaswamy, Adayya and P. R. Venkataswamy from the Mala caste when they attended the Mala-Madiga inter-caste wedding on the grounds that this went against Mala tradition. Resenting his anti-Madiga attitude, the expelled leaders Arige Ramaswamy, P. R. Venkataswamy, Adayya and others established the Arundathiya Mahasabha in 1931.¹¹

The emergence of intra-caste differentiation among the Dalits in India has been a serious topic for discussion among academics for quite some time. As I have pointed out earlier, it led to the fragmentation of a Dalit assertion in Andhra after the Karamchedu and Chundur massacres.¹² Out of 59 castes in the Scheduled Castes list of Andhra Pradesh, two castes have emerged as dominant, the Malas and the Madigas. In fact, these two castes are not dominant in all the regions of the state. They were dominant in coastal Andhra and have emerged as contending forces in the region over a period of time. But they have united and led a historical struggle under the aegis of Andhra Pradesh Dalit Mahasabha to counter the hegemonic dominance of Kamma and Reddy communal forces in the state. As the upsurge of the Dalits was culminating into a formidable movement in the state, Kanshi Ram entered state politics. Dalit youth, the discontented Dalit communists, Ambedkarities, the newly emerging Dalit elite have joined the ranks of the BSP. NTR had considered the BSP as a formidable force at that time. The Shudra upper castes were terrified by the unity within the Dalits and their ideological postures to bring the OBCs also into their political fold. Having realized what the outcome of such a formation would imply, the BJP which had its presence in the Telangana region raised the issue of intra-caste differentiation between Malas and Madigas. It has some pockets of influence among the Madigas in Hyderabad.

After NTR, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has severed its connections with the Left parties and joined the BJP in the state. The TDP, according to some, has almost sponsored the Mala-Madiga division to weaken the strength of Dalit power in the state. The Madigas and the Malas formed separate associations. The Madigas

wanted the SC category of reservations to be divided caste-wise while the Malas opposed it. The TDP had issued a Government Order categorizing the SCs into four groups when the total strength of the civil administration was dwindling. Though the Mala-Madiga movement appeared to be a state-level struggle, in its essence it was confined to coastal districts and limited to the organized state government employees. But the struggle gave a rude shock to united Dalit assertion. Interestingly, this did not benefit Hindutva as many had expected. It seems three important factors have contributed to this situation: firstly, the Madiga leadership soon realized the futility of the division without enough public or private jobs to occupy. Secondly, the sudden and disgraceful manner in which Bangaru Laxman, a Madiga leader, was thrown out of the BJP presidency gave a jolt to the community. Thirdly, the vocal segments of both the groups had already converted into Christianity and were not inclined to join the bandwagon of Hindutva. Therefore, the age-old design of divide, assimilate, and rule did not materialize in the case of the Mala-Madiga division in Andhra Pradesh due to its peculiar circumstances. But it may not be the same in other regions like Karnataka where similar attempts are being made by communal forces. Except Boyi Bhimanna, a prominent poet among the Malas, who has reinterpreted the Bhagavat Gita in a brahminical tenor, today no one is inclined to join the Hindu Parivar.

The first Dalit president of the BJP, Bangaru Laxman, it is said, has been moulded by Hindutva forces from his childhood. Recently, a former IPS officer Balakondayya, a Mala, joined the BJP. But none of them seems to have agreed with the total agenda of Hindutva nor do they openly propagate Hindutva. Bangaru Laxman seems to have now become disillusioned with the BJP. Therefore, the Hindutva forces among the Dalits are weak at the moment. But the strength of Hindutva is its long run vision and its perseverance.

CONCLUSION

Hindutva as a brahminical ideology has been in existence in Andhra and Telangana in a nascent form because of geographical and historical conditions. However, hard-core Hindutva forces have started entering into civil space after the liberalization and the expansion of the service sector in urban areas after 1990s. The Hindutva juggernaut since then did not leave Andhra-Telangana unaffected. Although for various historical reasons, it could not enter the Telugu speaking region in a

big way, unlike neighbouring Karnataka, the influence is palpable. The RSS/BJP has been always look out for every political fissure in a polity to make inroads. They tried it with their patented ways of engineering riots to polarise population. There are other subtle ways like introducing and promoting celebrations of Hindu festivals which were hitherto unknown. In the separate Telangana movement, Dalits played a big role, expecting it to be pro-Dalit state. But it turned out to be inimical to their interests. The chief minister of the new state, K. Chandrasekhar Rao, has displayed competitive Hindutva and has a tacit tie-up with the BJP. In the blatant violation of secular ethos, he had unashamedly donated gifts to various gods worth crores of rupees at the cost of the public exchequer. The influence of communists on the secular values of people in general and Dalits in particular is marginal. The Dalits have remained outside the scheme of Hindutva as the majority of the dominant groups were either converted to Islam or Christianity long back. But Muslim and Christian Dalits are being used by the Hindutva forces now to instigate 'others' against Dalits. There are some weaknesses in the formation of Dalit identity as some Christians call other Dalits as 'anyulu' (outsiders) and are slowly alienating themselves from the Dalit experiences. This can be used by Hindutva in dividing the Dalits into separate blocks to create a foothold for themselves. They have succeeded in dividing the 59 Dalit castes into ABCD (categorization in SC reservation) groups. But the Dalit renaissance movement in Andhra has just begun. It is left to the posterity to decide in which direction it will lead the Dalit masses.

Notes

- ¹ K. S. Chalam, 'Tantra: The Origin of Dalit Epistemology', *South India Journal of Social Sciences* 1, 1 (June 2003).
- ² Duncan B. Forrester, 'The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity: 1860–1990.' In *Religion in South Asia*, edited by G. A. Oddie (Delhi: Manohar, 1977).
- ³ Puchalapalli Sundarayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 1972: 22–26).
- ⁴ P. R. Venkataswamy, *Our Struggle for Emancipation* (Secunderabad: Universal Art Printers, 1955: 24–26; P. V. Rao. 'Tholi Suryudu-Bhagyareddy Varma', *Samaantara* (Telugu monthly journal), 3, 2 (May 2009): 5–7.

- ⁵ P. Muthaiah, 'Why Categorisations of SC Reservations?' From *Steel Nibs Are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India*, Susie Tharu, and K. Satyanarayana, eds. (Noida: Harper Collins, 2013).
- ⁶ Sri Sri and Gurajada are progressive modern Telugu writers, *Gurajadas Anyasulkam* (Bride Price) was published in 1915 abhorring the evil social practices in the Telugu country.
- ⁷ Tripuraneni Ramaswamy is known as the Periyar of Andhra. He started the rationalist movement and questioned brahminical traditions and scriptures.
- ⁸ Gurram Joshua is perhaps the first Dalit poet of modern India. See *History of Telugu Literature*, edited by G. B. Sitapati (Delhi: Sahitya Akademy, 1969).
- ⁹ Christophe Jaffrelot. 'Abhinav Bharat, the Malegaon Blast and Hindu Nationalism: Resisting and Emulating Islamist Terrorism', *Economic & Political Weekly* 45, 36 (2010): 51.
- ¹⁰ Sagar Muthai, Sagar Kumar Muthai, 'Judge Who Quit after Mecca Masjid Verdict Joins Duty, Seeks VRS', *Times of India*, 20 April 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/judge-who-quit-after-mecca-masjid-verdict-joins-duty-seeks-vrs/articleshow/63840197.cms>. (accessed 2 November 2019).
- ¹¹ V. Ramakrishna, *Social Reforms in Andhra* (Delhi: Vikas, 1983).
- ¹² K. S. Chalam, 'The Fragmented Assertion: The Emergence of Intra-Caste Differentiation among Dalits in India', accessional paper: SRTRI, August 1997, Hyderabad.

Hindutva Influence on Dalits: The Case of Karnataka

Shivasundar

To understand the Dalits' response to Hindutva in Karnataka, one will have to contextualize the phenomenon both at the national and at the Karnataka levels. In Karnataka, the Dalits and the Dalit movement are influenced by the various developments at the national level. Their trajectory thereafter is of course governed by factors particular to Karnataka. To begin with, the Dalit movement led by Dr Ambedkar in Maharashtra and later at the national level had very little influence over the Dalit movement in Karnataka, the only exception being the Gulbarga area, where Mr Shamsundar led a very powerful Ambedkarite movement. He is still remembered there as the Ambedkar of Karnataka. The Dalit movement led by him, however, did not extend beyond the surrounding area. In the absence of an organizational succession, even this influence could not last after his death.

The politicization of Dalits, if at all it can be called so, came basically from the upper caste patrons of the Congress Party through its so-called constructive programmes to uplift Harijans. The Congress patronage did not have any intention of inculcating self-confidence among Dalits; rather it was directed to reinforce their dependence on the upper caste. The other major political current around Karnataka, like the communist movement, self-respect movement in Tamil Nadu or the Telangana movement in Andhra Pradesh, which questioned the pro-feudal programme and brahminical attitude of the Congress and mobilized the Dalits under different political agendas, were visibly absent in Karnataka. Another sub-current, namely, Kannada nationalism, that came to the fore in Karnataka was from the beginning, strongly influenced by Tilak's steam of 'Congressism' that leant towards caste-based feudalism with a strong Hindu cultural nationalist discourse.

The leaders of Karnataka nationalism were all from upper caste background. Even though the pioneers of the movement like Alur Venkatarao and others asserted Kannada nationalist aspirations, they declared complete adherence to the Hindu nationalist construction of Indian nationalism. They wore the medals given by the establishment and never came in support of the growing voices of workers and farmers in the freedom movement. Rather, they aligned more and more with the sworn feudal elements in the Congress movement. Thus, it completely failed to voice aspirations of Dalits. The Telangana movement in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region (comprising districts of Bidar, Gulbarga and Raichur districts), had a very strong anti-Muslim bias unlike Andhra, where it was basically expressed as the anti-feudal programme mobilizing Dalits on an alternate political agenda of armed struggles. In the south (comprising districts of Kolar, Bangalore, Mandya, Mysore, South Canara, Shimoga, Chikmagalur, Chitradurga, and so on), it was basically a state patronized non-Brahmin movement of Other Backward Classes which did not include Dalits.

None of these alternative currents during the freedom movement took the Dalit agenda to the fore and mobilized Dalits against the caste system. Therefore, Dalit consciousness in Karnataka by and large remained confined within the ideological boundaries of Harijan *consciousness*. Apart from the absence of the political movements, the absence or insignificant numerical strength of the Dalit middle class with its own identity and agendas was also an important feature of the pre-1947 period in Karnataka.

In the post-1947 period also, Karnataka continued to be the bastion of the Congress Party and its ideology. In fact, Karnataka faced a political lull, as did other states in India, in the first two decades after independence. Constitutional reservations brought about a new Dalit middle class and the Green Revolution saw the rise of new agrarian classes in the political arena. While the Vokkaligas and other landholding classes enriched by the new agrarian economy began demanding their share in the economy and power structures, the Dalit middle class (which was still weak numerically and politically) slowly began asserting its identity. The Devraj Urs government that came to power during this time (early 1970s) significantly helped the crystallization of this process.

While the consolidation of landholding classes did not result in new political formations, as the Congress was able to contain them within its ambit, a section of the enlightened middle classes from the

OBCs as well as from the Dalits tried to articulate progressive aspirations outside Congress politics. They found a new ideological anchor in Ram Manohar Lohia. The Lohiaite political ideology with its strong anti-Congressism and strong pro-tenant programme with specific emphasis on the annihilation of caste, caught the imagination of these forces which later provided the basis for the emergence of the Janata Party in Karnataka. The weak communist movement, by then completely engrossed in parliamentary politics, with no roots in rural Karnataka and wrong perspective on the caste question, proved utterly inconsequential during these critical times. It was already overwhelmed by the strong anti-communist wave of Lohiaite socialism. These circumstances prevented the emergence of radical Dalit politics in the state.

It was only in the late 1970s that Dalit politics started to take the Ambedkarite path. The emergence of Dalit politics and its transformation from servile Harijan consciousness to Ambedkarite consciousness can be analysed in such a historical context. The new emerging Dalit middle class was to play an important role in the growth of Dalit politics and in the formation of the Dalit Sangharsha Samithi (DSS) subsequently. Even though this Dalit consciousness sprouted in the soil of anti-Congressism and a Lohiaite ideology, it grew under the strong influence of radical ideologies like that of the Dalit Panthers and the Naxalites. The Naxalite influence helped the Dalit movement to take the anti-caste-movement away from the Lohiaite cultural and super-structural space to the anti-feudal base. Armed with this radical consciousness, the DSS launched its struggle not only for the self-respect of Dalits, but also for the creation of an alternate society with a kind of socialist vision, that may be characterised by an ideological mixture of Marx, Lohia and Ambedkar. This radical Dalit discourse attracted all progressive forces belonging to several castes and ideological persuasions towards the DSS. It initiated several important land struggles and linked the Dalit question as a quest for self-respect and for social and economic emancipation. The Dalit agenda was thus catapulted from the margins to the mainstream politics of Karnataka.

There was, however, an inherent tension in the new Dalit leadership about the course of the struggle and political alliances it had to make. While one section of the leadership was always inclined towards making compromises for sharing political power, the other sections, aware of the problems with this course, were hesitant. Although they

managed to stay away from the proponents of power sharing, they could not chart out a new path. The resultant confusion provided a fertile ground for opportunist alliances in electoral politics, which was best exploited by the Janata Dal for coming to power in 1983 and again in 1985 under the leadership of an astute and scheming politician like Ram Krishna Hegde.

It was during his regime that many social movements having radical potential were co-opted into the state power. The opportunist forces in these organizations were promoted and incorporated. Opportunism was elevated to a level of political tactics. Such an open allurements for power brought in fissures within the rank and file of the leadership of the DSS, which subsequently led to multiple splits in the organization and also blurred the distinction between friends and foes. It opened the floodgates of opportunistic alliances and changed the orientation of the movement from the grass root Dalit to positions of power. The inevitable corruption and imperatives of power politics slowly took away the organization from the path of struggle. This descent did more damage to Dalit politics than anything else. The Dalit masses and, in particular, the youth with huge potential were rendered suddenly leaderless and rudderless. Added to this, was the emergence of a kind of narrow and sectarian political and ideological current within the Dalit movement. This sectarian and casteist politics and political opportunism were promoted by a corrupt section of the upcoming Dalit middle class with the blessings of Dalit bureaucracy. This section is being encouraged by the ruling classes in the state and pitted against the radical and moderate forces within Dalit politics. This sectarianism basically served as a defence mechanism for staving off the undesired influence of progressive people, which further alienated the Dalit movement and isolated its leadership from the progressive forces.

Thus, by the late 1990s, Dalit organizations had mostly shifted to the cities with political opportunism and fundamentalism as the principal course. It was during the same period that the impact of the policies of globalization had started being felt by the Dalit masses. Globalization unleashed a great deal of pauperization and impoverishment of masses, making them increasingly vulnerable to the vagaries of the government politics and its economic policies. The worst impact of globalization has been in marginalization of people's struggles. Paradoxically, the decline in peoples' struggles has happened at the time when they are most required. The transformation from a 'welfare state'¹ to a neoliberal one with no social responsibility

whatsoever and with increasingly repressive orientations has pushed the moderate social movements to be defensive. Challenged by the neoliberal state, many social movements succumbed to the pressure and the lure of corruption. The Dalit movement was no exception to this trend. Rather, the newly born Dalit fundamentalism, while vociferously contesting the claims and contentions of progressives enthusiastically capitulated to the anti-Dalit state and did not have qualms in forming an alliance even with the Hindu communal forces, the sworn enemies of the Dalits.

The emergence of the BSP in Dalit politics has successfully provided an ideological justification for the careerist and opportunist tendencies among a section of Dalit leadership. Such manipulative politics not only played havoc on progressive Dalit consciousness, but also paved the way for the entry of Hindutva into it. For instance, BSP leaders portray the RSS not as a communal organization with fascist objectives and with an inherent anti-Dalit agenda, but as a disciplined patriotic cultural organization. It indoctrinates hatred against all other castes. It dissuades Dalits from joining any secular movement because it does not think it is of any use to them. They reject political mobilization for struggles and deeply inculcate hero worship. During the ill fated BJP-BSP alliance and Mayawati's endorsement of the Modi government in Gujarat in the wake of all round condemnation for its role in the genocide of Muslims, such anti-Muslim justifications reached the peak. Such indoctrination takes its own course. While Hindu communalism gets legitimized in the eyes of Dalits, an anti-Muslim frenzy does the rest. Both these processes, unfortunately, are appearing in Karnataka. As one worried Dalit intellectual of Karnataka, Mr Indudhara Honnapura, described it, these days everything in the repertoire of Hindutva, save for the caste hierarchy, becomes acceptable to this brand of Dalit politics in the state.

It is in this context that Hindu fundamentalist forces started their overtures to woo Dalits. As elsewhere, they first began with co-opting Ambedkar, the greatest icon for Dalits, as one among the Hindutva-leaders. The outfits of the Sangh Parivar soon began to occupy the social spaces vacated by the progressive social movements, including Dalit organizations. The moving away of the latter from confrontationist politics provided these Hindutva organizations to fill in the communal venom and display their masculine valour against the hapless minority community. The depoliticization of the Dalit cadre made way for the indoctrination by the Hindutva forces through the RSS shakhas in

slums and rural areas. The overall legitimacy that the Hindu communal forces gained is primarily due to the bankruptcy of other political forces. The cooptation of Dalit leaders has certainly contributed to this phenomenon.

The influence of Hindutva over the Dalit masses in Karnataka should be located in this political context. Two developments can illustrate this phenomenon. In 2003, there was a communal clash in a village in the Haveri district of Karnataka in which several Muslims were killed and their households were burnt. Bajrang Dal activists who came from a neighbouring district instigated this. The reason was, as usual, a flimsy one. But the communities they used to instigate the clash were all Dalits. The graveyards of the Dalits and the Muslims in that village are situated side by side. Bajrang Dal instigated the Dalits by saying that the Muslims were encroaching upon their graveyard. The Dalits were instigated to block the approach road to the Muslims' graveyard unless they handed over the alleged patch of land. This created tension that later led to the said clashes. The human rights group that investigated the incident concluded that the Dalit masses because of the lack of leadership are susceptible to the propaganda of communal forces like the Bajrang Dal.

In another very recent development, an important Dalit leader who was a communist earlier and who was widely respected not only by the Dalits masses but also by others has recently joined the BJP. These two developments explain the situation in Karnataka.

REASONS FOR THE GROWTH OF HINDUTVA AMONGST DALITS

Absence of any progressive mobilizations of Dalits

It is now more than a decade that any mobilization of rural Dalit masses has taken place outside the electoral framework and for other democratic agendas like the land question and so on. Even urban Dalits are not mobilized on a common cause as they are divided into several factions. Some of the leaders are engaged in real estate deals while others are using Dalit masses to bargain with the powers that be. There are no attempts whatsoever by the Dalit movement for radical politicization or mobilization of Dalits against the caste system. Had this been done it would have been difficult for the Sangh Parivar to mobilize Dalits. The popular perception today is that during the decade of the 1980s educated and urban Dalit leaders would mobilize

rural Dalits and other oppressed sections against upper caste landlords, and in the process, forge a powerful united front between rural and urban, between Dalits and other democratic sections. Now the present-day Dalit leaders are found only in the taluka and district level offices. Thus the vacuum created was being filled by Hindutva forces.

Organized intervention of Sangh Parivar among the Dalit masses

Apart from the BJP's opportunist strategies to accommodate Dalit icons and agendas into its electoral framework, the RSS itself, through its *shiksha abhiyans* has successfully made inroads into the Dalit masses. This is especially true in the case of cities and towns of Karnataka. One example is the shiksha abhiyan that the RSS is carrying out in 500 slums of Bangalore. This is a project of *Rastrotthana Sahitya Parishat* funded by Infosys and Wipro, the pride of globalized modern India! In this project, the charity trusts of both the companies have financed the Rastrotthana Parishat to supply its venom-filled Hindu communal booklets free of cost to Dalit students in 500 slums in Bangalore. This is instituted through the pracharaks of the Sangh Parivar in the name of a literacy and education campaign. There are books about Ambedkar also, in that list. One such book claims that Ambedkar hailed Sangh Parivar as the only place where there is no Untouchability and that he blamed Muslims for dividing India. The remaining books are about Hindu communal icons and about spreading their communal venom. That this project has not received sufficient opposition from Dalit groups working in the state is itself a testimony of the state of the Dalit movement in Karnataka. Now, apart from the Scheduled Caste-Scheduled Tribe (ST) morchas of the BJP you have many more Sangh Parivar outfits working in slums indoctrinating Dalit minds and also providing space for the Dalit lumpen elements with a conscious strategy of infecting unemployed Dalit youth with Hindu communal venom.

The emergence of Dalit middle class and lumpen sections

There is another important factor for the growth of Hindutva influence over Dalits. In fact, it is these classes within the Dalit community that are vehicles of the Hindutva agenda among Dalit masses. While the left wing of the Dalit middle class in Karnataka spearheaded the radicalization of Dalit politics, the gradual institutionalization of such

dissent on the one hand and adoption of brahminical culture by upwardly mobile Dalits (holding Satyanarayana pujas is one such glaring evidence), on the other, slowly provided the required ideological and political legitimacy for Hindutva among Dalit masses.

Moreover, in the absence of radical Dalit politics, the semi-employed and unemployed Dalit youth, devoid of any democratic political idiom to express their anguish, were slowly channelized into the Hindutva stream by the Sangh Parivar in some pockets. Anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan propaganda came in very handy in this process. The northern districts bordering Maharashtra, like Belgaum, Bagalkot, Hubli are witnessing this development. Even in the southern parts in places like Kolar Gold Fields, Chickmagalur, and so on, a similar process is under way. It is important here to note that all these places are also where acute economic crises have seriously disturbed and dislocated the lives of Dalit masses. While in the northern districts, the Dalit movement is traditionally weak, in the southern parts, the weakness and opportunist manipulations of Dalit leadership and no effective mobilization of the Dalit masses, who are in deep distress, by any progressive organization has created a situation which is effectively used by the Sangh Parivar for indoctrination and for creating its foot soldiers. The general decline in progressive politics is certainly a reason for the growing Hindutva influence.

GROWING LEGITIMACY FOR THE POLITICS OF THE HINDU RIGHT

The growing legitimacy for Hindutva politics in the mainstream is also another reason for the acceptability of Hindu communal forces. Their proximity to state power, and their actual control over it are also some other factors responsible for this phenomenon. Even though during the 2003 general elections the rightist BJP faced a debacle in the rest of the country, in Karnataka they made great strides geographically and socially. There are strong feelings that in many places the BSP was instrumental for the defeat of the Congress and Janata Dal candidates and consequently for the victory of the BJP candidates. It seems, in Karnataka, the Sangh Parivar might have consolidated their base among the Dalits and OBCs. In the recent General Elections of 2004, Hindu Samajotsavas were organized by the Sangh Parivar in several parts of the state, and a special emphasis

was laid on the mobilization of Dalits. One of the main slogans was against Untouchability. There was hardly any resistance by the Dalit youth for wearing banians with inscription of OM or chanting of anti-Muslims slogans, which would have been unimaginable in the 1980s.

Depoliticization and deradicalization of Dalit consciousness

The Ambedkarite consciousness and other ideological influences over Dalits helped the radicalization and politicization of the Dalit agenda during the 1980s. But the recent articulations about the Dalit agenda devoid of any substantial content for self-respect and other issues by different Dalit groupings are only helping to diffuse the radical potential it once had and helping to keep the skeletal framework with sufficient elasticity to suit the immediate needs of self-motives and self-interests. Even though this is an all-India phenomenon, the devastating impact of such constructions is palpable in the state of Karnataka. The pro-globalization school, the isolationist caste fundamentalist school, the opportunist 'state power is the key school', all survive and thrive under the banner of Ambedkarism! All of them consciously de-emphasize the need for uncompromising struggle—the struggle against the caste system—the essential components of the Ambedkarite mission. For example, the question of land for which Ambedkar attached utmost importance is totally absent in all the contemporary Dalit political agenda. Personal upliftment has become the catchword, which is conveniently made use of by the Hindutva forces.

It should also be noted that these contemporary developments are not going unchallenged. The regrouping of other political actors with more radical, social and political agendas and non-sectarian organizational strategies with the most needed militant programmes are signs of hope in the state. This year's mobilization of Dalits to save the Bababudangiri shrine, a reply of secular democratic forces in Karnataka to the Sangh Parivar's agenda to saffronize Bababudangiri, is a case in point. In 2003 secular activists found a significant section of Dalit youth falling prey to the Sangh Parivar's propaganda about the shrine. There was even a verbal exchange during the campaign, but at many places it was possible to win them over. This time not only has Dalit participation in the Parivar rally come down, but also more Dalit organizations from all over the state participated in the rally organized by the secular forces. In sum, there is a strong need

for the radicalization of Dalit politics, the absence of which is paving the way for the growing influence of Hindutva over Dalits in India. Karnataka being no exception to this, it is completely dependant on the progressive forces in the state, including many non-fundamentalist Dalit organizations, to take up this cause at the earliest.

Note

- ¹ Whether Indian state was a welfare state or not, it did display some concern about people's welfare before the neoliberal paradigm set in by mid-1980s.

Gujarat: In Search of Answers

Anand Teltumbde and Subhash Gatade

INTRODUCTION

It has been more than seventeen years since February 2002 when Godhra and its aftermath—the genocide in Gujarat orchestrated by the Hindutva brigade with due connivance of the state machinery—took place. In this period, not only has the Sangh Parivar been able to reap the benefits of the politics of hate propagated by it but also to communicate its own destructive prowess to the splintered secular opposition in this country in no uncertain terms.

A major part of the analysis of the Gujarat genocide and the growing dominance of majoritarian forces in India has focused itself on the weltanschauung of the Sangh Parivar, its anti-people character; its subversion of democratic institutions and its relationship with the current neoliberal economic policies. Attempts have also been made, not only to comprehend the nature of Fascism in our times but also to discern the various threads which have gone into ‘popularizing’ the politics of hate peddled by the Hindutva brigade in the institutions of state and civil society (see also Essay 2).

Despite this it cannot be said that the whole dynamic of the institutional and ideological incorporation of the various sections of Hindu society ranging from the upper castes to the women and the Dalits, with the history of contradictions among them, into the maelstrom of militant Hindutva has been adequately understood. Neither has the gradual abandonment of secular pretensions by the upper castes been highlighted nor has the Hindutvaization of the Shudra castes (backward castes).

This apparent failure of the intelligentsia to properly discern various threads of the social fabric to understand this gory chapter in the

history, has its genesis in the skewed understanding which dominates even the academia which has, till date, constantly refused to integrate considerations of caste and other identities into its analysis. The Gujarat carnage has come to be characterized by the large-scale participation of tribals and Dalits as the foot soldiers of the Hindutva brigade. There has hardly been an attempt to understand the reasons behind it; much less the intricate relationship between the Dalits and the Hindutva forces vis-à-vis the Muslims. Rather the quietude that accompanied it seemed to insinuate a certain disdain; and, worse, a tacit confirmation of the societal prejudice that such heinous acts as were noted against Muslims could only be committed by these 'lowly' people. It came handy for the caste prejudices of people to make out that such heinous killings cannot be the act of the 'cultured' Brahmins and Banias in the Sangh Parivar. Worse, it inextricably bracketed Dalits with the Hindutva forces, reinforced false consciousness of Dalits as Hindus, and thereby served the agenda of the Sangh Parivar.

The communal conflagration in Gujarat has thrown up many issues of vital importance. The issue of Dalit participation is of particular importance; not because it magnifies the menace of communalism but because it decimates potential opposition to it. We seek to problematize this issue. An attempt is made to understand Dalit behaviour during the genocidal experimentation of Hindutva in Gujarat in terms of the peculiar evolution of the Dalit identity and consciousness from the paternalistic Harijanism and its subsequent transformation under various forces within the context of changes in the economy that befell the state. The absence of social osmosis or psychological support, reflected in the apathetic attitude of society in general towards Dalits, is also noted as the reinforcing factor of this behaviour. In 2014, the BJP had won on a total of 66 seats—40 SC and 26 ST seats out of total 84 SC seats and 47 ST seats respectively, the highest number of reserved constituency seats won by any single largest party ever since 1991. In 2019, BJP has increased its Lok Sabha tally from 282 in 2014 to 303 in 2019 and interestingly nearly half of its additional members (10 of 21) have come from reserved (SC/ST) constituencies, showing its expanded reach among Dalits and tribals. An analysis of the reserved seats shows that the party has won 77 of 131 such constituencies this time as compared to 67 in 2014.

GODHRA: AN ALIBI OF AN ACTION FOR A PLANNED REACTION

Definitely the crime of the Gujarat carnage lies not so much in physical participation, which doubtlessly is shared by all the castes and classes, but in the cold blooded conceptualizing, planning and leading in its execution, which has been done entirely by the ringleaders of the Hindutva brigade. Most fact finding reports highlighted the intricate planning with which this carnage was executed, refuting the contention of the state and the Hindutva brigade that it was a spontaneous reaction to the Godhra killings (the deaths of the 59 Kar Sevaks in the train compartment that was set on fire at Godhra Station on 27 February 2002). *Mainstream* (16 March 2002) quotes Professor Keshavram Kashiram Shastri, the 96-year-old chairman of the Gujarat unit of the VHP, saying that the list of shops owned by Muslims in Ahmedabad was prepared on the morning of 28 February 2002 itself. The admission thus comes from the horse's mouth that throws light on the details of the preparedness which existed in the Sangh Parivar and proves beyond doubt how the 'spontaneous reaction' to the heinous Godhra killings was engineered by the higher ups in the Parivar in collusion with the state. The enormity of it cannot be determined only by counting the numbers of killings, raping, looting and burning but by the long-term damage it inflicted on the moral fabric of society. The Hindutva brigade has not only violated the penal code or the Constitutional articles but also the civilizational mores of this land. The crime of the Sangh Parivar in Gujarat is unpardonable! As a matter of fact, understanding whatever happened in 2002 holds the key to understand the foolhardy decisions of the BJP in power has been taking since 2014 to polarize people.

Godhra met with condemnation from all, as it should. However, the fact remains that people still do not know who perpetrated Godhra and who were killed. The behaviour of authorities in dealing with crime of such an enormity and sensitivity, the subsequent forensic inferences refuting most versions peddled for this 'action' and the deafening silence observed over it in the area where it happened, thicken the veil of mystery around this unfortunate incident. No one can say for sure, whether Godhra was planned and if so by whom. This being the state of the 'action', the 'reaction' however materialized instantaneously in a manner that may shame even expert planners. The gangs were organized and scheduled such that they would not

attack their neighbourhoods; they were equipped with the printouts of the targets and provided with guides to pinpoint them in the midst of others, the resources such as trishuls, LPG cylinders and petrol cans, not to speak of jeeps and vans and the entire logistic that was expertly managed with the information flows with enviable efficiency never seen before. As it stands exposed by all the fact finding reports, the state had actively participated in this heinous 'reaction'. Contrary to this public version, the justice delivery system of the country has exonerated all the Hindutva leaders identified to have executed this carnage of unprecedented magnitude. Those who took cudgels for the victims, like Teesta Setalwad and Sanjiv Bhatt were hounded by it. Sanjiv Bhatt, an IIT Bombay alumnus and a former Indian Police Service (IPS) officer from Gujarat, is incarcerated in jail for daring to file an affidavit in the Supreme Court against the then chief minister of the Government of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, concerning Modi's alleged role in the 2002 Gujarat riots. Recently (on 18 June 2019), a Jamnagar Sessions Court in Gujarat sentenced Bhatt for life in a 1990 custodial death case.

There is no doubt that the Gujarat carnage was not a reaction but an intricately planned and passionately executed project with the definitive objective of consolidating the majority community in order to win political power. This was particularly necessitated because of the successive debacles the BJP faced in the elections all over the country and even in the elections for local self-government in Gujarat. Qualitatively there was nothing new in it as the Sangh Parivar always thrived on the communal polarization of people to win political power without scruples. Still, for its macabre magnitude, it was a new experiment. Its replicability elsewhere also demanded that it be formulated and executed with the precision of an experiment in a laboratory. Gujarat, characterized by the hegemony of Brahman-Bania conservatism, the well-oiled Sangh Parivar-machinery for propaganda, and militant action that had made deep inroads, not only into Dalit colonies, but also the tribal hamlets and the relatively longer BJP rule that succeeded in communalizing institutions of state and civil society, became a natural choice as the laboratory. The trail of this crime must extend, therefore, to the spreading of communal venom among the tribals and Dalits by various outfits of the Sangh Parivar. It is one thing to exploit political vacuum among Dalits and tribals and create a political constituency but it is an entirely different matter to convert them to communalism in order to make them the foot

soldiers in genocide. The former can be legitimate political work; the latter is an utterly illegitimate criminal act of which the entire Sangh Parivar in Gujarat is guilty.

HINDUTVA OVERTURES AND DALITS

Under the guise of religio-cultural work, the Sangh Parivar has been working for Hindutva which is essentially a political concept (see also Introduction, Essay 3). The religio-cultural concept of 'Hindu' though inimical to the Dalits and tribals, represented, according to many scholars, a dispersed identity that is located in a multicultural and multi-religious tradition and social organization.¹ In contrast Hindutva pretends to be inclusive of the Dalits and the tribals, by cosmetically voicing its opposition to Untouchability (and not to castes!), and strives for a monolithic culture and, based on it, a monolithic nation and state as well.

The precursor of Hindutva is Hindu Sanghatan, which means consolidation of Hindus. The movement for Hindu Sanghatan started in the mid-nineteenth century just after the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857, which even in its devastating defeat had presented a glorious unity of the people of India across communities. The British learnt their lesson and strove to encourage communal strife between the two major communities: Hindus and Muslims. One finds its manifestation in the writings like *Anandamath* and the emergence of movements of Hindu nationalism in Bengal.² While this is the ostensible reason for germination of the communal movements, what remains unanswered is why was the Hindu communalism started as Hindu Sanghatan; whom did they intend to bring together?³ The answer perhaps is to be found in the fact that the lower castes were still attracted towards Islam and Christianity in significant numbers through the egalitarian mystic of Sufi saints and humanitarian work of the Christian missionaries respectively. The communitarian modes of expression provided by these religions also acted as a cathartic attraction to the labouring lower castes. The *bhadralok* (literary, 'the gentry, i.e., Bengali educated upper castes') knew the importance of these castes as potential foot soldiers in the ensuing bloody battles indicated in *Anandamath*. They wanted to get them back into the Hindu fold. The predominant mode of this movement was Hindu Melas (fetes) and collective celebrations of festivals that ostensibly countered the attractions on the other side for these castes. Thus we can see lower castes' alienation constituting the *raison d'être* of Hindutva.

The genesis of the current version of Hindutva, that can be informally traced back to B. G. Tilak and formally to V. D. Savarkar, who targeted it towards these people with the political motive of creating a monolithic and monocultural Hindu rashtra. Admittedly it forms the source of inspiration of the entire Hindutva movement—from Advani's Rath Yatras to Pravin Togadia's hate speeches to Narendra Modi's 'reaction' in Gujarat. It resorted to building a repertoire of cultural resources with intellectual thuggery. Hindutva has never hidden its fascist fangs since its birth, and has actually showered praises on the likes of Hitler and Mussolini.⁴

As for the Dalits, true to their upper caste Hindu culture, the Parivar people first ignored them but soon, realizing their importance in the context of increasing fragmentation of electoral politics, began their strategic overtures towards them. By then Dalit politics had been past its zenith and was on a fast decline, inducing in masses feelings of frustration and hopelessness and impelling the emerging elite class to seek greener pastures elsewhere. Taking advantage of this situation and the increasing fixation of Dalit masses with the sole Ambedkar icon, the Sangh Parivar tried to lure the Dalits into their fold, firstly by co-opting Ambedkar as one of their *pratahsmaraniya*⁵ and thereafterby launching the co-optation platforms like Samajik Samrasata Manch. These programmes were operated over the last two decades in typical Sanghist perseverance. In case of the tribals, they had noted the political vacuum and soon monopolized the entire space much earlier than anybody could comprehend. They converted Adivasi tribals into *vanavasis* (forest dwellers), skilfully depriving them of their ownership antecedents and making them uncivilized junglees, Hinduized them through a plethora of organizations such as Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram, Ekal Vidyalaya, Sewa Bharati, Vivekananda Kendra, Bharat Kalyan Pratishthan, Friends of Tribal Society; replacing their tribal gods with Hindu gods like Ganeshas and others, and slowly poisoned them with communal hatred for other religions by organizing various campaigns like the 'trishul campaigns'. It is important to note that this kind of trishul campaign was conducted in Ahmedabad city just a few months before the 'reaction' to Godhra. Right from the late 1930s, the Hindutva forces identified the tribals as their potential target for Hinduization. They influenced many princely states to pass the anti-conversion laws to oppose the Christian missionaries' work. It created a climate in the mid-1940s for the Niyogi Committee to ban the work of the Christian missionaries in the fifth schedule areas, thus

paving the entry to the RSS-affiliated Vanavasi Kalyan Parishad to work among virgin tribal-lands. The slow poisoning of the tribal minds over five decades began paying dividends in the form of celebration of Hindu festivals, their conversion into Hindu religion (a la Ghar Wapsi) and attacks on their Christian-counterpart. In 1997, in Gujarat, 22 churches were burnt or destroyed, and another 16 damaged. The acts of violence include arson of churches, conversion of Christians by force and threats of physical violence, sexual assaults, murder of Christian priests and destruction of Christian schools, colleges, and cemeteries. Similar instances were reported from Nagaland, Arunachal and Mizoram where the RSS has provided political and social support to forces that could at one time be termed by them as 'separatist' and 'anti-national'. It is only for the fear of the backlash from the imperialist countries, which the RSS always wanted to ally with, the anti-Christian overtures have been curbed.

While there is much anxiety to note causal aspects for the lamentable transformations of the Dalits as an ally of the Hindutva forces, curiously there is hardly any attempt to see the things from the Dalit viewpoint or interrogate the civil society that allows at first instance such transformations. There is no doubt that the process of transformation of the Dalits into foot soldiers of Hindutva underscores a bitter reality about the civil society that has always refused to take note of their woes. No amount of injustice, humiliations or atrocities on Dalits stirs its conscience. Even in times of crisis they find themselves utterly isolated without any assistance from anyone. Why has even the so-called progressive section of society always kept quiet when Dalits face open oppression from powerful high caste people? Why is there no outcry from civil liberty activists when inhuman atrocities are committed on Dalits and when the state machinery plays the role of an active accomplice? Why are there no fact finding reports on these incidents? Why do the atrocities on the Dalits not nibble at the conscience of even the progressive analysts? Knowing that they are vulnerable, what proactive steps have these people taken to prevent them from falling prey to allurements of reactionary forces? Why do Dalit affairs have to belong to the Dalits alone? The sufferings and oppressions of the Dalits are as though taken for granted. In the case of communal conflict, the people taking cudgels for the minority community get eulogized as secularists. But in the case of caste conflicts, there is a risk of one's being derided as a casteist or condemned as an outright outcaste if one comes forward in support

of hapless Dalits. In the caste riots Dalits get beaten by the caste Hindus and in communal riots they get battered as the Hindus. In any situation they carry double the burden of an average citizen but remain unappreciated. Do these attitudes not reflect the age-old caste prejudice against the Dalits—the accusations any progressive would hate to accept? In any analysis of the Dalit behaviour, these and such other questions necessarily demand answers.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Gujarat represents an amazing degree of coexistence of tradition and modernity. Although Modi's propaganda of Gujarat as the model for development of the rest of the country is unfounded, as Gujarat still stands (2016–17) at 14th rank in terms of per capita GDP, it may be counted among the relatively advanced states with its per capita income of ₹156,691 being above the country average of ₹126,406. It is the third-most industrialized state in the country, just behind Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. At the time of the formation of the state in 1960, it was eighth in terms of industrial development, but with the focused attention on pushing industrial development in competition with Maharashtra, it overtook many states. This feat is particularly attributable to the dominant Mahajan (business class) culture of Gujarat. For centuries Gujaratis have been migrating not only to other states of India but also to other countries with a singular entrepreneurial zeal. It is this Mahajan culture that has led the state to entrepreneurship, cooperatives, industrialization and migration. The Mahajan culture provided a simple principle: '*kajiyanu mon kaluu*', which means 'conflict is always inauspicious'.⁶

Even during the times of Gandhian turbulence that subverted this principle, the Mahajan milieu remained supreme and hegemonic. Mahatma Gandhi himself represented this milieu in a certain sense in his methods of passive resistance, non-violence and advocacy of class collaboration. When the workers in rest of the country were revolting against their capitalist masters, the workers in Ahmedabad, a major centre for textile industry, were displaying exemplary cooperation with their exploiters under Majoor Mahajan Sangh (MMS), the mill workers' trade union started by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920. This Mahajan milieu got its first rude shock in the 1969 communal riots. The post-independence developmental strategies

adopted by the Congress and the policies of protective discrimination led to the growth of intermediate castes, backwards castes, sections of Scheduled Castes and Backward Classes (OBCs). This was resented by the traditional elites belonging to the upper castes. This resentment burst out in the form of Navnirman agitation (the movement for restructuring) by students against the new emerging sections of the middle class in Gujarat.⁷

In response to this upper caste student agitation, the Congress came up with its famed KHAM strategy, which totally marginalized the political aspirations of the Brahmin-Bania-Patidar trio, the traditional ruling classes in the state by the late 1970s (see Introduction). With this strategy, the Congress (I) leadership had succeeded in dislodging them from all core party positions between 1976 and 1980, so much so that there was not a single Patidar minister of cabinet rank when the Congress (I) formed the government in 1980 after sweeping the polls. This power hungry upper caste trio needed to do something to regain its lost grounds. The reservation issue, which always carried potential to galvanize the entire non-Dalit Hindu (caste Hindu) population against it, was grabbed to spark off statewide caste riots in the guise of an anti-reservation agitation in 1981.⁸

These riots were far wider in spread than even the latest genocide of the Muslims in February 2002, the Dalits having been battered in the then 18 of Gujarat's 19 districts. Dalits faced the wrath of the same Brahmin-Bania-Patidar trio again in 1985, although this time their agitation was against the hike in job quotas for the OBCs in government and educational institutions. Ironically the Dalits upheld these reservations for the OBCs under the Mandal Commission but were beaten by the OBCs at the behest of the upper castes. Soon, however, the upper caste trio realized the folly of its strategy in electoral terms—the anti-reservation stance could possibly antagonize 75 per cent of the population of the SCs, STs and OBCs, and started wooing the Dalits into the Hindu fold. While realizing the increasing unreliability of the traditional vote banks, the Congress had begun to woo the Hindu majority after the second coming of Indira Gandhi by openly communalizing the Kashmir and Punjab problems and, on its part, the BJP smartly jumped on to consolidate the entire Hindu mass on the basis of Hindutva, counterpoising it against the religious minorities. Rajiv Gandhi's political naiveté provided them a real boost by throwing up issues like Shah Bano and Ramjanmbhoomi and launching the

New Economic Policy in 1985, the reversal of the so-called 'socialist' stance of economic development that unleashed a new set of crises on people. If Jayprakash Narayan's total revolution had helped them (BJP) rise from political irrelevance to the national mainstream, it was Rajiv Gandhi's reign that catalyzed their emergence as an alternate political force. The aspiration of gaining political power, in the context of their image, however, could only be realized if they could maximize their share of the majority community and hence they began to actively attract Dalits towards them. The manifestation of this change was seen in Gujarat, in terms of the Dalit and OBC participation in the riots against Muslims in 1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath Rath Yatra against Muslims and thereafter in Advani's Rath Yatra.

In the build up of anti-Congress wave after the 1975–77 Emergency, the Congress lost power in the 1990 Assembly Polls, to the Janata Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Chimanbhai Patel became chief minister. In 1995, BJP won assembly election and Keshubhai Patel became CM but could only last for two years due to a split in the BJP led by Shankersinh Vaghela, who became CM but he could not overcome the factionalism in BJP. In the Zilla Panchayat elections in the year 2000, the BJP managed to secure 192 seats out of 717 seats in various Zilla Panchayats. This abysmal performance of the party and the loss of two assembly seats in by-elections, created intense pressure on Patel to vacate the chair for Narendra Modi as the caretaker CM on 7 October 2001. Within five months Godhra's action followed by reaction took place and in the 2002 election, the faction-stricken BJP came out with shining victory winning 127 seats in the 182-member assembly. BJP thereafter never lost an election and Modi became the longest serving chief minister of Gujarat.

DALITS IN GUJARAT

Historically, Gujarati Dalits never developed 'Dalit' consciousness in a manner that characterized the Ambedkarian movement in neighbouring Maharashtra. While in Maharashtra and elsewhere assertive Dalit movements had sprouted and were growing in the congenial political climate, the Gujarati Dalits remained under

the paternalistic influence of Mahatma Gandhi as his Harijans, as a part of Hindu community. Even after independence, save for certain pockets, this hegemony of the upper castes over the Dalit universe remained unaffected. In the wake of the countrywide turbulence during the late 1960s, and the rise of the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra, the educated Dalit youth in Gujarat were also inspired to found Dalit Panthers in Gujarat. The Panthers movement in 1970s, however, remained confined to urban areas. For the first time, the statewide 1981 riots awakened the Dalits to the ground reality and impelled them towards the Ambedkarian Dalit identity. The statewide celebrations of the birth anniversary of Dr Ambedkar that followed these riots marked this awakening. Many activists and organizations such as various Buddhist organizations, BAMCEF (Backward and Minority Communities' Employees Federation), the DS4 (Dalit Samaj Shoshit Sangharsh Samiti), the BSP, and Dalit Panthers had striven to engender Ambedkarite consciousness among Dalits but their efforts bore little fruit. The 1981-riots achieved in one shot what they could not do over many years. The backlash was so harsh and widespread that it proved a watershed moment in the Dalit consciousness.

It is significant to remember that during these riots the Muslims had sheltered Dalits at many places. The Dalits faced riot again in 1985, allegedly engineered by the BJP to cause the downfall of the government of Madhav Singh Solanki.⁹ The riot that began as caste-riot turned into Hindu-Muslim riot, that caused a death toll of 275, thousands of injuries and tens of thousands displaced.¹⁰ Yet just within one year, in 1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath Rath Yatra, the Dalits were seen enthusiastically supporting the BJP. When riots broke out all over Gujarat in 1990 during L. K. Advani's Rath Yatra, spearheaded in Gujarat by none other than Narendra Modi, the then general secretary of the state BJP, Dalits and middle class Hindus were clearly set against the Muslims. The BJP strategy of winning over Dalits, thereby consolidating broad sections of Hindus and polarizing the population along communal lines bore fruits at least in Gujarat. It is said that these riots began the spatial segregation of Muslims in all the three areas: the old walled city, the industrial mill areas and the new middle class and elite town. The subsequent riots that broke out

after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 ghettoized the city further. Muslims increasingly shifted to Muslim majority area for safety and Hindus went to Hindu areas. While this happened in case of the middle classes, the poor people from both the sides could not shift their abodes and continued to live next to each other.

The 'Dalit' consciousness created by the 1981 caste riots could not last long in the absence of any organized Dalit movement. On the contrary, the riots the Dalits suffered immediately next year sped up its decline. Therefore, when the upper caste Hindutva forces extended the hand of friendship to them, they appear to have been more than inclined to grab it. It was backed as by existential considerations: friendship with the Hindutva forces would spare them beatings and might bring in social and economic benefits from friendship with the caste Hindu. The latent aspiration of Sanskritization¹¹ does explain a part of the Dalits penchant for becoming a 'Hindu'. A Dalit broadly has two options: he or she can either reject or renounce the whole edifice of religion which sanctifies the caste system and strive for an alternate identity as Ambedkarite Dalits did or they can strive to climb, at least notionally, the social hierarchy by imitating the way of life and ritual of the dominant castes. In Gujarat, looking at its peculiar trajectory and the overall dominance of conservative forces in the political as well as social-cultural spheres, it becomes clear that the possibility of revolt or rebellion against the brahminical system in order to strive for an alternate identity was already foreclosed for the Dalits and the other oppressed sections. The only other option of Sanskritization therefore appears available for the Gujarati Dalits, which they accepted and became the Hindutva ally.

HINDUTVA THRIVES IN ECONOMIC CRISES

While during the first two decades after the formation of the Gujarat state the pace of economic development was spectacular, it engendered regional disparity. As Darshini Mahadevia observes, post-1980s industrial development in the state was extremely capital intensive¹² and could not create jobs to the desired extent. A large volume of investments took place in only a few large industries and in a small

geographic belt. Hence, as far as the common people are concerned, this economic growth had little consequence. It could not touch their lives and, as a result, the majority remain engrossed in their old social practices and ways of life. The nature of economic growth in the state generated many dichotomies. One is the dichotomy between capital intensive and other industries, the former getting all the preferred treatment during the globalization era after 1990s. Two is the dichotomy between the development corridor and the rest of the state.

The State Domestic Product (GSDP) of Gujarat showed commendable growth pattern until the mid-1990s but it suddenly fell and hovered around zero around the turn of the century. Table 14.1 presents these data on GSDP for the years from 1993–94 to 2013–14. The data reveal that the GSP performance of Gujarat during the Modi-years (October 2001 to May 2014) has been better than the previous years. But if we discount the years of political instability from 1997–98 to 2000–01, one may see the reverse picture. As a matter of fact, in the 1991 to 1998 period (before Modi took office) Gujarat was the fastest-growing of India's 14 major states. But after he took over Gujarat's growth rate slumped behind Uttarakhand (18%), a state created in 2000, and Sikkim (19.2%) which was not counted as a 'major state' in the 1991 to 1998 figures. By another measure, Gujarat's per capita GSP remained far from the lead, behind Goa, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and others. The same could be said of the unemployment rate of Gujarat (13%), which is better than the national average of 24%, but behind several other fast-growth states: Chhattisgarh (9%), Karnataka (11%), and Madhya Pradesh (12%). During his tenure as chief minister, FDI was one of Modi's targets through high-profile investment summits but even in that Gujarat lagged behind other states as per the RBI offices data: Ahmedabad registered \$9.3 billion, it was far behind Maharashtra's \$65.9 billion, New Delhi's \$38.8 billion, Chennai's \$12.6 billion, and Bangalore's \$12.1 billion. Gujarat's All-India ranking, based on FDI was fifth from April 2000 to December 2013. These were the state of the salient parameters of development that Modi flaunted for Gujarat as superlative. As seen above, the state was at best the middling one. On non-fiscal indicators such as health and overall quality of life, income inequality, both rural and urban, quality of life, infant mortality, etc. Gujarat had rather slipped under Modi (see Table 14.1).

Table 14.1. GSDP at Current and Constant Prices of Gujarat.

Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) at Current and Constant Prices of Gujarat				
{(At Current and Constant 1993–1994/2004–2005 Prices) (1993–1994 to 2013–2014)}				
			(₹ in Crore)	
Years	At Current Prices	At 1993–94/2004–05	Percent Growth Over Previous Year	
		Constant Prices	Current Prices	Constant Prices
At 1993–1994 Prices				
1993–94	49194	49194	–	–
1994–95	63516	58058	29.10	18.00
1995–96	71886	61246	13.20	5.50
1996–97	85837	69966	19.40	14.20
1997–98	91188	71442	5.90	1.50
1998–99	105305	76571	15.50	7.20
1999–00	108892	77354	3.41	1.02
2000–01	108484	75945	-0.37	–1.82
2001–02	121525	82267	12.02	8.32
2002–03 (P)	139690	88424	14.95	7.48
2003–04 (P)	168080	106394.64	20.32	10.32
2004–05 (Q)	189118	119711.694	12.52	6.34
2005–06 (Q)	226897	143625.801	19.98	10.00
At 2004–2005 Prices				
2006–07	283693	253393		
2007–08	329285	281273	16.07	11.00
2008–09	367912	300341	11.73	6.78
2009–10	431262	334127	17.22	11.25
2010–11	521519	367581	20.93	10.01
2011–12	598786	392058	14.82	6.66

(continued)

(continued)

Years	At Current Prices	(₹ in Crore)		
		At 1993–94/2004–05	Percent Growth Over Previous Year	
		Constant Prices	Current Prices	Constant Prices
2012–13 (P)	658540	416163	9.98	6.15
2013–14 (Q)	765638	452625	16.26	8.76

Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, Govt. of Gujarat (ON107) and (17126).

Note: P : provisional;

Q: quick estimates.

The magnitude of the economic decline can be realized from the growth figures for the first half of the 1990s to the latter half of the 1990s; the growth rate had actually fallen from 12 per cent to just 2.3 per cent in real terms causing corresponding decline in the living standards of the population (Table 14.2). The general economic dilapidation in Gujarat came handy for the BJP to lure away the crisis-ridden masses to its obscurantist projects by systematically constructing an identity of the Other. With no regular source of income and without any regular job, as Jan Breman observed, many could not even escape the wave of lumpenization which augured well for any kind of rioting.¹³

Table 14.2. Gross State Domestic Product by Broad Sectors: Sectoral Contributions (in percentage).

S. No.	Industry	At current prices			At 1993–94 prices	
		1993–94	1999–00	2000–01	1990–00	2000–01
1.	Primary	25.4	18.6	16.0	18.0	15.9
1.1	Agriculture	19.9	14.7	12.4	14.1	11.9
2.	Secondary	35.8	39.2	41.0	40.4	41.5
2.1	Manufacturing	28.3	32.8	33.8	33.3	34.3
3.	Tertiary	38.8	42.2	43.0	41.6	42.6
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Socio-Economic Review, Gujarat State, 2002–2003. Available at <http://www.gujaratindia.com/Useful-Info/Socio%20Economic%20Review/socio02/sdp.pdf>

Dalits being the lowest on the socio-economic scale were naturally the most affected lot. The closure of over 50 textile mills in Ahmedabad and the devastation of other small scale units under the onslaught of globalization directly hit the Dalits. As Bremen writes,

And, in this still ongoing crisis, at least one lakh workers have lost their jobs. While around the middle of the twentieth century half of the city's workforce used to earn its livelihood from employment in the composite textile enterprises dominating the industrial landscape, this percentage has now dwindled to a tiny fraction.¹⁴

The closure of the textile mills has been accompanied by the 'dramatic . . . collapse of the social infrastructure that has accompanied it. It is certainly not a coincidence that the orgy of violence that has taken place in Ahmedabad since the end of February 2002 seems to have reached its climax in ex-mill localities populated by the social segments from which a major part of this industrial workforce used to be recruited: subaltern Hindus (mainly Dalits, and OBCs) and Muslims.¹⁵ It may be easily argued that similar impoverishment of masses has taken place during this period even in other states; far more calamitous social changes had occurred in Bengal, both before and after partition but one does not see them resulting into gory communal conflicts as they happened in Gujarat. The answer to this enigma lies in understanding that social phenomena do not necessarily have a definitive causal relation with a set of factors even when they reflect strong correlations. They need certain catalytic factors to produce those phenomena. Socio-cultural patterns, hegemonic ideology, presence of certain individuals, and so on, constitute such catalytic factors which distinguish Gujarat from other states.

Generally, the Dalits who constituted unskilled or low skilled labour in factories could be easily displaced by new automating technology and social prejudices made them further vulnerable to loss of jobs. Their struggle for survival impelled them to take up some casual work that was traditionally being done by the Muslims. Thus began a sort of economic competition and clash of interest between the Dalits and the Muslims. Wherever the Dalit-Muslim clashes have occurred in Ahmedabad, this economic contradiction can be underscored easily in the change of occupational pattern that came during the last two decades.¹⁶ Jan Bremen attributes it to globalization and

the manner in which capitalism has grown in the state. The informalization of Ahmedabad's workforce following the closure of its textile mills resulted in the pauperization of the workers. Sections among these marginalized workers, mainly Dalits, are part of the Sangh Parivar's lumpen elements.¹⁷

Indeed, the impact of globalization should not be conceived in narrow terms as entailing mere job losses. The growth-centric economic development that globalization promotes invariably marginalizes people-issues as has happened in Gujarat. The economic boom in the early 1990s created alongside great disparities; while the industrialists, traders and educated middle castes benefited with this boom the farmers who had enjoyed tremendous prosperity during the green revolution years until the previous decades saw stagnation in their income, the lower classes anyway left out of the distribution net. When this boom receded, resulting in the decline in the living standards of the population as indicated by the actual decline in per capita income after 1996–97, it created fertile grounds for communal identities to flourish. Few realize that globalization with its ideological thrust on the autonomy of an individual and free market that provides unfettered space for these autonomous individuals to compete is intrinsically supportive of Social Darwinism, which manifests into fundamentalism, communalism and Fascism. It is not only in India, where the growth of the Hindutva forces can be directly correlated with the advance of globalization, but also all over the world that fundamentalism of some kind is seen on rise. From the 1990s, the right-wing populist parties have come up in most democracies in Europe.¹⁸ The atomized individual is basically an insecure creature in the market place, having lost the protective cover of the organizations like trade unions, readily accepted community in Hindutva when offered by the Sangh Parivar. Dalits also could not be an exception to this process.¹⁹

OTHER FACTORS IN DALIT PARTICIPATION

The specificity of the historical backdrop and the economic crisis engendered by growth-centric economic development strategies coupled with the presence of an unscrupulous dispensation governing the state largely provides a broad framework to understand this gruesome carnage and Dalit participation on the side of perpetrators. Many commentators have delineated additional factors that according to them have caused this sorry phenomenon. Some have noted that

the Dalits were lured with money, liquor and political prospects and were used like terrorists by the Hindutva forces.²⁰ While this aspect cannot be denied in any mass mobilization, as for instance, in any elections, it is improbable that these material incentives alone can impel masses into ferocious marauding and mass killing. These factors can certainly supplement the existing sociological make up but cannot be the cause of it. Similar things are said even for tribals that the Sangh Parivar provided them money and liquor to incite them to riot. But to consider that money and liquor alone have impelled tribals to commit inhuman acts will amount to ignoring the longstanding indoctrination that the Sangh Parivar has been doing in the tribal belts for many decades. As this systematic ideological indoctrination of tribals is the root cause for tribal participation, the psycho-sociological make up of Dalits over a period preceding the carnage should be identified as the root cause for their participation.²¹

An altogether different type of reaction to the entire gory episode is provided by Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, a Dalit-Bahujan scholar. While acknowledging that a gap does exist between the Dalits and Muslims in many parts of the state he indirectly blames the Muslim elite for this state of affairs and asks them to make special efforts to bridge the gap. In his article 'Dalit, OBC and Muslim relations',²² He has put forward this position in no uncertain terms. According to him, 'The Muslim intelligentsia failed to establish a rapport with the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the OBCs at the ground level.' He adds,

The Muslim intelligentsia must also be held responsible for showing indifference to the issues of caste and untouchability . . . In the case of Islam there is not only no investigative tradition, there is no social service tradition with a sense of social interaction before someone embraces Islam. Muslim intellectuals must learn from Christian missionaries and work among Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs so that a relationship of trust is established. All oppressed must learn to work for each other's liberation and build social bondages among them. That is the best way to prevent another Gujarat.

The absence of a relationship of trust between the Dalits and Muslims, as noted by Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, may appear plausible but then what relationship of trust could be assumed between the Dalits and

high caste Hindus that drive their Hindutva agenda? The fact remains that the people who participated on both sides historically had a relationship but owing to growing economic crises coupled with the machinations of vested interests, they were impelled to play an internecine game for the benefit of the communal forces.

Breman provides a richer explanation to the breakdown of the cohesive relationship transcending religions and castes through the Gandhian institution of Majoor Mahajan Sangh. He notes the catalytic role played by MMS in bringing about working class solidarity in past decades, albeit under a paternalistic shadow of the mill owners, when it had the unquestioned support of Hindu and Muslim workers alike. The MMS promoted a number of welfare practices that created meeting points within the mill localities 'which facilitated interaction between people of different identities' at 'sports clubs, reading rooms, classes for adult education . . . day nurseries, primary health centres'. Thus—and it is of central importance—'The "other" was not at a distance but highly visible and touchable as a workmate, a neighbour or a friend with whom close contact was maintained both within and outside the mill. This mesh of social cohesion that transcended the separate niches of caste and religion broke down once the MMS started to fade away.'²³

A valuable insight is offered into the process of Dalit activists crossing over to the BJP by P. K. Valera, a former bureaucrat and Dalit activist in Gujarat. He explains, 'In the Congress, the hierarchy is so rigid that it is difficult to make it to the top in a few years. As against this, in the BJP the journey to the top is rather quick. The party has given some carrots to the Dalit leaders by including them as their lower- and middle-level cadre.'²⁴ As opposed to Congress, the Sangh Parivar with a plethora of organizations provides vast employment opportunity. For a typical educated but frustrated Dalit youth, the politics of Hindutva provides some kind of political identity and a strange sense of camaraderie.²⁵ He sees it as political recognition, even if the benefits may be paltry; it proves an ideal bet. Therefore, when there was a churning in the various strata of oppressed sections, the absence of a strong democratic movement coupled with the near total absence of a transformatory social cultural movement facilitated the communal forces in making inroads in the Dalit-tribal psyches. This political carrot associated with the BJP certainly explains many ambitious Dalit activists jumping onto the BJP bandwagon. The relative vacuum in the BJP for the non-upper caste people has indeed been an attractive force for the opportunist elements from the

communities like Dalits and Muslims. This trend can be discerned all over the country, though it is expectedly more pronounced in Gujarat on account of the weak ideological anchors to Gujarati Dalits. Many young Dalit leaders like state social welfare minister Fakirbhai Vaghela have made a good political fortune in a short time.²⁶

SOME VITAL ISSUES

While it became known to all that the tribals and Dalits have played as foot soldiers of the Hindutva brigade in Gujarat, there have been many instances of Dalits providing protection to Muslims. As in earlier times, many Dalits had rushed out to protect Muslims but like one Anand Parmar, a 60-year-old activist, who tried to dissuade a Dalit mob from rioting in Ahmedabad, received violence in return from the Hindutva goons: stones were pelted at his office and he was threatened with dire consequences, and thus was thwarted in the process.²⁷ Similarly, it is equally true that people of all castes and classes took part in the looting of the Muslim shops and property according to their class interests. While the ordinary people looted the necessities, the elites plundered the shops with fashion goods and designer wares. Unlike earlier riots where there is a risk of life in indulging in looting, and therefore only the poor and desperate people could venture out, there was no such risk involved in the planned carnage in Gujarat. It thus emboldened even the upper caste women to venture out and loot the Muslim shops in their locations. While the tribal crowds looting the shops and houses belonging to Muslims was eloquently written on and showed on the television, there was no such media celebration when the high caste gentlemen and ladies from well-to-do homes looted the up-scale Muslim stores in the posh localities of Ahmedabad in broad daylight. The Gujarat carnage has thus also exposed the caste-class bias of our institutions.

The sighs of lament over Dalit participation in the Muslim carnage drowned the facts about the losses the Dalits themselves suffered during these gory times. It is now clear that the massacre of Muslims that took place in Gujarat with state connivance, as all fact finding reports highlight, had also a little Dalit blood accompanying it. The Dalits lost 108 lives in Gujarat; 38 alone in the city of Ahmedabad, which is a significant percentage of the official death toll of Muslims. The heart rending devastations that visited Muslims during this macabre campaign of the communalists was also shared by the Dalits albeit

in a smaller quantity. The experience of agony; the tears and tribulations; the pangs of pain that overwhelmed the Muslims; all these besieged the Dalit community too. Even the camps for victims from both the communities resounded with the similarity of their pathetic condition. Despite the seemingly 'connected' people frequenting these 'Hindu' camps, their condition was not a shade better than the Muslim camps that were run by the community volunteers. The condition of Dalits in these camps thus clearly mirrored the material reality that Dalits, irrespective of what label they are given, cannot be the part of the Hindutva privileges. Whatever their contradictions with their Muslim neighbourhood they could not really escape their predicament. The Gujarat violence clearly highlighted the truth that communities do not make much difference in people's suffering; their classes do.²⁸

IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

The question of Dalits performing as foot soldiers of Hindutva is simplistically explained by the 'Harijan' consciousness or the low level of 'Ambedkarian' consciousness of Gujarati Dalits, implying thereby that such phenomenon will not be possible elsewhere. However, the extent of the favourable ripples caused by the utterly mischievous slogan of 'Bhimshakti + Shivshakti = Deshbhakti', given by the then working president of the Shiv Sena, the sworn enemy of Ambedkarite Dalits, in Maharashtra, the centre of Ambedkarism, has shaken the confidence of analysts. It broadly reveals the deteriorating state of the 'Dalit' consciousness everywhere which can be attributable to the absence of a 'deology-driven' Dalit movement that is rooted in the livelihood issues of Dalit masses. Given the inherent divisive nature of castes, whether such a Dalit movement could be based on them is the core question that Dalits need to answer. While swearing by Ambedkar, paradoxically the Dalits are getting increasingly vehement in asserting their caste identity as though it is their asset. They are oblivious of the fact that hankering on castes is actually against Ambedkar's mantra of annihilation of caste.

To woo Dalits was a strategic need of the Sangh Parivar to strengthen us versus the other—the Muslims and the Christians. Its history itself testifies that there was no love lost between the Sangh Parivar and Ambedkar or his followers until 1973. They have been always at ideological loggerheads. It is only after the hardliner Golwalkar's death and ascension of Deoras as its supremo, the strategic

shift towards coopting both, Ambedkar and Ambedkarite Dalits, took place. However, after the BJP's victory in 2014 elections, it succeeded in fusing myriad castes into their 'Hindu' identity using every poisonous glue in its arsenal. It bought over Dalit leaders, but the Dalit masses were not as easy. As Bal Thackeray in Maharashtra openly differentiated between Dalits and Ambedkarite Dalits, and excluded latter, the BJP decided to make them into its another 'Other'. The first being the Muslims, the terrorists, the Ambedkarite Dalits may be stamped as the 'Maoists'. Every radical whisper of the Dalits against their growing deprivation and repression could now be nipped in the bud labelling them Maoists, and destroying them with their draconian laws.

Notwithstanding myriad camouflages created around Hindutva, as a cultural essence of the people treating this landmass as their punya bhumi or pitru bhumi or cultural nationalism or the way of life as the Supreme Court defined it, truly, it remains as the ideology of the supremacist Brahminism, its resurgence with vengeance to regain its lost kingdom for a millennium. Dalits constitutes its foundational scaffolding, its classical hierarchy having been dissolved under the onslaught of capitalist modernity. Brahminism seeks to recreate its poisonous paradigm where inequality would reign supreme, where liberty would be metered as per the caste-class status and fraternity would be profanity.

With increasing revivalist fervour, the contradictions between the Dalits and the non-Dalits are bound to increase. The atrocities are but the manifestation of these contradictions, and are reflected in statistics during Modi's rule in Gujarat as shown in Table 14.3.

Table 14.3. Cases Registered under Crime against SCs during 2001–14.

Year/Major Atrocities	Murder	Rape	Grievous hurt	Total under PoA
2001	17	15	284	356
2002	34	17	340	332
2003	12	23	305	320
2004	11	19	247	411
2005	10	20	270	434
2006	20	19	255	359
2007	17	30	283	328

(continued)

(continued)

Year/Major Atrocities	Murder	Rape	Grievous hurt	Total under PoA
2008	13	30	240	402
2009	20	28	241	400
2010	15	34	291	220
2011	12	45	279	192
2012	23	45	236	217
2013	29	75	273	212
2014	35	46	60	1075

Source: Table 4.2. Crime in India, Additional Tables: National Crime Research Bureau, Ministry of Home Affairs. <http://ncrb.gov.in/>

The interrelationship and the interlinkages between Hindutva and the neoliberal economic policies peddled under imperialist globalization need also to be unearthed. In fact, the neoliberalism that provides the ideological basis for imperialist globalization has given rise to fundamentalist and fascist forces, the world over through atomization of the individual and autonomizing his/her enterprise in the 'market' sans any moral precepts. Globalization policies of curbing public expenditure, privatization and marketization of everything has been directly responsible for galloping unemployment and consequent lumpenization of youth. It is not incidental that the rise of Hindutva, even of the Congress variety risen after the second coming of Indira Gandhi through Narasimha Rao, has been closely correlated to the policies of liberalization, privatization and globalization. The BJP which started with two-MPs in the Parliament in 1984 gets catapulted to power with 182 MPs in 1999 during this precise period.

Lastly, it needs to be understood that Hindutva is the fascist ideology of the ruling class and therefore it is futile to expect any alternative within the mainstream politics. Fascism always uses the prevailing parliamentary democratic framework to secure power. But once it is done, scraps it. Even during its use Fascism does not follow the parliamentary democratic norms to mobilize votes; it relies on fighting on the street to create mass frenzy. Rath Yatras, Mandir movement and gau rakshaks, lynch mobs are but examples of it. Bereft of this understanding, the parliamentary parties can never match the

aggressive strategies of Fascism and rather get dragged along its trail. This is precisely what has happened to all parties during the last five years. The resistance to Fascism has to inevitably happen on streets. These street battles may orient and shape up parliamentary processes but vice versa is not possible.

Notes

- ¹ Conventional language seems to fail to convey proper meaning in case of the Sangh Parivar. Ordinarily, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee represented a moderate element in the Sangh Parivar. But, when one recalls his defence of raking up Ram Mandir issue for communal polarization saying, 'because they started Mandal, we started Kamandal' (cited Jamanadas, K. *Safronization, Hinduization or Brahminization*, <http://www.ambedkar.org/jamanadas/Hinduization.htm>) or saying if Godhra happens again, Gujarat also would be repeated, one gets baffled as to what 'moderate' means.
- ² One of the earliest communal texts that may be identified as the product of this colonial engineering was the celebrated novel *Anandmath* written in Bengali by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who happened to be the first Indian to be directly appointed to the post of Deputy Magistrate in the year 1858 by the then British Lt. Governor of Bengal immediately in the aftermath of 1857. His *Anandmath* is an anti-British and anti-Muslim text. See Islam, Shamsul, Why Does Hindutva Hate Muslims and Christians so Violently? <http://www.insaf.net/central/insaf-old/sa2.html>, accessed May 30, 2004.
- ³ See R. C. Majumdar, *Three Phases of India's Struggle for Freedom* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1961), p. 14.
- ⁴ Marzia Cassolari, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s: Archival Evidence', 18 April 2004. Also, Shamsul Islam, Marketing Fascism As Hindutva, <http://www.secularindia.com/44new.htm> also available at <http://indianterrorism.bravepages.com/fascism%20as%20hindutva.htm>; accessed April 18, 2004; Also 'Hindutva's Fascist Heritage' Document, *Communalism Combat*, March 2000, <http://www.sabrang.com/cc/comold/mar00/document.htm>.
- ⁵ The RSS activists equate Phule and Ambedkar's ideas with the Renaissance in Hindu religion, which they claim was brought about by people like Swami Vivekananda and Aurobindo, and so on. The RSS claims that Ambedkar was a 'Reformer of Hindu religion'. As a matter of fact, Ramesh

Patange, in his 'Dr Hedgewar aani Dr Ambedkar' gives an editorial in '*Bahishkrut Bharat*', 21 Dec 1928 as a whole appendix. In that editorial Dr Ambedkar had narrated the ill effects of the caste system and observed that if you have to avoid the destruction of Hindu religion, you must get rid of the caste system. <http://www.ambedkar.org>, Saffronization, Hinduization or Brahminization Dr K. Jamanadas.

- ⁶ Generally it would mean that Gujarati culture is non-violent. Indeed it is the general impression about Gandhi's Gujarat. However, the facts are quite contrary. While the Mahajan culture prefers peace from the business viewpoint, its other facet reveals how violent it is even within its homestead. For instance, the 2001 Census reveals that the latest sex ratio in urban Gujarat is 879 females per 1000 males, the lowest figure in the last hundred years. It is evident that in the private sphere, violence is visible within one's own family in the form of foeticide and infanticide. If one considers the sex ratio in the population category of 0–6 years here too the state of Gujarat has fared badly as this ratio has decreased from 928 in 1991 to 878 in 2001. Also, see Rakesh Gupta, 'Gujarat Pogrom and Issues at Stake' http://asianaffairs.com/june2002/gujrat_pogrom.htm.
- ⁷ See Fernando Franco, Jyotsna Macwan and Suguna Ramanathan, *Journeys to Freedom: Dalit Narratives* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004).
- ⁸ Anand Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits for the Bania-Brahmin Crimes in Gujarat', [countercurrents.org](http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-gujarat.htm), <http://www.countercurrents.org/Dalit-gujarat.htm>, accessed 5 April 2004.
- ⁹ Asghar Ali Engineer (2003). *The Gujarat Carnage* (New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2003): 12–13.
- ¹⁰ Howard Spodek, 'From Gandhi to Violence: Ahmedabad's 1985 Riots in Historical Perspective', *Modern Asian Studies* 23, 4 (2008): 765–795.
- ¹¹ M. N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1966).
- ¹² Some of the examples of direct employment generation by highly capital-intensive new industries of the state can be cited: In RIL (Reliance Industries Ltd.) located at Hazira Industrial Area (HIA) ₹3.6 crores of investment was to generate one job. In the same industrial area, in Essar Gujarat, ₹2.1 crores was to generate 1 job. In the IPCL plant at Dahej, an investment of ₹2.26 crores, in GACL (Dahej) ₹2.18 crores and Modern Petrochemicals (Vagra taluka) ₹1.77 crores were to generate one direct job. Adani chemicals in Mundra, Kachchh has an investment of ₹4.48 crores per employment. See Darshini Mahadevia, 'Gujarat Development Experience and Success of Hindutva.' In *Lessons from Gujarat*, edited by Sandeep Pendse (Mumbai: Vikas Adhyan Kendra, 2003): 55–73.

- ¹³ Jan Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism', *EPW* (20 April 2002), available at <http://www.epw.org.in/showArticles.php?root=2002&leaf=04&filename=4360&filetype=html> (accessed on 18 April 2004).
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits'.
- ¹⁷ Dionne Bunsha, 'The Modi Road Show', *Frontline*, 19, 21 (12–25 Oct 2002); (<http://www.flonnet.com/fl1921/stories/20021025006900900.htm>)
- ¹⁸ Pippa Norris, *Radical Right: Voters and Parties in the Electoral Market*. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 3). The United States, more starkly exemplified under Donald Trump, is also a part of this global phenomenon; Jeffrey Kaplan and Leonard Weinberg, *The Emergence of a Euro-American Radical Right* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998: 1–2).
- ¹⁹ Teltumbde, 'Damning the Dalits'.
- ²⁰ Davindra Kumar cites Achyut Yagnik, political scientist and coordinator of the Ahmedabad-based Centre for Social Knowledge and Action: 'The Sangh has systematically made inroads among Dalits and tribals and is using them as instruments of Hindutva. This is being achieved with extended government patronage. A systematic Hindutva campaign is on in the tribal region. The VHP and the Bajrang Dal have registered their presence at the village level.' He also cites one social activist (not identified by him) as saying, 'Money (₹300 to ₹500), liquor and promises of power (insignificant positions in RSS, VHP or Bajrang Dal shakhas) were used to lure Dalit youths.' He also cites Udit Raj, who initiated a campaign of mass mobilization of Dalits and Muslims together with the Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind in the state in the aftermath of riots, points out: 'Dalits were being lured by money, liquor and political prospects and were used like jihadis by the Hindutva forces.' He further writes, 'Once co-opted, the Dalit recruits became the new foot soldiers. And they were assured of full state protection and legal assistance should cases be filed against them. The VHP has reportedly signed on a battery of 100 lawyers to fight all post-Godhra riot-related cases.' See Davinder Kumar, 'Poisoned Edge: The Sangh Exploits Dalit and Tribal Frustration to Recruit Soldiers for Hindutva's "War"', *Outlook*, 24 June 2002, at url: http://cac.ektaonline.org/updates/2002_06_23_archive.htm (Last accessed on April 18, 2004).
- ²¹ While the lure of money is significant, the polarization of tribals and Dalits was a plan set into motion by the Sangh well over a decade ago. It has

been active for long in the tribal belts through sister organizations like the Vanavasi Seva Sangh. These outfits seem to have succeeded in indoctrinating the tribals with the view that they are indeed Hindus and that Muslims are their enemies. Says Achyut Yagnik, political scientist and coordinator of the Ahmedabad-based Centre for Social Knowledge and Action.

²² Kancha Ilaiah Shepherd, 'Dalit, OBC and Muslim relations', *The Hindu*, 29 May 2002; also *Buffalo Nationalism: A Critique of Spiritual Fascism* (Kolkata: Samya, 2004).

²³ Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism'.

²⁴ Kumar, 'Poisoned Edge'.

²⁵ Sophia Khan, an activist of the Vikas Adhyayan Kendra in Ahmedabad says, 'For an unemployed, frustrated Dailt youth, being a member of a political outfit, and one which is in power, is some kind of political identity. He sees it as political recognition, even if the benefits may be paltry.' In Kumar, 'Poisoned Edge.'

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kumar, 'Poisoned Edge'.

²⁸ Ibid.

The Sangh Parivar Initiatives in the Tribal Belt of Wayanad in Kerala

T. K. Ramachandran and P. T. John

The degree of success achieved by the fascist project to enlist the Dalits and Adivasis as the foot soldiers in the Gujarat genocide has given them the courage to try the same tactics in the tribal belt of Wayanad where they had but marginal influence in the past. The initial phase of the operation climaxed with a Vanavasi conclave at Valliyurkkavu temple attended by none less than the sarsanghsanchalak, of the RSS, Sudarshan. The choice of the venue was both ironic and significant. Ironic because Valliyurkkavu has the dubious distinction of having been once a major slave market where the upper caste landlords literally bought the hapless Adivasis into bondage in the feudal era. The faith in the deity that the illiterate Adivasis had was cleverly employed by the overlords to make them accept supinely the rigours of slavery. That the descendants of the hated feudal oppressors could organize such a fairly well attended meeting is a pointer to the extent retrogressive political positions are becoming popular even in Kerala, which had been famed as the proud bastion of progressive thought and secular mores. It was also significant in that it revealed in graphic detail the diabolic communal project that the Sangh Parivar is trying to foist upon the unsuspecting masses of Wayanad. The organizational and ideological aspects of this initiative require of us in depth study and analysis. The following is intended only as an introductory study.

SANSKRITIZATION OF THE TRIBALS

A key feature of the fascist project in contemporary India is the construction of a pan-Hindu identity both as a vote bank and as a captive recruiting ground for the Saffron brigade. It goes without saying

that this project is fraught with internal contradictions given the die-hard brahminical bias of the lynchpin outfit within the Sangh Parivar, namely, the RSS. The Dalits and the Adivasis, who have suffered inhuman oppression and brutalization under the varna system, are bound to be wary of the new identity proffered to them by the votaries of the Hindutva however attractive its packaging may be. But the lessons of the Gujarat carnage perforce make it imperative for us to keep clear of facile optimism and complacency. It is important to remember that Gujarat was a major theatre of the anti-Mandal agitation and this did not prevent at least some sections of the Dalits and Tribals from falling under the influence of the vicious and virulent anti-minority campaign unleashed by the fascists. What is even more disquieting is the fact that most of the tactics employed in the hate campaign had been honed in the days of the anti-Mandal agitation and had been tried on the lower castes who were the targets of upper caste fury.

The Adivasi population of Wayanad is composed of four major subcastes: Kurichiyas, Kurumas, Paniyas, and Adiyas and is stratified in terms of both economic means and social status. At the top we have the landowning sections, Kurichiyas and Kurumas, and at the bottom we have the landless Adiyas and Paniyas. Well up to the 1990s, as in most other parts of Kerala, the Sangh Parivar had little in terms of mass base, though the RSS had a well-oiled, state-wide, organizational set up. (Presently it is estimated that Kerala is second only to Uttar Pradesh in terms of the number of Shakhas.) Among the Adivasis of Wayanad their influence had been confined to certain individuals and some stray pockets. And even this was limited to the comparatively affluent upper stratum of the Kurichiyas and Kurumas. The populace consisting of the Adiyas, Paniyas and others was totally outside their sphere of influence.

However, in the 1990s, utilizing to the hilt their newly won governmental clout and the enormous money power derived therefrom, the Sangh Parivar has put into operation a number of schemes to woo the tribals of Wayanad. The careful planning and meticulous execution that has gone into these initiatives is an object lesson for secular and democratic forces whose efforts to combat the fascists are still mostly confined to scholarly symposia and occasional shows of strength through bandhs and dharnas. What is significant about the strategies employed by the fascists in the post-Babri Masjid demolition phase is that its focus is no longer the political sphere, but the more

inchoate realm of the 'civil society'. It is the everyday life of the masses that they are trying to manipulate and aggrandize. Symbols, myths, rituals, religious observances, temple festivals are all being subtly used by them to further the communal agenda. This graphic route to Fascism where by the entire range of discourses in the society comes to be controlled by the saffron brigade requires serious consideration. The journals, the newspapers, the visual media and the multifarious institutions in the public sphere have all been infiltrated by their cadre so thoroughly that their apparent lack of strength in electoral terms is really deceptive. Over the years the fascists have put together a number of front organizations ranging from balagokulams to Temple Protection Committees, and Medical Missions to meditation centres, where its evil ideology is smouldering unperceived even by the most discerning eye. The entire gamut of practices within the public sphere from school textbooks to food habits, from theatre to the Kumbh Mela are impinged upon by diktat of the fascist ideologues.

The manner in which they have sought to bring under their sway the tribal places of worship in Wayanad is, perhaps, typical. In general, the belief systems of the tribals are so heterogeneous and discrete that one would be hard put to call it a religion in the modern sense of the term. Rather they are practices and observances of groups of people who share a close and symbiotic relationship with nature; and these practices and beliefs tend to vary depending upon their mode of production and the nuanced nature of its interface with their habitat and environment. The deities they worship are natural forces like rivers or figures like the Mariamman, who is supposed to afford protection against dreaded epidemics like smallpox or yet again vegetation gods. These objects of cult worship, some of them having their origin in hoary antiquity have little relation to the gods of the Hindu pantheon. The places of worship also have scarcely any resemblance to the elaborate temple architecture of South India—indeed they are more like shrines nestling under a tree in the *ooru* or by the river side, lacking any walled structure surrounding it and often even a roof. Moreover, the mode of worship was purely the internal matter of the tribe with the tribal chief doubling as the priest.

The *modus operandi* adopted by the Sangh Parivar activists to penetrate into this clan-bound preserve will become clear if we study the turn of events in a typical Adivasi *ooru* situated in the banks of the river Kabani, Pakkom. The major deity of this *ooru* is Pakkathappan, and his shrine is called Pakkom Kottai (literally the fort of Pakkom).

Pakkathappan (the god of Pakkom) is purely a local, autochthonous, cult figure, who is believed to protect the people of Pakkom. It all started with the creation of a samithy for the renovation of Pakkom Kottai in which some non-tribals were also accommodated, on the basis of the fiction that it was once a temple that had been destroyed by Tippu Sultan. In course of time its name was changed to Kshetra Samrakshana Samithy, an all Kerala outfit floated in the 1960s by the Sangh Parivar. Soon a 'swami' to perform the puja in the shrine made his appearance at Pakkom. It is not accidental that before he took up this priestly vocation he had been working as the office secretary of the VHP in Khozhikode. It is reliably learnt that the VHP has a computerized database on educated, destitute youth belonging to the temple castes who could be deputed as priests in the Adivasi shrines. They are on the pay roll of the VHP and can augment their income from the *dakshina* (cash offerings) offered by the worshippers. Again, once he was installed as the priest at Pakkom, there was a well-orchestrated whisper campaign about his alleged supernatural powers. Now an aura of divinity surrounded this figure, in the all too credulous eyes of the Adivasis, and the *theertham* (holy water) he dispensed was believed to have healing powers, and to ward off misfortune. It was only necessary to get him to perform a puja. He had, in effect, surreptitiously usurped the position of pre-eminence once enjoyed by the tribal chief and had some say in all matters concerning the tribe, both spiritual and mundane. What was remarkable was that figures like the swami of Pakkom have found their way to even obscure Adivasi shrines of Wayanad. One is reminded of the campaign waged by the RSS in the early 1990s to win over the Valmiki community of Uttar Pradesh and the efforts that are on to gain control of the jarams of Sufi saints in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka.

Dalits in the Hindutva Laboratory of Gujarat

Martin Macwan

In this essay, I provide an experiential perspective of the Dalit situation as it developed and deteriorated over the last four decades, much of which is dominated by the resurgent Hindutva forces during the last two decades. It is based on my first-hand experience of rural Gujarat.

It was in 1977 when I had for the first time accompanied my professors to help them with an economic survey in a Dalit settlement in Gujarati villages. Three years later, I lived in these villages for three days and nights each week for several years. Although I was not completely innocent about caste discrimination, I was stunned by the degree of its prevalence and normality it attained in village settings. The dominant castes thought that it was their right to sexually exploit Dalit women. Dalits were forced to offer free labour at times and be given one-seventh of the minimum wage. Dalit men, irrespective of whether they were educated or not, could not walk outside their area without covering their heads. Even government employees were not excepted. And all this was not sensed as an oddity by Dalits even after three decades of independence.

Dalits believed that it was their destiny; brought upon by their evil deeds in the previous birth and only God could solve their problems. It was the force of the ideological indoctrination that sustained the caste system that could be seen in most parts of rural Gujarat. The Dalit community had collectively internalized the dictum of karma (the system of rebirth into a caste as per one's past karma), and dharma (to perform the caste duties faithfully in order to be born in the higher caste in next birth). It was a dictum that produced and perpetuated hopelessness. This was communicated through the fables that reinforced their slavish beliefs through generations. It was reflected in the names they gave to their children: *Kachro* (waste), *Punjo* (waste),

Ghelo (stupid), *Gando* (mad), *Laghro* (in disarray), *Dhudo* (dusted), *Pocho* (weak), *Melo* (dirty). There was no way to dispel their beliefs. They were unaware of the movement their counterparts built in neighbouring Maharashtra, of Babasaheb Ambedkar, who had become an icon all over the country.

THE RISE OF HINDUTVA

Gujarat's has always been an ultra-conservative society but still the Hindutva forces could not make much headway in the state which was politically dominated by the Congress right through 1990, save for a brief spell of little under three years by the Janata Party, riding on a nationwide wave of anger against the Emergency. After the Congress split in 1969, the Congress (I) under the leadership of Indira Gandhi, forged a KHAM (Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims) formula, and continued to capture power in the state. KHAM eroded the political clout of the Brahmins, Baniyas and Patidars.¹

The backlash from Brahmins, Baniyas and Patidars took the form of an anti-reservation agitation in 1981. The failure to get two upper-caste boys who had poor academic records admission in a post-graduate medical course was used as a trigger to launch the tirade against reservations to Dalits. It led to riots in which Dalits were targeted in 18 of the Gujarat's 19 districts. At least 16 people were killed and several injured as a result of police firings. The characteristic footprint of the Hindutva forces was clear insofar as the agitators thought it fit to anoint Gandhi's statue in Ahmedabad with a *tilak* of blood before mounting their attack on Dalit bastis. The widespread beatings Dalits received in these riots opened their eyes to harsh reality, which manifested in large scale celebrations of Ambedkar jayanti in the following April. The second anti-reservation riots were in 1985. As Achyut Yagnik noted, 'The issue this time was the increase in job quotas of the non-Dalit socially and educationally backward castes; yet the victims were all Dalits'.²

In the intervening years the RSS, the fountainhead of the Hindutva forces, had tweaked their approach towards Dalits. It not only silently included Ambedkar among its pantheon of *pratahsmaraniya* (ones to be revered in the morning) but also launched a special vehicle—Samajik Samarasata Manch—to woo Dalits (see also Introduction, this volume). They made substantial inroads within three years which showed up in Dalits enthusiastically participating in the Jagannath Rath Yatra in 1986. When riots broke out during the procession of

Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath Rath Yatra, the BJP managed to garner the support of the OBCs and the Dalits against the Muslims. This marked a shift in its support base. When riots broke out all over Gujarat in 1990 during L. K. Advani's Rath Yatra, Dalits were again found on the side of middle-class Hindus against Muslims. Incidentally, the man who spearheaded the Rath Yatra campaign in Gujarat was Narendra Modi, who was then the general secretary of the state BJP, made use of the political turmoil to catapult himself to the chief-ministership in 2002.

Although the Congress managed to hold on to power, the political instability that set in with these intrigues of the Hindutva forces meant that power slipped into the hands of the BJP, and stabilized with Narendra Modi becoming the chief minister of the state. Soon after taking over the power, a mysterious incident of a bogie of Sabarmati Express, in which the Kar Sevaks were returning from Ayodhya where they had gone in connection with building a Ram temple at the site of the demolished Babri mosque, was burnt with its 59 inmates near Godhra railway station. Before even understanding what caused the fire, it was attributed to the Muslims by Modi (see Essay 2). What followed was an orgy of raping, killing, and burning of the Muslims. While the mobs were led by the Hindutva functionaries, some tribals and Dalits also were found participating on the side of the Hindus. The upper caste media, however, projected as though this heinous act was executed by the tribals and the Dalits, reinforcing the social prejudice against them as uncivilized inhuman brutes. The fact that people from all castes and classes had participating in the rioting, including the elite, who looted upmarket shopping centres, was thus dampened. It is true that after the closure of textile mills in Ahmadabad Dalits and Muslims (who comprise the poorest sections of the working class), often neighbours, sharing insecurity of livelihood were pitted against each other. But the impression of Dalits and Muslims as warring factions was deliberately spread to benefit Hindutva design. With the Dalit movement in disarray, the Sangh Parivar could exploit the frustration of the Dalit youth to mobilize them as its foot soldiers.

THE UNTOUCHABILITY SURVEY

Navsarjan, the Gujarat-based NGO working for Dalit rights since 1989, conducted a large survey for assessing observance of Untouchability in Gujarat in collaboration with the Robert F. Kennedy Center

for Justice and Human Rights (RFK Center).³ The study covered 1589 villages randomly selected and 98,000 respondents, categorized by sex, age, religion and sub-caste. The study mapped forms of discrimination, vertically and horizontally; Untouchability between Dalits and non-Dalits and Untouchability practised among various sub-castes of Dalits. The only earlier study on the subject was by I. P. Desai,⁴ which was revisited by Ghanshyam Shah later.⁵ The Untouchability survey produced an immense amount of data. There were 98 variables representing Untouchability practices observed by non-Dalits and 99 variables representing those prevailing within Dalit community itself. These data provided a descriptive analysis of the presence or pervasiveness of Untouchability. Using these variables, it was possible to assess the prevalence of Untouchability by counting the villages that experienced each of the practices. These variables representing different Untouchability practices necessarily exhibit some underlying structure. The very idea of Untouchability itself suggests that these practices are related to one another. Identifying these inter-relationships between different practices could provide a deeper understanding of Untouchability. The analysis was done using cumulative scaling model or the Mokken Scale that uses a series of binary responses: yes or no.

The report of this analysis, 'Understanding Untouchability' was published in 2010 by Navsarjan and was the second in the twenty-first century, the first being the ActionAid survey that was conducted by ActionAid in 2001–02, in 565 villages of 12 states (Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu). It had showed that Untouchability was practised in all these states to a significant extent. The Navsarjan Survey had far more granularity and was more intense although it was confined to only Gujarat. The state was being projected as the model of development by the then chief minister, Modi, who made very effective use of this 'Gobbelesque' lie to capture power at the centre. The report, expectedly evoked a harsh reaction from the government, which went to the extent of commissioning a counter study at a huge cost to the public exchequer. This study, covering only five villages, was conducted by Ahmedabad-based CEPT University and was published as 'Impact of Caste Discrimination and Distinctions on Equal Opportunities: A Study of Gujarat'. It found fault with the methodology of the Navsarjan Survey. Interestingly the government shared this report with the media

but refused to table it in the Assembly. When it became available, it was widely criticized by scholars for its faulty methodology and poor quality.⁶ Acceptance of reality is said to be the first step towards solution. The government chose to get into its usual denial mode, lest it punctured its much flaunted Gujarat model of development.

A SPATE OF ATROCITIES

The spectacular victory of BJP under Modi in 2014 was significantly due to the 66 (out of total 131) reserved seats it won. However, soon after taking over power, it began showing its ideological impulses which resulted in a surge in atrocity numbers. The anti-Dalit bias of the state under BJP was palpable which was compounded by the emboldenment of the conservative elements in civil society to commit those atrocities. Gujarat under Narendra Modi earned an epithet of being the laboratory of Hindu Rashtra. The atrocities on Dalits witnessed a 72 per cent increase during the last 15 years (2003–18) of which 11 years (2003–14) were under Modi as the chief minister of the state. The sheer number of atrocities has gone up from 897 in 2003 to 1545 in 2018. If one compared the crime rate (atrocities per lakh of population) for incidents in which Dalits who were grievously hurt, Gujarat ranks highest at 1, second only to Bihar which has a crime rate of 1.3. For the atrocities under the riot category it is second only to Maharashtra for 2015. Data show that Gujarat recorded 73 instances of riots under the Atrocities Act, which had 95 victims making the state's crime rate for the category 1.8, second only to Maharashtra's 2 with 270 riot cases and 365 victims. The all India rate for the category is 0.7. Violence against Dalit women has also seen a sharp rise in Gujarat. Cases of rape against Dalits and tribal women have increased seven times from 14 cases of rapes registered in 2001 to 104 cases registered in 2018.

There may have been an element of development of Ambedkarite consciousness among Dalits of Gujarat post-1981, which is both cause as well effect of the atrocities. Also, the aggravating agrarian crisis in the countryside after adoption of neoliberal reforms may also be seen being directly correlated to the rising atrocities. The farming upper castes to which most perpetrators of atrocities belong grudge the perceived rise of Dalits, which they attribute to the state patronage in the form of reservations. However, the particular spurt in the numbers of atrocities after the advent of Hindutva regimes should not be ignored.

Conservative elements are emboldened to commit atrocities on Dalits. There is a contribution of the judicial system too to this high crime rate. The conviction rate for atrocity cases in Gujarat is less than 3 per cent, which encourage perpetrators. Although Dalits are barely 7 per cent of the population in the state they are the most vocal and organized community. The Dalit youth are relatively educated, some of them being employed, and own motor vehicles to ride, are articulate on social media, fearless in expressing their views and hence, have been the subject of a great deal of jealousy. This is a reason for growing violence on Dalits. While the life of Dalits and their perception of both the self and others have changed, the non-Dalit population continue to perceive Dalits as they were earlier.

The number of rapes in Gujarat in 2002 were 19, which had gone up to 74 in 2014 when Modi left to take over as prime minister. Three Dalit youth were shot dead by the police in Thangadh in September 2012. Modi did not think it necessary to visit the families or express sorrow over the incident. No action has been taken in the case. His disdain for these matters is revealed by the fact that during his chief ministership from 2002 to 2014, the State Vigilance Committee met only six times between 2002 and 2014 though the act states that the committee should meet once in six months to review cases. The BJP government has not shown any seriousness in tackling violence against Dalits and tribals and has instead hankered upon *samrasata* (harmony) in society, which was their alternative to equality and social justice as enshrined in the Constitution. So, events like washing the feet of Dalits by Modi are just petty ploys to lure Dalits into voting for him. His theatrical interest in Babasaheb Ambedkar also may be seen motivated by the similar purpose.

His book, *Karmayog* published by the Gujarat state-owned Gujarat State Petroleum Corporation in 2007, was basically a collection of his speeches to high-profile IAS officials like his *Man ki Baat* in his present avatar of prime minister, is revealing. He termed the manual scavenging done by Dalits as their caste vocation as the 'experience in spirituality'. He wrote: I do not believe that they have been doing this job just to sustain their livelihood. Had this been so, they would not have continued with this type of job generation after generation.... At some point of time, somebody must have got the enlightenment that it is their ('Valmiki's') duty to work for the happiness of the entire society and that they have to do this job bestowed upon them by Gods and that this job of cleaning up should continue as an internal spiritual

activity for centuries. This should have continued generation after generation. It is impossible to believe that their ancestors did not have the choice of adopting any other work or business.'

There was no significant reaction from Dalits in the state, save for some Ambedkarite Dalits and many human rights activists. However, when a news item carried these remarks in *The Times of India* in November 2007 which was later translated in Tamil newspapers, it provoked a massive reaction among Dalits in Tamil Nadu. They staged protests and burnt Modi's effigies in different parts of the state. Sensing trouble, the entire edition of 5000 copies of the book was withdrawn. Two years later, addressing 9000-odd safaikarmacharis, he likened the safaikarmacharis' job of cleaning up others' shit to that of a temple priest. He told them: 'A priest cleans a temple every day before prayers, you also clean the city like a temple. You and the temple priest work alike.'

With massive backing from global capital, which was convinced that he could serve their interest best of all, he propagandized his Gujarat model. Projecting himself as someone who was identified with development, he mesmerized masses who massively voted him to power. He basically replicated this Gujarat model in the country with his autocratic style and brought the country to virtual collapse economically as well as socially and politically. He tried to efface most markers of earlier regime and destroyed institutions, which were the backbone of democracy under his saffronizing drive. Like most other statistics that revealed the state of the country, the atrocity statistics published by the National Crime Research Bureau faithfully since 1951 was also mutilated. He almost decimated electoral opposition, reducing it to follow him in his Hindutva. No wonder, the BJP went on winning most state elections that followed and even won the 2019 elections with a more stunning victory than in 2014. The BJP bagged a total of 79 reserved seats in the Lok Sabha, 13 more than its tally in 2014.

Dalits witnessed in 2014, when the BJP secured most SC reserved seats, a spurt in atrocities. It is interesting that with political reservation, no social group other than Dalits has clear representation of 16.5 per cent in the Lok Sabha and yet, both Untouchability and caste violence has grown persistently. It exposes the vile design of the ruling classes to structurally neutralize the threat of the independent Dalit voice in the Poona Pact of 1932. The reservations in joint electorates works to create stooges among Dalits who would barter away the Dalit interests for their selfish ends and continues unabated. In May 2019, in five days, Gujarat witnessed five reported cases where the Dalit wedding

processions with the groom riding a horse were prevented on the public roads. Again in May 2019, a 19-year-old son of an RTI activist was murdered in Manekwada village of Rajkot, a year after his father was hacked to death by the same accused family. In Jalila village of Botad district, the Dalit Deputy Sarpanch was hacked to death in daylight after repeated representations before the SP and DG of police failed to secure police protection for him. The deceased was the leader who had stood up fearlessly against the high handedness of the Kathi Darbars in the village. The deceased had filed four complaints against the accused under the Atrocity Act but he did not survive to register the fifth one.

The Dalit population in Gujarat is concentrated in Saurashtra region apart from 17.65 per cent in the urban areas of Ahmedabad. Saurashtra is characterized by its feudal character. In 1980s, 75 per cent of domestic violence cases against women in Gujarat, including burning women alive for dowry, were found here. In 1980s the Government of Gujarat had declared 11 of the 25 Gujarat districts as 'Dalit-Atrocity-Sensitive'. The list covered all the districts of the region. For more than a decade the region witnessed large scale conflicts for dominance between two dominant groups; the Kshatriyas who wielded the social power and the Patel community who rose from being landless Shudra tenants to becoming the most economically powerful community owing to land reforms. Lately, these conflicts have been confined, thanks to the changing political equations and, hence, the attention, especially of the Kshatriyas, has moved towards Dalits, who were silently progressing.

UNA: DESPAIR AND A NEW HOPE

Post-2014, with their electoral clout, Hindutva forces launched their onslaughts on minorities, particularly targeting Muslims (their declared other) and Dalits (their undeclared object of hatred) in the form of many campaigns like Ghar Wapsi, Love Jihad, Bahu Lao, Beti Bachao (bring in daughter-in-law and save your daughter) and intensifying their cow protection drive, duly enabled by the legislations of the various BJP state governments. The latter catalyzed lumpen gangs under protection of the local BJP-big wigs who began to extort money from the poor Muslim cattle farmers; or they lynched them to death. According to a Reuters report, a total of 63 cow vigilante attacks had occurred in India between 2010 and mid-2017. In these attacks between

2010 and June 2017, '28 Indians, 24 of them Muslims, were killed and 124 injured'.⁷ Human Rights Watch has reported that there has been a surge in cow vigilante violence since 2015.⁸ This cow campaign had also severally hit Dalits, who were next only to Muslims in being connected with abattoirs and dead cow related vocations. During the previous NDA rule under A. B. Vajpayee, perhaps Dalits were the first victims of this lynching by the Hindutva mob. On 15 October 2002, India witnessed one of the most gruesome atrocities carried out in the name of caste and 'cow protection' by the dominant castes in Dulina, a village in the Jhajjar district of Haryana. Five Dalits engaged in trading cattle skins were brutally done to death by a mob in the premises of a police station right before officials—three sub-divisional magistrates, the deputy superintendent of police, the station head officer and about 60 to 70 police personnel—who had been sent out there after an emergency call. They just watched passively as the Dalits were being killed. The incident shocked the world with its brutality and brazen indifference of the administration. However, one of the leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Giriraj Kishore, went on to justify these killings saying, 'Cow is considered more sacred than human beings in the Puranas'. The Banswal Commission that was set up to conduct an enquiry held three administrative officials *prima facie* guilty of not handling the situation correctly [*sic*]. On 9 August 2010, a district court awarded life imprisonment to seven convicts out of 30 accused in the case having found guilty of murder, rioting, trespassing, and other crimes. Interestingly, the case was not tried under the Prevention of Atrocity Act. Today all of them are out on bail and no one knows whatever happened to the police and those three officials whom Banswal Commission had held guilty.

After nearly 14 years, on 11 July 2016, four members of a Dalit family—Balu Survaiya, his wife Kunvar, his sons Vasram and Ramesh—their relatives Ashok and Bechar and a neighbour Devarshi Banu, in a nondescript village, Mota Samadhiyala, in Gir Somnath district of Gujarat were flogged by the so-called gaurakshaks suspecting them of killing a cow. As a matter of fact, they were skinning a dead cow, reportedly killed by Gir lions. They had brought it from the nearby village for skinning, which was their caste vocation. Later, they tied Ramesh, Vasram, Ashok and Bechar to their car, stripped, and marched them half-naked for about 25 km to Una. There the people in mob gathered took turns beating them with sticks, and iron pipes in full public view. Such was the temerity of the assaulters that they

recorded their act on video and posted it on social media, presumably to inspire others. Unfortunately for them, the video went viral, enraging Dalits all over the country.

On 12 July 2016, a huge protest rally was organized in Chandkheda area in Ahmedabad by various Dalit leaders in which more than 2000 Dalits participated and subsequently blocked the state highway. 13 July 2016, hundreds of Dalits held a protest rally against the incident and later occupied Trikon Baug, the main square in Una, for an hour. On 21 July, the issue was discussed in Rajya Sabha. The protests spread across Saurashtra region. Twelve Dalits youths attempted suicide in protest across the region and one of them died. Twelve people including seven police personnel were injured in the protest and one of them died. Jignesh Mevani, an activist, who mobilized people to protest against this heinous act of the Hindutva goons, led the protest march called 'Dalit Asmita Yatra' from Ahmedabad to Una which culminated on 15 August 2016 which was attended by some 20,000 Dalits and other progressive youths from all over the country. They took a vow to give up their traditional jobs of removing cow carcasses and demanded five-acres of land for the upliftment of Dalits. At least 10 Dalits were injured and several vehicles were torched when a mob attacked them returning from Una. The government had filed 74 cases against the protesters (see also Introduction).

The Gujarat Crime Investigation Department (CID) arrested 43 people in September 2016 including two minors and four police officers. Later 35 of them including the prime accused were released on bail and one arrested police officer died of jaundice in September 2017 on the ground that the trial would take long time. These people are not only influencing the witnesses to turn hostile but also openly taking them to court in their car. On 25 April 2018, one of them again attacked two of the victims while returning from shopping in Una in preparation for their conversion to Buddhism. In the heat of the agitation over the Una incident, the then Gujarat chief minister Anandiben Patel had visited Mota Samadhiyala and promised that the victims would be given Below Poverty Line cards, housing plots, five acre agricultural land and government jobs. However, in 2018, in response to MLA Mevani's question in the Assembly, the government reneged saying that there was no record of the promises. What remains of Una is that the victims find themselves rendered incapable of physical labour and suffer mental trauma.

JUDICIAL PREJUDICES

Judges, after all, are a part of the society and reflect its prejudices in their judgements. Looking at its cities superficially, Gujarat may appear modern but in its core it remains extremely feudal. Its feudal ethos is pervasively seen in every aspect of life vis-à-vis Dalits, tribals, Muslims and Christians. A study of 400 judgements delivered by the special courts in 16 districts of Gujarat since 1 April 1995 for a decade which was conducted by the Ahmedabad-based Council for Social Justice (CSJ) revealed a shocking pattern behind the collapse of cases filed under the Atrocities Act: utterly negligent police investigation at both the higher and lower levels, distinctly hostile role played by the public prosecutors and judges using technical lapse by the state to deny justice to the atrocity victims. There is a provision in the Act to punish the government functionary who has wilfully contributed to weaken the case. But judges never used it to punish delinquent police officers and rather chose to punish the victim for their lapse. The study revealed that in over 95 per cent of the cases, acquittals had resulted due to technical lapses by the investigation and prosecution, and in the remaining 5 per cent, court directives were flouted by the government.

The negligent manner in which the government treats the issues of atrocities is revealed by the response of Narendra Modi when he was the chief minister of Gujarat. On 16 April 2004, a question was asked to him in the Gujarat Legislative Assembly: 'Honorable chief minister may oblige us to tell, is it true that the DSP is responsible for the appointment of an officer not below the rank of DySP as investigating officer in the offenses under Atrocities Act? Modi shocked everyone with his faux pass saying: 'No, but there is a provision under rule 7 (1) of SC/ST act, 1995 to appoint officers not above the rank of DySP to inquire into all cases booked under atrocities act. It is not the responsibility of DSP.'

According to the data released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), as many as 68 per cent of the inmates in 1,387 jails across the country are under-trials. The percentage of under-trials who spend more than six months in prison has gone up from 62 per cent in 2013 to 65 per cent in 2014. In Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Gujarat, 75 per cent of under-trials spend this duration in prisons, giving these states the worst record. According to the 2011 Census, Muslims constitute 14.2 per cent, Scheduled Castes (SC) 16.6 per cent and Scheduled Tribes (ST) 8.6 per cent of India's population, taking

the total representation by all three groups combined to 39 per cent. However, their share of convicts is 51.3 per cent and of undertrials is 53.6 per cent.⁹ These data clearly reveal the anti-Dalit bias in our justice delivery system comprising mainly police and judiciary.

For Gujarat, these figures are much worse. The NCRB data in the report on Prison Statistics of India, 2013 tell us that while Dalits are 7.01 per cent in Gujarat, they represent 32.9 per cent in the total convicts in the state. Similarly share of Dalits in under-trials of Gujarat is 23.4 per cent. Put simply, the data suggest that the proportion of Dalits among Gujarat's convicts is nearly 4.9 times higher than their share in the state's population, with its under-trial numbers up to 3.5 times higher. This disparity has long been cited by activists as proof of widespread discrimination against vulnerable communities. According to the report, as of December 2013, there are 3,808 convicts in Gujarat. Out of these, 1,251 were members of the SCs or Dalits, 624 of the STs or Adivasis, 1,360 Other Backward Classes, and 573 'Others'. Out of a total of 7,604 under-trials, 1,778 are SCs, 1,405 STs, 2,718 OBCs and 1,703 'Others'. Interestingly, a comparison with other states suggests that the gap between the proportion of Dalit prisoners and their overall numbers in Gujarat is higher than any other part of India. Assam is a distant second in the list, with SCs comprising 18.2 per cent of all convicts and 17.7 per cent of under-trials against an overall population share of 7.2 per cent. The report also puts the number of Muslim convicts (23.3 per cent) and under-trials (23.6 per cent) at a proportion much higher than their share in the population, which stands at 9.1 per cent. Muslims make up for 886 of the state's total 3,808 convicts, and 1,796 of its 7,604 under-trials. The disparity between their proportion among Gujarat's prisoners and overall population is quite high, 2.6 times, even though it is lower than the gap in Odisha, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Uttarakhand. A comparison with the national average would suggest that, while Dalits and Muslims constitute a higher proportion of convicts and under-trials vis-à-vis their population, the all-India difference is not as wide as Gujarat's. At the national level, the data shows that while Muslims constitute around 13.4 per cent of India's population, they make up for 19 per cent of prison inmates: 17.1 per cent of all convicts and 21 per cent of undertrials. The situation with regard to SCs is not very different. As against their population strength of 16.2 per cent, SCs constitute 22.5 per cent of convicts and 21.3 per cent of undertrials.

In March 2018, the Supreme Court delivered a surprising judgement that punctured the very intent of the Atrocity Act observing that the Act was being misused by the SC/ST to to exact 'vengeance'. It directed that public servants could only be arrested with the written permission of their appointing authority. In the case of private employees, the senior superintendent of police concerned would exercise this authority. Already, this Act, famed as the only Act with teeth when it was enacted, is rendered ineffectual by the police. Instead of taking cognizance of this reality, the Supreme Court proactively saw its gross misuse and mended it to be meaningless. It is interesting that of the five judgements the Supreme Court referred to while issuing directions in relation to the Atrocity Act, three are from Gujarat High Court. How legitimate could it be that the Supreme Court would rely 60 per cent on Gujarat which houses merely 2.33 per cent of India's Dalit population to justify their observations? Worse, of the three such referred observations, two were related to a single judge, one, when he was a lawyer and the second when he became the judge.

Recently Navsarjan Trust (Volunteer) filed an RTI application before the office of the Gujarat chief minister to provide details of false cases filed by Dalits in the state since the enactment of the 'Atrocity Act'; 1989 until 2018. In reply to the query 164 police stations informed that they had no system to collect such information. The DySP in charge of the Atrocity Act of six districts informed that there were no such false cases in their districts. Police from seven districts did not submit any information. In all, the police provided information on 215 'false complaints' in a span of 29 years. A detailed investigation revealed that the so-called false cases pertained to Summary B and C where the police have not been able to find the accused or the witnesses/evidence! Cannot such observations by the Supreme Court in absence of credible evidence be construed as deep rooted prejudice?

NEW TRENDS IN DISCRIMINATION

Casteism in Gujarat is deeply entrenched in society but it was not seen in as blatant a form as today. It may seem unbelievable but National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had to issue a notice to the Gujarat Government over the existence of two separate anganwadis in village Hajipur of Patan District, one exclusively for the Dalit children and the other for the non-Dalit children. According to sociologist Ghanshyam Shah, Gujarat has always seen caste divisions.

However, such brazen discrimination in primary schools is a more recent phenomenon. He observed, 'The lower castes are now ghettoised in government schools as the upper castes prefer private schools. Thus the entire premise of the anganwadi structure and the mid-day meal scheme strengthening the social fabric by bringing together students from all communities has failed in the state.' In another village in the same district, Navsarjan came across Dalit children walking a kilometre in the sun to a school whereas there was a school right near their homes but it would not admit them.

A glaring example of this discrimination was captured in Gujarat's Surendranagar District by Bipin Solanki, Navsarjan's community correspondent for the area. Panva Primary School, a government-run school in Panva village of the Surendranagar District would openly discriminate between the Thakor, a 'high caste' and Dalit children. During the mid-day meal, the Dalit children would be seated away from Thakor children. 'We were not even allowed to serve food to our fellow classmates because we belonged to the Harijan caste. If we requested the teachers, they would scold us,' a 10-year old boy tells Bipin. Bipin was appalled by the consequences to children's psyche and decided to expose it by videoing it. Armed with this video as proof, Bipin mobilised the School Management Committee (SMC), mid-day meal authorities, and Dalit organizations of the region and demanded the abominable practice be immediately stopped. It was also circulated on WhatsApp and Facebook, which also exerted pressure on the school. The growing trend of discrimination in schools is keeping Dalit children away from schools. The Oxfam India Report (2014) by Centre for Equity Studies observes how exclusionary and discriminatory practices exist in Indian schools and as a result of these practices, 75 per cent of the more than six million children currently out of school in India belong to Dalits (32.4 per cent), Muslims (25.7 per cent) or Adivasis (16.6 per cent).¹⁰

It is definitely an impact of hegemonic Hindutva that caste identities are getting stronger and making annihilation of caste more difficult. With this growing caste consciousness, hitherto unheard of identities and symbols are being used to emphasize one's caste superiority. For instance, moustache stickers became the insignia of the Darbars, a caste claiming royal descent, and is pasted on their vehicles. In a village of Ahmedabad District, the Dalit locality was assaulted just because a Dalit youth there had pasted the moustache-sticker onto his motorcycle. In the wake of the ferment created by the Una incident,

in many villages, Dalit youths boycotted traditional village community meals on the occasions like weddings and other socio-religious events. Dalits were invited for community meals but were seated and served separately. The defiance of this tradition by the Dalit youths is taken as an affront by the non-Dalit youth. Several incidents in Gujarat over growing a moustache, or pasting moustache-stickers, wearing pointed shoes, gold chain or even good clothes by Dalits are being challenged by the non-Dalit youths, invariably with some amount of violence.

Most Dalit atrocities are rooted in the Dalit struggle for land ownership. While Saurashtra state witnessed the most successful land reforms immediately after independence which immensely benefited Patels, the land reforms were not implemented in other parts of Gujarat, attached to the Greater Bombay state at that time. These reforms could have benefited Dalits and tribal communities, many of whom were the real tillers of the land, either as tenants or cultivators of the government land. Instead of giving them land, the government took away their land under various alibi. In many villages even the burial lands of Dalits have been encroached upon by the powerful communities. In villages in Vadodara district there have been incidents when Dalits were coerced into giving up community land for alleged educational purposes in lieu of 20 kg. of coarse grain.

In a similar case an eight-acre plot of agricultural land in Dudkha village, claimed to be gifted to forefathers of Ramabhai Chamar and his widowed neighbour Hemaben Vankar by the former king of the region, was taken away by the government. They struggled to get it back since 2009. At last they managed to collect the prescribed amount and deposited it with the government to get its possession in 2013 but without any result. Bhanubhai Vankar, a retired village revenue official, had voluntarily engaged in organizing Dalits in local area over the land rights. When Dalits failed to secure their legal ownership over the community land they had possession over many years, even after paying the sum fixed by the collector in furtherance of ownership title, Bhanubhai had threatened self-immolation but without any impact on the insensitive administration. Eventually, Bhanubhai had to carry out his vow and immolated himself in the office compound of the collector. Bhanubhai succumbed to his burns during treatment. As Dalits refused to accept his body after the postmortem, the government was forced to order all district collectors to clear cases of land titles of Dalits wherever they were pending for many years.

Bhanubhai's immolation helped Dalits to free many of their lands off these encumbrances. Social tension in the event where the dominant castes have to vacate their encroachments in favour of Dalits or other landless seems inevitable.

Post-2014, the government has systematically targeted certain individuals and NGOs who have been critical of it. Navsarjan, set up in 1989, based on the earnings of its founders, has been working among Dalits on various issues. The need for broad-based community organization and strategic use of law to counter the violence were both the programmes and directions of the organization. Since the past three decades the organization has become prominent for its work: Initiation of the national campaign against manual scavenging, extensive mapping of the practices of Untouchability, setting up of the legal cells in many districts to help victims of caste and gender violence across caste and religion, undertaking a campaign to denounce Untouchability and discrimination prevalent among Dalits along sub-caste lines, organizing agricultural labourers across caste for minimum wages, setting up the Dalit Shakti Kendra to train Dalit and poor youths to ensure they do not fall back to caste-based occupations, and so on. It trained over 10,000 youths with 56.5 per cent women and 82.5 per cent labouring classes. It also helped set up number of institutes with similar objectives, community libraries equipped with progressive literature that can help children do away with caste and gender prejudices, and so on. In December 2016; the government revoked FCRA (Foreign Contribution Registration) Act registration of Navsarjan. While Navsarjan was least bothered about the FCRA registration; what irked Dalits in Gujarat the most, however, are the reasons given by the government for revocation of the registration: 'activities detrimental to national interest'. Unfortunately for the government, it has not been able to substantiate the charges it levelled. The state cannot bear the distortion of its image as a 'Model State' and is continuously challenged by glaring inequalities based on caste prejudices.

Notes

¹ Dinsha Bunsha, *Frontline* 19, 10 (11–24 May 2002).

² Achyut Yagnik, 'The Pathology of Gujarat'. <http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513/513percent20achyutpercent20yagnik.htm>. accessed 18 July 2019.

- ³ 'Understanding Untouchability: A Comprehensive Study of the Practices of and Conditions in 1589 Villages' (Washington, DC: RFK Center for Justice and Human Rights, 2010).
- ⁴ I. P. Desai, *Untouchability in Rural Gujarat* (Mumbai: Popular Prakashan, 1976).
- ⁵ Ghanshyam Shah, *Untouchability in Rural India* (New Delhi: SAGE, 2006).
- ⁶ Rajiv Shah, 'Responses to Govt-Sponsored Denial of Navsarjan's Untouchability Study', <https://navsarjantrust.org/2014/01/23/responses-to-govt-sponsored-denial-of-navsarjans-untouchability-study> accessed on 23 July 2019.
- ⁷ 'Protests Held across India after Attacks against Muslims'. *Reuters*, 28 June 2017. Retrieved 29 June 2017.
- ⁸ 'Cow Protection' Spurs Vigilante Violence, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/27/india-cow-protection-spurs-vigilante-violence> accessed 18 July 2019.
- ⁹ Muslims' share of convicts is 17.1 per cent and of under-trials is 21 per cent. The shares of SCs among convicts and undertrials are 22.5 and 21.3 per cent respectively and that of STs are 11.7 and 11.3 per cent respectively. 'Prison Statistics India 2013', National Crime Research Bureau, available at <http://ncrb.gov.in/PSI-2013/Full/PSI-2013.pdf>. 5. Accessed on 23 July 2019.
- ¹⁰ Oxfam India, When schools continue to exclude, can education reduce caste discrimination in India? <https://www.oxfamindia.org/featured-stories/when-schools-continue-exclude-can-education-reduce-caste-discrimination-india>. Accessed on 28 September 2019; Arif Rasheed, 'Development and Exclusion: Dalits in "Vibrant Gujarat"', *Contemporary Voice of Dalit* 10(1) 48–58, 2018 SAGE Publications. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2455328X17744624>. Accessed on 28 September 2019.

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