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Mapping Dalit Politics in Contemporary India:
A Study of UP and AP from an Ambedkarite Perspective

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
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For

Sharmila Sreekumar (Sharmi)
Shashikantha Koudoor (Sasi)
Vijay Kumar Boratti (Boranna)
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Sridhar Modugu (Komati mava)
Dilip Menon,
Sasheej Hegde and
Shamla Medhar (Shammy)

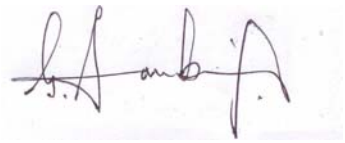
But for whose support, affection and love I am not what I am today

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Declaration

I declare that all material presented in this thesis is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person(s).



Sambaiah Gundimeda
January 2013

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Abstract……

Dalits who are placed at the bottom of the Brahmanical social order, have been the victims of social discrimination, economic exploitation and political oppression for several centuries. Recognising their problem as partly a political problem, the Dalits have taken to active politics during the end of colonial India and made a strong claim for political power. They demanded political representation ever since representative politics was introduced in India back in 1909. Despite the torturous setbacks under the Congress system in post-Independence India, the Dalits, by the early 1990s, had succeeded in carving out a space for themselves in India's caste-based political landscape.

Despite the similarity in the unjust socio-economic and political conditions of the Dalits, and Dalit mobilisations all over India against the injustices meted out to them by the caste-Hindu society, Dalit trajectories of political power have varied across time and region. Recognising the regional variations in the trajectories of Dalit politics, both in colonial and post-colonial India, my thesis analyses the evolution of Dalit politics in two states, i.e., Uttar Pradesh (UP) in Northern India and Andhra Pradesh (AP) in Southern India. It challenges the conventional North-South contrast, which suggests that while politics in northern India for much of the twentieth century was organised around the Hindu-Muslim axis, in southern India it was organised around caste lines. It also suggests that while the lower castes in northern India have come to be influenced by the conservative ideology of Gandhi and his Congress, the Dravidian ideology set the tone and content of lower caste politics in South India, and it is this ideology that resulted in their political empowerment.

Such claims, however, do not explain the present political power in the hands of the lower castes of the northern region and why Dalits in Southern India continue to be subservient to the domination of leadership of the upper castes. The divergent outcomes of Dalit politics, this thesis argues, are due to the ideological underpinnings through which their politics have come to be shaped and practised in these states. The socio-economic conditions of the Dalits in these states also contribute, to an extent, towards those divergences. Beyond the analysis of regional divergences, this thesis also attempts to analyse the impact of Dalit assertions upon the upper caste-based political system as well as upon the hierarchical social system. It argues that by deploying caste in their mobilisations, as well as caste-based distribution of, including demands for intra-Dalit, representative seats in the political arena, the Dalits are not only challenging the political domination of the upper castes, but also attempting to challenge the hierarchical nature of the Brahmanical social order in ways that go beyond upper caste ameliorative action for Dalits as well as other lower caste assertions (eg. OBC).

This thesis makes two principal arguments. First, it challenges the dominant understanding of the North-South contrast, of the South being more advanced than the North in terms of lower caste assertion. Through a detailed analysis of Dalit politics in UP and AP from the late 19th century to the present, I show that Dalit politics in the North has been ahead of the South, particularly in terms of challenging the dominance of the upper castes in the political arena. Second, the thesis argues that Dalit politics has been ideologically distinct both from upper caste activism on behalf of downtrodden castes, as well as from the politics of other lower castes such as OBCs, in seeking to transform the Brahmanical social order. These arguments develop Dr Ambedkar's pioneering theses on the importance of political power and the annihilation of caste for Dalits. The evolution of Dalit politics in UP and AP is analysed in its historical, sociological and ideological aspects.

This thesis is broadly divided into two main sections, while the first section examines Dalit politics in UP, the second section focuses on AP. On the basis of their trajectories, this thesis recognises three stages in Dalit politics. In the first stage which was set in colonial India, Dalit politics in UP were radicalised by the ideologies of Swami Acchutaananda and Ambedkar. But in AP the conservative nature of Gandhi and his Congress Party led to co-optation and ultimately domestication of the Dalit leadership. In the second stage, which is set in post-Independence India, while the Dalit politics in UP grows out of the colonial period to

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revolve around the idea of seizing political power, in AP they continued to revolve around the notion of self-respect without any attention to the idea of political power for the Dalits. And in the final stage, while the notion of 'democratisation' determines the nature of Dalit politics in UP; the idea of 'classification' of Dalit reservations had become the main content of Dalit politics in AP.

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Glossary of Terms…….

Achhut	---- Outcaste or Untouchable
Ad Dharm (Adi Dharm)	---- the original religion
Adi	---- original
Adi-Dravida	---- the original people among the Dravidians of South India, used as self-identification by some of the Dalits in Tamilnadu
Adi-Karnataka (Kannada)	---- the original inhabitants of Karnataka, used as self-identification by some of the Dalits in that state
Adivasi	---- aboriginal tribe
Andhra Kesari	---- lit. 'lion of Andhra', name given to the legendary Tanguturi Prakasam, leader of a Congress Party faction and founder of the Praja Party
Anicuts	---- irrigation system
Anna	---- elder brother
Arrack	---- distilled liquor
Babasaheb	---- honorific term devised for B. R. Ambedkar
Backward Castes	---- the Shudra castes, which are immediately above the Dalits in the ritual hierarchy
Bahujan	---- lit., mean 'majority', this is the term brought into the Indian political lexicon and popularised by the Bahujan Samaj Party
Beedi	---- traditional Indian lead cigarette
Bhakti	---- a medieval and later revivalist movement of Hindu worship that stressed devotion rather than learning
Bhangi	---- sweeper caste within the Dalit category
Bhumihar	---- landowning caste in Northern India
Brahmin	---- The caste of highest rank in the four-fold *varna* order
Brahminwadi	---- derogatory term used by the followers of Kanshi Ram and Mayawati to identify attitudes or behaviour claimed to embody Brahmanical prejudice against Dalits
Chamar	---- One of the Dalit castes in northern and western India with a

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traditional occupation connected to leather work

Chappal ---- leather sandals

Crore ---- Ten million

Dalari ---- broker or middleman

Dalit ---- a Marathi word for 'Untouchables', sometimes used for oppressed in general, but now used to identify the SCs

Dalit Maha Sabha ---- a socio-political organization of the Dalits in AP

Desam ---- Land, nation

Deshmukh ---- revenue collector turned village landlord

Dharma ---- duty/religion/law

Dharna ---- sit-in as a form of protest

Dhobi ---- caste of washer-folk, Dalits in northern and western India

Diwali ---- Hindu New Year celebrated by the lighting of lamps and associated rituals

Dora ---- Landlord

Gadi ---- residence of landlord

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Garibi Hatao ---- lit. Banish poverty. It was Indira Gandhi's election slogan in 1971

Gherao ---- a form of protest in which workers prevent employees leaving a place of work until demands are met

Goonda ---- goon; thug

Gram Panchayat ---- village *Panchayat;* the third tier of the *Panchayat raj* system

Gurukul ---- Arya Samaj monastery

Harijan ---- People of god, used to identify Dalits by Gandhi and his Followers

Harijan Sevak Sangh ---- Welfare organization established by Gandhi to persuade caste Hindus to abolish Untouchability

Hartal ---- Closure of shops or other facilities as a form of protest

Holeya ---- One of the developed Dalit castes in Karnataka

Inam ---- Land grant made by the State in lieu of free services rendered

Jagirdar ---- holder of land grand given for services rendered to the *Nizam*

Jagirdari System ---- a type of land revenue system in Mughal India and later in the *Nizam's* Hyderabad State, in which the jagirdar was technically

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the holder of an assignment of revenue

Jajmani ---- system of reciprocity of services and goods by different castes

Jatav ---- a segment of Chamars located in western UP

Jati ---- One of constituents of 'caste', also used for nation

Kabir panth ---- Sect that follows the teachings of the *bhakta* Kabir

Kamma ---- a dominant peasant caste in AP

Karma ---- a tenet of mainstream Hindu philosophy whereby one's deeds/condition (including caste) will determine lives yet-to-be lived;

Karnam ---- village officer in-charge of land records in AP

Kayastha ---- One of the upper castes in northern India, it is highly educated caste

Khatik ---- one of the Dalit castes in northern India; they are shepherds as well as butchers

Kisan ---- cultivator

Koiri ---- One of the peasant castes in northern region

Kshamaseema ---- lit. stalking ground of famines

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Kshatriya ---- the second highest caste within the four-fold *varna* order, their traditional occupation was to rule

Kulak ---- Rich peasant

Kullarh ---- disposable earthenware pot

Kurmi ---- peasant caste in UP and Bihar

Lakh ---- One hundred thousand

Lassi ---- butter milk

Lathi ---- a long heavy wooden stick used as a weapon by India police

Lingayat ---- One of the dominant (peasant) castes in Karnataka

Lok Sabha ---- lower house of Parliament

Madiga ---- the most deprived Dalit caste in AP and Karnataka

Mahanadu ---- The annual conference of the TDP

Mahatma ---- lit. great soul, a term of honour for M. K. Gandhi

Mala ---- One of the developed castes among the Dalits in AP

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Mali ---- peasant caste in northern and western India

Mandal ---- association or society; also the restructured middle-tier of the *Panchayat Raj* system

Mandal praja parishad ---- the middle-tier of the Panchayat Raj system in AP

Mang ---- a deprived Dalit caste in Maharashtra

Mantra ---- repetition of words of prayer

Manusmriti ---- the laws according to Manu

Manuwadi ---- derogatory term used by the members of the Bahujan Samaj Party to identify behaviour claimed to embody upper caste prejudice against Dalits and other lower castes

Mela ---- celebration, festival or gathering

Mazhabi Sikh ---- sweeper caste within the Dalit category but converted to Sikhism

Mehtar ---- another word for *Bhangi*

Munsif ---- village headmen in Andhra region

Musahar ---- the third largest (after Chamar and Dusadh) Dalit castes in Bihar, they are one of deprived castes within the Dalit category

Nadars ---- once Untouchable caste in Tamilnadu, but now it is kept in the Backward castes list

Namashudras ---- large Dalit caste in Bengal

Nirguna bhakti ---- the more radical branch of *bhakti*

Nizam ---- the ruler of the Hyderabad state

Other Backward Castes (OBCs) ---- socially and educationally deprived castes among the upper Shudras to whom the Constitution of India sanctioned reservation facilities

Paleru ---- Farm servant

Palle ---- village or rural locality

Panch ---- a committee of five elders

Panchama ---- Sanskrit term suggesting that the Dalits are in the 'fifth' category of the *varna* order

Panchayat ---- village or caste council (*panch* means five, hence lit., council if five

Panchayat Samithi ---- the middle-tier of the pre-Telugu Desam Party *Panchayat Raj* system; in the place of the *Panchayat Samithis* a number of

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	smaller units called *mandals* were created by the TDP government in AP in the mid-1980s
Panchayati raj	---- system of rural local government with three ascending tiers, viz., *gram Panchayat, Mandal* or *Panchayat Samithi* and *Zilla Parishad*
Pandit	---- a Brahmin scholar
Pasi	---- One of the Dalit castes in Bihar, traditionally they are brewers
Paswan	---- variant of Dusadh
Patel	---- dominated landlord caste of Gujarat
Patwari	----- junior revenue official
Pettamdar	---- the dominant caste/landlord
Pettamdari	---- economic and social dominance
Pradhan	---- head of panchayat or council
Pulaya	---- One of the Dalit castes in Kerala
Raedasi Sikh	---- Chamars of Punjab who converted to Sikhism
Rajbhanshi	---- One of the Dalit castes in Bengal
Rajya Sabha	---- the upper house of the Indian Parliament
Rasta rook	---- road blockade- a form of protest
Reddy	---- One of the dominant castes in AP
Reddy-raj	---- Rule by Reddis, a term used to describe the Congress rule in AP from the 1960s to early 1980s
Ryot	---- cultivator
Scheduled Castes	---- the official name for the Dalits
Shudras	---- the lowest of the four categories of the *varna* order, their traditional occupation being to 'serve' in a wide variety of manual tasks
Suguna bhakti	---- the less radical stream of *bhakti*
Samaj	---- Association
Sangham	---- Association
Sant	---- Hindu saint
Sarpanch	---- head of *Panchayat*
Satyagraha	---- a particular form of non-violent struggle that Gandhi developed

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Sufi	---- devotional cults of Islam
Sweepers	----- occupational term for a number of Dalit castes whose traditional job is to sweep public spaces and collect nightsoil and garbage
Taluq	---- Sub-division of a district
Tehsildar	---- revenue official
Telugu	---- the official language of the state of Andhra Pradesh
Toddy	---- country liquor distilled from coconut trees
Twice-born	---- the first three categories of the *varna* order whose males are entitled to wear the 'sacred thread' after a ceremony of early manhood; hence, a general term for 'upper caste'
Varna	---- the four categories (lit., colours) into which classical Hindu texts divide society
Vedas	---- ancient Hindu texts
Veedi	---- Street
Wada	---- locality
Vyshyas (Vyshyas)	---- the third category of the Hindu *varna* order, their traditional occupation was that of traders
Valmiki	---- the now usually preferred name for the Bhangis or sweeper community which follows the teachings of the saint Valmiki
Zamindar	---- revenue intermediaries and landlords under the British
Zilla	---- District
Zilla parishad	---- top-tier corresponding to the district in the three-tier *Panchayat raj* system

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Abbreviations……

AISCF ..... All India Scheduled Caste Federation
AP ..... Andhra Pradesh
APDMS ..... Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha
BAMCE..... All India Backward (SC/ST/BC) and Minority Communities Employees Federation
BC ..... Backward Castes
BJP ..... Bharatiya Janata Party
BSP ..... Bahujan Samaj Party
CPI ..... Communist Party of India
DMS ..... Dalit Maha Sabha
DS-4 ..... Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangarsh Samithi (Struggle committee of the oppressed Dalit Society)
ERDL ..... Explosive Research and Development Laboratory
MRPS ..... Madiga Reservastion Porata Samithi (Struggle Committee for the Madiga Reservations
MLS ..... Member of Legislative Assembly
NTR ..... Nandamuri Taraka Ramarao
OBC ..... Other Backward Castes
PPP ..... Poor Peoples Party
RPI ..... Republican Party of India
SC ..... Scheduled Castes
SCF ..... Scheduled castes Federation
SP ..... Samajwadi Party
ST ..... Scheduled Tribe
TDP ..... Telugu Desam Party
UP ..... Uttar Pradesh
UPSCF ..... United Provinces Scheduled Castes Federation

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Acknowledgements……...

During the course of my PhD many people have said that PhD is a journey through which one would discover oneself. At the end of my PhD I was not sure whether I have discovered myself, but surely the world in which I am an inhabitant. It is a nasty, brutish and selfish world that ever prepared to unleash its brute force to marginalize its opponents. I have come to this conclusion because of the people that I met during my long-journey, while during my PhD and outside it. Yet the very fact that I have survived all those brutal forces is a testimony that still they are a few good people and institutions (of course, they may have their selfish intentions in that) with whose help and assistance that I was able to fight back those those cruel forces against me.

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Prologue……

Dalits'[1] struggle for social equality, political power, and democratisation of the socio-cultural and political spaces in colonial India or post-Independence India has been shaped by their position in the Brahminic social order, the *Chaturvarna vyavastha.* As the very name clearly demonstrates, the system is constituted by four *varnas,* i.e., the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas, and the Shudras; thus, Dalits have neither a designated space nor recognised position within the official body of the *Chaturvarna vyavastha.* This, in turn, forced them to remain outside the system. Some social reformers in the late colonial India, such as Mahatma Jotirao Phule (1827-1890), and some politically-oriented caste-Hindu reformers, such as Mahatma Gandhi, tried to rectify this specific condition. Phule, for instance, by calling the Dalits as *Ati Shudras,* tried to make them part of the Shudra category, and thereby, incorporate them in the *varna vyavastha.* Barring the thin boundary between the two social categories, i.e., while the Shudras were inside the system, Dalits were outside it, the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of both the categories were at the same level. In that respect, bringing them together under a larger umbrella would have been an opportune thing to do; and their combined strength in the emerging political representative institutions during the colonial era, would have had different connotations. To that extent, Phule's gesture appears to be both revolutionary as well as pragmatic. But by calling the Dalits *Ati-Shudras,* Phule was not placing the Dalits along with or on a par with the Shudras inside the *varna vyavastha*, but directly below them; and thereby, allowing the Brahminic socio-hierarchical distinctions between them to flourish.

Similarly, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (hereafter Gandhi) also made some efforts such as trying to incorporate the Dalits into the body of the *Chaturvarna vyavastha* by calling them *Harijans* (children of god). Such an act by Gandhi was somewhat heroic. For until then, the Dalits, who were treated as *Asprushyas* (untouchables) and kept outside the Hindu community, had become children of god, and he declared that they were also part of the

[1] Dalit, a term that has become synonymous with Untouchable, is the name that many ex-untouchables, especially politically aware individuals, have chosen for themselves. The name means 'oppressed' and highlights the persecution and discrimination they face on a daily basis. For a discussion of the evolution of the meaning of the term 'Dalit', see Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in colonial India.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp: 162-167.

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Hindu society. Having said that, it is important to note here that Gandhi's campaign against untouchability was not necessarily born out of a genuine concern for the plight of millions of Dalits, but mainly on account of his concern for Hinduism; for Gandhi was convinced that the practise of untouchability was an 'ineffable blot' on Hinduism.[2] In other words, Gandhi's concern for the Dalits and his activities against the practise of untouchability sought to remove that 'blot' from the face of Hinduism rather than to secure social equality and political opportunities for the Dalits.

Further, one should ask two pertinent questions to understand the possible motivations behind Gandhi's new nomenclature for Dalits. First, if Gandhi was to believe in the fundamental equality of human beings, as he always claimed, then why only Dalits were treated as 'the children of God'? Are caste-Hindus not children of God? Secondly, what is the position of the so called 'children of God' in the *varna vyavastha?* It is important to note here that despite describing the Dalits as *Harijans* and his claim that the *Harijans* are part of Hindu society, Gandhi never mentioned in which *varna* the *Harijans* were to be placed. It was a well-known fact that Gandhi had always been an ardent advocate of the *Chaturvarna vyavastha,* and the traditional occupations assigned to the four varnas by that system. To my mind, this suggests that Dalits were to be integrated into the *varna vyavastha,* and to that extent they would become a part of the Hindu community. Yet, they would retain their name as *Harijans* which is nothing but untouchables.

This argument can be substantiated from other aspects as well. Once the *Harijans* were integrated into the *varna vyavastha,* what occupation should they pursue? Each varna in the *varnashrama dharma,* according to Gandhi, had 'its own *dharma,* its own rightful modes of livelihood, conduct, and service'.[3] Thus, in the name of *dharma,* Gandhi was asking the *Harijans* to follow their traditional occupations, which were forced on them by the Brahmanical social order. Though Gandhi did say that no *varna's* occupation, skills or abilities were superior to any other *varna's dharma.* For instance, imparting knowledge to the society - the dharma of the Brahmins - is not superior to manual scavenging - the dharma of the untouchable Bhangis. But if this is so, then why don't the Brahmins or any other caste-Hindus take on the manual scavenging occupation of the Bhangis? Surely, Gandhi sought to

[2] Arnold, David. 2001. *Gandhi.* London: Pearson, p. 174.
[3] Ibid., p. 173.

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do this, but his acts were more symbolic than substantive in nature, for none of the followers of Gandhi from upper caste backgrounds took-up scavenging as their occupation. In a way, this clearly demonstrates that the intended integration of Dalits into *varna vyavastha* is a mere symbolic gesture, which entraps them into a false belief that they are also part and parcel of the Hindu community without any substantive power or benefits that are enjoyed by the other four varnas. Moreover, the very term 'Harijan', for many Dalits, "is patronising and condescending, reinforcing and rationalising the hegemony of the upper castes over God's children."[4] These limitations and criticisms apart, one must truly acknowledge the contribution of Gandhi to the question of untouchability, in giving the issue a new political prominence.

Keeping aside the intentions behind the activisms of the social reformers against the practice of untouchability, both from the lower castes as well as upper castes, and the overall impact of such activism over the Hindu social organisation, and whatever the individual problems of the Dalit individuals, their collective situation at the bottom of the social hierarchy led to four fundamental problems: social discrimination, economic exploitation, cultural alienation, and political oppression. For almost all the caste-Hindu reformers, who acted against the appalling conditions of the Dalits, either on account of genuine personal concerns or political compulsions, the problem of untouchability is one of the social problems; and so they tried to ameliorate it by initiating some corrective programmes, such as opening up special schools for Dalit children, teaching them cleanliness, urging them to abandon alcohol and meat-eating, etc. But untouchability, unlike some social problems, such as widow remarriage and dowry, is not a social problem. It is essentially, as most categorically stated by Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891-1956), a political problem. He argued:

> It is wrong to say that the problem of the Untouchables is a social problem. For, it is quite unlike the problems of dowry, widow remarriage, age of consent, etc., which are illustrations of what are properly called social problems. Essentially, it is a problem of quite a different nature in as much as it is a problem of securing to a minority liberty and equality of opportunity at the hands of a hostile majority which believes in the denial of liberty and equal opportunity to the minority and conspires to enforce its policy on the minority. Viewed in this light, the problem of the Untouchables is fundamentally a political problem. [5]

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[4] Ibid., p. 180. See also, Ambedkar, B.R. 1991[1945]. *What Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables.* In: Moon, Vasant., ed., *Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 9. Bombay: The Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, esp. Chapter X: 'What Do The Untouchable Say? *Beware of Mr. Gandhi',* pp: 226-256.

[5] Ambedkar, B. R. 1991[1945]. *What Congress and Gandhi...,* p.190.

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Precisely that was the reason why he always urged the Dalits to concentrate their energies towards gaining political power:

> Nobody can remove your grievances as well as you can and you cannot remove them unless you get political power in your hands.[6]

But, how the Dalits responded to their conditions and problems is the fundamental question, which this thesis seeks to address. An important aspect in answering this question is that of the physical location of the actors. Dalits are not located in one particular geographical region. Although in some regions thickly and in some other regions thinly, nevertheless, they are spread throughout India. This is what complicates the Dalit question. In the sense, irrespective of their physical location, i.e., whether in northern India or southern India and western India or eastern India, their social location throughout the country is the same – the bottom of the Hindu social hierarchy; and so, their problems are same everywhere. Yet, there are few similarities in their fight against untouchability. Their geographical locations and socio-economic and political conditions and contexts that are specific to their respective geographical regions shaped the Dalits' response against untouchability. Although this complicates the very question of untouchability, it also gives an opportunity, especially from the point of research, to examine and analyse the Dalit response to the question of untouchability comparatively. The current thesis aims to seize that unique opportunity by analysing Dalit politics in Uttar Pradesh in Northern India and Andhra Pradesh in Southern India from an Ambedkarite perspective. By comparing Dalit politics in these two states, it seeks to understand the Dalit responses to the injustices and violence suffered at the hands of the upper castes. It also seeks to understand the social as well as political dominance of higher castes over Dalits; and Dalit mobilisations and assertions against such dominance and the ideological bases of that assertion. It further seeks to understand the impact of Dalit politics upon the Brahmanical social order and upper caste-dominated political order. In short, this thesis seeks to contribute to four major discussions regarding Dalit politics: a) the debate regarding the master-narratives in the politics of North and South India, i.e., the Hindu-Muslim cleavage in the North and Caste in the South; b) the claim that historically Dalit consciousness was less developed in the North than in the South; c) the debate around

[6] Ambedkar at the 1930 Nagpur Conference on Depressed Classes, quoted in Nath, Trilok. 1987. *Politics of the Depressed Classes.* Delhi: Deputy Publications, p. 225.

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the Dalits and Shudras (OBCs) as an undifferentiated category of people; and d) why Dalits in UP succeeded in attaining political power while they did not do so in AP.

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First……..

Introduction

In the year 2002, two articles provoked me. The first one was Ashutosh Varshney's 'Is India Becoming More Democratic?' In this article Varshney claims a certain 'Southernization of North India'. He claims that while the politics in northern India had thus far been organised around the Hindu-Muslim axis, in South India, it was organised around caste lines. For him, "If the Hindu-Muslim cleavage has been the 'master narrative' of the politics in northern India for much of the twentieth century, caste divisions have had the same status in South India".[7] But with the rise of lower-caste politics what is happening in the North today, Varshney claims, is the Southernization of North India. I was intrigued by this claim. Two questions that struck me, and which haunted me for a long-time were: is caste-based politics a contemporary phenomenon in North India or is caste the main axis around which politics has always been organised in North as well as in South India? And, is this the first time that the lower-castes, especially the Dalits, are challenging the caste-based cultural hegemony and political domination of the caste-Hindus by competing for political power?

The second article was, 'Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste' by Rajni Kothari. In this article, Kothari comes up with two fascinating arguments. First, "Casteism in politics", for Kothari, "is no more and no less than politicisation of caste".[8] Such politicisation of caste, he firmly believes, will lead to a transformation of the caste system. He substantiates this position by directing our attention to transformations that have already been happening in India both structurally and ideologically. Compelled by the electoral process, the traditional castes have engaged in a whole variety of new

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[7] Varshney, Ashutosh. 2000. Is India Becoming More Democratic? *The Journal of Asian Studies,* 59 (1), pp: 3-25, here, p. 5.

[8] Kothari, Rajni. 1994. Rise of the Dalits and the Renewed Debate on Caste. *Economic and Political Weekly* (hereafter *EPW),* 29 (26), pp: 1589-1594, here, p. 1590.

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alignments, splitting and federating along secular political lines to bargain with political parties. Such engagement is, of course, motivated by the self-interest of these castes, and yet, that engagement has "undermined the rigidity of the system".[9] On the ideological front, Kothari points out a whole range of shifts. In the place of hierarchy, there is plurality. Earlier, while the status of an individual in society was ordained, now it is negotiable. Earlier, while the roles and positions of people were ritually defined, now the same roles have civic and political definitions.

Kothari's second argument is that although caste is oppressive, it can provide a base for the struggle against oppression; and, in fact, caste facilitates the oppressed to move away from the traditional structure to modern spaces. In a way, for him, caste "has the potentiality of being a two-pronged catalyst: as purveyor of collective identity and annihilator of the same hierarchical order".[10] Although I was, and still am, extremely sceptical about the second argument, I still am convinced with the first argument, especially the idea of transformation on the ideology of caste. This conviction was borne out of my experience of the Dandora Movement in Andhra Pradesh (AP).

In 1995, the Madigas, one of the four major Dalit castes in AP - (the Malas, Adi-Andhras and Rellis are the other three major Dalits castes), mobilised under the banner of Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS - Madiga Committee for Reservation Struggle) for sub-classification of Dalit reservations in the state. Questioning the appropriation of a major share of the Dalit reservations by the Malas and Adi-Andhras, the MRPS demanded caste-based re-distribution/sub-classification of the reservations. Along with this demand, one of the audacious acts of the MRPS activists was suffixing the caste title 'Madiga' to their names. For instance, Krishna, a prominent leader of the movement, had become Krishna Madiga and Krupakar, another main leader of the movement, had become Krupakar Madiga. Such suffixing of caste title to individual names had hitherto been an exclusive preserve of the upper castes and some of the upwardly mobile castes within the Shudra category, such as Yadavas. They use the caste titles with great pride

[9] Ibid., p. 1590.
[10] Ibid.

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and insist that others, especially the lower castes, address them with those caste titles in private or in public.

In contrast, the Dalits never felt confident in suffixing their caste identities, for most of their caste titles, such as Madiga, served as terms of abuse in the hands of the caste-Hindus. The pride and arrogance displayed by the caste-Hindus through their caste titles was suddenly "punctured"[11] when the Madigas, the so-called "lowest of the low", also began to use their caste title. Thus, this experience substantiates Kothari's argument on the transformation of the ideology of caste. However, I was still doubtful of his argument that the "politicisation of caste" leads to the "transformation of the system", and that caste has the potentiality of working as a catalyst or annihilator of the hierarchical order. Not surprisingly, this doubt has generated a host of questions, which directed me towards the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh.

The BSP, which was started by Kanshi Ram in 1984 in UP, mobilised the Dalits and other lower castes under the broad category of *Bahujan* (majority of the people) for political power. By deploying caste in its electoral mobilisations, the party not only succeeded in politicising caste in UP, but also gained political power in that state. Did that politicisation transform the system? What did the BSP do to transform the lives of the Dalits? These two questions actually pulled me back to AP and forced me to reflect on the Dalit movement and politics in that state.

The Dalits in AP suffered two major atrocities in the mid-1980's and early 1990's at the hands of the two main dominant castes in the state. The first one was organised against the Madigas of Karamchedu village in 1985 by the Kammas; the other was conducted by the Reddys against the Malas in Chunduru village in 1991. These two atrocities led to the emergence of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha (APDMS), under the leadership of Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao, with the twin demands of self-respect and annihilation of caste. For nearly a decade, the APDMS mobilised the Dalits, Adivasis, and Shudras (or the Backward Castes) against the caste-based atrocities committed

[11] Balagopal, K. 2000. A Tangled Web: Subdivision of SC Reservations in AP. *EPW,* 35(13), pp: 1075 – 1081, here, p. 1077.

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against the Dalits and other lower castes by the upper castes, and against the socio-economic and political domination of the latter. These mobilisations generated a strong consciousness among the lower strata in the state, particularly among the Dalits; and, by the early 1990's, prepared them as strong contenders for political power. However, this contention did not result in political power for Dalits in particular and Bahujans in general in the state. Why did Dalits succeed in winning political power in UP and why did they fail in AP?

With these questions in mind, I read some key books on the Dalit movement and politics in UP and AP. Among these, two books on UP were the latest at that time, and one book on AP was acclaimed as path-breaking by critics. Sudha Pai's *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh* examined Dalit politics in post-Independence UP. By focusing on the BSP, Pai examines three key aspects of the Party: the origin and trajectory of the BSP, its mobilizational strategies, and its ideology. Two claims that caught my attention in Pai's book were: first, she claims that, in comparison with western and southern India, the northern province of UP did not witness any anti-Brahmanical movements by the Dalits prior to Independence. The second claim is that the BSP, which claims to espouse Baba Saheb Ambedkar's ideology, failed to fulfil his dream of a democratic revolution. These two claims impelled me to ask: Is it true that the Dalits did not have any anti-Brahmin movement in colonial UP? What was Ambedkar's dream of democratic revolution and how and why did the BSP fail to fulfil that dream?

The second pivotal work is Christophe Jaffrelot's *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Low Castes in North Indian Politics,* which examines the lower castes' electoral assertion in North India. In order to explain the contemporary caste-based politics of the lower castes, Jaffrelot not only examined their politics in colonial North India, but also attempted to make sense of all India politics by comparing the lower caste politics of northern India with that of the politics of the southern India's lower castes. A particular claim, by Jaffrelot, that caught my attention is that the Dravidian ideology set the tone and content of lower caste politics in South India, and it is this ideology that resulted in

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their political empowerment.[12] Two problems, however, with this claim are: first, by South India, did he mean only Tamil Nadu or all the regions/states in South India? Jaffrelot was right if he meant it in the first sense. But the same cannot be said to be true with the other regions/states in South India. For regions and states like Coastal Andhra and Hyderabad in South India did not witness the Dravidian movement. If lower caste movements, especially the Dalit movement in colonial Coastal Andhra and in the Nizam State of Hyderabad, were not based on the Dravidian ideology, what was the ideology around which the Dalit movements were organised?

This question took me to a close reading of Gail Omvedt's work: *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution: Dr. Ambedkar and the Dalit Movement in Colonial India*. In this fascinating work, Omvedt examined Dalit movements and politics in three regions in colonial India, i.e., Maharashtra, the Nizam State of Hyderabad, and Coastal Andhra. After a closing reading of the book I felt that this work was a one-dimensional reading of the Dalit movement and politics in the Nizam State of Hyderabad and Coastal Andhra; because even prior to the entry of Ambedkar in these two regions, the Dalits mobilised around the 'Adi' ideology. By assuming the identities of Adi-Hindu and Adi-Andhra in Hyderabad and coastal Andhra, respectively, they mounted a strong critique of Brahmanism and demanded their share in the emerging political power. Of course, she mentions these aspects, but as passing commentary. My second problem with this work is with its presentation of Dalits and their politics. Dalits were presented as if they were one homogenous category, organised against Brahmanical ideology and its oppression. Were all Dalits united in their fight against Brahmanism? Viewing Dalit politics and their movement from the vantage point of caste-based movements among the Dalits in contemporary AP, it becomes clear that Dalits have always been divided on the basis of caste. And so, what was happening inside the Dalit category? And if they were united, what led to disunity among the Dalits in contemporary AP? These questions have shaped my research agenda.

[12]Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2003. *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India.* London: Hurst & Company, pp: 166-180.

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With the above questions in mind, in this thesis, I attempt to understand the contours of Dalit politics along three principal axes: (i) historically, in the context of a history of anti-caste and especially Dalit protests from the late 19th century onwards in UP and AP; (ii) thematically, in the context of contemporary debates about enlarging the space of democracy in India; (iii) comparatively, by making a broad contrast between North India and South India. The following delineation elaborates the nature and aims of the present study.

Analysing Dalit politics, historically and thematically, became important in order to understand the contours shaping Indian politics today. The present study, therefore, has the potential to shed new light on the question of caste and politics in India. Indeed, in the last few years, public-political arguments over the institution of caste have plainly intensified and, more than ever before, social scientists are studying an institution which is reshaped by contentious and confusing discourses. A theme worth exploring here is what some social scientists have called the "substantialisation of caste", i.e., moving away of caste groups from their more traditional relationships of socio-economic interdependence towards more competitive models of social interaction[13] - primarily, but by no means exclusively, in the context of Dalit self-assertion. A comparative regional profile could lend further dimension to the problem. A hypothesis worth exploring is whether the politics in North India and South India are based on different trajectories. As has been pointed out recently, if the Hindu-Muslim cleavage has been a master narrative of politics in North India through much of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, caste division has had the same status in southern India. While plausible as an assessment, this assertion would require further probing, and I propose to do so from an Ambedkarite perspective within both North and South Indian politics.

[13] In the words of Louis Dumont the 'substantialisation of caste' is "transition from a fluid, structural universe in which the emphasis is on interdependence …to a universe of impenetrable blocks, self-sufficient, essentially identical and in competition with one another," in which structure seems to yield to substance, each caste becoming an individual confronting other individuals." Dumont, Louis. 1970. *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications.* Delhi: Vikas, pp: 222 & 227.

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North and South Indian Politics – A Comparison

Two influential claims on North and South Indian politics impel the present research. One claim is that of 'Southernization of North Indian politics' by Ashutosh Varshney; the second claim is made by Christophe Jaffrelot. For him the divergences in the politicisation of the lower castes in North and South India were mainly due to the composition of castes in both the regions. Let us examine these two claims one after the other briefly. First, as noted above, Ashutosh Varshney, in his article: 'Is India Becoming More Democratic?',[14] claims that while politics in northern India, so far, was organised around the Hindu-Muslim axis, in south India it was organised around caste lines; as such for him, "If the Hindu-Muslim cleavage has been the 'master narrative' of politics in North India for much of the twentieth century, caste divisions have had the same status in South India."[15] However, with the rise of lower caste politics in today's North India what is happening is, Varshney argues, the 'Southernization of North India'. Viewing the politics in northern India from the vantage point of religious cleavages and the way the politics in North India, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, has been unfolded since the late 1970's and the way caste has been brought onto the centre of the political dais, it might appear that the politics in North India appears to be following in the footsteps of politics in South India. However, the question remains, is caste-based politics only a contemporary phenomenon in North India? Is this the first time that the lower castes, especially the Dalits, are challenging the caste-based cultural hegemony and political domination of the upper castes by competing for political power?

It was true that the 'Hindu-Muslim cleavage' had been the *main* axis around which politics in colonial Northern India were organised. But that does not mean that it was the *only* axis around which people organised their politics. While several social scientists have noted that caste is the central fault-line of India – pre-colonial and post-colonial,[16] others have been reluctant to accept and engage with the caste question.[17] At least in the

[14] Varshney, Ashutosh. 2000. Is India…, pp: 3-25.
[15] Ibid., p.5
[16] See for instance, Aloysius, G. 1996. *Nationalism without a Nation in India.* New Delhi: OUP; Menon, M.Dilip. 2006. *The Blindness of Insight: Essay on Caste in Modern India: Chennai: Quadra Press.*
[17] One recent example is Ashutosh Varshney's 2002. *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

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United Provinces, if not entire northern India, we have evidence, presented in Chapter Two, to suggest that in the political domain caste cleavages are as important as that of the religious-cleavages. In a way, it is to claim that the Hindu-Muslim cleavage is a master narrative is to fail to appreciate the politics of those people who organised outside the fold Hindu or Muslim.

Secondly, Jaffrelot in his *India's Silent Revolution: the Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* claims that divergences in the politicisation of the lower castes in North and South India were mainly due to the composition of castes in both the regions. In northern India, the caste system is traditionally the closest to the *varna* model with its four orders (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vyshyas, and Shudras) and the Untouchables. In the South, on the other hand, the twice-born are seldom 'complete' since the warrior and merchant castes are often absent or poorly represented, as in Maharashtra and Bengal. By the same token, the upper *varnas* are more in number in the North, whereas in the South, the proportion of the Brahmins and even of the twice-born is often low.[18] The North-South contrast derives also from the kind of land settlement that the British sustained in these two areas. While the *Zamindari* system prevailed in North India, the *Raiyatwari* system was more systematically implemented in the South. The former solidified the hierarchy of peasant society whereas the latter was more conducive to different forms of social equality.[19] Moreover, in Northern India the "demographic weight of the upper castes and their role in the local power structure"[20] prepared the ground for the development of Gandhian conservative ideologies in politics. This, in turn, led to arresting lower caste consciousness in the prison of Sanskritisation. On the contrary, the politicisation of the lower castes in the South, Jaffrelot argues, was due to the absence of a complex middle order, that is, "the warrior and merchant castes are often absent or poorly represented".[21] Such absence, in turn, Jaffrelot claims, has facilitated a strong lower caste mobilisation under the banner of Dravidianism against Brahmanical hegemony and domination.

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[18] According to the 1931 census, the last one which enumerated castes, the upper varnas represent from 13.6% (Bihar) up to 24.2% (Rajasthan) of the population. In Andhra Pradesh, for instance, the Brahmins and Kshatriyas represent respectively 3 and 1.2% of the population.
[19] Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2003. *India's silent …,* pp: 5-6.
[20] Ibid., p. 9.
[21] Ibid., p. 7.

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There are two fundamental problems with Jaffrelot's reading of the politicisation of the lower castes in South India. First, one does not understand the possible link between the absence of a middle order in the caste hierarchy and the politicisation of the lower castes. In the sense, the upper castes discriminated against the lower castes, especially against the Dalits, irrespective of the presence or absence of the middle order in the caste hierarchy; as victims, it was natural for the Dalits to organise against their victimisers. Secondly, Jaffrelot seems to have based his present argument upon the simple assumption that all the lower castes who had been the victims of a common enemy and common ideology, i.e., Brahmins and Brahmanism respectively, have mobilised under the universal category of non-Brahmins by embracing the ideology of Dravidianism during the colonial era. This is rather a sweeping generalisation. For all the lower castes may be victims of Brahmanism, yet they were (and are) not united in their fight against that ideology. Every caste, especially those castes that were placed at the top of the non-Brahmin hierarchy, fought its battles against Brahmanism independently.

Further, a problem in Jaffrelot's argument is in his understanding of the idea of lower castes or the non-Brahmin category and the extent of their power in the socio-political and cultural domains. It is true that the caste system in the Hindi belt is traditionally organised around the *varna* model or at least, closest to that model with its four orders – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, and the Untouchables. The hold of the first three castes on the economic resources and their domination in the socio-political and cultural domains were so complete that there was very little space available for the Shudras and Untouchables during the colonial and immediate post-Independence periods. In other words, when we say the lower castes in the Hindi belt it is both the Shudras and Dalits.

Similarly, in South India also the lower caste category includes both the Shudras and Dalits. But then, just as there are differences between the Shudras and Dalits – in terms of their position in the caste hierarchy and the availability of resources, particularly economic resources, there are differences within the Shudra category as well. The Shudra category in Southern India is essentially divided into two layers of castes. The first layer

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comprises of castes, like Kammas and Reddys in Andhra Pradesh, Lingayats, Vokkalingayats, Shettys in Karnataka, and Reddiyars, Mudaliars, Chettiyars, Pillais in Tamil Nadu. This set of castes or category of castes are also known as the *sat-Shudra* category. In terms of caste position, these castes may be placed below the Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the social hierarchy, but in terms of their control over the economic resources and domination in the social and political spheres, this category of people are more powerful than the Brahmins or any other castes in the social hierarchy. The second layer is constituted with service castes like, Yadavas, Kurmis, Gollas, Salees etc. During the colonial as well as the immediate post-Independence periods, there was not much difference between this set of castes and the Dalits, particularly in terms of social status and availability of resources for economic and social development. The dynamics of these differences between the Shudras and Dalits have changed since the late 1970's, which is, of course, a different matter altogether.

But the point that I am trying to make here is that lack of an ample presence of the warrior and merchant castes in South India does not mean that there were no castes that occupied and controlled similar spaces of power as those occupied by the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the Hindi belt. In other words, the castes in the *Sat-Shudra* category may be viewed as compensating for the lack of Kshyatriyas and Vaishyas in South India. And as the castes within the non-Brahmin category were divided both vertically and horizontally, they were at variance in their responses against Brahmins and Brahmanism. The castes like Reddys and Kammas, who have been in positions of privilege within the non-Brahmin category, were not against the Brahmanical caste system per se. They were simply against the Brahmins, who enjoyed the highest social status and cultural privileges. To put it differently, the privileged non-Brahmin castes were against the privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins, while at the same time aspiring for the same social status and cultural privileges. During the early part of the twentieth century the dislike for Brahmins that the privileged non-Brahmin castes nurtured reached the heights, when jobs in the British government in India were completely taken up by the former. It was against this domination and to stake a claim for a share in the job market that the *Sat-Shudras* launched the non-Brahmin movement.

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On the contrary, the aspirations of the lower castes within the non-Brahmin category – especially the Dalits - with imposed restrictions were different in important respects from the aspirations of the privileged non-Brahmin castes. Of course, the Dalits, just like the *Sat-Shudras,* also condemned the pre-eminence of the Brahmins in government employment, and they too sought their share of jobs. But unlike the privileged non-Brahmin castes, the Dalits sought to destroy the system that deprived them of human dignity. In essence, the Brahmins in AP, unlike their counterparts in UP, were not dominant castes; the intermediate non-Brahmin castes, particularly the Reddys and Kammas were the dominant castes. This was the main reason why that the Dalits in AP allied with the Brahmins rather than with the non-Brahmins; and this was also the main reason for the slower emergence of an independent Dalit movement in the state. Thus, the politics of lower castes cannot be understood adequately under the rubric of the non-Brahmin category, for the category is not homogenous. There are massive differences among the castes within the non-Brahmin category, in terms of social status, the social respect they command, access to economic resources and in terms of their position in the local power structures. These differences must be taken into consideration while studying the politics of the non-Brahmins. In particular, both societies in North and South India - are pervaded by the Hindu hierarchical caste structure and Dalits in both the places are kept at the bottom of the society, including by non-Brahmins. This study it intends to compensate for the inadequate attention to Dalit views in dominant scholarship by focusing on the Dalit struggle for recognition as equal human beings and their politics for social justice and democratisation of the Indian society.

Caste and Democracy in India: Understanding caste, as a system of social hierarchy and domination is central to understanding the position of Dalits in India today. Why is it that caste continues to persist in modern India? At the time of independence, Nehruvian progressive ideologues and academic theorists expected that institutions of democratic government would exert destructive influence on the traditional structure of caste. It was expected that the idea of modern citizenship and economic progress would eliminate all forms of intermediate affiliations of identity and loyalty between the state and the individual. To put the same in the words of Sudipta Kaviraj, 'the logic of industrial

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development and the logic of democratic citizenship were both to work as combined logic of individuation, and dissolve primordial identities like caste and religion'.[22]

The modernist project, however, did not lessen the relevance and significance of caste. Rather, it has only increased political potency.[23] Drawing from the experiences of democratic politics, M.N. Srinivas argued that although socially caste is declining, it has been strengthened in the context of modern politics. This is because, "the power and activity of caste has increased in proportion, as political power passed increasingly to the people from the rulers".[24] Caste has become an important factor in the functioning of the democratic institutions. Given the importance of the caste factor in the political process of the country, Rudolph and Rudolph argued that the importance of caste was unlikely to decline because "…the need for mediating collective and adaptive structures based on birth and integrated by primary group sentiment and interest transcends the imperatives of modernity in politics and society."[25] Taking a similar line, Kaviraj argues, "since elections required aggregation of perceived interests and the format of perception of identity was deeply traditional, appeals to caste or occasionally religious identities were more effective in the short term. It was evident that politicians wished to win elections before they modernised their country", and to win elections, "politicians manipulated the existence of traditional identities in actual electoral practice".[26]

For some scholars, these political trends – the amalgamation of caste and politics – are positive. Rajni Kothari, for instance, argues that as long as caste consciousness was the preserve of the Brahminical caste-Hindus, it was respectable. But today those who suffer from within the system are also invoking caste identity to break it rather than preserve it. To put it in his words, "Caste can be oppressive but it can also provide a basis for struggle against oppression. It can at once be traditionalist and modernist. It has the potential to be a two-pronged catalyst: a preserver of collective identity as well as an

[22] Sudipta, Kaviraj. 1997. Introduction. In: Kaviraj, Sudipta. ed., *Politics in India.* New Delhi: OUP, p.8.
[23] See for instance, Srinivas M.N. 1978[1962]. *Caste in Modern India: And Other Essays*, London: JK Publishers, p.15; Rudolph L.I. and Rudolph S.H. 1967. *The Modernity of..:* Kothari, Rajni. 1970. *Caste in Indian politics.* New Delhi: Orient Longman; ...., 1986. *Politics in India.* Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
[24] Srinivas, M.N., 1978. *Caste in Modern …,* p.23.
[25] Rudolph L.I. and Rudolph S.H. 1967. *The Modernity of …,* pp: 97-98.
[26] Sudipta, Kaviraj. 1997. Introduction…, p.8.

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inhibitor of the same hierarchical order from which collective identity is drawn".[27] He also insists that caste, far from being an impediment to the creation of a democratic political order, was a structure through which politics must 'strive to organise'.[28] He maintained that the political mobilisation of castes had made a substantial contribution to the development of democracy. He explains further that "it is because 'ethnic' identities are openly acknowledged, politically organised, and made explicit bases for bargaining that more open processes of institutional penetration and political integration has been possible in India".[29] Javeed Alam too debunks one of the myths of modernisation that caste can always be reduced to casteism. He argues that the collective nature of 'un-freedom' in India, unlike Europe, has made the struggle for emancipation community-based rather than a struggle based on the individual.[30] This thesis seeks to deepen these arguments by foregrounding the Dalit view, which has been insufficiently addressed in these debates. Dalits have been using their caste to focus attention on the collective nature of their oppression.

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Further, this thesis will demonstrate that a study of Dalit politics will contribute not only to an understanding of the nature of domination but such a study will tell us about the nature of democracy on the Indian subcontinent. For as mentioned above, the rise of lower castes and Dalits in the northern India and their simultaneous empowerment in southern India has led scholars to argue collectively that India's democracy has become more inclusive and participatory. Yogendra Yadav, for instance, argues, "[d]emocratic system enjoys greater legitimacy today than in the past. The poor and the deprived defend democracy more vigorously than the elite".[31] Ashis Nandy too rather forcefully asserts that, "socialism, secularism, development, nationalism, security, science and technology have all become debatable, in some cases abrasively so, but not democracy".[32] He continues that the peace movement in the '50's and '60's, environmentalism and the re-emergence of Gandhism in the '70s, and globalisation in the

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[27] Rajni, Kothari. 1970. Introduction. In: Kothari, Rajni. ed., *Caste in …,* pp*:* 4-5.
[28] Ibid., p. 225.
[29] Ibid., p.241.
[30] Alam, Javeed. 1999. Is Caste Appeal Casteism? *EPW,* 34(13), pp: 757-761.
[31] Yadav, Yogendra. 1999. The Maturing of Indian Democracy. *India Today,* 31 August.
[32] Nandy, Ashis. 1999. Sustaining the Faith. *India Today,* 31 August.

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'90's - they have all risen and fallen. But only "the appeal of democracy has not faded in India. Indeed, it has deepened over the years. It now cuts across parties, educational levels, classes, castes, religion, gender, and ethnic divisions. The poor seem committed to it more than the ultra-rich".[33] Sheth also endorses these views and calls this process as the 'secularisation of Indian politics'.[34] Further, he is of the opinion that the "Indian representative democracy is indeed moving closer to the people. They now feel more involved and show greater concern for institutions of local and regional governance".[35]

Such judgements are, however, contested. Even those who agree that power has decisively moved down the caste hierarchy are unsure about what it means for the poor and the oppressed. Jayal argues, "free and fair elections, freedom of speech and expression, and the rule of law and its protection to all are necessary, but by no means sufficient conditions for a democracy to be meaningful".[36] The democratic project is incomplete until the meaningful exercise of the equal rights of citizenship has been guaranteed to all. Political equality, she argues, gets severely restricted by inequalities that deny many from having equal opportunities. Kaviraj also argues that the introduction of the formal principle of political equality could not overcome the actual unequal economic structure of Indian society, reinforced by the uneven distribution of gains under a predominantly capitalist economy.[37] However, despite his criticism on the process of democratic politics, Kaviraj recognises its contributions to and the changes it has been effecting on caste, a process which he theorises as the 'democratisation of caste'. One unintended consequence of populist politics, for him, was that it fundamentally altered the structural properties of caste in the electoral arena. As political parties became concerned more with the spatial concentration of castes than their status within the caste hierarchy, electoral politics resulted in a 'democracy' of caste groups in place of a

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Sheth, D.L. 2000. Caste and the Secularisation Process in India. In: Ronald, de Souza Peter., ed., *Contemporary India: Transitions.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp.237-263.
[35] Ibid., p. 243.
[36] Niraja Gopal, Jayal. 2001. Introduction. In: Jayal, Niraja Gopal. ed., *Democracy in India.* New Delhi: OUP, pp: 23-37; also see Jayal, Niraja Gopal. 2001. *Democracy and the State*, New Delhi: OUP, pp: 2-3.
[37] Kaviraj, Sudipta. 2002 [2000]. Democracy and Social Inequality. In: Frankel R. Francine *et al.,* eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy.* New Delhi: OUP, pp: 89-119.

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'hierarchy'.[38] He further argues that, on the one hand, there is considerable decline of caste in traditional arenas of social behaviour, like commonality and marriages. In political life, on the other hand, caste has been given a powerful new life due to electoral politics. People started claiming, Kaviraj asserts, "equality on the basis of caste, without giving up their caste identity".[39]

If one were to view caste and politics from a non-Dalit perspective, then secularisation of caste and democratisation of caste successfully capture the nuances of the social and political processes in India. However, viewed from the Dalits' sociological and political discourses the above theorisations have limited significance. Democratic practices are supposed to involve a process of transformation that takes place through the opening up of opportunities to participate, the inclusion of excluded voices, democratising access to the media, politicising the depoliticised, empowering the powerless, and reducing political dependency by transforming a passive citizenship into an active one. However, in the Indian democracy, historically, it is largely the dominant upper castes that have defined and decided the political agenda of Dalits, with Dalits receiving token representation and excluded from substantial participation in political life. Further, the denial of access to resources, participation in political processes, exclusion from the social milieu, and subjugation to an ideology of servitude and bondage of the Dalits have not been tackled sufficiently in academic scholarship. For instance, in recent years, persons from the Shudra category, with their newfound strength in electoral politics have started claiming 'equality' and started suffixing their caste name to their actual names. *Madiga, Golla,* and *Kurmi* are just a few examples of this phenomenon. Along these lines, Gupta has argued that this is because "castes are proud of their identity, regardless of where the textual traditions place them on the 'purity-pollution' hierarchy. Each caste puts itself in some way, for some reason at the high-end of the hierarchy, meaning that there is no one uncontested ranking of castes but rather, there are perhaps as many rankings as there are castes."[40]

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[38] Ibid., p.102.
[39] Ibid., p. 109.
[40] Gupta, Dipankar. 2004. Introduction: The certitudes of caste: When identity trumps hierarchy. *Contributions to Indian sociology* (n.s.) 38 (1& 2) (2004), pp: v-ix.

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However, this theory does not hold ture when applied to the lowest status groups, Dalits and Adivasis.[41] Dalit caste names have connotations of dirtiness and low status. Dalit caste names like 'Madiga', 'Chamar', 'Mahar' and 'Mala' are not prestigious; rather they are dirty words for the upper castes. And Dalits are seen as intrinsically lower - even the so called political equality hasn't helped to put an end to this situation. After more than half a decade of Independence, a vast mass of this group still lives in segregated colonies on the outskirts of villages; the major chunk of the Dalit masses - more than 80 percent - still live in rural areas and also continue to suffer due to the continued practice of the two-class system - the most obvious sign of this oppression. This, however, does not mean that I am undervaluing changes that have been happening at the grassroots, particularly rapid economic transformations in the era of market reforms.[42]

But while material advancement addresses one layer of the problems suffered by the Dalit constituency, their problems are much larger than simple material deprivation. Indeed, it is not just the uneducated and poor Dalits, even educated and employed, who have benefited from positive discrimination policies have been victims of caste-based discrimination and segregation. In fact, their educational, economic and cultural development did not help to disentangle them from caste-based discrimination. In a way, class mobility has not helped the stigmatised social identity. Thus, it is this cultural segregation and violence against the Dalits that form the basis of their struggle for recognition, equality, and political power. It should be noted here that there are two aspects in the Dalits' struggle for politic power: first, it is a struggle against their marginalisation in the political arena. From this aspect, it is a struggle to realise their citizenship rights, that is to say, as citizens they have every right, like the upper caste citizens, to take part in the politics and acquire political power. Second, John Gaventa had argued elsewhere, in a different context, that institutionalised arrangements for participatory governance would not necessarily be more inclusive or pro-poor. Rather, it

[41] In Andhra Pradesh, the *Lambada* group in the Adivasi category have been suffixing 'Naik', their caste name, to their proper names, but other groups like '*Yanadi* and *Erukula*' do not want to follow this due to the stigma of a 'tribal' attached to these groups.

[42] See, for instance, Kapur, Devesh *et al*., 2010. Rethinking Inequality: Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in the Market Reform Era. *EPW,* 45 (35), 39-49.

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would depend on the nature of power relations which those institutional spaces[43] imbued. Drawing from Gaventa's argument, I would like to ask, once in power, how has that power been used by the Dalits. That is, whether political power in the hands of Dalits has been used to reverse the situation, i.e., Dalits dominating the political arena and thereby marginalising the upper castes in that arena, or whether such power has been used to create possibilities for the marginalised to take part in local governance and thereby make way for transformation at the grassroot-level. It is these nuances that this study offers to bring forth from the vantage point of an Ambedkarite perspective. But what is an Ambedkarite perspective?

Ambedkarite Perspective:[44] The term Ambedkarite or *Ambedkarvadi,* literally means someone speaking and advocating Ambedkar's philosophy – akin to the Marxist (*Marxvadi*), or the Liberalist (*udaravadi*) or *Ambedkar vicharavadi* (subscribing to Ambedkar's thought). During the late fifties, especially after Ambedkar's *diksha* ceremony (initiation ceremony) to Buddhism in October 1956, the term was used somewhat disapprovingly by his critics and opponents, and conversely, with an aura of respect by adherents of the philosophy of Ambedkar.[45] Ever since its inception in 1957, the Republican Party of India made all efforts to popularise the term, and by the early 960's, the term and its equivalents in regional languages, were widely used across India to denote a distinctive mode of beliefs and values, mobilisation, organisation, and also religious pursuits.[46] Although the term lost its appeal to 'Dalit' with the rise of the Dalit Panther Movement in the 1970's, the émigré followers of Ambedkar have always preferred to describe themselves as Ambedkarites rather than Dalits.[47]

[43] John Gaventa. 2004. Towards participatory governance: assessing the transformative possibilities. In: Hickey, Samuel and Giles Mohan., eds., *Participation: from tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to participation in development.* New York: Zed Books, pp: 25-41, here, p. 25.
[44] I thank Prof. Valerian Rodrigues (JNU, New Delhi) and Dr. Kusuma Satyanarayana (EFLU, Hyderabad) for clarifying my understanding of the Ambedkarite perspective.
[45] For an earlier hostile view, see Jivaka. 1959. B.R. Ambedkar's Buddhism and His Dhamma. *The Maha Bodhi* (periodical), 67(12), pp: 352-53.
[46] Kshirsagar, R. K. 1994. *Dalit Movement in India and Its Leaders.* Delhi: M.D.Publications.
[47] Hardtmann, Eva Maria. 2009. *The Dalit Movement in India.* New Delhi: OUP, p. 159.

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That apart, the Ambedkarite perspective quintessentially draws from Ambedkar's ideas on caste oppression and degradation of the marginalised in all walks of life - democracy, equal rights, the State. Yet, at the same time, an Ambedkarite perspective does not necessarily confine itself to the ideas of Ambedkar, which evolved in particular socio-political or economic contexts. Rather, it involves a dynamic and critical re-interpretation of Ambedkar's ideas in any given context. Such an active re-interpretation of ideas is not retrograde in nature, but rather seeks to enlarge the space of democracy and equality in the society at large.

Ambedkar's ideas and ideology essentially revolves around the individual, that is to say, the well-being of the individual is at the heart of Ambedkar's ideas and activism and so the individual constitutes the centre of his analysis. But the Hindu social order, as Ambedkar argued, "does not recognise the individual as a centre of social purpose…there is no room for individual merit and consideration of individual justice…";[48] "…The division of labour brought about by the Caste System is not a division based on choice…It is based on the dogma of pre-destination."[49] In a way, individuals have been trapped by Hinduism through its caste system. It is important to recognise here that when we say individuals, it refers to all the castes in the Caste System. A Brahmin individual may enjoy greater freedom, rights, privileges and status compared to a Dalit, but he is also trapped by the social ideology of Hinduism. In the sense, he does not have a choice (in the traditional social structure) but to adhere to the occupation and values imposed upon him by the Caste ideology. As Caste does not allow individual merit, effort and choice, what Ambedkar wanted first and foremost was to annihilate Caste so as to liberate individuals from its clutches. Of course, at this stage it is also important to recognise that in advocating the annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar is primarily concerned with individuals from the Dalit and lower caste backgrounds; for their subordination is

[48] Cited in Gore, M.S. 1993. *The Social Context of an Ideology: Ambedkar's Political and Social Thought.* New Delhi: Sage, p. 262, quote taken from Rochana Bajpai. 2012. Liberalism in India: A Sketch. In: Jackson, Ben and Marc Stears, eds., *Liberalism as Ideology: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeden.* Oxford: OUP, p.72.

[49] Ambedkar, B.R. 1979[1936]. *Annihilation of Caste with a Reply to Mahatma Gandhi.* Bombay: Government Central Press, p. 47.

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greater than individuals of the upper castes. The question is, how to destroy Caste? For Caste, as Ambedkar perceptibly argued, is not a physical object but a state of mind:

> Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which therefore has to be pulled down. Caste is a notion, it is a state of the mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a notional change.[50]

Such notional change is possible only by destroying "the belief in the sanctity of the Shastras", for it is the Shashtras that have been inculcating the notion of Caste among the Hindus. But is it possible to destroy the Shashtras? In case there is such a possibility, is it going to be an easy task? Destroying Shashtras, i.e., destroying belief in the sanctity of the Shashtras, is possible. In the sense, it requires replacement of the Hindu belief system, a system that believes in denying liberty, equality and fraternity in favour of separatism and exclusion, with another religious belief system that recognizes liberty, equality and *maitri* among all the people.[51] Yet Ambedkar knew that such a replacement is not an easy task. Because the Caste system not only divides people into separate communities, it also places these communities in a graded order, one above the other with regard to social status; not surprisingly, it is this gradation that allows these communities to claim superiority over the other. In Ambedkar's words:

> Each caste takes its pride and its consolation in the fact that in the scale of castes it is above some other caste. As an outward mark of this gradation, there is also a gradation of social and religious rights, technically spoken of as Ashtadhikaras and Sankaras. The higher the grade of a caste, the greater the number of these rights; and the lower the grade, the lesser their number….Castes…are jealous of their status and know that if a general dissolution came, some of them stand to lose more of their prestige and power than others do.[52]

As the Caste System through its gradations bestows rights on each caste, they all cling to their respective positions in the social hierarchy. In short, all castes may not be equal in status but are jealous of their status, and so are "slaves of the Caste System".[53] And it is simply on account of this slave mentality that a general mobilisation of the Hindus against the Caste System is a Himalayan task and so the destruction of Shashtras. This may be the case, but Ambedkar does not want people, especially the Dalits and other marginalised sections of Indian society to suffer due to Caste. He firmly believed that the

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[50] Ibid., p. 68.
[51] See, Ambedkar, B.R. 2004[1936]. *Conversion as Emancipation.* New Delhi: Critical Quest.
[52] Ambedkar. B.R. 1979. *Op. cit.,* p. 72.
[53] Ibid.

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entrenched social problems could be rectified with better political arrangements. Indeed, as we have noted in the prologue, unlike other nationalist leaders, such as Gandhi, Ambedkar categorically notes that untouchability is not a social problem but a political one; and for a political solution the intervention of the State is *sine qua non,* as the State has a responsibility towards the poorest and the most underprivileged. One way of fulfilling that responsibility is by providing universal franchise because franchise is "the inherent right of every individual in the State",[54] and positive discrimination in favour of the oppressed, that is to say, providing guaranteed places for Dalits and other similarly placed groups in government and public services. Perhaps it is not out of place to note here that Ambedkar was, as rightly pointed by Bayly, "one of the first intellectuals worldwide to argue the case for the principle of positive constitutional and political discrimination in favour of an underclass".[55]

Further, for Ambedkar, while elections, political parties and parliament were important, they were only formal institutions of democracy that could not be effective on their own in an undemocratic atmosphere. Yet, we know that during his lifetime, Ambedkar had floated two political parties, the Independent Labour Party and the All India Scheduled Castes Federation; the Republican Party of India, which was formally established in October 1957, was, in fact, the brainchild of Ambedkar and floated a short while before his death in 1956.[56] In other words, Ambedkar knew that political parties were perhaps only formal requirements in a democracy, yet they were indispensable for the working of a democracy. Indeed, they are *sine qua non* towards realisation of democracy. And Ambedkar viewed democracy as a form and method of government whereby revolutionary changes in the economic and social life of the people could be brought about without bloodshed.[57] At the heart of Ambedkar's approach to the question of democracy was the space available to the marginalised sections to bargain for adequate protection – in terms of their presence in political parties and in the government, the

[54] Vasant Moon, ed., 1976. *Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches, vol. II.* Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, p. 559, quoted in Bajpai. 2012. *Op. cit.,* p. 72.
[55] Bayly, C.A. 2012. *Recovering Liberties: Indian Thought in the Age of Liberalism and Empire.* Cambridge: CUP, p. 297.
[56] Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2000. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Analysing and Fighting Caste,* London: Hurst & Company, p. 86.
[57] Das, Bhagawan. 1963. *Thus spoke Ambedkar.* Jalandhar: Buddhist Publishing House, p. 61.

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access to opportunities in education and employment and the opportunities to earn respect and live a dignified life. It may be noted here that from the above description it is clear that Ambedkar's ideas and idealism are quite diametrically opposite to Gandhi's. In a sense, while Gandhi, in the name of *dharma,* did not allow individuals to have freedom and choice; Ambedkar insisted upon the freedom and choice of individuals.

In a way, while there are certain core determinations attached to being Ambedkarite, its substantive meanings vary widely. In one sense of the term, an Ambedkarite is one who argues that untouchability is a distinct social phenomenon and must be addressed in the political domain rather than through social reform as emphasised by Gandhi. It calls for political mobilisation of Dalits and other similarly placed groups at all levels which among other things would demand preferential consideration and affirmative action for them as a way of democratic inclusion. In another sense, an Ambedkarite accuses the rest of society, particularly the Brahmins and the upper castes, as being responsible for the degradation of the lower castes and for not being predisposed to extending special considerations to the latter. Moreover, the upper castes are said to speak the language of equal rights or that of class mobilisation to ward off their culpability. In this perspective, the Brahmin becomes the Dalits' Other, and traditional authority, including culture, is rendered deeply suspect.

Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh as case studies: As noted above, in order to map the contours of Dalit mobilisation for social equality and political power through democratic politics in India, I have taken Uttar Pradesh in northern India and Andhra Pradesh in South India as case studies, by settingup a contrast between them. Uttar Pradesh is often described as the "Hindi–speaking heartland" of India. The State has a population of 16.61 crore as per the 2001 Census and a geographical area of 2.41 lakh sq.km. Its share in the total area of the country is 7.3 per cent, while its share in the country's total population is 16.2 per cent. Nearly 80 per cent population of U.P. resides in rural areas spread over 97,942 inhabited villages. The state is now organised into 71 districts, 311 tehsils and 820 development blocks. It is divided into four economic regions viz. Western region, Central region, Eastern region and Bundelkhand. The first

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three regions fall in the Gangetic plains, while Bundelkhand forms part of the southern plateau. Economically the state is one of most backward states in India, "giving its citizens less than some of the worst performing economies in sub-Saharan Africa".[58] However, it sends eighty-five members to the *Lok Sabha*, out of 545. This makes it politically the most crucial region in terms of determining the formation of the central government in New Delhi. It is also the chief locale for the transition to a post-Congress polity and is the pivotal site of contest among non-Congress groups. Inter-caste conflict, assertive lower castes, and Hindutva politics all manifest themselves in UP. Potentially, the most radical challenge to upper caste hegemony, the outcome of which would affect the overall structure of social inequality, is taking place in UP today. The BSP, a Dalit political party, has been in power for the longest period in the state. The way in which conflicts between castes and communities are played out in UP will influence the course of democratic politics and alter the ways of wresting and sustaining political power at the national level.

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Similarly, Andhra Pradesh is one of the major states in India and ranks fifth in terms of population. The population of the state was about 75.7 million in 2001 (Census 2001). Its geographical spread of 274.4 lakh hectares accounting for 8.37 per cent of the total area of the country makes it the fourth largest state in the country. There are 23 districts and 1128 Mandals in the state; and geographically it is divided into three regions which are distinct in terms of socio-economic characteristics for historical reasons and the region-specific resource base. Of the 23 districts, nine are in Coastal Andhra; ten are in Telangana and four in Rayalaseema.

The state is still largely agricultural in terms of population and employment. Although the share of agriculture in GSDP has declined from above 60 per cent in the 1950's to around 22 per cent recently, it continues to be the primary source of livelihood for around 60 per cent of the population in the state. This complex and semi-feudal economic scenario has also decisively influenced the power structure in the state. The agriculture land has been

[58] Hasan, Zoya. 2000. Representation and Redistribution: the New Lower Caste Politics of North India. In: Frankel R. Francine *et al* eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy.* New Delhi: OUP, p.148.

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monopolised by the upper caste landowners, specifically Reddys and Kammas, on whom the landless and indigent Dalits are dependent. The Reddys and Kammas, the two main upper castes within the non-Brahmin category, are classic examples of those castes M.N. Srinivas has called 'dominant castes' in Indian society.[59] Since the late '70's, the state has witnessed a massive mobilisation of different sections of society - women, rural poor, and Dalits in particular - marking a new phase in grassroots politics in the state. After the Telugu Desam Party's assumption of power in 1983, tension grew between the upper caste peasant communities and the Dalits in the villages. The two major attacks on Dalits in 1985 and 1991 by the Kammas and Reddys, respectively, caused a great upheaval in the state; consequently the Dalits were organised by people from within the community in a protracted struggle for justice against these atrocities.

Today, however, the political potency of the Dalits is increasing. There is an unprecedented politicisation of caste taking place, which has significantly taken the form of both segmentation and mobilisation of Dalits. The *Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi* (MRPS), a separate Madiga organisation, demanded the classification or sub-categorisation of reservations in education, employment, and governmental benefits, in tune with the numerical strength of the sixty castes within the Dalit category. On the other hand, the Malas, who have been enjoying a greater presence in education, employment, and political spaces that are reserved for the Dalit category as whole, objected to this demand and formed the Mala Maha Nadu (MMN) as a counter-movement. As such, with the emergence of the MRPS as a major force and MMN in opposition, the crisis in the Dalit movement and in politics in the state has reached a different level today. Such segmentary and yet comprehensive assertion may have significant impact on the course of politics in AP and signal the shape of Dalit mobilization in the future.

To sum up, this thesis aims to examine Dalit politics comparatively in Uttar Pradesh in northern India and Andhra Pradesh in southern India. It seeks both to challenge the

[59] They are 'numerically the strongest in the village or local area and economically and politically exercise a prepondering influence'. See, Srinivas, M.N. 1959. The Dominant Caste in Rampura. *American Anthropologist,* 61 (1), pp: 1-16

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dominant thinking on politics in northern India and southern India and to fill the gaps in our understanding of Dalit mobilisations for political power and social justice in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra Pradesh. I make four main arguments in this thesis. First, it was not just around the axis of the 'Hindu-Muslim cleavage', but also around the axis of caste that the politics in northern India was organised. Second, Dalit consciousness in the northern region was not underdeveloped in comparison with Dalit consciousness in the Southern region. Dalit in UP were among the first to make a claim for political power, while their counterparts in other regions were seeking social equality. Third, in seeking to transform the Brahmanical social order and upper-caste dominated political power, Dalit politics is ideologically distinct both from upper castes activism on behalf of downtrodden castes, as well as from the politics of other lower castes such as OBCs. Finally, Dalits in UP succeeded in gaining political power both due to the foundations laid by the Adi-Hindu movement and the Dalit mobilisations for political power through the United Provinces Scheduled Castes Federation (UPSCF) in colonial India and Republican Party of India (RPI) in post-Independence UP and continuation of that tradition of mobilisation for political power in the contemporary period under the leadership of Bahujan Samaj Party. The Dalits in Andhra Pradesh, however, could not acquire political power due to their over-emphasis on the idea of social equality during the colonial as well as the post-Independence periods; and also due to their incarceration in caste-based activism on the question of sub-categorisation of the Scheduled Castes reservations in the state.

Research Methods: To make a comparative study of Dalit politics in North and South India, I carried out intensive research in UP and AP over a twelve-month period (November 2003-October 2004). I also add here that I am a Telugu-speaking Dalit from AP and so bring to this thesis first-hand experience of the issues examined. A lifetime of personal experiences as a Dalit who continues to experience upper caste dominance, has produced a lack of objectivity but a wealth of in-depth knowledge that will influence this thesis. As an individual who grew up in a Dalit community and experienced discrimination, and dominance along caste lines, I have particular biases and views. However, I hope to bring some of the richness of personal experiences to the thesis.

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This project mainly used three methods of research. Firstly, the informal interview technique was employed, which was useful in garnering the attitudes, values and obtaining a deep and personal understanding of the Dalit critique of caste. Altogether 100 people were interviewed in both UP and AP. Secondly, I used participant observation among political leaders, Dalit leaders, activists, and villagers. Thirdly, I have also collected a whole range of documents and primary material, including pamphlets, newspaper articles, and other published articles from various Dalit political parties as well as social organisations that have been working for the development of Dalit communities in UP and AP.

Fieldwork in UP: Before I began my fieldwork in Uttar Pradesh I did not know anyone in that state. I landed in JNU in the first week of October, 2003 and contacted Dr. Vivek Kumar, know for his sympathies towards the BSP and its activities. He introduced me to Avinash Goutham, one of the M.Phil students in the Centre for Studies of Social Systems (CSSS). I spent nearly a week in JNU campus interacting with political sociologists like Prof. Valerian Rodrigues, Prof. Gopal Guru, Prof. Surendra Jodhka, Prof. Mary John and also with Dalit students from various parts of India. In the second week of October I moved to Lucknow and with Avinash's help, who also hails from Lucknow, I visited the offices of all the main political parities, particularly, Bahujana Samaj Party (BSP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Communist Party of India (CPI), Congress (I), and Samajwadi Party. I spent nearly a week talking to the office-bearers and activists from various political parties and another week talking to BSP workers, office- bearers and sympathisers. In my interaction I was mainly focusing on the workers' relationship with the BSP, when and why did they join the Party, what have been the Party's achievements while in power and what did the Party do to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits and other marginalised communities in the state.

In the last week of October, both Goutham and I left for Banda in Bundelkhand region. This region comprises of seven districts: Jhansi, Jalaun, Lalitpur, Hamirpur, Mahoba, Banda and Chitrakoot. In Banda we met Mr. Ram Kishore Varma, who was BSP's divisional co-ordinator. With his help we met BSP MLAs – both from Dalit and non-

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Dalit backgrounds in all the seven districts and took extensive interviews. We also met Bahujan Samaj Party workers and leaders in all the district headquarters in the region. The party workers took us to their villages and helped us to interact with the Dalits as well as with the non-Dalits. In Chitrakoot, Hamirpur and Banda districts we visited a few Dalit villages, where the Ambedakar Village Scheme (AVS) was implemented.

During my fieldwork in UP, national elections were announced. Having previously visited party offices and made a wide range of contacts among the upper echelons of the local political parties, I was invited by BSP, BJP, and SP party leaders to observe their campaigns. It was during this time that I managed to obtain the most informative and complex data. Information pertaining to voting practices as well as ethnographic material relating to the national elections were also collected. By the end of March 2004, through intensive interviews and interactions, in-depth information pertaining to Dalit politics in UP had been collected and the observations were recorded.

Fieldwork in AP: Andhra Pradesh being my home state, I had an easier time in conducting fieldwork in the state. I began the fieldwork in AP in April, 2004. Initially I stayed in Guntur district to observe the national as well as state election campaigns. That gave me an excellent opportunity to observe and understand not only the machinations of Dalit politics, but also the caste-inflected nature of mainstream politics at a crucial time in the state and indeed national history. Post-elections, I travelled across the state, particularly to the district headquarters, to meet Dalit leaders and activists. I made three trips to Karamchedu and Chunduru villages, where violence against Dalits was orchestrated by the upper caste Kammas and Reddys.

After spending three months in observing the elections, interacting with district-level Dalit activists and leaders and meeting with the victims of violence, I moved to Hyderabad, the capital city of AP. I spent three months meeting and gathering information from Dalit activists and leaders there belonging to organisations including Madiga Dandora, Mala Mahanadu, SC, ST, BC and Minorities Employees' Welfare Associations. Leaders and activists belonging to Dalit political parties like *Mahajana*

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Sangarshana Samithi (MSS), Republican Party of India (RPI), and BSP were also interviewed.

Structure of Study: My thesis comprises of eight chapters, including the introductory and concluding chapters. These chapters are divided into two main sections: while Chapters Two, Three and Four are on UP Dalit politics, Chapters Five, Six and Seven are on Dalit politics in AP. As seen above, the introductory chapter had discussed the claims made by Ashutosh Varshney and Christophe Jaffrelot and limitations of their claims. I also discussed the limitations in existing literature on caste politics and democracy, and the objectives of the study I have undertaken.

Chapter Two will examine Dalit politics in UP, both during the colonial as well as the immediate post-Independence periods. The chapter concentrates on the mobilisation of Dalits for their share of political power in the wake of the introduction of the Montague and Chelmsford Reforms in 1919. It also focuses on Dalit politics under the banner of the Republication Party of India (RPI). The examination will address the following questions: Is religion the only axis around which politics in colonial UP was organised or did caste also play important role? Was Dalit consciousness in colonial UP delayed due to lack of social and political movements? Finally, what were the demands and activities of the Dalits under the RPI during immediate post-Independence period in UP? The aim of the chapter is to challenge the North-South contrast as observed by Varshney and Pai's arguments of delayed development of Dalit consciousness in UP; I argue that it was not just around the Hindu-Muslim divide that the politics in northern India had been organised, but also around caste. I also argue that by demanding their share in the emerging political power, the Dalits in UP exhibited a political consciousness in the colonial era in constrast to what some scholars have suggested.

Chapter Three examines Dalit politics in post-Independence UP, particularly from the early 1970's to the early 1990's. The chapter mainly focuses on Dalit relationship with the Congress party as well as the context in which the BSP emerged. It will address the following questions: What was the so-called special relationship between the Congress

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and the Dalits? Did this empower the Dalits? What kind of socio-economic conditions provided the context for Dalit mobilisation around BAMCEF and later on, under the banner of the BSP? How did the BSP mobilise the Dalits and other lower castes for political power? The aim of the chapter is to examine the relationship between the Congress and Dalits in the post-Independence era in UP and effects of some of the socio-economic measures on the Dalits - during Congress regime in the state. The chapter also aims to examine the history of the BSP, especially the wider socio-economic context and the ideological features of Dalit politics in the state.

Chapter Four examines BSP's electoral politics for power. It also concentrates on the party's idea of 'social justice' and its programme whilst in power. The examination will address following questions: Why was the political alliance between the SP and BSP short-lived? Were there major differences between the BSP and SP's ideological vision? What was the BSP's idea of social justice and how did it try to realise this? The aim of the chapter is to show the contradictions between the politics of the Shudras and Dalits, to analyse the BSP's concept of 'social justice', and also to understand the BSP government's programmes.

Chapter Five examines Dalit mobilisations and their politics in the Madras Presidency, particularly in the Telugu region during the colonial era. The chapter concentrates mainly on the ideologies adopted by the two major Dalit groups in the British-ruled Andhra region and Nizam's Hyderabad state. The main argument in this chapter is that Dalits in the state were organised around the ideology of Adi-Hindu, rather than the ideology of *Dravida.* I also argue that unlike political agenda in UP, in AP the social agenda dominated the Dalit movement, which led to their 'domestication' in post-Independent AP politics by the Congress and the Communists.

Chapter Six focuses on three aspects of Dalit politic in post-Independence AP: (a) Dalit politics under the Congress and Communist parties; (b) Dalits mobilisation under the banner of the APDMS; and (c) the rise and fall of the BSP in the state. The examination will address the following questions: how did the Congress and Communist parties

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address the Dalit question? What was the context that led to the formation of the APDMS? What was the ideology of the APDMS and what were its programmes and activities? What were the reasons for the emergence of Dalit movement under the banner of the *Andhra Pradesh Dalita Maha Sabha (APDMS)?* And, why did the BSP fail at electoral politics in AP? The chapter will show how the upper-caste based leadership of the Congress and Communist parties used their power to strengthen the domination of the upper castes in the political and social domains, and how this, in turn, led to the marginalisation of the lower castes, particularly the Dalit constituency in the state. It also shows how casteism among the Dalits and other lower castes resulted in the failure of the BSP in electoral politics.

Chapter Seven examines the emergence of the *Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi* (MRPS) and Mala Mahanadu (MMN) in AP during the early 1990's. The chapter's main focus is on the arguments and counter-arguments concerning the classification of SC reservations in the debate between the Madigas and Malas in the state. The examination will address the following questions: what were the arguments forwarded by the MRPS in support of its demand for caste-based classification of the SC reservations? What arguments were put forward by the MMN in its opposition to the classification demand of the MRPS? And, what were the main challenges thrown up by marginalisation within the Dalit castes to the larger Dalit politics? The chapter shows, contrary to Omvedt, that there were differences within the Dalit category. The Dandora movement best captures the distinctiveness of an Ambedkarite Dalit ideology with respect to social transformation The conclusions of the study are discussed in *Chapter Eight.*

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Part – I

Uttar Pradesh

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Two.....

Making Claims for Power: Dalit Politics in Uttar Pradesh, 1919-67[♣]

Introduction

As mentioned in the previous pages, two influential claims impel the present research on UP Dalit politics. While the first claim is about the Hindu-Muslim cleavage as the master narrative of politics in North India by Ashutosh Varshney, the second claim was that of the delayed Dalit consciousness in Uttar Pradesh by Sudha Pai. I have noted my reservations on Varshney's claim in the introductory chapter. Therefore, let us examine Pai's claim. In her work: *Dalit Assertion and the Unfinished Democratic Revolution: The Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh,* Pai argues that the Dalit consciousness in the state was delayed due to lack of social and political movements comparable to similar movements in southern and western India. Is it true that the Dalits in UP did not launch any socio-political movements, movements that were comparable to those launched by their counterparts in South and West India? For me, the claim made by Pai is a simplified one. Two aspects are systematically emphasised by scholars who studied the socio-religious movements based among the lower castes; the lower castes have never passively accepted the social hegemony of the upper castes, social hegemony which has been institutionalised in the form of 'caste' and legitimated through religion; in fact, there have been significant differences in the cultural traditions of lower caste Hindus compared to those of the upper caste Hindus, and above all, in the area of socio-religious ideology.[60] A

[♣] The title of this chapter is inspired by an article of Rawat, R.S. 2003. Making Claims for Power: A New Agenda in Dalit Politics of Uttar Pradesh, 1946-48. *Modern Asian Studies,* 37 (3), pp: 585 – 612.

[60] Kolenda, Pauline Mahar. 1958. Changing caste ideology in a north Indian village. *Journal of Social Issues,* 14 (4), pp: 51-65; -----, 1960. Changing religious practices of an untouchable caste. *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, 8(3), pp: 278-87; -------, 1964. Religious anxiety and Hindu fate. *Journal of Asian Studies,* Vol. 23, pp: 71-81; Lynch, Owen. 1972. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar: Myth and Charisma. In: Mahar, Michael J. ed., *The untouchables in contemporary India,* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, pp: 96-112; Zelliot, Eleanor. 1970. Mahar and Non-Brahman Movements in Maharashtra. *Indian Economic & Social History Review*, 7(3), pp: 397-415; -----, 1980. Chokhamela and Eknath: Two bhakti modes of legitimacy for modern change. *Journal of Asian and African studies,* Vol. 15, pp: 136-56; David N. Lorenzen. 1987. Traditions of non-caste Hinduism: The Kabir Panth. *Contributions to Indian Sociology (n.s.)*, 21(2), pp: 263-284; Schaller, Joseph., 1996[1995]. Sanskritization, Caste Uplift, and Social Dissidence in the Sant Ravidas Panth. In: David, N. Lorenzen., ed., *Bhakti Religion in North India: Community Identity and Political Action.* New Delhi: Manohar, pp: 94-119; Robb, Peter., ed., 1993. *Dalit*

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few scholars, like Robert Miller,[61] Mark Juergensmeyer[62], and Gail Omvedt,[63] have suggested that there exists a 'parallel', 'alternate', or 'counter' cultural tradition carried principally either by the Untouchables or the Adivasis. The Dalits in UP too have engaged in a powerful spiritual battle against Brahmanical Hinduism, even before the colonial times, and formed their own religious traditions in the form of *Bhakti.* The social strength gained through these traditions was employed in political activism during the latter half in colonial India. Therefore, my main argument in this chapter is that the Dalit consciousness in UP was not delayed as claimed by Pai and other scholars, if we look at the cultural as well as political sphere. On the eve of Montague and Chelmsford reforms in 1919, the Dalits in the state as their counterparts in the other regions of the country, especially western and southern India, which we shall see later in Chapter Five, have claimed a separate 'Dalit' identity for themselves, i.e., the Dalits as a separate community, separate from the caste- Hindus. Indeed, this Dalit identity had become the foundation for the formation of a new politics, raising a new set of issues and mobilising all Dalit castes collectively under a single umbrella. Significantly, this identity did not exist earlier, but emerged in the 1920's and gradually acquired a concrete form between the 1940s and 1960s.

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My main objectives in this chapter are twofold: (a) to show how caste which had been the main axis around lower caste politics had been organized in colonial UP. This I will show by an examination of Dalit activities and politics during the colonial era. Such an examination is intended to show the importance of caste, in addition to the Hindu-Muslim cleavage, in analysing the politics of UP. It also intended to show that Dalit consciousness in UP was not delayed, and therefore, the Dalits were not behind their counterparts in southern and western India in raising their voice against Brahmanical

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Movements and the Meanings of Labour in India, Delhi: OUP; Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth – Century India,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[61]Miller, Robert J. 1966. Button, button…great tradition, little tradition, whose tradition? *Anthropological Quarterly,* 39(1), pp: 26-42.

[62] Mark, Juergensmeyer. 1980. What if untouchables don't believe in Untouchability? *Bulletin of concerned Asian scholars*, 12(1), pp: 23-28; -----, 1982. *Religion as social vision: The movement against Untouchability in 20th century Punjab.* Berkeley: UCP.

[63] Omvedt, Gail. 1980. Adivasis, culture and modes of production in India. *Bulletin of concerned Asian scholars*, 12 (1), pp: 15-22.

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Hinduism and the domination of the upper castes in social and political spaces. In fact, by demanding their share in the emerging political power under the Adi-Hindu ideological umbrella, Dalits in the state were far ahead of their counterparts in other parts of India during the colonial era; and (b) to explore Dalit politics through the Republican Party of India (RPI) in post-Independent UP.

With these objectives in mind, this chapter has been divided into two main sections. While the first section which is divided into two sub-sections examines how the context of the national movement for power has set the Dalits' claim for power in UP during the colonial era, the second section concentrates on Dalit politics in post-Independent UP through the Republican Party of India (RPI). The first sub-section of the first section examines the Dalit relationship with Arya Samaj as well as Dalit activism under the banner of Adi-Hinduism. In this section, my main argument is that by rejecting the identities that were imposed on them by the caste-Hindus, and by reconstituting themselves as a separate community around the *achhut* identity, Dalits not only demanded equality, but importantly also claimed their share in the emerging political power. The second sub-section in the same section examines Dalit politics under the leadership of B. R. Ambedkar and his United Provinces Scheduled Caste Federation (UPSCF). In the second main section, I examine the Republican Party of India (RPI) with specific emphasis on the supposed shift 'from caste to class' in Dalit politics. I argue that the shift from caste to class is only to explore the possibilities of building political alliances without losing focus on a united *achhut* identity and agenda.

2. I. National Movement – Context of Dalit Activism in colonial United Provinces

At the dawn of the 20th century, Dalits in the United Provinces were seen organising themselves through the Adi-Hindu movement and Buddhist organisations. Through these organisations, they made two claims: one, they are *mula bharatvasi* (original inhabitants of India),[64] and they wanted separate representation for the Dalits on the lines of Muslims in political institutions. It is important to note here that for many scholars, for instance

[64] I have drawn my information on Adi Hinduism mainly from Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics of the Urban…,* esp. Chapter 5. 'Untouchable assertion', pp: 143 – 184; Khare, R.S., 1984. *The Untouchable as himself: ideology, identity, and pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars.* Cambridge: CUP.

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Owen Lynch,[65] Ambedkar's entry into UP politics had been a turning point for Dalits and their politics in this region. The real shift, for me, however, came from the Adi-Hindu movement. For, prior to this movement, the efforts of Dalits were aimed at gaining social respectability and a respectable position within the Brahmanical social order. But, Adi-Hinduism did not merely divert that focus from the religious sphere to the political, but it also sought to disentangle Dalits from the Hinduism preached by Brahmins by constructing an independent identity for them. The Dalits, through these claims, sought not merely a respectable social identity for themselves and social equality, but also, due share in the emerging political power. The context of these claims was of social and political developments both at the regional and national levels. The Dalits, especially those who were living in the urban centres, were affected by these developments.

The Indian national movement, as forcefully argued by Aloysius, was not only a struggle for freedom from colonial rule; also, importantly, it was a struggle for power among the divergent castes and communities.[66] These divergent communities could broadly be categorised into two: the Brahmin communities that include the first three castes/communities in the varna order;[67] and the subaltern or non-Brahmin communities, which include Dalits, Shudras, Adivasis, and Muslim masses.[68] As these categories represent different layers, i.e., higher and lower, in the hierarchal social order, their social discourse was also largely shaped by their social standing. Not surprisingly, the same social discourse was reproduced in their political consciousness and agendas.

By the early 20th century, the dichotomies between those two social forces – the Brahmin and non-Brahmin communities – were more obvious. While the first group of castes were clamouring for reincarnating the Brahmanical social order as nationalist ideology, the non-Brahmins were making every effort to demolish the same order. In order to achieve those objectives, both the groups required political power and we see both the groups

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[65] Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Politics of Untouchability: Social Mobility and Social Change in a City of India.* New York: Columbia University Press.
[66] Aloysius, G. 1997. *Nationalism without a Nation in India.* Delhi: OUP.
[67] Until and unless specified, I will be using this definition of Brahmin, as including Kshatriya and Vaishya.
[68] Aloysius, G. 1997. *Nationalism…,* esp. chapter IV: 'Nationalism: The Movement for Transfer of Power', pp: 93 – 122; also, Ghosh, S. K., 1989. *India and the Raj 1919 – 1947,* Calcutta: Prachi.

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demanding that the British transfer political power to the colonised. Interestingly, from the outset it appears that both the groups were placing similar or one demand, i.e., transfer of power. Yet, it is important to note here that the intentions behind the same demand were quite conflicting, indeed, in direct contradiction to one another. While the former was demanding transfer of power to retain its dominance in the social structure, as well as to attain a hold in the emerging power structure, the latter, whose position within the socio-political structure until recently had appeared to be immutably fixed at the bottom rung through the formidable doctrine of *karma* and *dharma,* were aspiring for homogenisation or equitable distribution of power within society.

While these disparate social forces with divergent political and social agendas have engaged simultaneously in collaboration with each other against the coloniser and in competition against each other for power, the occurrence of two events in the 1920's had not merely changed the nature and course of the national movement for freedom but also changed the discourse of power. The proposal for further devolution of power to Indians by the colonial government was one such event; the entry of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (hereafter MK Gandhi) [69] into the Indian national movement was the other event.[70] Dalits in the United Provinces responded to these events; first by establishing *Adi-Hindu Dharm* and later through the United Province Scheduled Caste Federation (UPSCF). The greatest significance of these organisations was that, until then, Dalit struggles were concentrated on gaining social respectability and acceptability from caste-Hindus. Since the 1920's, however, these organisations have directed the energies of Dalits to gain their share in power in the emerging democratic representative institutions. Before we examine these aspects, let us briefly look at the Dalit conditions in northern India at the turn of the 20th century.

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[69] For instance, see Brown, Judith. 1969. The Mahatma and Modern India. *Modern Asian Studies,* 3(4), pp: 321 – 42; Parekh, Bhikhu. 1989. *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform.* New Delhi: Sage Publications; ----, 1989a. *Gandhi's Political Philosophy: A Critical Examination.* Houndmills: Macmillan Press; Arnold, David. 2001. *Gandhi.* Harlow: Longman; Hardiman, David. 2003. *Gandhi in his times and ours: the global legacy of his ideas.* New York: Columbia University Press.

[70] In treating Gandhi and his activities as an event I follow Aloysius line of thinking. For him understanding Gandhi as an Event means 'the unearthing of Gandhi that had a determining role on the course of the nationalist movement'. Aloysius, G. 1997. *Nationalism…,* pp: 170 – 213.

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The Dalits in northern India were, as their counterparts in southern India, which we shall see in Chapter Four in the AP section, deeply discriminated against and prevented from entering into public places by the caste-Hindus. By the 1920's, caste-based exclusions and discrimination against Dalits had become a pervasive problem, and they were prevented from engaging in any form of economic or public activities. Such exclusions were not just in rural areas, but also in urban spaces. For instance, outside the confines of menial jobs, such as sweeping, scavenging, and leather works, there were very few economic avenues available for them in urban areas.[71] For the upper caste Hindu employers preferred *Shudras* for unskilled manual labour rather than Dalits. The colonial government's urban local policies also added to their difficulties. Nandini Gooptu mentions three such areas of difficulties: first, after the First World War, the government began to put tremendous restrictions on Dalit occupational activities, particularly on those who handled dead animals, hides, and skins or engaged in pig-rearing, through municipal sanitary by-laws and licensing regulations; secondly, the colonial government's new schemes of the Improvement Trusts for sanitary improvement; and finally, the development of un-reclaimed lands also adversely affected Dalits by displacing and dispossessing them from their residential areas.[72]

In addition to these economic restrictions and regulations, Dalit were also excluded from the intellectual spaces available at that time. For instance, some of the educated Dalits, who were small in number and who were to become the most active Adi-Hindu ideologues in later years, aspired to participate in the burgeoning Hindi public sphere. But they came to experience exclusion from participating in those public debates, not on account of lack of intellectual capabilities but simply on account of their low caste status as well as social concerns. The views and social concerns of the educated Dalits were, understandably, coloured by their experiences as members of the 'untouchable' castes, and hence, they attempted to raise caste-related issues and concerns through some of the

[71] The first generation of Dalits that migrated to the growing urban centres, such as Allahabad, Benaras, Kanpur and Lucknow, in the late nineteenth century was absorbed as scavengers, sweepers and conversancy workers in the army cantonments, civil stations and municipalities and as leather workers in the leather industries. But at the turn of the century, despite the population growth, the urban expansions have slowed down. As a result the second generation Dalits were forced to look for jobs other than menial ones and trades. See Gooptu, Nandini.2001. *The Politics of the Urban…,* pp: 143 – 184.
[72] Ibid., p. 153.

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platforms available to them, such as the social uplift programmes of the Arya Samaj and Hindu reform literature.[73]

However, as Francesca Orsini's study of the developing Hindi sphere in the early decades of the 20th century demonstrates, the educated Dalits were almost neglected by the participants of the mainstream Hindi literary field. For the mainstream participants, who were invariably drawn from the Brahmanical communities, "only matters which appeared under the *jatiy* or 'national' guise were fit to be discussed. Anything which appeared particular or heterogeneous was, as a consequence, not part of the 'public'"[74] In a way, Dalits were sandwiched between the Brahmanical communities, who in the name of caste and religious sanctions practised untouchability, and the colonial government which in the name of developmental activities dispossessed the Dalits by placing restrictions on their only economic activities. Against these sanctions and restrictions, Dalits began to actively seek ways and means for educational and employment opportunities.

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This was also a period in which Dalits were compelled to realise the importance of having representation in local political bodies. For, apart from the colonial government's local policies, it was the Indian local authorities – read upper caste individuals - who entered the colonial bureaucracy and restricted Dalits' access to municipal schools. Had Dalits accessed these political institutions they would have argued against such policies and prevented those catastrophes. It was on account of such blatant restrictions that they felt a strong need to "find avenues for engagement with institutional politics and to organise themselves to contend with local policies."[75] The opportunity to realise that need came in the form of Montague and Chelmsford reforms or 'Mont-ford reforms' in 1919[76]. That introduced the concept of communal representation for the Muslims.

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[73] Wilkerson, B. Sarah. 2006. Hindi Dalit Literature and the Politics of Representation. Ph.D. University of Cambridge, p. 31

[74] Orsini, Francesca. 2002 . *The Hindi Public Sphere, 1920 – 1940: language and the literature in the age of nationalism.* New Delhi: OUP, p. 12.

[75] Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics…,* p. 153.

[76] Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2005. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System.* New York: Columbia University Press, pp: 53.

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The Montford reforms, as noted by Mendelsohn and Vicziany, had dual relevance for Dalits: first, the Dalit demand for communal representation along the lines of representation given to the Muslims was actively supported by the Muslim League. Such support, of course, was born out of the self-interest of the League. For the Hindu numbers were exaggerated because of the latter's "false identification of the 'degraded castes' as Hindus", an identification that would fetch more representative positions for the Hindus. This, in turn, means undue advantage for the Hindus against the Muslims in representative bodies. Secondly, the concept of representation for Muslims successfully established a precedent for political representation for other communities.[77] While these political developments had a bearing in the concerns and activities of the Hindu nationalists of various ideological stances, the instance of the reforms provided an occasion for Dalits to introspect their relationship with the upper castes and the latter's efforts at religious reform through the Arya Samaj.[78] A brief examination of the Dalit relationship with the Arya Samaj is in order. For "the immediate impetus," for the emergence of Adi Hinduism, as observed by Gooptu, [79] came from the shifts in the activities of the Arya Samaj.

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2. I.1A. Dalits and Arya Samaj: As caste discrimination against the urban Dalits in the social and economic activities increased, they began to look for effective ways to contain it. While some of them converted to Christianity, as it could offer education as well as material benefits, others, especially the educated young Dalits, began to take active interest in the activities of the Arya Samaj. The Samaj through its doctrinal position of "Brahmin by merit, not birth", or "varna on the basis of individuals' merits, actions, and

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[77] Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany. 2000. *The Untouchables: Subordination, poverty and the state in Modern India.* Cambridge: CUP, p. 99.

[78] The Arya Samaj was established as a socio-religious reform movement in Bombay in 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati. The Samaj sought to revise Hinduism that was based on the Vedas and revitalisation of Hindu society based on the golden age of the Vedic Aryans. In order to strengthen the Hindu society it urged the lower castes, who had converted to Christianity and Islam to return to the Hindu-fold through the process of 'purification' or *shuddhi.* See Jones, Kenneth. 1976. *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th century Punjab.* Berkeley: UCP; Jordens, J.T.F. 1978. *Dayananda Saraswati: his life and ideas.* Oxford: OUP; Van der Veer, Peter. 1994. *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India.* Berkeley: UCP.

[79] Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics of…,* p. 155.

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temperaments", [80] and its social activities, such as setting up of schools, hostels, and scholarships for the children of the lower castes, attracted many young Dalits.

The Samaj, although instituted to serve the interests of the caste-Hindus, initially appeared to be serving the interests of Dalits (and for that matter other lower castes as well). First, illiteracy among Dalits was falsely considered to be the cause for their social domination by the educated upper castes and of their exclusion from better jobs and opportunities.[81] Education had become a highly valued qualification, and quite naturally the Dalits began to appreciate the efforts of the Arya Samaj. They enrolled their sons in schools run by the Samaj, indeed, they themselves joined these schools. For instance, Manikchand Jatavaveer (1897-1956), one of the founders of the Jatav Mahasabha in 1917, was a teacher in a school run by the Samaj in Agra. Sunderlal Sagar (1886-1952), another co-founder of the Mahasabha was even versed in Sanskrit so much so that he was called Pandit.[82] Some Dalit members of the Samaj even became its preachers. For instance, Swami Acchutanand (1879-1933), whose given name was Harihar, became the Samaj's *upadeshik* (itinerary preacher) under the name of Hariharananda, and preached moral reform, vegetarianism, teetotalism, and temperance as means of achieving a purer status.[83]

Secondly, the Samaj's advocacy of non-hereditary nature of *varna* is an important departure from the hereditary and sacrosanct nature of *varna* of Brahmanical Hinduism. Such advocacy led the Dalits to believe that the Hindu religion is capable of change and through such change it is capable of accepting individuals as equal human agents. Thirdly, until the establishment of the Samaj, no upper caste Hindu organisation had ever argued that an individual's *varna* could be improved. In the sense, all the arguments against the sacrosanct nature of *varna* had come from the lower castes, the victims of the system, but not from the upper castes, the beneficiaries of the system. Quite naturally, the

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[80] Dayananda, Swami. 1981. *The Light of Truth.* cited in Jaffrelot, C. 2003. *India's…,* p. 191.
[81] D.C. Dinakar. 1986. *Swatantra Sangram mein Acchuton ka Yogdan.* Lucknow, p. 89, cited in Gooptu. Nandini. 2001. *The Politics of* …p. 154.
[82] Kshirsagar, R.K. 1994. *Dalit Movement and Its Leaders.* New Delhi: MD Publications, p. 230-231.
[83] Ibid., p. 321. Also see, Jigyansu, Chandrika Prasad. 1968. *Adi Hindu Andolan ka Prabartak Sri Swami Acchutanand Harihar.* Lucknow: Bahujan Kalyan Prakashak.

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Samaj's advocacy of non-hereditary nature of *varna* made the Dalits and other lower castes believe that by acquiring merit they can surmount caste divisions as well as enter the Hindu caste hierarchy.[84] Perhaps one should also mention Dayananda Saraswati's position against Brahmins that gave a fillip to the hopes of the lower castes. In his *Sathyartha Prakash* (The Light of Truth), Saraswati uses very strong words against "the sectarian and selfish Brahmins…these ignorant, sensual, hypocritical, irresponsible, and vicious people…(who) often dissuade persons from learning and ensnare them (the lower castes) into their evil ways with the result that they lose health, peace of mind, and wealth."[85] Following the Samaj's position on *varna*, many Dalits began to claim Kshatriya status. For instance, the Chamars claimed descent from the Yadu race, which entitled them to Kshatriya status.[86]

It may be mentioned here that if one were to compare the doctrinal position of the Samaj with that of the Brahmanical stance, the stance of the former is a liberal one. Unlike the varna of Brahmanical Hinduism, the *varna* in the Hinduism professed by the Arya Samaj is not based on inheritance of an individual, but upon an individual's good conduct and actions of merit not in the previous but the present birth. Yet, the said doctrinal stance of the Samaj is a twist in language rather than a major substantive change of position on the varna. It not only condemns the inherited nature of the varna, but upholds caste, which produces divisions (varnas*)* among the people. This means the Samaj does not intend to bring about equality either of *varnas* or of individuals. It still upholds the classification of people in the name of varna.

Moreover, the proposed up-gradation of the lower-*varnas* to the upper-varnas is dubious for two reasons: first, Arya Samajis were ready to give Kshatriya status to both the Shudras and Dalits, but not Brahmin status, the highest varna in the hierarchy. This means that the prescribed good conduct and actions of merit take the lower-*varnas* up to a certain level in the hierarchy but not to the highest layer in the hierarchy, in effect creating a glass ceiling for the Dalits and the Shudras. Secondly, endogamy has been the

[84] Gooptu. Nandini. 2001. *The Politics…,* p. 155.
[85] Jaffrelot, C. 2003. *India's silent…,* p. 90.
[86] Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Poltiics of Untouchability…,* pp: 68-69.

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central pillar of the *varna*/caste system. By insisting on the strict enforcement of endogamy, the Arya Samajis are simply upholding the caste system, an extension of the *varna vyavastha*. An upgradation to the Kshatriya varna but strict adherence to the practice of endogamy means that a Dalit, who acquires merit by swimming against currents, would be promoted to the Kshatriya status. Yet, he is not worthy of marrying a woman from upper-varnas and so he will still have to marry a woman from his own caste. Thus, had the ideas of the Arya Samaj been put into practice or followed by people, the social structure of the Hindus would have ended up with three layers, where the top and bottom of the hierarchy would be represented by Brahmins and Vaisyas, respectively; and rest of the castes and *varnas* would be accommodated in the middle layer. This means that in the middle layer there would be Kshatriyas, Shudra Kshatriyas, and Dalit Kshatriyas. These larger categories would be further sub-classified in the name of castes. For instance, there would be Thakur Kshatriyas, Yadav Kshatriyas, Chamar Kshatriyas, and so on.

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Perhaps, it may not be out of context to add a few lines on the idea of 'classification'. In Chapter Seven in the section on AP, we see that the Madigas launched a social movement for the 'classification' of the Dalits into four groups and for the re-distribution of the opportunities of reservation provided for them on the basis of each group's proportionality in the total Dalit population in the state. The idea of proportionality was put forward by the Madigas because the Malas and the Adi-Andhras are the two castes that are relatively forward castes within the Dalit group in the state. Despite their relatively small population (especially) in comparison with the Madigas, they have been enjoying a major share in the quota of the reservation for the Dalits. As one would have gathered, I do not subscribe to the Arya Samaj's variety of classification; such classification is simply to divide the people on the basis of their imposed social situations. Such an act of classification ultimately results in preventing one group or the other from accessing opportunities, which in turn, leads to the preservation of those opportunities as exclusive to these groups. This, in essence, produces and re-produces individuals around imposed social identities with little hope of ever overcoming those identities and situations in social, economic, and political spaces. On the contrary, one

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will see in Chapter Seven that I support the Madigas' proposal for classification. For such classification does not thwart any group from accessing opportunities. In fact, such classification only leads to equitable distribution of the opportunities of reservation among all the Dalit castes. Such distribution ultimately leads to eradication of socio-economic and political differences among the Dalit castes, which, in turn, facilitates the Dalits becoming one group – true to the word and spirit.

To get back to our discussion on Dalits and Arya Samaj, in addition to the above discussed theoretical positions of the Samaj, some of its political activities, particularly after the introduction of communal representation, made the Dalits disenchanted with its activities for social uplift and eventually led to their alienation from the Samaj. In 1919, the British colonial government introduced communal representation on the principle of relative numerical strength of various religious groups. The Arya Samajists and other Hindu nationalists were increasingly troubled by this introduction not only because of its basis or principle, but more importantly, also for the accentuated religious activism among the Muslims in response to the Khilafat movement. To contain the religious 'ferment' among the Muslims and to expand and strengthen the Hindu community, the Samaj intensified its shuddhi activities for the inclusion of the lower castes and Hindu converts to Islam and Christianity, especially the former.[87] A large number of Shudras, who were aspiring to acquire Kshatriya status within the caste structure, were drawn into the Samaj only to become its 'foot soldiers.'[88]

[87] Many Arya Samajists in the early twentieth century were concerned about the growing 'census mentality' which suggested a declining strength of the Hindu community based on population statistics. Shuddhi campaigns were originally used as a defensive tool by the Arya Samaj against the conversion of Indians to other 'foreign' religions, namely Christianity and Islam and were performed on upper caste religious converts. After 1900, Shuddhi ceremonies were done to 'purify' members of the lower castes in order to bring them back into the Hindu fold. According to Jones, the Shuddhi campaign drastically altered the internal social composition of the Arya Samaj by increasing the numbers of untouchable Samajists. These campaigns also instigated increasing tensions within both the Arya Samaj and within the larger Hindu community since none could agree on how to position 'purified' untouchables within a casteist society, particularly since Arya Samaj's untouchables and uplift activities directly threatened upper caste domination at the local level. See, Jones, K.W., 1976. *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth-century Punjab.* Berkeley: UCP.

[88] See Das, Veena. ed., 1992. *Mirrors of Violence: Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia.* Delhi: OUP; Gupta, Charu. 2001. *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women Muslims and the Hindu Public in Colonial India.* Delhi: Permanent Black; Menon, M. Dilip., 2006. *The Blindness of Insight...*

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Of course, the shuddhi activities were not entirely confined to converted Muslims or Christians alone. At times, the shuddhi programme was extended to Dalits as well. For instance, in 1923, a shuddhi society exclusively for the Dalits was inaugurated by the Arya Samaj in Benaras and Allahabad.[89] The shuddhi ceremony evolved from the ritual of *prayaschit.* Such conversion programmes among the Dalits, as Jordens observes, implicitly suggest that the condition of the Dalits prior to being purified was sinful.[90] Moreover, as we have seen in the above, Dalits who had joined the Samaj were not accorded equality of status. They were continually distinguished from the other Samajists in the name of their 'untouchable' status.

Not surprisingly, the Dalits in the Arya Samaj became disillusioned with the lack of social equality observed between 'purified' members of the lower castes and upper castes, even among members of the Arya Samaj. Achutaanand's biographer notes feelings of 'disillusionment' as he questioned the ulterior motives of the Hindu reformers, who, he now believed had no intention of instituting true social equality among the castes, but simply desired to strengthen the Hindu community whose numbers had dropped in successive colonial Censuses.[91] Thus, the Dalits were convinced that "the Samaj acted as the 'army of high caste Hindus', whose only intention was to rally the Hindu community against the Muslims, and that the Samaj's attempt to uplift the lower castes was merely a part of this strategy…the Samaj did not aim to eradicate untouchability and that shuddhi was a cunning ploy to perpetuate the hold of the higher castes over the untouchables."[92] In fact, the intention behind the Samaj's intensification of shuddhi after 1919 political reforms was also very sharply criticised by the Dalits. Ram Charan, for instance, argued that "in 1919 reforms came…and representation was given according to population; those religious groups who were more populous would get more places; and what else but *acchutodhar* [uplift of untouchables] conferences

[89] Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics…,* p. 223.
[90] Jordens, J.T. F. 1975. Hindu Religious and Social Reform in British India. In: Basham, A.L. ed., *A Cultural History of India.* Oxford: OUP, pp: 365 – 82, here, p.380.
[91] Jigyasu, Chandrika Prasad., 1968. *Adi Hindu Andolan ka Prabartak Sri Swami* Achutaanand *Harihar.* Lucknow, cited in Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics of the Urban Poor…* p. 157.
[92] Ibid., pp: 156 -57.

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everywhere."[93] It was at this crucial juncture that Dalits, in order to repudiate Vedic Hinduism and the caste system and, more importantly, to construct a new and positive Dalit identity, evolved the new ideology of Adi-Hinduism.

2. I.1B. Adi-Hindusim and Dalits claims for Power: Swami Achutaanand,[94] in association with some other ex-Arya Samaj Dalits, particularly Ram Charan,[95] evolved the ideology of Adi Hinduism. Two central claims made through this ideology were: (a) the present lower castes (Dalits, Shudras, and Adivasis) are the descendants of the Adi Hindus, the original inhabitants of India; and (b) *bhakti* is the original religion of the Adi Hindus.[96] As Adi Hinduism developed in the social context of exclusion encountered by the Dalits in urban centres, especially in the sphere of work and labour, and in the political context of communal representation, the aims of these two claims are obvious. First, it was an attempt to challenge the ritually imposed low social status and menial occupations as a

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[93] Chaudhury, A.P. 1973. *Picchre tatha Dalit Brag ke Mahan Neta Rai Ram Charan ka Jivan Charit tatha Unke Sanshipta Karya* (Ram Charan Biography), quoted in Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *op. cit.,* p. 47.

[94] Swami Achutaanand was born to a Chamar family in Umari village in Mainpuri district, UP. As his father was employed in a military cantonment area, Achutaanand had a relatively privileged childhood. He received his early education at the cantonment school run byChristian missionaries where he learned to read Urdu, English, Hindi and Gurumukhi. Between the ages of fourteen and twenty-four, Achutaanand travelled across north India with mendicant saints. He associated himself with Swami Sacchidananda, from whom he learned Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi and Sanskrit. According to Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, who penned Achutaanand's biography, Achutaanand was extremely well-versed in religious ideology, having studied Guru Granth Saheb, the Bijak of Kabir as well as works by other *bhakti sant* poets including Dadu Dayal, Ravidas and Namdev. Achutaanand also read R C Dutt's Bengali translation of the *Rig Vedas,* and engaged in lengthy discussions with the missionaries of the Theosophical Society and with the Jain and Buddhist sadhus. After his disassociation with the Arya Samaj, Achutaanand launched the All India Achhut Caste Reform Sabha in 1919. See, Kshirsagar, R.K. 1994. *Dalit Movements in India and its Leaders (1857 – 1956).* Delhi: M.D. Publishers.

[95] Ram Charan, unlike Swami Achutaanand, was born in a slum in Gwaltoli in Kanpur. Despite eking out their livelihood as casual labourers, Ram Charan's parents sent him to a local municipal school. As an adult he moved to Lucknow, where he worked in the Railway Audit Office to earn a living and continued his studies in a night school. After earning a degree in law, Ram Charan became widely known for using his legal knowledge to defend Dalits in their court cases and organising local Adi Hindu organisations across the state of U.P. See, Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics…*p.160.

[96] In making these claims the Adi Hindu ideologues relied upon two sources, other than the existing bhakti traditions among the Shudras and Dalits. First, one of the Arya Samaj's arguments in favour of the shuddhi was that Hindus had been forcibly converted to Islam by the Muslim conquerors and rulers in medieval India. And these converts were to be reconverted to the Hindu-fold through the shuddhi. (See Jones, K.W. 1976. *Arya Dharm…,*pp: 150-1). Achutaanand, observes Gooptu, adopted this explanatory concept of 'forcible imposition of religion' and 'projected it backwards to the Vedic age to argue that the Aryan invaders had subjugated and imposed Vedic Hinduism on the original Indians, the Adi Hindus, and deprived them of their bhakti (religion).' Secondly, the colonial government in its ethnographical classifications propagated the notion that the caste system originated through the encounters between the Dravidian and Aryan races. While these ideas gained publicity through Census records, the Dalits in UP became acquainted with them through the Christian missionaries. See, Ibid., p. 158.

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consequence that were crosses to bear for the Dalits; and secondly, it was also an attempt to demand social equality on the basis of their pre-Aryan ancestry as the original rulers of India, as well as the followers of egalitarian religious systems.

Swami Achutaanand, in his Adi Hindu theory, argued that the so-called 'untouchables' were once the rulers of a thriving civilization. Their 'golden age', however, came to an end when the invading Aryans with their brute force and treachery, overpowered the peace-loving Adi Hindus. Once conquered, the Adi Hindus were turned into slaves and forced to perform 'low' jobs; furthermore, the Brahmanical Hinduism, with its hierarchical caste system, was imposed upon them by the Aryans. It may be mentioned here that although Swami Achutaanand was the first to propagate this theory in the North Indian context, nevertheless, he was not the first to articulate this particular re-interpretation of ancient history. In fact, he seems to have been influenced by Jyotiba Phule, a radical social reformer of Maharashtra during the mid-nineteenth-century. Phule presented an early critique of the caste system as a Brahmanical imposition. He was also one of the first to popularise the alternative interpretation of the Aryan race theory by positioning the lower castes as the original inhabitants of India. [97]

The Adi Hindus' radical re-interpretation of the theory of the Aryan invasion is significant for three reasons. First, it offers a historical explanation for the origin of untouchability and forced imposition of menial occupations. "They [Dalits] were made to do the most insulting and demeaning jobs, such as cleaning excreta and dirty clothes. They were repeatedly told that you are shudras and your only work is to serve [*gulami*]. Those who were thus made to serve [*gulam* or *dasa*] were then called untouchables."[98] Secondly, it explains how the upper castes, in the name of religion, came to occupy higher positions in society. The Aryans, it was argued by the leaders of Adi Hinduism, in order to make education, political power, and wealth their exclusive preserve assumed the higher status of *Brahmins, Kshatriyas,* and *Vyshyas*. "The rule of making shudras was

[97] O'Hanlon, R. 1985. *Caste, Conflict and Ideology: Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Low-Caste Protest in Nineteenth Century Western India.* Cambridge: CUP, pp: 131 – 141.
[98] Extract from a speech by Ram Charan in 1927, cited in Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics..,* p.162.

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not a religious one. It was political to the core", [99]and thirdly, the Adi Hindu ideology, by stretching the 'beginning' of ancient Indian history farther back in time, prepares the ground for Dalits to stake a claim for the powerful category of 'indigenes', i.e., the original inhabitants of India. It is interesting to note here that this claim of being the 'rulers of India' by the Adi Hindus has striking similarity to that of the claims made by Dalits under the Arya Samaj for *Kshatriya* status.

Commenting on the Adi Hindus' claim of being the original inhabitants of India, Jaffrelot observes: "Far from establishing a separate identity that would pull the Dalits out of the caste system, the Adi Hindu movement used their so-called original identity as a means of promoting their status within the system. Thus, the bhakti resurgence did not imply a radical questioning of their belonging to Hinduism."[100] Jaffrelot seems to have misjudged the importance of the Adi Movement and its shifts. The Dalit question is invariably entangled in the problem of caste, which, in turn, is linked with the ideology of Brahmanical Hinduism. In their assertion of pre-Aryan origin of Dalits, Shudras, and Adivasis – the ideologues of Adi Hinduism – found an effective means to disentangle themselves from the Brahmins and other upper castes that began to claim the Aryan origin. Interestingly, this self projection of the upper castes is powerfully employed by the Adi Hindus to buttress their own claim. In a sense, they could not only project the Brahmins and other upper castes as outsiders, but also effectively unite all the other marginalised communities as the descendants of the original inhabitants and rulers of India. In other words, rather than working within the upper-caste paradigm where to be an ancient ruler necessitated *Khatriya* lineage, the Adi Hindu ideologues put forward a powerful historical narrative, which enabled them to claim that the upper-castes were actually foreigners to the sub-continent and that Adi Hindus had ruled India until their invasion. It is, indeed, a strong moral claim to *autochthonous being* over *kshatriyahood* as the new authority to govern, an idiom increasingly valued during a time of growing upper caste Hindu (Indian) nationalism.

[99] Ibid., p. 164.
[100] Jaffrelot, C. 2003. *India's silent…,* p. 204.

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Apart from claiming the status of original inhabitants of India, the Adi Hindu ideologues also claimed *bhakti* as their original religion, and urged the Dalits to adopt the introspective dimension of bhakti (*atmavad*). *Bhakti* is a form of worship of God through devotion, meditation, self-introspection, and direct communion. Spiritual knowledge, they argued, is the only way to arrive at true knowledge or *satyagyan* and evolve one's world-view. Introspection would lead to self-realisation or self-knowledge (*atmagyan*), which, in turn, would facilitate the follower to articulate an autonomous value system that was not derived from or imposed by the upper castes. The Adi Hindus emphasised on spiritual introspection primarily for two reasons: first, to stimulate 'thinking-for-oneself' without reference to received notions and religious prescription of the upper castes; and secondly, to bypass the Brahmin as the middle man (*pujari*) between God and worshipper:

> Do not follow any ideology [*mat*] because you have been hearing it for a long time, or because it is held by some great [*bade,* literally big, implies a socially superior person of upper class or caste] person or because it is the view held by any cult or sect. Accept only an ideology that you have arrived at yourself.[101]

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In order to propagate their ideology – that the Adi Hindus are the *mula Bharatvasis* – the original inhabitants of India, and *bhakti* is their separate, pre-Aryan religion – the Adi Hindu leaders initiated a number of activities. To begin with, a number of Adi Hindu *sabhas* (associations) were opened in main cities, particularly in Kanpur, Lucknow, Benaras, and Allahabad. Each sabha had its *pracharaks* (advocates) and *upadeshiks* (preachers), who regularly visited Dalit neighbourhoods to preach Adi Hindu ideology.[102] Apart from elaborating the ideas of Adi Hinduism, one of the central focuses of the Adi Hindu leaders during these meetings was to denounce Hindu religious rituals and ceremonies and ask their audience to restrain from observing those ceremonies. They argued that the elaborate and expensive modes of observance of religious rituals and festivals were prescribed by the Brahmanical communities not only to impose the Brahmins' superiority over them (since Brahmins are needed to conduct religious rituals), but also to impoverish them, which, in turn, would ensure that the lower castes remained in a constant state of economic dependence upon the upper castes. Dalits were asked to

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[101] Jigyasu, Chandrika Prasad. 1968. *Adi Hindu Andolan…,*cited in Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *op. cit.,* p. 162.
[102] The idea of preaching a religion through pracharaks and upadeshiks, was undoubtedly, borrowed from Christian missionaries and Arya Samajis.

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achieve economic self-sufficiency, occupational diversification, and to gain education. The meetings addressed by the Adi Hindu leaders were occasions for Dalits of different caste groups and *bhakti* sects to come together and exchange their views.[103]

Throughout the 1920's, UP had witnessed an unprecedented rise in the socio-religious activities of the Dalits. For instance, the Ravidas Chamars of Kanpur and Allahabad attended a number of meetings organized by the Adi-Hindu sabhas. Almost all those meetings were chiefly addressed by Swami Achutaanand. In 1925, the Mehtars (sweepers) in Kanpur organised several meetings for the social uplift of their caste group; and Swami Achutaanand, in his capacity as the leader of the Adi-Hindu movement, was invited to preside over some of these meetings.[104] In Lucknow, in April 1927, a number of Chamar caste groups convened a joint meeting to pledge their support to the Adi-Hindu movement and resolved to form a volunteer corps. Achutaanand's constant appeals to all the lower castes roped in a number of individuals from disparate caste groups into the Adi-Hindu movement. As a result of all those activities and appeals, the participants in the Adi-Hindu conferences in the 1930's included individuals from the Chamar, Dhobi, Paasee, Bhangi/Valmiki, Kureel, Dhusia, and Kori castes. A 'spirit of revolt', as reported in the police reports, sowed its seeds among the Dalits.[105] In other words, by the early 1930's the Adi-Hindu movement, which was initiated by a few ex-Arya Samajis in the early 1920's, succeeded in bringing divergent Dalit castes under its umbrella. The Adi-Hindu identity became the Dalit identity and the ideology of the Adi-Hindu movement became the ideology of the Dalits in the state.

Two other initiatives undertaken by the Adi-Hindu leaders to propagate their ideas were literary works and street theatre. Achutaanand first expressed his Adi Hindu philosophy in poetry in 1917.[106] His poems, including *Ghazal Chetavani* (Warning in the form of a Ghazal), *Itihas Gyan* (Knowledge of History) and *Adi Vams Astak* (The Original Lineage in Eight Stanzas), outlined a basic history of the original inhabitants of India and their

[103] Gooptu, Nadini. 2001. *The Poltiics...,* p. 159.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid, p. 160.
[106] This was five years before the Adi Hindu movement formally began its agitations in 1922. See Jaffrelot, C. 2003. *India's silent...*,p. 201-05.

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oppression by the invading Aryans. Through these poems, he consciously called upon members of all the lower castes to 'remember' their past as 'Adi-Hindus' (original inhabitants) and rise to re-claim their true heritage as the descendents of the ancient rulers. Achutaanand's poems provided a graphic description through which his audience was able to visualise the greatness of their lineage and their subsequent 'fall' due to an Aryan conspiracy.

In addition to these literary works, Achutaanand established a press which initiated a new field of radical literature on Adi Hindu philosophy in pamphlets written by Dalits for the consumption of Dalits.[107] Further, he published a monthly newspaper *Achut* from the early 1920's (which later became a daily and changed its name to *Adi Hindu,* and was in print until 1932) and monthly journal called *Usha* (Dawn) published from 1928.[108] Achutaanand's literary production through his press, as observed by Sarah Beth Wilkerson, inspired many Dalit literatti to set up publication houses; one of these was Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu's 'Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan' (Bahujan Welfare Press) in Lucknow. The growth of several independently-owned Dalit presses, as Wilkerson notes, "brought about a proliferation of small, inexpensive Dalit literary pamphlets in Hindi which began to circulate at untouchables' meetings, community gatherings, and local *melas* (festivals) and spread a new political consciousness among various 'untouchable' communities."[109]

Drawing from Phule, Achutaanand also adopted street theatre as a form of transmitting his Adi Hindu ideology to an audience who were largely illiterates. One of the plays of Achutaanand that gained tremendous popularity among Dalits was *Ram-rajya nyaya* (The Justice of Ram's Rule). The death of Shambuk, a member of the lower castes at the hands of the Hindu ruler Ram, who kills the former on the advice of a Brahmin, and the slavery of the original inhabitants of India, i.e., the Adi-Hindus under the Brahmins's ideology, were the two main themes of the play. Ramrajya (the kingdom of Ram) has been

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[107] Wilkerson, B. Sarah. 2006. *Hindi Dalit Literature…*,p. 27.
[108] Badri Narayan. 2004. Introduction. In: Narayan, Badri and A. R. Misra. *Multiple Marginalities: an anthology of identified Dalit writings.* New Delhi: Manohar, p.19.
[109] Wilkerson, B. Sarah. 2006. *Hindi Dalit Literature…,* p. 33.

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portrayed by the caste Hindus as an age of highest point of Hindu rule under the ideal King Ram.[110] Dalits, in opposition to the dominant Hindu narrative, characterise Ramrajya as the time of injustice, misrule, and an age of severe oppression of Dalits. They epitomise the injustice of Ramrajya against them in the story of Shambuk, who was wrongly condemned to death for practising asceticism against the dictates of the Vedas on account of his lower caste origins. Drawing from the Dalit narratives of *Ram katha* (Ram's story) Achutaanand in his play highlights the true meaning of slavery and freedom. When a charge was levelled against one of his subjects, Ram, in his position as the king of the state, should have enquired into the charge; instead, he simply followed the ill advice of a Brahmin and killed an innocent but intelligent citizen.

In a way, Achutaanand was showing how an issue was manipulated by Brahmins to monopolise knowledge; and how the King, who lacks thinking prowess, is enslaved by the former. In contrast to Ram, the slave of the Brahmins, Shambuk, was depicted as an embodiment of true freedom. For, by refusing to obey the dictates of the Brahmins and their ideology, he stood for his freedom. In fact, he chooses death to protect his freedom. Thus Achutaanad, in his play, shifts the basic meaning of slavery and freedom to emphasise the core of his ideology – "that freedom for Dalits lies in the ideological rejection of Hindu philosophy and the 'remembering' of one's glorious past as the indigenous inhabitants of India."[111] In the next chapter, we will see how the BSP has employed many of the propagating strategies employed by Achutaanand and the other Adi-Hindu leaders in its political mobilisations.

Having established a base of support for the Adi-Hindu movement and having demonstrated the strength of the Dalit constituency, the Adi Hindu leaders began to channel their mobilised energies onto the political realm of representative institutions, to secure representation for themselves in the legislative bodies as well as to gain economic

[110] Romila Thapar, in one of her excellent essays, asserts that the narrative of Ramrajya, known as *Rama katha,* (Ram's story) was neither a sacred text nor history (*itihasa*) but *kavya,* a poetic composition. It was only in the 19th century context, where the Indian intellectual's sudden urge to know India's ancient history through the texts emerged that the Ramayana itself came to be viewed as a source of history rather than a myth. See Thapar, Romila. 2000. A historical perspective on the story of Rama. In: Thapar, Romila., ed., *Cultural pasts: essays in early Indian history.* New Delhi: OUP.

[111] Wilkerson, B. S. 2006. *Hindi Dalit ….,* p. 84.

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facilities. In 1925, they formed the Adi-Hindu Depressed Classes Association (also called the All-India Adi-Hindu Mahasabha) as a mouthpiece for their political campaigns. Through this association they effectively consolidated and united the disparate Dalit castes for political action.

In a conference held on December 27 and 28, 1927 in Allahabad, the Mahasabha, while laying out its agenda, made a claim for an inclusive *achut* or 'untouchable' identity. This was an all India conference, which was attended by 25,000 Dalits from UP and another 350 delegates from other parts of the country, such as Punjab, Bihar, Delhi, the Central Provinces, Poona, Bengal, Madras, and Hyderabad. The deliberations of the conference were widely reported and discussed in contemporary newspapers in UP.[112] It was declared in the conference that the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha was a movement of all Dalits and Swami Achutaanand was its leader. Some of the issues that were discussed in the conference were in direct confrontation with the Hindu nationalists and Congress. For instance, the movement's struggle against social injustice, as noted by Ramnarayan Rawat, was described as "achut nationalism -- social uplift as their religion and self-respect as their Home rule and the audience was advised to ignore Hindus who called them 'traitors'".[113] It should be mentioned here that through this specific event one can confidently conclude that the Dalit consciousness in UP, as argued by Pai, was not delayed. In fact, by organizsng an all-India Dalit conference – for the first time in the entire country – and bringing all the regional Dalit leaders under one umbrella for the purpose of uniting the entire Dalit community in the country, the Adi-Hindu leaders in UP had become national leaders during the 1920's and 30's. Also, the participation of Dalit delegates from Nizam's Hyderabad in the conference – we will see more on this in Chapter IV – clearly shows the similarities in the concerns and activities, which brought out the trends in Dalit activism, both in UP and AP together.

[112] Report of All India Adi-Hindu Mahasabha, January 7, 1928, submitted to the Simon Commission. Apendix: List of Memoranda, Evidence – UP/427, Report on United Provinces (3 vols) Indian Statutory (Simon) Commission, OIOC, British Library, cited in Rawat, S.R. 2006. 'The Problem'. *Seminar: The Monthly Symposium,* February.
[113] Ibid.

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Two significant political events that catapulted the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha into heightened political activism were the visit of the Indian Statutory Commission or Simon Commission to Lucknow in 1928 and the deliberations of the Round Table Conferences in 1931-32. The importance of these events was that they further sharpened the questions of separate Dalit identity and Hindu unity.[114] While Dalits put forward their claim for separate representation on the basis of their separate identity, the caste Hindus opposed such representation for Dalits on the grounds that a separate representation for the Dalits threatened Hindu unity.

On the eve of the Simon Commission's visit to Lucknow on November 28, 1928, a mammoth mass demonstration, followed by the staging of a street play at the Charbagh Railway Station, was organised by Ram Charan and Shiv Dayal Singh Chaurasia, leaders from the Adi Hindu Mahasabha. In a memorandum to the Simon Commission, the Adi Hindu leaders demanded political rights as well as preferential treatment. They argued that "owing to their 'low' and 'depressed' status, they continued to be confined to low-paid, menial jobs, and failed to obtain education, better employment, and a voice in the representative institutions."[115]

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A point to note here is that the Adi Hindu Mahasabha was not alone in demanding separate representation for Dalits on the basis of their separate identity. The Simon Commission received similar petitions from Dalit organisations across UP, including the Adi Dharmis from Dehradun, the Kumaon Shilpakar Sabha of Almora, the Jatav Mahasabha of Agra, the Dom Sudhar Sabha of Garhwal, and the Chamar Sabha of Kanpur. Thus, unanimity in claiming a separate *achut* identity had become a marked feature of Dalit politics of the time.

Over the issue of separate/joint electorate for Dalits, a number of public demonstrations, agitations, and meetings were organised and addressed by the Adi Hindu leaders as well

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[114] For an interesting commentary on this issue with special reference to UP Congress, see Gould, William. 2005. The U.P. Congress and 'Hindu Unity': Untouchables and the Minority Question in the 1930s. *Modern Asian Studies,* 39(4), pp: 845 – 860.

[115] Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics…,* p. 174.

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as other Dalit groups during the Round Table Conferences in 1931-32. For instance, during the Second Round Table Conference in London in 1931, a 'wire' was sent by a group of Jatavs from Agra, in which they insisted that 'Ambedkar, not Gandhi' was their leader.[116] Again, when Gandhi undertook a fast against the Communal Award of 1932, which sanctioned separate electorates for Dalits, the Congress and Gandhi's project of *Harijan* uplift were subjected to violent criticisms by the Adi Hindu leaders. They pointed out rather sharply that, unlike the rest of Indian society, the Dalits were the victims of 'double servitude'[117] – first, to the caste-Hindus and, second, to foreign rule. And they questioned that after the foreigners leave, "who would rule in independent India?"[118]

At this juncture, it is suggested that we discuss further, although briefly, the issue of separate electorates for the Dalits and the subsequent Poona Pact. The Indian leaders failed to arrive at a harmonious agreement over the question of representation for various communities in the second Round Table Conference in 1931 in London. Such a failure was, as asserted by Aloysius, primarily due to disagreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi, especially the latter's obsession with self:

> He (Gandhi) was concerned more with being the sole recipient of the power settlement rather than the terms of the settlement itself. He obsessively claimed that he, in his person, represented everybody in India and no other representatives were required to bargain for power. Gandhi's main purpose for attending the Round Table Conference appeared to be to gain monopoly of power, or otherwise to let power remain in alien hands. On no count could power be shared with those who had the temerity to sit as equals with the traditionally elevated and privileged.[119]

Following that failure, it was decided that the representatives would abide by the decision of the British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, who presided over the Conference. On August 16, 1932, MacDonald announced the 'Communal Award' by which a total of seventy-one seats in the Indian legislatures were to be set aside for Dalits. The Prime Minister, however, also promised to respect any alternative arrangement that the representatives of various communities might agree to.

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[116] Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Politics…,* p. 81.
[117] The term was used by Ambedkar in his memorandum to the Simon Commission, cited in Dinkar, D.C., 1986. *Swatantrata Sangram…,* p. 81, cited in Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics.,* p. 175.
[118] Jigyansu, Chandrika Prasad. 1968. *Adi Hindu Andolan ka…,* cited in Ibid., p. 175.
[119] Aloysius, G. 1997. *Nationalism…,* p.199.

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What did the Award entail? The Award entitled the Dalits to the following: (a) that only they would choose their representatives, and (b) they would be able to cast a second vote to choose who among the caste-Hindus was best suited to represent their interests in a legislative body. Such a safeguard was necessary, Ambedkar argued, since not only were the Dalits outnumbered by *savarnas* (caste-Hindus), they were also vulnerable to physical attacks by caste-Hindus during the elections. In other words, Ambedkar believed that the political severance of the Dalits from the rest of the Hindu community was supremely necessary if the former were to escape their subjugation in either a colonial or independent India.

However, for Gandhi, who claimed to "represent the vast majority of the Untouchables", Ambedkar's argument was complete anathema. Interestingly, he could understand the arguments advanced by other minorities, but the claim advanced on behalf of the Dalits was 'the unkindest cut of all'.[120] Further, despite the room for negotiations on the provisions of the Communal Award, Gandhi saw the Award as something that divides the Hindu community, and he undertook a 'fast unto death' to register his protest against the Award and also to persuade the Dalits and caste-Hindus to unite in rejecting it. Although Ambedkar at first opposed any negotiation - 'I do not care for political stunts',[121] he stated rather boldly. Yet, he did not want to take the responsibility for Gandhi's death. Moreover, his position was undermined by the willingness of the other important Dalit leader, M.C. Rajah, to support a joint rather than a separate electorate. Thus, Ambedkar was forced to sign the Poona Pact, which stripped the Dalits of the unique 'double vote' as well as a separate electorate for which Ambedkar had so long campaigned. The impact of the Poona Pact on Dalit politics was tremendous. Dalits had to pay a heavy price, in the sense it was the caste-Hindu majority that decided which of the Dalit candidates – faceless and pliant – would win. We shall see the consequences of the terms of the Poona Pact in the next sub-section.

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[120] Quoted in Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany., 2000. *The Untouchables*…p.104.

[121] Kumar, Ravinder. 1987. Gandhi, Ambedkar and the Poona Pact, 1932. In: Masselos, Jim., ed., *Struggling and Ruling: The Indian National Congress, 1885-198.* New Delhi: Sterling, p. 95.

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To get back to our discussion on the Adi Hindu activities, through their arguments and socio-political activities, the Adi Hindu leaders succeeded in bringing the disparate Dalit castes under the umbrella of the Adi Hindu organisation; and they also succeeded in uniting the Dalit castes in their claim of separate *achut* identity. It was on the basis of their separate identity, the Adi Hindu leaders, put forward a charter of demands or a Dalit agenda that included: "proportionate representation in legislative bodies, reservations in government jobs, adequate Dalit representation in the Congress ministry, permanent rights over land by changing the tenancy Acts, fixed wages for agricultural labour and for the removal and skinning of dead animals, rights to use public wells, the abolition of *begari,* the right to convert to any religion, and rejection of the term 'Harijan'".[122] Thus, the ideologues of Adi Hinduism, as observed by Khare, provided not only "an ideology of radical equality" and a "strategy for doing better in everyday life", but also "a political culture for civil rights and organised protest."[123]

When the Adi Hindu dharm was at its height in popularising the concept of original inhabitants of India, Buddhism also gained considerable attention among the lower castes in UP, particularly in Lucknow and Kanpur.[124] While Swamy Bodhanand Mahasthvir (1874-1952) was instrumental in popularising Buddhism in Lucknow, Acharya Ishvardatt Medharthi (1900–1971) was preaching the message of the Buddha in Kanpur. What is significant for our understanding is that in their preaching of Buddhism they have combined the ideological arguments put forward by Swami Achutaanand. For instance, Bodhanand, who was also active in the Adi Hindu movement, powerfully articulated the Adi Hindu ideology in three books. He wrote these books with Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu:[125] *Mula Bharatavasi Aur Arya* ('Original Inhabitants and Aryans'); *Bhagavan Gautam Buddh;* and *Bauddha charyapaddati.*[126] Through these books, he powerfully argued that Sudras and Dalits were the original inhabitants of India, and had been

[122] Rawat, S. R. 2006. The Problem...
[123] Khare, R. S. 1984. *The Untouchable as Himself: Ideology, Identity and Pragmatism among the Lucknow Chamars.* Cambridge: CUP, p. 78.
[124] I have drawn my material from Maren Bellwinkel – Schempp. 2004. Roots of Ambedkar Buddhism in Kanpur. In: Jondhale, Surendra and Johannes Beltz., eds., *Reconstructing the World: B.R. Ambedkar and Buddhism in India.* New Delhi: OUP, pp: 221-244.
[125] 'Jigyasu' was Chandrika Prasad's pen-name meaning one who is curious or one who enquires.
[126] Maren Bellwinkel – Schempp. 2004. Roots of Ambedkar Buddhism in Kanpur… pp: 221-244.

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deprived of their land and enslaved by the Aryans because they had been defenceless and peace-loving. Bodhanand's disciples carried out his message with the propagation of self-respect among the lower castes.

In 1916, Bodhanand founded the *Bharatiya Buddh Samiti* and in 1925, he set up the Buddh Vihara in Risaldar Park in Lucknow. Through these monastery-like centres, he gathered a circle of young and educated Dalit and Shudras, who were to become torch-bearers of the Dalit movement and politics in the later years. For instance, Chandrika Prasad Jigyasu, who was a disciple of Bodhanand, founded the *Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan* and through this press, he published a number of books pertaining to Dalit history and politics. He even brought out a number of booklets, which were famous as *'two-anna'* editions. These editions, which were short and concise, covered all major Dalit topics. Further, Jigyasu is well remembered for his book, *Bharat ke Adi Nivasiyon Ki Sabhayata* (The Civilization of India's Original Inhabitants), published in 1937. The significance of this book is its passionate and elaborate discussion on the vision of an Indian nation and democracy – a Dalit vision – which was different from the one preached by the then mainstream nationalist organisations like the Congress.[127] In this way, Jigyasu as an author and publisher, contributed immensely to the growth of Dalit consciousness in UP. Chedi Lal Sathi, another disciple of Bodhanand, rose to become the RPI's (UP branch) first president.

Similarly, Ishvardatt Medharthi, a Dalit by birth, was one of the great Sanskrit scholars as well as prolific writers of his times. In 1933, he wrote *The Caste System Exposed,* in which he was more forthcoming in propagating the idea of original inhabitants of India. In one of his booklets, '*The Primitives and Ancestors of India and the Sant Religion*', published in 1939, he considered the Vedas as the unjust oppressive religious vision of Aryan invaders. He asserted that the 150 million Sudras and Dalits and primitive people of India (Adivasis), whom he called the *purvajanas,* were the ancient rulers of the country. They had been trapped into slavery by the invading Aryans. What is important to recognise here is that Swami Achhutanand's *Adi Hindus* and Swami Bodhanand's

[127] Rawat, S. R. 2006. The Problem….

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Mulanivasi were *purvajanas* for him. Further, availing his Sanskrit knowledge and equating the *purvajanas* with *asuras,* Medharthi claims that the *asuras* had actually been named as such by the Aryans. For the *purvajanas* did not drink *sura* (wine), whereas the Aryans ate meat and drank wine. He even tried to give new etymological meaning to the word *raksas,* the word with which Dalits were identified. He argued *raksas* were the ones who saved others – *raksa karna.* The *purvajanas* lived an egalitarian life – there was no *varna* order amongst them and all were equal.[128] Thus, in claiming that achhuts were the original inhabitants of India and descendants of the *dasas, asurs,* and *dasyus*, which were recurrent themes in the Brahmanical Hindu texts, Dalits were challenging both colonial and Hindu interpretations of their identity. In other words, through these traditions and ideological assertions, the Adi Hindu and Buddhist movements among the Dalits not merely reconstituted a positive identity, but also prepared them for political struggles for their rights under the UPSCF.

2. I. 2. United Provinces Scheduled Castes Federation (UPSCF): In the previous sub-section, we have seen how the Dalits in UP carved an independent social space on the basis of their 'acchut' identity as well as the claim of the original inhabitants (*Mool-bharat-vasi*). Such identity claims placed them equally not only on a par with the caste-Hindus in the social setting, but also legitimised their claim for a share in the emerging political power. We have also seen how the introduction of Communal Representation for the Muslims provided real opportunity for the Dalits to intensify their mobilisational activities for their share in the political representation. After the formation the All-India Adi Hindu Mahasabha, the Dalit leaders not only mobilised their own community from the province, but by organising an all-India Dalit conference, they tried to mobilise the entire Dalit community in the country. The issues – Dalit-specific and national-specific – discussed in the conference clearly show that Dalit consciousness in UP was not delayed, but was far richer than their counterparts in other regions in the country. My main objective in this sub-section is to examine the main political concerns of the Dalits in UP in the 1940's and their activities under the banner of the United Provinces Scheduled Castes Federation (UPSCF).

[128] Maren Bellwinkel–Schempp. 2004. Roots of Ambedkar Buddhism in Kanpur… pp: 233-234.

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We have seen above that the caste-based discrimination against the Dalits in education and employment opportunities in the urban centres and the colonial government's policies and programmes led to their mobilisations and activities in the province in the late 1920's. This changed in the 1930's and 40's. Two trends became clearly visible during the late 1930's and early 1940's in colonial India. First, the national concerns came to dominate and, in fact, take precedence over the regional and local concerns. As a result, Dalit activities and politics in colonial UP were shaped by national trends and concerns during that period. In fact, national trends shaped the concerns not just in UP, but importantly also in the Nizam's Hyderabad and Coastal Andhra in the Madras Presidency, as well as in other parts of the country, as we will see in the case of AP in Chapter Five.

Secondly, communities increasingly began to rely on the political institutions such as the Congress Party and Muslim League to express their social and political concerns. A consequence of these features was that national leaders came to be accepted by the local communities.[129] For instance, Gandhi had firmly established himself as the leader of the Congress Party for life; and despite the presence of many prominent leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru within the Party, Gandhi became synonymous with the Congress. A majority of the Muslims lent their support to the Muslim League and came to accept Mohammed Ali Jinnah (1876-1948) as their leader. Similarly, a majority of the Dalits saw in Ambedkar their leader, who could fight for them and secure their interests. For Ambedkar, with his religious and social agitations against Brahmanical Hinduism and with his firm confrontation with none other than Gandhi at the Second Round Table Conference in 1931 in London and later during the Poona Pact deliberations, he earned great respect and recognition from Dalit communities throughout India. Such respect and recognition, in turn, established him as a legitimate spokesperson for the Dalits at national and international forums.[130] Further, the formation of the Scheduled Caste

[129] Bose, Sugata and Ayesha Jalal. 1998. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy*. London: Routledge.

[130] Eleanor, Zelliot. 1972. Gandhi and Ambedkar: A Study in Leadership. In: Mahar, J.M. ed., *The Untouchables in Contemporary India.* Tucson: University of Arizona; -------(1979) Learning to Use of Political Means: The Mahars of Maharashtra. In: Kothari, Rajni. ed., *Caste in…,* pp: 29-69; ------, 1998. *From Untouchable to Dalit: Essays on the Ambedkar Movement.* New Delhi: Manohar publications;

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Federation (SCF) by Ambedkar caused enormous changes in Dalit activism in North India. This formation had become a platform to consolidate the disparate Dalit castes and thereby further strengthen the politicised identity of the Dalits. In fact, the SCF had become a political institution for the Dalits through which they could articulate their social and political concerns. In UP, a branch of the Party, i.e. the United Provinces Scheduled Castes Federation (UPSCF) was set up in 1944, two years after the formation of the SCF in Maharashtra. It was through this political body that Dalit political energies were most effectively channelled into political mobilisations for political power.

One question that particularly loomed large in the 1940's, which was a minor concern during the Adi-Hindu movement in the 1920's and 30's, was that with a history of being oppressed, what would be the place of Dalits in independent India? The context of this question was the results of the elections that were conducted in the aftermath of the Poona Pact, in which most of the reserved constituencies were won by the Congress Party. I shall discuss the consequences of the terms of the Poona Pact later, but first a few words on the Gandhian programme of the *achutodhhaar* (Harijan uplift). In the introduction of the thesis, we have discussed this programme at length. The Congress, following the controversy over separate electorates and solid support rendered to Ambedkar by the Dalit community during the deliberations of the Poona Pact, had intensified its Harijan uplift initiatives to win 'the hearts and minds' of the Dalits.[131] In this endeavour, the Party sought to give Dalits an alternative identity as 'Harijans' or the people of God, in contrast to the Adi Hindu movement's '*achut*' identity; and the Dalit emancipation was sought through the twin ideas of 'acculturation and integration' into the Hindu community.[132] Although caste hierarchy was not rejected, the programme's emphasis on equality of castes through temple entry satyagrahas organised by the Congress appealed to the Dalits. For instance, it was felt by a Dalit that "being part of the

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Lynch, Owen. 1969. *Politics of...;*Jurgensmeyer, Mark. 1988. *Religious Rebels in the Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchables.* Delhi: Ajanta Publications.

[131] Ambedkar, B.R. 1945. *What the Congress and Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables.* Bombay: Thacker & Co.; Prashad, Vijay. 1995. Between Economism and Emancipation: Untouchables and Indian Nationalism, 1920 – 1950. *Left History,* 3(1) Spring/Summer, pp: 5-30.

[132] Gooptu, Nandini. 2001. *The Politics...,* p. 175.

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Congress meant breaking the barrier between castes". Hazari, a Dalit writer, recounting his sense of liberation, writes "if I wore a Gandhi cap no one would ask who I was".[133]

However, such a sense of liberation was dubious. As Gandhian *Harijan* ideology with its emphasis on *varnashramadharma* did not liberate Dalits from their economic and social bondage to the caste-Hindus, the Gandhian cap also could not liberate them. At best, the Gandhian cap might have facilitated the concealment of their caste identity and allowed them to be somebody. In the sense, as long as they are hidden behind the veil of that cap they might feel safe and liberated. But once the reality, hidden behind the cap, is revealed they would be made to feel ashamed for pretending to be somebody else. Moreover, the Gandhian programme of *'achutoddhar'* (Harijan uplift), as argued by Dilip Menon, identifies, "the problem in terms of an opposition between cleanliness and the lack of it, locating the whole issue not in terms of economic or social realities but in a physical state".[134] In any case, it was not the Harijan uplift programme which created a dubious sense of liberation among the Dalits, but the terms of the Poona Pact, which in turn resulted in the Congress' success in the reserved constituencies.

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The Communal Award had reserved 20 seats for the Dalits in UP. But under the terms of the Poona Pact, those 20 seats were converted into double-member seats. According to this revised system, each voter in a reserved constituency was allowed to cast two votes. This would be done in two stages. In the first stage, which is called *primary,* Dalits would vote exclusively for Dalit candidates.[135] Two candidates who secure the largest majorities in the *primary* were entitled to contest in the second stage. In the second stage, or the general election, the reserved seats will become general seats, by virtue of which the general candidates were also entitled to contest in the elections. Two votes for a voter allowed the latter to exercise his preference either to vote for two general candidates or

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[133] Hazari. 1951[1935]. *I was an Outcast: The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian.* Cited in Rawat, S.R. 2003. Making Claims for Power…, p. 590.
[134] Menon, M. Dilip. 1994. *Caste, Nationalism and Communism in South India, Malabar, 1900-1947.* Cambridge: CUP, p. 85.
[135] An election in the first stage becomes obligatory only when more than four candidates contested.

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for two Dalit candidates or for one of each.[136] Rawat notes Shankar Shastri's explication of the rationale of the two votes' mechanism that was put forward by the caste Hindu signatories of the Poona Pact. "The Dalits had two votes, one because of their *achut* identity and the other because they were Hindus. Similarly, Hindus exercised two votes, one because of their Hindu identity and the other because *achuts* were Hindus."[137] This blatant politics played by the caste-Hindus sabotaged Dalit interests during the Poona Pact. In addition to the system of two votes, the electoral franchise that was defined on the basis of property and education also worked in favour of the caste-Hindus which in turn benefited the Congress Party. Of course, Ambedkar was clearly aware of this brazen politics. But with Gandhi's life at stake he did not have a choice but to accept the dictates of the caste-Hindus.[138]

The distortions inherent in the electoral system, a consequence of the Poona Pact, were especially revealed in the 1946 elections in UP. The twenty reserved seats for the Scheduled Castes in UP included four urban constituencies, which were the only seats that SCF contested. In the primaries, nine SCF candidates were successful as against four from the Congress Party. However, in the general election or the second round, the Congress won all the seats thanks to the support of the non-Dalit votes. A most striking result occurred in Agra, where four SCF candidates polled 47.39 per cent of valid votes as against 27.1 per cent by four Congress candidates.[139] In a way, the Congress swept away the twenty seats reserved for the Dalits. Thus, although Dalits continued their demand for separate electorates even after the Poona Pact, the result of the 1946 elections justified their demand. They plunged into accentuated political action with a demand to remove the 'evil Pact' when they realised that the Cripps Mission or Cabinet Mission formula was influenced by the outcome of the 1946 elections.

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[136] Shastri, Shankarananda. 1994 [1946]. *Poona Pact or Gandhi.* Lucknow: Bahujan Kalyan Prakashan (Hindi), pp: 74-5, cited in Rawat, S. R. 2003. Making Claims for Power… p. 607.
[137] Ibid., p. 607.
[138] On this, see Aloysius, G. 1997. *Nationalism...*esp. chapter VI. 'Nationalism and Nation: The Gandhian Synthesis', pp: 170 – 213; Jaffrelot, C. 2005. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability: Fighting the Indian Caste System.* New York: CUP, pp: 59 – 67.
[139]Reeves, Peter. 1971. Changing Patterns of Political Alignments in the General Elections to the U.P. Legislative Assembly, 1937 and 1946. *Modern Asian Studies,* 5(2); Reeves, P.D. B.D Graham and J.M. Goodman. 1975. *Elections in UP, 1920-51.* New Delhi: Manohar, pp: 315-19.

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On March 24, 1946, the British government dispatched a team of three Cabinet Ministers to India to seek agreement on how to enact self-determination and Independence with the Indian political leaders.[140] Two issues of major concern for the Mission were the formation of an interim government and principles and procedures for framing a new constitution for independent India. Dalits expected some kind of constitutional safeguards from the Mission. In fact one of the major demands of the SCF,[141] since its formation in 1942, had been separate representation by recognising Dalits as a separate community. Despite initial assurances and commitments made by the Viceroys, (for instance, Lord Wavell in a letter to Gandhi unwaveringly stated that 'Scheduled Castes are one of the important and separate elements in the national life of India. That their consent is a necessary condition for the transfer of power to Indian [*sic*]')[142] the Cabinet Mission in its final awards on May 16, 1946 failed to provide any specific safeguards for the Dalits. By lumping Dalits under the general category, the Mission recognised three main communities in India: General, Muslims, and Sikhs for the representation in the Constituent Assembly. The failure of the SCF and the success of the Congress in the reserved seats was sufficient reason for the Cabinet Mission to recognise Dalits not as separate but as part of the Hindu community.

Dalits's sense of betrayal and anger against the colonial government and especially towards the Congress, fermenting since the Poona Pact, provided the context for widespread political agitations as well as a strong critique against the Mission's award. Ambedkar, for instance, felt:

> It is quite obvious that the proposal for a Constituent Assembly is intended to win over the Congress, while the proposal for Pakistan is designed to win over the Muslim League. How do the proposals deal with the Depressed Classes? To put it shortly, they are bound hand and foot and handed over to the caste-Hindus. They offer them nothing: stone instead of bread. For the Constituent Assembly is nothing but a betrayal of the Depressed Classes […] If they are there, they cannot have a free, independent decisive vote. In the first place, the representative of the Depresses Classes will be in a hopeless minority. In

[140] The Mission consisted of Lord Pethwick – Lawrence, the Secretary of State for India, Sir Stafford Cripps, President of the Board of Trade, and A.V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty.
[141] One of the main reasons for the formation of Scheduled Castes' Federation was the Cabinet Mission. Jaffrelot, C. 2005. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability*…p. 80.
[142] Moon, Vasant. ed., 1990. *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Writings and Speeches,* Vol. IX, Bombay: the Government of Maharashtra, pp: 338-339.

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> the second place, all decisions of the Constituent Assembly are not required by a unanimous vote.[143]

The SCF organised *satyagrahas* or peaceful protests against the Mission award throughout India. In these agitations while Dalits continued to put forward the demand for separate electorates, they called for an immediate abrogation of Poona Pact – "a political fraud of the Congress and caste-Hindus against them".[144] In UP, from July through November 1946, two rounds of satyagrahas in 23 districts (including rural areas near Eta, Etawa, Raizabad, Gorakhpur, Fatehgarh, Ferozabad, Agra, Azamgarh and Ferrukhabad) were organised by the UPSCF leadership. In the first round, on July 16, 1946 in Lucknow, a huge demonstration with thousands of Dalit protesters, led by Tilak Chand Kureel, the president of the UPSCF, marched to the Legislative Assembly. In addition to these demonstrations, the UPSCF leadership, including Manik Chand, Faqir Chand, Tilak Chand Kureel, and Swami Chamanand travelled throughout UP. While continuing to call for separate electorates for Dalits, they asked the Congress rather emphatically to define the Dalits' future position in independent India. They argued that "Independence would not mean freedom for Dalits, but simply replacing one tyrant (the British) with another (the Brahmans)".[145]

The second round of *satyagraha* was largely concentrated in western UP, especially in Agra. Apart from taking part in the Lucknow agitation, the leaders of the UPSCF's Agra unit presented 11 demands to the Provincial government in Lucknow, which included a demand for reservations of government jobs for the Dalits. They also organised a massive parade through Agra streets against the Poona Pact, which had become 'an act of defiance' for the upper castes.[146] A staunch criticism against the Congress leaders – Gandhi, Nehru, and Jagjivan Ram, especially against Jagjivan Ram also became part of these agitations. Gandhi and Jagjivan Ram were branded as 'traitors and cheats' to the

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[143] Ambedkar, B.R. 1990. 'Objections to Cripps proposals App. IX to What Congress and Gandhi have done to Untouchables', in *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches,* vol. 9, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, p. 339.
[144] Dalits, irrespective of their membership in a particular party, were unanimous in their criticism against the Cabinet Mission. See Rawat, S. R. 2003. Making Claims for Power… p. 598.
[145] Wilkerson, B. S. 2006. *Hindi Dalit Literature…,* p. 40.
[146] Lynch, Owen. 1969. *Politics of…*p.88.

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cause of the Dalits. And not surprisingly, they used the occasion to repose their faith in Ambedkar and his leadership. Ambedkar was compared favourably to 'Ram' and Dalits were exhorted to worship him as 'Bhim'.[147] Bowing down to the satyagraha pressure built by the UPSCF, as observed by Owen Lynch, the Provincial government awarded 17 per cent reservations for Dalits in the government jobs as well as legislative bodies. A new department – the *Harijan Sahayak Shakha* (the Harijan Welfare Department) – was also established by the government.[148]

In post-Independent India, the UPSCF continued to be an important political force through which Dalits in the state articulated their demands and aspirations. In a conference, held in Lucknow on April 24-25, 1948, which apparently was the last to be organised by the UPSCF, the Party emphasised on the importance of continuing their struggle for power. Ambedkar, who took part in the conference, stressed this stand of the Party in his inaugural speech. 'What I want is power – political power for my people – for if we have power we have social status.'[149] This statement of Ambedkar reflects the fears of Dalits in post-Independent India. The revolutionary gestures enshrined in the Constitution of India to emancipate Dalits, such as abolition of untouchability, promise of citizenship and facilities of protective discrimination, did not convince the Dalits. They were apprehensive about the genuineness on the part of the caste Hindus in realising the Constitutional promises. It was this state of anxiousness that propelled them to continue their struggle for power. In other words, until then Dalit struggle for political power was to secure a place for their voice in the legislative bodies and to gain economic facilities. But now, it was to actualise those Constitutional promises that they should continue their struggle for political power. The deliberations in the conference, it may be mentioned, filled a new vigour among the delegates and inspired them to re-dedicate themselves for the Dalit cause.

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[147] Rawat, S. R. 1996. The Making of the Scheduled Caste Community in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of the SCF and Dalit Poltiics 1946 – 48. M.Phil. Department of History, University of Delhi, cited in Pai, Sudha., 2002. *Dalit Assertion…*p. 61.

[148] Lynch, Owen. 1969. *Politics…,* p.133.

[149] *National Herald,* 26 April 1948, cited in Rawat, S. R. 1996. *The Making of the Scheduled Caste Community in Uttar Pradesh: A Study of the SCF and Dalit Poltiics 1946 – 48*. M.Phil thesis, Department of History, University of Delhi, cited in Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Dalit Assertion…*p. 63.

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Unfortunately, Dalits in general and the UPSCF in particular could not sustain this vigour, for it gradually petered out mainly on account of the Congress' tricks of enticing the Dalit leaders with power. On the occasion of the first general elections in 1951-52 many of the UPSCF leaders migrated to the Congress party. At the end of 1952, the Party more or less crumbled and was gradually removed from public memory. While the migration of the UPSCF's leadership to the Congress Party was said to be the main reason for its disintegration, the inherent drawbacks of identity politics in a democratic framework, where support of other communities is essential to win power, was another reason for the failure of UPSCF in the elctions. For instance, apart from the Muslim's support in few pockets in western UP, no other community or caste supported the UPSCF. Further, except Chamars in the urban areas in western UP, most of the Chamars and other Dalit castes supported the Congress rather than the UPSCF.[150] Disregarding these limitations on the part of the Party, despite its sudden emergence and disappearance, the Party's significance lies in the mobilisation of Dalit political energies and channelling the same to secure rights and power for Dalits, particularly in a period of transition that was marked by utmost confusion and enthusiasm. Had the Party not mobilised Dalits for their rights, the interests of the Dalits would have simply been washed away by the sea of Independence. In any case, the failure of the UPSCF, however, was not the end of the Dalit movement and its struggle for power. They had learned their lessons from their failure and they began to look for ways to plug in the limitations of identity politics. It was this search that resulted in the formation of the RPI in October 1957.

2. II. Republican Party of India (RPI): Prelude to the future Dalit politics[151]

Ambedkar, in his retrospection and analysis of the setback of the SCF in the 1951-52 elections, arrived at two conclusions.[152] First, the system of reserved seats for Dalits was

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[150] See Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Politics…*p.136.

[151] My information on the UP branch of RPI and its activities was drawn from several sources, including, Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Politics…;* Brass, Paul. 1985. *Caste, faction and party in Indian Politics.* Delhi: Chanakya Publications; Hasan, Zoya. 1989. *Dominance and mobilization: rural politics in western Uttar Pradesh, 1930 – 80,* New Delhi: Sage Publications*;* Prashad, Vijay. 2000. *Untouchable Freedom: a social history of a Dalit community,* Oxford: OUP; Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Dalit Assertion…;* Jaffrelot, C. 2003. *India's Silent…;* Kumar, Vivek. 2006. *India's Roaring Revolution: Dalit Assertion and New Horizons,* Delhi: Gagandeep Publications.

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neither an alternative nor a substitute for the system of separate electorates. But in view of the unanimous rejection by the Congress members in the Constituent Assembly, entertaining the idea of separate electorates for Dalits in post-Independent India is purely utopian. Since the system of reserved seats singles out the Dalit electorates and hampers their efforts to reach other social groups, the system should be abolished. In agreement with Ambedkar's conclusion, the Executive committee of the SCF passed a resolution asking for the dissolution of the system of reserved seats.[153] Secondly, any Dalit-based (or for that matter any caste-based) political party had less chance of success at the electoral level. As such, it was necessary to form alliances with other political parties as well as with other social groups. Towards achieving this end, the existing SCF must be abandoned and a new political party with broader mandate than the SCF should be formed.[154]

Ambedkar, in order to set this new plan into action, encouraged Dalit activists to work with the leaders of other communities, and on his part he personally began to consult various socialist leaders, particularly Ram Manohar Lohia, P.K. Atre, and S.M. Joshi, so as to seek their support to form a new political party, which would be called the Republican Party of India (RPI). The choice for the name of the new party reflects Ambedkar's long search for a viable political platform for the oppressed masses. "Ambedkar's political career was," as Gail Omvedt points out, "devoted to finding forms through which Dalits could exert themselves in an autonomous fashion, and at the same time, build an enduring alliance with non-Brahmans, Shudras, workers, and peasants."[155] In other words, one of the main aims of the new party was to mobilise the lower caste groups as a 'federation of oppressed populations,' that are discriminated against on

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[152] Despite the SCF's worst performance in the elections, it did manage to win two Lok Sabha seats, one in Hyderabad and the other in Bombay Presidency. It even, for the first time, secured representation in Legislative Assemblies of Madras, Hyderabad, the State of Mysore, PEPSU (Patiala and East Punjab State Union) and Himachal Pradesh.

[153] Duncan, R. Ian. 1979. Levels, the Communication of Programmes and Sectional Strategies in Indian Politics, with reference to the BKD and the RPI in UP state and Aligarh District. Ph.D. University of Sussex, p. 236, cited in Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2005. *Dr. Ambedkar and Untouchability...* p. 85.

[154] Keer, Dhananjay. 1971. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission.* Bombay: Popular Prakashan, pp: 487 & 491.

[155] Omvedt, Gail. 2000. Undoing the Bondage: Dr. Ambedkar's Theory of Dalit Liberation. In: Yadav, K.C. ed., *From Periphery to Centre State: Ambedkar, Ambedkarism & Dalit Future,* New Delhi: Manohar, pp: 139 – 40.

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account of their ascribed social status.[156] The new party, RPI was established on April 22, 1958,[157] and a branch of the Party was immediately formed in UP, and the leadership of the new party was mainly drawn from the erstwhile UPSCF.

With the establishment of the RPI, Dalit politics in UP, especially in western UP, was once again renewed by leaders like Tilak Chand Kureel,[158] Chedi Lal Sathi, and B.P. Maurya. Among these three people, the role of the latter two is important. Chedi Lal Sathi was, as Jaffrelot points out,[159] the main architect of the RPI in the state. He was born in a poor Kewat (fishing caste) family. As a young boy, he was attracted to Gandhi and Congress party. For some time, he worked as a typist in UP Congress office, from where he went on to become secretary to Lal Bahadur Shastri and G.V. Pant, when the latter became Chief Minister of the state. Apparently Ambedkar appears to have attracted him into the SCF in 1952, and since then he stayed loyal to Ambedkar and his political activism. In 1960, after Kureel, he became the president of the RPI and continued in that position until 1964.

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Although Chedi Lal Sathi was the architect of the RPI in UP, the man who stood at the forefront of the party and, who, indeed, popularized that party was B.P. Maurya. He was born in a poor Jathav family in Khair, a *tehsil* in Aligarh district. During his childhood, he was taught by a Catholic priest to read and write. Just like Chedi Lal Sathi, the young Maurya too, as a young man, was inspired and influenced by Gandhi and the Congress' slogan of *swaraj.* He joined Congress in 1941 when Gandhi visited Khair. Soon after he left for Agra to pursue his studies, and during his stay in the city he was involved in Jathav movement. Maurya's association with Congress proved to be a temporary infatuation. Later he met Dr. Ambedkar in Delhi and realised that "he was the real leader because he knew our problems".[160] In 1948, he resigned from the Congress and joined SCF. After this development he returned to Aligarh, where he completed LLM from

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[156] Jaffrelot, C. 2005. *Dr. Ambedkar…,* p. 87.
[157] Although the preparation for the formation of the new party started as early as 1954 onwards several unforeseen events such as untimely demise of Ambedkar on 6 December 1956 delayed the process.
[158] Tilak Chand Kureel was the founding President of the RPI in UP from 1958-60.
[159] Jaffrelot. C. 2003. *India's silent…,* p.107.
[160] Interview with B. P. Maurya, cited in Ibid., p.108.

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Aligarh Muslim University and became Assistant Professor of Constitutional Law in 1960 in the same University. While pursuing his studies in law and even after joining the University as a teacher, he was also actively engaged with Dalit issues as well as problems of the landless labourer. He mobilised the landless labourer in Aligarh for land and minimum wages. In April 1957, he organised a conversion meeting, where nearly 100,000 Jathavs converted to Buddhism.[161]

In consonance with Ambedkar's aims - to reach out to the wider oppressed sections and at the same to time to address the problems specifically pertaining to Dalits – a number of issues were taken up by the RPI. The Party's 1962 election manifesto, which was at a later stage placed before Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri in the form of 'a charter of ten demands', helps us understand the main concerns and issues of the RPI.

1. The portrait of Babasaheb Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, 'the Father of the Indian Constitution' must be displayed in the Central Hall of Parliament.
2. Let land go to the actual tiller of the land.
3. Idle and waste land must go to the landless labourers.
4. Adequate distribution of food grains and control over the rising prices.
5. The lot of slum dwellers be improved.
6. Full implementation of the Minimum Wages Act, 1948.
7. Extension of all privileges guaranteed by the Constitution to the Scheduled Castes who have embraced Buddhism.
8. Harassment of the depressed classes should cease forthwith.
9. Full justice for them under the Untouchability (Offences) Act.
10. Reservation in the services to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes be completed as soon as possible, not later than 1970.[162]

In addition to the above ten resolutions, two other significant demands of the UP branch of the RPI were: first, that Urdu should be made the official language of the state, and if that cannot be done, measures should be taken to teach Urdu on a par with Hindi in schools; and second, that taxes on shoe-makers should be remitted. Owen Lynch mentions the reasons for the specific significance of these two demands. While the first owes to the RPI's electoral alliance with the Muslims in the state, especially in the city of

[161] Also, see Hasan, Zoya. 1989. *Dominance and mobilization: rural politics in western Uttar Pradesh, 1930 – 80,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp: 116-7.
[162] 'Election Manifesto – The Republican Party of India', cited in Lynch, O., 1969. *The Politics…,* p. 104.

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Aligarh (more on this below), the second is on account of the prominence of the Jatavas/Chamars in the party.[163]

Setting aside these two specific demands, one could see in the RPI's manifesto a range of issues, which were not merely concerned with the Dalits, but also the socially and economically marginalised communities. Indeed, the party had not just confined itself to passing of the resolution. It had organised a number of mass mobilisation and protest movements to demand that the ruling Congress party implement the above issues. When the government failed to implement these demands, the RPI's activists made several attempts to occupy fallow land and as many as 30,000 of them got arrested in 1964. The significance of RPI's concerns and activities was that they were in direct confrontation with the concerns of the Congress party. For instance, while the Congress under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru considered discussion of caste distinctions to be a traditionalist discourse, the RPI fought to place the realities of caste discrimination against the lower castes at the heart of national debate. While the Congress sought to direct the nation towards increasing industrialisation in the 1950's, the RPI argued for radical land redistribution and agricultural reform to improve the economic position of the lower castes.[164] Through its activities and confrontations, the RPI was able to establish itself, although for a brief period, as a strong alternative to the Congress Party for the lower castes and other oppressed masses in the state.[165]

The RPI's greatest moments were 1962 and 1967 elections, where it made inroads into political power. While in the 1962 election the RPI won one Lok Sabha seat in Aligarh district and two Vidhan Sabha seats, in the 1967 elections it won two Lok Sabha seats. Despite the fact that the state and entire country was still under the influence of the Congress party which won the nation her independence, the success of the RPI was no insignificant event. It reflected the Dalits' determination to take power into their hands and thereby change their pathetic socio-economic conditions. Of course, it must be

[163] Ibid., p. 104.
[164] Brass, Paul. 1985. *Caste, faction and party in Indian Politics.* Delhi: Chanakya Publications, p. 224.
[165] While the Congress managed to win all the reserved seats in the 1952 and 1957 elections, in 1962 the RPI defeated candidates in two important constituencies and four rebel leaders of the Congress won with the support of the RPI. See Hasan, Zoya. 1989. *Dominance and mobilization…* p. 114.

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mentioned here that it was neither the sheer determination of the Dalits to win power nor their activism that led to their success in Aligarh district. The Chamars, who were main supporters of the party, constitute 22 per cent of the UP population and the Aligarh district had the highest concentration of the Chamars. Besides, the Muslims, the other largest community in the state, were feeling alienated after the bifurcation of the country into India and Pakistan. Their sense of alienation turned into betrayal after the Hindu-Muslim riots in Aligarh in 1961. The Congress leaders who had promised security for those Muslims who would stay back in India after the partition, did not provide any form of security, particularly during the riots.

Most horrifically after the riots, the government was lenient towards the Hindu goons and did not even punish them. It was this sense of alienation and betrayal by the Congress government that pulled the Muslim population in the state, especially in western UP, towards the RPI. On its part the RPI used the situation to its own advantage by exploiting the anti-Congress feeling among the Muslims. The Party has precipitated the momentum by coining slogans like *Jatav Muslm bhai bhai, Hindu kaun kahan se aye?* (Jatav and Muslim are brothers, where do the Hindus come from). The other slogan that was aggressively directed against the upper castes was, "Thakur, Brahmans, and Banyas make their face black".[166] It was this coalition of the Jatavs and Muslims that resulted in the success of the RPI in electoral politics. Ian Duncan captures the politics of the RPI success in the following terms:

> The important factor in many of the seats won by the RPI in UP was the informal alliances which the party was able to form with the Muslims in some areas of the State, which had been affected by communal disturbances shortly before the elections. Three of the successful candidates for the Legislative Assembly were Muslims as was one of the successful candidates for the Lok Sabha.[167]

Thus, it was the informal alliances with the Muslims and giving the party's tickets to Muslim candidates that led to RPI's success in the elections.

The electoral success of the RPI, however, was short-lived and it could not win in any election after the 1967 Assembly elections, and thus, could never become, as initially hoped, either the political platform for the oppressed masses or an alternative to the

[166] Duncan, R.I., 1979. Levels…p. 286, cited in Jaffrelot, C., 2003. *India's silent…,* p.109, *passim 62.*
[167] Ibid., p. 253.

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Congress. The reasons for the failure of the RPI experiment are many: first, the brief success of the RPI lies in B.P. Maurya's engineering of a local coalition between Dalits and Muslims in the city and district of Aligarh. As the coalition was driven by political opportunism rather than historical sympathy between the two groups, the partnership did not last beyond the 1967 and 1969 state assembly elections.[168]

Secondly, the RPI's claim, both as a party of the poor as well as the party of 'Ambedkarites', appeared to cause confusion among its workers and supporters. One of the primary aims of the party was to "organise the peasantry, the landless labourers, workers in factories and other wage earners". As such the party, for those who were wedded to class-based politics, was *supposed* to be organising the labourers and workers. Contrary to this expectation, the Party's manifesto described itself as an Ambedkarite party and its pledge was to "engage itself in organising the downtrodden masses of India, particularly the Buddhists, SCs, STs, and OBCs".[169] Thus, there appears to be a void in communication between the leadership and the workers and supporters, a gap which led to disappointment and departure of those sections of people that were interested in class-based politics.

Thirdly, a section among the middle class Dalits were content with the new opportunities thrown up by the Constitution of India, such as abolition of untouchability, reserved seats, and promises of economic betterment. Using these they wanted to enter the power structure and improve their socio-economic conditions rather than lead a movement to challenge the established social and political orders. Owen Lynch in his research on Agra Chamars observes the two Dalit groups with contrasting interests and ideals. While one group of Dalits, whom Lynch calls 'the Congress conservatives', were mostly businessmen, they wanted to support the Congress in order to gain patronage in the form of subsidies and licenses. The second group of Dalits, mostly the RPI leaders and

[168] Mendelsohn, Oliver and Marika Vicziany. 2000. *The Untouchables.*. p. 213.
[169] Duncan, R.I. 1979. Levels, the Communication of Programmes…. p. 236.

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workers, were 'keen to maintain a separate party, based on distinct lower caste identity'.[170]

Fourthly, despite its avowed aim to combine caste and class categories and reach out to as many socially deprived communities as possible, the RPI could not reach out beyond the Chamar/Jatav caste. The reason for such a narrow concentration of the party was the attitude of the Jatavs towards the party, as well as other Dalit castes. For them, the party belonged to them and not to any other group. They hindered many attempts to expand the party membership and were even unwilling to give party offices to non-Jatavs.[171] While confirming this attitude of the Jatavs, Zoya Hasan comments, '[the RPI's] activities came to be restricted because of its identification with the Jatavs, a fact which helped Congress wean away other Scheduled Castes from the RPI's influence.'[172] In addition to these factors, the Congress Party's methods of co-option and accommodation also largely contributed to the end of RPI initiative of the Dalits in UP, which is our point of discussion in the next chapter.

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Conclusion: Against Varshney's thesis of 'Southernisation of North Indian politics', and Pai's 'Delayed development of Dalit consciousness in UP', I have tried to put forward two arguments in this chapter. First, it is not just the Hindu-Muslim cleavage that shaped the politics in North India. Caste, which has been at the centre of the politics in South India, has also been at the core of the politics in the northern region. I have substantiated my argument by an examination of Dalit mobilisation for social equality and political power in colonial and post-colonial UP after Independence. I have shown how the Dalits deployed caste in their struggle against the domination of the upper castes and how they

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[170] Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Politics…,* p. 111.

[171] Prashad, Vijay. 2000. *Untouchable Freedom…,* p. 122.

[172] Hasan, Zoya. 1989. *Dominance and mobilization…*p.119. This is not specific to UP, even in Maharashtra the party was largely dominated by Mahars. And the Party leadership made little attempts to reach out the other Dalit castes in the state, such as Chambhars and Mangs. A remark made by Namdeo Vhatkar, a Chambhar politician, mirrors the domination of the Mahars: Even though the name [the Scheduled Castes Federation (SCF)] stood for all the Scheduled Castes, in reality this party was only the party of the Mahars. For this reason the Chambhars, Dhors, Mangs, Bhagi and all other castes considered to be Harijans joined the Congress party. The SCF later became the RPI. After the Mahars' conversion it remained a party of one caste and one caste only.' Quoted in Gokhale-Turner, Jayashree B., 1979. The Dalit Panthers and the Radicalization of the Untouchables. *Journal of Commonwealth and Comparative Politics,* 17(1), pp: 77-93, here, p. 81.

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made a strong claim for political power on the basis of their separate identity. Secondly, by reading about Dalit activism under the banner of the Adi-Hinduism, I have argued that Dalit consciousness in colonial UP was by no means delayed. By raising their voice against Brahmanical Hinduism and by demanding social equality on the basis of their claim of *mula-bharatvasi,* Dalit consciousness in UP was on a par with Dalit consciousness in southern and western India. In fact, by making a claim for political power, the Dalits in UP were far ahead of their counterparts anywhere in India during that time. It is, indeed, on account of the foundations for political power laid by Dalit activism during the colonial era that the Dalits in post-Independent UP could direct their energies to attain political power through the RPI. Of course, in a democratic set-up, securing political power requires support from many quarters, and this is where the Dalits failed in the immediate post-Independent UP. Moreover, some of the strategies employed by the Congress to co-opt the Dalit leadership which we will discuss in the next chapter also worked against the independent political activities of the Dalits. More specifically it worked against the RPI.

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***Three*……**

Mobilising for Power: The Emergence of BSP and Dalit Politics in UP, 1970-90

> Political power is the master-key with which you can open any lock, whether it is [a] social, educational, or cultural lock.
>
> - Kanshi Ram[173]

In the previous chapter, we examined Dalit mobilisations for social equality and political power in colonial and the immediate post-colonial UP. Mobilising under the banner of the Adi-Hindu movement, which was initiated by Swami Achutaanand and Ram Charan, the Dalits in the Province rejected the 'untouchable' tag. Assuming the *achut* identity, they declared themselves as *mula bharatvasi* (the original inhabitants of India). On the basis of this new separate social identity, they demanded not just social equality, but more importantly, they also made a strong claim for a share in the emerging political matrix. The assertion of the *mula bharatvasi* buttressed their claim for political power. During the 1930's and '40's while the caste-Hindus accepted the leadership of Gandhi, the Dalits in the state swam against the current by condemning his stand on the Communal Award and role in the subsequent Poona Pact. They stood firmly behind Ambedkar during the Round Table proceedings in London and proclaimed him as their only leader. Following Ambedkar's political initiatives in Maharashtra, the Dalits in the state also opened branches of the two political parties – the SCF in the '40's and RPI in the late '50's. Through these political parties, the Dalit leadership made every effort to mobilise the Dalits as well as other marginalised sections in the state for their rights and political power.

But their efforts at winning political power did not yield any positive results as they could not garner the support of the caste-Hindus and others. Apart from the inimical attitude of the caste-Hindus against the Dalits and their political parties, the terms of the Poona Pact were largely responsible for their failure in electoral politics. Further, with the Congress' co-option politics, particularly since the late '60's, the Dalits' independent political

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[173] Rajan, Ambeth.1994. *My Bahujan Samaj.* Delhi: ABCDE, p. 1.

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activities shifted from a tragedy to a catastrophe. The co-option of the Dalit leadership herded the Dalit voters into the hands of the Congress. But how did the Congress manage to co-opt the Dalit leadership into its fold? Did the Congress do anything substantially to improve the lot of the Dalits? Did Congress' co-option put an end to the independent political activities of Dalits? How did the BSP mobilise the Dalit constituency for political power and why did the majority of Dalits in the state support the BSP?

These questions are important for one specific reason. Kanchan Chandra in her *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* attributes the BSP's electoral success in UP to (a) greater representation accorded to the Scheduled Caste (SC) elites, especially to those of the Chamars, who constitute a majority among the SC category in the state; and (b) a series of electoral alliances that the Party entered into with the other political parties.[174] She substantiates this argument on the basis of the evidence drawn from the BSP's electoral failure in Punjab and Karnataka. The Party's failure in Punjab's electoral politics, she argues, was due to greater representation accorded to the Chamar elites, although the Chamars constitute a minority among the SCs in Punjab. Apart from this undue representation to one particular caste, the limited representation given to the non-Chamar elites among the SCs and the Party's failure to negotiate electoral alliances with other political parties led to its failure in the state. In Karnataka, contrary to the political situation in the above two states, the SC elites enjoy a high degree of representation in the mainstream political parties. As a result, the SC voters, she claims, had no incentive to vote for the BSP.

There is one fundamental flaw in Chandra's argument. That the elites among the Chamars in UP were given greater representation in the BSP is true. And this might have provided both the material as well as psychological incentives to the non-elite Chamars. But that does not explain the reasons for the support extended by the other Dalits castes (i.e., non-Chamar SCs) to the BSP. For a lack of representation should have driven them away from the Party rather than within it. Following this, one interesting question that

[174] Chandra, Kanchan. 2004. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed: Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India,* Cambridge: CUP.

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arises is: why did the non-elite Chamars and other Dalit castes support the BSP? Chandra answers this but rather unsatisfactorily.

The fact that the BSP was not born out of struggles of the Dalits at the grassroots, but sprang up from the activities undertaken by the All India Backward (SC/ST/OBC) and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF) and the Dalits' support to the Party, highlights an important aspect. By the early 1970's, there was a noticeable economic change among the Dalits in the state. Much of this improvement is, obviously, due to the compensatory discriminatory provisions as well as the welfare measures for the empowerment of Dalits. With new assurances gained through the Constitutional provisions and economic advancements through the cottage industries, such as leather-making and sandal-making, the Dalits began to assert themselves both in the urban as well as rural areas. Such an assertion by the 'untouchables', not surprisingly, became a cause for hatred and fear among the upper castes. In the sense, the new assertiveness as well as the political awareness and educational advancement of the Dalits were seen as a breach of tradition by the upper castes. For them, "the Jatavs, as untouchables", as observed by Owen Lynch, "are getting not only out of place but also out of hand."[175] To show them their place in society, the upper castes resorted to the practice of discrimination in urban centres and unleashed violence and riots against the Dalits in the rural areas during the 1970's and early 1980's. Although the Dalits were terrified by the brutality and cruelty of the upper castes, such cruelties, in turn, provided the context for them not only to raise their voice against the caste-based violence against them, but more importantly, to lend their support to the BSP.

The present chapter aims to examine the history of the BSP, especially the wider socio-economic context and the ideological features of Dalit politics that Chandra's account leaves out. I have divided the chapter into three main sections. The first section examines Dalit activities prior to the emergence of the BSP. Here, I have concentrated on the special relations between the Congress and Dalits. Prior to the entry of the lower

[175] Lynch, Owen. 1981. Rioting as Rational Action: An Interpretation of the April 1978 Riots in Agra. *EPW,* 16 (48), pp: 1951-1956, here, p. 1952.

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caste-based BSP and SP, the Congress dominated political power in the state. Moreover, the Congress was also the major beneficiary of reserved seats for the Dalits in the State Assembly and Parliament. The second section examines the history of the BSP – its evolution from BAMCEF to BSP. The final section analyses the mobilisation of the BSP and the issues it raised during its campaigns.

3. I. Dalits and Congress: A Difficult Relationship: In one of its election manifestos the Congress party declared: "The Congress has pledged to promote with special care the educational, employment, and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people, particularly the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribe, and Backward Classes".[176] The Dalits appeared to have believed in the Congress. A cursory look at the election results in seven assembly elections from 1962 to 1985 in the reserved seats (Table below) point out that the Dalits mainly supported the Congress party.[177]

Table 3.1: Performance of the parties in the reserved (SCs) seats in UP Assembly

Party	1962	1967	1969	1974	1977	1980	1985
BKD	-	-	22	23	--	--	--
CPI	6	1	-	2	--	2	--
CPM	-	-	1	-	--	--	--
INC (I)	55	45	45	48	8	72+1*	71
NJP (SC)	--	--	--	--	--	9	--
JP	-	-	-	-	79	--	--
LKD	--	--	--	--	--	--	12
JS/BJS/ BJP	8	24	12	13	-	3	3
PSP	4	1	-	-	--	--	--
RPI	1	2	-	-	--	--	--
SOC	5	-	-	-	--	--	--
SSP	-	10	5	-	--	--	--
SWA	5	3	1	-	--	--	--
IND	4	2	2	2	1	1	2
Total	88	88	88	88	88	88	88

*One seat was won by the Indian National Congress (U).
Source: Election Commission of India

Interestingly, the victory of the Congress in a majority of the reserved seats is not just confined to UP alone. In fact, it was able to secure most of the reserved seats for the Dalits all over India, particularly in the 1962, 1967, and 1971 parliamentary elections. In

[176] 'The Election Manifesto of the Congress in 1971', cited in McMillan, Alistair. 2005. *Standing at the Margins: Representation and Electoral Reservation in India.* New Delhi: OUP, p. 266.
[177] In the mid-1960's a few Dalits were also mobilised by the Socialists. But that did not last beyond the 1967 state assembly elections.

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1962, Congress won 82 percent of Dalit seats when its national average of all seats was 54 percent; in 1967 the contrast was 61 to 52 percent; and again, in 1971, the contrast was 66 to 64 percent.[178] In all these three elections, the Congress' proportion of the Dalit seats topped its proportion of all seats. However, we witnessed a general decline in the Congress' proportion of Dalit seats, particularly after 1984.

Table 3.2: Distribution of Scheduled Castes' Parliamentary Seats by Parties, 1971-84[179]

	1971			1977			1980			1984		
Party	No. of SC Seats	% of SC Seats	% of All Seats	No. of SC Seats	% of SC Seats	% of All Seats	No. of SC Seats	% of SC Seats	% of All Seats	No. of SC Seats	% of SC Seats	% of All Seats
Congress	48	66	64	15	19	28	46	60	67	52	75	79
Janata	7	10	7	45	58	55	14	18	16	1	1	3
Communist parties	8	11	9	9	12	5	7	9	8	4	6	5
DMK, AIADMK & TDP	6	8	4	4	5	4	4	5	3	9	13	8
Others	4	5	16	5	6	8	5	7	6	3	4	5

Sources: Election commission reports for 1971 -80 and provisional tables for 1984.

Notes: The figures are for the seventeen large states only; in 1980, there were seventy-nine scheduled caste constituencies in all; in 1984, because there were no elections in Assam and Punjab, it was reduced. 'Congress' refers to Congress ® in 1971, Congress in 1977, and Congress-I in 1980 and 1984. 'Janata' refers to the component units that united in 1977; to the pre-merger components in 1971; to the Janata, Lok Dal and Congress-U in 1980; and to the Janata and the DMKP in 1984.

On the basis of the electoral success of the Congress in the reserved seats and the declarations of the Congress in its political manifestos and campaigns we come across two kinds of political commentaries during this time. First, the Rudolphs attribute the disproportionate electoral support of Dalits for the Congress in the Nehru era and for Indira Gandhi's Congress to 'a special relationship' between the Congress and the Dalits.[180] Secondly, terming the Dalits as a 'vote bank' for the Congress, Mendelsohn and Vicziany argue that the Dalits voted for the Congress, because of the latter's commitment to act on 'untouchability and poverty'. "In the years after Independence, the Untouchable's support for the Congress clearly strengthened. From 1952 until 1989, with the exception of the post-Emergency election of 1977, the Untouchables tended to function in both national and State elections as a vote bank for the Congress. Their vote

[178] Rudolph L. I. and Susanne H. R. 1987. *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 188.
[179] This Table is taken in, Ibid., p.189.
[180] Ibid., p. 187.

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for Congress was a vote for the party ruling the government, a party that had committed itself to a plan of action on untouchability and poverty."[181] As we have seen in the two tables above, a majority of the seats reserved for the Dalits both in the Assembly and in Parliament had gone to the Congress Party. From that point of view, one may agree with the Rudolphs when they state that the Dalits and Congress had a 'special relationship' and also with Mendelshon and Vicziany for terming the Dalits as 'vote bank' for the Congress. But two questions must be summarily posed here: How did the Congress manage to turn the Dalits into its 'vote bank'? To ask the same question differently, why and how did the Dalits become a 'vote bank' for the Congress? And, what did their 'special relationship' with the Congress do to them? In the following pages I make an effort to answer these two questions,[182] and in this endeavour I have concentrated on two specific aspects: (A) Political Representation for the Dalits; and (B) Zamindari Abolition Act and Land Reforms.

3.IA. Political Representation for the Dalits: Until 1961 most of the reserved seats were in double-member constituencies, in which one of the seats could be filled only by a member either of the Dalit or the Adivasi category and the other was open to general competition.[183] But in 1961, single-member constituencies were brought into force by abolishing double-member constituencies. Although it has been said that the abolition of double-member constituencies was primarily inspired by the concern of politicians over the expenses in campaigns in double-sized districts, in reality it was done, as has beeb clearly indicated by Marc Galanter, due to the well publicised resentment expressed by

[181] Mendelsohn and Vicziany. 2000. *The Untouchables…,* p.204. Corbridge and Harris also make a similar observation: "Members of India's Scheduled Communities voted disproportionately for the Congress in national and State elections…' See, Stuart, Corbridge and John Harris. 2000. *Reinventing India: Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and Popular Democracy.* Cambridge: Polity Press, p.213.

[182] Apart from my own primary sources, some of my information in this section comes from Jaffrelot, *India's silent …,* pp: 89-114.

[183] In 1952, all of the Dalit seats and half of the Adivasi seats in the Lok Sabha were in double-member constituencies. In 1957, 467 out of 470 Dalit seats in the Vidhan Sabha and 115 of the 221 seats reserved for Adivasis were also in double-member constituencies. On the functioning and abolition of the double member constituencies, see, Dushkin, Lelah. 1972. Scheduled Caste Politics. In: Mahar, Michael., ed., *The Untouchables in Contemporary India,* Tucson: University of Arizona Press, p. 189.

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the upper castes.[184] There is another dimension in single-member constituencies. During the demarcation process, it appears, care had been taken to reserve constituencies, which had small Dalit populations.[185] For instance, of the 76 constituencies reserved for Dalits in the 1962 elections in the state, there was not even a single constituency that had a Dalit majority. At the most, the Dalit population represented 10-30 per cent, which means, 75 per cent of the population in the reserved constituency comprised non-Dalits.[186] Such an arrangement, in turn, means that in any given constituency even if the entire Dalit population vote *en masse* for a particular Dalit candidate, he or she will not win the election; the one chosen by the non-Dalits would win the seat. In other words, constituencies might have been reserved for the Dalits, but the outcome of the elections, i.e., winning or losing, would be decided by the non-Dalits, (read) upper castes. But the politics of making and unmaking the reserved constituencies apart, what actually happened in the reserved constituencies?

As we have noted earlier, from the very beginning, political representation for the Dalits has been compounded with controversy and criticism. To begin with, one of the remarkable contributions of political representation for Dalits is that it did provide for their 'substantial quantitative presence'[187] in representative bodies. The Dalit legislators, who have been elected under the banner of various national and regional parties, are of the opinion that representation for Dalits has been a great success. They claim that their presence in the legislative bodies not only safeguarded the interests of the Dalits, but also helped to check the monopoly of the upper castes over legislative bodies. Of course, such a claim is not shared by all the Dalits, especially the educated and poorer sections among them. They are of the opinion that the said measure, instead of becoming a viable voice of the Dalits, had become a weapon in the hands of the upper castes, with which the latter

[184] Galanter, Marc. 1979. Compensatory Discrimination in Political Representation: A Preliminary Assessment of India's Thirty- Year Experience with Reserved Seats in Legislatures. *EPW,* 14 (7&8), pp: 437-454, here, p. 438.
[185] Unlike Dalits, Adivasis generally concentrate in specific areas. Due to this nature, the Adivasis' constituencies comprise nearly 70 percent of their population.
[186] On demarcation in general, see McMillan, Alistair. 2005. *Standing at the margins…*
[187] Galanter, Marc. 1984. *Competing Equalities…*p.50.

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destroyed the independent leadership of the Dalits (more details given below).[188] What ultimately matters for them is not simply the *presence,* but the *quality* of that presence, which had become a rarity. For a long time, Dalit representatives did not actively participate in debates in the legislative bodies even if the issues concerned the Dalits and other marginalised strata. Such indifference on the part of the Dalit representatives resulted from the fact that a majority of them came not from the ordinary Dalit backgrounds but from extremely privileged backgrounds and did not empathise with the former.

It is not just the individual Dalit representatives who are responsible for a lack of qualitative presence in the representative bodies, the upper castes and political parties are equally responsible for the same. As noted above, the changing of the double-member constituencies into single-member constituencies put the Dalit candidates at the mercy of the non-Dalit population and upper caste-based political parties. Given a choice between two Dalit candidates – one that speaks the language of the Dalits and the other that speaks the language of the upper castes-based mainstream political party – whose candidate would be chosen by the non-Dalit public? G. Narayana, who studied political elites among the Dalits, gives an example. During the 1967 elections in the Sasani reserved constituency, a Congress-Dalit candidate was challenged by a RPI-Dalit candidate. The upper castes supported the Congress-Dalit candidate, because: "He lives simply, talks softly, and above all, he had not forgotten his caste status. He pays due regard to all *Brahmins* and does not sit with them on the same cot."[189] Arguing on similar lines, Galanter notes that the representatives for the reserved constituencies were selected on grounds of "acceptability to others rather than by virtue of forceful representation of interests of the preferred groups".[190] Thus it is clear that the single-member constituencies put Dalit candidates at the mercy of the non-Dalit population, and voting for a Dalit candidate was governed by what the non-Dalit community expects or asks of the Dalit candidates, that is, 'know thy place'.

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[188] Interviews with Ram Kishore Varma, and Shyam Sunder on December 15 &16, 2004 at Banda and Bojja Tarakam on 17 June, 2005 in Hyderabad and Katti Padmarao on 12 August, 2005.
[189] Narayana, G. 1974. The Political Elite among the Scheduled Castes. *Journal of Constitutional and Parliamentary Studies,* Vol. 8, pp: 214-19, here p. 216.
[190] Galanter, Marc. 1979. Compensatory Discrimination…, p. 446.

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Further, as selection of the candidates is always in the hands of the Party, the Dalit candidates generally never argued against the Party and its upper caste-based leadership. Jagjivan Ram, one of the most prominent Dalit leaders of his time, admitting the reality of the reserved constituencies, conceded: "Since one had to depend on the non-Scheduled Caste votes, one went along with the fortunes of the party".[191] These two observations clearly reflect two foremost limitations faced by the Dalit representatives, *viz,* (1) dependency on the non-Dalit population for winning elections; and (2) dependency on political parties for funding. In the next section we shall see how the Dalits under BSP leadership managed to overcome the funding problem. But presently, what is important to recognise here is that the dependency of the Dalit representatives both upon the non-Dalit population and upper caste-led political parties is not something voluntarily sought by Dalits themselves but rather imposed on them through the present form of a representative system. Such imposed dependency undeniably turned the Dalit leader not just submissive, but as pointed by Kanshi Ram, turned them into the *chamchas* (stooges) of the upper caste leaders.[192] Marc Galanter in his examination of the working of political representation for the Dalits also made the similar observation:

> The design of the legislative reservations – the dependence on outside parties for funds and the need to appeal to constituencies made up overwhelmingly of others – tends to produce compliant and accommodating leaders rather than forceful articulators of the interests of these groups.[193]

Thus, the dependency of the Dalit candidates upon the political parties over a period resulted in the emergence of a pattern that helped to reiterate the dominance of the dominating political parties. For instance, as long as the Congress party remained dominant it captured most of the reserved seats. During the mid-80's, when the BJP became a dominant party, it won in most of the reserved constituencies.[194] Thus, the larger parties that have tended to win the reserved seats have done so without gaining support from Dalits or Adivasis in the reserved constituencies. Further, some of the Dalits who managed to get elected independently were absorbed by the mainstream

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[191] Interview with Jagjivan Ram, cited in Frankel, R. Francine. 1989. Caste, Land and Dominance in Bihar: Breakdown of the Brahmanical Social Order. In: Frankel, Francine R. and M.S.A. Rao., eds., *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order.* New Delhi: OUP, pp: 46-132, here p.83.
[192] Kanshi Ram. 1984. Struggle for Equality and Self-Respect. *Oppressed Indian.*
[193] Marc, Galanter. 1984. *Competing Equalities…*, p. 549.
[194] See, McMillan, Alistair. 2005. *Standing at the Margin…*

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political parties, especially the Congress (I), by "offering lucrative and prestigious posts in the establishment"[195] (more on this below). But, how did the Congress manage to co-opt the Dalit leadership, i.e., RPI leadership into its fold and turn the Dalits as its 'vote-bank'?

As the above table (Table 3.1) indicates except in the post-Emergency elections in 1977 the Congress party had consistently secured Dalit reserved seats until 1985. Two factors seem to have been instrumental in the success of the Congress. First, after the decline of the RPI most of the leaders were co-opted by the Congress. For instance, one of the prominent leaders of the RPI, B.P Maurya, after his defeat in the 1967 elections joined the Congress in the early 1970's. The rationality behind this shift is a telling story:

> I joined Congress because by the time there was no great opposition leader. No socialists. I joined Indira Gandhi against certain conditions which she fulfilled later: the preamble of the Constitution should refer to socialism; agricultural labourers should be guaranteed minimum wages; land reform should be implemented. She agreed and I joined. She wanted me to become more civilised. I was very rough and tough so she sent me to the United States. When I came back she made me a Minister. I became close to her. And she has been very kind to me.[196]

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Three aspects are clear from Maurya's statement. First, since there was no 'great' opposition leader against the Congress it would be futile on his part as a leader of a small political party to fight against the Congress, an indication of the emergence of the weak leadership which was willing to make compromises with the strong political party and thereby, go against the grain of the interests of their own community. Secondly, his joining the Congress was on account of the ideology of the party. Interestingly, in his reference to the economic aspects like, 'guaranteed minimum wages' and 'land reforms' he was, like the Congress leaders of his generation, narrowing down the Dalit question to an economic issue. By then Maurya had come to conclude, "There is nothing like Dalit politics. This is a most confusing approach because Scheduled Castes and Scheduled

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[195] Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2007. Reservations and the Dalits at the Crossroad. *Center for the Advanced Study of India,* University of Pennsylvania: http://casi.ssc.upenn.edu/india/iit_Jaffrelot.html (accessed 10/10/2007). Of course, even such members were eventually "ghettoised in the social welfare departments". See also, Guru, Gopal. 2002. A Subsidised Notion of Democracy. *EPW,* 37(1), pp: 40-41; Weiner, Myron. 1989. The Political Consequences of Preferential Policies: India in Comparative Perspective. In: Varshney, Ahutosh., ed., *The Indian Paradox: Essays in Indian Politics,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp: 151-175.

[196] Interview with B.P Maurya, quoted in Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2003. *India's silent…,* p. 112.

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Tribes are part and parcel of the entire society."[197] Such words, as observed by Jaffrelot, echo Gandhi's analysis of the caste system' they also indicate a lack of clarity among the Dalit leadership on the specific nature of the Dalit question. Thirdly, one does not understand how a rough and tough Indian person would become 'civilised' merely by going to the United States. Rather than a civilised aspect, one would certainly discern the material inducements thrown to the Dalit leadership by the Congress.

Similarly, Chedi Lal Saathi, who had been an active member in lower caste politics and the Ambedkarite movement since the late 1920's, also followed the path shown by Maurya. And not surprisingly, his justification for the shift is more or less akin to that of Maurya. While recounting the incident that led to his shift, where apparently Indira Gandhi herself went to persuade him, he said: 'Mrs. Gandhi came (to him) and said – "We are in trouble; we are asking for socialism, so you join us, otherwise upper castes and the rich people will come".[198] Thus, for Sathi also, ideology was the main reason for his shift to the Congress. But it is obvious to those perceptive enough to see through it that what induced these leaders into the Congress-fold was not ideology *per se*, but the enticement for positions of power and the material benefits offered to them by the Congress. For instance, soon after his joining of the Party, Maurya became Minister of State in the Ministry of Agriculture and Industry in 1974, and Sathi became general secretary of the UP Congress in 1973.[199] While for leaders like Maurya and Sathi, positions of power were cloaked in the garb of ideology, for other leaders having alliances with the Congress Party, it was a matter of survival. For instance, Owen Lynch in his study of Agra Jatavs observes:

> The conservatives consider membership in the Congress Party a matter of survival. The Congress controls to some extent the financial resources and licensing offices upon which they (Dalits) depend…The conservatives' main strategy can be summed up in one phrase, why bite the hand that feeds you?[200]

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[197] Ibid.
[198] Interview with Chedi Lal Sathi, quoted in Ibid., p. 113.
[199] The other prominent Dalit leaders co-opted by the Congress were Ram Dhan, Ganpat Ram, Jai Prasad, Ram Pyare Suman, Baddal Ram, Mata Prasad, Dharamveer and Mahasay Masuriya Din from eastern Uttar Pradesh; Kanhaiyalal Sonkar, Ram Kinkar, Gaya Prasad Prashant, Tilak Chand Kureel, Chaudhury Buddha Dev, Bhagauti Prasad Kurel and Mewalal Sonkar in central UP and SP Gautam, Ram Lal Rahi, HL Azad, Kamal Dariyabadi, Chaudhury Dharam Singh from western UP. See Kumar, Vivek. 2002. *Dalit Leadership in India* Delhi: Kalpaz Publications, p. 162.
[200] Quoted in Lynch, Owen. 1969. *The Politics…*p. 111.

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In a way, while the Congress Party co-opted the Dalit leaders through the inducement of prestigious posts, the Dalit leaders joined the Congress for their own political and material survival. But the question is, did Congress' Dalit leaders enjoy any space in the Party? Before answering this question it may be noted here that except for Babu Jagjivan Ram, we do not find any other Dalit leader who had been incorporated within the Congress organisation. Of course, at the state level some Dalits, such as Bhola Paswan Shastri in Bihar, and Damodaram Sanjeevaiah in AP, became chief ministers. They got those positions, as rightly pointed out by Frankel[201] and Elliot,[202] as default measures rather than from any concern for or in recognition of the worth of those leaders. As Jagjivan Ram was the only Dalit leader to reach the top of the Congress' organisational structure, it is suggested that we look at his career graph in the Congress to understand whether the Congress' Dalit leaders did anything towards the promotion of the Dalit constituency.

Above we observed that the non-Dalit population voted those Dalit candidates, who 'knew their place' and Babu Jagjivan Ram was one such typical Dalit politician who knew his place. And that was the reason why he became an ideal 'untouchable for the Congress to promote through its ranks'.[203] Jagjivan Ram, who belongs to the Chamar caste in Bihar, was fortunate to have a hardworking agriculturalist father and a brother, who was employed in the British army. Unlike most of the other Chamar families in the village, a steady income in Jagjivan Ram's family allowed him to attend to school. After completing his primary schooling in his native village, Jagjivan Ram shifted to Calcutta to pursue his higher education. It was while studying there that he was attracted to both the Arya Samaj activities among the Dalits and to Congress politics. In 1928 he founded Ravidas Mahasabha with an aim to unite all the divergent Dalit castes. It was unclear as to why he wanted to unite the Dalits, despite giving his own caste-specific name, i.e., Ravidas, to the organisation. But whatever his reason, through this organisation he was

[201] Frankel, R. Francine. 1989. Caste, Land and Dominance…', pp: 100-2.
[202] The installation of Damodaram Sanjeevaiah, a Dalit member, as the chief minister of AP was not because he was democratically elected by the Congress party, but simply because he was selected as a consensus Harijan candidate in order to avert an impending power conflict between the two Reddy candidates – Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy and Kasu Brahmananda Reddy. See Elliot, M. Carolyn. 1970. Caste and Faction among the Dominant Caste…In Kothari, Rajni., ed., *Caste in India…,* pp: 121-61.
[203] Mendelsohn and Vicziany. 2000. *The Untouchables…*p. 207.

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neither proposing any radical measures against the caste system, nor caste-based discrimination against the Dalits. He was simply parroting the preaching of the Arya Samaj, i.e, asking the Dalits 'to give up drinking and uncleanliness'.[204]

During the early 1930's the Congress, under the leadership of M K Gandhi, was locked in a bitter fight with B R Ambedkar over the representation for Dalits in legislative bodies. The Congress leaders were on a desperate search for a Dalit leader, who could counter-weigh the charisma of Ambedkar. It was during this time that young Jagjivan Ram came into contact with Rajendra Prasad, a Brahmin Congress leader from Bihar, who initiated the former into the Congress in 1930. Since then there was no looking back for Jagjivan Ram. From 1930's to until 1970's he became the Congress' symbol of ''Harijan' and was promoted within the ranks of the Congress party. He was appointed as the secretary of the Bihar Anti-Untouchability League (*Harijan Sevak Sangh),* and in that capacity he accompanied Gandhi during his Bihar tour in 1934.[205] In 1937 he was made a member of the Bihar Legislative Assembly. In 1940, he became the secretary of the Bihar Congress and immediately afterwards, he joined the All India Congress Committee. Such promotions for Jagjivan Ram were primarily for two reasons. First, as pointed out, the Congress was in desperate need for a Dalit leader, who could counter-weigh the growing influence of Ambedkar among the Dalits. Jagjivan Ram, with his Arya Samajist-kind of ideology, was a perfect *Harijan.* On his part, Jagjivan Ram did not disappoint his masters. During the time of the second Round Table conference in 1931, he requested Gandhi, in a telegram, to send him as the representative of the 'nationalist' Depressed Classes. And again in 1946, he led a delegation to the British Cabinet Mission in order to present 'the view point of Nationalist Harijans and repudiate […] the claim of Dr. Ambedkar and his organisation […] to be the representative organisation of Harijans in India'.[206] Second, unlike most of the other Dalit leaders in the Congress, Jagjivan Ram was a tactical politician, who could mould his position in accordance with the positions

[204] Kshirsagar, R.K. 1994. *Dalit Movement in India and its Leaders…* p. 311.
[205] See Ram, Jagjivan. 1980. *Caste Challenge in India.* New Delhi: Vision Books, p. 45.
[206] *The India and Pakistan Year's Book and Who's Who,* Bombay: Times of India, 1949, p.800, cited in Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2003. *India's Silent…* p. 99.

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of those who held power. This had become evident particularly during transition of leadership in the Congress in post- Independence India.

After India's Independence, Jagjivan Ram held various Cabinet portfolios, such as Labour Minister,[207] Communication Minister, Railways Minister, Minister of Food and Agriculture and Defence. In all these responsibilities he proved his administrative skills and emerged as one of the most important power base within the Congress party at the national level. Some of his initiatives are worth a mention. The Minimum Wages Act, the Coal Mines Labour Welfare Fund and the vast network of Employees' State Insurance Corporation, by and large, are the creations of Jagjivan Ram.[208] As the Communication Minister he took a decision that "every village in India with a population of 2,000 must should have a post-office, and if in a particular area there was no such village within many square miles, then the criterion laid down was that nobody would have to walk more than two miles to utilise postal facilities. Thus, during his tenure as Communication Minister, the vast network of post-offices increased by more than 50 percent.'[209]

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It was when he was holding this portfolio that,[210] "The various air transport companies, for example, the Indian National Airways, the Bharat Airways, the Airways India etc. were continuously showing losses and the Government had to give them generous subsidies year after year. Jagjivan Ram decided to nationalise air transport. He faced a lot of flak for this. Some of the industrialists got panicky and branded him a Communist. Some big newspapers also came out with editorials and leading articles against the proposed move to nationalise air transport. But he was convinced that it would prove to be in the interest of the public as well as the employees. A committee was set up to go into the matter of compensation which was to be paid in a phased manner. He was thus a pioneer in the process of nationalisation. Air services showed marked improvement in

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[207] Appointing Jagjivan Ram as the Labour minister was also part of Congress' tactics against Ambedkar. The latter was hoping to get the labour portfolio in the Nehru's Cabinet.
[208] Sharma, D. P. 1974. *Jagjivan Ram: the man and his times.* Delhi: Indian Book Company, p. 84.
[209] Ibid., p. 91.
[210] During this time the Communication ministry covered the entire Post and Telegraph Organisation, the Civil Aviation Department, and the Overseas Communication Service.

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business soon after the take-over. The pay scales of the employees were revised and pushed up. Overtime benefits were also introduced for a lot of technical and even non-technical employees. In December 1956, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru felt that Indian Railways also needed a facelift. On December 7, 1956 he asked Jagjivan Ram to take over the Railways portfolio and then gave him the Transport Ministry as well. When General Elections in the beginning of 1957, there were slight changes in the Cabinet and portfolios changed hands, but the Indian Railways, the biggest employers in the country, was kept under the charge of Jagjivan Ram. He headed the Railway Ministry until April 9, 1962. Under him, new railway lines were laid throughout the length and breadth of the country."[211] With all his administrative initiatives and reforms, Jagjivan Ram became not just one of the significant national leaders of his time, but also an important leader within the Congress party. Yet despite the national significance he enjoyed or his importance within the party, two powerful positions in the country, that of Prime Minister or President, did not come to him. That was simply because of the casteist attitude of the Congress Party rather than for any other reason. This fact can be seen in a brief examination of the contest for the post of Prime Minister, after the death of Jawaharlal Nehru.

After the death of Jawaharlal Nehru on May 27, 1964, there came the question of who would be the next Prime Minister of India. Lal Bahadur Shastri from Uttar Pradesh and Morarji Desai from Gujarat made it clear that they were aspirants for the coveted position. Kamaraj Nadar, the president of the Congress party, contacted Jagjivan Ram to discuss the question of the future Prime Minister of India. But the latter suggested that the whole affair should be 'postponed for two or three days', and 'stressed that the party should choose a leader after consulting as many people as possible'.[212] Thus Kamaraj Nadar picked up the idea of *consensus* in the selection of the candidate for the PM's position and communicated the same to the members of the party. Given the unexpected nature of Nehru's death and its impact over the country, which was passing through a turbulent phase in its history, the idea of choosing a candidate on the basis of consensus

[211] Sharma, D.P. 1974. *Jagjivan Ram...,* pp: 91-92.
[212] Ibid., pp: 99-100.

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appeared to be the right course of action. Yet, in the above suggestion, as Devendra Prasad Sharma points out, Jagjivan Ram had something different in his mind. He wanted to emerge as the consensus candidate, particularly in the event of conflict between Lal Bahadur Shastri and Morarji Desai – the two Brahmin candidates.

Interestingly the leadership question was sorted out without any conflict between the two contenders. This was due to three specific factors, of which the role played by Jagjivan Ram was also crucial. First, Uttar Pradesh with its largest number of Parliamentary seats was the main deciding agency in the selection of the new leaders. And most of the MPs from this state, particularly the Brahmin MPs, formed the largest single block within the Congress and put their weight behind Lal Bahadur Shastri. Second, the Congress syndicate had set themselves against Morarji Desai, for "they felt that he was too rigid a person and would not make a good Prime Minister".[213] In addition to the Syndicate's attitude towards Desai's candidature, Desai himself did not have a good support base beyond Maharashtra, Mysore and Tamil Nadu. Finally, it was stated that Jagjivan Ram had less support among the members from Uttar Pradesh, Bengal, Assam and Tamil Nadu, but enjoyed good support among members from Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, and Andhra Pradesh. Apparently, some of his supporters suggested that Jagjivan Ram should join hands with Morarji Desai and share the two positions of Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, between them. Despite these suggestions and contrary to newspaper speculations, Jagjivan Ram neither stood in the fray for leadership, nor did he join hands with Morarji Desai. Jagjivan Ram knew that on his own he had less chances of winning the contest. This was the main reason for him suggesting a 'consensus candidate'. That is, he wanted to make use of an opportunity that would come up in the event of a conflict between the two contenders for the position. Further, he was well aware that either going against the powerful Congress syndicate or joining hands with Desai, the weak power base within the Congress would weaken his own base inside the Congress party. It is clear from this that in his long political career Jagjivan Ram generally did not act against the will of his Party bosses. In fact, the extraordinary longevity of his Congress career was, as remarked by Mendelsohn and

[213] Ibid., p. 100.

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Vicziany "a consequence of both his competence and also his carefulness not to engage in dissent and controversy".[214] This exceptionality of Jagjivan Ram, as observed by Paul Brass, "gave his caste brothers the illusion that such a rise to power was possible". But the fact has been that, "the Scheduled Caste leaders who have been given Congress tickets in the reserved constituencies are non-militant and have no power in the local or state Congress organisations".[215] But how did the Congress manage to turn the Dalits into its vote bank?

As the Dalit leadership was co-opted through the inducements of positions of power and material benefits, the Dalit masses were also persuaded into the Congress-fold by establishing a special league, the *Dalit Varg Sangh* (The League of the Dalits) as well as extending reservations and other facilities. For instance, during the early 1970's, especially keeping the 1971 general elections in mind, Indira Gandhi took many significant decisions that roped in a large number of Dalits into the Congress-fold. Some of the notable decisions were in the fall of 1969, when Buddhists became eligible for Scheduled Caste post-metric scholarships; in December of the same year the Constitution was amended to extend reservations in representative bodies for another ten years; in January 1970, a proposal was made by the government to toughen the Untouchability (Offences) Act; and in April, reservations for direct recruitment to the central services were raised from 12.5 to 15 per cent for Dalits.[216] Further, between 1971 and 1977, a number of policies and programmes were designed exclusively for the rural poor, the landless and small farmers in the state. For the Dalits, wells were dug for drinking water and sites for houses and land for agriculture were distributed. Interestingly, many of these schemes were operated not by the state government, but carried out under the supervision of the central government to bring about a 'total rural regeneration'. Through these policies and programmes, the Congress Party was able to effectively capture and integrate the Dalits within its fold.[217]

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[214]Mendelsohn and Vicziany. 2000. *The Untouchables…* p. 207.
[215] Brass, R. Paul. 1966. *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh.* Berkeley: UCP, p. 105.
[216] Dushkin, Laleh., 1998. Scheduled Caste Politics…p. 208.
[217] Pai, Sudha. 1993. *Uttar Pradesh: Agrarian Change and Electoral Politics.* Delhi: Shipra, pp: 44-45.

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The politics of co-option and accommodation of the Dalits in the Congress Party had two major implications on both of them: first, the Congress was assured of securing three-fourths of the reserved seats at any given time and in any given election. The guaranteed support of the Dalits added to the support of the upper castes, especially the Brahmins and Thakurs, and the Muslims' support also helped the Congress form successful governments in the state. Secondly, the Dalits' support to the Congress Party did not benefit them beyond small measures like housing sites and wells.[218]The Dalits' co-option into the Congress Party, in effect, destroyed the space for the emergence of a strong and independent Dalit leadership in post-independent India, at least for the next three decades after Independence. Within the Congress, the Dalit MPs and MLAs found their hands were tied insofar as addressing the causes of the Dalits because they did not have a support base: that is, they were not exclusively elected by the Dalit voters, but by voters from all castes and communities. In fact, there was not a single reserved constituency with a majority of Dalit voters. This absence of a majority Dalit constituency compelled the Dalit leaders to seek the support of others, the upper castes as well as other lower castes who were dependant on the upper castes in the form of a patron-client system.[219]

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Such practical inconsistencies of the Dalit representation led one Dalit to comment, "This system does the Scheduled Castes no good because the people in the reserved seats belong to the party in power and are often incapable persons. Although they are educated, they dare not speak out against the party in power. They do not represent their people to the party and the government, but represent the party in power to the people."[220] Indeed, the measure of political representation for the Dalits in practice, it has been forcefully observed by Kanshi Ram, assisted the upper castes to create 'a bunch of Dalit leaders' that became stooges (*chamchas*)[221] in the hands of the former at the expense of the poor

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[218] My interview with Bablu Choudhari, Lucknow, 24 Febraury, 2005.

[219]Satish Saberwal in his analysis of reserved constituencies in Punjab draws the same conclusion: 'A constituency at the state-level […] would have a large majority of high caste voters, making the candidates less dependent upon – and therefore less responsive to – the Harijan vote. Support from high caste leaders is, therefore, crucial for success at this level [as well as at the level of the parliamentary constituency, one might argue].' Saberwal, Satish. 1972. The Reserved Constituency. Candidates and consequences. *EPW,* 7(2), pp: 71+73-80.

[220] Quoted in Shah, Ghanshyam. 1997. Consequences of Reservations. In Pai Panandiker, V., ed., *The Politics of Backwardness: Reservation Policy in India.* New Delhi: Konark Publishers, p.244.

[221] Ram, Kanshi. 1984. Struggle for Equality & Self-Respect. In: *Oppressed Indian.*

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Dalits. This is one of the reasons why leaders like Ambedkar, who ventured into a long fight against the Congress to obtain the reserved seats, called for their abolition as early as 1955 itself. Since then Dalits, especially the educated Dalits have been arguing against political representation for the Dalits. For instance, Kanshi Ram, denouncing the Poona Pact that laid the foundation for the present form of representation, criticised that saying, "it (the Pact) was designed to make the Dalits stooges in mainstream political parties, especially in the Congress."[222]

Thus from the above discussion on the measure of political representation for the Dalits we can conclude that although Dalits gained access to representative bodies, that measure did not assist them to develop a viable voice that could firmly secure their interests. Instead the measure became a solid weapon in the hands of the non-Dalits, especially the upper castes, because to win in any reserved constituency contestants required votes from both the Dalits and non-Dalit constituencies. Non-Dalits have mostly preferred candidates, who do not forget his/her caste status, and who pay due regard to the upper castes. On their part, the political parties make sure that they always pick up the *right* Dalit candidates, who could mouth the language of their respective parties in the tone of the common Dalits. The Congress party had been the major beneficiary of the measure of political representation for the Dalits. For by co-opting a majority of the Dalit leaders through the inducements of positions of power and material benefits, the party managed to keep a check, though temporarily, against the growth of an independent Dalit leadership. Further, through a number of welfare programmes the party succeeded in inducing the Dalit constituency into its fold, ultimately turning them as its 'vote bank'. The Congress party might have succeeded in halting the growth of the independent Dalit leadership by co-opting the RPI leadership, and it might have gained political benefits by turning the Dalits as its 'vote bank', but the question is, has Congress done anything substantial to improve the economic condition of the Dalit constituency in UP? I shall answer this question by examining the implementation of the Zamindari Abolition Act and Land Reforms in the state.

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[222] Ram, Kanshi. 1997. Poona Pact Denounced. In Atey, Manohar., ed., *The Editorials of Kanshi Ram* [Part – I], Hyderabad: Bahujan Samaj Publications, p. 93.

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3.IB. Zamindari Abolition Act and Land Reforms: On the impact of policies to eliminate rural poverty, such as Zamindari Abolition Act and Land Reforms by the Nehruvian State, we come across two sets of commentaries or views. The first view, which draws from the Marxian class perspective, is that there are structural forces in Indian society, entrenched social classes whose actions constrain the political elite from implementing policies against the interests of the former.[223] According to the second view, the countryside has come under the increasing political and economic dominance of the landed castes. These castes have used traditional social authority and political power in moulding the state's socio-economic measures to their advantage.[224] Taking the cue from the later view and by an examination of the process of implementation of the Zamindari Abolition Act and Land Reforms and the kind of language used in that process, I argue that the landed castes, which have had been aided and abetted by the Congress Party in UP have deliberately kept the Dalits out of the ambit of land distribution.

In UP, like in any other state in India, social discrimination and economic oppression by caste and class go hand in hand for Dalits.[225] In the sense, the positional location of castes in the hierarchy corresponds with material conditions, the state of land holding and landlessness.[226] Time and again such conditions have been consistently reinforced by the kind of land settlement and patterns of land distribution by governments in colonial and post-colonial India. During the colonial rule the land settlements made by the British from the late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century were closely

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[223] For a sample of this view see, Pranab Bardhan. 1984. *The Political Economy of Development in India,* Oxford: Basil Blackwell; and also the critique by Weiner, Myron. 1986. The Political Economy of Industrial Growth in India. *World Politics,* 38(4), pp: 596-610.

[224] For a representative sample see Frankel, R. Francine. 1978. *India's Political Economy, 1947-1977: The Gradual Revolution.* Princeton: PUP; and for two critiques of it, Kohil, Atul. 1980. Democracy, Economic Growth, and Inequality in India's Development. *World Politics,* 32(4), pp: 623-638 and Brass, Paul R., 1981. Class, Ethnic Group, and Party in Indian Politics. *World Politics,* 33(3), pp: 454-457; …., 1990. *The Politics of India Since Independence,* Cambridge: CUP, esp. chapters 8 & 9, pp: 269-335.

[225] This is not true in the case of Shudras. Social discrimination against them is not duplicated in economic oppression. In fact, the economic prosperity of the upper layers of Shudras, such as Jats, Yadavs, Kurmis, had led to their political mobilisation. See Brass, Paul R., 1980a. The politicisation of the peasantry in a north Indian state: Part I. *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 7(4), pp: 395-426; -----. 1980b. The politicisation of the peasantry in a north Indian state: Part II. *Journal of Peasant Studies,* 8 (1), pp: 3-36.

[226] For caste-class relationship in UP, see Hasan, Zoya. 1989. Power and Mobilization: Patterns of Resilience and Change in Uttar Pradesh Politics. In: Frankel, R, Francine and M.S.A. Rao., eds., *Dominance…*pp: 133 – 203; Gould, Harold. 1990. *Politics and Caste*. New Delhi: Chanakya; Lieten, G.K., 1994. On Casteism and Communalism in Uttar Pradesh. *EPW,* 29 (14), pp: 777-81.

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connected with the positional location of castes. For instance, under the Zamindari system, the inequalities of status and power inherent in the caste system corresponded more or less to inequalities in access to and distribution of material resources.[227] Although, Indians got rid of the British in 1947, they could not get rid of the system of the asymmetrical distribution of material resources. Thus, at the time of Independence, Thakurs and Brahmins together owned 57 per cent of the agricultural land in the state. The intermediate castes owned another 32 per cent, the Muslims 11 per cent, and Dalits a mere 1 per cent.[228] The Zamindari Abolition Act undertaken by the government of UP also did not make any difference to the existing pattern of land ownership, particularly for Dalits.

The Zamindari Abolition Act and the subsequent land reforms were two watershed events in the immediate post-Independence UP. These events were important for their role in the dislocation (although not completely) of the upper caste Brahmins and Thakurs from their dominant positions – of social, economical, and political power. Those events were also important for placing the Shudras on the path to economic empowerment, which had a decisive impact on future politics. Many academic works reveal that intermediate castes like Jats, to a large extent, and the Shudra castes like the Yadavs and the Kurmis, to a small extent, were the major beneficiaries of the Zamindari Abolition Act. Indeed, with all its limitations, the Act, observes Zoya Hasan, "reduced the relative economic gap between upper castes and OBC land-owners."[229] As far as the Dalits were concerned, although few Dalit tenant farmers benefited by the Act, a majority of them were kept out of the whole project of distribution of the land. Two reasons seem to be at the heart of such exclusion: first, following the Abolition Act, the land was distributed among the tenant farmers and share-croppers only. The Dalits, who worked as agricultural labour for the Jats, Tyagis, Yadavs and Kurmis, do not fall in the category of the tenant farmers or the share-croppers. Hence, it seems that they were excluded from the process of land

[227] Ahmed, Imtiaz and Saxena, N.C. 1994. Caste, Land and Power in Uttar Pradesh. In Sharma, K.L., ed., *Caste and Class in India*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, pp: 171-208.
[228] Singh, Baljit and Misra, Shridhar. 1965. *A Study of Land Reforms in Uttar Pradesh.* Honolulu: East-West Centre, p. 259.
[229] Hasan, Zoya. 1998. *Quest for Power: Oppositional Movements and Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh.* New Delhi: OUP, p. 138.

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distribution. It must be mentioned here that the Act did not have such phraseology as 'landless' and 'agricultural labour',[230] and from that point of view, we can say that the entire scheme was designed to establish a system of peasant proprietorship rather than a system that would have ended landlessness in the state. Second, Charan Singh, who was the minister in-charge to oversee the whole distribution process, was not keen on land distribution for the landless and agricultural labourers, especially for the Dalits. An observation made by Byres on Charan Singh discloses the latter's attitude towards the Dalits and other marginalised sections:

> In Charan Singh's universe the vast majority of *Harijans* are not members of the 'farming community' at all. They are, for the most part, landless agricultural labourers or very poor peasants… When asked, 'What about those with no land at all, the landless peasants?', the reply from Charan Singh was chilling and uncompromising: Well, landless – if a man is landless he cannot be called a farmer or peasant. Then he's a labourer. If you want to give land to the labourer – well, there is no land to give to the labourer.[231]

Strictly speaking, after the abolition of the Zamindari system, the land taken from the Zamindars should have been distributed among the landless and agricultural labourers. But that did not happen. In fact, the man in-charge of the distribution did not even consider the Dalits for the distribution. It is one of the examples where social power in combination with political power results in economic power and thereby reproduces the power of the socially dominant classes and castes at the expense of the marginalised classes and castes.[232] One can further substantiate this point from a field study completed

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[230] Charan Singh, a Jat by caste, pioneered the Zamindari Abolition Act and the subsequent land reforms and the Uttar Pradesh Consolidation of Holdings Act of 1953. His 'social background' – (Jats are located in the middle of the Brahmanical Social Order), as many scholars emphasised, deeply entrenched in his 'ways, views and attitudes'. He, like many of his caste fellows, strangely nursed a hatred for Brahmans and Dalits – the two castes/communities that were placed at the top and bottom of the social hierarchy. Charan Singh, despite holding many important political positions – both in the state and central governments – until his death sustained this hatred for these two rungs of the social order. In fact, throughout his political career he stood as champion and spokesman for the rich peasants, an association that led many commentators such as Baxter, Byres, Duncan and Paul Brass and others to describe him as 'a representative of rich and middle peasantry.' See Baxter, Criag. 1975. The rise and fall of the BKD in Uttar Pradesh. In: Weiner, Myron and John Osgood Field., eds., *Electoral Politics in the Indian States,* V. IV, Delhi; Duncan, R. Ian. 1979. The politics of food-grain procurement: a case study from Northern India, cited in Terence, J. Byres. 1993. Charan Singh, 1902 – 87: An Assessment. In: Arnold, David and Peter Robb., eds., *Institutions and Ideologies: A SOAS South Asian Reader,* Richmond: Curzon Press, pp: 265-307.

[231] Ping, Ho Kwon. 1979. The rise of the aging sun. *Far Eastern Economic Review* 103, 11 (23 March), cited in Byres, J. Terence. 1993. *Op. cit.,* pp. 286 – 287.

[232] See Frankel, R. Francine. 1988. Middle Classes and Castes in India's Politics: Prospects for Political Accommodation. In: Kohli, Atul., ed., *India's Democracy: An Analysis of Changing State-Society Relations.* Princeton: PUP.

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in 1960 by Baljit Singh and Sridhar Misra. According to them, while only 6 per cent of Dalit families had been able to take advantage of the reforms by purchasing land in the ten years after reforms began in 1951, 55 per cent of the higher caste Hindus and 61 per cent of intermediate caste Hindus and Muslims have purchased the land.[233] Daniel Thorner aptly summed up this new development:

> UP Zamindari Abolition Act has provided for a new hierarchy of tenure holders in place of the old, but the new one too is reminiscent of the old. Zamindars have officially disappeared, but the same persons have been rechristened landlord of very substantial and very high quality tracts of land. For the bulk of the peasantry classified as *sirdars*, tenure remains virtually the same and so does rent, now collected by the government rather than the Zamindars. At the bottom remain the mass of landless and crop-sharers.[234]

In other words, since the Dalits were kept away from the land distribution, the abolition of the Zamindari system made little difference to their existing economic woes. But one notable change was that the Dalits, who used to work for the Brahmins and Thakurs earlier, now began to work for the Shudras - Jats, Tyagis, Kurmis and Yadavs – the new owners of the land.

The subsequent developments in the agricultural arena, such as the Green Revolution, have also substantially benefited the beneficiaries of Zamindari Abolition Act and land reforms rather than the landless Dalits.[235] Some of the later initiatives, such as Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and the Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers Programme (MFAL), to rectify the limitations and class bias of land reforms and the Green Revolution, also could not make any inroads to eliminate rural inequities between castes and classes. For, recipients of aid under these programmes were selected by local agencies normally dominated by the existing rural elites.[236] Yet, it may be noted here that although the land reforms in UP did not benefit the landless Dalits, the overall impact and consequences of these reforms had changed the face of rural UP. As the land was transferred from the upper castes to the middle castes, particularly to the Shudras, it corroded the domination of the upper castes at the grassroots. It also ended the patron-

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[233] Singh, B. and Misra, S. 1965. *A Study of Land Reform…,* p. 259.
[234] Thorner, Daniel. 1956. *The Agrarian Prospect in India,* Delhi: Allied Publishers.
[235] See Frankel, R. Francine. 1971. *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs*. Princeton: PUP.
[236] See Pandey, S.M. 1974. *Development of Small Farmers and Agricultural Labourers.* Delhi: Shri Ram Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Development; also, Joshi, B. 1982. *Democracy in Search of Equality: Untouchable Politics and Indian Social Change*. Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, esp. chapter 4. 'The New Nation: Public Policy and Scheduled Caste Development', pp: 60-85.

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client relationships between the upper castes and lower castes. However, this did not mean the end of domination of one caste(s) over other castes. Indeed, the land reforms and the consequent empowerment of the Shudras have only added one more constituency to the list of already existing constituencies of oppressors. The Shudras, who came to own lands became exploiters of the Dalits.

Of course, we should clearly recognise an economic shift that triggered many changes. The economic changes in the rural economy led the rural dominant and propertied castes and classes to invest in urban areas. Although this slowed down agriculture in the rural areas, it hastened developments in the urban centres. From the point of view of the rural Dalits, this is an important shift. For developments in urban areas have increased employment opportunities for them in farms, brick kilns, in construction activities and rickshaw-pulling. This shift is nothing but a disentanglement of the rural Dalits from their upper caste patrons, which in the words of Mendelsohn is, 'historic, non-revolutionary transformation.'[237] Of course, those Dalits who moved to the urban centres for work, surely disentangled themselves from the dominance of the upper castes and upper Shudra castes to a greater extent, but what about those Dalits who continued to live in rural areas? We shall answer this question in the next section.

To conclude our discussion on the Dalits' special relationship with Congress, on the basis of the declarations made by the Congress Party to promote the interests of the Dalits and also on the basis of its electoral success in the reserved seats, the Rudolphs attribute a special relationship between the Congress Party and Dalits. Unlike Rudolphs, I was concerned with how that special relationship came to be forged between the Congress and Dalits and what that relationship did to the latter. In order to understand these two aspects, I have examined the measure of political representation for Dalits and the implementation of the Zamindari Abolition Act and land reforms in the state. The changing of double-member constituencies into single-member constituencies changed the political fortunes of the Dalit constituency forever. For it placed the non-Dalits,

[237] Mendelsohn, Oliver. 1993. The Transformation of Authority in Rural India. *Modern Asian Studies,* 27(4), pp: 804 – 42, here, p. 807.

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especially the upper castes, and the upper caste-based political parties, in an unduly advantageous position to decide the electoral fortunes of the reserved candidates, which means that the Dalits and their representative were placed at the mercy of the non-Dalits and their political parties. The Congress Party used this situation to its advantage by selecting those Dalit candidates, who would not dare to question the party's leadership and its policies and programmes – even though such policies and programmes went against the interests of the Dalit constituency. The non-Dalits too played their part by voting those Dalit candidates who would not question the dominance of the upper castes or the hierarchical caste system and its traditions.

Apart from the single-member constituencies and the attitudes of the non-Dalits towards the Dalit representatives, the one particular episode that placed the Dalits and their leaders in the hands of the Congress was its co-option tactics. It succeeded in co-opting the RPI leadership through the inducements of positions of power and material benefits. A few welfare measures helped the Party to attract the Dalit masses too into its fold and ultimately turn them into its 'vote bank'. But the Congress Party, despite benefiting from the measure of political representation for the Dalits and the Dalit 'vote bank', did little precious to improve their socio-economic miseries. Instead, the Party sided with the upper castes and other dominant sections in keeping the Dalits away from the benefits of land distribution and measures of SFDA and MFAL. In a way, the Congress has succeeded not just in weakening the Dalit leadership, but more importantly, the larger Dalit masses also who were now at its mercy for any form of socio-economic benefits. But how did the BSP mobilise the Dalits for political power? In the first place, what was the context in which a Dalit-based political party emerged on UP's political arena? We shall examine these questions in the next section.

3. II From BAMCEF to Bahujan Samaj Party

I have argued above that the BSP's electoral success was not on account of lack of representation for the Dalit elites in mainstream political parties or simply on account of the representation accorded by the BSP to the Dalit elite, especially Chamars, but primarily on account of the support rendered to the Party by a majority of the Scheduled

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Castes. Moreover, the BSP's arrival on UP's political arena was not a sudden event. The Party grew out of the All India Backward (SC/ST/OBC) and Minority Communities Employees Federation (BAMCEF), a social association of middle-class Dalits - as well as members from other lower caste and communities - who were in government employment and the *Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti* (DS-4), the political wing of BAMCEF. It was the efforts of these two organisations that made the BSP what it is today.

But before we move any further one significant question is, why did this mobilisation happen with the Dalit employees and why had it not happened with the Dalit political leaders? Let's look at the Dalit leaders and employees respectively, one after the other. There are two main reasons why the BSP could not be initiated by the Dalit leaders, especially the Congress Dalit leaders. Firstly, Dalit Congress leaders were domesticated by the Congress' upper caste leaders by means of patronage; and secondly, Dalit leaders were not confident of winning elections on their own merit, and to win elections they were dependant on the banner of the Congress as well as that of the party's machinery. Thus, by establishing a new party, they did not want to risk their established positions. In a way, it is a mindset of, 'why bite the hand that feeds you?' Feeding is fine, but at what cost? It was at the cost of self-respect as well as the complete submission to the upper caste leaders. But the instances of the Dalit employees were completely different. All of them were followers or at least appeared to be followers of Ambedkar, and were familiar with his teachings and writings, especially the two famous works of Ambedkar: *Annihilation of Caste* and *What Congress and Gandhi have done to the Untouchables.* (Of course, the Dalit political leaders are always familiar with Ambedkar's works). But what distinguished the Dalit employees from the Dalit political leaders or for that matter, from the Dalit masses was their independence, especially economic independence. Unlike the Dalit political leaders, the Dalit government employees were neither dependant on the upper castes for patronage or their votes, nor on the Dalit masses who were dependant on the upper caste landlords or owners for their livelihood. Their livelihood was their government job. Thus, this economic independence was a key factor which allowed them to give their time and money to BAMCEF's activities. In fact, they

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sponsored and supported with missionary zeal almost all the programmes and activities undertaken by Kanshi Ram through BAMCEF and BSP, particularly during the initial phase of the party.

It is important to throw some light here on Kanchan Chandra's argument about the support rendered to the BSP by the educated Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Caste elite. She argues that the educated Scheduled Castes sought "careers that would give them better economic opportunities and higher status than their parents"[238] and they could secure this only by, "obtaining control of the state', for such control "presented them with more opportunities than the private sector".[239] It is precisely for this reason, Chandra argues, that the educated Scheduled Castes supported the BSP. Similarly, the Scheduled Caste elite "required political clout to ensure favourable posts and promotions. Access to political clout, in turn, depended on having members of their own ethnic category in elective offices."[240] It was this realisation, Chandra further argues, that led the Scheduled Castes elite to support the BSP. But I differ with Chandra's argument. My argument is that it was on account of the discrimination suffered by both the educated and the elite Scheduled Castes in modern spaces of opportunities that led them to support the BSP, for in the party they saw an agency that would end their sufferings.

In the rest of the section my aim is to examine the history of the BSP – what made the Dalits launch a political party or what was the context in which the formation of the BSP took place; and how did the Party mobilise the support of the Dalit constituency, or better still - how did the Party construct the Dalit identity, an identity which in turn ensured its success in electoral politics? I have divided this section into three sub-sections. The first sub-section briefly provides the social context or the social situation of the Dalits. This will help us understand the conditions within which the BSP emerged. The second sub-section describes the formation of BAMCEF and its activities. The final sub-section describes the activities under DS-4 and the formation of the BSP.

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[238] Chandra, Kanchan. 2004. *Why ethnic parties…,* p. 174.
[239] Ibid., p. 174.
[240] Ibid., p. 176.

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3. II.A. Violence against Dalits: Social context of Dalit mobilisations: The BSP's electoral success was ensured, at least in its initial stage, by its mobilising the Dalit constituency. How did the Party mobilise the Dalit constituency, which has been divided along caste and class lines? In the first instance, what was the context in which disparate Dalit castes came to be united under the broad category of a Dalit party? To put the same question differently, what was the social context that compelled the Dalits to form their political formation? We shall look at the first question in the next sub-section, but for the present, we shall examine the social context in which the formation of the BSP took place. In this examination, my main aim is to show how the increase in incidences of violence against the Dalits at the hands of the upper castes compelled them to unite under the Dalit social category, which eventually led them to support the BSP.

Before we proceed any further, it is suggested that we take note of the insights provided by Mendelsohn and Vicziany on the problem of violence against Dalits.[241] On the basis of the actual nature of violence suffered by Dalits, Mendelsohn and Vicziany divided incidents of violence into two broad categories. First, there is 'traditional violence'. That is, demanding sexual favours from Dalit women in return for some inducements, or raping Dalit women; and violence against the Dalits on the basis of their association with the dark forces of life, as the caste-Hindu mind would interpret it – are a few examples of traditional violence against Dalits. Secondly, there is violence on account of Dalits' resistance against caste-based discrimination or the caste-Hindu response to the Dalits. The Dalits' objection to discrimination against the practice of ritual untouchability, claims to social respect, agricultural land, housing sites, and payment of statutory minimum wages, are a few examples for the second category of violence against them.[242] This category of violence was unleashed against the Dalits during the 1970's and '80's in UP and also in other parts of India.

Although the stated violence and social oppression against the Dalits were not new experiences in their every day lives, by the early 1970's, however, we witness a new

[241] For an insightful commentary on atrocities against Dalits, see Mendelsohn and Vicziany. 2000. *The Untouchables…*, esp. chapter 2. 'The question of 'Harijan atrocity', pp: 44-76.
[242] Ibid., p. 45.

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phenomenon in its execution and in the forms of oppression. While during earlier times, individual Dalits were targeted by the upper castes for any 'wrongdoing', i.e., breaching the customs imposed on them by the caste society, since the '70's the Dalits were targeted as a group even though the wrongdoing was committed by individual Dalits. We shall witness similar phenomenon in AP as well during the same period (see chapter 5). In other words, violence against the Dalits was not because of their collective wrongdoing, but simply because of their collective identity. Since suffering was a collective phenomenon, a phenomenon that is mainly because of a collective identity, a majority of the Scheduled Castes kept their individual caste identities aside and stood behind the BSP for their collective freedom by claiming the Dalit identity.[243] In the remaining sub-section, I have provided two cases of caste Hindus' response against the Dalits claim to social respect as well as their claim to citizenship rights.

Case 1: 'Serve us in glass tumblers' – Refusing to be Untouchables in Hathras:[244] Hathras is a small town situated close to Aligarh town in western UP. On May 18, 1980, at about 3 pm on a hot summer day, four young men entered the cool-drinks shop of Kaushal Chandra Gaud. Gaud belonged to the toddy-tappers caste within the Shudra category. They asked for four glasses of *lassi* (buttermilk). As the young men in question belonged to the Bhangi caste, the shop owner served them lassi in *kullads* (earthen cups).

The young men, who were in their twenties, were frustrated and angry at being treated as untouchables time and again, even by a poor person like Gaud whose economic situation and social status was akin to theirs. They asked him to serve them lassi in glass tumblers rather than in 'kullads'. Gaud's responded by saying that would not be possible because they are untouchables. Seething with anger the young men said, "[B]ut we also pay the same price for the lassi as everyone else. So serve us in glass tumblers just like you do for

[243] See Alam, Javeed. 1999. Is Caste Appeal Casteism? Oppressed Castes in Politics. *EPW,* 34(13), pp: 757-761.

[244] Case is taken from Joshi, Vijay. 1980. Uttar Pradesh: Caste Conflict in Hathras. *EPW,* 15(29), p. 1211. During my field work interviews I realized a few facts of the incident were hidden by the author, especially he described the young men that entered the cool drinks shop were coming after consuming arrack in a nearby shop, which is utterly untrue. For other gruesome attacks against the Dalits in UP, see Akbar, M.J., 1988. *Riot after riot: Reports on Caste and Communal Violence in India.* New Delhi: Roli Books.

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your other customers."[245] Although the young men did not raise their voice against him, Gaud could sense their anger. Without further discussion, he served them the cold drink in glass tumblers. The faces of the young men lit up with joy. They felt as if they had conquered the world. After enjoying the cold lassi, they complimented Gaud for making such a delicious drink. They handed him the money and after thanking him profusely, they were about to leave the shop.

It was at this point that Brahmanical casteism once again reared its head in the Shudra (Gaud's) mind. He insisted that the men should clean their glasses themselves before they left the shop. The young men got angry again. "Do you ask the *savarna-log* (upper castes) to wash their glasses? Then why are you asking us," they questioned controlling their anger. "Because you are untouchables and they are the upper castes," retorted Gaud dismissively. The word 'untouchable' hurt the youngsters. They refused to clean the glasses. There followed angry exchanges between Gaud and the youths which escalated into physical violence. Other shop-keepers and Dalits gathered in the shop and a full blown fight broke out between the shop-keepers (upper castes as well as Shudras) and the Dalits (mostly Bhangis). Although a sub-inspector of police came to the scene with a few constables, they could not control the angry mob. They had come to blows and were throwing stones at each other. Eventually the situation was brought under control after the arrival of a police contingent.

Although both the parties stopped fighting after the police descended on the scene, they renewed the violence the next day. The Bhangis, who work as *safai karm charis* (sweepers and cleaners) for the Municipality, gathered in front of the Municipal office to demand protection from the Shudras as well as the upper castes. The shop-keepers, who were joined by the Shudras and upper castes, went to the main streets and pulled down the shutters of all the shops. From there they moved to Seeal Mohalla, a neighbourhood mostly populated by the Dalits. The caste-Hindu mob demanded the closure of all the shops in that area as well. When the Dalits objected to the demand, it triggered off fresh

[245] My interview with Naresh Bhangi in Hatharrah on February 18, 2004. Naresh Bhangi is a social activist and one of the leaders of the Bhangis.

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violence between the caste-Hindus and the Dalits. The violence spread to the Dalit neighbourhood of Nagla Balansha Mohalla. Questioning the audacity of the Dalits who had insisted they should also be served lassi in glass tumblers, the caste-Hindus looted Dalit houses and shops as if to give them a fitting response. Further, they set huts on fire by dousing them in kerosene and went on the rampage killing the cattle owned by the Dalits.

Case 2: Riots in Agra:[246] On April 14, 1978, just as they did every year, those living in Jatav *basti* in Agra gathered to celebrate the birthday of their hero, Baba Saheb Ambedkar. An important event in the celebrations was a seven-hour long parade. The parade kicked off in Jatav *basti.* The procession started after sunset and continued late into the night as it wound its way through the Dalit as well as upper caste neighbourhoods. The two main attractions of the parade were imaginatively decorated tableaux depicting scenes from the lives of Buddha and Ambedkar, and an elephant carrying a life-sized portrait of Ambedkar. A brass band that kept pace provided the music for the procession. At about 11 pm, the parade was passing through the upper caste neighbourhoods of Pipal Mandi and Rawat Para. All of a sudden, bricks and stones rained down on the crowd. As they had faced similar incidents earlier as well, the Jatav marchers were ready to strike back at the violence against them. They retaliated by throwing back the bricks and stones at their oppressors and in the process, damaged a house and some shops before the police could arrive on the spot.

The next day, April 15, the upper caste store-keepers, along with their leaders, wore black arm-bands to protest against the 'attack by the untouchables'.[247] They went to Chhatta police station to lodge a case against the Jatavs. On their way to the police station the upper castes shouted slogans such as, 'Change the route of the parade', 'Death to Ambedkar', and 'Doom to the Jatavs'.[248] Some of the complaints of the upper castes were that the police had not registered a case; that the parade caused major disturbances in Pipal Mandi and Rawat Para neighbourhoods; and that despite their complaints against

[246] The case is primarily taken from Owen, M. Lynch. 1981. Rioting as Rational Action... pp: 1951-1956.
[247] *Amar Ujala,* April 16, 1978.
[248] Owen, Lynch. 1981. Rioting as Rational Action…, p. 1952.

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the march and the 'violent behaviour of the untouchables', the route of the parade had not been changed. Other complaints included the amount of destruction – the shops of innocent owners had been looted; all the Jatav marchers were armed with dangerous weapons. Interestingly, the complainants denied hurling bricks and stones at those taking part in the march.[249]

The Jatav leaders and leaders of the other Dalit castes met and denied all the charges levelled against them by the upper castes, and called for peace between all the castes. Further, a decision was taken to hold a peace march on April 23 against the upper castes' insult to Ambedkar by wearing black arm-bands, and to pass through Rawat Para once again - the upper caste neighbourhood where stones were thrown at them earlier. Those in the peace march shouted slogans such as, 'Gandhism is false', and 'Hail Ambedkar'.[250] As the parade approached Rawat Para, the upper castes clashed with the Dalit marchers. The upper caste members threw hot water at those in the procession and the latter retalaited by throwing their sandals at the attackers. As always, the police landed on the scene late and they tried to disperse the crowd with lathis and tear gas. There was bedlam as women and children were injured in the lathi charge.[251] There was blood spill on the streets and the police arrested some of the important Jatav leaders.

Five aspects are clear from the above incidents of violence between the caste-Hindus and Dalits. First, having separate glasses for the caste-Hindus and the Dalits is a blatant practise of caste discrimination against the Dalits. By asking the shop-keeper to serve them in the same glasses used for caste-Hindus, the Dalit youths were making a point that they should be treated as equals. Secondly, the caste-Hindus responded with violence to the Dalits' demand for equality. We should note here that although the initial incident was between four Dalit men and a shop-keeper, a large section of caste-Hindus voluntarily pitched in to teach the Dalits a lesson for demanding equal treatment. In the violence that ensued, the caste-Hindu mob targeted not just the four Dalit men but the latter's entire caste. Another aspect of the violence against the Dalits was destruction of

[249] *Amar Ujala,* April 16, 1978, cited in Ibid., pp: 1952-53.
[250] Ibid., p: 1953.
[251] *Amar Ujala,* April 16, 1978, cited in Ibid., p.1953.

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property, such as houses and cattle. "Focussing on the physical properties of the Dalits was a motivated act by the *savarnalog* (the upper castes)," observes Narendra Gautam, "They knew that reconstructing houses and getting new livestock would be next to impossible for the Dalits. And in the process of rebuilding their houses and lives, the Dalits would not dare to question the *savarnalog*."[252] To a large extent, the violence against the Dalits was not a spontaneous act, but a carefully studied and planned one.

Thirdly, public roads are open for use by the general public; and the Dalits, as part of the of the country's population, have every right to use the roads. But the upper castes did not want the Dalits to use the roads which was why they lodged a police complaint against them. What we have to understand here is that by using the public roads the Dalits were claiming their civil rights just like any other citizen, as it was enshrined in the Constitution of India. The upper caste's objection was to obstruct the rights of the Dalits. Finally, the role of the police: while in the first incident most of the time they remained mute spectators to the caste-Hindus' violence against the Dalits, in the second incident they took the side of the upper castes by beating up the Dalit protesters and arresting their leaders. In a way, the state and society had united in the oppression and suppression of the Dalits. It was in such a social context that the Dalits were looking for a political party which would take up their problems and fight for them. In the BSP they found that answer. But, when and how did the formation of the BSP take place? We shall answer this question in the next sub-section.

3. IIB. Formation of the BAMCEF and its activities: The BSP which emerged from the BAMCEF and the DS-4, was the brainchild of Kanshi Ram, who in turn, was responding to the institutional discrimination meted out against fellow Dalit employees by the upper caste employees. As such it is important to understand who Kanshi Ram was and what kind of experience led him to conceive those bodies. Kanshi Ram, whose followers address him fondly as *Saheb* or *Manyawar,* and who was also generally considered to be

[252] My interview with Narendra Gautam, a sociology graduate from Allahabad University, 10 March, 2004.

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'the messiah of the oppressed' and the embodiment of Ambedkar himself,[253] was born on March 15, 1934 in a humble Raidasi Sikh (Dalit) family in Khawaspur village of Ropar district in Punjab.[254] He is one of the few fortunate Dalits to get an education and later, employment in the government sector. After his degree, he took up a job as a researcher in the Explosive Research and Defence Laboratory (ERDL), an ammunitions factory in Pune.

One of the common criticisms levelled by the Dalits against Nehruvian institutions is that they had become 'Brahmin *agraharams*' (Brahmin residential areas) in post-Independent India. Considering the presence of both the Dalits and non-Dalits in those institutions, such a criticism against the Brahmins is unfair. But this does not mean that these institutions have become non-discriminatory. In fact, these institutions were both *Brahmanised* and *Hinduvised* by the Brahmins and other upper castes, who constituted the majority there. The Dalits, who were constitutionally entitled for a representation to the tune of 15 percent, had always remained in a minority in those institutions on account of this prescribed percentage, as well as the unwillingness on the part of the upper-caste Hindu executives to fill up even the prescribed percentage of posts. Such a gap in spatial presence between the Dalits and the upper-caste Hindus allowed the latter to take control and impose their 'raj' in these institutions. Kanshi Ram, who was working in ERDL, encountered one such instance of cultural hegemony of the upper castes. It is said that incident not only changed his life and work, but also the entire course of the Dalit movement and politics in contemporary India.

The ERDL cancelled the two holidays meant to celebrate the birthdays of Babasaheb Ambedkar and Gauthama Buddha, and instead sanctioned a holiday on the birthday of Tilak and added one more day to the Diwali holidays.[255] Although the Dalits were in a minority in ERDL, they had the courage to question the cultural hegemony of the upper

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[253] Some of the slogans of the BSP cadre testify their identification of Kanshi Ram with Ambedkar: (a) *Baba tera Mission adhura Kanshi Ram karega pura* (Baba, referring to Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram will complete your unfulfilled Mission); (b) *Baba Saheb ka doosara nam Kanshi Ram, Kanshi Ram* (Kanshi Ram is the second name of Baba Saheb).

[254] Teltumbde, A. 2006. An Enigma Called Kanshi Ram. *EPW,* 41(43&44), pp: 4531 -32, here p. 4531.

[255] Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Dalit Assertion…*p. 87.

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castes. Moreover in Pune, where the ERDL was located, the young Dalits were continuously engaged in discussing the ideas of Mahatma Phule and Ambedkar. Dina Bhana, a Dalit employee in the laboratory, was enraged by the list of holidays and protested against the decision which led to his suspension from the ERDL. It should be noted here that despite the strong presence of Ambedkarite organisations in Pune, no Dalit organisation took up the issue. After Ambedkar's death, particularly in the early 1960's, both the Dalit movement and the politics in Maharashtra were highly fragmented and Dalit leaders were busy fighting each other. So much so, the cancellation of the two holidays appeared to be a non-issue for them. But young Kanshi Ram was enraged by this blatant caste-biased decision and the high-handedness of the upper caste management. He supported Bhana and organised a protest against the management's decision. Moreover, he filed a case against Bhana's suspension in a District Court of Law, despite intimidation by the management. Although the case took two years, the Court verdict not only revoked Bhana's suspension, more importantly, it also restored the two holidays.

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This incident seems to have had a lasting impact on Kanshi Ram as well as other Dalit employees in the laboratory. They felt the need for a strong Dalit organisation that would fight the high-handedness of the upper caste authorities in the organisation, and with that intention they began associating with various Dalit organisations in Maharashtra, such as People's Education Society, Buddha Club, etc. During this period, the radical Dalit movements, *Dalit Panthers* and *Dalit Sangharsh Samiti* (DSS), were emerging in Maharashtra and neighbouring Karnataka, respectively. Although Kanshi Ram and his colleagues at the ERDL appeared to have been aware of these movements, they were not attracted to them. Instead, RPI become their choice, as they, especially Kanshi Ram, had been deeply influenced by Ambedkar's call for political power, a call that was given to Dalits and other marginalised sections on September 24, 1944 in Madras. Ambedkar declared: "Understand our ultimate goal. Our ultimate goal is to become the rulers of this country. Write this goal on the walls of your houses so that you will never forget. Our struggle is not for the few jobs and concessions but we have a larger goal to achieve. That

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goal is to become the rulers of the land."[256] Ambedkar called upon Dalits to become rulers of India within the parliamentary framework but not through acts of insurgency. Kanshi Ram too, it appears, decided to work within the parliamentary framework rather than outside of it. Hence, he did not associate with the emerging radical Dalit movements in Maharashtra or Karnataka.

At this stage, the Dalit movement and politics in Maharashtra were dominated and controlled by self-styled Ambedkarites, who were divided into two larger groups: one group consisted of the RPI leaders that came exclusively from the Mahar caste and the other, Congress Dalit leaders who came from different Dalit castes, especially the non-Mahars. While the former splintered into many factions, the latter group was more or less domesticated by upper caste Congress leaders like Y. B. Chavan.[257] Although Kanshi Ram appeared to have been disillusioned with the state of Dalit politics, especially with the RPI kind of politics, he worked for the Party for nearly eight years, particularly during the initial phase of his activism. Working for the party had been a learning experience for the young Kanshi Ram. Most of his ideas and arguments took shape during this stage. He felt that the idea of true democracy under the *varna*-based social order was impossible. The Indian democracy, for Kanshi Ram, is, "rule by the upper castes, based upon *manuvadi* or the *Brahmanic* order."[258] Further, his close observation of RPI leaders and Congress' Dalit leaders and the treatment meted out to these two groups by the upper caste Congress leaders, led Kanshi Ram to see them as *chamchas* (stooges) of the Congress. These ideas were later developed in his book, *The Chamcha Age* (An Era of the Stooges). But the trigger was with the co-option of a Dalit leader by the Congress. Dadasaheb Gaikwad was a committed and much respected RPI Dalit leader. But he joined the Congress for a Lok Sabha reserved seat. Kanshi's dream of political power for the oppressed masses was completely shattered by this act, and thus began his disassociation with the RPI.

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[256] Quoted in Crossette, Barbara. 1990. A Call to the Downtrodden: Break Down the Door. *The New York Times,* April 18.
[257] Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Dalit Assertion….* p. 88.
[258] Ibid., p.89.

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BAMCEF: Disenchanted with the *chamcha* politics of the RPI and the Congress' Dalit leaders, Kanshi Ram and his close associates at the ERDL decided to develop an organisation which would spread the ideas and ideals of Ambedkar and Phule. During this time, Kanshi Ram was joined by Kaparde, a committed Dalit employee, and together they began to formulate ideas for an organisation to be built up by educated employees from the lower castes. The idea of an organisation for Dalits was taken up by Kanshi Ram and his colleague passionately, a BSP activist recollects, as if it was their life mission.[259] On December 6, 1973 they established BAMCEF[260] with the object of fighting against caste discrimination within the civil service;[261] its motto, 'Educate, Organise, and Agitate', was adopted from Ambedkar's teachings. Through this association the Dalit leadership managed to establish a network of Dalit employees in various government services throughout Maharashtra and in the adjacent regions. In 1976, a functioning office of the BAMCEF was established in Delhi. The base in Delhi seemed to be a good move as it facilitated the spread of the organisation in Punjab, Haryana, UP, and MP. BAMCEF's first unit in UP was started in 1978 in Agra, and later re-launched in Lucknow with Raj Bahadur, a government employee at the Central Telephone Office, as the founder-convenor.[262]

A significant aspect about BAMCEF was that unlike other socio-political organisation of the Dalits, it was relatively free from monetary constraints. For almost all the members in the organisation were government employees and that enabled them to support the organisation's activities with generous monetary contributions. This in turn enabled the organisation to undertake activities in a much bigger way. But then, as an organisation of government employees, its focus was mainly two types of activities: to disseminate information among the educated Dalits, and to organise public demonstrations against injustices meted out to them. The main aim of these activities was to raise the consciousness of the Dalits to their plight and to press for social action. The former was

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[259] Interview with a BSP activist in Mahoba on 25th March, 2005.
[260] Prior to the establishment of BAMCEF, Kanshi Ram and his colleagues had established *the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Minorities Employees Welfare Association* in 1971, see Mendelsohn and Vicziany. 1998. *The Untouchables…* p. 220.
[261] See, Kumar, Vivek & Sinha, Uday. 2001. *Dalit Assertion and Bahujan Samaj Party: A perspective from below.* Delhi: Bahujan Sahitya Sansthan, p. 58.
[262] Interview with Sandeep Gautham, Lucknow March 12, 2004.

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organised through various forms of literary and cultural events, like launching of the journal - *Oppressed Indian*, celebrating Ambedkar's birth and death anniversaries, re-starting the 'Ambedkar Memorial Football Tournament' and felicitations for Dalit poets (*kavi sammelana*) on Ambedkar *Jayanti*. As for social action, it was held through public awareness programmes. One such programme was, 'Ambedkar Mela on Wheels'. This was an audio-visual account of Ambedkar's life and views, together with contemporary material on oppression, atrocities, and poverty of the Dalits. Apparently this 'Mela' seemed to have been one of the biggest mobilising campaign undertaken by BAMCEF in nine North Indian states, spread from Jabalpur to Jammu and Allahabad to Jaipur.

Apart from this Mela, the other important activity undertaken by BAMCEF was popularising the 'Ambedkar calendar' that contained information on the efforts and events connected with the leader's life and mission.[263] It is said that between 1977 and 1980, more than 2, 50,000 calendars were distributed in North India, a reflection on how the organisation was spreading its wings.[264]

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The BAMCEF's greatest contribution, it should be noted, was the funding of its monthly magazine and newspaper. Kanshi Ram and his colleagues were more than convinced by the fact that the mass media which was dominated by the upper castes/classes, did not highlight issues relating to the Dalits. Hence it was important to have their own medium, not only to highlight the plight of the oppressed, but also to conscientise the oppressed. In the words of Kanshi Ram: "All the efforts by the oppressed Indians throughout the length and breadth of the country could have resulted in the building of a solid organisation by these people, but the blacking out of news keeps them isolated and in the dark. An efficient news service owned and operated by the oppressed Indians would

[263] Some of the quotations from Ambedkar are very well chosen to awake and inspire the Dalits. For instance one of the famous quotes of Ambedkar in BAMCEF's calendar that was chosen by Kanshi Ram is: "You must have firm belief in the sacredness of your goal. Your aim is noble and sublime; and your mission glorious. Blessed are those who are awakened to serve others. Glory be to those who devote their time, talents and all for the amelioration of slavery. Glory to those who keep up the struggle for the liberation of the enslaved, in the face of heavy odds and humiliation till they achieve their aim of securing rights for the downtrodden." - Dr. Ambedkar, quoted by Ram, Kanshi in 1997. The Sacredness of your goal. In: Atey, M. ed., *The Editorials of Kanshi Ram* Part I, Hyderabad: Bahujan Samaj Publications, p. 35.
[264] Ibid., p. 34.

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bring things out into the light."[265] Towards this end, BAMCEF sponsored, *'The Oppressed Indian'*, a monthly magazine in English. Kanshi Ram himself wrote the editorials. Since its establishment in 1973, until the formation of the BSP in 1984, and to an extent even in the later years, BAMCEF remained the resource body in terms of men and material help, especially monetary assistance.

Two other most important achievements of BAMCEF were, first, the organisation succeeded in bringing a majority of the lower caste government employees, especially Dalits in UP and other North Indian states under its umbrella; and secondly, through the print media, it was able to spread the ideology of Ambedkar and Phule among educated Dalits. An important outcome of BAMCEF's activities had been the growing popularity of Kanshi Ram among the educated Dalit youth in the state. They looked up to him as 'the messiah of the Dalits' and began to rally around him. In fact, it was the youth who helped to popularise DS-4, when BAMCEF initiated this political platform in 1981.

3. II.3. From DS-4 to BSP: The BAMCEF, under the leadership of Kanshi Ram, had always nurtured the idea of political power for the oppressed Indian. But he could not have achieved his ambition by confining BAMCEF's activities only among the middle class and educated Dalits. There had to be wider scope of its activities, particularly its political activities to reach out to rural Dalits who were really oppressed. Towards achieving this end, the leadership wished to set up a parallel political organisation that would not only address the problems of the Dalits and other oppressed masses, but also stand up against the Congress' politics of 'domestication'. In other words, the new political organisation would be the *agitational* wing of BAMCEF. With these aims in mind, the Dalit leadership established the *Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharshan Samiti* on December 6, 1981 which came to be known as DS-4.[266]

If the BSP was an instant success among the lower castes, it was because of the activities undertaken by DS-4. It criticised the domination of the upper castes within the existing

[265] *The Oppressed Indian.* April, 1979.
[266] For a brief description on the need for the formation of the DS-4, see Kanshi Ram. 1997. D-S4 For Limited Political Action. In Atey, M. ed., *The Editorials of Kanshi Ram…*,p. 85.

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socio-political and cultural arenas; also, the mobilisational strategies of Kanshi Ram and other Dalit leaders reached its pinnacle with DS-4. A metaphor that Kanshi Ram and his followers often repeated was the former's analysis of the Indian social system based on the analogy of a ballpoint pen: the top of the pen represents the upper castes, which constitute only 15% of the population, the rulers of the country; while the pen itself represents the remaining 85 % which continued to be the ruled. The sketch of the Indian social system given by Kanshi Ram was as follows:

Table 3.3: The Indian Social System

Beneficiaries of the system 10% to 15%	- Brahmin	3.5%
	- Kshatriya	5.5%
	- Vyshya	6%
Victims of the system 85% to 90%	- Intermediary Castes	10.5%
	- Other Backward Castes (OBCs – 3743 castes)	52%
	- Scheduled Castes (SCs – 1500 castes)	15%
	- Scheduled Tribes (STs – 1000 castes)	7.5%

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Kanshi Ram's articulations metamorphosed into slogans, which were often extremely aggressive and easily caught the attention of Dalits and non-Dalits alike. Some of the slogans were:

- *Tilak, taraju aur talwar inko maro joote char* (The tilak (Brahmin), the scales (represents the merchant caste, the Vysya) and sword (represents Kshatriya – the warrior caste), hit them with shoes (shoe represents the Chamars)[267]

[267] Ian Duncan has an interesting commentary to offer. According to him, D-S4 and BSP inherited the tradition of chanting slogans during demonstrations and processions from the Republican Party of India, the main vehicle for Ambedkarite politics in the 1960's. Some of the election campaigns of the RPI were contested in the court of Law, particularly the Allahabad High Court, as the campaigners were seeking to win votes on the basis of caste and religion. One such slogan was *Thakur, Brahman aur Lala/Kardo inka munha kala* (Thakur, Brahmin and Banias, make their faces black). Two things are clear from this statement. First, it was a statement to disgrace the Hindu upper castes. And secondly, it was a statement to show the Jatavs' complaining against the upper castes labelling them as black. This is emphasised by rhyming *Lala/kala,* where 'kala' means black and 'lala'is a vernacular representation of the Banias. Also read. Duncan, I. 1999. Dalits and Politics in Rural North India: Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 27(1), pp: 35-60, here p. 57, *passim 8.*

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- *Vote hamara, raj tumhara, nahin chalega, nahin chalega* (We have the vote, you have the power, this will not last, this will not last)

- *85 par 15 ka raj nahin chalega, nahin chalega* (85 percent living under the rule of 15 percent, this will not last, this will not last)

- *Jiski jitni samkhya bhari uski utni bhagidari* (power should be distributed to each caste in accordance with its strength in population). We shall see how this particular slogan was put into practice by the BSP in the next chapter.

Through the analysis of the Indian social system based on the analogy of a ballpoint pen and through the various slogans, the BSP's message to the Dalits and other lower castes was clear: the Brahmins – by controlling education and occupying the highest position in the traditional social structure, the Kshatriyas – by controlling the land and dominating temporal power and the Vaishyas – by controlling trade were keeping the Dalits and other lower castes away from them all. Not just that. Even in Independent India, they re-established themselves by controlling political power. In normal circumstances, in a democratic framework, it is the majority that rules, but the upper castes, whose percentage is a mere 15 percent of the total population of the country, are able to hog political power. The lower castes, whose percentage in the population is 85 percent, continue to remain the ruled, by casting their votes for the candidates belonging to the upper castes. Such a state of blatant injustice against the lower castes should not be tolerated any more. Political power in the country should be distributed among all the castes in proportion to their population size. In a way, the DS-4 activists were able to show the caste-based divisions within society, the differences between upper caste and lower caste society, the power and domination of the former at the cost of the latter. Not surprisingly, this message pervaded the 'mind and body' of those belonging to the lower castes who had been victims of upper caste domination and power, and it led to unity among the lower castes.

The D-S4 soon began to take-up community-specific problems by organising the Dalits, Shudras, and minority groups through 'cadre camps', 'awakening squads', and 'bicycle marches'. Two important programmes under the DS-4 were (a) Cycle march and (b) Denunciation of Poona Pact. In the year 1983, between March 15 and April 17, the D-S4

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organised a 3,000 km cycle march, which was termed the 'miracle of two feet and two wheels' that covered seven states in North India. The main purpose of this march was to mobilise the Dalits and the other oppressed to build their own organisations and movements, and "to educate the oppressed and the exploited …to build their own organisation and independent movement."[268] The march was also to point out the weaknesses of the oppressed and to explain to the Dalits how they were being exploited by the upper castes. To quote Kanshi Ram:

> 85 per cent of the oppressed and exploited people that Dr. B. R. Ambedkar nourished for years have today become tools in the hands of the ruling class, to the extent that they never feel shame when others use them. Whenever rallies are organised by political parties to show their strength, the poor SC/ST, OBC, and minority people rush there and are paid for it. They are happy to go and strengthen the hands of their oppressors and exploiters. They neither feel shame nor do they think of the harm they are doing to themselves.[269]

DS-4's message to the lower castes was clear: the upper castes have been enjoying political power at the cost of the lower castes. The lower castes, on their part, instead of putting an end to such exploitation, were strengthening it by attending their political rallies and meetings. The lower castes did not feel ashamed about it. They cared only for the few rupees thrown at them by the political parties comprising the upper castes. The pittance thrown at them would give them temporary relief, but by their inaction they were only harming themselves as it would distance them further from political power.

Denunciation of Poona Pact: The second major programme conducted under the banner of D-S4 was, 'Denunciation of the Poona Pact'.[270] A month-long programme, which started at Poona on September 24, 1982 and ended at Jhalundhur (in Punjab) on October 24, 1982 was undertaken.[271] This programme was organised against the Congress Party's Golden Jubilee celebrations during the same period. Kanshi Ram, apart from writing numerous articles for the 'Oppressed Indian', devoted twenty-seven pages in his only

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[268] 'Marching to Awaken the Ambedkarite Masses', *The Oppressed Indian*, 5, 1, April 1983, p. 16, quoted in Jaffrelot, Christophe. 1998. The Bahujan Samaj Party in North India: No Longer Just a Dalit Party? *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* 18(1), p. 38.

[269] Joshi, B.R. 1986. *Untouchable! Voice of the Dalit Liberation Movement.* Delhi: Select Book Service Syndicates, p. 110.

[270] See the discussion on the Poona Pact in Chapter II.

[271] The denunciation programme appeared to be so successful with the organisers having to add an extra thirty locations from the initially planned thirty places. See, *The Oppressed Indian*, November, 1982.

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major work, 'An Era of the Stooges' (*The Chamcha Age*) in denouncing the Pact. One of the major criticisms levelled against the Pact was 'making the Dalits stooges in the mainstream political parties, especially the Congress'. According to Kanshi Ram, "…the worst evil effect of the Poona Pact was when their leader Dr. Ambedkar was taking them to the Bright Age from centuries of living in the Dark Age, the efforts of their leader was being derailed by pushing the Scheduled Castes into the *Chamcha* Age (An Era of the Stooges)."[272] Yet, it should be mentioned here that despite deprecating the Poona Pact, neither Kanshi Ram nor the other D-S4 leaders were for separate electorates for the Dalits. The denunciation, they argued, was to conscientise the Dalits on the historical injustice meted out to them Gandhi and his Congress. They wanted "to make common cause with the other oppressed and exploited" for their political representation.[273]

We noted that the DS-4 was formed as an activist wing of BAMCEF that would spread the ideals of Ambedkar among the oppressed, particularly among the Dalits, and unite all the oppressed groups in Indian society, i.e., SC, STs, Minorities and Shudras. for political power. But it was only a quasi-political party working under BAMCEF, an organisation comprising government employees who were forbidden from undertaking any form of political activity, especially in electoral politics. Moreover, since the formation of DS-4 there had been differences among the members of BAMCEF. They divided into two groups: one group supporting the DS-4 and its activities, the other group which wished that BAMCEF would remain as an organisation for the welfare of the government employees. Interestingly, many members in the latter group were loyal to several strands of the RPI and they did not want another political party for the Dalits. In addition to these differences, there were also financial difficulties on account of DS-4's thrust for political power. The RPI loyalists in BAMCEF were unwilling to provide additional funds which resulted in the gap between the two groups within BAMCEF widening. Kanshi Ram, who was annoyed with the differences within the organisation took the plunge, and announced the creation of a new political party, the Bahujan Samaj Party in 1984. With the formation of a new organisation, the focus of BAMCEF as well as the

[272] Ram, Kanshi. 1997. Poona Pact Denounced. In: Atey, M., ed., *The Editorials…,* pp: 93-94.
[273] 'Denunciation Over – What Next?', *The Oppressed Indian*, November, (1982).

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Dalit leaders shifted from organising the Dalits to obtaining political power. Indeed 'political power' became the explicit goal of the BSP, a goal which was compared to a 'master-key' by Kanshi Ram, "Political power is the master-key with which one can open any lock, whether it is social, educational, or a cultural lock".[274] But how did the BSP mobilise the support of the oppressed, especially the Dalits, and what strategies did it employ in its mobilisational activities? We shall answer these questions in the next section.

3. III. BSP's strategies in the mobilisations of the Dalit constituency

Two strategies adopted by the BSP that played a pivotal role in mobilising the Dalits and other marginalised sections were its use of the print media and the Dalit *mela.* We noted in the previous chapter that the Adi-Hindu leadership used print media to propagate their ideas and ideologies. Mahatma Jyotibha Phule was the first person to initiate this tradition in Maharashtra by starting *Deenabandhu* on January 1, 1877. Many Dalits were inspired by this initiative and between 1910 and 1930, in Maharashtra alone, nearly fifty newspapers were published, of which *Bital Vidhwansham, Son Vanshiya Mitra, Nirashrit, Hind,* and *Nagrik* are well known.[275] In UP, Swami Achhutananda followed the tradition of printing – of pamphlets, booklets, and books – to propagate the ideology of the Adi-Hindu movement. This tradition of publication was continued by many educated Dalits in colonial and post-colonial UP.

Booklets and pamphlets constitute two other major forms of the Dalit print medium. Through these forms, especially through booklets, the Dalit writers began to write on a range of issues that pertained to their socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions. Not surprisingly, they adopted their own interpretation, an interpretation that has been termed as "a view from below" by Vivek Kumar.[276] "The major objective behind these

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[274] Ambeth, Rajan. 1994. *My Bahujan Samaj,* Delhi: ABCDE publications, p. 32.
[275] Narayan, Badri. 2006. *Women Heroes and Dalit Assertion in North India: Culture, Identity and Politics.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 51.
[276] Interview with Dr. Vivek Kumar (12th October, 2004) Dr. Kumar is a sociologist and teaches at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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booklets", as observed by Badri Narayan, "is to make Dalits aware about their rights and duties and to make them politically conscious."[277]

The importance of these Dalit newspapers and magazines should be clearly recognised here. First, as most of these newspapers and magazines carried a Dalit literare section that criticised the limitations of the policies pursued by the governments (in both colonial and post-colonial India) in bettering their conditions, and the economic oppression and social discrimination against the Dalits by the upper caste Hindu society in their everyday lives, they helped not only to sensitise the Dalit masses, but also to make them conscious of their problems; this, in turn, facilitated the mobilisation of the Dalit masses against caste-Hindu oppression and injustices.[278] In a way, the newspapers and magazines became agents of information that pushed the Dalits for transformation. Second, as the Dalits were both producers as well as consumers, the process of production and consumption of literature in the print media led to the formation of a literary group among them, which would continue the tradition of writing on Dalit issues.

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The BSP in its mobilisational activities used the available critique in the Dalit booklets. It also went to the extent of appealing to the Dalit writers to work on more booklets highlighting the problems of the Dalits, Adivasis, and OBC communities. The Dalit writers appear to have been inspired by that appeal and produced a large number of booklets between 1991 and 2000. The following Table provides information on the trend of Dalit booklets:

Table: 3.4. Decade-wise trend of publication of popular Dalit booklets

Decade	Number of Booklets
1931-40	2
1941-50	2
1951-60	7
1961-70	56
1971-80	13

[277] Narayan, Badri. 2006. *Women Heroes…*,p.54. (Italics are supplied).
[278] Schwartz, M. B. 1997. Indian Untouchable Texts of Resistance Symbolic Domination and Historical Knowledge. In Seneviratne, H.L. ed., *Identity, Consciousness and the Past: Forging of Caste and Communities in India and Sri Lanka.* New Delhi: OUP, p. 179.

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1981-90	26
1991-2000	114
2001-2006	69
Total	289

Source: Dalit Resource Centre, G.B. Pant Social Science Institute, Allahabad.[279]

As the above Table clearly demonstrates, from 1960's onwards the number of Dalit booklets began to go up and by 1991-2000 (a decade) the numbers peaked. This is due to two simple reasons. First, contrary to the promises made by the Nehruvian state at the time of Independence, it did not include the Dalits in its developmental initiatives. By excluding the Dalit society, the upper caste Hindu society appropriated for itself majority of the developmental facilities. On realising they were excluded, the Dalits began to feel disillusioned with the Nehruvian State and its promises. They expressed their disillusionment through the booklets. Second, Dalit writers, who were encouraged by the BSP's political mobilisations for assumption of power, began to question their place in society as well as in the national graph. Such questioning led to a plethora of booklets, in which Dalits produced alternative narratives about the place and role of the Dalits and other lower castes in society and in the nationalist movement. But which key issues and criticisms found in these booklets and pamphlets were used by the BSP in its mobilisations?

As stated above, the Dalit booklets and pamphlets addressed a range of issues. But, the BSP picked the stories, themes, and issues that spoke of the treachery of the upper caste Hindus, especially the Brahmins and Kshatriyas against the Dalits in the socio-cultural domain, and narratives that claimed a respectable and valiant position for the Dalits in the freedom struggle. Among them five themes were noteworthy: (1) The story of *Shambhuk vadh* (killing)*;* (2) the story of *Ekalavya's tyaag* (sacrifice of Ekalavya); (3) sacrifices of the Dalits in the 1857 Rebellion; (4) *Veer Naari Jhalkaribai* (the valiant lady, Jhalkaribai); and (5) *Dalit ki Beti Udadevi* (the daughter of Dalits/the champion of the Dalits). In the following paragraphs I shall examine two stories - of *Shambhuk vadh* and *Veer Nari Jhalkaribai.*

[279] Cited in Narayan, Badri. 2006. *Women Heroes …* p. 55.

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The story of the killing of Shambhuk: Shambhuk, who was a lower caste person, had a great desire to learn and read the *Vedas.* He approached the Brahmin gurus, who were the sole preachers of the *Vedas,* and requested them to teach him the *Vedas.* On learning Shambhuk's caste, the gurus not only rejected his request, they also humiliated him on account of his 'lowly' birth. As if this was not enough, they threw him out of the premises of the *ashram* (the school). Undeterred by the rejection of the Brahmin gurus and determined to act against the humiliation meted out to him, Shambhuk began to meditate on the banks of the river Godavari in *Dandakaranya* (a forest called Dandaka). It must be recognised here that meditation was considered to be the highest form of attainment for the human mind. But that act was patented by the Brahmins under the caste system. Shambhuk, by the power of his meditation, acquired the skill to read and learned the *Vedas* on his own. But unlike the Brahmin gurus he never kept the knowledge to himself. He began to share his newly acquired knowledge with his fellowmen in the lower castes. Angered and horrified by Shambhuk's deeds, the Brahmins used all the skills at their disposal to stop him from preaching the *Vedas* to the lower castes, but in vain. And they waited for the right moment to take revenge on him.

Once there was severe famine in the kingdom of Rama. People were dying with no food and water. On learning about the calamity, King Rama asked *Sage Vashishta* about the cause of the famine. Sage *Vashishta*, a Brahmin guru himself, the one who along with his Brahmin tribe was waiting to take revenge on Shambhuk, saw this as the right moment to strike at the latter. He informed Rama that the famine was caused by a lower caste person, Shambhuk, who against the rules of the caste system was not merely reading the *Vedas* but also imparting that knowledge to other lower caste persons. The kingdom, he told the king, would come out of the famine and prosper again only if Shambhuk was killed. King Rama, on hearing the words of Sage *Vashishta,* went to Shambhuk's ashram in *Dandakaranya,* along with his brother Laxman. There they questioned Shambhuk's activities of learning and teaching the *Vedas.* Shambhuk, who by then had become a gnani, calmly replied that he did not commit any crime but was only imparting the knowledge of the *Vedas* to the people who had been kept in the dark from time immemorial. But the King harshly told him that by the law of the

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Varnashrama Dharma, the lower castes were there only to serve the people from the higher castes and were not entitled to receive the knowledge of the *Vedas,* a knowledge that was the exclusive preserve of the upper castes. He added that Shambhuk by his learning and teaching of the *Vedas* had committed the worst crime and deserved death as punishment. Saying this, Rama killed Shambhuk and thus avenged the Brahmins gurus.

From the above story, the Dalit writers and the BSP wanted the Dalit constituency to understand three aspects. First, they wanted the Dalits to understand how historically the Brahmins were controlling education and how the lower castes were barred from learning and writing, and thus, from the system of acquiring knowledge. Second, the story portrayed the heroism of Shambhuk, as he put up with all the difficulties imposed on him by the Brahmins. The lower castes, the descendants of Shambhuk, also possessed the same qualities as Shambhuk, especially the determination to achieve something despite difficulties; and finally, how the Brahmins and Kshatriyas joined hands to dispossess the lower castes.

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*The story of veer naari Jhalkaribhai***:** The story of Jhalkaribhai is famous in Bhundelkhand region, especially among the Koris (Koris is one of the Dalit castes in UP). Jhalkaribhai lived in the fort of Rani Lakshmibhai of Jhansi at the time of the 1857 Rebellion and took part in the mutiny by challenging the British soldiers. Yet nowhere in the history written by the caste-Hindu historians has her name or role in the Rebellion been mentioned.[280] Even in the account of foreign scholars we do not find any mention about her. "Such an act of deliberate omission", as observed by Avinash Goutham, a sociologist at JNU, "should not surprise us, as foreign scholars depended on the information given to them by the caste-Hindus, who for obvious reasons would not want to give a prominent position to a Dalit woman in history."[281]

The story of Jhalkaribhai as narrated by my informants in Jhansi is as follows:

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[280] Badri Narayan mentions one exception. Vishnu Rao Godse, who travelled Central India at the time of Rebellion, mentions the name of Jhalkaribhai in his book: *Majha Pravas.* Godse addresses her as 'Jhalkari Korin' - mentioning Jhalkaribhai's caste identity too. See Narayan, Badri. 2006. *Women Heroes and Dalit…*p. 119.

[281] Avinash Gautham, research scholar, CSSS, JNU, New Delhi.

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> Jhalkaribhai, a beautiful Kori woman, was the maid servant of Rani (princess) Lakshmibhai of Jhansi. Jhalkaribhai, who was the same age as the Rani herself, became a close friend of the latter. Rani was so fond of Jhalkaribhai that she treated Jhalkaribhai as her own sister and taught her war skills such as archery, wrestling, and shooting. Soon Jhalkaribhai excelled in all these warrior skills. The Rani was extremely happy with Jhalkaribhai's excellent skills, and on account of her excellence she was made commander of the female army of Jhansi, an army that was created by the princess herself. When the British soldiers under the commandership of General Rose attacked the fort, Lakshmibhai was concerned about the safety of the fort as well as her young son. She was completely confused and unable to decide as to which course of action to take. At this crucial juncture, Jhalkaribhai came to her rescue. She asked the princess to leave the fort with her son and assured her that she would fight the British in her place. The Rani, who was confident of Jhalkaribhai's abilities, readily agreed to the proposal and immediately left the fort with her son. Jhalkaribhai dressed as Rani Lakshmi plunged into war. With her excellent command in using the sword she began to kill the enemy's soldiers mercilessly. But General Rose played a trick and eventually captured her. The British celebrated the capture without realising that they had captured the maid and not the princess; and for her part Jhalkaribhai too did not reveal her identity for nearly a week, during which time Lakshmibhai and her son escaped to Nepal. When the British realised that they had captured the princess' maid, they were stunned at the bravery and the skills of Jhalkaribhai in war, and eventually freed her.

It is important to note here that apart from Ambedkar, the Dalits have few leaders, especially among women to inspire them. The BSP was badly in need of a Dalit woman leader and it began projecting Mayawati as the Party's leader, who could fight against the upper castes and win political power for the Dalits. It was during that time the Party made use of the story of Jhalkaribhai, who valiantly fought the British. In Bhundelkhand, I was told that Dalit mothers told the story of Jhalkaribhai to their daughters and inspired them to become a leader like Mayawati. In that sense, the Party succeeded in inspiring the Dalits, especially the Dalit women with the story of Jhalkaribhai.

Apart from the cultural re-interpretation and establishment of Dalit heroes, some of the booklets also reinterpreted the cultural histories of the Dalits. Two booklets that help to

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explain this interpretation are *Mool Vansha Katha* by Dr. G. P. Prashant, published in 1994 from Lucknow; and *Vichitra Parivartan* by Umesh Kumar. Prashant, while directly addressing his fellow Dalits in his *Mool Vansha Katha,* put forward a compelling argument: "Your history has been demolished to belittle you. Your *asuras, rakshasas,* and *daityas* are now synonymous with hatred. Who knows that *asuras* were vehement opponents of liquor consumption, that *rakshas* were those who opposed sacrifices in the *yajna* and guarded the rights of the people, and that *daityas* were the children of *Diti*."[282]

Similarly, Umesh Kumar also reinterprets the Dalit history that spans from 6000 BC to 1995 AD as the history of the original inhabitants of India. For him, Dalits had a golden age of peace and prosperity before they were enslaved by the invading Aryans. In a chapter entitled *Bharatiye Achambha,* Umesh Kumar challenges the dominant narratives of mythology by a re-reading of Brahmanical scriptures and asserts his new reading as true 'history'.[283] Such a "process of re-writing and reading this new kind of history", as argued by Narayan and Mishra, "becomes an alternative education for members of the Dalit community about their own Dalit heroes, their status as the original inhabitants of India and their past golden age which ended in a fall from glory following the violent Aryan invasions."[284] But how did the BSP take the stories that have been re-interpreted by the Dalit writers in their booklets and pamphlets to its intended group? The BSP had initially employed *mela* and *Jagriti Dasta* (Cultural Squad) to take the stories of Dalit heroes to the lower caste public, and spread the message of the BSP among the rural folk, especially the Dalits. The following is a delineation of those two aspects:

Dalit Mela: Mela is a form of social gathering, generally organised annually for celebrations and for exchanges in northern India. Although these *melas* are supposed to be neutral in terms of caste and community, in reality, they are caste and community-specific. In the sense, while Hindus organise their own *melas*, such as Dushera; the Muslims have their own, such as Bakr-Id and Muharam; and so do the Dalits. For the

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[282] Prashant, G.P. 1994. *Mool Vansha Katha,* Lucknow: Cultural Publishers. (Cited and translated from Hindi in Narayan, Badri and A. R. Mishra., eds., 2004. *Multiple Marginalities: An Anthology of Identified Dalit Writings.* Delhi: Manohar, p. 74.
[283] Kumar, Umesh. 1996. *Vichitra Parivartan.* Allahabad: Kushwaha Publishers.
[284] Narayan, Badri and A. R. Mishra. eds. 2004. *Multiple Marginalities*.....p. 75.

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space of *mela*, as observed by Sarah Beth, "raises questions of participation and access, since it is an activity occurring in the so-called 'public sphere', open to everyone, but whose participants are in actuality defined by their caste (*and communal)* identities where cultural codes of decorum, i.e., beliefs of purity and pollution – exclude the participation of the upper castes"[285] from the lower caste *melas* and vice-versa.

The history of the Dalit *mela* in UP goes back to the colonial times and the space of the *mela* was used by the Dalits to celebrate their own festivals, such as the *jayantis* of Kabir and Raidas.[286] In post-colonial UP, they added to this list of festivals the *jayanti* of Ambedkar in 1957, after the death of their beloved leader.[287] Since then Ambedkar *jayanti* has been celebrated with great pride by the Dalits, especially the Jatavs of Agra, with a day of feasting, games, political speeches, and other festivities, which generally culminates in taking out processions with Ambedkar's statue or portraits to the main streets and localities. The BSP has used this space of the *mela* not only to celebrate the bravery of the Dalit heroes, but also to mobilise the Dalit constituency for political power.

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With the BSP, the site of the Dalit *mela* became the site for Dalit identity construction. This construction was done through various forms. First, the BSP has added to the traditional list of the Dalit *melas,* Shahuji Maharaj *mela,* Periyar *mela* and Buddha *jayanti*

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[285] Beth, Sarah. 2005. Taking to the Streets: Dalit *Mela* and the public performance of Dalit cultural identity. Paper presented in BASAS Conference, University of Leeds. Italics are supplied.

[286] Apparently the Dalit *mela,* according to Badri Narayan, originated in Bihar in 1935, when the Dusadhs (one of the most numerous Dalit castes in Bihar after the Chamars), began to celebrate the heroic life of Chuharmal. Chuharmal, who belonged to the Dusadh caste, was known for his strength and morality. He falls in love with Rani Reshma, a princess of the Bhumihars, one of the upper caste landed community in Bihar. Every year during the month of *Chitya,* the Dusadhs gather in thousands in a village called *Mor,* 10-12 kms south of the Mokama station where a large statue of Chuharmal has been erected. The celebration of the Chuharmal *mela* includes 4-5 days of singing, dancing, wrestling as well as the recitation and theatrical performance of the love tale of princess Reshma and Dalit hero Chuharmal. For a detailed study as well as an analysis of the Dalit *mela* celebrating the heroism of Chuharmal, see, Narayan, Badri. 2001. *Documenting Dissent: Contesting Fables, Contested Memories and Dalit Political Discourse.* Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study.

[287] Owen Lynch describes how Ambedkar *jayanti* came to be added to the list Dalit *melas.* Before 1957, the Jatavs of Kaji Para locality in Agra have had celebrated Kans *mela* in honour of Krishna's defeat at the hands of his wicked uncle Kans. However, in 1957 after the death of Ambedkar, "fourteen young men from Kaji Para decided that since Ambedkar was their acknowledged leader and saviour, he should replace Krishna and the date of fair should be changed to 14 April, Ambedkar's birthday." See Lynch, Owen. 2002. Ambedkar Jayanti: Dalit Reritualization in Agra. *The Eastern Anthropologist,* 55(2-3), p. 116.

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mela. With these additions, throughout the year there is one *mela* or the other that constantly brought the Dalits together and which facilitated their exchanges. Second, it has also brought the *Dalit leela* or Dalit folk drama into the *melas.* The narratives of the Dalit *leelas* were positioned in direct opposition to the narratives of the upper caste Hindus' *leelas*. For instance, Dalit *leelas* include Kans *leela* in place of the Krishna *leela,* Shambhuk *leela* in place of the Ram *leela* and Jhalkaribai *leela* in place of the Rani of Jhansi *leela.* In Kans *leela,* the story is retold as the fall of a noble and humane king Kans by the greed of the Yadava king Krishna to expand the latter's empire. Similarly, in the Shambhuk *leela*, Shambhuk is idolised as an ascetic, and king Ram depicted as a villain; as he killed Shambhuk. In a way, through such narratives, the Dalit *leelas* were not only subverting the *leelas* of the upper castes, but also recasting the characters of "a meta-narrative, idealising previously demonised characters such as Ravana or Kans, and exposing the immoral nature of traditional heroes like Ram or Krishna".[288]

While the *melas* became the site for Dalit gatherings and celebration of the memories, achievements and heroic deeds of the Dalit heroes, it essentially facilitated the dissemination of BSP's message. The Party used a number of other cultural platforms, such as theatre, to take its message to the grassroots. For this purpose, the Party has set up the *Jagriti Dasta* (Awareness Squad), which consists of writers, dramatists, poets, artists, and others. The main job of this squad is to write songs, poems, plays with the BSP message, paint pictures of the Dalit heroes, and then transmit the same among rural Dalits through various cultural performances.[289] During the 1990's the *Jagriti Dasta* used to tour UP, especially the rural areas. In their performances, the members of the *Dasta* normally pick up folk songs and popular ballads, which are specific to particular regions and recompose them with words carrying the message of the BSP. In all their public performances, they make sure that they include the narratives that glorify the above mentioned Dalit icons.[290]

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[288] Beth, Sarah. 2005. Taking to the Streets…
[289] Singh, R. K. 1994. *Kanshi Ram aur BSP: Dalit Andolan ka Vicharik Adhraar: Brahmananvad Virodh.* Allahabad: Kushwaha Publication, p. 122.
[290] Ibid., pp: 1-2.

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With the *Jagriti Dasta,* the theatre groups occupy a special position. Their special position essentially comes from the popularity they command in urban and rural areas in UP. A number of Dalit theatre groups, such as *Apna Theatre* and *Mandali,* are active in the regions of Bundelkhand and eastern areas of UP, especially in Kanpur, Banaras, Allahabad, Lucknow, Bareli, Jhansi etc. During my field work in Kanpur, I met Dev Kumar, a Dalit social activist and the director of *Apna Theatre* (Our theatre). His first play was *Dastaan.* This play narrates the story of the cruelties by the Aryans (the Brahmanical upper castes) against the indigenous people (the Dalits and other lower caste groups). Other plays of this theatre include *Bhadra Angulimaal, Chakradhari, Sudarshan, Kapat, Agya Etihass* (based on the Udadevi Pasi), *Amar Shaheed Matadin Bhangi,* and *Jamadaar Ka Kurta*.[291] Dev Kumar proudly informed me that through their plays his theatre helped the BSP mobilise support of the Dalits and other lower castes.

Through booklets, cultural activities, and political campaigns, the BSP sought to make the Dalit community realise its condition – how they were exploited by the upper castes, and how they could gain their lost respect and social power by winning political power. As it has always emphasised, the idea of "them" versus "us" or the upper castes (*savarnalog*) versus us (*bahujans),* the Party could project the upper castes as the 'other' and thereby construct a broad Dalit identity for the Dalit castes and a larger *Bahujan* identity for all the lower castes and other oppressed groups; and mobilise the *bahujans* for political power.

Conclusion: I began this chapter by arguing against Kanchan Chandra, who claimed that the BSP in UP succeeded because of the greater representation accorded to the SC elite, especially the Chamars. Her argument was that since Chamars were given a majority of the seats, the Dalit constituency voted for the Party. It is true that Chamars, who constitute a majority among the SC category in UP, got a large percentage of political seats when compared with the percentage of seats given to the other Dalit castes. But it is difficult to explain BSP's success, especially among the Dalits, solely on the basis of the Party's distribution of seats. I argue that the BSP's success among the Dalits is not

[291] Field notes, Kanpur, April, 2004.

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simply because of the distribution of seats, but more importantly on account of the discriminations suffered by the Dalit constituency at the hands of the caste-Hindus, especially the upper castes. To establish my argument I examined the Dalits' condition during the Congress regime in the state. Although Congress had been the major beneficiary of the reserved seats for Dalits, it did not do anything substantial to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits. In fact, it used its power to exclude the Dalits from the process of land distribution and other measures meant to improve the economic condition in the rural areas. Although the government measures did not improve the conditions of the Dalits, the general development in the state did benefit the Dalits. It improved their economic condition and the education levels of the Dalits. This improvement, in turn, led them to realise their real conditions in the socio-economic and political arenas, and they began to assert themselves by demanding social respect and equality of treatment. The upper castes were enraged by such demands of the Dalits and decided to teach the 'Untouchables' a lesson and show them their place in society. UP has witnessed high incidence of violence against Dalits in rural areas and discriminatory practices against urban Dalits in the 1970's and early '80's.

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These conditions formed the context in which some of the educated and employed Dalits, such as Kanshi Ram, organised against caste-based discrimination and domination of the upper castes. Towards achieving this end, they also floated organisations, such as BAMCEF from which the DS-4 and later the BSP emerged. Through numerous political campaigns, literary and cultural activities, the BSP succeeded in constructing a positive Dalit identity and brought the hitherto divided Dalit castes under its umbrella for political power. Despite failure in its earlier phase in electoral politics, from 1995 onwards the BSP began to win a good number of seats in both the State Assembly and Parliament, which enabled it to form the government in the state on four occasions. But what did it do with that political power? We shall examine this question in the next chapter.

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***Four*.....**

Bahujan Samaj Party: Social Justice and Political Practice

Introduction: In the previous Chapter we examined the Dalits' *special relationship* with the Congress, the social context of the emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party and its mobilisation of the oppressed, especially the Dalit constituency, for political power. Although BSP's journey in Uttar Pradesh's rough political terrain has been excruciatingly painful, ultimately it did achieve the long-cherished goal of the Ambedkarites, attainment of political power. What is interesting in the manifestation of this goal is the emergence of a Dalit woman, Ms. Mayawati, as a leader who led the party to the seat of power in an otherwise andro-centric world of politics. Not only that she became chief minister for a fourth-time, a record not just in UP but in any State in the Indian Union.[292] Nonetheless, a pertinent question is, what are the consequences of gaining political power by the BSP in terms of improvement in the conditions of the oppressed? This is an important question, for the BSP's appeal and political mobilisation around the caste axis rather than class orientation, and its supposedly primary aim of political power, have been criticised by many commentators.

Two criticisms seem to be particularly relevant. First, commenting upon the party's early activities Jagpal Singh remarked that "mobilisation of the rural poor is seldom done on the issues emanating from capitalist agriculture."[293] Looking at the BSP through similar lenses, Dreze and Gazdar notes that the BSP is another expression of the 'unprincipled factionalism', characteristic of UP politics, not going much beyond the "relatively narrow objectives such as caste-based reservations of public sector employment."[294] Secondly, it has been charged that the party, aside from its overwhelming emphasis on 'political

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[292] Mayawati assumed chief ministership for the first time in 1995 and in 2007 she attained that position again, for the fourth time. The details of the tenures of the BSP under Mayawati's leadership are: (1) 3 June 1995 to 18 October, 1995; (2) 21 March 1997 to 21 September 1997, (3) 3 May 2002 to 29 August 2003 and, (4) 13 May 2007 to 7 March, 2012.

[293] Singh, J. 1993. *Capitalism and Dependence: Agrarian Politics in Western Uttar Pradesh, 1951-1991*, Delhi: Manohar, p. 109.

[294] Dreze, J. & Gazdar, H. 1998. Uttar Pradesh: The Burden of Inertia. In: J. Dreze & A. Sen., eds., *Indian Development: Selected Regional Perspectives*, Delhi: OUP, p. 104, also see, *passim* 143, p. 104.

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power,' does not have either a concrete programme of action or an ideology for the emancipation of the Dalits. The BSP, from these commentators' perspectives, can be seen as a party that epitomises the growth in Dalit consciousness and yet, increasingly politicises caste.[295] Although I am sympathetic to the observations of these critics, I think it is necessary to pose certain questions to counter their arguments. For example, what is the main aim of the BSP's 'politicisation of caste'? What is the meaning of 'political power' for the BSP, and what is the end goal of such political power?

Another aspect that caught the attention of sympathisers of progressive politics and lower caste-based politics alike is the difficult relationship between the two lower caste-based political parties, Samajwadi Party (SP) and BSP. Classifying all the oppressed in Indian society, particularly the Shudras and Dalits who have been victims of the Brahminical caste system, as Bahujan, the BSP tried to mobilise both the communities for political power. On its part, in its mobilisation of the lower castes, especially the Dalits, the SP is also using the same language, the language of *social justice*, like the BSP. If both parties stood for the social justice for the lower castes, then why did the political alliance between SP and BSP break up? Are there any contradictions between the political ideals and political practices of the SP and BSP?

The three main aspects in the criticism levelled against the BSP and the question of a difficult relationship between the SP and BSP are: (1) contradictions between the Shudras and Dalits, (2) the BSP did not have an ideology and (3) the BSP did little for the emancipation of the Dalits. Keeping these three aspects in mind, in the present chapter I seek to answer the following three questions:

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[295] Given the BSP's emphasis upon caste, these observations appear to be true. For, while bringing 'caste' into the centre of democratic politics, the 'class' factor is apparently pushed backstage. But I do not think that political parties like the BSP can afford to ignore the class factor. The people, whom it claims to be mobilising, are not merely victims of caste discrimination, but also victims to the prevailing material inequalities. In other words, the sufferers of caste are in most cases also sufferers of class. Of course, this does not mean that victims of material inequalities are also victims of caste inequalities. For instance, a number of people who belong to the upper castes are vulnerable to material inequalities, along with the lower castes. However, when it comes to the social space, the upper castes, irrespective of their material standing, dominate the lower castes. A number of scholars clearly demonstrated the substantial entanglement of caste and class. For an analysis on this congruence, see Sharma, K.L., ed., 1994. *Caste and Class in India.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications.

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(A) What are the differences between the politics of the Shudras and Dalits?

(B) What does the BSP's concept of social justice stand for?

(C) What did the BSP do for the Dalits while in power?

In order to answer these questions, I have divided the Chapter into three sections. The first section very briefly examines the political ideal of the SP - *social justice* - and points out the contradictions between the Shudras and Dalits. The second section analyses the BSP's idea of *social justice;* and the final section attempts to critically examine some of the programmes pursued by the BSP while in power.

4. I. Dalits and Shudras: Natural Allies or Incompatible Partners?

Kancha Ilaiah, in his famous work, *Why I am not a Hindu,*[296] offers a strong epistemological critique of the Bahujans'[297] stand against Brahmanism and culture.[298] There are two fundamental limitations in Ilaiah's work. First, Ilaiah romanticised the socio-economic relations at various levels in the grassroots, especially the lower levels. There has always been stiff competition between the Shudras and Dalits for agricultural work and land for cultivation. We have seen in the previous chapter, how Dalits have been kept out of the land distribution process on the pretext that they were not cultivators. And again, as shown previously, Shudras, on their own or working as henchmen for the Thakurs, have been at the forefront in the acts of violence against the Dalits.

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[296] Kancha, Ilaiah. 1996. *Why I am Not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy,* Calcutta: Samya.

[297] The term 'Bahujan' literally, 'the many', or 'majority of people' means the masses 'who have been devoid of humanity for centuries' in contrast to 'a handful who take their pleasure for granted, call themselves superior and live at the cost of the masses'. The term arose in 1906 in the context of *Satyashodhak* movement in Maharashtra. Excluded from *Bahujans* are 'not merely the Brahmins, but also the educationally advanced castes as well as the merchant castes'. The concept has a class content as it 'tends to exclude the aristocratic and wealthy among non-Brahmins', though, if the upper classes come from a primarily peasant or poor non-Brahmin castes, they may identify themselves 'in terms of their social roots' and culture of sentiments as part of the Bahujan Samaj. See Omvedt, Gail. 1976. *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahmin Movement in Western India: 1873-1930.* Bombay: Scientific Socialist Educational Trust, p. 4. Although I do not have any problems with this broad definition of the term, I wanted to use it in popularly and academically agreed or understood definition of the term. In recent years the term has come to be equated with either Shudra category or OBC category.

[298] Although I agree with many academics who do not consider Ilaiah's work as scholarly,(See for instance, Kathinka Froystad in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 37, No. 1, January 2000, pp: 121-122) for me, it is, however, one of the important works on the question of caste.

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Secondly, although the author claims a non-Hindu identity, he does not offer his critique of the Brahmanical social system from the perspective of non-Hindu but as a *Shudra,* the term Shudra being part of the title of the book itself (*Why I am not a Hindu: A Shudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy*). By offering his critique against the Brahmanical world view that essentially shaped the contemporary Hindu world view, he presents it not as an 'outsider' but as a *Shudra*, an 'insider' of the system. From that perspective, Ilaiah's critique cannot be 'Dalit-Bahujan' (the term *Bahujan* has been used by the author as an equivalent for the terms, *Shudra* and *Other Backward Castes*) as he asserts, but rather simply the critique of the *Shudras.* For, one fundamental difference between the critiques of the Dalits and Shudras against the Hindu social order or the Brahmanical Social Order (BSO) [299] is that of their respective locations in that vertical social order. While the Shudras have a place in the vertical order, although as the fourth varna, the Dalits did not have any place in it. Of course, sometimes it has been told that the Dalits formed the fifth varna which is not part of the official order. This means that the official body of the social order has completely closed its doors against the Dalits. Thus, a Shudra's critique against Brahmanism is an *insider's* view of the system, and a Dalit's is that of an *outsider* of the system. In a way, a critique against Brahmanism, despite certain similarities between the *Shudras* and *Dalits,* has to be either a *Shudra* or a Dalit critique, but cannot be a critique of Dalit-Bahujans. In any case, what we have to recognise here is that by considering Dalits and Shudras as one category of people and thereby terming them as 'Dalit-Bahujans', Ilaiah attempts to project the two categories of people as an undifferentiated and homogenous category. Can Shudras and Dalits be lumped together under a homogeneous but abstract social category of 'lower castes' or Bahujan? Are the politics and political ends of the Shudras and Dalits similar? Why did the SP-BSP combine fall apart?

In what follows, I attempt to point out very briefly the fundamental incongruities between politics and political ends of the Dalits and Shudras. I argue that an undifferentiated analysis of the politics of the Shudras and Dalits is, at best, not incisive

[299] For a range of discussions and debates on the nature of BSO and Dalit intellectual arguments, see *Dalit Voice: The Voice of the Persecuted Nationalities Denied Human Rights.* A fortnightly magazine, published from Bangalore and New Delhi since 1981. http://www.dalitvoice.org

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and, at worst, seriously misleading. The reason for this is that, from the point of view of historical marginalisation, both the categories have similar political interests – Representation and Power. From a caste perspective, however, the two groups essentially have divergent interests – one stands for upward mobility within the caste structure, and the other for its alteration and, thereby, its annihilation. Moreover, the practical problems in sharing power apart, the socio-economic differences between the two communities and the divergent ideological orientations of the SP and BSP, especially on the idea of 'social justice', are what make them incompatible partners. As we will see below, SP sought political power in the form of social justice in order to replace the upper castes from the positions of power and privileges, while the BSP sought political power in order to democratise the social and political systems.

In the previous chapter we noted that for the BSP the *bahujan samaj* constituted of - Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs (and also the religious minorities), as all of them have been victims of the caste-based varna, an order that was created and perpetuated by the Brahmins. Since all of them have that one thing in common, they have a common interest in rooting out the varna and ending the social, economical, cultural and political dominance of the *manuvadis.* Therefore, on account of their victimisation and the common interest in annihilating varna, the Dalits, Adivasis and Shudras are 'natural allies'. It has been told that in joining hands with the Shudras and other oppressed sections, BSP's leadership was inspired by Ambedkar's idea of an, "autonomous Dalit movement constantly attempting to strike up an alliance between the Dalits and Shudras".[300] Indeed, one can see this inspiration of Ambedkar's in the name of the very first organization floated by Kanshi Ram and others, the All India Backward (ST/ST/OBC) and Minority Communities Employees' Federation (BAMCEF).[301] Since the phase of DS-4 onwards, the party had stressed on the common interests of the groups in the *bahujan samaj* and the need for unity in order to realise their common interests and

[300] Quoted in Omvedt, Gail. 1998. Peasants Dalits and Women: Democracy and India's New Social Movements. In: Mohanty, Manoranjan *et al,* eds., *People's Rights, Social Movements and the State in the Third World.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, p. 224.
[301] See Jaffrelot, Christophe. The Strategy Pays Off. *Tehelka,* 26 May 2007.

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also political power. For instance, delivering a speech during an election campaign in Haryana in 1987 Kanshi Ram notes:

> The other limb of the *bahujan samaj* (in addition to the Dalit constituency) which we call OBCs, needs this Party (i.e., the BSP) badly. Thirty-nine years after Independence, these people have neither been recognised nor have they obtained any rights. Improvements have been made for the SCs and the STs, but nothing similar has happened for these people. The reports of both these Commissions (Kalelkar and Mandal) were thrown in the waste-paper basket on the pretext that there are 3,743 castes that can be called OBCs…[302]

According to Kanshi Ram, although the OBCs, Dalits and Adivasis have been victims of similar socio-economic deprivations, governments have taken measures, such as reservations and welfare schemes, to alleviate the problems of the last two groups only. They paid little attention to the OBC population, either in terms of welfare schemes or in educational and employment opportunities. Kanshi Ram was more vocal in his criticism of the Central government's position on OBCs. In his opinion, the Central government's non-action on reports about the OBCs revealed its unwillingness to take up the problems of the OBC population. Kanshi Ram might have made these observations in an election campaign, but they help us to understand BSP's stand on OBCs. And it was this stand of the BSP and its idea of 'natural allies' that led to its forging an electoral alliance with the SP on the eve of the 1993 elections.

The State Legislative Assembly elections in UP in 1993 witnessed an unprecedented political amalgamation when the Dalits and the Shudras joined hands. In the coming together it seemed as if the theories and dreams of social revolutionaries and political reformers such as Jotiba Phule, Ambedkar, Ram Manohar Lohia and others had been realized. The BSP - whose support base chiefly comes from the Dalits and the SP - whose support mainly constituted the Shudras - fought the election together around the twin notions of social justice and opposition to communal mobilisation. This extraordinary alliance was exalted and received with much enthusiasm by the lower castes, Muslims and progressive political observers alike. It was thought that the alliance was a fitting response to the BJP and its Hindutva ideology, which relies "on an organic view of

[302] Extract of a speech by Kanshi Ram, cited in Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Dalits assertion…,* p.122.

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society where castes are seen as the harmonious limbs of the same body",[303] thus neglecting social oppression, economic exploitation and political suppression of the lower castes and the Dalits. The SP-BSP alliance was also viewed as an appropriate response to the Indian National Congress's paternal and pseudo-secular politics. Further, the alliance, it was even claimed, was the beginning of 'real' secular politics and unity of the oppressed within the state. For instance, Mulayam Singh Yadav declared: "Secular unity has been achieved with the formation of the SP-BSP combine."[304] Thus, the alliance and its formation of a joint government have been viewed as democratisation of the Indian democracy that was looked upon as being traditionally not egalitarian, where political power was concentrated in the hands of the upper castes. Thus it was the harbinger for the destruction of the vertical social order.

If we look at the alliance between the two lower caste-based parties from the point of electoral gains, it did facilitate in improving their electoral tallies.[305] The SP won 109 seats and secured a share of 25.83 per cent of the votes, and the BSP won 67 seats and secured 11.11 per cent of the votes in the total percentage of votes polled. More importantly, immediately after the elections, a coalition government was also formed by the combine. While Mulayam Singh Yadav became the chief minister, the BSP obtained 11 out of 27 ministerial portfolios and the coalition began with a great show of comradeship. However, the coalition lasted for 16 months only, from November 1993 to June 1995. The split or the failure of the coalition government was said to be caused by personality clashes and political rivalries between the SP and BSP, but the reasons are more deep-rooted, well beyond those clashes and rivalries.

First, let us examine the events that took place during the course of the coalition. As both the parties were in their formative years (Mulayam Singh Yadav left the Samajwadi Janata Party to form the Samajwadi Party in 1993, just before the election to the State Assembly), each party wanted to gain maximum leverage out of the coalition. Both

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[303] See Hansen, B. Thomas. 1999. *The Saffron Wave: Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India.* New Delhi: OUP, pp: 60-89.

[304] *Frontline,* August 27, 1993, p. 35.

[305] In writing about the political alliance between the SP and BSP and subsequent failure of their coalition government, I have relied upon the work of Sudha Pai. 2002. *Dalit assertion…,* pp: 162-169.

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wanted to use their current power as a launching pad for their future politics. Yadav, in order to strengthen his hold over the administration and party, used his position as chief minister to favour people from his own caste (i.e.,Yadavas) in recruitment and promotions in the district administration. For instance, out of 900 teachers appointed in Kumaon and Garhwal districts, 700 teachers belonged to Yadava caste; and in the police force, out of 3,151 newly selected candidates, 1,223 were Yadavas.[306] The BSP and the Scheduled Castes Officers' Forum criticised such acts of the SP as the *Yadavisation* of the administration, which led to major tensions between the BSP and SP.

Yadav also made attempts to erode the support base of the BSP by wooing the latter's support groups, especially the Muslim and lower castes, into SP's fold. For instance, Muslims in the state regard Kanshi Ram as the champion of the Urdu language on account of his support for the teaching of Urdu language in UP. In order to take away that credit (of the champion of Urdu language) from Kanshi Ram and simultaneously to increase his supporters from among the Muslims, Yadav, it has been stated, took several steps for the promotion of Urdu.[307] For instance, he replaced Sanskrit with Urdu under the three-language formula and initiated the recruitment of Urdu teachers. Further, it appears that Yadav never missed a chance to encourage MLAs of other parties, particularly those that belonged to the OBC category, even those MLAs in the BSP, to defect to his own party so as to strengthen SP's position to form an independent government.[308] In fact, immediately after the BSP's decision of withdrawal of support to the coalition government, 13 BSP's legislators who belonged to the OBC category, joined the SP under the leadership of Raj Bahadur.[309]

Of course, it was also told that the BSP tried to make most out of its newly acquired power by interfering in the everyday functioning of the government. The resignation of Masud, one of the BSP ministers in the coalition government, was on the grounds of the dictatorial style of functioning of the BSP leadership, especially Mayawati. And the BSP

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[306] See *India Today,* 15 October 1994, pp: 35-37, cited in Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Op. cit.,* p. 166, *passim 8.*
[307] My interviews among the Muslims in Banda city in March, 2005.
[308] See 'Mulayam Singh seeking to win over more MLAs', *Times of India,* 21 February 1995.
[309] See *The Hindustan Times,* New Delhi, 3 June 1995.

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also made attempts to fortify its hold among the Dalit civil servants by placing demands for postings and transfers of Dalit bureaucrats.[310] In any case, making most out of political office is not unique either to the BSP or SP, or to individuals heading these parties. Rather, it is a game that nearly every political party and individual politician plays, to attain and retain political power. There exist substantive differences between the two social groups and the parties that they support (OBCs and Dalits), and also the differences that have been constructed around the concept of social justice.

First, as pointed out above, unlike the Dalits, the Shudras are part of the four-fold varna system. It is this aspect of their 'being part of the system', despite holding the lowest position within it that affords them access to social resources. Apart from a space for material improvement, theoretically, Hinduism also allows them to enter the Kshatriya-fold, the second highest rung in the social hierarchy. For instance, as god Sri Krishna belonged to the Yadava caste, it facilitates the Yadavas' claim for Kshatriya status. Similarly, Kurmis also claim their lineage to Kush, son of Sri Rama. In addition to the claims made by individual Shudra castes, Hindu social reform movements that emerged in late colonial India, such as Arya Samaj, were also willing to bestow Kshatriya status on them. The Shudras' claim for the Kshatriya status, as Ramaseshan asserts, was primarily to equip them psychologically to overcome their lower status in the ritualistic caste order.[311]

Secondly, what started as an act of equipping themselves psychologically became the norm among the Shudras. Almost all the Shudras who improved on their material condition began to claim Kshatriya status. Apparently this claim, especially in post-Independent India, particularly since the late 1970's, was not to equip themselves psychologically, but to differentiate the Shudras from the other marginalised communities and castes as well as to lord over them. For instance, during the political rallies organised by the SP, Mulayam Singh Yadav proudly calls himself as 'Sanatani

[310] See Mishra, Amaresh. 1994. UP Cracks in the Alliance. *EPW,* 29 (30), pp: 1907-8.
[311] Ramaseshan, Radhika. 1994. Dalit Politics in UP. *Seminar: The Monthly Symposium,* January, Annual Number 425, pp: 70-74.

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Hindu' and his caste followers take much pride in slogans such as 'Jai Shri Krishna'.[312] In other words, the Shudras were more than willing to inhabit the Hindu caste order.

Finally, there have always been conflicts between the Dalits and the OBCs in the countryside. To give one example, the land reforms after India's Independence and benefits of Green Revolution created a class of small farmers from the Yadava and Kurmi castes within the OBC category in the state in general and in eastern UP in particular.[313] Some Dalits in this region enjoyed agricultural prosperity, which resulted in their assertion against the domination of the upper castes and OBCs in the region. Although the upper caste *Rajputs,* as Sudha Pai points out, were worried about the increasing assertiveness of the Dalits, it was the OBCs, particularly the Yadavas and Kurmis, who were responsible for most of the atrocities against the Dalits.[314] "The backward classes," Pai emphasises, "were keen to keep the Dalits under them."[315] In a report, *The Times of India* observes that in the first five months of the SP-BSP coalition government's tenure, about 60 clashes took place between the Dalits and OBCs, in which 21 Dalits and 3 OBCs were killed.[316] The killing of Dalit youth who attempt to question the Shudras' social dominance, murders against Dalit political and social workers, abduction of Dalit girls and occupation of agricultural land owned by the Dalits are some of the brutalities the Shudras committed against the Dalits.[317]

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[312] Researcher's observations during the SP political rally in Banda, 20th March 2004. Also see Kumar, Pradeep., 1999. Dalits and BSP in Uttar Pradesh. *EPW,* 34 (14), pp: 822 – 826.

[313] Lerche, Jens. 1998. Agricultural Labourers, the State and Agrarian Transition in Uttar Pradesh. *EPW,* 31(13), pp: A29-35.

[314] Pai, Sudha. 2002. *Dalit assertion …,* p. 167.

[315] Ibid., p. 167.

[316] *The Times of India,* New Delhi, 2 March 1994.

[317] While examining the contemporary conflicts between the Backward Castes and Dalits, especially in South India, many observers emphasised on the economic factor as the chief reason behind such conflicts. For instance, Janaki Nair observes: "Shrinking opportunities for even agricultural work in the rural areas and the restricted opportunities in the urban or service sectors may yet mean that the cleavages along castes lines will still be deployed in the struggle for altogether slim pickings." – Janaki Nair. 1993. 'Fight for fairness: And the changing equations, *Frontline,* June 4, 1993, pp: 46-48. Although the economic factor is an important element in the conflicts between the Shudras and Dalits, one cannot simply underestimate the caste element, in such conflicts. For instance, a Shudra agricultural labourer without any hesitation might resort to fighting against a Dalit agricultural labourer, but he would think twice about engaging in a fight with either a Brahmin agricultural farmer or a Thakur farmer. My interviews in Mohabadab with Dalit and Shudra labourers during my field work in UP in 2004 and 2005.

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Even the SP's concept of social justice which centres on the idea of equality, also demonstrates their hunger for domination. In order to understand SP's concept of social justice, it may be suggested that we need to examine some of the arguments put forward by the proponents of reservations for OBCs during the Mandal debate.[318] Drawing arguments from the Mandal debate is for one simple reason. The SP's idea of social justice is a mere replication of the idea of social justice that was advocated by the proponents of OBC reservations during the Mandal debate. And whatever the arguments that were put forward by the SP in the later years are simply an extension of the Mandal concept of social justice.

One important feature in the Mandal debate on the issue of social justice was that the reservations were demanded not as a means to rectify economic inequalities suffered by the OBCs, but as a means to obtain social status and power.[319] For instance, Hukumdeo Narayan Yadav, [320] one of the chief advocates of reservations for the OBCs, argued: "Far more important than economic well being is status and honour in society. When a Harijan becomes a government officer he is recognised by society. But even if he has money but does not hold a government job, no one is prepared to even sit with him."[321] What is clear from Yadav's observation is that an individual's status and honour in society comes not from that individual's economic position, but from his holding a government job. It is important to understand here that the idea of 'holding a government job' does not exclusively relate to securing employment in the government sector. It also means, 'acquiring state power'. In a sense, being in charge of state power is seen as something that enhances the individual's (here a community's) social status and honour.

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[318] I borrowed aspects of the debate in Bajpai, Rochana. 2006. Redefining Equality: Social Justice in the Mandal Debate, 1990. In: Mehta, V. R. and Thomas Pantham., eds., *Political Ideas in Modern India: Thematic Explorations*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp: 326-339.

[319] Leaders of the Janata Dal (JD) repeatedly reiterated that quotas in government jobs were neither a means of securing basic material needs nor for improving economic well-being. For instance, V.P. Singh, the leading ideologue and architect of the politics of social justice, saw in reservations the potential for 'changing the social order' and creating a 'constituency of the backward, poor and vulnerable sections' to reverse the 'adverse bias in the socio-economic and political system against the weaker sections'. See Mustafa, Seema. 1995. *The Lonely Prophet: A Political Biography of V.P. Singh.* New Delhi: Wiley Eastern, p. 164, cited in Bajpai, Rochana. 2006. Redefining Equality… .

[320] During the Mandal controversy, Yadav was one of the leaders of the Janata Dal.

[321] Mulayam Singh Yadav in *Sunday Observer,* (Delhi), 2 September 1990, quoted in Bajpai, Rochana., 2006. Redefining Equality…

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From the above observations, what is clear is that the caste mobilisation[322] and deployment of the same in the political arena by the Shudras is to secure a share in the institutions – political, economical and educational – in which they were under-represented. Under-representation in the institutional spaces and therefore a representation for the under-represented is something that the Dalits have also been arguing about, and from that standpoint, there is little difference between the demand for representation by the Shudras and Dalits.

However, an important point of difference is that of ending the caste system.[323] Annihilating the caste system is important as it would lead to equality in social status among individuals (more on this in the next section). On the contrary, caste-based mobilisations of the Shudras are not to put an end to the caste structure, but simply to remove the upper castes from positions of power and privileges. This aspect in Shudra politics has been emphatically observed by Zoya Hasan: "The main purpose in the politicisation of caste and its employment in the competitive politics of democracy by the OBCs is not the abolition of the caste system, but the establishment of a political practice committed to the removal of upper castes from power and provisions…"[324] Removing the upper castes from the positions of power and with the Shudras occupying those positions, it was nothing but the replacement of one group of individuals by another group. Such a replacement would certainly not put an end to structural inequalities. This understanding is important, for it demonstrates the crucial differences over the concept of social justice between the SP and BSP.

Moreover, the Yadavs, Kurmis and Lodhs, and numerous other upper and middle caste groups within the Shudra category, were neither socially discriminated against nor economically exploited, but were only deprived of political power.[325] Hence, from the

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[322] Zoya Hasan, writing on the political mobilisations of the OBCs in UP, both in the colonial and post-Independence India, highlights two chief goals of such mobilisations: 'to secure recognition for their low caste status from the colonial government in order to get quotas in local representative bodies' and for 'reservations in post-Independence India'. See Hasan, Zoya. 1998. *Quest for power…,* p.121.

[323] Concept of Bahujan Samaj Party. In Atey, M. ed., 1997. *The Editorials of Kanshi Ram…,* pp: 155-168.

[324] Hasan, Zoya. 1998. *Quest for power…,* p.122.

[325] It must be established here that many so-called backward and middle castes, especially Jats and Yadavs, did not consider themselves socially inferior to any other castes. In fact, these groups assert their superior

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beginning, their target was political power and mobilisation through political parties. In other words, the pursuit of political power dominated the concerns of the leaders from the Shudra category. Consequently, their aspirations were channelled through electoral and party politics.[326] Thus, for Dalits, social justice is, in addition to securing a share in the political power and economic interests, a change in the alignment of social relations within civil society; whereas for the Shudras, it is one of the important means for securing a share in political power and economic interests. It is this difference that distinguishes these two groups and their advocacy of social justice. In fact, the policies for compensatory measures for Dalits are justified not on the grounds of their educational and economic backwardness, but on account of the extreme social discrimination they had suffered for centuries.[327]

To conclude our discussion on the Shudras and Dalits in UP, I have made three points. First, the breakup of the alliance between the Shudra-based SP and Dalit-based BSP was due to opportunistic politics practised by both the partners in alliance, while in power. Secondly, the social outlook of the Shudras, especially their attitude towards caste is different from that of the Dalits. While Dalit politics and activities aim to annihilate the caste system, the political and social activities of the Shudras aim to improve their social status by claiming Kshatriya status in the vertical social order, and thereby the desire to perpetuate an in-egalitarian social structure. Finally, political power in the form of social justice is sought by the Shudras in order to replace the upper castes from the positions of power and privileges, while the Dalits sought political power in order to democratise the

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social status vis-à-vis Dalits, and simultaneously, used their backwardness in relation to upper castes in order to gain the facilities and benefits of reservations.

[326]Ram Manohar Lohia, one of the towering personalities of the Indian socialist movement, proposed 60% of administrative jobs to be reserved for the lower castes. With this proposal, he also advocated the idea of dislodging the upper castes from positions of power and administration. 'I think that the *dwijas,* in special conditions, should not get government services.' See, Rammanohar Lohia's correspondence with R.L. Chandapuri in Mohan S. *et al* eds., 1997. *Evolution of Socialist Policy in India.* New Delhi: Janata Dal, p. 43. Although Rammanohar Lohia's proposal of dislodging of the upper castes from the positions of power was informed by certain strategic calculations, such as empowerment of the lower castes and due to the nature of caste system and inequalities, the notion of social justice for the OBCs appears to be informed by Lohia's advocacy. Mulayam Singh Yadav was the first politician to advocate the empowerment of the OBCs on the principle of exclusion of upper castes, and inclusion of Muslims and Dalits in a coalition to fight the upper castes. See Hasan, Zoya. 1998. *Quest…,* p.172.

[327] For a discussion on the differences in reservations for the Dalits and OBCs, see, Suri, K.C.1995. 'Competing Interests, Social Conflict and the Politics of Caste Reservations in India', *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics,* Vol. 2, pp: 236-7.

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social and political system. In the next section we shall see how the BSP proposed to achieve democratisation in the social and political arenas.

4. II. The BSP's idea of Social Justice[328]

On March 13, 2004, Sunil Kumar, a resident of Jhalu, a small town in Bijnor district, travelled to Lucknow, covering a distance of 398 km, to attend a rally organised by the BSP. After the rally, when he was waiting for the return train in Charbagh railway station, I asked Kumar why he travelled all that way to attend a half-day meeting in Lucknow. He responded to my question in just three words: *ijjat ke liye, maryaada ke liye, and samaan ke liye* (for respect, dignity and equality). [329] These are the three words that prominently came up in all my interviews with BSP supporters, most of whom were Dalits. Here we are painfully reminded that Ambedkar also uses the same words in his discussion on the 'annihilation of caste'.[330] The use of the same words by Dalits in 2004, which were used by Ambedkar in 1936, suggests continuous victimisation and non-recognition of the human agency of Dalits on account of their caste.

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The BSP, which claimed to restore *respect, dignity* and *equality* for Dalits, had drawn its ideology from the writings, speeches and activities of B. R. Ambedkar. The party, in its Election Manifesto in 1993, announced two specific programmes pertaining to the social and political fields. These programmes, according to the Party, were the guidelines to achieve social justice in an Indian society which is caste-ridden, and the polity is dominated by the *savarnas* (upper castes). It has mapped out the following as its objectives of social justice:

Five-fold struggle for social transformation

1. Restoration of human dignity and respect for individuals
2. To build a humane culture
3. Strive to achieve dignity of labour

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[328] The BSP, since its formation in 1984, has been claiming 'Ambedkarism' as its ideology and 'social justice' as its ideological vision. From this claim one would understand that social justice forms part of Ambedkarism. However, the Party has been using both the terms interchangeably. Until and unless specified, I shall also be using the two terms in similar fashion.

[329] Interview with Sunil Kumar, 13th March, 2004, Charbagh, Lucknow.

[330] See Ambedkar, B.R. 1989 [1936]. Annihilation of Caste. In: Moon, Vasant (comp.) *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches,* vol. 1, Bombay: Education Department, Government of Maharashtra, pp: 23-96.

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4. To achieve genuine pluralism
5. To eradicate inequalities among castes and communities so as to promote *bhaichara* (brotherhood) and thereby horizontalise the vertical social order

Five-fold programme for political power

1. To unite and organise the fragmented *Bahujan Samaj* for political power
2. To strengthen political democracy
3. To provide freedom and security to religious minorities
4. To protect the votes of the oppressed
5. To attack and eradicate corruption [331]

The above ideas in the BSP's concept of social justice could be summed up as: to horizontalise the vertical social order and to democratise the undemocratic political order. In the following, I attempt to examine these two aspects in two individual sub-sections.

4. IIA. Horizontalisation of the Vertical Order: The BSP's idea of, 'horizontalisation of the vertical social order' could be summed up in Kanshi Ram's analogy in all his public meetings to a pen (refer to this discussion in the previous chapter). Kanshi Ram holds a pen vertically and compares it with the Hindu social order. In the next step, he holds the pen horizontally and asserts that, just as he has repositioned the pen from a vertical to a horizontal angle, the BSP's mission is to reposition the vertical social order into a horizontal social order, and thereby achieve equality among the castes. In other words, placing the castes on equal footing is one of the objectives of the BSP. So, the question is, what did the BSP do to horizontalise the vertical social order?

The BSP and its Dalit constituency employed three strategies towards achieving the stated objective. The first strategy was to acknowledge caste identities in public places and public meetings with great pride. Caste-Hindu titles such as Pandey, Bhargav, Dwivedy, Thakur, Khare, Gupta, Varma, etc. were employed by the caste-Hindus both to identify their caste backgrounds as well as to demonstrate their social superiority over others. In all contexts, they used their caste titles as symbols of pride.[332] Caste identities of the Dalits, on the other hand, were used by the caste-Hindus as words of abuse, which

[331] 'Concept of *Bahujan* Samaj Party'. In Atey, M., ed. 1997. *The editorials...,* pp: 155-168.

[332] The disease of displaying caste identities as symbols of pride is not confined to ordinary people. Academics who built their careers by theorising caste happily practise caste in their everyday lives. Otherwise how could one explain Bhargava in Rajeev Bhargava, Gupta in Dipankar and Pandey in Gyan Pandey, Kothari in Rajni Kothari, Deshpande in Satish Deshpande and Hegde in Sasheej Hegde.

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is nothing but an act of denying the human dignity of the former. For instance, the word 'Chamar' and 'animal' are interchangeably used by the caste-Hindus: "The upper castes do not make any difference between Chamars and animals" (*savarna-log chamarko janvar samasthe*). This demonstrates the upper castes' attitude against the Chamars in particular, and Dalits in general. And at times, the upper castes use these terms to humiliate not only the Dalits, but also other people from the caste-Hindu background. It is because of the stigma and humiliation attached to the caste titles of the Dalits that no Dalit, unless forced by circumstances, would ever dare or wish to disclose his/her identity. "It is a way of piercing our eyes with our fingers," i.e., using Dalit identities to humiliate the Dalits themselves.[333]

But Dalits began to look positively at their identities since the '80's, especially after BSP's work. Mayawati in all her public political meetings begins her addresses by introducing herself as: *Mai chamar ki beti hoo, my Dalit ki beti hoo* (I am the daughter of Chamars, I am the daughter of the Dalits). After that, she would call the names of several Dalit castes, as if she is chanting a *mantra* - the Mahashahs, the Satnamis, the Balmikis, the Pasis, the Dhobis, the Koris, the Muzhabis, the Mujhwars, etc - welcoming them to the meeting.[334] As Mayawati calls out these names, the audience is filled with happiness and pride, akin to that of the caste-Hindus in their caste identities, and acknowledge their approval by applauding throughout.

At this point, one might doubt that BSP's idea of Dalit assertions around their humiliated caste identities is moving away from Ambedkar's idea of 'annihilation of caste'. Gaya Charan Dinakar, a BSP MLA from Baberu assembly segment in Banda district points out that "the BSP's idea of 'equalisation of castes' should not be treated as the party's shift away from Ambedkar's ideology."[335] The Party's call for 'equality of castes', according to Dinakar, is in consonance with Ambedkar's vision, and the change in focus from the individual to caste is only a shift in the strategy. Dinakar further explains that although Ambedkar's vision of a casteless society is theoretically flawless, the strategy that he

[333] Interview, Ram Charan, a cobbler, December 14, 2004, Lucknow,
[334] Based on attendance at several rallies and public meetings of the BSP.
[335] My interview with Gaya Charan Dinakar at his residence in Baberu (March 21-23, 2004)

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proposed towards the realisation of such a vision has a flaw: "If individuals are part of castes and if those castes are part of a hierarchically organised social order, then the first step towards the realisation of an individual-based society would be equalisation of castes rather than annihilation of castes."[336]

What Dinakar is arguing is that caste, whether one accepts or denies it, is a reality in India, and in order to realise Ambedkar's vision of equality of individuals, one must work with this reality rather than do away with it. Because, he argues, a lack of respect and dignity for an individual, especially for Dalits, is on account of his caste identity. In a sense, if an individual from the Dalit community is discriminated against and humiliated by the caste-Hindu society, it is not because of that individual's appalling character but because of his caste, which is considered to be appalling for the *savarnas* (the caste-Hindus). "And what we are trying", claims Dinaker, "is to weaken that caste mindset by using our caste". Thus, it is here that we witness an interesting way of using caste by the BSP and Dalits. Through a positive assertion of caste identities, they are not merely making positive their humiliated identities but equally, also subverting the caste hierarchy and its ideology.

The second strategy has been adapting and attaching the caste titles to individual proper names. Attaching caste titles/identities to individuals' proper names has been practised by the upper castes and Shudras for a long time. The lower castes, especially the Dalits, never tried to attach their respective caste titles. The caste identity of an individual in society is primarily about the name of the caste to which he/she belongs. If this is so, then why do only the individuals that belong to the upper castes (and Shudra community) attach their respective caste identities to their proper names, *why not* those from the lower castes, especially the Dalits (*hum kyo nahi,* questions Ajay Kumar.[337]

The reasons for the act of attaching or not attaching caste titles by the upper castes and Dalits respectively are well known to most Indians. The caste identity of an upper caste

[336] Ibid.
[337] My interview with Ajay Kumar in Lucknow on March 13, 2004.

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does not simply connote only to the name of the caste to which an individual belongs, it also signifies many other things. To begin with, it identifies the location of the caste of an individual in the hierarchical social order. 'Location' is a very crucial aspect, as it empowers upper caste individuals to demand respect from others, especially those from the lower rungs. The caste identity is also a matter of pride for the upper caste individuals, a pride that psychologically boosts their confidence in themselves. In fact, upper caste identity makes the upper caste individuals feel special. Having said that, it is important to note here that in normal circumstances people have to work in order to have pride in themselves and to gain respect from others which in turn, translates in their feeling good about themselves and having a positive outlook. In a way, the caste identity bestows on the upper castes basic psychological ingredients, such as a positive identity, respect and pride which are essential in making them confident individuals. If the caste identity for upper castes means respect, pride and a positive outlook, then what does it mean for lower caste individuals, especially for the Dalits?

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As I have mentioned earlier, pride in one's own identity and commanding respect from others are basic psychological ingredients in the making of a confident and positive outlook in individuals. Dalits, who are kept at the lower rung of the social hierarchy, are treated with contempt by the upper castes as well as other castes which are on top in the social ladder. In other words, the system of caste-fixed gradations among castes is as Dr Ambedkar argued, "with an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt".[338] And Dalits, who are to face disrespect and hatred in their everyday life, suffer mental agonies and lose not just confidence in themselves, but more importantly, their very humanness. This is the reason why Ambedkar asserted that the Dalit battle is, "a battle for the reclamation of the human personality".[339]

In order to reclaim their human personality, the Dalits in the state, just like the caste-Hindus, began to attach their respective caste titles to their names. For instance, Soma

[338] Ambedkar, B.R. 1990 [1946]. Who were the Shudras? How They came to be the Fourth Varna in the Indo-Aryan Society? In: Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, *Writings and Speeches,* Vol. 7, Bombay: Government of Maharashtra, p. 25.
[339] Cited in Dhananjay, Keer. 1971. *Dr. Ambedkar: Life and Mission. B*ombay: Popular Prakashan, p. 351.

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Sunder became Soma Sunder Jatav or Soma Sunder Chamar and Naresh became Naresh Balmiki. It may be mentioned here that the adaptation of the title 'Jatav' or 'Balmiki' was not a new phenomenon among the Dalits in UP. In the late early 1920's, during the heyday of Arya Samaj politics in colonial North India, some of the Chamars who joined Arya Samaj adapted the 'Jatav' title to claim their lineage with Sri Krishna. But the Chamars' adaptation of the same title in the late 1980's was in a different context, which entailed a different line of thinking. There is no mention of Sri Krishna or the invoking of caste myths that usually link up Chamars with Brahmins. In tune with the BSP's positive assertion of caste identities, the Dalits adapted their caste titles in a secular fashion.

In a way, the strategies of suffixing of Dalit caste titles to the individuals' names and the public acknowledgement of such caste identities are positive moves: they are acts of recognising social identities till now unrecognised and not respected; but more importantly, also to claim social equality. Although BSP's strategies are diametrically opposed to the strategies proposed by Ambedkar, the BSP is in complete conformity with Ambedkar's idea of annihilation of caste. Whether the BSP's strategies would result in the annihilation of caste is something which cannot be answered just yet, but they have certainly equipped the Dalits positively and paved the way for social equality between and among castes in UP society. We will witness similar adaptation of caste identities by the Dalits in AP in the sixth chapter.

The final strategy is that of deflating the pride of the upper castes on account of their caste identities. Some of the titles and caste identities which were supposed to be an exclusive preserve of the caste-Hindus are being adapted by the Dalits. For instance, titles and caste identities such as Choudhury, Singh, Verma, Pandey, Shukla, etc. were adapted by the Dalits, especially by the educated and the middle-classes among them. The individuals who adapted these titles justified their act on two grounds. First, they acknowledged that the moment they disclose their (original) names - names that do not contain caste tags - they are immediately recognised as people belonging to lower caste backgrounds and consequently, their treatment by others also changed. The use of such

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titles was, thus, a strategy to avoid 'constant pain of being mistreated' by others.[340] Second, it was claimed that as long as Dalits used their 'real' caste titles, these had become weapons for the *savarnas* to abuse them. "Now that we have adapted their caste titles, despite their anger and annoyance, the caste-Hindus would have to address us with respect. Otherwise they would be disrespecting their own castes."[341]

Commenting on the importance of ritual actions in moulding hierarchical relationships, Chris Fuller observes:

> Ritual action in particular is the context in which hierarchical relationships – between castes, rulers and subjects, or men and women as well as between deities and human beings – are repeatedly being constructed, and even when such relationships are not homologous with others outside the religious domain, the former are always presented as a model of how the world might or even should be.[342]

Although a small percentage of Dalits in UP either converted to Christianity and Buddhism or became followers either of Kabir or Ravidas Panthis, a large percentage of them were still in the Hindu fold. Their being part of the 'Hindu community', however, did not mean that they accepted their 'status' in the caste hierarchy. In fact, the most potent challenge to caste hierarchy and Brahmanical Hinduism came from those Dalits who followed Hinduism. For instance, for the last nearly twenty years, the Chamars did not invite Brahmins to conduct ritual performances or marriage ceremonies. "The Chamars' decision to stop calling the Brahmin priests", observes Manuela Ciotti, "is a political and symbolic statement in their strategy of challenging hierarchical relations and touches on the essential rules of Hinduism.'[343] Although this phenomenon, explains Vivek Kumar, was not a new one, it increased after the emergence of the BSP.[344] One among them with knowledge of Sanskrit would be the *pujari* and would conduct all their rituals, including the marriage ceremonies.

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[340] Interviews with Surendar Singh, a Chamar by caste and manager of a computer centre in Lucknow, December 16, 2004; Ravinder Choudhury, March 11, 2004, Hathara.
[341] Interview with Raj Bhupal, March 20, 2004, Jhansi.
[342] Fuller, Chris. 1997. Introduction: Caste Today. In: Fuller, C., ed., *Caste Today.* New Delhi: OUP, p. 11, *passim* 8.
[343] Ciotti, Manuela. 2006. In the past we were a bit "Chamar": education as a self-and-community engineering process in northern India. *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.), 12, pp: 899-916.
[344] Discussions with Dr. Vivek Kumar, Lecturer, Dept. of Sociology, JNU, New Delhi.

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In northern India, with the emergence of Kabir and Ravidas Panthis during the medieval period, they urged the Dalits to realise God on their own, i.e., without the help of a Brahmin or a middle man, and this tradition continued during the anti-Brahmin movement among the lower castes and Dalits in the nineteenth century. O'Hanlon argues that, 'by the end of the 1880's, the performance of religious ceremonies without the assistance of Brahmans had come to occupy an important place in non-Brahman activity throughout the Deccan.'[345] For Manuela Ciotti, such performance by the Chamars is their 'desire to be part of the mainstream religious culture, in contrast with their caste's history of ritual exclusion.'[346] It is true that Dalits have always nurtured the desire to be part of mainstream society. However, that does not mean they wanted to be a part of mainstream religious culture - a culture that did not treat them as equals. What they were doing, in my opinion, was inventing a religious tradition of their own - a Hindu religious tradition that did not involve Brahmins. If their desire was to be part of mainstream religious culture, they would have invited Brahmins to perform their religious as well as marriage ceremonies, thereby accepting the standing social order. If the strategies of acknowledging caste identities in public places and meetings, attaching caste titles to individuals' names, and adapting upper caste titles by the lower castes have been deployed by the Dalits and the BSP to horizontalise the vertical social order so as to bring equality among the castes, then what did the BSP do to democratise the political arena which has been dominated by the upper castes?

4. IIB. Democratization of undemocratic Political Order: The Indian political order, for the BSP, is an undemocratic order for one simple reason: it denied "equality of political opportunity for all". The denial, however, is not an inherent character of the order. But the Indian system has acquired that character on account of the control and dominance by the upper castes. By virtue of such control, the upper castes have been appropriating not just the national resources for their own benefit, but also controlling opportunities of the *bahujans* (read the lower castes). And it is only through the realisation of political power by the marginalised sections, it has been argued by the leadership of the BSP, that

[345] O'Hanlon, R., 1985. *Caste, conflict and ideology*…p. 301.
[346] Ciotti, Manuela. 2006. In the past …., pp: 899-916.

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political control of the upper castes can be wiped out and social equilibrium achieved: that is, "restore to the majority the power to decide, by doing so we will democratise the political order".[347] To put the same in the words of Kanshi Ram: "Political power is the *guru-killi* (master-key), which enables its wielders to open every lock, whether social, political, economic or cultural."[348] But, how did the BSP propose to acquire political power? Before we answer this question, it is suggested that we look at the political situation in UP prior to the emergence of the lower caste-based political parties.

Prior to the emergence of lower caste-based political parties in the 1980's, more than three decades after India's Independence, the political order in UP had been dominated by the upper castes. The following Table delineates the point:

Table 4.1: Caste and Community Representation in the UP Assembly, 1952-74 (in %)[349]

Castes & Communities	1952	1957	1962	1967	1969	1974
Upper castes	58	55	58	45.3*	43.9*	45.8*
Intermediate castes	3	3	2	-	--	----
OBCs	9	12	13	29.2	26.8	28.4
SCs	20	21	22	--#	20.9	16.3
Muslims	10	9	7	5.6	8.2	9.6
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

* Includes Bhumihar, Tyagi, Vyshya, Kayasth, and Khatri.
# Data is unavailable

As the above Table demonstrates, since the early 1950's and until the mid-1970's, the upper castes had been controlling political power largely, to the exclusion of the lower castes in the state. The emergence of the lower caste-based political parties, both the SP and BSP, effectively questioned this upper caste domination and facilitated an increase in

[347] My interview with Ram Kishore Varma, 14 March, 2004, Lucknow.
[348] Kanshi Ram as quoted in Dubey, Abhay Kumar. 2001. Anatomy of a Dalit Player: A Study of Kanshi Ram. In: Shah, Ghanshyam., ed., *Dalit Identity and Politics.* New Delhi: Sage. Also see *Indian Express,* 05 January 1998. By the time I began my fieldwork in UP, Kanshi Ram was bedridden with a paralytic stroke. Most of my information on the idea of 'political power' comes from other leaders in the BSP, as well as from media reports.
[349] Meyer, Richard. 1969. The Political Elite in an Under-Developed Society: The Case of Uttar Pradesh in India. Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, p. 89, cited in Jaffrelot, C. 2007. Caste and the Rise of Marginalized Groups. In: Ganguly, Sumit *et al.,*eds., *The State of India's Democracy,* Baltimore:The Johns Hopkins University Press, p.76.

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the lower castes' share in UP's political power structure. However, it should be recognised, once again here that the end logic of the politics of the Shudra-based SP is that of reversing the earlier situation. That is to say, while earlier it was the domination of the upper castes, now it became the domination by the lower castes. However, the BSP's method of caste-based distribution of Party tickets, as we would see below ensured the presence of not just the lower castes but the upper castes as well in the power structure. And this form of social distribution of power was the essence of BSP's idea of democratisation of the undemocratic political order. In a way, BSP's politics is not to reverse the earlier situation but to infuse equality in that situation, and in what follows I will attempt to examine how the party sought to democratise the undemocratic order.

According to Kanshi Ram, restoring power to the powerless involved two stages. In the first stage, the *Bahujans,* in the vanguard of the BSP, would capture state power. This would be done not by means of violence, but by means of the 'ballot box', i.e., by taking part in the electoral process. In the second stage, the Party, by making use of the state, would initiate programmes such as providing better wages and good working conditions which would empower the marginalised, thereby leading to a social transformation.[350] In a way, the BSP sought political power for a dual purpose: (a) to secure an opportunity for the socially marginalised and politically voiceless to be part of the political rule and, thus, democratise the undemocratic political order, and (b) to use the state to empower the marginalised and thereby bring about social transformation. How the BSP used state power to empower the marginalised is the focus of my discussion in the next section.

The BSP's idea of 'Democratisation of the undemocratic order' may be summed up in one of its political slogans: *jiski jitni sankhya bhari – uski utni bhagedari* (representation on the basis of numbers). Political power should be distributed equally among all the castes on the basis of each caste's weight in the total population. Indeed, caste-wise distribution of the Party's tickets became a main strategy for mobilizing and involving every caste in the state's political process. The table below illustrates this aspect:

[350] Pai, Sudha (2002), pp: 121 -126.

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Table 4.2: Caste and community of the BSP MLAs (in %) (1989-2002)

Caste & Community	1989	1991	1993	1996	2002
Upper Castes			1.5	13.5	16.6
Brahmin			1.5	4.5	6.8
Rajput				6	6.8
Banya					1.3
Bhumihar				1.5	1.3
Kayasth				1.5	
Intermediate Castes	**22.8**	**91.4**		**1.5**	**1.3**
Jat				1.5	1.3
OBC			44.7	42	39.7
Yadav	7.6	16.6	14.9	1.5	2.7
Kurmi	7.6	16.6	7.5	12	10.9
Lodhi			1.5	1.5	4.1
Koeri					1.3
Shakya				1.5	1.3
Rajbhar		8.3	2.9	3	1.3
Saini					2.7
Pal/Gadaria				6	2.7
Kashyap					1.3
Kushwaha			1.5	6	2.7
Muraon/Maurya				3	2.7
Nishad		8.3	1.5	4.5	1.3
Bhagel				1.5	1.3
Gujar					1.3
Other	7.6	41.6	14.9	1.5	2.7
Scheduled Castes	**38.4**		**34.3**	**27.2**	**25.9**
Jatav				16.6	20.5
Pasi				7.6	4.1
Khatik				1.5	
Other				1.5	1.3
Muslim	**30.7**	**8.3**	**16.4**	**16.6**	**10.9**
Non-identified			2.9		

Source: Centre of South Asian Studies: Occasional Paper No 2, University of Cambridge.[351]

If we pay close attention to the above Table, we can easily discern the differential rate of distribution of seats among various castes and communities over a period of time. We see that for the assembly elections in 1989 and 1991 we do not find any representation for the upper castes. A majority of the seats have been distributed between the OBCs and Dalits. However, we notice a change in representation since 1993. The upper caste also began to find a place in BSP's representation, and their share in the Party's representation increased from 1.5 percentage in 1993 to 16.6 percentage in 2002. Interestingly, during

[351] Jaffrelot, Christophe. 2005. The BSP in Uttar Pradesh: party of the Dalits or of the Bahujans – or catch – all-party? Occasional Paper No.2, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of Cambridge.

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this period of gradual growth in representation for the upper castes in the Party, there was a simultaneous decline in representation for the OBCs.

The BSP, which started to mobilise the lower castes against the *manuvadis* with fierce slogans, such as *Brahmin, Bania, Thakur chhod! Baaki sab hai DS-4* (All the castes and communities, except the Brahmins, Banias and Thakurs, are part of the DS-4); *Tilak, tarazu aur talwar, inko maaro jootey chaar* (the Brahmins, Banias and Thakurs should be beaten up with the sandal), distributing its seats of representation among the upper castes may be a surprising development. But one should not read too much into that development, for any political party that wants to gain political power in a democratic framework ends up widening its space of representation so as to accommodate as many social groups as possible. Moreover, for the BSP, which has taken-up the path of caste-based distribution of political seats in order to democratise the political space, cannot refuse seats of representation for the upper castes as such refusal would simply go against its political objective.

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Yet, it is important to recognise that the turn of events – simultaneous growth and decline in the representation of the upper castes and OBCs respectively - is not a simple one at that. In the previous section, we examined at length the electoral alliance between the SP and BSP, the reasons for the failure of the coalition government formed by the two parties, and the larger conflicting interests between the Shudras and Dalits. The failure of the coalition and the increased incidence of violence against the Dalits by the Shudras forced the BSP to climb down from the utopian notion of unity of the oppressed and open its eyes to the realities at the grassroots. The turn of events is also important for another reason. They facilitated a rethinking in the Party's attitude towards various social groups, and thereby, in its ideology, which in turn, led to further caste-wise distribution in the representation of seats since 1996.

Allocating the Party tickets on the basis of caste meant the Party's earlier criticism against *manuvadis* and its slogans against the upper castes such as, *'Brahmins, Baniya, Thakur, Chhod! Baki Sab hai DS-4'* were no more in the lexicon. Inviting the upper

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castes into the fold of the BSP, Mayawati observes: "BSP is no more a caste-based party because it has adopted the policy of *Sarvajan Hit*a (welfare of all castes)…the Party now wants to take the help of all to remove the disparities prevailing in society."[352] Starting from the 1996 Lok Sabha's elections, the Party began to nominate candidates in proportion to the caste and community breakdown in society. Out of 85 candidates, the BSP fielded 17 Muslims (20%), 20 Dalits (23.5%), 38 OBCs (45%) and 10 upper castes (12%) – five Brahmins and five Rajputs.[353] Caste-wise distribution of the party's tickets was further crystallised in the state legislative elections in 2007. Out of 403 assembly seats, the BSP allocated 139 seats to upper castes (89 Brahmins, 38 Thakurs, 14 Vaishya and 1 Kayasthas), 110 to OBCs, 93 to Dalits and 61 to Muslims. This form of allocation of tickets actually led the BSP's success in the 2007 assembly elections and helped it to form a government, for the first time on its own strength.

The caste-wise distribution of seats of representation and the strategy of *sarvajan* might have resulted in the electoral success of the BSP, but it is important to ask: why did various castes join the BSP and what is the implication of this form of distribution among the upper caste- dominated political order in particular and the democratic framework in general? Below, I will try and trace the reasons for the rallying of various castes into the fold of the BSP, and later, I shall comment on the larger implications of this caste-based distribution of political seats.

Many of my Dalit respondents have confided that they do not sincerely think that those who joined the BSP from the upper castes did so because they genuinely believed either in the Bahujan Samaj or Sarvajan Samaj.[354] "Had the *savarnas* been sincere about the Bahujan Samaj why would they continue to beat us and kill our people and rape our women," questions Somesh Singh, a BSP worker from Banda.[355] And Ram Prasad Jatav,

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[352] *The Pioneer,* 20 February 1998.

[353]. The total number of Lok Sabha seats prior to the bifurcation of UP into Uttaranchal (later on Uttarkhand) and Uttar Pradesh was 85; after the bifurcation while the Uttarkhand got 5 Lok Sabha seats, the rest remained in UP. See *The Hindu,* 11 August, 1996.

[354] My interviews with Ratan Lal, Ashok Nandu, Raja Singh, Om Prakash, Pyarelala in Lucknow on 12-13, March, 2004. All are BSP's party workers.

[355] Interviews with Somesh Singh and other Dalits in Bundelkhand region, Lucknow and Delhi durng December, 2003, February and March, 2004.

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a Chamar youth and a BSP activist from Chitrakoot, responds to this question: "They joined the BSP simply because we can make them win and through our Party they could get either the contracts[356] or get their work done".[357]

The Dalits' apprehensions about the upper castes in the BSP can be substantiated from different points. First, the upper castes' previous political allegiances and the struggle for political power among themselves: during the early 1990's, when the BJP was in the seat of power in UP, apart from the OBCs, particularly Lodhs and Kurmis, most of the upper castes - the Brahmins, Thakurs and Vaishya - constituted its supporting base. Despite competition for power among these ambitious and divergent castes, the BJP was able to keep them united under its banner with skillful distribution of power among them. For instance, in its five stints in power during 1991– 2002, the BJP reallocated power from time to time among the competing castes by changing chief ministers, i.e., Kalyan Singh, a Lodh; Ram Prakash Gupta, a Vaishya; and Rajnath Singh, a Thakur.

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With the electoral success of the SP and BSP, and when the BJP was reduced to a third position in the state, both the upper castes as well as OBCs began to migrate either to SP or BSP, largely to the former. Of course, this migration was also supported by these parties to gain electoral dividends. For instance, the SP, through Amar Singh Thakur, the party's Thakur mascot, attracted a large number of Thakurs into its fold. The Party also succeeded in attracting a considerable number of Vaishya from the BJP through its Vaishya leaders like Shyama Charan Gupt, a business tycoon in the Bundelkhand region. Interestingly, despite the change of party, the old feuds and competition for power did not subside among the upper castes. In fact, such struggles for power among different upper castes further intensified as they joined the SP. For instance, while the Thakurs and Vaishya were fighting to get second-level leadership, the Yadavas – the power wielder in SP – felt a constant threat to their leadership as the Thakurs began to fill the rank and file of the Party. And of all these social groups, only the Brahmins had become 'political untouchables' due to the weakening of the BJP and a lack of presence for their former

[356] Public works, such as laying of roads and repairing canals that would be undertaken by the private individuals.
[357] Interview with Ram Prasad Jatav in Chitrakoot, 24 November 2004.

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political bastion – the Congress, from the point of electoral victories. All these socially dominant but politically desperate castes were left with no choice, as they could not gain political strength on their own. They had to join either the SP or BSP.

Second, although initially some of the upper caste groups such as Thakurs and Vaishya joined SP, they were apprehensive about the Party's penchant for power and its record of social and political *goondaism,* corruption and criminalisation of politics. While the association with a 'criminalised' SP may not have tainted their reputation in the long run, the 'excesses' of the SP while in power, between 1993 and 1995 and again between 2003 and 2007 appear to have vexed all sections in UP. Thus in such a complex political environment, the BSP appeared to be the only political party that could serve the interests of the upper castes better. Of course, the Dalits were also using the political alignment to actualise their goals. The BSP party cadre justified the Party's distribution of tickets to the upper castes from the standpoint of fighting with the system and not with the *manuvadis.* In the words of Raj Vijay, a BSP office-bearer: "Our fight is against the system. This is the only way the BSP can capture power on its own."[358] But these justifications and rationale apart, what is the significance of the caste-based distribution of party tickets in a caste-dominated political order in particular and a democratic framework in general?

Although India has formally adopted the system of democracy it was functioning in an undemocratic fashion for several decades after Independence because of the caste system. The information pertaining to the caste and community of the representatives in the UP Assembly from 1952 to 1974 given in Table 3.1 clearly demonstrated the dominance of the upper castes, which constituted a minority in the overall population. The lower castes, despite their majority in numbers, have remained in the category of the 'ruled'. This phenomenon, as pointed out by Kanshi Ram, is nothing but the rule of the minority over the majority under the veil of democracy. By adopting the method of caste-based distribution of seats in political representation, the BSP has shown a path to bring in the hitherto neglected and excluded castes into the process of democracy, and thereby, laying

[358] Interview with Raj Vijay, BSP General Secretary, Mau district, 10 January, 2004.

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a path to democratise the undemocratic order. Yet, it is important to recognise that this method of distribution also leads to turning away castes with small population sizes from the democratic process. For instance, in UP there are 66 Dalit castes, which together making up 21% of the state's population. According to the 2001 Census, the Chamars/Jatavs constituted of 56% within the Scheduled Caste population. The Pasis constituted 16%, while the third rung comprising Dhobis, Koris and Balmikis made up another 15%. The fourth rung comprising Gonds, Dhanuks, and Khatiks constituted about 5%. Of these four groups of castes, the BSP generally distributed its SC reserved seats in the state legislative assembly and Lok Sabha among the Chamars and Pasis. We hardly see any representation for Gonds, Dhanuks and Khatiks.

To conclude our discussion on the BSP's idea of social justice, I have noted the two essential elements in the BSP's rhetoric of social justice: (a) horizontalisation of the vertical order, and (b) democratisation of the undemocratic political order. In order to horizontalise the social order, the BSP recognised and acknowledged the hitherto humiliated and shunned social identities of the lower castes, and on their part, the Dalits began to proudly attach their caste titles to their names. With these strategies, although the upper castes are not affected directly, they essentially puncture the pride embodied in the caste identities of the savarnas. And in order to realise its second objective, the BSP began to distribute its party tickets to all the castes in the society on the basis of each caste's weight of the population. Although this method of distribution might reduce the domination of the upper castes in the representation sphere and bring the more and more neglected castes and communities into that sphere, it will also turn away those caste groups with small population sizes. The strategies of a hortizontal social order and the democratisation of the political order surely instilled social confidence among the lower castes and secured their political representation, but in addition to these two aspects, what did the BSP do for social transformation in general and emancipation of the Dalits in particular while in power? We shall examine this question in the next section.

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4. III Using State

In the previous section we have discussed that democratising the undemocratic political order and transforming the society in which people live with dignity and respect was the essence of BSP's idea of political power. We have also discussed how the BSP tried to democratise the political order by distributing Party seats, and thereby political power, among all castes and communities on the basis of their weight in the total population. But the question is after assuming political power what did the BSP do? To ask differently, how did the BSP rule the state and whether their rule led to the transformation of society, as it always claimed? These questions assume importance in the wake of transfer of political power from the hands of upper castes to lower castes and also in the wake of criticism against the BSP's use of power. For instance, Barbara Joshi, in one of her essays, '*Whose Law, Whose Order? "Untouchables," Social Violence, and the State in India*,' poses a question: "Is the state always a passive instrument reflecting the will of those who dominate society and economy, or could it be an instrument of change?"[359] The state in India, without any doubt, has been an instrument of change. But those changes, as observed by Pranab Bardhan, are conditioned by the state's requirement for the sheen of legitimacy among the subalterns.[360] This means that the changes were allowed by those dominating to the extent that those changes did not alter existing power equations. If this is so, would the lower castes and lower classes act differently if they got political power in their hands?

Similarly, some of the programmes and policies pursued by the BSP while in power have become subjects of intense criticism. Two aspects of such criticism are noteworthy: the lack of a concrete economic policy and the state-funded statues of Ambedkar. On the second aspect, scholars like Sudipta Kaviraj felt that, except for giving some political prestige, the installation of statues of Ambedkar, "does nothing to alter the structural bases of privilege in education, health and other opportunities which serve to reproduce

[359] Joshi, R.B. 1982. Whose Law, Whose Order: "Untouchables," Social Violence, and the State in India. *Asian Survey,* 22(3), pp: 676 – 687, here, p. 678.
[360] Bardhan, Pranab. 1984. *The political economy of development in India.* Oxford: Blackwell.

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the inequalities against which the politics of the lower castes is directed."[361] Although I am sympathetic to this argument, for me the importance of Ambedkar statues, as argued below, lies not to arrogate to the Dalits their political prestige or the democratisation of public space.

On the first aspect, it was argued that the BSP, unlike most mainstream political parties, does not have a guiding philosophy on the economic front. Such a deficiency on the part of the BSP has become one of the most potent weapons of criticism in the hands of its political opponents, the academia and the media. For instance, Sudha Pai in her 'Deprivation and Development in UP: The Economic Agenda of the BSP' has taken a firm stand against the Party and criticised it for the lack of an economic agenda.[362] Her three major points of criticism are: First, the BSP, despite its claim of being an Ambedkarite Party, neither follows Ambedkar's economic philosophy, i.e., 'State Socialism',[363] nor devises a comprehensive alternative economic agenda for the Dalits. Secondly, for Pai, the BSP's concentration on the economic empowerment of the Dalits while the Party was in power, is 'doling out a kind of 'retributive social justice' to Dalits, rather than promoting general development of the State which is interlinked with the development of the Dalits. She asks, "Can there be sectional development in the larger context of under-development in UP?"[364] And thirdly, the developmental programmes undertaken by the Party in the name of Dalits, are in practice helpful to only a section of the Dalits rather than the community as a whole.[365]

For me, the first point of Pai's criticism is not merely uncharitable, but also illogical. For, being an Ambedkarite party does not mean that the BSP has to axiomatically follow

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[361] Kaviraj, Sudipta. 2002 [2000]. 'Democracy and Social Inequality', in Frankel, R. Francine *et al.,* eds., *Transforming India: Social and Political Dynamics of Democracy.* Delhi: OUP, pp: 89 – 199, here p. 113. I am actually surprised at the sudden urge on the part of the caste-Hindu academics, working under the veil of Left intellectualism, to comment on the installation of Ambedkar statues. I wonder why they did not write anything earlier when Ambedkar statues were being demolished and humiliated by the caste-Hindu mob.

[362] Pai, Sudha. 2003. Deprivation and Development in UP: The Economic Agenda of the BSP. *Man and Development,* 25(1), pp: 35-54.

[363] For a critical assessment of Ambedkar's 'State Socialism', see Omvedt, Gail (1994), pp: 231 - 240

[364] Pai, Sudha Pai. 2003. Deprivation…, p. 36.

[365] Ibid., pp: 35-54.

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everything that Ambedkar had proposed or done. The historical circumstances, in which Ambedkar was operating, were different from those of the BSP. The dawn of independence had created an atmosphere of great confidence and belief, not just for Ambedkar but also for most of the Indian national leaders. They were all more confident that through Constitutional means they could undo what 200 years of British rule did to India and reconstruct an India of their choice.

Ambedkar's idea(lism) of 'State Socialism' calls for the rationalisation not only of basic industries but also of land and its working in collective forms, with peasants treated as tenants of the state. The idea of collective farming is highly impractical in the Indian social context of caste. And six decades have passed by, yet India is at a historical economic juncture, where local problems are no longer merely local, but are intricately connected with global problems. The idea of 'State Socialism', as proposed by Ambedkar, in the present circumstances is not only gigantic, but also a near impossible task. If that is so, then working for a Herculean task which is certainly unrealistic, simply wastes precious energy and the lives of generations of Dalits, retarding their historical progress.

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Pai's second point of criticism can be responded from two vantage points. First, let us reverse her question: since an element is a part of a whole – can the 'whole' be developed without developing a 'part'? If the 'whole' is something – then that something is actually constituted by some (different) parts; and until and unless each part is developed, the whole cannot become 'something' or developed. Despite that partial development, if one were to call it development, then such development is lopsided rather than absolute development. Of course, I am aware that the idea of 'absolute development' is a myth. Secondly, the Dalits have been neglected for centuries and even in post-Independence India, if they were to become vulnerable to such negligence, one should rightly call it as 'intentional' negligence rather than 'unintentional'. Rectification of such intentional negligence requires some form of concerted effort to undo the historical injustice against the Dalits. And finally, from the point of availability of resources in UP, no state in the post-Independence era has sufficient resources at any given point of time. Despite

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conditions of resource crunch, all the ruling parties until the early 1990's have managed, *within the limited resources,* to develop upper castes. The crucial point of this 'management of development' is prioritisation and the diversion of resources. And a consequence of it is reproduction of inequalities, whereby the Dalits are further marginalised. How this biased nature of development has been rectified by the BSP and how development of the Dalits could actually lead to universal development is the point of my discussion in this section. I have divided this section into three sub-sections. The first section is an examination of how the BSP government dealt with rural poverty. This issue has been explored through the examination of two programmes initiated by the BSP: land distribution and Ambedkar Village Scheme (AVS). The second section critically examines how the BSP has broken the nexus between the socially dominant and the state by using the latter. And the final section takes up the issue of installation of Ambedkar statues in UP or what the upper caste dominated English media projected as the 'Ambedkarisation of UP'.

4. IIIA. Rural poverty and the BSP's measures: Rural poverty and its elimination had been the central concern of all the political parties and governments since Independence. Apart from initiating a number of empowerment programmes, the issue of land distribution to the landless has been taken up both by the Congress as well as the non-Congress governments in UP on a massive scale. For instance, in 1976, the Twenty Point Programme was initiated by the Congress government under the leadership of Indira Gandhi. Under this programme, land titles for some 1 million acres were *supposed* to have been distributed to the rural poor in UP. But out of those 1 million acres, it was said that only 11.6 percent of the land was effectively distributed.[366] The remaining land, although it was distributed to the poor on paper, it was under the control of the 'village councils' (*gaon sabha)*, which were generally controlled by the upper castes or OBCs. Although Atul Kohli attributes such control to inertia in the administration,[367] it was, in fact, the caste attitude of the upper caste bureaucrats that resulted in the ineffective

[366] Kohli, Atul. 1987. Uttar Pradesh: Political fragmentation, middle peasant dominance, and the neglect of reforms. Kohli, Atul. ed., *The state and poverty in India: The politics of reforms.* Cambridge: CUP, pp: 189 – 222.
[367] Ibid.

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distribution of the land.[368] In a way, this example suggests how the dominant upper castes have used the state resources to their advantage by using the machinery of the state itself.

In its formative years the BSP campaigned in almost all the villages in the state to occupy government land. A slogan that spread the message of this campaign was: *Jo zameen sarkari hai, wo zameen hamara hai* (Government's land belongs to us). And when the Party assumed power - both in 1995 and 1997 - one of its key concerns was land re-distribution in favour of the Dalits and OBCs, particularly the Most Backward Castes (MBCs). Under a special drive, it distributed some 52,379 acres of land among 81,500 MBCs; 20,000 Dalits were given about 15,000 acres of Gaon Sabha land; and all tenants of more than 10 years standing were granted *bhumidhari* rights, a scheme under which many small scale farmers from the Dalit and OBC categories benefited.[369] Further, the BSP government acquired about 1,052,000 acres of land and out of that 1,020,000 acres of land were distributed among the most backward castes and Dalits. About 20,000 more Dalits benefited when 15,000 irregular-land nominations were regularised in their name.[370] This pattern of land distribution shows that the BSP was committed to improving the economic conditions of the marginalised sections. Yet, in a curious way, it did not distribute any land when it was in power for the fourth time, between 2007 and 2012.

Another programme of the BSP government that yielded better social and economic results than the land programmes is the Ambedkar Village Scheme (AVS). The AVS is a comprehensive programme of action for the development of Dalits in rural areas. Although under the AVS, initially some thirty-six developmental programmes were listed, there seemed to be predominant concentration on six programmes, including drinking water, electricity, housing, schools, primary health centres, public toilets and link roads. Originally, this scheme consisted of allotting special funds for socio-economic

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[368] Interviews with Ram Kishore Varma at Atarra (Banda district) on 15 March, 2004 and with Surendra Pal at Chitrakoot on 17 March, 2004.

[369] Pai, Sudha. 2004. Dalit Question and Political Response: Comparative Study of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. *EPW,* 39(11), pp: 1141-50, here, p. 1145.

[370] Akhtar, Mohammad Jamil. 1999. *Iron Lady Mayawati.* New Delhi: Bahujan Sangathak, cited in Kumar, Vivek. 2003. Uttar Pradesh: Politics of Change. *EPW,* 38(37), pp: 3869-3871.

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development for one year to villages with 50% Dalit population. When Mayawati formed the government in 1995, she extended this programme to those villages with 22-30% Dalit population. All in all, 25,434 villages were included in the Scheme.[371]

What is significant about these programmes is that they are basic programmes that any government in power is expected to undertake. And many governments in the state appear to be implementing them since the early 1960's, at least on paper. For instance, in the late 1960's, as a way of dealing with rural discontent, on account of the increasing inequalities in the post-Green Revolution period, the Congress government - under the scheme of its Anti-Poverty Programme - implemented similar programmes. But the novelty of the AVS was its emphasis upon the Dalits. Commenting on the impact of this scheme, Vivek Kumar observes: "Today Dalits do not need schools, hospitals, sources of water or roads used by the 'upper castes' which has thus broken the traditional shackles of caste relations. The whole process has saved the Dalits from facing the perpetual humiliation inflicted by the upper castes whenever they became angry and put restrictions on the use of these facilities by the Dalits."[372] Viewing the scheme through a similar lens, Manini Chatterjee observes:

> In Lucknow and Delhi politicians may scoff at Mayawati's *dalit ki beti* histrionics, but spends a day in these Ambedkar villages …the most visible sign of change is the enthusiasm for education. In a cluster of four villages in western-central UP – Abbasganj, Hasanpur, Kaneri, Chatauni (in the Rae Bareli-Lucknow region) there are four primary and two junior schools and one high school. Almost every Dalit parent sends their sons and daughters to school.[373]

From the above comments, two aspects are clear: first, basic civic facilities such as drinking water, primary health care, and schools had previously been under the control of the upper castes. Through the control of these essential resources, the upper castes were able to control the Dalits and other marginalised sections. It is important to recognise here that these civic facilities are not merely instruments of domination but also actively

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[371] When the programme was introduced, the requirement was 50% Dalit population. It was in 1995 that the BSP government lowered the required Dalit population from 50 per cent to 22-30 per cent, thereby covering more villages. For details of the programme, see Government of Uttar Pradesh (1999) *Ambedkar Gram Vikas Yojana Sambandhith Mahatvapoorn Shasanadesh* (Report in Hindi), Lucknow: Government of UP.

[372] Kumar, Vivek. 2003. Uttar Pradesh…., p. 3870.

[373] Chatterjee, Manini. 2003. Maya's Gone but in these Dalit homes the change's for real. *The Indian Express,* September 1, New Delhi.

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used to humiliate the Dalits, particularly the Dalit women. Whenever Dalit women went out to fetch drinking water from the facilities located in the upper caste areas, they were subjected to lustful gazes of the upper caste men and at times, abuse. But having these basic facilities in their locations meant the Dalits and their women would no longer be subjected to such humiliation. Moreover, the provision of basic amenities which they had been denied for centuries, instilled in them a sense of confidence and respect for themselves.

Secondly, although some of these basic facilities are located within the Dalit locations, some other facilities like roads, high schools and junior colleges are for the use of the community and for the good of everyone. Most of the upper castes, despite their complaints against the BSP government for the special treatment meted out to the Dalits, were happy to see a road for the first time in their lives.[374]

It may not be out of place to mention some of the achievements and failures of the BSP government in the social sector.[375] For years, the UP state has been neglecting housing security to its people. According to the National Sample Survey Organization data, while 23% of the households in rural UP live in pucca houses, in urban slums, merely 12% households live in pucca houses. This means that 77% of the households in rural UP and 88% households in the urban slums are living in mud houses. The BSP government has taken some bold steps towards improving housing security. During 2007-10, it initiated three major housing schemes: Mahamaya Awaas Yojana (MAY), Kanshi Ram Sahari Gareeb Awaas Yojana (KSGAY), and Sarvajana Hitay Shahri Garib Awas Malikana Haq Yojana to benefit various sections of the population, both in the rural and urban areas. The Kanshi Ram Sahari Gareeb Awaas Yojana targets BPL (Below Poverty Line) families in urban areas. Under this scheme, while 23% and 27% benefits go to the OBCs

[374] Susheel Kumar Misra, a 65-year-old Brahmin told me that he always thought that he would die without seeing a road in his village. Now he is happy that Behenji gave a *daambar* (tar) road, in an interview with Misra on March 23, 2004 at Mahoba.

[375] Until and unless cited separately, my information on the BSP government's achievements and failures comes from: 'Achievements of BSP Government in Last 3 Years', Information and Public Relation Department, Government of Uttar Pradesh, published in *The Hindu,* 13 May, 2010, Bangalore, p. 25; Singh, Shyam. 2010. Three Years of the BSP Government in Uttar Pradesh. *EPW,* 25(38), pp: 77-81. (I thank Dr. Jens Lerche for directing my attention to this article).

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and SCs respectively, 50% benefit goes to poor people in the general category. When the scheme was initiated, the BSP government intended to construct 1.01 lakh houses and by September 2010 it managed to construct 96,418 houses in the urban areas. Another housing scheme: Sarvajana Hitay Shahri Garib Awas Malikana Haq Yojana, also targets the urban poor. Under this scheme, ownership will be given to those BPL (below the poverty line) families that have been living in the slums on government land. For the benefit of the rural poor, in addition to proper implementation of the already existing Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY),[376] the BSP has initiated two more schemes: Mahamaya Awaas Yojana (MAY), and Mahamaya Sarvajan Awaas Yojana (MSAY). While the former provides housing security exclusively for the SC/ST communities in rural areas, the latter targets the non-SC/ST poor families. During 2007-10 under MAY, 3.06 lakh SC/ST families have benefited at a cost of Rs. 949 crore and 50,000 non-SC/ST families benefited. During the same period, the government has succeeded in constructing 10.3 lakh houses by expending Rs. 3,316 crore under the IAY.

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In addition to the above, certain other noteworthy schemes and initiatives by the BSP government (during the period of 2007-10) in the arenas of social security, welfare, health, education and employment may be noted below:

- In 2007, it started Mukhyamantri Mahamaya Garib Aarthik Madad Yojana. This scheme was to give Rs. 300 per month to those poor families excluded from the list of the BPL.
- The amount of old age pension has been increased from Rs. 150 per month to Rs. 300.
- Financial assistance for the marriage of SC/ST girls from Bundelkhand region has been hiked from Rs. 10,000 to Rs. 20,000.
- Financial assistance for medical treatment for the poor has increased from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000.
- For the physically challenged people:

[376] IAY is jointly initiated by the Central and State governments. While the former gives 75% of the total expenditure, the latter gives the remaining 25%.

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A. Financial assistance to purchase artificial limbs or other auxiliary equipment has been increased from Rs. 3,500 to Rs. 6,000.

B. Rs. 2 crore has been earmarked to provide financial assistance for the purpose of marriages.

C. Financial assistance to those people who are studying or undergoing training has been enhanced from Rs. 550 per month to Rs. 850 per month.

- Mahamaya Gharib Balika Ashirvad Yojana has been initiated in 2009 to benefit girls born in BPL families. Under this scheme a girl will get Rs. 1 lakh by the time she becomes 18 years old. Through this scheme 1,01,705 girls had benefited by 2010.
- Rs. 11,000 is provided to each widow if she is ready for her remarriage.
- While the previous Mulayam Singh government had spent Rs. 224.65 per head in 2006-07 for health measures, the BSP government had spent an average of Rs. 290.82 per head per year on health.
- In addition to a bicycle, a sum of Rs. 25,000 in two instalments was given to each girl student of 11th and 12th classes.
- Under the Scheduled Castes Special Component Plan, certain amount of money has been allocated in the budget for the benefit of the SCs exclusively. For instance, Rs. 5,329.2 crore was allocated for the financial year 2007-08. This amount was 45.7% higher than the previous Mulayam Singh government's contribution in 2006-07. In 2008-09, an amount of Rs. 7,700.52 crore was allocated under the same plan, which was 44.5% higher than the previous year's budget.

Yet, in other social security areas, the BSP government paid scant attention. For instance, the state of heath of people is in a miserable state in UP. Life expectancy in UP is one of the lowest in the country. But the BSP government did not take any measures, not even a single health security scheme, to improve health conditions in UP. In the field of education also the UP has been lagging behind in comparison with many states in the country. But the BSP government did not take any noteworthy measures to improve education in UP.

4. IIIB. Using state to protect the vulnerable sections: A number of strategies have been employed by the upper castes to control the Dalits and other marginalised sections. The

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state in post-Independence India, in fact, had largely become one of the instruments manipulated by the upper castes to perpetuate their dominance in society. And among those numerous strategies, violence was one of the successful tactics to put the Dalits, who were 'getting out of hand', 'in place'.[377] In other words, Dalit resistance to comply with Brahmanical notions of caste - and, thus, to caste-Hindu domination - is dealt with violence by the upper castes.

And if one were to examine the role and responsibility of the state in the event of violence against Dalits - from various government Orders and Acts, such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 (PoA Act) to establishing a number of police stations in violence-prone areas - it appears that the State has been fulfilling its responsibilities in protecting the Dalits. Yet, the continuing and, in fact, growing incidences of atrocities against Dalits is a marked indication that such attempts are being thwarted by caste-Hindus. This failure, as highlighted by many studies, [378] is due to collusion between the upper castes and the police.[379] There are worse occasions wherein the state, if not taking action against the culprits, even fails to condemn the violence against the Dalits. For instance, in 2001, the BJP under the leadership of Rajnath Singh was running the government. In that year, two Dalit families were brutally murdered by Thakurs in Jehrana village in Western UP. In Hasanpur village, again in Western UP, three children and two women were brutally murdered by Thakurs in broad daylight the same year. In both the incidents, neither Chief Minister Rajanth Singh, a Thakur, nor the local MLA or the State Law Minister Radhey Shyam Gupta, a Bania by caste, condemned the incidents or paid a visit to the house of the victims.[380]

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[377] Lynch, Owen. 1981. Rioting as Rational Action…, p. 1952.

[378] See for instance, Human Rights Watch. 1998. *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's "Untouchables",* New York.

[379] Of course, this is not true in all cases of caste-Hindu violence against Dalits. There are incidences where the police firmly stood to protect Dalits.

[380] A number of atrocities against the Dalits had taken place during Rajnath Singh's rule in UP. For instance, in Bara Banki district, upper caste men poured acid in the eyes of four Dalits and blinded them. In Mirzapur district, 16 Dalits were gunned down by the police on the pretext that they were Naxalites. Similar atrocities have been reported from Banda, Kanpur (Rural), Unnao, Etah distrcts and Robertsganj in Sonbhadra district. According to figures compiled by the National Crime Record Bureau for the National SC/ST Commission, Uttar Pradesh tops the list of atrocities against the Dalits. A total of 6,122 offences

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This biased attitude by the state, however, received a setback when the BSP assumed power in UP. It showed how state laws and agencies could effectively be employed in the service of the socially oppressed communities. For instance, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989 (PoA Act), which came to be termed the Dalit Act in UP, assumed some "meaning whenever the Mayawati-led BSP was in power".[381] UP, under BSP's rule, became the only state where it was not possible to casually insult a Dalit and get away with it. To refer to a Dalit with contempt—which caste-Hindus did as a matter of convention and traditional right—became a crime that could result in an FIR and booking under Section 3 (I) X of the Act. Police officers were given instructions to fearlessly implement the Act which was unprecedented in any other state under any other regime.

Although the implementation of the Act was seen by the caste-Hindu society and the media —both used to routine humiliation of Dalits —as a means of registering false cases of blackmail in the name of the Dalit Act, [382] it went a long way in recognising and restoring a sense of self and dignity among the Dalits of UP. Interestingly, the police, apart from being 'true servants of the state' during BSP rule, also became intolerant, 'in contrast to their traditional tolerance' to the upper castes' exploitation of the Dalits. For instance, Craig Jeffrey and Jens Lerche narrate an incident in Jaunpur, where police forced the Thakurs to accept a 33 per cent wage rise for the Dalits.[383]

Dalits were not the only section that was protected by the BSP government. In fact, with the arrest of Raghuraj Pratap Singh (alias Raja Bhaiya, who is also famous as the king of

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were committed against Dalits in 1999, with 2,597 offences reported and 2,683 cases registered under the Act. 'The objective behind all the murders', as one journalist observes, 'is the same – to impress [upon] the Dalits that the status quo will prevail.' 'The killings in Jehrana and Hasanpur were the fallout of tensions between an economically and politically empowered caste and a downtrodden community that has been trying to achieve self-respect. See 'Caste Killings', in *Frontline,* vol. 18, no. 14, July 07-20, 2001, p

[381] Anand, S. 2006. Fusing Phule and Ambedkar. *Outlook,* 14 Oct. 2006.

[382] However, none of my interviewees, especially the Dalit activists and Dalit lawyers in Lucknow and Banda, agree with this allegation. They insist that a majority (more than 85 percent) of the complaints are genuine. Field interviews in November, 2004.

[383] See Jeffrey, Craig and Jens Lerche. 2001. Dimensions of dominance: class and state in Uttar Pradesh. In: Fuller, C. J. and Veronique Benei. eds., *The Everyday State & Society in Modern India,* London: Hurst & Company, pp: 91 – 114.

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Kunda in Pratapgarh district) under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA)[384], the BSP protected other castes and individuals too. Pratap Singh, who was an independent MLA, ran almost a parallel government in Pratapgarh district. The charges against Pratap Singh, as reported in a national newspaper, demonstrate the extent of his grip over the local economy:

> A FIR was lodged at Jethwara police station against Raghuraj Pratap Singh alias Raja Bhaiyya and his father for extorting money from the business community and traders of Derwa Bazar. Another criminal case of grabbing 170 bighas of government land and misusing public property has been lodged against Raja Bhaiyya, Uday Pratap, former Kunda SDM Jalil Ahmad Siddiqui and former Kunda tahsildar Ashok Kumar Srivastava at Hathiganwa police station under sections 386, 420, 466, 467, 468 of the IPC, sections 12, 13, 14 of the Anti-Corruption Act and section 3 of the Public Property Act.[385]

Despite these many charges, none of the previous governments in the state arrested Pratap Singh, simply because all the political parties, especially the BJP and SP, benefited from him in numerous ways. The fear that Pratap Singh evoked in Kunda was evident: people did not even whisper a word against him, not even in private conversations. "Raja Bhaiyya will get to know: he has moles all over the place. Why invite trouble?" was the common refrain. After his arrest, a Brahmin in Kunda felt: "now we will vote freely according to our will, all these years we could not even see the ballot box or paper."[386]

In the beginning of this section, we asked whether a Dalit-based party on the assumption of political power acted differently from the other parties. The implementation of the Ambedkar Village Scheme and the daring arrest of Pratap Singh are testimonies that a Dalit-based political party can act differently. The two aspects also respond to Pai's criticism of the BSP. From both these aspects it was not just the Dalits but others also benefited, which means that by developing parts one could develop the 'whole' as well.

4. IIIC. Ambedkar statues – democratisation of public space: The caste-Hindu world's denial of human dignity to the Dalits manifests itself in various forms. One form was that of preventing the latter from using public spaces, such as, roads, parks or land by the

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[384] Prior to his arrest under the POTA, the Gangster's Act had already been registered against Pratap Singh. And during the SP's regime some 44 criminal cases were pending against him.
[385] *The Times of India,* 26 January, 2003.
[386] Reported in *Indian Express*, 26 January, 2003.

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former. Two aspects must be noted from this: first, in the name of 'public', it is the caste-Hindus who have arrogated for themselves the public spaces. Secondly, both by the logic of appropriation and prevention, Dalits are denied a place in 'public.' From this, it is understood that in India, *public* represents the caste-Hindus and not the Dalit public. Disagreeing to share public space with the Dalits and preventing them from using the public spaces was seen as rejection of human rights as well as denial of citizenship rights for the Dalits.

While Dalits, both in colonial and post-colonial India, had been fighting for their legitimate rights, the caste-Hindus were able to suppress such fights and, thereby, dominate the public spaces with the help of the State. This nexus between the upper castes and the state had not merely been challenged by the Dalits in Uttar Pradesh through the BSP, but was also destroyed to the extent that the Dalits had now gained their right to use public space, along with other citizens of India. In the previous decades, Dalits' struggle for equal use of public spaces was manifested in celebrating marriages by making the Dalit bridegrooms sit on palanquins (this being a 'right' reserved for the upper castes) and taking out processions on April 14 every year, the birth anniversary of their leader, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Such claims of the Dalits, especially since the early 1980's, were manifested in the installation of statues of Ambedkar in public spaces.

When the BSP came to power, it tried to give a permanent physical form to the symbolic meaning of Ambedkar. Apart from installing a number of Ambedkar statues throughout the state, particularly in every district and tehshil's main centres, the BSP in over three chief ministerial terms, constructed a massive park in the state capital of Lucknow. The park, which is called 'the Ambedkar Memorial Park,' is the only site where a gigantic bronze statue of Ambedkar is installed like Abraham Lincoln's statue at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington. The Rs. 200 crore park was dedicated to the public on January 15, 2003.[387] The BSP even issued a Government Order assigning half an acre of communal land in each village for the construction of an 'Ambedkar Park'.

[387] See, *Frontline,* 20(3), 2003.

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What is the symbolic significance of the installation of Ambedkar statues or 'the Ambedkarisation of UP' – a phrase euphemistically used by the English media, the latter dominated by the upper castes? Perhaps before examining the significance of these symbolic gestures, it may be useful to look at some of the opinions on the Ambedkarisation of UP. The Ambedkarisation of UP has attracted criticisms from different quarters and on various counts. Most of the rural upper castes were outraged and minced no words in their verbal attacks against the project. For instance, the project was condemned as nothing but *chamarisation of UP* (*woh chamar logonka party ham ko bhi chamar bana raha hai!*).[388]

If this type of attack represents a blatant and unsophisticated rural upper caste who are threatened by the prospect of losing their traditional domination and control of the lower castes, especially the Dalits, the urban upper castes - who also happen to fall in the elite and middle class categories - also came up with similar criticisms, but in a more nuanced and sophisticated fashion. One strong point of criticism levelled against the statues of Ambedkar is that the BSP and Dalits should not have used public places either to promote Ambedkar and his 'ism' or to popularise the BSP. For public places, it was said, belonged to 'everyone'. Further, using indirect language it was said, "since they (the Dalits and BSP) are 'encroaching' upon public places, then they would have to bear the 'consequences'".[389] Two aspects are clear in this criticism. First, the Dalits were not recognised as part of 'public' or 'everyone'. Had their position as part of the public been recognised, then there would not have been any objections to the Dalits' use of public places. And secondly, the Dalits 'use' of the public space was viewed as 'encroaching', as if an outsider was occupying territory belonging to others. Further, the word 'consequences' denotes a kind of warning to the Dalits.[390] And those people who did not want to seem as blatant as the rural upper castes and as hypocritical as the urban upper castes, put forward their criticism about the cost of the Ambedkar statues by arguing that

[388] Interviews with Raghuvamsi Tripathi and Sushil Kumar Thakur in Jalaun on 10 & 11 of June, 2005.
[389] Interviews with Ravi Ranjan in Banda on 5th June, 2005. In a recently published news article, M V Kamath also came up with similar arguments. See 'Dalit Future: A matter of concern' – *News Today,* 3 Jan, 2007.
[390] Nicolas, J. 2006. Learning the Use of Symbolic Means: Dalits, Ambedkar Statues and the State in Uttar Pradesh. *Contribution to Indian Sociology (n.s.),* 40 (2), pp: 175-207, *passim 7,* p. 182; see also, Mishra, V. 1999. 'The Dalit Question', in *Selected Works,* Delhi; Central Office of the CPI (ML), pp. 192 – 94.

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the BSP's politics of Ambedkarisation of UP was a mere waste of tax-payers' money. For, such a project did not benefit the Dalits in any tangible fashion.[391] Although one would not dismiss the rationality of this criticism, one should question the narrow understanding of the significance of the Ambedkar statues. In any case, the upper castes blind to Dalits' demand for equality, respect and dignity, are also blind to their civic rights to share and enjoy public space along with the other citizens.

Irrespective of the above attacks by the upper castes, what we have to recognise here is that of the actualisation of citizenship rights by the Dalits. In the sense, as mentioned above, public spaces belong to all the citizens of the country. Yet, domination of that space by the upper castes by setting up statues of leaders of their castes and communities resulted in the exclusion of Dalits from that space. When the Dalit-based BSP came to power, it set up the statues of Ambedkar, a leader of the Dalits in public places. Such an act not only resulted in the breaking up of upper caste domination in public spaces, more importantly, it gave the Dalits the right to represent themselves in those public spaces. In other words, it was an act of democratisation of public spaces by the Dalits through the BSP.

The overall attitude of the upper castes against Dalits on the issue of *Ambedkarization* of public space in UP may be inimical, yet one should not underestimate the impact of Dalit politics in social relations. As noted above, UP society is a highly Brahmanical society, where discrimination against Dalits was rampant and they were treated even worse than animals by those in the upper castes. Some twenty years ago, Dalits were not allowed to enter the houses of Brahmins and other upper castes. Earlier Dalits were not invited to the marriage functions of the upper castes and the former would not dare to sit beside an upper caste person. They were forced to take up work with a stigma attached to it, such as attending to dead animals. But now all those caste-based social relations appear to be somewhat antiquated. Both the upper castes and Dalits, especially those who are involved in Party politics, enter each other's houses freely and sit on the same *charpai* (bench-like

[391] See, 'Exchequer suffers as Mayawati splurges on statues of Dalit heroes', in *India Today,* 28 July, 1997.

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arrangement).[392] Invitations are exchanged during weddings and other social gatherings. Separate seating and dining arrangements for weddings began to fade by 1990 and was substantially eliminated by 2007.[393] By engaging in politics, the Dalits, who had been denied recognition and respect, acquired political power, which in turn resulted in new confidence among themselves and importantly, recognition from the caste-Hindu society.

To conclude our discussion, in order to understand how the BSP has used the State for social transformation I have examined three aspects in this section. I have taken note of programmes like the Ambedkar Village Scheme which although meant for the empowerment of Dalits, actually benefited all groups in the village. I have also pointed out that by arresting anti-social elements, like Pratap Singh, the BSP used the State in giving protection to the vulnerable sections in society. Although the BSP, through the instrument of power, may have been successful in providing tangible economic benefits and had put up the statues of Ambedkar, it could not change the attitudes of the upper castes against the Dalits and their demand for equality in sharing public space along with others. Yet, political power in the hands of the Dalits changed the social fabric of UP society forever.

Conclusion: In this Chapter, I attempted to examine three aspects of the BSP. First, the BSP leadership, which was inspired by the ideologies of Jothiba Phule and Ambedkar and their stress on the importance of unity between Shudras and Dalits in rooting out the caste system and dominance of the upper castes. On the eve of election for the UP Legislative Assembly in 1993 the Shudra-based Samajwadi Party and Dalit-based BSP forged an electoral alliance and eventually formed a coalition government. However, within a short span of six months the coalition government had collapsed. In my analysis, I argued that Shduras and Dalits were not natural allies but incompatible partners. For the Shudras want to oust those from the upper castes from positions of power, and wished to dominate the oppressed groups like Dalits. The Dalits, on the

[392] Field observations.
[393] On this see, Devesh Kapur *et al.,* 2010. Rethinking Inequality: Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in the Market Reform Era. *EPW,* 25 (35), pp: 39-49.

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contrary, looked at achieving equality of castes both socially and politically, and in turn, to realise a democratic form of society and polity.

Second, I have examined the BSP's idea of social justice. The social justice of the BSP constituted two aspects: (a) horizontalisation of the vertical order, and (b) democratisation of the undemocratic political order. In a close examination of these two aspects, I have noted that some of the strategies adopted by the BSP, such as a public acknowledgement of them instilled a sense of social confidence among the Dalits, which led to their claim of equality of castes. On the *democratisation* front, despite the existence of political democracy, sections of people from the oppressed groups continued to remain as the 'ruled'. The upper castes which are small in number, were able to hold on to the positions of power on account of their social dominance and economic superiority. The BSP tried to end the political dominance of the upper castes by providing seats of representation for all the castes on the basis of each caste's weight in population size. Although this method of distribution might result in the inclusion of hitherto politically suppressed castes and communities into the political process, it would also result in the neglect and isolation of those castes with less or a negligible population size in the democratic process.

Finally, in order to find out what the BSP did for the oppressed, particularly the Dalits while in power, I have examined the empowerment programmes pursued by the BSP government. Through the programme of land distribution and Ambedkar Village Scheme, the BSP facilitated the economic empowerment of the Dalits in the countryside. The Ambedkar Village Scheme not just improved the Dalits' condition, but also provided civic and educational facilities for other groups in the villages as well. On the putting up of the Ambedkar statutes in public places, I have noted that although the upper castes continued to be hostile with the Dalits, the installation of statues led to democratisation of public places. In other words, the BSP has to a large extent, succeeded in destroying ideologies and structures of caste and also in democratising the upper caste-centred public spaces and political power.

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To give a general conclusion to the UP section, in my examination of Dalit politics in UP, I have primarily focused on three questions: whether the Hindu-Muslim cleavages have been the 'master narrative' of politics in northern India, or is caste also one of the main axis around which the politics in the region is organised; whether the BSP's overwhelming representation given to the Dalit elite, especially the elite from the Chamar caste, was different from other parties; and whether the BSP emphasis on social justice is different from other parties such as the SP, and if it has done anything for the emancipation of the oppressed, particularly the Dalits.

The Second Chapter examined Dalit mobilisation under the leadership of the Adi-Hindu movement in the colonial UP. By claiming the status of *mula bharatvasi* and assuming the *achut* identity, the Dalits demanded not just social equality they also claimed a share in the emerging political power structure. These demands of the Dalits clearly demonstrate that their social and political activities were organised around the caste axis rather than around Hindu-Muslim cleavage. Significantly, among all the Dalits in various regions in colonial India, it was the Dalits in UP that placed demand for a share in political power for the first time. I have dismissed Sudha Pai's argument that Dalit consciousness in colonial UP was delayed due to a lack of socio-political activities on a par with Dalits in other parts of India and have suggested that the Dalit consciousness in colonial UP was far richer than other Dalit groups in rest of India.

The Third Chapter challenged Kanchan Chandra's position that BSP's electoral success in UP was due to the disproportional representation given to the SC elite, especially the elite from the Chamar caste in the state. In my analysis, I have examined the Dalit political activities under the Congress regime and noted that the Congress has been at the forefront in taking advantage of the Dalit political reservation both in the State and Parliament. Despite taking advantage of the Dalit representation, the Congress did not use its office to emancipate the Dalits from their appalling socio-economic conditions. I have discussed the brutal discriminatory practices and violence against the Dalits by the upper castes, and argued that those conditions provided the context for Dalits to take up politics by floating a political party that could fight for the causes of the oppressed

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communities. The Dalits support to the BSP is, I have argued, not on account of the disproportional representation, but on the grounds of programmes and activities initiated by the party to secure *equality, respect and dignity* for the Dalit constituency.

In the final Chapter in this section, I focused on three aspects. First, I examined the electoral alliance between the Shudra-based SP and the Dalit-based BSP, and I argued that the failure of the alliance between the two parties goes much beyond the personal clashes of the leadership of both the parties. The Shudras' socio-political agenda, social domination and exclusive political power in their hands, go against the social justice agenda – *horizontalisation of vertical social order* and *democratisation of undemocratic political order* – of the BSP. I have also discussed at length the programmes pursued by the BSP to actualise its social justice agenda. Finally, I have examined the measures to improve the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits by the BSP while in power, and showed that a Dalit-based party actually acts differently not just for the emancipation of its constituency, but also for the improvement of the general public. Are Dalit experiences and activities in AP different from those of Dalits in UP? We shall examine this question in the second section of the thesis.

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Part II

Andhra Pradesh

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***Five*……..**

For Respect and Social Equality
Dalit Activism in Telugu Country, 1917-1950

Introdcution: I have argued thus far against the claims of prominent scholars (eg. Ashutosh Varshney, Christophe Jaffrelot and Sudha Pai) that in addition to the Hindu-Muslim cleavage, caste conflicts also played an important role in shaping the politics of North India. Further, I have suggested that in organising against caste-based discrimination and domination the Dalits in northern India were not behind their counterparts in the south of the country. In fact, caste consciousness of the former is far sharper than the latter: not only were the Dalits in North India involved in mobilising for self-respect and social equality, they also demanded a share in the emerging political power. In other words, they were the first to realise the importance of political power, give voice to their realisation and pursue the same firmly and effectively.

For the purpose of the present chapter, it is important to recall Jaffrelot's argument in *India's Silent Revolution: the Rise of the Lower Castes in North India*. For Jaffrelot, the divergences in the politicisation of the lower castes in North and South India, were mainly due to the composition of castes in both the regions. In northern India the "demographic weight of the upper castes and their role in the local power structure"[394] prepared the ground for the development of Gandhian conservative ideologies in politics. This, in turn, led to arresting lower caste consciousness in the prison of Sanskritisation. On the contrary, the politicisation of the lower castes in the South, Jaffrelot argues, was due to the absence of a complex middle order, that is, "the warrior and merchant castes are often absent or poorly represented".[395] Such absence, in turn, Jaffrelot claims, has facilitated a strong lower caste mobilisation under the banner of Dravidianism against Brahmanical hegemony and domination. It may be recalled that I differed with Jaffrelot's position and argued that it was not in the 1990's but way back in the early 1920's itself that North India experienced politicisation of the Dalits. In the wake of the socio-cultural hegemony of Brahmanism and the political domination of the upper castes, the Dalit

[394] Jaffrelot, 2003. *India's silent*…p. 9.
[395] Ibid., p. 7.

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constituency in UP – both during the colonial as well as immediate post-Independence periods, especially until the late 1960's, built a strong socio-political movement upon the ideologies of Swami Achutaanand and Ambedkar for social equality and political power.

Also, there are two problems with Jaffrelot's reading of the politicisation of the lower castes in South India. First, one does not understand the possible link between the absence of a middle order in the caste hierarchy and the politicisation of the lower castes. In the sense, the upper castes discriminated against the lower castes, especially against the Dalits, irrespective of the presence or absence of the middle order in the caste hierarchy; as victims, it was natural for the Dalits to organise against their victimisers. Secondly, Jaffrelot seems to have based his present argument upon the simple assumption that all the lower castes who had been the victims of a common enemy and common ideology, i.e., Brahmins and Brahmanism respectively, have mobilised under the universal category of non-Brahmins by embracing the ideology of Dravidianism during the colonial era. This is rather a sweeping generalisation. For all the lower castes may be victims of Brahmanism, yet they were (and are) not united in their fight against that ideology. Every caste, especially those castes that were placed at the top of the non-Brahmin hierarchy, fought its battles against Brahmanism independently.

Further, a major problem in Jaffrelot's argument is in his understanding of the idea of lower castes or the non-Brahmin category and the extent of their power in the socio-political and cultural domains. It is true that the caste system in the Hindi belt is traditionally organised around the *varna* model or at least, closest to that model with its four orders – Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras, and the Untouchables. The hold of the first three castes on the economic resources and their domination in the socio-political and cultural domains was so complete that there was very little space available for the Shudras and Untouchables during the colonial and immediate post-Independence periods. In other words, when we say the lower castes in the Hindi belt it is both the Shudras and Dalits.

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Similarly, in South India also the lower caste category includes both the Shudras and Dalits. But then, just as there are differences between the Shudras and Dalits – in terms of their position in the caste hierarchy and the availability of resources, particularly economic resources, there are differences within the Shudra category as well. The Shudra category in Southern India is essentially divided into two layers of castes. The first layer comprises of castes, like Kammas and Reddy's in Andhra Pradesh, Lingayats, Vokkalingayats, Shetty's in Karnataka, and Reddiyars, Mudaliars, Chettiyars, Pillais in Tamil Nadu. This set of castes or category of castes are also known as the *sat-Shudra* category. In terms of caste position these castes may be placed below the Brahmins in the social hierarchy, but in terms of their control over the economic resources and domination in the social and political spheres, this category of people are more powerful than the Brahmins or any other castes in the social hierarchy. The second layer is constituted with service castes like, Yadavas, Kurmis, Gollas, Salees etc. During the colonial as well as the immediate post-Independence periods, there was not much difference between this set of castes and the Dalits, particularly in terms of social status and availability of resources for economic and social development. The dynamics of these differences between the Shudras and Dalits have changed since the late 1970's, which is, of course, a different matter altogether.

But the point that I am trying to make here is that lack of an ample presence of the warrior and merchant castes in South India does not mean that there were no castes that occupied and controlled similar spaces of power as those occupied by the Kshatriyas and Vaishyas in the Hindi belt. In other words, the castes in the *Sat-Shudra* category have compensated for the lack of Kshyatriyas and Vaishyas in South India. And as the castes within the non-Brahmin category were divided both vertically and horizontally, they were at variance in their responses against Brahmins and Brahmanism. The castes like Reddy's and Kammas, who have been in positions of privilege within the non-Brahmin category, were not against the Brahmanical caste system per se. They were simply against the Brahmins, who enjoyed the highest social status and cultural privileges. To put it differently, the privileged non-Brahmin castes were against the privileges enjoyed by the Brahmins, while at the same time aspiring for the same social status and cultural

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privileges. During the early part of the twentieth century the dislike for Brahmins that the privileged non-Brahmin castes nurtured reached the heights, when jobs in the British government in India were completely taken up by the former. It was against this domination and to stake a claim for a share in the job market that the *Sat-Shudras* launched the non-Brahmin movement.

On the contrary, the aspirations of the lower castes within the non-Brahmin category – especially the Dalits - with imposed restrictions were completely different from the aspirations of the privileged non-Brahmin castes. Of course, the Dalits, just like the *Sat-Shudras,* also condemned the pre-eminence of the Brahmins in government employment, and they too sought their share of jobs. But unlike the privileged non-Brahmin castes, the Dalits sought to destroy the system that deprived them of everything that a human being aspired for with dignity and honesty. In essence, the Brahmins in AP, unlike their counterparts in UP, were not dominant castes. It was the intermediate non-Brahmin castes, particularly the Reddys and Kammas. This was the main reason why that the Dalits in AP allied with the Brahmins rather than with the non-Brahmin upper castes; and this was also the main reason for the slower emergence of an independent Dalit movement in the state. Thus, the politics of lower cannot be understood under the rubric of the non-Brahmin category, a category that is not a homogenous one but a heterogeneous category. There are huge differences among the castes within the non-Brahmin category, in terms of the social status, social respect they command, access to economic resources and in terms of their positions in the local power structures. These differences must be taken into consideration while studying the politics of the non-Brahmins.

The aim of the present chapter is two-fold. First, to examine and analyse Dalit activism under the banners of the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha of the Telugu districts in the Madras Presidency and the Adi-Hindu Mahasabha in Nizam's Hyderabad during the colonial era. Secondly, this chapter seeks to elaborate and extend the analysis of Gail Omvedt on Dalit activism both in coastal Andhra and Hyderabad areas. Omvedt, with her wider focus on Dalit politics in colonial India at large, could not explore the local Dalit

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politics in the Telugu belt in great detail. She presents the Dalits as one homogenous category without paying much attention to the caste-based differences and conflicts among them, particularly between the Malas and Madigas; and I have tried to fill those gaps in this Chapter.

The Chapter has been divided into three main sections. The first section examines Dalit politics from 1917 to the early 1930's in the coastal Andhra region, leading to the second section that pays attention to Dalit activism in the princely state of Hyderabad during the same period. Although the struggles in both the regions revolved around similar concerns, I examine Dalit activism in these two regions separately in the hope of bringing to the fore a nuanced analysis. Through this examination I have tried to show how the Dalits contested the idea of nationalism, an ideology with the help of which the upper castes were mobilising against colonial rule for the transfer of political power. I will also show how the Dalits by conceptualising a society and a nation based on equality, dignity and self-respect put forward alternative ideologies and their distinct approaches to Indian nationalism. From late 1930's until India's Independence in 1947, Dalit activism came to be hugely affected both by regional as well as national political events, especially the latter. During this period the Dalit leaders, both in coastal Andhra and Hyderabad, travelled across the regions and voiced their common concerns on each other's platforms. An analysis of the Dalit activism in both these regions is carried out in the third section of this Chapter.

Before we move any further two aspects may be noted. First, the non-Brahmin movement in the Telugu region, unlike in the Tamil region of the Madras Presidency, did not gain much ground; and wherever a weak movement existed, it was largely confined among the privileged non-Brahmin upper castes, especially among the Kammas, Reddy's, Velams, and Rajus and to some extent Kapus. The Dalits, despite being part of the larger non-Brahmin category, did not become part of the non-Brahmin movement in the Telugu belt, for they were discriminated against not only by the Brahmins but also by the non-Brahmins. It was on account of this casteism of the Brahmins and of the privileged non-Brahmins that the Dalits in the South, as this Chapter through its study of Dalit activism

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in the Telugu districts of the Madras Presidency demonstrates, mobilised not under the ideological plank of Dravidianism, but under the *Adi* ideology.

Secondly, during the colonial era, the Telugu belt was divided between the British- ruled Madras Presidency and the Nizam-ruled princely state of Hyderabad. The Telugu-speaking areas in Madras Presidency comprised of seven districts of coastal Andhra region (Srikakulam, Vishakhapatnam, East Godavari, West Godavari, Ongole, Guntur and Nellore), and four districts of Rayalaseema region (Kurnool, Cuddapah, Chitoor and Ananthapur). These were (and are) two disparate regions. The Rayalaseema region was (and is) known for its continuous droughts and the resultant backwardness, which has rightly earned the region the epithet, *kshamaseema,* i.e., 'stalking ground of famines'. Coastal Andhra, on the other hand, was a picture in contrast with heightened economic energy due to major irrigation schemes across the Krishna and Godavari rivers and the subsequent commercialisation of agriculture; it was primarily in this economically dynamic region as well as in the Nizam-ruled Hyderabad state that Dalit activism took place.

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5. I. For Respect and Equality: Dalit Activism in Coastal Andhra

This section is an attempt to examine Dalit activism in coastal Andhra Pradesh in the 1920's. The Dalits in this region, before being dragged into divergent national and regional political forces, especially into the politics of Ambedkar, Gandhi's Congress and the Communist Party from the late 1930's, united under the banner of the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha for respect and social equality. In activism of more than a decade that began in 1917 they rejected the imposed social identities such as the *Panchama* identity, and by claiming the *Adi* identity, they not only contested Brahmanical Hinduism but also the caste-based social system; more importantly, they also sought to reconstruct a society based on social equality, dignity and respect for individuals. During this time the Dalits in UP also, as seen in Chapter Two, organised themselves around the ideology of Adi-Hinduism. Through that ideology they critiqued Brahmanical Hinduism and the discrimination against the Dalits in the socio-economic spheres in UP. Although Dalit activism both in UP and the Telugu belts expressed similar concerns – social equality,

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respect and opportunities in the economic and political domains – and was directed by the Dalits themselves, there was a subtle difference between the two. The Dalit leaders in UP became the leaders of the Adi-Hindu movement after coming out of the Arya Samaj, thus emerging from the shadow of patronage of the upper castes. In other words, the Adi-Hindu movement emerged thanks to independent efforts of the Dalit leaders without interference or support from outside. Contrary to this, Dalit activism in the Telugu land was not an outcome of the independent efforts of Dalits; it involved participation of the upper castes as well, especially the Brahmin social reformers. The Dalit leaders, as we shall see, were groomed and given the necessary support throughout the colonial era by those social reformers. And this is one of the main reasons why, unlike in UP, a strong Dalit critique against Brahmanical Hinduism could not emerge in the Telugu region.

The rest of this section is divided into two sub-sections. The first sub-section examines the growth of Dalit consciousness and the agencies that helped to raise that consciousness; the second sub-section examines the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha-based Dalit activism in the same region.

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5. IA. Education and the growth of Dalit consciousness: Prior to the introduction of western education by colonial rulers, every region in India had its own system of indigenous education. The system of *pathasaala* was prevalent in Telugu-speaking areas, in which the schools were generally located in *agraharams* (Brahmin localities) and the students were taught by Brahmin gurus. As the location of the schools and social background of the teachers amply demonstrate, education in these schools was nothing but the recitation of *Vedas, Upanishads* and other Brahmanical Hindu texts. Moreover, access to these schools was strictly confined to the Brahmins and other upper caste Hindu children. The children of lower caste Shudras, Adivasi communities and Dalits were barred even from entering these schools.

A survey ordered by Sir Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras Presidency (1820-27) confirms both the monopoly of the Brahmins as well as exclusion of the Dalits from *pathasaalas.* According to this survey in the Presidency, there were as many as 12,488

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schools and 188,000 students in a population of 12,850,941 – roughly 1 school per 1000 persons and 1 student per 67 persons.[396] Further, it was also found that education was completely under the control of the Brahmin teachers. Even among the students, Brahmins comprised 60 to 75 per cent, far outnumbering the non-Brahmin castes.[397] The books used in these institutions were either directly derived from the *Vedas, Shastras, Puranas* or other epic literature.[398] One of the most striking findings of the survey was the complete exclusion of Dalits and lower caste Shudras. However, this situation changed with the efforts of the Christian missionaries, the colonial State and Hindu social reformers. A number of schools for Dalit boys and girls were opened throughout the province. Education not only raised the consciousness of the Dalits about their inhuman social conditions and appalling economic situation, but also provided them with new ideas, hopes, employment opportunities and thus, new possibilities. We shall look into the efforts of Christian missionaries, the colonial State and caste Hindu reformers, one after another.

(a) The Christian missionaries' association with Telugu-speaking areas goes back to the fifteenth century, when two Jesuit priests began working for the emancipation of Dalits in Chandragiri in Chitoor district.[399] From the early nineteenth century onwards, missionaries started schools for the Dalits throughout Madras Presidency.[400] And it was Alexander Duff of the Church of Scotland Mission who spearheaded education among the Dalits in the Telugu-speaking areas. He was primarily interested in evangelism and believed that western education and values imparted by the missionaries through their

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[396] Minutes of Sir Thomas Munro, March 10, 1826, cited in Dharmapal. 1983. *The Beautiful Tree: Indigenous Indian Education in the Eighteenth Century.* New Delhi: Biblia Impex, pp: 248-251.

[397] Frykenberg, E. R. 1986. Modern Education in south India, 1784-1854: Its Roots and Its Role as a Vehicle of Integration under Company Raj. *The American Historical Review,* 91 (1), p. 44.

[398] For instance, in schools and colleges in Rajahmundry the texts used were, in addition to the *Vedas* and Shastras, the Bala Ramayanam, Rukmini Kalyanam, Krishna Satakam, Sumati Satakam, Vasu Charitra, Manucharitra, Bhagavatam, Gajedramoksham etc. For details, see the Report of the Collector, Rajahmundry, submitted to the Board of Revenue, September 19, 1823, cited in Yagati, C.R. 2007. *Writing Dalit History and Other Essays.* New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, p. 47, *passim 23.*

[399] Ramaswamy, Uma. 1974. Self-Identity among Scheduled Castes: A Study of Andhra. *EPW,* 9(48), pp: 1958-1964.

[400] It should be recognized here that conversion of Natives into Christian faith had been the main motive of all the missionaries in India. In fact, initially the missionaries aimed at Brahmins, who were supposed to be 'educated and intelligent'. But to their horror, they soon realised the 'insincerity of Brahmins', an insincerity that also extended to their religious beliefs. See, Dirks, N.B. 2001. *Castes of Mind…*p.137.

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schools could be used as an effective instrument for evangelism.[401] In other words, Duff's motive in opening the schools was to spread evangelism. Yet, the missionaries did not practise any form of discrimination in admission to the schools. They admitted everybody disregarding the pupil's caste and religion. Although Dalits availed of this opportunity by sending their children to these schools, the upper castes did not send their children when they found that Duff was against caste-based segregation of pupils in his schools.[402] Interestingly, the non-imposed exclusion of children of the upper castes from the schools was an advantage for the lower caste children, especially Dalits, as they could focus on education without interference by Brahmins and other upper caste pupils and their casteist behaviour. By the end of nineteenth century nearly twenty mission societies, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, were working for the cause of the Dalits in the Telugu districts. Dalits, who were discriminated against by the upper castes, were naturally attracted to the educational initiatives of the Christian missionaries, and in course of time, a large number of them converted to Christianity. [403]

The Brahmins and other upper caste Hindu were alarmed by this trend: Dalits' education and conversion to Christianity. Although they could not come up with any substantial arguments against Dalits' education, they did question the converting to Christianity. Sneering at converts as the 'rice Christians', they claimed that conversions were motivated by material interests rather than the ideals of Christianity. They even launched the *Crescent* newspaper in 1844 to defend, "rights and privileges of the Hindu community".[404] Interestingly, the missionaries did not deny that the Dalits converted to Christianity out of material considerations. For instance, Robert Caldwell of Tinnevelly

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[401] Richter, Julius A. 1908. *A History of Missions in India.* London, pp: 192-3, cited in Yagati, C.R. 2003. *Dalits' Struggle for Identity: Andhra and Hyderabad 1900-1950.* New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, p. 67.
[402] Dirks, N.B. 2001. *Castes of Mind…* p.131.
[403] For detailed missionary activities and mass conversion movements in Andhra region, see Fishman, A. V. 1941. *Culture Change and the Underprivileged: A Study of Madigas in South India under Christian guidance.* Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India; Manor, J. G. 1971. Testing the Barrier Between caste and outcaste: The Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church in Guntur district. *Indian Church History Review,* 5(1), pp: 27-41; see, also Dirks, N. B. 2001. *Castes of Mind…,* especially Chapter Seven: 'The Conversion of Caste', pp: 127-148.
[404] Suntharalingam, R. 1967. The Madras Native Association: A Study of an Early Indian Political Organization. *Indian Economic and Social History Review,* 4 (3), p. 237.

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mission admitted that the lower castes initially came to Christianity for protection and aid, "the natural outcome of the circumstances in which they are placed". Yet he asserted:

> I cannot imagine any person who has lived and worked amongst uneducated heathens in the rural districts believing them to be influenced by high motives in anything they do. If they place themselves under Christian instructions, the motive power is not theirs, but ours…They will learn what good motives mean, I trust, in time – and perhaps high motives too – if they remain long enough under Christian teaching and discipline; but till they discard heathenism, with its debasing idolatries and superstitions, and place themselves under the wings of the Church, there is not the slightest chance, as it appears to me, of their motives becoming better than they are.[405]

Given the motives of the missionaries as well as the converted Dalits, there can be no denying that the work of the former among the latter was indeed commendable. For instance, during 1876-79 when the Madras Presidency was struck with famine, missionaries rendered extraordinary services among the Dalits who were the worst-hit. It was during this time that the Dalits perceived the contrasts in treatment between caste Hindus and the missionaries. While the former treated them worse than animals, the missionaries treated them with dignity, kindness and, most importantly, as equals. Not surprisingly, the Dalits were overwhelmed by the material help and the human dignity accorded to them, and eventually embraced Christianity. According to one estimate, nearly 20 percent of the Dalits in West Godavari, 32 percent in Krishna, and 57 percent in Guntur districts had converted to Christianity in 1931.[406]

The work of Christian missionaries changed the Dalits in three fundamental ways. First, they became aware of their social and economic plights and realised the inequalities in the ritual hierarchy of the Hindus. Second, conversion helped them to reject their lowly place in Hindu society and thus, to shed imposed social identities. As Christians, they affirmed a new social and religious identity. This new identity did not depend on its acceptance and recognition by the caste Hindus. That, in turn, led to significant alterations in behaviour, occupation and enhancement of status.[407] Finally, those Dalits that remained within the fold of Hinduism began to realise that the dogma of

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[405] *Reminiscences of Bishop Caldwell,* quoted in Dirks, N.B., 2001. *Castes of Mind...*,p.135.

[406] Forrester, Duncan B. The Depressed Classes and Conversion to Christianity: 1860-1960. In: Oddie, G.A., ed. 1991. *Religion in South Asia: Religious Conversion and Revival Movements in South Asia in Medieval and Modern Times.* New Delhi: Manohar, 65-93.

[407] Pickett, J.W. 1933. *Christian Mass Movements in India: a Study with Recommendations.* Abingdon: Cincinnati, pp: 128-9, cited in Yagati, C.R., 2003. *Dalits' struggle for* …p. 67.

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untouchability which had been used to justify their miserable condition, was false and was not upheld by the missionaries or the British government.[408] Moreover, the missionaries' work among the Dalits shamed the colonial rulers and upper castes and focussed their attention on the plight of the Dalits.

(b) The Colonial State: The Brahmin monopoly over the education system in India began to break down when the colonial rulers introduced Western education through the medium of English, in which the right to education of every individual was firmly affirmed. In their dispatch of 5th May 1854, the Court of Directors argued that "no boy be refused admission to a Government college or school merely on the grounds of caste".[409] Although the principle of equal access to education was reiterated by the colonial government on several occasions, such affirmations remained in theory largely. In reality, the old dominant sections of society managed to monopolise the new opportunities generated by the introduction of English education, [410] and Dalits continued to be excluded from the schools. Moreover, the colonial government succumbed to the pressures of the upper castes and made compromises under the pretext that no principle, however sound, could be forced upon an unwilling society in defiance of social and religious sentiments.

Of course, the colonial government initiated a few measures for the education of Dalits when Christian missionaries voiced strong criticism against the government's apathy towards the downtrodden. For instance, in May 1891 the Madras Missionaries Conference submitted a Memorial to the Governor, in which the missionaries observed:

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[408] Farquhar, J.N. 1915. *Modern Religious Movements in India.* New York: Macmillan Co., p. 368.

[409] Frykenberg, R.E. 1986. Modern education in South India, 1784-1854: Its Roots and its role as a vehicle of integration under Company Raj. *The American Historical Review,* 91(1), p. 45.

[410] Nearly all writers on Indian nationalism have consistently noted that groups and communities that reaped the maximum benefits of this new education during the whole of the nineteenth century and a good part of the first quarter of the twentieth century were the upper castes, particularly the Brahmins. Anil Seal mentions this formulation unambiguously. Noting that English education was concentrated in the three coastal presidencies, and here too mainly in the metropolitan centres, Seal describes how in Bengal, 'it was the Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas, in Bombay, the Brahmins in solitary, perilous pre-eminence and so too, in Madras, they held the near monopoly of education and that they were not any class but just the same old wine in new bottles", for 'yesterday's scholars of Persian, now became enthusiasts for English'. See, Seal, Anil. 1968. *The Emergence of Indian Nationalism*. Cambridge: CUP, pp: 11, 38-97; Brown, Judith. 1984. *Modern India: The Origins of Asian Democracy.* Delhi: OUP, p. 77.

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> Though Government has proclaimed slavery to be illegal, many Pariahs are living in practical slavery…The *mirasdars* systematically oppose the establishment of schools for the education of Pariah children. As a result of centuries of disability and oppression, the Pariahs have now sunk into a condition of helpless degradation and the defects and vices of their social life give to their degradation a rigidity, which makes all improvement appear hopeless if they continue to be left to themselves.[411]

Following the recommendations of the Hunter Commission of 1882, the colonial government initiated separate schools (popularly referred to as the *Panchama* schools) for the Dalits. It offered financial assistance in the form of grants-in-aid, scholarships for the children and allotment of public land to construct proper schools.[412] Further, in 1893 the Madras government came up with a series of proposals, which were hailed as the *Magna Carta of Panchama education.* Some of the important measures recommended by the government were: establishment of special schools by local boards and municipalities for Dalits in all villages where they were in considerable number; allotment of government wastelands for Dalit schools; opening of night schools for Dalit labourers, special scholarships and provision for slates, books and furniture in grant-in-aid schools, etc.[413] Education for Dalits was further encouraged by the colonial government in 1918-19. It instructed that the schools be shifted from *agraharams* (Brahmin localities) to other places which the Dalits could easily access and insisted that no construction of schools was to be undertaken unless it was certified that the locality was accessible to the Dalits.[414] The results of these efforts were tremendous. Between 1919-20 and 1936-37 schools for the Dalits increased by 42.2 percent, while the strength of the students went up by 180 percent. This was an impressive change, and yet it must be noted that, compared to the total population, only 7.52 percent among Dalit boys and 1.65 percent among the Dalit girls benefited from school education.[415]

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[411] Memorial of the Madras Missionaries Conference to His Excellency the Right Honourable the Governor of Fort St. George, dated May 1891, Revenue Proceedings of the Madras Government, 30 September 1892, p. 611, quoted in Jangam, C. 2005. *Contesting Hinduism: Emergence of Dalit Paradigms in Telugu Country 1900 – 195.* Ph.D. Shool of Oriental & African Studies, University of London, London, p. 39.
[412] Vaikuntham, Y. 1982. *Education & Social Change in South India: Andhra, 1880-1920.* Madras: New Era, p.181.
[413] Yagati, C.R. 2003. *Dalits' struggle for* …p. 73.
[414] *Report on Public Instruction for the Madras Presidency for the Year 1918-19,* Vol. 1, p.12, cited in ibid. pp: 73-74.
[415] Figures were cited in Satyanarayana, A. 2005. *Dalits and Upper Castes: Essays in Social History.* New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, pp: 63-64.

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Whatever the limitations of the colonial state's efforts in promoting education among Dalits, these efforts significantly affected the Dalits forever. Firstly, the Dalits were introduced to the letter which was denied to them by the local state operating on the principles of the Brahmanical caste system. Secondly, for the first time Dalits were introduced to the language of rights (for instance, access to education as a basic right of every individual) and the principles of equality, such as equality before the law. Thus, it legitimised their status as human beings and their entitlement to social respect and dignity in society.

(c) Caste Hindu Reforms: From the late nineteenth century onwards, the caste Hindu society, especially the Brahmins in the Telugu belt began to respond to the criticisms of the Christian missionaries against the Hindu religion and social practices of caste Hindus. Those who responded can broadly be divided into two groups: conservatives and social reformers. The conservatives stood for the preservation of the caste system and the practice of untouchability as ancient tradition sanctioned by the Holy Scriptures and by divine dispensation. The reformers, who were influenced by Arya Samaj and Brahmo Samaj, urged their fellow caste-Hindus to do away with the practice of untouchability and discrimination against the Dalits. Interestingly, they did not advocate annihilation of the caste system – a system which is the root cause for differential treatment and the practice of untouchability.

It may be noted here that, while in UP, caste-Hindu criticism against the practice of untouchability was mainly centered in the Arya Samaj, in the Telugu belt, besides the Arya Samaj-inspired critique against the caste system, a number of social reformers from the caste Hindu backgrounds persistently attacked the practice of untouchability and caste-based discrimination of the Dalits. They also opened a number of schools and hostels exclusively for Dalit boys and girls. It was precisely on account of this engagement of caste Hindu reformers with the Dalit issue that the Dalits' critique against upper caste discrimination against them in AP was not as strong as in UP. Importantly, with the upper caste going soft, the Dalits were also co-opted into the Congress and

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Communist parties as *Harijans,* indirectly setting the ground for dependent politics of the Dalits in the later years.

Two people who worked for education of the Dalits in coastal Andhra during the early part of the nineteenth century were Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919),[416] and Raghupathi Venkata Ratnam Naidu (1862-1939).[417] While Naidu concentrated his efforts in Kakinada and Machilipatnam areas, Viresalingam centered his activities in Rajahmundry and northern Circar districts. The Maharaja of Pithapuram financially supported Veeresalingam's efforts in promoting education among the Dalits. With the financial assistance from the Maharaja, a high school and two separate hostels for Dalit boys and girls were established in Rajahmundry. The Maharaja also sponsored Ram Manohar Roy Hostel in Kakinada for college-going Dalit students; and it was from these educational institutions sponsored by the Maharaja that the first generation Dalit intellectuals of coastal Andhra emerged.[418]

Eventually the foundations laid by Veeresalingam and Naidu for Dalits' education were further strengthened and, in fact, effectively developed by a number of other reformers, particularly since early 1900. For instance, in 1907, *Andhra Deenajana Sangam* was founded in Machilipatnam for the socio-economic and spiritual development of the Dalits through education. By 1924, through this organisation, 12 night schools and 9 day schools and one part-time school for girls in and around Machilipatnam were established. Guduru Ramachandra Rao started *Sevashram* for Dalit children at Gudivada in 1912. S. V. Ramji Rao established *Arundhati ashram* for Dalit girls and *Nandhanar* a*shram* for the Dalit boys at Machilipatnam in 1912 to spread education among them.[419] Further, under his own editorship Ramji Rao launched *Deenabandhu,* a Telugu weekly that

[416] For a detailed biographical sketch and his activities see Ramakrishna, V. 1983. *Social Reform in Andhra 1848 – 1919.* New Delhi: Vikas.
[417] Kesava Narayana, B. 1976. *Political and Social Factors in Andhra, 1900-56.* Vijayawada: Navodaya publishers; Ramakrishna, V. 1993. A Background Study to the Emergence of Caste Consciousness in Coastal Andhra Pradesh. In: Das, Suranjan and Sekhar Bandopadhyay. ed. *Caste and Communal Politics in South Asia.* Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi &Co.
[418] Abbasayalu, Y.B. 1978. *Scheduled Caste Elite: a Study of Scheduled Castes Elite in Andhra Pradesh.* Hyderabad: Osmania University, pp: 51-52; see, also Rammurthy, Pamu. 1976. *Rashtra Harijana Nayakula Jivita Charitra* (Life histories of Dalit leaders in Andhra Pradesh), Kakindada.
[419] *Krishna Patrika,* 23 March 1918, p. 4.

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exclusively addressed the problem of untouchability and the issue of socio-economic development of the Dalits in 1918. Nallapati Hanumantha Rao established *Srikrishna Ashramam* in Pedapalem, Guntur district in 1913. The main intention behind this *ashramam* was to reconvert those Dalits who had converted to Christianity back to Hinduism.[420] Thallapragada Narasimha Sharma and his wife Viswasundaramma established *Ananda Niketanamu* in Rajahmundry in 1923.[421]

Some of the caste Hindu reformers were so committed in their efforts to ameliorate the sufferings of the Dalits that they were ready to fight with their own caste people for this cause. To take one example, Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao set up a school in Yalakurru Agraharam, his native village in Krishna district. When he began to admit the Dalit children into this school, the entire Agraharam, including some of the sympathisers of the Dalit cause, opposed the move. Kasinadhuni, however, stood up against the opposition and took in the children to the school. Vemula Kurmaiah, who later went on to become one of the prominent Adi-Andhra leaders, and eventually the Congress' *Harijan leader,* had received his early education in this school.[422]

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Having said that, it is important to question why the Brahmins in coastal Andhra were at the forefront in 'reforming' the Dalits. It was during this time anti-Brahmin movements were organised in western India and parts of South India, that is, in Mysore state as well as in the Tamil area of the Madras Presidency. In coastal Andhra also the Reddy's and Kammas took up an anti-Brahmin stance. It was a fall out of the Brahmins' concern for Dalits' education and untouchability. Since the Reddy's and Kammas were landlords and peasants who owned thousands of acres of cultivated land in the villages, their interests lay in perpetuating the caste hierarchy coupled with economic benefits for themselves. In effect, their ideas were diametrically opposed to the well-being or the uplift of the Dalits. This enmity proved to be a significant factor and explains why the Dalits distanced

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[420] *Krishna Patrika,* 14 June 1924, p. 3.
[421] 'Ananda Niketanamu', *Krishna Patrika,* 16 March 1935, pp: 9-10.
[422]Vemula Kurmaiah, after completing his secondary education from National High School in Machilipatnam with a generous scholarship from Ayyadevara Kalaswara Rao, a Brahmin Congress leader, spent two years in Gandhi's Sabaramathi Ashramam before joining Benaras Hindu University. Apparently he was the first Dalit to graduate from that university and Jagjivan Ram was the second to do so.

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themselves from the non-Brahmin leaders in coastal Andhra. Further, the non-Brahman leaders also did not have any cultural and ideological agenda to enlist and assimilate Dalits into their politics. On the other hand, the Brahmins, who were disengaging themselves from agricultural activities, did not have any direct conflict with the Dalits. Thus, the trajectory of caste dynamics made the Dalits get closer to the reformist Brahmins than the anti-Brahmin, landholding Kammas, Reddy's and Velamas. But what was the context in which Dalit mobilisation under the banner of the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha took place?

5. IB. The Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha: In Chapter Two we noted that with the ebbing of the nineteenth and the dawn of the twentieth centuries, while the Brahmins and other upper caste Hindus were 'inventing' an India with the Aryan theme as a tool to claim their superiority over the rest of the Indians, the Dalits and other lower castes were using the same to claim an authenticity and legitimacy to rule over the country. For them, the golden age of the sub-continent was the pre-Aryan epoch, an epoch in which "social equality was presumed to have flourished and society on the whole was organised on fraternal and democratic lines".[423] In the southern part of India the pre-Aryan era was conceptualised as the Dravidian and Adi-Dravidian civilisation. For instance, the Tamils considered the Sangam Age to be pre-Aryan, and they believed that in that era there was no caste/varna system and the present lower caste and untouchables were free men, owners of land and rulers of the people. The ideology of the Adi-Dravida extended throughout the southern peninsula into Adi-Kerala, Adi-Andhra and Adi-Kannadiga. We have noted that during the same period in Northern India, particularly in the United Province and Punjab, pre-Aryanism expressed itself as Adi-Hinduism and Adi-Dharmism, respectively. It may be noted here that although Dalit concerns in both the regions were expressed through the *Adi* movements, they differed with each other fundamentally in one important aspect. While the Dalits in northern India claimed a separate origin and identity through the *Adi-Hindu* movement, the Dalits in South India, especially in coastal Andhra, did not claim separate origin, but simply a respectable status within the Hindu society. The main purpose of the present sub-section is to examine the

[423] Aloysius, G. 1997. *Nationalism…*p. 164.

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Dalit mobilisation and activism in coastal Andhra region under the leadership of the *Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha*.

The changes brought in by the British presence affected the face of rural-based traditional India forever, particularly from the late nineteenth century onwards. The construction of railways and canals allowed free movement of the people and goods from one locality to another; the spread of literacy and the growth of the press allowed ideas to be exchanged over greater distances; the emergence and expansion of towns as major economic, administrative and educational centres helped to integrate previously scattered localities.[424] The Dalits in coastal Andhra were also, along with other castes and communities in Madras Presidency, beneficiaries of these developments and new consciousness. Moreover, as seen above, they also benefited from the special measures undertaken by various agencies. But towards the end of the nineteenth century they found themselves left out and increasingly falling back due to new administrative measures by the colonial government and the response of the upper castes to those new initiatives. Two specific events that compelled the Dalits in coastal Andhra to organise themselves as a group were: (a) mushrooming of caste associations, and (b) the emergence of the non-Brahmin movement.

From the early 1900s, the Madras Presidency witnessed the growth of caste-based associations and mobilisation by the upper castes and lower castes alike. At the heart of these caste associations were the introduction of Census, the growth of western education and recruitment of the natives to fill up bureaucratic jobs in the colonial government. Firstly, in 1901, following the British practice of attempting to fix whole caste-clusters in the Brahmanical varna order, a number of the castes felt that they were denied their 'rightful' status. For instance, the wealthier Komatis were outraged by the fact that they were denied Vyshya status. They founded the Arya Vyshya Mahasabha in 1907 and organised many agitations against the decision of the Census Commissioner.[425]

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[424] Srinivas, M.N. 1962. *Caste in Modern...*, p. 16.

[425] Washbrook, D. 1975. The Development of Caste Organizations in South India 1880-1925. In: Baker, C.J. and D.A. Washbrook. eds. *South India: Political Institutions and Political Change 1880-1940.* Madras: Macmillan, p.154.

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Secondly, the political leadership of the Brahmins was, as argued by Arnold, based on their "near-monopoly of western education and profession", as well as backed by their landed wealth and traditional social authority.[426] The non-Brahmin raiyats and traders, who were previously disinterested in western education and profession, were beginning to realise the economic and political advantages in these professions.

However, it was not easy for the educated non-Brahmins to intrude into these professions. "To succeed in these", Washbrook argued, "they needed to develop the broader patterns of social linkages which could provide investment for education and contact for preferment…Young educated Kammas or Reddy's required boosts of patronage and support if they were to get into the professions and senior administration."[427] One way of obtaining the required patronage and support was "by appealing back to caste myths and identities and by trying to strengthen their ritual connection with their caste."[428] Thus, we find the emergence of the Kamma Mahajana Sabha, under the leadership of Oxford-educated N.G. Ranga in 1910. This association was financed by zamindars of Chellapalle and Muktiala – both belonged to the Kamma caste. The Reddy's also, under the leadership of Cambridge-educated C. Ramalinga Reddy and London-educated K. Koti Reddy, found the Reddy Mahajana Sabha in 1914. This association was funded by the Reddy zamindars of Wanaparthy and Munagala.[429] Thus, the whole idea behind the mobilisation of the non-Brahmins around caste identities was to transform themselves into pressure groups and thereby "win from the government educational concessions, public appointments and nomination to local boards and legislatures".[430]

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[426] Arnold, David. 1977. *The Congress in Tamilnad: Nationalist Politics in South India, 1919-1937.* London: Curzon Press, p. 18.
[427] Ibid., p. 176.
[428] Ibid., p. 176.
[429] Ibid., p. 179. Some of the other notable caste associations of this time were: the *Agnikula Kshatriya Sangam* of fishermen (formed in 1901); *The All Madras Viswakarma Kuloddharana Sangam* (1903) – this was an amalgamation of five artisan castes, which were also known as Panchalas; *the Rajaputra Sangam* of Rajus (1905); *the Gouda Mahajana Sabha* (1907); *the Adi-Velama Mahajana Sabha* (1914) and, *the Telaga Sangam* of Telagas (1914).
[430] Arnold, D. 1977. *The Congress in Tamilnad…,* p.19.

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Secondly, as mentioned in the first chapter, the entry of Gandhi into India's political scenario led to a renewal of the struggle for independence throughout India. The struggle for independence is, as has been asserted by Aloysius, not only a struggle for the transfer of power from the colonial to the natives, but it is also a struggle for power within the caste Hindus, particularly between the Brahmins and non-Brahmin landed gentry. In south India, particularly in Madras Presidency, while the Brahmins were mobilising around the ideology of nationalism, the non-Brahmins were mobilising around the ideology of Dravidianism and non-Brahmanism. In Telugu districts specifically, while the Brahmins were organising around Indian nationalism, the non-Brahmin landed Reddy's, Kammas, Velamas and Rajus – despite differences among them - united under the ideology of Telugu nationalism against the domination of the Brahmins.[431]

In 1916, when the South Indian Liberal Federation, better known as the Justice Party, was formed, all the non-Brahmin upper castes rallied behind its banner, and claimed to represent the interests of all non-Brahmins in the Presidency, including the Muslims, Christians and Dalits, for it was during that time that the colonial government announced its intention of political representation for the natives. Both the Brahmins and non-Brahmins competed against each other to win the support of the Dalits, and as part of this support-seeking gimmick, they began to condemn the practice of untouchability, and initiated a number of measures to uplift Dalits socially and economically. They also demanded representation for non-Brahmins, including the Dalits, in all the representative bodies and in public appointments. These relatively radical ideas and assertions of the Justice Party in Brahmin-dominated polity and society attracted many non-Brahmin castes and communities into its fold. Dalit leaders like M.C. Rajah of Madras Presidency also supported the Party. Support from many quarters led to the Party's success in the 1920 municipal elections; and the Party used its position in the Legislative Council in Madras to bring a series of resolutions that aimed to give non-Brahmins a greater proportion of government jobs. Dirks mentions about two Government Orders that were promulgated in 1921 and 1922. While the first Order directed district collectors and other local officials to be attentive to the subject of distribution of appointments among various

[431] On this see, Harrison, S.S. 1960. *India: The Most Dangerous Decades.* Princeton, N.J.,: PUP.

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castes and communities, the second Order echoed the mind of the government in its resolve to give preference to non-Brahmin and other 'backward' communities in its recruitments.[432]

Undoubtedly, the Government Orders opened spaces for employment and representation in legislative bodies for the non-Brahmins, a space that had hitherto been occupied and controlled by the Brahmins. But in the name of representation for the unrepresented, the dominant upper castes in the non-Brahmin category, particularly Pillais, Mudaliars, Reddy's, Kammas, Chettiyars and other castes only next to the Brahmins in the traditional caste hierarchy, appropriated positions in government recruitment and in legislative bodies. In other words, the upper caste non-Brahmins replaced Brahmins from positions of power. However, although the Justice Party condemned the practice of untouchability and demanded the representation of Dalits in representative bodies and in public appointments, the reality was that the Party was not genuinely concerned about Dalit issues. The true face of the Justice Party where Dalits were concerned was exposed after its possession of power in the Madras Legislative Council in 1921. The abolition of the labour department and the refusal by P.T. Chettiyar, one of the main leaders of the Justice Party to support anti-untouchability laws in 1922, provided the evidence that the non-Brahmin movement would neither protect nor would benefit the interests of the Dalits.[433] It was on account of this attitude of the leadership in Justice Party against Dalits and their concerns that the latter distanced themselves from the Party. Criticising the Brahmanical attitude of the non-Brahmin leaders, M.C.Rajah observed: "Considered from the stand point of the depressed classes, this (Justice Party) Ministry which seemed to have begun well has been moving backwards under the influence of leaders (who are) more responsible to the vested interests, social pride and aristocratic affectation than to the principles of justice and democratic progress."[434] Thus, the Justice Party took up those issues of justice not for the uplift of the socially and politically marginalised

[432] Dirks, N.B. 2001. *Castes of Mind…,* p. 242.
[433] Saraswathi, S. 1974. *Minorities in Madras State: Group Interests in Modern Politics.* Delhi: Impex India, pp: 117-8.
[434] *Madras Legislative Council Proceedings,* Vol. II, 1923, p. 2600.

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sections but to strengthen their own claim for communal representation and to justify their demands against Brahmins.

It was against this backdrop and the struggle for power between the Brahmins and non-Brahmin upper castes, that the Dalits of all the regions in the Madras Presidency rejected them and began to articulate their concerns independently around the 'Adi' ideology and began to identify themselves as Adi-Dravidian, Adi-Andhra, Adi-Karnataka. At this juncture, it may not be out of context to note the communication between the Dalit leadership both in the Telugu and Tamil districts in the Madras Presidency. The rejection of the Dravidian ideology of the non-Brahmin movement and its leadership by the Dalits in both the regions, and a demand for representation of the Dalits in the legislative council and local bodies on the basis of their distinct Adi identity shows that the Dalit leaders in both the regions were in touch with each other.[435] In fact, M.C. Rajah, the secretary of the Adi-Dravida Mahajana Sabha in 1916, writes about the Malas and Madigas of the Telugu country, particularly of East Godavari district, in his *The Oppressed Hindus*.[436] The year 1917 saw mobilisation of the Dalits in the coastal Andhra districts of the Madras Presidency under the banner of the Adi-Andhra Maha Sabha. A statement issued in 1917 by B. Venkatapathi Raju and Gangaraju Panthulu – organisers of the first provincial-level conference of the Depressed Classes Association – testifies Dalits' intention to orgnise independently on a par with the other castes in the region.

> [A]s the feeling of nationalism is spreading it is producing diverse movements like Sanathan Dharm movement, Kshatriya, Vyshya, Kapu, Velama and Kamma caste movements; and the recent non-Brahman movements were reflection of that consciousness. It is the same feeling which is urging us to organise Panchama Maha Sabha.[437]

The direction of Dalit activism under the leadership of the Adi-Andhra Maha Sabha could be gauged when Sundru Venkaiah, a Dalit from Krishna district and one of the protégées of Guduru Ramachandra Rao, spoke in the conference in Vijayawada:

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[435] Interestingly, the communication between the Telugu Dalits and their Tamil counterparts was established not during the emergence of the Adi movements in the Madras Presidency. It was established way back in the late nineteenth century on account of their Burma connection. On this see, Dirks, N.B. 2001. C*aste of mind…,*pp: 240-41; Satyanarayana, Adapa. 2002. Migration of Telugu coolies to colonial Burma, 1871-1947. *Dr. Garigipati Rudrayya Chowdary Endowment Lecture – 9,* 25 February, Ramachandrapuram, East Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh.

[436] Rajah, M.C. 2005[1925]. *The Oppressed Hindus.* New Delhi: Critical Quest.

[437] *Krishna Patrika,* 20 September 1917, p. 6.

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> [w]hen the whole nation is awakening; we must come out of our slumber and assert that we are also human beings. Like everyone else, we also have a soul and body. Like other Hindus, we are also sons of this country. Many organisations are striving for the rights and self-respect of this nation like Deshiya Mahajana Sabha and Andhra Mahajana Sabha. Along with these organisations, it is our bounden duty to fight for self-respect and development of the Hindu country and also the Andhra belt.[438]

In the above statement one can see an internal as well as an external message. Internally, it is a call to the Dalits to realise that they are *also* human beings as any other caste Hindus and that their right should be asserted. For the caste Hindus, Dalits may be 'untouchables', but that does not mean that they are not part of India; and as part and parcel of the country they, along with other sons of the soil, have a duty to fight and restore the lost self-respect and dignity of the country. It has an external message for the caste Hindus as well, that the Dalits are no longer willing to be treated as non-humans by a casteist Hindu society and their rights as human-beings must be respected. Further, they were also informing the caste Hindu society of their willingness to take part in the struggle for India's Independence. It should be noted here that although the above statement came from a Dalit leader, who was trained in the *Sevashram* under the tutelage of a reforms-oriented Brahmin, it was clear that the Dalits were no longer willing to suffer caste discrimination against them by the caste Hindu society and were ready to fight for their rights as human beings. But what were the main concerns and demands of the Dalits put up by the the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha? What were the main activities of this association?

Dalit politics between the early 1920's and the late 1940's revolved mainly around three themes/aspects: (1) Identity, (2) Social Reforms; and (3) Political representation, and in the following we shall examine briefly those three themes:

(a) *Adi-Andhrulu* (The original inhabitants of the Telugu region): In 1917 Guduru Ramachandra Rao, a Brahmin social reformer from Krishna district, had called for a Dalit conference in Vijayawada, the cultural capital of coastal Andhra. Before we proceed to discuss the details of the Dalit conference, it may be noted that the annual conferences organised by the Adi-Andhra Maha Sabha are a good source to understand the concerns

[438] Ibid., p. 9.

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of Dalits as well as their relationship with the non-Dalits of that time. The annual conferences were an outcome of the joint efforts of the Dalit and some Hindu social reformers. For instance, Guduru Ramachandra Rao shouldered the responsibility of organising the first annual conference. Madari Bhagyayya, a Dalit leader from Hyderabad, who was popularly known as Bhagya Reddy Varma, was specially invited to preside over the conference, Sunduru Venkaiah, a Dalit protégé of Ramachandra Rao, chaired the reception committee of the conference.

But in a society where the Dalits were treated worse than animals, organising a Dalit conference was not an easy task. On the day of the conference the famous *Kanaka Durga* temple, among the biggest in Vijayawada, was closed down as the temple authorities did not want the temple to be polluted by the *Panchamas* and their supporters. The hotel owners refused to provide lodging to nearly 300 delegates - comprising both Dalits and caste-Hindus. Even the management of the Town Hall which had earlier agreed to rent out the hall for the conference refused to open the doors of the hall for the meet. Eventually they did open the doors following the intervention of Ayyadevara Kaleswara Rao, an influential Brahmin and Congress leader. Despite all these difficulties, the organisers of the conference conducted their first meeting on the first day of the meet.[439] Interestingly, the conference was a big success on account of what was being expressed by the Dalits, and also because the issues raised at the conference were discussed in mainstream newspapers like *Krishna Patrika* and *The Hindu.*[440]

The Conference was originally labelled as, 'the First Provincial Panchama Mahajana Sabha' (*Pradhamaandhra Desa Panchama Mahajana Sabha*). But Bhagya Reddy rejected the *Panchama* identity and argued that the term in question was not there in the Puranas or the other Hindu scriptures, and "the so called Panchamas were the original sons of the soil and rulers of the country."[441] Then the delegates unanimously rejected the

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[439] Poornachand, G.V. 2000. *Deenajana Bandhavudu Sree Vemula Kurmaiah* (Vemula Kurmaiah: The saviour of the wretched). Vijayawada: Sree Madhulatha publications.
[440] After the success of the first conference in 1917 annual conferences were held practically every year until the late 1930s. For a detailed account of the First Adi-Andhra Conference, see, Ibid.
[441] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic…*pp: 117-118.

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Panchama term and embraced the *Adi-Andhra* identity. What was the significance of this identity?

As mentioned in Chapter Two, during the early part of the 1920's, Dalits from all over India were influenced by the Aryan and non-Aryan debates, and were mobilising around the *Adi* identities. The Dalits in coastal Andhra were also mobilising on the same grounds by asserting that they were the original sons as well as rulers of the *Bharata khanda* (Indian continent). However, unlike the Dalits in UP, the Dalits in the Telugu land were not claiming a separate identity outside the caste Hindu society. They were simply claiming a respectable status within Hindu society. The *Adi-Andhra* identity was to extricate themselves from the demeaning labels given to them, i.e., caste-based identities of Dalits, such as Madigas and Malas. They hoped that a new identity would earn them social respect from the caste Hindus. The other important dimension of this new identity was that they sought equal status - equal to that of caste Hindus within the Hindu society: "Like all the *jatis* (castes) we are also sons of this country (*Hindu Desamu*). Of this country's population, six percent belongs to our caste. Once upon a time, our ancestors held a great position in this country's history."[442]

It may be noted here that M.C. Rajah was the first Dalit leader to be nominated to the Madras Legislative Council, and he used the opportunity to articulate the problems faced by Dalits in the Presidency, securing various social and educational rights for them. It was on account of Rajah's activism in the Legislative Council that the Madras government had issued an Order in 1922, with directions that the name Adi-Dravida replace Pariah and Pallar in the Tamil districts and Adi-Andhra replace Mala and Madiga in the Telugu districts.[443] Partly on account of the Government's direction and partly in their own interest, some of the educated Dalits and those Dalits who were part of the Adi movements in the Presidency adopted the 'Adi' identities, leaving behind their traditional castes names, such as Pariah and Madiga. Between 1921 and 1931 in the Telugu districts there was a striking variation in the number of Malas and Madigas. Around 14,93,000

[442] *Krishna Patrika,* 10 November 1917, p.9.
[443] Madras Legislative Council Proceedings, Vol. IV, 1922, p. 2047.

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Malas in 1921 were reduced to 8,39,000 in the 1931 Census. Similarly, 7,37,000 Madigas in 1921 were reduced to 6,12,000 in 1931. In a way, more than 6,65,000 Malas and Madigas had assumed the Adi-Andhra identity.[444]

(b) Questioning the practice of Untouchability: The Adi-Andhra leadership was quite critical of caste oppression and the practice of untouchability. They questioned the caste Hindus for discriminating against them and ridiculed them for worshipping dogs and monkeys but refusing to treat fellow human beings with equality and dignity. Interestingly, but not surprising, the Dalit leadership did not question the Hindu religious philosophy, a religion that laid the foundation for the behaviour of caste Hindus and their discrimination against the Dalits. And it appears that the Dalit leadership firmly believed, though it was not true, that the Hindu *shastras* did not sanction caste inequalities and the practice of untouchability; those evil acts were born from the minds of evil men and justified in the name of religion, they reasoned. In fact, the Dalit leaders, drawing from their knowledge of the Hindu *shastras* -- knowledge acquired during their training in *ashramas,* challenged the orthodox caste Hindus to show evidence in the *shastras* of the word *panchama* or sanction of the practice of untouchability against them. For instance, the usual justification of the caste Hindus for discriminating against the Dalits is the *karma* theory. Contesting that theory as baseless and illogical, Kusuma Dharmanna questions whether God himself practices such differences:

> When we (Dalits) ask who is responsible for our oppression and troubles
> You might say I am helpless and it is your *karma*
> (But) what are the differences between you and us?
> Oh *Sarveshwara*! Tell me, does god *Eswara* – the omnipresent- differ on the basis of caste?
> The foolish people humiliate us as Malas
> Are the blood and flesh of Malas different from the others?
> What different kind of flesh and blood do those pure (caste Hindus) have?
> These illogical beliefs only prove their madness.[445]

Jala Rangaswamy, another notable leader of the Adi-Andhra movement, follows suit and asks: 'Did any *shastras* mention *panchama?'*[446] Further, he asks the caste Hindus to explain to him what the Dalits have done to deserve the brutal behaviour of the caste Hindus against them:

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[444] *Census of India, 1931,* vol. XIV, Madras Part-I, Report, p. 343.
[445] Dharmanna, Kusuma. 1933. *Nalla Dorathanamu* (brown lordism). Rajahmundry, p. 4.
[446] Rangaswamy, Jala. 1930. *Antaranivarrevvaroo?* (Who are the untouchables). Rajahmundry, p. 2.

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> Many great men were born into our community
> But we are considered low and oppressed
> Tell us what sin did we commit (against you)?
> How did this untouchability come into existence?
> What crime did we commit (against you)?[447]

(c) Mala Shuddhi – Urging for Internal Reforms: Most of the Dalit leaders were trained in the *ashrama* schools established by the Brahmin reformers. When these Brahmin reformers joined the Congress, the Dalit leaders were also roped into the Party and were influenced by the ideals of Gandhi. Dalits, particularly the Dalit leadership in coastal Andhra, somehow came to believe that the main reason for their deplorable condition and the stigma of untouchability against them were because of their own social and cultural practices. As such, they tried to *purify* themselves by abstaining from the habits that were considered appalling to the caste-Hindus, particularly Brahmins. The Brahmins identified alcohol consumption, eating meat (particularly beef), animal sacrifice and unhygienic habits like not taking bath, or keeping their house clean, the use of obscene language, smoking and illiteracy as the primary evils infesting Dalits. Thus with acceptance by the caste-Hindu society being their motive, the Dalit leadership made concerted efforts to *reform* fellow Dalits from their *evil* and *sinful* habits. They even produced a great body of literature in the form of poetry, songs, *bhajans,* pamphlets and essays condemning the bad habits and practices and urging the Dalits to renounce sinful habits like beef-eating and animal sacrifice. [448] It appears that the Dalit leadership seemed so obsessed with internal reforms so as to gain acceptance from the caste-Hindu society that they went to the extent of arguing that renouncing beef would be a pre-condition for asking for rights and equality with others in the Hindu society. For instance, Jala Rangaswamy, who wrote *Mala Shuddi* (Cleanliness of Malas), stated:

> Let us first abolish all evil practices and ask for rights. In the morning you go out for work and come back and ask for food. You do not even wash your hands and feet but will sit to eat. Before eating you do not even pray to God. You come out smoking tobacco and exhale smoke like a machine amidst people. Otherwise, you will eat and swallow same tobacco. You never take bath; once a year you will bathe. How long will you lead such an ignorant life? At least now you get awakened.[449]

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[447] Ibid., p. 5.

[448] For instance, Dharmanna, Kusuma. 1930. *Madhyapana Nishedhamu* (Prohibiting Alcohol). Rajahmundry: Saraswati Power Press; -------. 1933. *Harijana Shatakamu.* Rajahmundry: Kusuma Kuteeramu; China Venkaiah, Nakka. 1935. *Makoddi Kallu Sara Keerthanalu* (We do not want toddy and arrack). Nandyal: G.N. Merchant.

[449] Rangaswamy, Jala. 1930. *Mala Shuddhi.* Rajahmundry: Sree Anjaneya Mudhraksharashala, pp: 6-7

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For Rangaswamy, whose ideas and ideals originally came from the Rajahmundry *ashrams*, not bathing daily, not combing one's hair, smoking and chewing tobacco, eating beef, alcohol and sleeping late into the day were degenerative practices among the Dalits. But he did not understand that he was actually humiliating his own people on account of their habits which were the result of illiteracy and poverty and which in turn were an outcome because of their position in the caste hierarchy. Two other important aspects of the Adi-Andhra activism were contesting caste-Hindu nationalism and demanding their share in the emerging political power.

(d) *Makoddii Nalladoratanam* (We do not want brown Lordism): From the numerous writings of the Dalits between the 1920's and 1940's it was clear that real freedom for them meant freedom from caste oppression, elimination of untouchability and the end of social discrimination. They felt that social equality, respect and dignity were composite to India's independence. They preferred social equality to political freedom, and questioned the sincerity of the caste-Hindu nationalists in establishing an egalitarian 'nation-state'. They asserted that unless social equality is achieved, freedom would be worthless. In other words, Dalits in coastal Andhra questioned the ideology of nationalism espoused by the caste-Hindus, particularly from platforms like the Congress party, as an all-encompassing ideology with its anti-colonial rhetoric, which forced alternative visions of a nation and nationalism to the margins often denigrating them as invalid.

Kusuma Dharmanna was the first Dalit intellectual in the Telugu region to challenge the nationalism of the caste-Hindus. It is important to note here that unlike the other Dalit leaders of that time, Kusuma was not a product of the Ashrams sponsored by Brahmin reformers and he was very sharp in his critique of Brahmanical Hinduism and nationalism. While Garimella Satyanarayana, who was a Brahmin, wrote the song denouncing British rule: *maa koddu ee tell doratanam* (we do not want white *lordism*), Kusuma wrote a powerful and fascinating song, *maa koddu ee nall doratanam* (we do not want black *lordism*). He unleashed a strong critique against the caste-Hindu nationalist leaders who advocated independence from the British, but refused the same to the Dalits.

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To quote him: "They (the caste Hindus) fight against the government for independence, but they refuse to give same independence to Malas; they do not allow us into temples and public areas. They even do not allow us to draw water from wells! They say Malas do not have rights. If we do not have rights, how can they have *swarajya* (independence)?"[450] By questioning the hypocritical stand of the caste-Hindus, hypocrisy that is a fall out of the Brahmanical ideas, Kusuma laid the foundation for a Dalit vision of freedom, a freedom that contrasts with the freedom espoused by the Brahmins and other caste-Hindus. For the Dalits, liberation from Brahmanical subjugation is the pre-condition for Independence, and equality of all human beings is real freedom.

Vagiri Amosu was more powerful in his critique of caste-Hindu nationalism. For him the Gandhi-led Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930 was no more than a movement to bring back caste-Hindu domination to oppress the rising marginalised classes. Illustrating his argument he pointed out the intolerant attitude of caste Hindus: "[I]f they (caste Hindus) spot an Adi-Andhra in a temple, they react angrily like a snake which spews venom when you step on its tail, and beat him to death. But they revere a dog as god!"[451] He expressed doubts about the possibility of social equality and Dalits' share in the governance of independent India:

> [T]hey (caste Hindus) have no ethical principle of respecting a fellow human being. We have no guarantee that we will get respect in future from such unkind people. There are many educated people in our community, how many of them will have a chance to govern the country along with caste Hindus as equals? The national movement will not offer anything for the deprived like us except wishful thinking.[452]

(e) What about our 'share'? – Demanding Representation: The publication of Montague-Chelmsford *Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms* on 2 July, 1918 stirred a debate all over India. In Madras Presidency, Brahmins and non-Brahmins through the Congress Party and Justice Party, respectively, intensified their mobilising activities to grab

[450] Dharmanna, K.1933. *Nalla Dorathanamu* (Brown Lordism), Rajahmundry: Lakshminarayanamma, p.10
[451] Amosu, Vagiri. 1930. *Satyagraha Udyamamu – Nimma Jatula Nirasanamu (Depressed Classes Protest against Civil Disobedience Movement).* Bheemavaram, p. 7.
[452] Ibid., p. 5.

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emerging political power from the colonial rulers.[453] Although Dalits in the Tamil-speaking areas were actively involved in these activities, just like their counterparts in western and northern India, the Dalits in coastal Andhra were silent about political reforms. It may be that they were under the assumption that their caste-Hindu patrons, who were also the leaders of the Congress Party, would take care of their political needs. However, on two occasions, they demanded their share of representation both in the administration as well as in political bodies.

First, on May 11, 1921 the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha of the Krishna district branch at its district-level convention passed two resolutions: (a) it urged the government not to appoint 'non-*panchamas'* (non-Dalits), particularly the Christians and non-Brahmins, as representatives of the Adi-Andhras. For such appointments were not only against the very principle of representation, but against their own interests; (b) In representative bodies, such as the legislative council, taluk boards, and labour boards, representatives were selected with education and property as the criteria for selection. Generally, such criteria proved to be a major stumbling block for the illiterate Adi-Andhras. So they urged the government to make a special provision that would allow the entry of the Dalits without any financial burdens into representative bodies.

In the context of the constitutional reforms and expanding representative politics, the resolutions of the Krishna district Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha, had some significance. This aspect of excluding the Dalits who had converted to Christianity from joining the representative bodies reflected emerging confrontations between the Dalits that subscribed to the broader Hindu social and religious practices and the Dalits that subscribed to Christianity and its way of life. This, of course, in turn reflected the Adi-Andhra leadership's close ties with the caste-Hindus, who were against Christianity and those Dalits who had converted into that religion. That apart, rejection of the idea of non-Brahmins representing Dalits pointed to a radical assertion by the Dalits that they were capable of representing themselves.

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[453] See Eugene, F.I. 1969. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929.* Berkeley: University of California Press; Baker, C. J. 1976. T*he Politics of South India, 1920-1937.* Cambridge: CUP.

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Thus, since its foundation in 1917 until the late 1920's, the Dalits under the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha had mobilised for social equality with active support from the reformist Brahmin leaders. Yet, they questioned Brahmanical Hinduism and the political domination of the upper castes and demanded their share in the emerging political power. Of course, such questioning, as we have seen, was not as strong as that of the Adi-Hindu leaders in UP. Even the mild criticism and Dalit mobilisation had gradually petered out and by the end of the 1920's the ground lay open, only to be appropriated by Gandhi's Congress and the Communists. We shall see these developments in Section Three, after examining Dalit activism in Nizam's Hyderabad.

5. II. For Social Equality and Political Representation: The Adi-Hindu Activity in Hyderabad

From the early 1900's onwards Hyderabad and Secunderabad– the two urban centres in the Telangana region of the princely state of Hyderabad – witnessed small but vigorous Dalit activity, initially for social recognition and social equality and later on, especially since the early 1930's, for political representation. Three men at the centre of this activity were: Madari Bhagya Reddy Varma (1888-1939), Arigay Ramaswamy (1875-1973) and B.S. Venkatrao, all of whom belonged to the Mala caste.

We have briefly noted in the first chapter that Bhagya Reddy Varma was closely associated with Swami Acchutanand and his Adi-Hindu movement in UP. The role of Bhagya Reddy Varma in Hyderabad's Dalit activity can be equated with that of Swami Acchutanand's role in UP. By claiming the Adi-Hindu identity for the Dalits, Bhagya Reddy Varma was at the forefront of the Adi-Hindu movement. He initiated a number of social and cultural activities through which he aimed to claim equitable space for the Dalits in Hyderabad's multi-cultural and multi-religious society. Yet, these two leaders differed with each other fundamentally on a crucial aspect. While Swami Acchutanand emphasised on the Adi-Hindu identity, that is, a separate identity for the Dalits throughout his activism, Bhagya Reddy's emphasis on the Adi-Hindu identity for the Dalits was only a strategy to integrate the Dalits into the caste-Hindu society. As we will see below, on the one hand, by holding the All India Adi-Hindu Conference and by

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establishing the Central Adi-Hindu Social Service League, Bhagya Reddy, on the one hand, was claiming a separate identity for the Dalits; on the other hand, by involving caste-Hindu organisations as Brahmo Samaj and Jeeva Raksha Gnana Pracharak Mandali, and by establishing Swasti Dal Volunteers Corps, which worked mainly among the caste-Hindus during the time of natural calamities, and by involving them in the promotion of Telugu nationalism, which was promoted mainly by the non-Brahmin upper castes, Bhagya Reddy never hid his intention of the integration of the Dalits into the caste-Hindu society. What is interesting about his stand was that he was not aiming at integrating the Dalits because they were some kind of helpless creatures who required the helping hand of caste-Hindus - the kind of ideology that was behind Gandhi's idea of Harijans. Rather he projected them as people with merit and thus, equal to the rest of the caste-Hindus.

The Nizam-ruled Hyderabad state was the largest princely state in the Indian sub-continent. It consisted of nine Telugu speaking Telangana districts (Adilababad, Hyderabad,[454] Karimnagar, Khammam, Nalgonda, Warangal, Mehboobnagar, Medak and Nizamabad); five of Marathwada (Beedar, Aurgangabad, Parbhani, Nanded and Osmanabad); and three Kannada speaking districts (Gulbarga, Bidar and Bijapur). Of these the Telugu speaking districts made up 47 percent of the total state's population and represented the largest linguistic unit. Despite its territorial vastness, the Hyderabad state was economically one of the most backward regions in the sub-continent,[455] and until after the First World War, the region had witnessed little development either of commercial agricultural or industrial in nature.[456] The backwardness of the state was also because of its political structure and relations with its subjects. For instance, the Nizam's support base – constituted by 'a class of landed gentry',[457] - consisted of Muslim *jagirdars* and Hindu *deshmukhs* and *deshpandes* – belonging to the Reddy, Velama and

[454] In recent years the Hyderabad district has bifurcated into the urban district of Hyderabad, and rural district of Rangareddy, and thus the number of districts in Telangana has gone up to ten.
[455] Two of the richer agricultural regions – coastal Andhra and Berar (Vidarbha), which earlier had been controlled by the Nizam, were annexed to the British territories. And whatever was left to the Nizam was a combination of rocky and drought-prone area.
[456] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and…*p.119.
[457] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class and Social Articulations in Andhra Pradesh: Mapping Differential Regional Trajectories.* London: Overseas Development Institute, - Working Paper No. 179, p. 6.

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Brahmin castes. While at the top, the state allowed its subjects hardly any civil or political rights, at the lower levels, the landed gentry inflicted untold sufferings upon the rural population, such as illegal eviction of farmers from their fields and the extraction of free goods and labour, which was known as *vetti* – mainly from the Dalits.

Thus, Hyderabad state was 'the most feudal'[458] in the sub-continent, a state that denied any kind of dignity and self-respect to its people. While such feudal rule was repressive for all the subjects, the worst hit was the Dalits. In that respect they were caught between traditional, caste and feudal forms of subordination and 'had little opportunities to move into freer forms of industrial or agricultural wage labour'.[459] It should be mentioned here that while the caste-Hindu society in general had been oppressive to the Dalits, the Muslim society was no angel either. It also practised social discrimination against the Dalits. In fact, taking advantage of political power, the Muslims also humiliated the Dalits in the worst possible ways. For instance, in the *Devadasi* custom very often the *Basavis* or *Matangis* formed relations with affluent or noble Muslim men. And when the Dalits stepped in to stop this custom, they experienced heightened antagonism from the Muslim population.[460] It was against this caste and class-based subordination that the Dalits in Hyderabad and Secunderabad launched a small but vigorous movement for social equality and political representation by adopting the Adi-Hindu identity since the early 1900's. But what was the specific context in which Dalit activism in the form of Adi-Hinduism emerged?

Although by the early 1920's the entire Indian sub-continent was occupied in the movement for freedom from British colonial rule, the Hyderabad state stood aloof by effectively repressing any form of political movement in its territory. Even the Congress and Communists could not get a toehold in the state until the late 1930's. Yet people (particularly the non-Muslims), who were charged up politically, found alternative ways of organising through religious and linguistic movements and became part of the anti-colonial struggle, a struggle that had both anti-Nizam and anti-Muslim undertones in the

[458] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and* …, p. 119.
[459] Ibid., p. 120.
[460] Ibid., pp: 120-121.

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state. For instance, what started as the preservation and promotion of Hindu religion and culture by the Arya Samajis in Hyderabad took on a political colour and fed into the Congress movement to give it a 'Hindu' nationalist tenor.[461] The Muslims, who were threatened by such activities of the Arya Samajis, sought to promote an orthodox Islamic culture. The clamour, both among the Muslims and Hindus, to promote their versions of culture, which had religious overtones, resulted in tearing down the fabric of communal harmony, and by the late 1920's Hyderabad was witnessing frenzied polarisation on communal grounds.

Further, although a majority of the people in the Telangana region - excluding the state bureaucrats, landed gentry and the Muslims - spoke Telugu, Urdu language was used not only as the medium of instruction in all educational institutions, but the entire state business was conducted exclusively in that language. The upper castes saw such pervasiveness of Urdu as a form of cultural domination of the Muslims, who were already enjoying political power in the state through the Nizam, a Muslim. In order to promote their language and culture the upper castes initiated a number of measures since the early 1900's. For instance, the Sri Krishna Devaraya Andhra Basha Nilayam – a library, was established in Hyderabad in 1901 under the patronage of the Raja of Munagala. The Sri Raja Raja Narendra Andhra Basha Nilayam was established at Hanumakonda in 1904; the Vignan Chandrika Mandali was established in Hyderabad in 1906 and the Andhra Jana Sangam was established by Madapati Hanumantha Rao in 1921.[462] By the 1930's these initiatives transformed into an effective mass-based, peasant- oriented forum for the articulation of the demands of the upper castes in the Telangana region. It was at the height of the communal and linguistic politics and tensions that the Dalits began to claim social equality and political representation on the basis of Adi-Hindu identity in Hyderabad and Secunderabad.

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[461] Ibid., p. 120.

[462] See Hanumantha Rao, Madapati. 1950. *Telangana Andhrodhyamam* (Andhra (Telugu) Movement in Telangana). Hyderabad: Andhra Granthamala; Sarojini, Ragani. 1975. The Movement for the Social and Cultural Revival of Telangana in the Hyderabad State. In: Bawa, V. K., ed., *Aspects of Deccan History.* Hyderabad: Institute of Asian Studies; Srinivas, K. 2001. *Rendu Prapancha Yuddhala Madhya Telugu Sahityam: Telangana Sahitya Punarvikasam 1919-1939.* Ph.D. Potti Sri Ramulu Telugu University, Hyderabad.

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(A) Bhagya Reddy Varma and the Adi-Hindu Movement, 1900-1930: As mentioned above, the three men at the centre of the Dalit activity in Hyderabad and Secunderabad were Bhagya Reddy Varma, Arigay Ramaswamy and B.S. Venkatrao. During the first phase (1900-1930) of Dalit activity while Bhagya Reddy provided the leadership, the other two leaders were at the forefront in the second phase (1930-1950).

Bhagya Reddy Varma, whose original name was Madari Bhagayya, was born into the Mala caste on May 22, 1888 to Madari Venkaiah and Rangamamba. He lost his father at an early age and began working while still a young boy, as butler in a Roman Catholic household in Secunderabad. Francis Xavier Dos Santos, a barrister who had employed Bhagya Reddy was kind to him. In addition to sponsoring Bhagya Reddy's education, Santos also bore all the expenditure on his books and Telugu journals. Through the reading of these journals and books Bhagya Reddy was exposed to contemporary happenings both in India and the world at large. Again through these books he was acquainted with the activities of various social reformers and social movements, and the debate on the questions of Aryan and non-Aryan themes. This exposure made him extremely conscious of his own caste's social standing within the Brahmanical social structure, and the extreme forms of discrimination against the Dalits by the caste-Hindus. It was this consciousness, claims Gautam – the son of Bhagya Reddy – that propelled him to work for the people's uplift.[463]

Bhagya Reddy began his career as a Dalit social activist by associating with the Jagan Mitra Mandali,[464] a Dalit cultural organisation. The main function of this organisation was to organise the singing of *bhajans* and *harikatha* (folk tales) performances, mainly for the benefit of Dalits, as they were prevented from attending these activities in the Hindu temples. In 1911 Jagan Mitra Mandali was renamed first as Manya Sangam and later as the Central Adi-Hindu Social Service League (the Adi-Hindu League),

[463] Gautam, M.B. 1991. *Bhagyodayam – Madari Bhagya Reddy Varma* (Life Sketch and Mission of Bhagya Reddy Varma). Hyderabad: Adi-Hindu Social Service League Trust, pp: 2-3.

[464] The Jagan Mitra Mandali appears to be one of the earliest organisations founded by the Dalits. Gautam, the son of Bhagya Reddy Varma, claims that the organisation was founded by his father. But it appears, from an account of P.R. Venkataswamy, Varma was merely involved with the organisation's activities since its inception. See Venkataswamy, P. R. 1955. *Our Struggle for Emancipation,* 2 Vols. Secunderabad: Universal Art Printers.

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immediately after the Madras government accepted the Dalits' demand for recognising them as Adi-Hindus in 1922.[465] The Adi-Hindu League organised the first all India Adi-Hindu Conference in Hyderabad in 1922.[466] The Conference was attended by Dalit delegates from various parts of India, especially from Bombay, Pune, Karachi, Nagpur, Yavatmal, Raipur, Vijayawada, Machilipatnam, Rajahmundry and Eluru.[467] This all India-level participation indicated both an expansion of Dalit activities in Hyderabad, as well as the growing influence of Bhagya Reddy as a national-level Dalit activist.

Some of the resolutions passed in the Adi-Hindu Conference shed some light on the concerns and activities of Dalits during the 1920's. The conference touched on the issues pertaining to social practices, religious rites and ceremonies of the Dalits and also urged them to educate their children. The following resolutions were passed at the meet:

(1) The present demeaning names thrust on the so-called Untouchables by Aryan Hindus and which are in vogue should be dropped and they should be called Adi-Hindus, and according to the regions as Adi-Andhra, Adi-Dravida, Adi-Karnataka and Adi-Maharashtra. Together they should be known as Adi-Hindus (the original pre-Aryan Hindus);
(2) The Adi-Hindus' should educate their children and take full advantage of the facilities given to them by the native States and British Government;
(3) The States and British Government should open primary schools exclusively for the benefit of the Adi-Hindu children, and penalties should be imposed on the authorities of the middle and high schools, run both by the private organisations and government, if they do not admit the Adi-Hindu students into these institutions;
(4) Marriages at very early age should be prevented; in a marriageable couple, the bride's age should not be below 14 years and bridegroom's below 19 years;
(5) In marriages and other auspicious functions, liquor and meat (non-vegetarian food) should not be served and expenditure on pomp and show should be avoided;
(6) Dedication of girls to deities as *Devadasis* – known as *Jogins, Murlis,* and by other names in different parts of India should be declared immoral and such a custom must be abolished altogether;
(7) Adi-Hindu *Acharyas* (the Dalit priests) should work for the moral uplift of the community and dissuade them from believing in superstitions.[468]

From the above resolutions two aspects are clear: First, there was a growing consciousness among the Dalits about their stigmatised social identity, standing, and

[465] Yagati, C. R. 2003. *Dalits' struggle …*p. 172.
[466] Gautam, M.B. 1991. *Bhagyodayam…*,pp: : 2-3.
[467] Vadlakonda, Narasimha Rao. 1923. Nizam Rasthra Andhrodhyamamu (Telugu movement in Nizam's State). *Andhra Patrika,* 14 Annual Issue, p. 170.
[468] Gautam, M.B. 1991. *Bhagyodayam…,* p.51.

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economic condition, especially of poverty and illiteracy; secondly, there was also a growing aspiration as well as assertion by them to ameliorate those debilitating conditions and to adopt the upper caste customs. Not surprisingly, these resolutions shaped the aims and objectives as well as the activities of the Adi-Hindu Social Service League. To mention some of the aims and objectives of the League:

(1) To discourage the Adi-Hindus from using ignoble appellations (such as Mala and Madigas) imposed on them by others, and to make themselves known only as Adi-Hindus;
(2) To generate mutual sympathy and brotherhood among the Adi-Hindus;
(3) To remove the prevailing social evils among the Adi-Hindus, and to educate them in a manner which would ultimately lead to their social, moral, religious, economic and literary uplift;
(4) To undertake research work on the ancient history of the Adi-Hindus and to spread knowledge among them by publishing books, leaflets and newspapers under the title of 'Ancient Indian Historical Literature Series';
(5) To establish the Adi-Hindu societies, schools, reading rooms, *bhajan mandals,* and boys' scout associations mainly for their benefit;
(6) To strive for and achieve due recognition with the help and co-operation of all classes of people.[469]

From the above resolutions as well as aims and objectives of the Adi-Hindu League, it is clear that the Dalits were concerned mainly with three issues: (a) a separate social identity, (b) internal reforms, and (c) external reach, i.e., co-operating with the others. Let's examine the Dalit activities which have centered on these three main aspects:

(a) Claiming Adi-Hindu Identity: As mentioned earlier, Bhagya Reddy was influenced by the debates around the Aryan, non-Aryan and Dravidian identities. In addition to these debates, the everyday practices of discrimination against the Dalits and their extremely disabling socio-economic conditions forced Bhagya Reddy to conclude that the Dalits are a separate entity from the caste-Hindu society; and that they were not only the original inhabitants of India (the Adi-Hindus), but also the rulers of the country before the advent of the Aryans, i.e., the upper-caste Hindus. He propagated this idea of separate Adi-Hindu identity on various platforms. For instance, in his *Purana Charitramu: Bharatha Kanda Pracheena Jathulu* (Original Communities in Ancient India: A History), Bhagya Reddy traced the history of Dalits to the pre-Aryan times and built a royal lineage for them.[470] And in 1917 in the 'First Provincial Panchama Mahajana Sabha' in Vijayawada,

[469] Venkataswamy, P. R. 1955. *Our Struggle for …,* p. 40.
[470] This book was published by the Jagan Mitra Mandali.

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while standing amidst caste Hindu reformers, particularly the Brahmins, Bhagya Reddy boldly rejected the Panchama identity for the Dalits and gave them the Adi-Hindu identity.[471] When Bhagya Reddy organised an All India Adi-Hindu Conference in Hyderabad under the chairmanship of Rau Sahib T. J. Papanna, a Dalit from Belgaon, the Adi-Hindu identity was once again claimed by the Dalits. One of the resolutions of the conference describes the Dalits as, "the descendents of the original inhabitants of this country who were rulers and owners of this land of their birth before the advent of Aryans to the country".[472]

Thus, by declaring themselves as the Adi-Hindus, the Dalits were claiming not just the historical heritage and the status as the original inhabitants of India, but more importantly establishing that they should be the rulers of India. In addition to this claim, on the eve of taking the Census in 1930, Bhagya Reddy and others in the Adi-Hindu League campaigned among the Dalits to identify themselves as Adi-Hindus rather than by their individual caste names, such as the Madigas and Malas. The Adi-Hindu League leaders also submitted a memorandum to the Nizam of Hyderabad to consolidate all the Dalit castes into one broader segment as Adi-Hindus.[473] Interestingly, the Nizam responded positively to this request and subsequently ordered the Census Commissioner to record the Dalits as Adi-Hindus, and from the Census records of 1931 it became clear that the campaigns of the Adi-Hindu leaders were successful, as a total of 24,73,230 Dalits were identified as Adi-Hindus.[474] But what did Dalits want to achieve by the adaptation of the Adi-Hindu identity?

The aims behind the adaptation of the Adi-Hindu identity by the Dalits of Hyderabad were not fundamentally different from the Adi claims elsewhere in India during that time. First of all, it was to claim an independent identity from the caste-Hindu society, an identity that provides them not just space to remove themselves from the Brahmanical social structure, but more importantly, endows them with an inheritance, that is, as the

[471] Abbasayulu, Y.B. 1979. *Sociology of Depressed Classes.* Hyderabad: Osmania University, p. 8.
[472] Cited in Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and Democratic…,* p. 122.
[473] Census of India, 1931, Vol. 23, *The Nizam's Dominions (Hyderabad State)*, Part-I, Report, p. 225.
[474] Ibid., p. 248.

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original inhabitants of India as well as rulers of the country before the advent of the Aryans, the outsiders. This would allow them to do away with the imposed and stigmatised identities, such as the identities of Mala and Madiga etc. Thus, the Adi-Hindu identity was an attempt to instill a sense of self-respect and dignity among the Dalits. Finally, it had the potential to bring all the Dalits as Adi-Hindus under a broad umbrella which in turn, helps the Dalits both to transcend their individual caste boundaries and forge a strong unity among themselves as one group of people.

Yet, it should be clearly recognised here that although the ideology behind the Adi-Hindu claim of the Hyderabad Dalits was the same as that of the Adi ideologies of the Dalits elsewhere in India, the Dalits in Hyderabad differed fundamentally from the rest of the Dalits. What lay beneath the claim of the Adi-Hindu identity was not a claim of separate racial and religious identity, but a claim for a respectable, dignified and equitable identity of the Dalits within the caste structure. Bhagya Reddy Varma's, a Mala by caste with an upper caste identity, is a case in point. He was originally Madari Bhagaiah. But he took the name 'Bhagya Reddy Varma' in order to claim a high status – 'Varma' being Brahminic and 'Reddy' indicating the high status non-Brahmin.[475]

(b) Reforming Self (Internal reforms): Bhagya Reddy and his associates, who were involved and influenced by the ideologies of the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj came to believe that the socio-economic problems suffered by the Dalits including poverty, illiteracy, discrimination as well as the stigma of untouchability was on account of their bad behaviour. If this so-called bad behaviour was to be corrected, then the caste-Hindus would treat the Dalits with respect and dignity, and above all, as equals. Four conditions were identified as the main reasons of the so-called 'bad behaviour of the Dalits': (1) child marriages, (2) alcohol and meat consumption, (3) practice of the *Devadasi* custom and, (4) illiteracy. Accordingly a number of activities were undertaken by the Adi-Hindu League under the leadership of Bhagya Reddy. For instance, Bhagya Reddy wrote songs

[475] A Dalit using the Reddy title was vehemently resented and fiercely contested by the caste Hindus. For instance, Suravaram Pratapa Reddy, a prominent Telugu literary activist – nevertheless a Reddy by caste questioned the act of Bhagya Reddy Varma: "…if everyone called himself a Reddy, what would happen to the original Reddys?" See Venkataswamy, P.R. 1955. *Our Struggle…*p. 3.

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against the consumption of alcohol (*Madhyapaana Nishedha Keertanalu* [Songs on prevention of alcohol consumption]), which were dramatised and performed by the Adi-Hindu League activists in the Dalit localities.

In addition to these, Bhagya Reddy and his associates focused their energies on spreading education among the Dalits. Education, for them was an important tool in the social and moral uplift of the Dalits. Towards this end: Bhagya Reddy established the first publishing house in Hyderabad under the name of Adi-Hindu Press, and started a Telugu fortnightly called *Bhagyanagar Patrika* in 1925.[476] Through this newspaper he tried to expose the devastating conditions of the Dalits. "But major sections of the *Patrika* were", Jangam observes, "devoted to preaching to the untouchables especially about social and religious reforms, abstinence from intoxicants, to discontinue the practice of animal sacrifice in marriages, festivals and funerals."[477] Further, the newspaper regularly carried short stories of those Dalits who heroically abstained from all temptations, particularly of women and alcohol.[478] These stories were mainly from the Hindu *puranas,* such as the Mahabharata and Ramayana. Interestingly, Bhagya Reddy invited and encouraged the upper castes to write on the conditions of the Dalits as well as measures to be taken for the uplift of the Dalits.

Secondly, in 1910, Bhagya Reddy, with active support from the *Manya Sangam,* set up three lower primary schools in three Dalit localities in Easamaiah Bazar, Lingampally and Boggulakunta. Inspired by the success of these schools, more schools were opened up in different parts of Hyderabad and Secunderabad. For instance, M.L. Audaiah, a member of the Adi-Hindu Social Service League, founded an Adi-Hindu Primary School at Secunderabad, which was subsequently patronised by the Resident of Hyderabad (the British representative in the Nizam State) and named as William Barton Boys School.

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[476] Bhagya Reddy could not run this newspaper continuously. After two years, the paper had to be closed down as he was fallen sick and went to Mysore for the medical treatment. He managed to revive the paper after his return to Hyderabad in 1930. See, Ramesan, N. 1966. *The Freedom Struggle in Hyderabad, Vol. IV (1921-1947),* Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, p. 79.

[477] Jangam, C. 2005. *Contesting Hinduism…,* p.135.

[478] One of the examples of the reformed Dalits was Puthalapattu Sriramulu's *Adimandhra Bhaktuni Jeevitham* (Life of an Adi-Andhra Devotee), *Bhagyanagar Patrika,* 1 July 1932, pp: 6-9, cited in ibid. p. 135.

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Gradually the number of schools started by the Adi-Hindu League in and around Hyderabad and Secunderabad rose to 26 and about 2500 students were studying in those schools. These schools were funded mainly by the *Jeeva Raskhsa Pracharak Mandali* or the Deccan Humanitarian League, and also from the donations from the public at large.[479]

(c) External reach: Although Bhagya Reddy's main focus had always been the Dalits and their socio-economic development he also tried to reach out to the caste-Hindu society by taking part in their socio-religious, as well as cultural and political initiatives. Through these participations Bhagya Reddy not only tried to prove that Dalits were as capable as any caste-Hindus but also sought to create a positive impression about the Dalits among the caste-Hindus, so as to build bridges between the caste-Hindu and Dalit societies. In other words, on the one hand, Bhagya Reddy and his associates initiated internal reforms among the Dalits through the Central Adi-Hindu Social Service League, while on the other hand, both by sharing some of the concerns of the upper castes as well as taking part in their organisational activities, the Dalit leaders made an effort to reach out to the caste-Hindus with the intention of integrating the Dalit society into the caste Hindu society. The Dalit efforts to reach out to the caste-Hindu society were mainly focused in three areas: (1) Participation in the caste-Hindu-based religious activities, (2) Social integration, and (3) Telugu nationalism. Let's discuss these aspects in detail:

(c1) Participating in the religious activities of the Caste Hindus: From the early years of his social activism Bhagya Reddy involved with the caste-Hindu-based religious reform movements in Hyderabad. For instance, he was one of the leading figures both in the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj. In fact, he was one of the founders of the Brahmo Samaj in Hyderabad, along with Aghorinath Chattopadhyaya and N. G. Wellinker.[480] And when the Hyderabad branch of Arya Samaj initiated a campaign against the practice of untouchability, Bhagya Reddy was at its forefront. Interestingly, Bhagya Reddy's involvement was not confined to these religious reform associations. He knocked at the

[479] In 1933 when maintaining of this elaborate network of schools became difficult, the Nizam came to the rescue of these schools by taking them over and merging them into government-run chain of schools. See ibid.

[480] Dhakarapu, Apparao. 1980. *Akhila Bharata Brahma Samajamu: Samkshiptha Charitra* (All India Brahmo Samaj: A Brief History). Hyderabad, p. 542.

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door of every religion, except Christianity and Islam, to gain their confidence and social acceptability for the Dalits. For instance, while organising the Dalits through the Manya Sangam, he preached Buddhas' teaching and celebrated Buddha's birth anniversary. Some of the Jain merchants in Hyderabad began to appreciate Bhagya Reddy's efforts to ameliorate the wretched conditions of the Dalits. And they supported his social activities with financial aid. Bhagya Reddy saw this help as the change of heart among the Jains towards the Dalits, and so he wrote several pamphlets urging them to allow the Dalits into their temples. One example of such pamphlets was: *Jaino! Achuthonko Jaina Mandirome Berok Anedho!* (Oh Jains! Let the *panchamas* freely enter the Jain temples). And in order to please the caste-Hindus he urged the Dalits to give up meat eating, perform *bhajans* in the temples and recite the Hindu religious mantras.

Bhagya Reddy's involvement with various religious associations, especially with the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj inspired the Dalits and subsequently many Dalits joined these religious associations.[481] Of course, it should be mentioned here that, although Dalits joining these associations were inspired by the presence of their leader, they often had a different aspiration. As these associations were founded upon the fundamental principle of human equality, they did not recognise any individual on the basis of his/her caste and, thus, the problem of untouchability did not arise. For instance, for the Brahmo Samajists, every individual was a Brahmo. And Dalits felt that by being part of these religious associations they not only escaped the stigma of being untouchables or the social prejudices but, more importantly, gained self-respect and human dignity.

But the Dalits' strategy of joining religious associations in order to be given human dignity did not work out that way. Despite becoming Brahmos, they continued to be identified as *panchamas* and thus, continued to be discriminated against. Interestingly, such discrimination against the Dalits was not just by the normal caste-Hindus, but even by those caste-Hindus, who were members of these religious associations. P.R. Venkataswamy observes:

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[481] Abbasayulu, Y.B. 1978. *Scheduled Caste Elite…,* p. 32.

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> [I]f a Hindu was asked his caste, the questioner would not feel satisfied with the simple answer Hindu. He would be anxious to know his sub-caste also. Under such circumstances, an untouchable should say either a *Mala* or *Madigas* or some other sub-caste. If a member of Brahmo Samaj was asked his caste, he would straightaway say, without fear of stigma, that his caste was Brahmo. As the movement developed, the word Brahmo lost its significance and whoever said that he was a Brahmo was suspected either to be *Mala* or a *Madiga.*[482]

In a way, whether outside the Brahmo Samaj or inside it, Dalits were treated as Dalits by the caste-Hindus, and their dream of a new identity, respect, and social amalgamation was thwarted by the caste prejudices against them by society at large and the caste-Hindu society in particular.

(c2) Social Integration: Bhagya Reddy's ideas on social integration of the Dalits with the caste-Hindu society were practical and far ahead in its thinking. He evolved a three-pronged strategy: First, he involved some of the key public persons – drawn mainly from upper caste and class backgrounds – in the Adi-Hindu League by offering them some important positions within the organisation. For instance, while Justice Rai Balmukund, a retired High Court Judge, was made president of the League; N. G. Wellinker, Justice Keshav Rao and Vaman Ramachandra Naik, prominent public persons in Hyderabad, were made vice-presidents of the League. In addition to this, the League had an executive committee as well as an advisory board. While the former consisted of 12 Dalit members, who were drawn from various Dalit castes, especially from the Mala and Madiga castes, the latter was constituted by members drawn from various religious groups. For instance, during the League's initial years, the Advisory Board had 34 upper-caste Hindus, one Muslim, one Christian, one Parsee and two Jains.[483] However, the whole enterprise of integration of the Dalits with the other social communities by means of positions in the League seemed to be an ambitious one, which did not give the expected results. Yet, it had its own benefits. For instance, the presence of the powerful and prominent members of Hyderabad not only gained social recognition and respect for the League, it also secured financial benefits for the continuation of the organisation's

[482] Venkataswamy, P.R. 1955. *Our Struggle …,* p.9.
[483] Ibid.,p. 39.

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activities. For instance, Rai Balmukund not only supported the League financially, but also used his position to secure grants-in-aid to the Adi-Hindu schools from the Nizam.[484]

Secondly, Bhagya Reddy, though his writings, in the form of pamphlets and essays in his newspaper, advocated inter-caste marriages between the Dalits and upper-caste Hindus. One of the prominent works of this advocacy was his *Veera Suratha Manjari: Mala Pillanu Raakumarudu Pendliyaduta* (Royal Prince Marrying a Mala Girl). It may be interesting to note here that acquiring power, material benefits or social elevation by means of marriage, especially by offering daughters to powerful people, such as kings and feudal lords were not unknown both in Indian history and literature. So far, however, those articulations were confined exclusively to the upper castes and the literature created by them. But Bhagya Reddy through his fictional work was breaking the stereotype of marriages at that time by effectively asserting that a royal prince can marry even a Mala girl; and that Mala girls are as beautiful as any other upper caste girls and equally capable of attracting the attention of a royal prince. However, it must be pointed out that, despite Bhagya Reddy's claiming of Adi-Hindu identity for Dalits, his use of Mala identity rather than the Adi-Hindu identity by making his subject in the story a girl from the Mala caste reflected his own biases against the other Dalit castes. As a Mala himself, he always thought that Malas were better than the rest of the Dalit castes. What is striking is that we see hardly any presence of the Madigas in Bhagya Reddys' initiatives.

Thirdly, a final strategy in Bhagya Reddys' social integration was his Swasti Dal Voluntary Corps. He established the Swasti Dal in 1912 with 35 volunteers, who were drawn from the Mala caste exclusively. The main objective of the Dal was to provide relief services in times of disasters and calamities. Reports in the *Andhra Patrika* (a newspaper) inform us of the services of the Dal volunteers during times of epidemics. For instance, during the early 1920's, when Hyderabad was struck by plague and cholera, the Dal volunteers helped the victims by distributing medicines, milk and fruits, and also

[484] The presence of Rai Bahadur Venkata Rami Reddy, the Hyderabad city police commissioner, in the League also secured financial help from numerous business people in the city. See Pratapa Reddy, Suravaram (1939) *Rajah Bahadur Venkata Rami Reddy Jeevitha Charitra* (A Life History of Rajah Bahadur Venkata Rami Reddy), Hyderabad: Reddy Sangam.

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in disposing the unclaimed dead bodies.[485] Interestingly, Sir Ali Imam, president of the executive council of the Nizam's Government, in recognition of the services of the Dal awarded Bhagya Reddy and his team a certificate of appreciation.

In addition to these voluntary services, Bhagya Reddy was also involved as the organising secretary of the *Jeeva Raksha Gnana Pracharak Mandali,* which was popularly known as the Deccan Humanitarian League. This League was established by Rai Balmukund in 1913 in order to spread the ideals of non-violence and the protection of animals.[486] But what was the significance of these voluntary activities by Bhagya Reddy and his team? As we have noted, Bhagya was influenced by the ideologies of the Brahmo Samaj and Aray Samaj and he came to firmly believe that overcoming caste-based restrictions against Dalits and entering the domain, both physical and non-physical, of the caste-Hindus wold be by means of good character and deeds. Through these *seva* activities, Bhagya wanted to prove that Dalits, who were always seen as people at the receiving end of the *seva* by the caste-Hindus, could render services to the caste-Hindus and thus mould their behaviour and character.

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(c3) Telugu Nationalism: As mentioned earlier, the power struggle between the elite Muslims and upper caste Hindus took the form of religious and cultural preservation and promotion movements. And the question of language became one of the main ingredients in the entire saga of the power struggle. While the Muslims insisted on the continuation of Urdu as the medium of instruction both in the primary as well as higher educational institutions, the Hindus, by forming Andhra Maha Sabha, demanded that they should be allowed to impart education in the Telugu medium. Bhagya Reddy and his associates, who had been part of the caste Hindu-based reformist religious organisations, and who were funded by the caste-Hindus, naturally took the side of the latter, joined the Andhra movement, and were active participants in the annual conferences of the Andhra Maha Sabha. Besides, Bhagya Reddy had been at the forefront in promoting the Telugu

[485] *Andhra Patrika,* Annual Issue, March 1926, p. 17.
[486] Ramesan, N. 1957. *The Freedom Struggle in Hyderabad, Vol. III,* Hyderabad: Govt. of AP, p. 235.

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language by launching his fortnightly newspaper, *Bhagyanagar Patrika*, in which he campaigned for the installation of Telugu as the medium of instruction in schools.

Of course, while being part of the Telugu movement, he did not deviate from his larger agenda of uplifting the Dalits. In fact, he used the Andhra Maha Sabha forum to gain certain benefits for the Dalits from the Nizam government. For instance, in the first Andhra Maha Sabha conference held in Jogipet of Medak district in 1930, he proposed two resolutions. In the first resolution, he urged the Nizam government to take all the necessary measures for the educational needs of the Dalits, and in the second resolution, he condemned the Nizam's officials for forcing the Dalits to perform forced labour (*vetti chakiri*) and requested the Nizam to intervene and stop the practice.[487] Allowing the Dalits to use the Andhra Maha Sabha platform to put forward their concerns did not mean that upper castes changed their mind and began to treat the Dalits equally. Even in these spaces Dalits, including Bhagya Reddy – a prominent public intellectual of his time - were vulnerable to caste-based prejudices and the practice of untouchability. For instance, in the first Andhra Maha Sabha conference, when Bhagya Reddy reached the dais, members in the audience marched out of the hall shouting slogans against the audacity of a Dalit in getting on the dais which was the exclusive preserve of the upper castes.[488]

Despite significant activities, Dalit activism under the leadership of Bhagya Reddy Varma in Hyderabad could not transform the socio-economic conditions of the Dalits, mainly for two reasons. First, both the ideas and activities of the Adi-Hindu leaders suffered from numerous contradictions. Most notably, the very purpose of claiming an Adi-Hindu identity was to move away from the Brahmanical social structure, claim a respectable social identity and, thus, on the basis of such identity construct a strong and united Adi-Hindu community. But Bhagya Reddy Varma, the main ideologue of the *adi* ideology in Hyderabad, did not argue for the separation of Dalits from the broader Brahmanical social and religious life. Moreover, he was critical of the Dalits and falsely

[487] Madapati, 1950. *Telangana Andhrodhyamam…*pp: 77-78.
[488] Ibid.

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argued that, "the degeneration leading to social ostracism was due to their (*Dalits*) own apathy and ignorance".[489] He was also under the impression, again falsely, that social customs and bad habits among the Dalits, particularly the dedicating of girls to goddesses, sacrifice of animals and eating meat were the main reasons for their degraded social position. And so he always urged his followers to purify themselves by discarding these evil acts. Such thinking was exactly in consonance with the Arya Samaj and other Hindu reformist organisations.

Second, despite his preaching of doing away with caste identities of the Dalits, such as the Malas and Madigas - which were considered to be ignoble from the standpoint of caste-Hindus - and calling for unity of the Dalits under the banner of the Adi-Hindu appellation, Bhagya Reddy Varma was obsessed with Mala identity. One of the titles of his books was *Veera Suratha Manjari: Mala Pillanu Raakumarudu Pendliyaduta* (Royal Prince Marrying a Mala Girl). If he were true to his Adi-Hindu identity, then the title should have been Adi-Hindu instead of Mala. But using the word Mala in the title, yet preaching the Adi-Hindu identity, suggested Brahmanical hypocrisy. Moreover, he was not even in favour of inter-dining and inter-caste marriages among the Dalits. Of course, this is not to suggest that all the Mala leaders were equally hypocritical as Bhagya Reddy Varma. For instance, Arigay Ramasway, although he came from the Mala caste, adopted a Madiga girl and actively worked for the unity between the two castes.[490]

5. III. Dalit Activism in Telugu Country, 1930 - 50

During the 1930's and 1940's, political developments at the national level, particularly peasant resistance, Congress's pro-Hindu inclinations, growth of the Communist Party and rise of Ambedkar as the sole leader of the Dalits, were all finding a dramatic centre in the politics of the coastal Andhra region as well as in Nizam's Hyderabad. In the First Chapter we noted that following the entry of M K Gandhi on the political scene of the country, we witnessed the entry of new contestants in the struggle for power. While earlier, the struggle was confined to the elite and middle classes, now the masses were

[489] Krishnaswamy, K. Mudiraj. *Pictorial Hyderabad,* p. 516, cited in Jangam, C. 2005. *Contesting…*p. 145.
[490] My interview with DVS Nayarayana, Hyderabad, 22 Feb, 2005.

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also drawn into the game. Further, in what was an astute move by Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the Congress signed the Lucknow Pact with the Muslim League in 1916, by which the Congress accepted the principle of a separate electorate for Muslims "in the larger interest of forging a united Hindu-Muslim front against colonial rule".[491]

The force of such mass-based mobilisation as well as political unity between the two major religious groups against colonial rule certainly had far-reaching consequences. The British, who were already caught up in the web of economic severities due to the First World War, were further threatened by these new developments. They began to initiate a few measures in order to assuage Indian public opinion. On August 20, 1917, Edwin Montague famously declared that the British government's objective was to bring about, "the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to progressively realise a responsible government in India as an integral part of the Empire".[492] This declaration was followed by the Montague-Chelmsford reforms of 1919. These reforms though they did not provide for the provision of a separate electorate for the Dalits, they did provide a few nominated seats for them in legislative bodies[493] and thus raised the curtain for intense political activity by the Dalits across the country. For the first time, the Dalit spokesmen were heard in political assemblies and the legislatures took an interest in the problems of the Dalits. The denial of access to Dalits in schools, wells and roads was declared illegal in various legislative resolutions and administrative orders. Yet, such resolutions and orders were, Marc Galanter points out, "honoured largely in the breach".[494] The government, on its part, began to provide land, housing, schooling, and government posts to the Dalits which resulted in the increase of Dalit children in schools and the entry of a few educated Dalits in government services. Thus, by the close of the

[491] Bose, S. and A. Jalal., 1998. *Modern South Asia: History, Culture, Political Economy.* London: Routledge, p.129.
[492] Metcalf, R. Thomas. 1997[1995]. Ideologies *of the Raj.* Cambridge: CUP, p. 225.
[493] Galanter, Marc. 1984. *Law and the Backward Classes in India,* Berkeley: UCP, p. 29.
[494] Ibid., p. 28.

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1920's, as Eleanor Zelliot observed, "the principle of special attention (for the Dalits) was firmly established".[495]

One particular event that animated all the castes, communities and political parties for a heightened political activity during the end of 1920's was the visit of the Simon Commission in 1928. The Commission was empowered to make recommendations for Round Table Conferences to create a new constitutional framework for India. While all the upper caste and class-based political outfits, including the Congress, Muslim League and Justice Party boycotted the Commission, ostensibly on account of lack of "Indian representation" in it, the Dalits all over India welcomed the Commission by organising meetings in its support. By this time, Ambedkar had emerged as a powerful voice of the Dalits. As a member of the Bombay Legislative Council, he introduced Mahar Watan Bill against the forced performance of all forms of free labour, earlier for the so-called *gram pramukhs* (village elders) and now for the British bureaucrats. Ambedkar appeared before the Commission and submitted a long memorandum, which was often described as the "manifesto of untouchable rights",[496] in which he demanded reserved seats for the Dalits in legislative bodies, special educational concessions and recruitment to government jobs; and the Commission in its Report substantially accepted a majority of the demands in the memorandum.[497] But the Report was finally rejected by all the major contenders, including the Congress, Muslim League, Justice Party and Dalits. The British Government, in order to arrive at a possible way out, convened a Round Table Conference in London and invited delegates of all parties and prominent interests groups.

It was precisely at this time that the Dalits, both in Hyderabad and coastal Andhra, turned their attention from their earlier focus of respect and social equality to the question of political representation. But they were not united in their demand. They were, in fact, being pulled in various directions by the major forces in Telugu politics, either into the communist movement or into a pro-Hindu Congress or pro-Muslim politics of

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[495] Zelliot, Eleanor. 1969. *Dr. Ambedkar and the Mahar Movement*. Ph.D. University of Pennsylvania, quoted in Galanter, Marc. 1984. *Law and…*, p.28.
[496] Omvedt, Gail. 2004. *Ambedkar: Towards an Enlightened India.* New Delhi: Penguin, p. 36.
[497] Galanter, Marc. 1984. *Law and the Backward …* p. 30.

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patronage,[498] in addition to a weak but sustained independent activity. In the following section I attempt to examine the Dalit politics and activities, both in Hyderabad and Coastal Andhra. Despite internal regional peculiarities, the Dalit activities in the Telugu-speaking areas during the 1930's and 1940 can be analysed as a unit, for developments in one region had their impact on the other.[499] As Dalit politics and their activities were influenced by three major forces in national and regional politics: Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Communists, I have examined Dalit activity during this period in three sub-sections: (a) Pro-Ambedkarite politics, (b) Pro-Gandhian politics, and (c) Pro-communist politics.

(A) Pro-Ambedkarite politics: Although the Dalit leadership in coastal Andhra region did not show any keen interest in Ambedkar's Depressed Classes Conference of 1930 and issues surrounding the First Round Table Conference, some of the Dalit leaders from Hyderabad did take part in a special session of the Ninth All-India Adi-Hindu Conference in Lucknow in 1931. The conference, which was held on the eve of the Second Round Table Conference, was presided over by Bhagya Reddy. One of the most significant and unanimous resolutions of the conference was recognition of Ambedkar as the sole and true representative to speak on behalf of 90 million Dalits.[500] In addition to this, Dalits in Hyderabad submitted numerous memoranda to the Nizam of Hyderabad, demanding political representation. Subsequently, the Nizam announced the formation of a Constitutional Reforms Committee, under the chairmanship of Aravamudu Aiyangar on September 22, 1937, popularly known as Aiyangar Committee. Interestingly, the Committee was constituted exclusively by members drawn from the Muslim and caste-Hindu backgrounds. The Dalits, who constitute 18 percent in the total population of the state, were not included in it.

Angered by such a blatant exclusion, the Dalits took to the streets and demanded the statutory confirmation of the fundamental rights of citizenship by the legislature,[501] and special protection of the rights of the Dalits and other minorities in the state. In a

[498] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic…,* p..281.
[499] Ibid., p.280.
[500] Gautam, M.B. 1991. *Our Struggle …,* p.32.
[501] Report of the Reforms Committee – 1938 (1347F). Hyderabad-Deccan: Government Central Press, p. 138, cited in Yagati, C.R. 2003. *Dalits' struggle…*,p.146.

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memorandum to the Nizam, they emphasised proportional representation. It was stated that since the Dalits constituted 18 percent of the state's population, 18 per cent of seats should be reserved for them in all the representative bodies of the state. A special representation for the Dalits should be given in the municipal councils, district and taluk boards and other organs of the government. Further, in the event of adoption of separate electorates by the State, the memorandum stated that there should be separate electorates for the Dalits:[502]

> [A]s the depressed classes of the state have certain specific economic and social problems they should be provided with adequate special representation in the council. Till the majority community (Hindus) create full confidence in them, they should be provided with 10 seats in the council. These seats should be distributed over the 16 districts of the state …but any depressed classes' candidate of any one constituency may stand for any other constituency. The above mentioned seats should be contested in election on the basis of separate electorates. The suffrage of the depressed classes should be so wide as to enfranchise a major portion of their population. In addition to the reserved seats, the depressed classes' candidates must be made eligible to any other general seats in any constituency from any part of the state.[503]

Although the Aiyangar Committee rejected the Dalits' demand for separate electorates by equating the notion of separate electors with communal representation, it did take note of their concerns: "A demand has been made on behalf of *Harijans* that seats should be reserved and separate electorates formed for them. We cannot endorse the principle, which generally underlies communal representation. But in the social, educational and economic interests of the *Harijans,* we nevertheless consider it necessary that they should be granted representation in the Legislature."[504] Accordingly, it recommended for one elected representative in municipal committees and town committees, one for the district boards and, finally, two elected representatives for legislature.[505]

The next round of Dalit activity took place when Ambedkar declared his decision on conversion. In 1935 at a Bombay Presidency Depressed Classes conference in Yeola, he put forward the idea of moving away from Hinduism and declared, "I was born a Hindu and have suffered the consequences of untouchability. I will not die a Hindu."[506] This

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[502] Ibid., p. 130.
[503] Cited in Venkataswamy, P. R. 1955. *Our Struggle…,* pp: 108-09.
[504] Report of the Reforms Committee – 1938 (1347F). Hyderabad-Deccan…, p. 59, cited in Yagati, C. R. 2003. *Our Struggle…,* p. 147.
[505] Ibid., p. 148.
[506] Omvedt, Gail. 2004. *Ambedkar…,* p. 61.

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declaration, which was described as a "veritable bombshell", triggered off a great debate on the conversion question throughout India. In the Telugu region also, some young Dalits, such as Eali Vedappalli (1911-71), organising secretary of Adi-Andhra conferences in East Godavari, and Geddada Brahmaiah (1912-50),[507] secretary of an Adi-Andhra Sangham in 1935, were energised by Ambedkar's declaration. They were joined by Kusuma Dharmanna (1898-1948). Dharmanna was one of the important Dalit poets of his time. We have mentioned earlier that he was the author of the famous song *maakoddu nalladoratanam* (we don't want a country ruled by the upper castes). He was also publisher for the *Jayabheri* newspaper. These three leaders became "a sort of mouthpiece for the Ambedkarite group"[508] in coastal Andhra. The tenth conference of the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha was organized at Rajahmundry, East Godavari district in 1935. While Kusuma Venkataramayya was the president of the conference, Kusuma Dharmana was its reception committee chairman. This conference was inaugurated by M.C.Rajah, one of the prominent Dalit leaders of the Madras Presidency. After this conference, several district-level and two provincial-level conferences were organized under the leadership of Kusuma Dharmanna in 1936 and 1938. The twelfth provincial level conference that was organized in 1938 was presided over by Bhagya Reddy Varma. The discussions and debates in all these conferences focused on the demand for reserved seats for the Adi-Andhras in all representative bodies, sanction against those opposing the presence of the Dalit children into schools, job reservations and a demand for waste land. But the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha could not sustain its activism for a long time and beyond the boundaries of East Godavari district. As the popularity of Gandhi and his Congress began to get augmented in the Telugu districts, a majority of the Dalits began to drift into the *Harijan* fold of Gandhi and the Congress; and thus, Adi-Andhra activism could not make a significant impact upon the Dalits in the province.

However, Dalits in Hyderabad were electrified by Ambedkar's declaration. Given the growing communal tensions between the Hindus and Muslims, which were manifested through the dominance of the Arya Samajis over nationalist Hindus, and in the rise of the

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[507] Brahmaiah edited the *Adi-Andhra Patrika* between 1938-40. See Gautam, M.B. 1976. The Untouchables' Movement in Andhra Pradesh. *Harijan Conference Souvenir,* Hyderabad: Govt. AP, p. 71.
[508] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic…,* p.289.

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Majlis-i-Ittehad-ul Mussalman politicising the ordinary Muslims, the excitement among the Dalits was not surprising. For it gave them an opportunity to carve out a separate space for themselves, away from the Hindus and Muslims. But not all of them were eager to grab this new opportunity. They were divided into two major groups opposing each other on Ambedkar's declaration. The pro-Ambedkarite group, which was organised by Venkatrao and Arigay Ramaswamy, was constituted mainly by the young Dalits. The other group, which was led by Bhagya Reddy, continued to believe in internal as well as external reforms. In 1936 the pro-Ambedkarite group was invited to attend a Maharashtra Untouchable Youth Conference in Poona. As Omvedt notes, they were impressed by the "fire-eating speeches of the Maharashtra leaders",[509] and in their return to Hyderabad, they organised a Youth League of Ambedkarites with Venkatrao as president and Venkataswami as secretary. The main aims of the League were: "to organise the youth; to support Ambedkar in leading untouchables out of the Hindu fold; to enlighten people on the evils of Hinduism, to oppose conversion at present but search for a new democratic religion; and to organise a vigorous campaign on socio-economic disabilities."[510]

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Soon the leadership struggle between Venakatrao and Ramaswamy rocked the League, and this, in turn, led to further division of the League. While Venkataswamy formed the Hyderabad State Depressed Classes Association in 1938 and began to lean in a pro-Muslim direction, Ramaswamy went on to revive the Hyderabad State Adi-Hindu Mahasabha. Venkatarao's pro-Islam choice was rather surprising. Until 1938, he never showed any inclination towards Islam. Indeed he never showed any interest towards religious issues. His choice was influenced by his concern for the empowerment of Dalits and a firm belief in the ability of the Hyderabad state, a state that can rescue the Dalits from the clutches of the caste-Hindus and also to provide material benefits to the Dalits.[511] For instance, after Ambedkar's declaration on conversion, the Hyderabad state took several initiatives towards attracting the Dalits into the Islamic fold, such as employing full-time paid Islam preachers and supporting the Majlis in their conversion

[509] Ibid., p.296.
[510] Venkataswamy, P.R. 1955. *Our Struggle…,* p. 122.
[511] Interview with DVS Narayana, Hyderabad, 23 February 2005.

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campaigns among the Dalits. In addition to these measures, the State also provided Dalits with government jobs. It also made the anti-*vethbegar* legislation, which rescued a great number of Dalits from the virtual slavery of the caste-Hindus. Undoubtedly, all these measures provided the basis for the pro-Islam stance of the Dalits and their leaders in Hyderabad.[512]

Although the divisions among the Dalits continued, they all attended the founding meeting of the Scheduled Caste Federation in Nagpur in 1942. During the meeting, Ambedkar advised them to compromise and organise as the Scheduled Caste Federation without any official affiliation to the all India body. But Venkatrao refused to work with the Adi-Hindu group led by Arigay Ramaswamy, Subbaiah and Venkataswamy. On their return, the Dalit leaders of Adi-Hindu faction convened a general body meeting, in which they changed the name of their organisation as the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) and selected Subbaiah as its president and Venkataswamy as its general secretary. Beyond condemning the Dalits' conversion to Islam, the SCF of Hyderabad could not do anything, both due to the continuous factionalism among the Dalits and the fact that Dalits were divided along caste lines. From Bhagya Reddy Varma to Venkatrao and Arigay Ramaswamy in Hyderabad, Vemula Kurmaiah and Kusuma Dharmanna from coastal Andhra - all the important Dalit leaders came from the Mala caste and focused their activism among the Malas, except Arigay Ramaswamy, who addressed the inter-caste differences among the Dalits - especially between the Madigas and Malas - and encouraged inter-caste marriages among them.

In coastal Andhra, a branch of the SCF was formed under the leadership of Buldas, after Ambedkar's visit to Krishna district in 1944. Beyond fighting against atrocities and celebrating Ambedkar's *jayanti,* this branch was not able to affect events very much. Moreover, as Omvedt observes, "In that period of turmoil, with an aroused mass of Dalits, this could not compete with the hard organising and real economic issues being taken up by the Communists or the patronage and co-opting facilities offered by the

[512] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. p.292.

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Congress."[513] Thus, a pro-Ambedkarite Dalit activity was almost dead even before the transfer of power from the British.

(B) Pro-Gandhian Politics: What is fascinating about the relationship between the Dalits and the Congress in the Telugu region was how the oppressor (the Brahmin) himself came to the rescue of the oppressed (the Dalit). While doing so, the former was able to retain his social hegemony and political domination and, in turn, further subordinate and marginalise the latter. As mentioned above, it was the Brahmins who initiated social reforms among the Dalits and who established schools for educating the Dalit children. Those efforts have, undoubtedly, benefited a section among the Dalits. Those Dalits who studied in these schools rose to become leaders of the Adi-Andhra movement, and it was from these schools that a number of Dalit literary figures sprang up and enriched Dalit literature and, thereby, Telugu literature. Yet, it was also equally true that these schools became powerful entities in the hands of the Brahmins to contain the force of the emerging Dalit anger against the socio-cultural hegemony of the former. In a sense, it was through these schools that the Brahmins were able to capture the talented young Dalits and domesticate them for their own interests.

In its domestication of the Dalit leadership, the Congress, under the leadership of the Brahmins, followed a two-pronged strategy: (1) using the *aashrama*-educated Dalits to marginalise the Ambedkarites and, (2) diverting the Dalits' attention from the important issues, such as share in power, towards immaterial issues, such as temple entry.

Although by the late 1920s, Ambedkar had established himself as a strong Dalit leader, his influence was, however, mostly confined to western India. Dalits in Telugu districts were unaware of his activities, at least, until the conflict between him and Gandhi over separate electorates for the Dalits. When some of the younger members of the Adi-Andhra movement came to know about Ambedkar's arguments and the counter-arguments by Gandhi and the latter's adamant attitude by resorting to fasting in the Yeravada prison, they began to shift their loyalties towards Ambedkar. It was during this

[513] Ibid., p.291.

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political heat at the national level that the seventh Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha conference was organised in Bezwada in August 1932, under the leadership of Vemula Kurmayya – another protégé of the Brahmins. The venue of the conference became a battleground between the Ambedkarites and Gandhians.

From the outcome of the discussions, it was clear that the issue was not about separate or joint electorates, it was rather about the leadership of Gandhi and Ambedkar and the arguments that these leaders represented. It was also about the issue of legitimacy of caste-Hindu led nationalism and its appeal to the Dalit constituency. As we have seen in Chapter 1, one of the main arguments of Ambedkar in his demand for separate electorate for Dalits was that they were a separate element within Indian society and hence they were entitled for separate electorates. Gandhi refused this by arguing that Dalits were part and parcel of the Hindu society, and the demand for separate electorate was nothing but dividing the Hindu family. Thus, while Gandhi's fast was seen as an act to protect the unity of Hindus, Ambedkar's demand was an act of separatism. All these arguments and issues found a centre in the discussions at the conference. The presidential address of Vemula was mostly devoted to the issue of Gandhi's fast. He praised Gandhi for sensitising the caste-Hindu society on the deplorable conditions of the Dalits, and placing the abolition of untouchability in the Congress agenda. As expected, he vehemently opposed Ambedkar's move for separate electorate, for such a move would alienate them from the caste-Hindu society. Interestingly, he justified his stand on the basis of the history of the earlier Adi-Andhra conferences, in which the Dalits conceived themselves as part of Hindu society rather than outside of it. And he urged the delegates to trust the good judgement of the caste-Hindus, particularly Gandhi on the joint electorates for the Dalits, and asked them to join the Congress in its fight against the British in liberating the country. Despite the young Dalits' protests, the conference ended by declaring Gandhi as their leader and voting in favour of the joint electorate.[514]

Once the question of share in political power was successfully submerged, the next step of the Congress was to divert Dalit energies towards the non-material issues. And

[514] For details of this conference, see *Krishna Patrika,* 23 August 1932, pp: 16-17.

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Gandhi's *Harijan Sevak Sangh* (HSS) facilitated this diversion. Following the Poona Pact, Gandhi launched the so-called 'Harijan upliftment programme' by establishing the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and in 1932 Andhra branch of HSS, *Andhra Rashtriya Harijan Sevak Sangh* was established in Vijayawada. The branch had an interesting social representation. While Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao, a Brahmin and M. Bapineedu were appointed as President and General Secretary, respectively; Vemula Kurmaiah and Naralasetti Devendrudu (both were Malas [Dalits]) were recruited as the Joint Secretaries. The activities of the Sangh were mostly confined to cleaning of streets and roads in Dalit localities, digging drinking water wells, and establishing separate schools and hostels for the Dalit students. One of the important programmes that was taken up by the Congress leaders was the issue of temple entry for the Dalits. In several districts they organized *satyagrahas* in the name of Gandhi and secured entry forthe Dalits into the temples. Gandhi also made a visit to coastal Andhra to promote the programme in 1933. He personally led the Dalits into two temples in Siddhantam village in Krishna district.[515] M.B. Gautam, a Dalit activist and chronicler, reported the effect of Gandhi's tour: "During Gandhi's tour, lakhs of rupees were collected from the people in the name of *Harijan biksha* (fund) and he (Gandhi) earmarked funds to each district from the collections for providing for the needs of the boarders admitted into hostels managed by the provincial and district Harijan Sevak Sangh branches."[516]

Given the enthusiasm and activism generated by the Andhra Harijan Sevak Sangh and on the basis of the press reports, the programme appeared to be a success. But that was only on the surface. In reality the fate of the Andhra Sangh was no different from other Sanghs in other parts of the country, and the entire programme of Harijan upliftment was "hollow", [517] to use an evocative phrase by Sripada Subramanya Shastri, a famous Telugu short story writer. The temples that were opened to the Dalits were either already abandoned by the caste-Hindus or in a dilapidated condition. Even those temples that

[515] *Krishna Patrika,* 23 December, 1933.
[516] Gautam, M.B. 1976. The Untouchables movement …, p. 72.
[517] Sreepada Subramanya Shastri, in one of his famous short stories, observes that in practice Harijan activities of the caste-Hindus were nothing but 'hollow', cited in Gundimeda, S. 2009. *Madiga saahityam: telugu saahiti phalakampai kotta daruvu* (Madiga Literature: A new beat on Telugu literary drum), in *Veekshanam,* 7(4),p. 33.

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were opened for the Dalits during Gandhi's visit were not only closed soon after he left, purification ceremonies were conducted in a big way to cleanse those temples after that event. Moreover the Sangh activities were concentrated mainly in the town areas and little was done in the rural areas where untouchability and discrimination against the Dalits were practised as a matter of right by the caste-Hindus. Further, what is most astonishing about this whole facade called temple entry of the Dalits is that it was not just the ordinary members of the caste-Hindus that opposed the entry of Dalits into temples. Even some of the Congress leaders, who were at the forefront of the programme, opposed the Dalits' entry in their local temples. To cite one example, Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao, the president of the Andhra Harijan Sevak Sangh did not allow the Dalits into the temple at Yalakarru Agraharam, his native place, where members of his family manage the temple.[518] Thus, the pomp of the activities of the Sangh did not necessarily result in an avowed *change of heart* among the caste-Hindus, but had greatly helped the Congress to rope the Dalits into its fold, and use them against Ambedkarites in order to gain ground in the Dalit community.

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(C) *Pro-Communist politics:* Since the late 1930's, some of the Dalits in both Hyderabad and coastal Andhra began to be drawn into the Communist movements. They were attracted to the Communists' slogans, especially to that of 'a classless society'. However, in practice, the idea of a classless society, as elsewhere, remained a utopic idea; in fact, the movement facilitated and secured the domination of the upper castes, especially from the two dominant castes, Reddy's and Kammas. For instance, P. Sundarayya, Ravi Narayan Reddy and Badam Yella Reddy were all Reddys; M. Basavapunnaiah, Chandra Rajeswara Rao, and C. Vasudeva Rao were Kammas. More specifically, while in Telangana it was the Reddy's who dominated the peasant struggles, in coastal Andhra it was the Kammas that led and controlled the Communist movement for land distribution and minimum wages for agricultural labour. It should be noted here that the Kammas and Reddys joined the Communist party despite caste-based social rivalries and competition for political power between the Kammas and Reddy's should be understood from the vantage point of the domination of the Brahmins in the Congress; one significant

[518] *Krishna Patrika,* 30 December, 1935.

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outcome of the domination of the Communist party by these non-Brahmin upper castes was that it secured and safeguarded the material interests not merely of these two castes, but the rest of the upper castes in the Telugu region.[519]

As mentioned, the Hyderabad state did not allow any form of political activity on its soil. But the politically conscious upper castes organised against the Nizam and against the British under the veil of the Andhra Jana Sangam, a cultural organisation for the promotion and propagation of Telugu language and Telugu culture. Later, the Andhra Maha Sabha was formed, wherein Congressmen, Socialists and Communists all found a place in it. In the late 1930's, it split into two movements, one led by Congress and the other by the Communists.[520] When the group led by the Communists began taking up issues such as the abolition of *vetti*, protection of tenants and the demands of 'land-to-the tiller', the Dalits, along with the other lower castes, were attracted to its activities and accepted the leadership of Ravi Narayana Reddy and Bagam Yella Reddy.

In the 1940's, the Andhra Maha Sabha under the leadership of the Communists, mobilised the rural peasants and landless labourers against the Nizam and against *dora* (feudal lords). This struggle was by far the largest peasant and landless revolt in Indian history.[521] Mao Tse-tung's *On the Protracted War* and *Guerilla War fare* became popular references in the Telangana struggle. Mao's slogan *land to the tiller* became the slogan of Telangana.[522] During the Telangana struggle, the Communists established a parallel government in the rural areas of the Nalgonda and Warangal districts. They also organised people's courts, which decided cases and punished 'enemies of people' – the landlords, *patels* and *patwaris,* informants and government spies.[523]

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[519] See Harrison, S. S. (1956) 'Caste and the Andhra Communists', *The American Political Science Review,* 50(2), pp: 378-404; ……. 1960. *India: The Most Dangerous Decades.* Princeton: PUP.
[520] Gray, Hugh. 1968. Andhra Pradesh. In: Weiner, Myron. ed., *State Politics in India,* Princeton: PUP, pp: 405-06.
[521] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *op. cit.,* p. 280.
[522] Sheshadri, K. 1967. The Communist Party in Andhra Pradesh. In: Narain, Iqbal. ed., *State Politics in India,* New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, p. 391.
[523] Ibid., p.391.

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The Telangana struggle provided the Communists with a rare historical opportunity towards ending the gap between the rich and poor, and thus, establishing their long-cherished goal of a 'classless society'. But the casteist mind of the Communists leaders, as argued by U. Sambasivarao,[524] prevented them from seizing the opportunity. During the course of the struggle a great amount of land belonging to the Brahmin-Karanam, Reddy and Velama *doras* was occupied by the Communists in order to redistribute it among the peasants and landless labourers. It was in the redistribution of the land that the caste-based upper caste bias of the Communists was visibly revealed. In each village a committee called *panch* committee was established for the redistribution. In the name of revolutionaries these committees were primarily occupied by members belonging to Reddy and Kapu upper castes. Dalits were completely denied any role either in the formation of the *panch* committees or any say in the redistribution of the land. "While the lands of the *doras* were distributed among the Reddy and Kapu farmers and tenants, the common pastures and wastelands became the lot of the landless Dalits and other lower castes."[525]

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The Dalit experience with the Communists in coastal Andhra was not so different from their counterparts in the Hyderabad state. By the late 1920's the Kammas in coastal Andhra found themselves at loggerheads with the Brahmins for social equality and political power. Interestingly, in their confrontation with the Brahmins, the Kammas were divided into three groups. The first group was constituted largely by rich landlords (*zamindars*). They were fighting against the Brahmins, first as the anti-Brahmins movement and later on by dominating the Justice Party.[526] The second group was constituted by the Kamma *ryots* and peasants. They associated themselves with N.G. Ranga and struggled for dominance in the Congress. As the N.G. Ranga group was operating within the Congress, their activities among the Dalits were inspired by the Gandhian idea of *Harijan.* During 1934-35 Ranga formed 'Harijan Seva Dal' with the

[524] My interview with U. Sambasivarao, Hyderabad 20 January, 2005. Also see, May Seventeenth Comrades. 2001. *What should be done in India?* (in Telugu), Hyderabad: Dalita Bahujana Sraamika Vimukti.
[525] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class and Social Articulations…,* p. 6.
[526] The Non-Brahmin movement and Justice Party were not exclusively dominated by the Kammas. Some other Zamindars and rich landlords from the other upper castes, especially the Reddys and Rajus were also part of these forums.

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active support of his wife as well as notable social reformers from among Brahmins, especially Unnava Lakshminarayana, author of *Mala palli* (Mala village), and Guduru Ramachandra Rao. The third group was constituted by the educated youth of the Kammas. This group, which was inspired by Marxism and the Russian Revolution, was at the forefront in the formation of a Communist Party unit in coastal Andhra. Although the landless Dalits never supported the anti-Brahmin movement, they oscillated between the Congress-based N.G. Ranga group and Communists led by B. Basavapunniah, C. Rajeshwar Rao and others. Both the groups fought against each other for control of the peasant movement and competed to organise landless labourers and Dalits.[527]

By the late 1930's, many young Dalits, such as Guntur Bapaiah, K. Surya Prakash Rao and Nutakki Kotayya, were increasingly becoming impatient with the Congress-led Harijan activities. They were inspired by the Communists' mobilisation of the agricultural labourers for minimum wages and for wasteland. They joined the Communists and actively participated in their mobilisation of the rural landless and agricultural labour. When the Agricultural Labour Union was formed, Guntur Bapaiah and K. Surya Prakash Rao were elected as the Union's general secretary and president, respectively. While the issue of minimum wage pertains to all the agricultural labour - irrespective of caste -, the Communists initiated certain specific programmes for Dalits, which are different from Congress' tokenism towards Dalits. For instance, they initiated anti-untouchability measures in rural areas and even supported the temple-entry of the Dalits.

Undoubtedly, the Dalits, along with the other landless agricultural labourers, were the main beneficiaries of the Communists struggle for minimum wages. Yet, their association with the Communists and their movements did not liberate them from the clutches of the caste. They did not even provide any 'ideological alternative' to the Congress. [528] By accepting the term 'Harijan' for Dalits, despite strong opposition against the term by Ambedkar and other Dalit leaders, they showed a clear unwillingness to accept any kind

[527] See, Sheshadri, K. 1967. The Communist Party…., pp: 396-397.
[528] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic…,* p.291.

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of alternative or autonomy for the Dalits. In fact, they went to the extent of calling the Scheduled Caste Federation as a 'communal organisation'. Such an anti-Ambedkar stance by the Communists alienated some of the dedicated Dalits from the organisation. For instance, in 1944, when the Agricultural Labour Union in one of its resolutions described the Muslim League as a 'political party', but called SCF as a communal organisation, K. Surya Prakash Rao left the organisation by circulating a dissenting note against the resolution. In the same note he emphasised the "economic and social degradation of Dalits and the need for unity of the toiling masses, arguing finally that social uplift was even more important than economic betterment."[529] Further, the Communists' involvement in the 'anti-untouchability' campaigns was not undertaken as a part of party policy or theorised as a crucial aspect of the Indian revolution. In a way, their lack of systematic analysis and understanding of the issue of caste and Dalit concerns reveals their blindness to the entirety of the Dalit question.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have attempted to examine Dalit activism in the Telugu region since the early 1920's. Despite emerging from the platforms provided by the Brahmin social reformers in coastal Andhra and the upper caste benefactors in Hyderabad, Dalit activists powerfully voiced their concerns. Inspired by the 'Adi' ideology, they launched the Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha and Adi-Hindu League in coastal Andhra and Hyderabad respectively. Mobilising under these associations, Dalits claimed respectable and equal social status along with the other castes in the Hindu social structure. Of course, they also claimed their share of power in the emerging political structure. But such a claim was not as powerful as that of the Dalits in UP, in the sense, the former did not make consistent efforts for political power as they did in their demands for social equality and respect. Further, Dalits in the Telugu belt were never able to move away from the shadow of the caste-Hindus, and indeed, their concerns and claims were shaped under that shadow. It was precisely on account of this that the Dalits in the Telugu region, unlike their counterparts in UP, could never give vent to their ire against the Brahmanical caste society and oppression by the upper castes.

[529] Ibid.

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Since the early 1930's although the Dalits got an opportunity, in the form of Ambedkar, to move away from the shadows of the upper castes, they chose to remain in upper caste patronage and thereby, continued to dance to the tunes of the upper castes rather than reconstituting themselves as an independent force. This, in turn, facilitated the upper castes and their political parties to divert the Dalit energies away from the demand of political power. In a way, the above examination and analysis of the Dalit activities and politics in the Telugu region during the late colonial period clearly differed with the claims made by Pai, Jaffrelot and Omvedt. In the sense, Pai argued that Dalit consciousness in the northern region during the colonial period was not developed on a par with the Dalit consciousness in other regions of India, particularly the southern and western regions of India during the same period. But our analysis shows that Dalits in the South were behind their counterparts in the North, for while the former was confined to the demands for social equality and respect, the latter went to the extent of demanding their share of political power on the basis of their independent identity.

Our analysis also rejects Jaffrelot's claim that lower-castes in the southern region had mobilised around the Dravidian ideology. The Dalits, who are part of the lower-caste category, were not influenced by Dravidian ideology but by the *Adi* ideology of the Dalits. Our examination also clearly points out the gaps in Omvedt's presentation of the Dalits and their socio-political activities. It brought forth the caste-based prejudices of the Mala leaders against the Madigas and how the former suppressed the latter. In a way, caste-based political antagonism among the Dalits, particularly between the Madigas and Malas in contemporary Andhra Pradesh were rooted in the prejudices of the Mala leaders against the Madigas during the colonial period. Further, the seeds for contemporary domestication and marginalisation of the Dalits in the political sphere by the Congress with its *Harijan* slogan and socio-cultural assimilation agenda, and the Communists with their economic agenda, were sown during the colonial period. But what have been the Dalits' activities and politics in post-Independence Andhra Pradesh? We shall answer this question in the next Chapter.

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***Six*……..**

From Demands for Respect and Social Equality to a Quest for Power: Dalit Movement and Politics in AP, 1950 - 1990

In the previous Chapter, we have seen the contributions of the Christian missionaries, the British colonial state and the Hindu social reformers towards the growth of Dalit consciousness in the Telugu region. A majority of the Dalit leaders in the early 1920's were educated in schools established by these agencies. Although they were inspired by the ideologies of the schools in which they studied, the *Adi* ideology had a strong influence over them. This influence, in turn, resulted in the formation of the *Adi-Andhra Mahajana Sabha* in the coastal Andhra region and the *Adi-Hindu League* in Nizam's Hyderabad. Under the leadership of these organisations they have assumed the Adi-Andhra identity in coastal Andhra region and Adi-Hindu identity in Hyderabad; and on the basis of their Adi identity, the Dalits in the Telugu region demanded not just respect and social equality, but also a share in the emerging political power.

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The entry of Gandhi and Ambedkar into national politics and Dalit activities had far-reaching implications on the Dalits' activities. Indeed, the entry of the leaders reconfigured Dalit politics and activism both at the national as well as regional levels. Those regional Dalit forces that agreed with Gandhi and his 'ism', had become moderate in their outlook, and thus posed no real threat either to the caste system or the socio-economic and political domination of the upper castes. But those regional Dalit forces that agreed with Ambedkar and his ideas rejuvenated their activism and thrust their demands for social equality and a share in political power more forcefully. Obviously, this had posed a real threat to the domination of the upper castes and the caste system, the social system that facilitated their domination in the economic and political spheres.

The Dalit leaders in the Telugu region, unlike the Dalit leadership in UP, were groomed by upper caste social reformers. On account of this grooming Gandhi's Congress and his *Harijan Sevak Sangh* became their natural destinations, for their benefactors were already part and parcel of those organisations. In a way, the Dalit leaders were willing to do

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anything that their benefactors wanted, and follow their path unquestionably. It was on account of this blind faith in their upper caste benefactors that the Dalit leadership in the Telugu belt missed an historical opportunity, in the form of Ambedkar, to move away from the shadow of the upper castes and emerge as an independent political force. This missed opportunity, in turn, led to their domestication and marginalisation in the political realm by the upper castes in post-Independence Andhra Pradesh.

The present Chapter seeks to: (a) understand the Dalit relationship with the two dominant political parties in the state, namely the Congress Party and the Communist Party of India; (b) examine Dalit activism under the leadership of the APDMS; and (c) analyse the Dalit activities at the electoral politics through the BSP. I place two arguments in this Chapter: first, the Dalit leadership in AP, unlike their counterparts in UP, did not focus on the idea of political power. Their concentration on the notions of social justice and equality certainly conscientises the Dalit and non-Dalit constituencies in AP to a larger extent, but could not prepare the ground for the independent political mobilisation of the Dalit constituency in the state; second, unlike UP, where unity within the Dalit social constituency and between the Dalits and other lower castes led for the success of the BSP and SP in electoral politics, in AP, a lack of unity not just between the Dalits and other lower castes and also within the Dalit segment, resulted in the failure of the Dalit-based political parties in electoral politics. Towards an exploration of these objectives and arguments, I have divided the Chapter chronologically into three main sections. The first section examines Dalit activities since the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956 to until the late 1970's and their relations with the two political parties mentioned above. The second section analyses the formation, ideology and activities of the APDMS in the 1980's; and the final section examines and analyses Dalit mobilisation through the BSP for political power in the mid-1990's. It is expected that this examination and analysis of Dalit politics in contemporary AP would add to the existing literature on Dalits and their politics in AP. Before we jump on to the first section, I would like to touch briefly on the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh in 1956.

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Formation of Andhra Pradesh: In the previous Chapter, we noted that the Telugu speaking areas were divided between the British-ruled Madras Presidency, and the Nizam-ruled princely state of Hyderabad. While the Madras Presidency had seven districts of coastal Andhra region and four districts of Rayalaseema region in its control, nine districts of the Telangana region were under the control of the Hyderabad state. Owing to the Tamil Congress leaders' practice of discrimination against Telugu-speaking Congress leaders, there was a demand for a separate Andhra state comprising of the Telugu speaking regions of the Madras Presidency. After India's Independence, the mass mobilisation for a separate state intensified and the Telugu-speaking people in the Madras state, setting aside all sorts of differences and divisions and took part in the mass agitations. In a way, the demand for the separate state, as noted by Harrison, "became in its final stage a mass expression of the regional patriotism of all Telugus."[530] Yet, the Central government under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru did not consent to the demand of the Telugus; instead, it appointed a Commission under the leadership of S.K. Dar. The Commission did not favour the demand.

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In 1949, the Indian National Congress appointed a Committee, consisting of Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Seetaramayya, popularly known as the JVP Committee. Although the Committee did not favour the creation of new states on linguistic lines, it did suggest the formation of the Andhra state, provided that the Telugus give up their claim over the Madras city. The Telugus did not agree with this suggestion and continued to press their demand. Meanwhile Potti Sriramulu from Nellore took up a fast-unto-death on October 19, 1952 in Madras for a separate Andhra state; and on the 58th day of his fasting, i.e., on December 15, 1952 he died. As the death of Sriramulu sparked off violence in all the Telugu-speaking areas in the Madras state, the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru on December 19, 1952 announced a separate Andhra state consisting of seven districts of coastal Andhra and four districts of Rayalaseema. On October 1, 1953 the Andhra State with Kurnool as its capital city finally came into existence.

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[530] Harrison, S. S. 1960. *India: The Most Dangerous Decades.* Princeton: PUP, p. 110.

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During this time, the Hyderabad State was also undergoing rapid political changes. After India's Independence, the last Nizam of Hyderabad resisted the Indian government's efforts to merge Hyderabad state into the Indian Union. He wanted to become independent by making Hyderabad state as the third dominion. He even approached the United Nations for recognition of Hyderabad State as a separate country. In his ambition, the Nizam was supported by the Majlis-i-Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen (MIM – Association for Muslim Unity), which began to advocate establishment of permanent Muslim dominion in Hyderabad. The Nizam's para-military wing, the Razakars, joined the State army and police and unleashed a reign of terror against those people, organisations and parties, especially against the Communists, who were fighting for the liberation of Hyderabad from the Nizam's rule. The Communists in the Telangana region took to armed struggle and established a parallel government in parts of Telangana, which was popularly known as *raat-ki-sarkar* (rule at night). It was at this time the Government of India launched a 'Police Action' against the Nizam in September 1948, and the Indian military captured the Hyderabad state with little effort within five days of launch of its operation. Although this capture led to the merging of the Hyderabad state into the Indian Union, this actually raised the curtain on a different demand.

There had been a demand by the Telugus, particularly from coastal Andhra, for the creation of *Vishaalaandhra* (Greater Andhra) comprising of seven districts of coastal Andhra, four districts of Rayalaseema, nine districts in Telangana region and Telugu areas in Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, and Mysore. In December 1953, The Government of India set up the States Reorganisation Commission, with Syed Fazl Ali as the Chairman. Although the Commission was convinced of the advantages of *Vishaalandhra*,[531] it favoured the formation of a separate Telangana state. The Congress High Command, however, favoured the idea of *Vishalaandhra* and prevailed upon the leaders of Andhra State and Telangana. Eventually, in 1956, the Andhra state (comprising of coastal Andhra

[531] The Commission opined that the "Advantages of a larger Andhra State including Telangana are that it will bring into existence a state of about 32 millions, with large water and power resources, adequate mineral wealth and valuable raw materials. This will also solve the difficult and vexing problem of finding a permanent capital for Andhra, for the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad are very well-suited to be capital of Vishalandhra." See Singh, K. S. 2003. *People of India: Andhra Pradesh.* New Delhi: Government of India, Vol. XIII, Part-I, pp: 11-12.

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and Rayalaseema regions) and the Telangana region was politically integrated on a linguistic basis in order to constitute the state of Andhra Pradesh.

6. I. Struggling for space: Dalit activities in AP, 1956-82

Immediately after India's Independence and during the process of the formation of AP, the politics in the Telugu region underwent massive changes, and the majority of the tendencies and issues that are unfolding in today's AP politics could be seen in embryonic form in the early 1950's. The emergence of four major trends could be noted: first, the emergence of the Indian National Congress and the Communist Party of India as two major political parties in the state, and of the two, emergence of Congress as the single dominant party; second, the end of the domination of the Brahmins, and the emergence of the Reddy's as the dominant caste group inside the Congress Party; third, caste-based competition for political power through the political parties, i.e., Reddy's through the Congress and Kammas through the Communist Party began to compete for political power. Three other upper caste groups – Kapus, Velamas and Goudas – also joined this competition, especially since the 1980's; and finally, marginalisation of the Dalits in the political arena. For the present, two pertinent questions should be posed here: what is the relationship between Dalits and the two major political parties? Was there any Dalit activism outside the sphere of upper caste competition for political power through the Congress and Communist parties? We shall answer these questions in this section. I have divided the section into four sub-sections. The first two sub-sections examine Dalit relationship with the Congress and Communist parties respectively. The third sub-section concentrates upon the activities of the Dalit-based political party, the Republican Party of India; and the final sub-section examines Dalit activities outside the political arena.

6. IA. Dalits and the Congress (1957-82)**:** After the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh, the Congress Party remained dominant in state politics for more than two decades. During its period of dominance the Congress won in all the elections held for the Parliament and Legislative Assembly in the state; and it remained as the 'citadel' of

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the Party even when the Congress 'system'[532] began to break down elsewhere during the 1960's, especially when the non-Congress parties were forming governments in several states in 1967. How did Congress manage to achieve its pre-eminence in the state's political domain? Of the several reasons, one specific reason that helped the Congress to dominate the political scene in Andhra Pradesh was, to my mind, the presence of the Reddy's and the Dalits in the Congress party. To specify, the Reddy's as the wielders of the Congress steering wheel and the Dalits as its vote-bank, enabled the Party to remain in power for a long time. If this is so, how did the Reddys come to acquire that power, and how did Dalits become the Congress vote-bank?

The Reddys, who belonged to the *Sat-Shudra* category in the traditional Hindu social structure, constitute about 8% to 10% of the State's population and are spread throughout the three regions of AP: Telangana, Rayalaseema and Coastal Andhra. In fact, the integration of Andhra and Telangana regions led to a preponderance of Reddy's in the power structure of the party and of the State. Bejawada Gopal Reddy and Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy were the two main Reddy leaders that built the political strength of the Reddys in the State. In the early 1950's the Reddy's found themselves in fierce competition for top positions in the Congress Party against the Brahmins, who were in a dominant position both in the Party as well as the government.[533] To note one such instance, at the time of Independence the elections to the office of the President of the Andhra Provincial Congress Committee (APCC) were held, and this election provided an occasion for a trial of strength between two rival groups. One group was led by Tanguturi Prakasam, a Brahmin by caste and who was popularly known as *Andhra Kesari* – the Lion of Andhra. He supported the candidature of N.G. Ranga, Kamma by caste, for the post. The other group was led by Pattabhi Sitharamayya, another senior Brahmin Congress leader, and he supported Sanjeeva Reddy for the post. In the fight Ranga was defeated by Sanjeeva Reddy, a defeat that led to the exit of Tanguturi and Ranga from the Congress. Such an exit was seen as the end of the Brahmin dominance in the Party and also as a turning point in the Reddy-Kamma rivalry that was emerging in

[532] Kothari, Rajni. 1964. The Congress 'System' in India. *Asian Survey,* 4 (12), pp: 1161-1173.
[533] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class and Social Articulation…,* p. 9.

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AP in the post-Independence period.[534] And on November 1, 1956, Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy became the first Chief Minister of the enlarged state. Thus by mid-1950's the Reddy's had succeeded in wresting the reins of the Congress Party from the hands of the Brahmins. From then onwards until today they continue to steer the wheel of political power in the state through the Congress Party. Not surprisingly, domination of the Reddys led the critics to view the Congress as 'Reddy Raj',[535] and the following table substantiates the argument:

Table 6.1: Caste backgrounds of Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh

S.No.	Name	Party	Tenure	Caste
1	N. Sanjeeva Reddy	Congress	01-11-1956 – 10-01-1960	Reddy
2	D. Sanjeevaiah	Congress	11-01-1960 – 11-03-1962	Dalit-Mala
3	N. Sanjeeva Reddy	Congress	12-03-1962 - 28-02-1964	Reddy
4	K. Brahmananda Reddy	Congress	29-02-1964 – 29-09-1971	Reddy
5	P.V. Narasimha Rao	Congress	30-09-1971 – 18-01-1973	Brahmin
	President's Rule		**18-07-1973 – 10-12-1973**	
6	J. Vengala Rao	Congress	11-12-1973 – 05-03-1978	Velama
7	M. Chenna Reddy	Congress	06-03-1978 – 10-10-1980	Reddy
8	T. Anjaiah	Congress	11-10-1980 – 24-02-1982	BC
9	B. Venktram Reddy	Congress	24-02-1982 – 20-09-1982	Reddy
10	K. Vijay Bhaskar Reddy	Congress	20-09-1982 – 08-01-1983	Reddy
11	N. T. Rama Rao	TDP	09-01-1983 – 16-08-1984	Kamma
12	N. Bhaskararao	TDP	16-08-1984 – 15-09-1984	Kamma
13	N. T. Rama Rao	TDP	16-09-1984 – 02-12-1989	Kamma
14	M. Chenna Reddy	Congress	03-12-1989 – 17-12-1990	Reddy
15	N. Janardhan Reddy	Congress	17-12-1990 – 08-10-1992	Reddy
16	K. Vijay Bhaskar Reddy	Congress	09-10-1992 – 12-12-1994	Reddy
17	N. T. Rama Rao	TDP	12-12-1994 – 31-08-1995	Kamma
18	N. Chandra Babu Naidu	TDP	01-09-1995 – 11-10-1999	Kamma
19	N. Chandra Babu Naidu	TDP	11-10-1999 – 14-05-2004	Kamma
20	Y.S. Raja Sekhara Reddy	Congress	14-05-2004 – 02-09-2009	Reddy
21	K. Rosaiah	Congress	03-09-2009 – 24-10-2010	Vyshya
22	N. Kiran Kumar Reddy	Congress	25-10-2010 -	Reddy

Source: Srinivasarao, K., 2002. *Telugu Verdict 1952-2002: Fifty Years Political Analysis* (in Telugu), Hyderabad: Prajasakthi book House.

Table 6.2: Caste-wise break of CM's of AP

S.No.	Caste
1	Reddy – 8
2	Kamma - 3
3	SC-(Mala) – 1
4	Brahmin - 1
5	Velama - 1
6	BC - 1
7	Vysya - 1
Total	- 16

[534] Suri, K.C. 2002. *Democratic Process and Electoral Politics in Andhra Pradesh, India,* working paper 180, London: Overseas Development Institute, p. 13.

[535] Prasanna K. A. ed., 1994. *Andhra Pradesh Government and Politics.* Delhi: Sterling Publishers, p.158.

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As has been clearly reflected in the above two Tables, political power in AP since its formation in 1956 until today has largely been controlled by the elite classes that belonged to the Reddy and Kamma castes through the two main political parties in the state: Congress (I) and Telugu Desam Party (TDP), respectively. We shall discuss the Kamma politics through the TDP in the next section. But how did the Reddy's consolidate political power and how did they continue to hold on to that power? Political power, creation of new institutional structures, and some of the techniques employed by them while in power, especially the technique of accommodation, are said to be the forces that worked in their favour and helped consolidate power and facilitated their continuous domination in the political sphere. In other words, the possession of power through the Congress Party is the key factor that led to the Reddy's deploying that power for their perpetuation in the domain.

Of all the policies and programmes undertaken by the Congress Party in post-Independence India, the most important policy was land reforms. In addition to land reforms, another programme specific to AP in this period was the introduction of the *Panchayati Raj* system towards decentralisation of governance at the grassroots under the leadership of Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy in 1957. It was by using both the land reform policies and the new administrative structures that the Reddy's succeeded in consolidating their power in the political firmament of the State. One of the crucial aspects in the entire process of consolidation is that of the preservation of the socio-economic and political powers of the dominant castes. For instance, the maximum land allowed per family under the Andhra Pradesh Land Reforms Act of 1972 was 10 acres of cultivable land and 25 acres of uncultivable land. But the Agricultural Census of 1988 revealed that there were 2000 upper caste farmers in the State holding 100 acres and above.[536] Further, as reflected in the Table below, the land in the possession of small, semi-medium and medium farmers during 1955-71 had decreased, while the number of medium and larger farmers had increased.

[536] Ratnam, K.Y. 2008. *The Dalit Movement and Democratization in Andhra Pradesh.* Washington: East – West Centre, working paper, No. 13, p. 7.

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Table 6.3: Changing Structure of the Agrarian economy in Andhra Pradesh: The Percentage Distribution of Operational Holdings by Size Class, 1956-2006

Year	Share in Number of Holdings					Share in Operated Area					
	Marginal	Small	Semi-Medium	Medium	Large	Marginal	Small	Semi-Medium	Medium	Large	Avg Size
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1955-56	38.6	18.3	17.7	16.7	8.7	7.9	9.7	16.1	28.1	38.2	2.43
1970-71	46.0	18.5	17.4	12.7	4.3	8.0	11.3	19.2	30.8	30.7	2.51
1977-77	46.6	20.3	17.4	12.2	3.4	9.3	12.8	20.8	32.3	24.8	---
1980-81	49.3	20.9	16.0	9.1	2.1	13.1	16.2	23.3	28.7	18.7	1.94
1985-86	54.2	20.8	15.2	8.0	1.8	14.5	17.3	24.0	27.3	16.3	---
1990-91	56.0	21.2	14.5	6.9	1.3	16.4	19.6	25.2	26.1	12.8	1.50
2000-01	60.9	21.8	12.4	4.3	0.6	21.6	24.8	26.4	19.8	7.5	1.25
2005-06	61.6	21.9	12.0	40	0.5	22.7	25.8	26.5	19.0	6.1	1.20

Note: 1. Marginal – 0 to 1 hectare; small – 1 to 2 hectare; semi-medium – 2-4 hectare; medium 4-10 hectare; and large -10 hectares and above. 2. Avg – Average size of the holding in given hectares.
Source: Human Development Report 2007: Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad: Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, p. 64.[537]

Such decrease and increase of the number of small and medium farmers, respectively, clearly indicate two things. First, the beneficiaries of land reforms in the State, as elsewhere in India, were farmers or peasantry, but not the landless labourers. It is important to recognise here that when we say farmers, we imply the members that belong to the non-Brahmin upper castes, particularly the Reddy, Kammas, and Kapu castes. Majority of the lower castes, especially those castes that come under the current category of the Most Backward Castes (MBCs), and almost the entire Dalit category were landless labourers, particularly in the duration of the land reform process.[538] It may be mentioned here that while the upper castes have been allowed to appropriate thousands of acres of cultivable and uncultivable land by the Congress government under leadership of Reddy, the landless Dalits who were cultivating the wastelands were forcefully evicted even from those wastelands. In fact, their crops were destroyed by the upper castes with the help of the police.[539] Second, land reforms by removing the gross and wide differences between the landed gentry and the peasantry have, as argued by K. Srinivasulu, brought about a certain "homogenisation of agrarian propertied classes".[540] And it is this homogenisation

[537] See also, Mangala Gowri, C and Venkata Ramanaiah., 2008. 'Land Reforms and agrarian conditions in Andhra Pradesh during Post-Independence Era', in Social Science Research Network, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1304527 accessed on 30 November, 2012; Sambi Reddy, C. Jojaiah, Venugopala Rao and N. Narasaiah., 2012. Land and Income Inequalities in Rural Andhra Pradesh. *The Marxist,* 28(2), pp: 50-74.
[538] Ram Reddy, G. 1989. The Politics of Accommodation: Caste, Class and Dominance in Andhra Pradesh. In: Frankel, R. Francine and M.S.A. Rao., eds., *Dominance and State Power…,* pp: 293-94.
[539] Ratnam, Y.K. 2008. *The Dalit Movement…,* p. 7.
[540] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class and Social Articulation..,* p. 8.

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that led the other rich peasantry, particularly the Kamma and Kapu castes, to become the core supporters of the Congress Party under the leadership of the Reddys.

If land reforms facilitated homogenisation of the upper class base of the upper castes, which in turn led to their becoming the core support base for the Reddy-dominated Congress Party, the *Panchayati Raj* system paved the way for the penetration of their (Reddys') power into the grassroots. The *Panchayati Raj* system has a three-tier structure, consisting of the village *Panchayat* at the bottom, the *Panchayat Samithi* in the middle (the block/taluk level) and the *Zilla Parishad* at the top (district level). This system is, for our purpose, significant for two main reasons. First, it had become a fresh avenue of power and prestige for the upper castes in general and Reddy's in particular. The political aspirants from the Reddy castes were accommodated through this system. For instance, an examination of the first three *Panchayati Raj* elections conducted in 1959, 1964 and 1970 reveal that the Congress Party captured all *Zilla Parishad* chairmanships (except that of Nalgonda in 1964, which went to the CPI) and most *Panchayat Samithis*. It is important to note here that all the chairmen of the Zilla Parishads were handpicked by chief ministers, thus perpetuating the domination of the Reddy's.[541] A study on the social backgrounds of the leadership at the level of *Panchayat Samithis in* the Telangana region indicated that in 1970-76, out of 112 *Samithi* presidents, the proportion of the upper castes, particularly from the Reddy and Kamma castes, was 92.4 percent.[542] Second, as the system had become a mechanism to provide access to funds and control over their distribution for development, the Reddys (and other upper castes) utilised the government machinery, resources and patronage in exercising control and commanding loyalty from the lower castes, which eventually became the 'traditional vote banks' for the Reddy-dominated Congress Party.[543] If the Reddys could possess state power through the Congress party and deploy the same power for their perpetuation in that domain, what were the Dalits doing inside the Congress? Or to ask differently, what was the relationship between the Dalits and the Congress Party?

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[541] Narasimha Reddy, A. 1979. Congress Parties and Politics. In: Ram Reddy G., and B.A.V. Sharma. ed., *State Government & Politics: Andhra Pradesh.* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, pp: 193-255, here p. 210.
[542] Ram Reddy, G. 1989. The Politics of Accommodation…, p. 307.
[543] Gray, Hugh. 1968. Andhra Pradesh…, pp: 399-431.

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We have seen in the previous Chapter that that through the *Harijan Sevak Sang* Gandhi and his Congress succeeded in diverting the energies of the *Harijan* leaders towards non-material aspects, such as the temple entry programme, and thus, succeeded in marginalising the emerging Ambedkarites forces. Vemula Kurmayya, Damodaram Sanjeevaiah, Raghavulu, Kota Punnaiah, Goka Ramaswamy, and B.S. Murthy were some of the Congress' *Harijan* leaders.[544] After India's Independence and following the formation of an independent Andhra Pradesh state, these *Harijan* leaders became the natural choice for the Congress in the reserved constituencies. Later on, some of the SCF leaders, such as Arigay Ramaswamy and Butti Rajaram, were co-opted by the Congress, thus improving its list of the *Harijan* leaders. A cursory look at the party performance in the reserved seats for Dalits in the AP state legislative assembly, as shown in the Table below, clearly demonstrates that the Congress has been winning more than half of these seats in any given election.

Table 6.4: Party-wise Performances in SC Seats in AP Legislative Assembly (1957-2004)[545]

Year/Party	INC	RPI	PDF	SWA	CPI	CPM	JNP	STS	TDP	BJP	TRS	IND	Total
1957	13	01	03	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	18
1962	33	-	-	01	08	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	43
1967	24	02	-	07	02	01	-	-	-	-	-	04	40
1972	36	-	-	-	-	-	-	01	-	-	-	03	40
1978	30+2		--	-	-	-	06	01	-	--	-	--	39
1983	09	-	-	-	02	-	-	-	28	-	-	-	39
1985	02	-	-	-	03	02	01	-	30	01	-	-	39
1989	25	-	-	-	-	03	-	-	08	01	-	02	39
1994	02	-	-	-	03	05	-	-	28	-	-	01	39
1999	08	-	-	-	-	-	--	-	29	01	-	01	39
2004	24	-	-	-		02	-	-	07	-	06		39

INC: Indian National Congress; RPI: Republican Party of India; PDF: Peoples Democratic Front;
CPI: Communist Party of India; CPI (M): Communist Party of India (Marxist); JNP: Janata Party;
STS: Sampurna Telangana Praja Samithi; TDP: Telugu Desam Party; BJP: Bharatiya Janata Party;
TRS: Telangana Rashtra Samithi; IND: Independent

With the Congress co-opting Dalit leaders, it led to the destruction of an independent Dalit voice, but such a move, Ratnam argued, not only resulted in awareness among the Dalits about the government's developmental programmes, but also provided an avenue through which Dalit leadership could work for the betterment of the Dalit community. [546] In a sense, in order to stabilise and strengthen their own position in their respective

[544] Ratnam, K.Y. 1998. *Dalit Movement in AP: A Study of Political Consciousness and Identity.* Ph.D. Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, p. 3.
[545] See Statistical Reports of Assembly Elections for AP, *Election Commission of India,* New Delhi.
[546] Ratnam, K.Y. 1998. *Op. cit.,* p.4.

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constituencies, the Congress' Dalit leaders consistently informed the Dalit public about the state administration, its policies and programmes. This helped the Dalits to take part in various developmental programmes. Further, those Dalit leaders that were given ministerial positions used their positions to effectively bargain for better allotment in budgetary allocations and consistently pressured the government to take measures for education, housing and employment facilities for Dalits. It may be true that the Congress provided an avenue for the Dalit leaders to help their community by informing them about the government's developmental programmes, and also to bargain for the budgetary allocations. Such efforts, however, ultimately helped not so much the Dalits, but the Congress mainly. The party transformed the Dalits into its vote-bank, and used that vote-bank to dominate and control the State's politics for more than two decades. In other words, if AP had become "the citadel of the Congress", it was largely due to this solid vote-bank. [547]

Further, whatever the awareness gained by the Dalits, such awareness could not help the Dalits to gain from those developmental programmes in any substantial way. For instance, in 1960 the government of AP passed a Bill on, 'the Andhra Pradesh Ceiling on Agricultural Holding'. The two main objectives of this Bill were: to reduce the concentration of land, and redistribute land among the agricultural labourers. But the Bill was never implemented with any seriousness, and in almost all villages, the Congress leaders, through the State administrative machinery, assisted the upper caste Reddys and Kammas to retain hundreds of acres of excessive land in their control. Even when the Dalits and other marginalised sections moved to use the wastelands for cultivation, they were all arrested and summarily sent to jails.[548]

Also, Dalits' experience with the Land Reforms Act was no different from their experience with the Bill on 'the Ceiling on Agricultural Holding'. In 1972, the State

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[547] Ram Reddy, G. 1976. Andhra Pradesh: The Citadel of the Congress. In: Narain, Iqbal., ed., *State Politics in India.* New Delhi: Meenakshi Prakashan, pp: 1-29; see also, Hanumantha Rao, V. 1993. *Party Politics in Andhra Pradesh, 1956-199.* Hyderabad: ABA Publications.

[548] The arrest of the Dalit agricultural labour was raised in the Assembly by Vemula Kurmaiah, a Dalit MLA from Krishna district. According to him 174 Dalits in Adilabad, 502 in Krishna, 1044 in Guntur and 1818 from Warangal were arrested by the police. 'Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly Debates, March 4, 1970', cited in Ratnam, K.Y. 2008. *The Dalit Movement…,* p.37, *passim 2.*

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government passed the Land Reforms Act, in which it was stated rather emphatically that the maximum land allowed per family was 10 acres of cultivable land and 25 acres of uncultivable land. It was estimated by the government that, through the Act the state government would get nearly 10 lakh acres of land for distribution among Dalits and landless sections from the marginalised categories. But only 5.94 lakh acres of land was actually distributed to the Dalits, Adivasis and Backward Class.[549] Further, it has been pointed out that wherever the land redistribution took place, the title deeds (*pattas*) were distributed only for namesake, as those lands were still controlled by the upper castes.[550] Moreover, the distributed land was unproductive and unfit for cultivation.

It should also be mentioned here that, while the Dalits were being used by the Congress as the vote-bank so as to firmly establish itself in the State's politics, the Congress used its *Harijan* leaders to contain factionalism within the party. One instance of the latter aspect deserves mention. We have noted that domination of the Reddy's inside the Congress party, and that domination, over a period of time, led to factionalism in the Party. By the early 1960's the factions that emerged as strong contenders for power were the one led by Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy and the other by Kasu Brahmananda Reddy, the two most powerful Congress leaders that the State had ever seen. In 1960, when they both took up competition for the position of chief minister as a matter of prestige, the Congress leadership in Delhi brought in Damodaram Sanjeevaiah, who was a Mala, rather than powerful leaders from the other upper castes like the Kamma, Raju and Velama, and installed him as the chief minister of the State.[551] Damodaram was the first Dalit to become chief minister in any Indian state. Although the selection of Damodaram as CM of the State was a great surprise, such selection was not without reasons. First of all, he was chosen as a consensus *Harijan* candidate in order to avert an impending power conflict between the two Reddy candidates – Neelam Sanjeeva Redday and Kasu

[549] See Rangarao, S.P. 1996. Land Reforms and Scheduled Castes. Paper presented at the National Seminar on the land reforms and Dalits at Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, December 16.
[550] Ratnam, K.Y. 2008. *The Dalit Movement…,* pp: 7-8.
[551] See Bernstorff, Dagmar. 1973. Eclipse of "Reddy-Raj"? The Attempted Restructuring of the Congress Party leadership in Andhra Pradesh. *Asian Survey,* 13 (10), pp: 959-979.

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Brahmananda Reddy.[552] Second, a *Harijan* CM would bring the numerically large social groups of the marginalised sections, especially the Malas and the Madigas, into the Congress-fold and thus, gradually erode the Communists' influence among these groups.[553]

Interestingly, although the intention of the Congress in installing Damodaram as the CM was to use him until the dust settled in the power conflict between the two Reddy candidates, Damodaram used the opportunity for a different purpose. Soon after his installation, he made an effort to consolidate the representatives of the marginalised sections within the Congress party, especially the Dalits, religious minorities (Muslims and Christians) and Backward Castes. He instructed the Department of Development to earmark 15 percent of funds to be spent exclusively for the welfare of these communities. He also issued a government order that until suitable persons from the Dalits and Adivasis were found, the positions that were reserved for them should be kept vacant. Further, he tried to extend the reservation benefits to many Shudra castes by including more Shudras in the State list of the Backward Castes.[554] The welfare policies and programmes favouring the Dalits and marginalised sections of Damodaram were, however, vehemently opposed by the Reddy's and other upper castes inside the Congress party. What the upper caste-dominated Congress wanted, as Ratnam argued, was not the empowerment of the Dalits, which would ultimately facilitate the latter to question the domination of the former, but the subordination and further marginalisation of the Dalits and other oppressed sections, so as to perpetuate the upper castes' own domination.[555] A majority of the MLAs that belonged to the upper caste backgrounds, irrespective of their caste and faction within the party, rebelled against Sanjeevaiah and agitated until he was removed from the position of chief minister in 1962. Thus, in post-Independence AP, while the Dalits were used as vote-banks by the Congress, their leaders were used as the facilitators for the upper castes to gain and control political power.

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[552] See Elliot, M Carolyn., 1970. Caste and Faction among the Dominant Caste: The Reddis and Kammas of Andhra. In: Kothari, Rajni. ed., *Caste in Indian Politics…,* pp: 121-61, here p. 152.
[553] Suri, K.C. 2002. *Democratic Process…,* p. 18.
[554] See Reddy, Ram G. and BAV Sharma. 1979. *State Government…;* Innaiah, N. 1986. *State Government and Politics: A Study of Andhra Pradesh Politics 1885-198.* Hyderabad: Hyderabad Scientific Service.
[555] Ratnam, K.Y. 1998. *Dalit Movement …* p.6.

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6. IB. Dalits and the Communists: In the previous Chapter we have noted that the Dalits - both in Telangana and coastal Andhra regions - were attracted to the Communist slogans of 'classless society' and 'social equality'. In practice, however, these slogans remained empty promises. For the Communist movement, under the leadership of the two dominant non-Brahmin upper castes – the Reddy's and Kammas – not only sidelined the caste question but also marginalised the Dalits within the rank and file of the party organisations. Even in post-Independence Andhra Pradesh, the Communists' position and attitude against the Dalits and their specific problems did not change. Yet, in electoral politics, just like the Congress, the Communist Party also used the Dalits in order to swell their own position in the state legislative assembly. In this sub-section my main aim is to examine the Communists' relationship with the Dalits, and how the former dealt with the caste question in post-Independence Andhra Pradesh.

One of the significant aspects of the leadership of the two main political parties in the state - the Congress and Communist Party of India - is that of polarisation around caste-lines. While the Reddy's, as observed by Harrison, "gravitating almost by default, had cornered the market (the leadership of the Congress) on the bulk of the (Congress) party's non-Brahmin patronage",[556] the Kammas have outnumbered others, especially the Reddys, in the Left parties.[557] An important characteristic of this leadership was that a majority of the Kammas that occupied the party leadership were either rich landlords themselves or sons of rich landlords. It was estimated that the Kammas owned 80 per cent of the fertile delta land.[558] And it was precisely this caste and class position or, in the words of B. T. Ranadive, the 'wrong social base' of the party leadership that decisively shaped the party's direction in the State. Interestingly, the Communist leadership, as observed by Harrison, "had made no secret of their 'rich peasant' policy

[556] Harrison, S. S. 1956. Caste and the Andhra Communists. *The American Political Science Review,* 50(2), pp: 378-404, here p. 384.
[557] It may be interesting to note here that of the two main Left groups in the state, while the group that chose the parliamentary path, was dominated by the Kammas (Chandrasekhara Rao, Chandra Rajeswara Rao, Makineni Basavapunniah, Ch. Hanumantha Rao were notables in this group), the other group which chose the revolutionary path was dominated by the Reddys (Puchhalapalli Sundaraiah, Kondapalli Seetharamayya, Tarimela Nagireddy were notables in this group).
[558] Harrison, S. S. 1956. *Op. cit.,* p.381.

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within the party".[559] In fact, the leadership explicitly declared on this point in a 1948 programme report for the Indian Communist Politburo which stressed on two major tactical rules of thumb:

1. In delta areas the pressure of population would be heavy, and as such slogans should be raised for the distribution of lands belonging to rich ryots among poor peasants and labourers…
2. Propaganda should be carried on to convince the ryots about the just demands of the workers, and we should also affect compromises with such of those ryots who would follow us. Assurance should be given that we should not touch the lands of rich ryots.[560]

Two aspects are clear from the above rules of thumb. First, they illustrate the devious means adopted by the Communist party to mobilise the poor peasants and labourers. Here, one might argue that the means may be devious but those means were adopted in order to achieve the Party's ultimate goal: the goal of establishment of a classless society. The idea of a classless society may be true, but nowhere were they talking about the distribution of land to the landless, even after the seizure of power. Besides, how do they seek to establish the classless society? Secondly, from the second rule of thumb, it was clear that on the pretext of 'sympathisers of the Communists', the Communists were not going to seize the land that belonged to 'the rich ryots'.

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It may not be irrelevant to pose two questions here: first, can those rich ryots be called Communists especially after they decided to retain their land and continued to join the struggle to establish "a classless society"? Secondly, how could the Communists establish a classless society without transforming the structures that are at the root of class-based inequalities? From these, we can conclude that the upper castes had been using the Communist party not only to pacify the angry landless poor, but also to continue their dominance over the structures that produce and reproduce the class-based inequalities. Unfortunately, the landless believed the Communist leadership's empty slogan of distribution to the landless, despite the fact that both the perpetuators of the feudal system and the party leaders that were talking about ending that system came from the same upper caste backgrounds. And the upper caste Communists exploited the trust that the landless labourers placed in them in order to win the elections.

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[559] Ibid., p.391.

[560] *Self-Critical Report of the Andhra Communist Committee, January 1948 – February 1952,* - a party document not intended for publication, quoted in Ibid., p. 391, see also, *passim 46,* p.391.

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One distinguishing feature of coastal Andhra region from the other parts of the State in the early 1950's was its high population density, particularly the high percentage of landless labourers. The population density ranged from 900 to 1200 persons per square mile in coastal Andhra, as compared with 316 in the rest of the state, and more than 37% of the total agricultural population in coastal Andhra was landless labourers,[561] a majority of whom were Dalits. As mentioned above, from the beginning, the Communists attempted to organise Dalits, especially the Madigas, Malas and Adi-Andhras in coastal Andhra; and on their part the Dalits had become the bulwark for the Communists. This explains the electoral successes of the Communists both in 1946 as well as in the 1951 assembly elections, especially in the latter. For the 1951 assembly elections, six of the 31 seats won by the Communists in coastal Andhra were reserved for the Dalits.[562]

Although in the name of the landless labourer the Communists took advantage of the Dalits in the reserved constituencies, they did not address the caste problem of the Dalits.[563] In fact, they advanced several arguments in order to avoid that question. Interestingly, it is not that the Communists did not recognise the existence of caste. For instance, Devulapalli Venkateswararao, one of the important Communist ideologues in the state, observes: "In every county we see the existence of religion and old customs and traditions in public life. In addition to these, we have caste in our country. Caste is a vestige of feudalism, and caste will wither away as soon as we destroy feudalism. This is only possible through revolution."[564] Thus, the Communists did recognise the existence of caste. Yet, for them, caste is almost insignificant and, hence, it is not wise to wage any struggle for its annihilation. Of the several, three important arguments of the Communists on the question of caste are: (1) Unity of the proletariat/workers, (2) Land Distribution,

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[561] Ibid., p.386.
[562] Ibid., p.387.
[563] I am not saying that the Communists did not talk about the caste-based specific problems of the Dalits. Indeed, a number of Communist leaders did talk about the Dalit conditions in their writings. Some of the notables are: T. Nagireddy's *Takattulo Bharatadesam,* P. Sundarayya's *Telangana People's Struggle and its Lesson,* (Calcutta: CPI (M), and D. Venkateswararao's *Telangana Porata Charitra.* It must be, however, noted here that in these writings the Communist leadership simply did talk about the Dalit problems, but they did not address the caste question and did not have any discussion or programme of action about its annihilation.
[564] 'Comrade Devulapalli's Court Statement', quoted in Sambasivarao, U. 1990. 'Annihilation of Caste – Communists' Standpoint' (in Telugu), *Edureeta,* July, p. 8.

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and (3) Automatic withering away of caste in the capitalist economy.[565] Let's examine these three arguments in the below:

(1) Unity of the proletariat/workers: It has been argued by the Communists that the caste question should not be taken up before the achievement of revolution (i.e., achieving political power by the Communists), for such undertaking would destroy the unity of the proletariat/workers.[566] For instance, Vemulapalli Venkatramayya argues:

> [I]n our country the proletariat is constituted both by the upper castes as well as lower castes. And if we have to wage the struggle against the caste before the revolution, then that would lead to disunity among the proletariat, especially the upper castes would move out of the (Communist) party.[567]

Venkatramayya seems to be mainly concerned with the upper caste proletariat. It may be correct that the struggle against caste would result in the exit of the upper castes from the party. But can the lower caste proletariat remain in the party if the party does not take up the caste question? How would the party unite the proletariat that has been divided around caste and class lines?

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Devulapalli Venakateswararao's response to the second question is:

> [A]lthough people (the proletariat) are divided on caste lines, they could be united on the basis of their common problems…. Caste divisions on their own are not dangerous, but casteism is very dangerous and this has grown to unprecedented levels in the last 35 years.[568]

Two important elements in this argument are: first, irrespective of their position in the caste hierarchy, all the proletariat are victims of class inequalities and can be brought together on the basis of this common suffering. Secondly, by arguing that caste divisions are, on their own, not dangerous, Devulapalli seems to be separating casteism from that of caste divisions. Indeed, casteism is the end-product of caste divisions. That is to say, if there were no caste divisions then there won't be any place for casteism. In any case, even if we agree with Devulapalli that caste divisions are not dangerous but casteism is dangerous, then the big question would be how would the Communists unite the

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[565] For the Communists' response on the caste question, see Nageswararao, Edpuganti, Balaramamurthi Etukuri and Pattabhiramarao, Parakala. eds., 1992. *Bharata Desamlo kula vyavastha* (Caste System in India), *Communism,* the special edition on caste, Vijayawada.

[566] See Nageswararao, Bollimunta. 1981. '*O Rijarv Panchayati katha'* (The Story of a Reserved Panchayat), *Praja Sahiti,* 43 (3), pp: 13-15.

[567] Vemulapalli Venkatramayya, quoted in May Seventeenth Comrades. 2001. *What should be done in India?,* Hyderabad: Dalita Bahujana Sraamika Vimukti, p.45.

[568] 'Comrade Devulapalli's Court Statement',…, p. 7.

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proletariat who are the embodiment of casteism? In other words, can the Communists unite the proletariat without eliminating casteism among them?

(2) Land Distribution: Equating the caste problem with the class problem, the Communists argued that the caste problem of the Dalits would disappear with the re-distribution of land. Two important elements of this main argument are: first, in his 'Agrarian Revolution,' Pucchalapalli Sundarayya argues: "What is the main problem of the *Harijans* and Backward Castes? In reality, their main problem is that of lack of land….Without uprooting feudalism and without achieving the agrarian revolution on the principle of 'land to the tiller', it is almost impossible to provide justice to them (the *Harijans* and the BCs).[569] Arguing along similar lines, Devulapalli Venkateswararao also states: "There is an organic interconnection between the destruction of feudalism and annihilation of the caste system. The section of people that have been perpetuating the caste system will be automatically uprooted once we uproot feudalism, and such uprooting is possible only through an agrarian revolution."[570]

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Although stated differently the essence of the above two arguments is the same. They tied the caste problem with the economic problem, i.e. land, and posited that as soon as that economic problem was sorted out, the caste problem would disappear on its own. This is however, as Tarakam termed, a 'baseless' argument.[571] The poverty of the Dalits is definitely on account of their impoverished minds, the handiwork of the Brahmanical caste system. But economic empowerment itself does not solve the caste problem, for even the economically well-off Dalits have also been the victims of the caste-based discrimination of the upper castes – not just the upper class upper castes but even the lower class upper castes. As such the solution to caste does not lie in the distribution of land.

(3) Automatic withering away of caste in the capitalist economy: Arguing that caste will automatically wither away in a capitalist economy, Devulapalli observes: "Once we enter

[569] Pucchalapalli Sundarayya, quoted in Sambasivarao, U. 1990. Annihilation of Caste…, p. 8.
[570] 'Comrade Devulapalli's Court Statement', quoted in Ibid., p.10.
[571] Tarakam, Bojja. 2002[1996]. *Caste and Class* (in Telugu), Hyderabad: Hyderabad Book Trust, p. 77.

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into a capitalist economy there won't be any room for a Brahmin to remain as Brahmin and a Kamma as a Kamma".[572] For me, this is an escapist argument by the Communists. What Devulapalli was suggesting was that there is no need for a separate struggle against caste. For India will certainly enter into the capitalist economy and by its nature, the capitalist economy forces people from their traditional enclaves and caste-based identities to embrace professionalism. In other words, people would be known by their professions (what they do) and not by their caste-based identities (who they are).

The above clearly demonstrates not just the escapist argument of the Communists, but more importantly also their gross misreading of the social trends, their overestimation of the capitalist forces and underestimation of the Brahmanical forces and the casteist mind of the Indian society, especially the upper castes. It may be true that capitalist economy allows people to become professionals, but that does not necessarily mean that those professionals grow out of their casteist mindset. For instance, Ramoji Rao, a Kamma by caste, is one of the biggest capitalists in AP. To his credit, he has a film studio that spreads over 5000 acres of land in Hyderabad, Eenadu, the largest newspaper in the state, TV channels in 13 Indian languages, and various other businesses. According to one estimation, he and his family alone command nearly 25 to 30 per cent of businesses in AP.[573] To have such a vast business empire, he should have talented professionals, irrespective of caste identities of those professionals. But apparently, it is Ramoji Rao's personalised policy that 80-90 per cent of the employees in his outfits should be drawn exclusively from the Kamma caste, a policy which is strictly adhered to.[574]

Further, one of the main pillars of the caste system is marriages within the caste. It may be true that inter-caste marriages are taking place, but a vast majority of the marriages are taking place not outside but within the castes, even in today's India which has more or less entered a capitalist economy. In conclusion, this sub-section attempted to examine the Communists' relationship with the Dalits in post-Independence Andhra Pradesh. The Communist parties led by the upper caste Kammas and Reddy's used the Dalits for their

[572] Devulapalli Venkateswararao in Andhra Jyothi (Telugu newspaper) 3 June, 1984.
[573] Interview with B.S. Ramulu, Social Activist and writer, Hyderabad – 4 February, 2005.
[574] Interview with S.V. Subbarao, reporter Eenadu newspaper, Hyderabad - 23 February, 2005.

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own political interests, but avoided rather skilfully in addressing the caste-specific problem of the Dalits.

6. IC. The Republican Party of India (RPI) in AP: In the previous chapter, we have noted that some Dalits - both in Hyderabad and coastal Andhra - accepted Ambedkar as their national leader and followed his activities since the early 1930's. In 1942, when Ambedkar established the Scheduled Caste Federation, they have also opened branches of SCF in their respective regions and organised Dalits for their share in the emerging political power. Although prior to the first general elections in 1952, none of the branches managed to win in any election, they did voice Dalit concerns during the twilight of colonial rule. Interestingly, in the first general elections in 1951, the SCF won five assembly seats and one Lok Sabha seat from Hyderabad State.[575] It is important to recognise here that the success of the party was neither on account of increased political consciousness nor due to increased political activity by the Dalits. They felt threatened and alienated after the annexation of Nizam's Hyderabad State by the Indian Union in 1948. They could trust neither the Communists, who during the Telangana revolt raised the slogan of 'land to the tiller' to the Dalits, but distributed land among the upper caste Reddys as well as Shudras, especially of Gouda, Kurmi, Padmashali and Yadava castes; nor could they place their trust in the Congress, which sent the Indian army into the Hyderabad state. The army saw Dalits as sympathisers both of the Razakars as well as Communists, and wrecked their lives by killing Dalit men and children, raping Dalit women and by burning down their huts.[576]

After the formation of RPI in 1957 in Nagpur, the two SCF branches in AP (one in Hyderabad, and the other in coastal Andhra) decided to merge into one. Under the chairmanship of Eali Vadapalli, a state-level conference was organised in Secunderabad in 1958, where the merger of the two branches was formalised. The new party was named as the Andhra Pradesh Republican Party of India. In the same conference, B V

[575] 'Statistical Report on General Election, 1951 to the Legislative Assembly of Hyderabad, *Election Commission of India,* New Delhi, http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/SE_1951/StatRep_51_HBD.pdf, accessed 19 December 2007.
[576] Interview with Ganumala Gnaneswar, General Secretary, RPI, Hyderabad, 26 Feb. 2005.

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Ramanaiah from East Godavari and J. Eswaribai from Hyderabad were elected as the party president and general secretary respectively. Some of the prominent Dalit leaders that took part in the conference were: Bojja Appala Swamy, Subbarao, Lakshmi Narayana and Konda Surya Prakasarao.[577]

It may be recalled from Chapter One that during the early 1960's the RPI initiated nation-wide demonstrations with ten demands, including land to the tiller, distribution of waste and idle land to the landless labourer and full implementation of the Minimum Wages Act of 1948. The RPI branch in AP also organised a number of demonstrations in front of the Legislative Assembly and offices of the District Collectors (Magistrates). Several party workers and supporters courted police arrests during those demonstrations. The Congress-led government in the state did not concede to any of the RPI's demands. Yet, the RPI gained respect in the political domain; particularly the Dalit constituency recognised it as the party with "some substance" and a "committed leadership for the welfare of the downtrodden".[578] The successful organisation of mass demonstrations resulted in newfound confidence among the RPI leadership, and with that new confidence they contested in eleven reserved seats in the 1967 assembly elections. Although many of the candidates lost their deposits, the party did win in two reserved (SC) seats (B. V. Ramanaiah from Amalapuram constituency and J. Eswaribai from Yellareddy constituency).[579]

Of all the forty Dalit MLAs in the 1967-1972 Assembly,[580] only the two RPI candidates were assertive in voicing Dalits' concerns in the Assembly. Some of the demands placed by the RPI MLAs were: declaring Ambedkar's birthday as a state holiday, an increase in the wages of agricultural labourers, and housing facilities and employment opportunities

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[577] Narasimharao, M.L. 1994. *Sahasamoorthi: J. Eswaribai* (Life History of J. Eswaribai), Secunderabad: SJES Trust, p.30.
[578] Interview with Bojja Tarakam, President, RPI, Hyderabad, 27 Feb. 2005.
[579] See Statistical Reports of Assembly Elections (Andhra Pradesh for 1962, 1967 and 1972 elections), *Election Commission of India.* http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp, accessed 19 December, 2007. The RPI lost in all the eighteen seats it contested in 1962 assembly elections, and again in all the nine seats in 1972 assembly elections.
[580] The distribution of Dalit MLAs during the 1967-72 Assembly were: Indian National Congress (INC) – 24; Swatantra Party – 7; RPI – 2, CPI – 2, CPI(M) -1, and Independents: 4.

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for the Dalits and other marginalised sections.[581] On a number of occasions the RPI leaders have also questioned the government on its indifference to the mounting atrocities against the Dalits, and its lack of sincerity in the distribution of land to the landless. To give one such example, in July 1968, questioning the government for delay in the distribution of government land to the Dalits and backward classes, Eswaribai asked: "Thousands of acres of *banjaar* lands were available in every village. Once in a while the Honourable Minister for Revenue announces that the government is distributing those lands to the *Harijans* and other poor people. But so far he has never informed the assembly the details of the distribution. Whenever we raise the issue, the Minister always finds some other excuse to not reveal the details. We demand that the government should immediately release the details of land distribution in every Taluk. …Most of the lands that were distributed among the *Harijans* were unsuitable for cultivation."[582]

Besides the political activity, the RPI leadership also started a newspaper and a fortnightly in order to spread the ideas and ideals of Ambedkar. In 1972, Ramanaiah started 'Republican Jyothi' – a fortnightly, and 'Jai Bheem Patrika' under the editorship of B. H. Tirupathi. They have also established the Ambedkar Memorial Society in Hyderabad. The Society sponsored translation of some of the major works of Ambedkar, including the 'Annihilation of Caste'.

Although the RPI's activism both inside and outside the Assembly was impressive, it was short-lived. By the early 1970's there was steep decline within the party, and by the mid-seventies the party became almost non-functional in the state. The party's decline was partly to do with the functioning of the RPI in Maharashtra as well as the change in the interests of the local leaders. First, much to the chagrin of the Dalits, the RPI in Maharashtra entered into an electoral alliance with the Congress in the 1976 elections which became the starting point for future splits within RPI. It was the Dalits who were not in favour of the alliance with the Congress who organised themselves under the leadership of B.D. Khobragade. The AP branch rejected the RPI-Congress alliance and

[581] See Bhaskar Rao, N. 1968. *The Politics of Leadership in an Indian State: Andhra Pradesh,* Vijayawada: Bharat Publications, pp: 60-64.
[582] Narasimharao, M.L. 1994. *Sahasamoorthi…,* pp: 46-47.

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declared Khobragade as its national leader.[583] But the Dalit supporters in the state were disappointed not just with RPI's alliance with the Congress (their main enemy both in the national and state politics), but also with the constant splits within the party. Second, the Congress government used every possible means to dissolve the RPI in the state. For instance, during the early 1970's it consistently used police force against the RPI leadership and its activists.[584] Finally, we mentioned that Easwaribai, with her activities both outside and inside the assembly, became the face of the RPI in the state. But she was attracted to the separate Telanaga statehood in 1970's and diverted her attention from RPI to the activities of the 'Telangana Praja Samithi'. With her departure the party lost its credibility among the Dalits and by the mid-1970's, the party workers began to join other political outfits, especially the CPI (ML), and some others, including the Dalit youth who began to mobilise under the banner of the *Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangam* (Ambedkar's Youth Association).

6. ID. The Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams:[585] After the decline of the RPI, its activists, especially the young Dalits rallied around the leadership of Bojja Tarakam. Tarakam, who was an advocate in the AP High Court, had a political background. His father, Bojja Appalaswamy, was one of the SCF leaders in coastal Andhra, and was elected twice from Amalapuram constituency in East Godavari district in 1951 and 1955. Tarakam was 'disappointed and annoyed' with the functioning of the RPI in Maharashtra and the decline of the party in the state. But he did not want the decline of the RPI to mean the end of Ambedkarism and Ambedkarites' activities in the state. With a strong motive to continue with their activities and to spread Ambedkarism particularly among the Dalit youth, in 1971 Tarakam started *Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangam* in Nizamabad district in Telangana region. [586]

[583] Narasimharao. M.L. 1994. *Sahasamoorthi…,* pp: 30-31.
[584] Ratnam, K.Y. 2008. *The Dalit Movement…*,p.16.
[585] Some of the information in this section is, apart from other sources, also drawn from Tukaram, Bhakta.1992. Andhra Pradesh-lo Dalita Udyamam – Oka Pariseelana (Dalit Movement in Andhra Pradesh), *Nalupu,* 4 (2), pp: 4-7.
[586] Interview with Bojja Tarakam, Hyderabad, 26 Feb. 2005.

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One of the initial activities of the *Sangam* was to organise the *beedi* workers for minimum wages in Nizamabad district. A majority of the Dalits and other marginalised sections in Nizamabad were *beedi* workers.[587] Despite consistent demands from the workers, the upper caste owners of the *beedi* factories denied minimum wages. The *Sangam* organised several demonstrations in front of the taluk offices and before the office of the district collector for twenty-five days. On the twenty-six day, the government conceded the demands of the *Sangam* and agreed to take measures for the proper implementation of the 'Beedi and Cigar Workers Act'. Soon news of the success of the *Sangam* spread to other districts in the state and Dalit youth invited Tarakam to launch branches of the *Sangam* in their respective districts. At the beginning of the 1980's every district had a branch of the *Sangam.*

The 1980 decade in AP, as elsewhere in India, started with increased upper caste violence (more on this below) and caste-based discrimination and humiliation of the Dalits.[588] What is important to note here is that it was not just the ordinary Dalits who were subjected to upper caste violence and humiliation, even the Dalit politicians were also subjected to the same treatment. For instance, Masala Veeranna, a Congress Dalit MLA was denied entry into temples in the state.[589] Angered by this instance the *Sangam* initiated public action in the form of demonstrations against the upper caste Congress leaders and the police for their inaction. The *Sangam* also wanted to use the occasion to inform the public, especially the Dalit public about the casteist and undemocratic attitude of the upper caste politicians, the nexus between the upper castes and the police. In 1982, the *Sangam* observed the two national days, Independence Day and Republic Day as Black Days. On the eve of the celebrations of those two occasions, the *Sangam* members expressed their protests by wearing black shirts and hoisting black flags throughout the state.[590]

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[587] It appears Tarakam was first approached by Dalit youth from Nizamabad and invited to start a youth association. Interview with Pratap in Hyderabad, 28 Feb. 2005.
[588] See Human Rights Watch. 1999. *Broken People: Caste Violence against India's "Untouchables",* New York: Human Rights Watch.
[589] See Ratnam, Y. K. 2008. *The Dalit Movement…,* p. 17.
[590] According to *Eenadu,* a Telugu newspaper (27 January, 1982), some 50,000 Dalits with black flags were gathered near Ambedkar's statue in Hyderabad against the Congress government.

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These public demonstrations and activism apart, the *Sangam* took certain measures towards spreading Ambedkar ideas and ideals among the Dalits in the state. First, the *Sangam,* along with the Scheduled Castes Employees' Welfare Association, started night schools for the slum dwellers in Hyderabad and Secunderabad. According to J. B. Raju, a member of the *Sangam*, over a period of five years nearly 220 people benefited from the night schools.[591] Secondly, they restarted *Jai Bheem Patrika.* P.V. Rao, who later on became the president of the Mala Mahanadu, was its editor. Under a new column called *Raktaasruvulu* (Tears of blood) in the *Patrika,* he chronicled the atrocities against the Dalits. Bojja Tarakam contributed several articles, in which he exposed how the upper castes and their politicians had been using the state machinery both to perpetuate their domination and to marginalise the Dalits. Thirdly, the *Sangam* initiated installation of Ambedkar statues in every village, town and district headquarters. While in the villages and towns the statues were installed in Dalit localities, in the district headquarters they were installed in the main centres. These statues were, as Ratnam pointed out, "intended to create a strong effect not only on the Dalits but on every onlooker, reminding them of Ambedkar's three mottos: 'educate, agitate, and organise'."[592] It should also be noted here that the installation of Ambedkar statues in the city's main centres signifies the consciousness of Dalits about their right to share public space along with the caste-Hindus.

To conclude our discussion, in this section I have made an attempt to examine the Dalit relationship with two of the upper castes-based dominant political parties in the State, the Congress and the Communist Party, and their socio-political activities since the formation of AP. Congress had been the major beneficiary of the facility of political representation for Dalits, and used the Dalit leaders, especially Damodaram Sanjeevaiah to avert political conflict between its two powerful factions. But it neither addressed the question of caste nor used its political power to ameliorate the impoverished socio-economic conditions of the Dalits. In fact, it used political power to destroy the Dalit-based RPI. The Communist Party also used the Dalits and their political representation to its

[591] My interview with J. B. Raju, Hyderabad, 22 December, 2005.
[592] Ratnam, K.Y. 2008. *The Dalit Movement …,* p.17.

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advantage, despite mouthing worthy slogans. It did accept the existence of caste, yet it did not want to fight against the system of caste for 'tactical' reasons. In other words, both the parties took advantage of Dalits, yet they used political power and party space to marginalise the Dalits. The Dalits tried to organise themselves outside these two political parties, through RPI and later through *Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams.* Through these platforms the Dalit leadership tried to voice Dalit concerns and problems. Although in the initial stages they seemed to make a mark, in the long run they could not sustain their activism due to strong opposition by the ruling Congress party, and also due to lack of material resources. But what were their concerns and activities in the 1980's, particularly after the emergence of Telugu Desam Party in the state's political arena? We shall examine this question in the next section.

6. II. Against Brahmanism and Domination: The APDMS

Two significant events that took place in the early 1980's in AP were the formation of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the emergence of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha (APDMS). The TDP emerged from among the Kammas, the APDMS came from among the Dalits; while the former questioned the political domination of the Reddy's,[593] the latter questioned the socio-economic and political domination of the upper castes. Further, these formations not only defined the politics and Dalit activism in the state during the 1980's and '90s but continued to shape them as well, even today. Although caste biases and the question of domination are at the base of these two formations, they neither represented one social base nor belonged to one stream of thought. Indeed, they represented two opposing social bases - upper and lower layers in the hierarchical social structure - and two ever conflicting and never converging streams of thought – Brahmanism and Ambedkarism.

In Chapter Three we noted that Dalit activism emerged in the 1970's from the context of the social oppression suffered by them in the hands of the upper castes. We have also noted that in order to arrest the emerging Dalit consciousness, the upper castes mobilised

[593] Neither NTR, the founder of the TDP, nor any other leader of the TDP used the language of 'Reddy domination'. It had been articulated as 'Congress Rule', 'Congress Domination'. See Prasanna K.A. 1994. Caste and Political Leadership. In: Prasanna K. A. ed., *Andhra Pradesh….*

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en masse and committed atrocities against the Dalits indiscriminately. In their response against the upper castes' deployment of caste, the Dalits also deployed caste as the basis for their mobilisation. In a way, caste had become a focal point around which the atrocities were organised and mobilisations against them were initiated. During that period we also witnessed a similar phenomenon in AP. The two dominant castes in the state – the Kammas and Reddys – organised two most brutal massacres against the two Dalit castes – the Madigas and Malas – in Karamchedu on July 17, 1985 and Chunduru on August 6, 1991, respectively. Against this upper caste carnage, the Dalits in the state organised through the *Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha* (APDMS), and between 1985 and 1993 they led a protracted struggle for justice and social equality; and caste had become the rallying point in Dalit mobilisation.

During the course of the struggle, the Dalits have, by rejecting the identities imposed both by the Brahmanical social structure and the state in post-Independence India, and by claiming Dalit identity, put forward a strong critique against the ideology of Brahmanism and the socio-cultural domination of the upper castes. My main aim in this section is to examine the context of the emergence of the APDMS in the '80s and analyse Dalit activism under its leadership and the Dalit critique of Brahmanism and upper caste domination. I also analyse the ideology of the APDMS for a society based on equality and justice. I have divided this section into three sub-sections. While the first sub-section examines the context of the formation of the APDMS, the second sub-section analyses the ideology of the APDMS; and the final sub-section is an examination of Dalit activism under the leadership of the APDMS.

6. IIA. Carnage in Karamchedu: Context of the Formation of the APDMS: As mentioned above, one of the significant events that took place on the state's political theatre was the formation of the TDP in March 1982. It was founded by N.T. Ramarao, a Kamma by caste and a famous Telugu film actor. Although the Kammas, along with the Reddys, were the main beneficiaries of the land reforms in the state and more or less equally represented in the Legislative Assembly, they always resented the fact that they were not

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offered the highest political position in the state – that of the chief minister.[594] But in other avenues, the Kammas proved to be more enterprising than the Reddy's. They were in the forefront in utilising the 'Green Revolution' facilities. By using high-yielding variety seeds, chemical fertiliser and the easy availability of capital for agriculture through the nationalised banks, the Kammas amassed great wealth. They reinvested their agricultural wealth into commercial activities such as rice mills, tobacco and sugar production, film industry, hotels, newspapers etc. This changing economic base strengthened their social status and political power at the grassroots, and also helped them gain additional ministerial positions in the Reddy-led Congress governments. Yet, "Kammas continued to resent the failure of Indira Gandhi to appoint a Kamma chief minister in the state. Of the nine Andhra Pradesh chief ministers before Mr. N.T. Rama Rao, six were from the Reddy community, and none from the Kammas".[595] "The growing disjuncture", as observed by Atul Kohli, "between economic power and the failure to capture the highest political office – with all the symbolic and the real gains – alienated the Kammas" from the Congress.[596] When NTR made his move from the silver screen to the political stage, a majority of the Kammas, irrespective of party affiliations, ideological differences and class positions, rallied behind him and wrested political power from the hands of the Reddys.[597]

The TDP's assumption of political power had far-reaching effects on all aspects of social life, particularly over the way in which the Kammas saw themselves (i.e., the self-esteem

[594] Representation of Reddys and Kammas in the Assembly and the ministry before and after TDP came to power (in percentages)

Year	Representation in Assembly		Composition of Ministries	
	Reddys	Kammas	Reddys	Kammas
1978	24.1	14.6	27.3	15.2
1983	25.9	16.0	26.7	20.0

Source: Vaugier-Chatterjee, Anne. 2009. Andhra Pradesh: A Two-Dominant Caste Socio-Political System. In: Kumar, Sanjay and Christophe Jaffrelot., eds., *Rise of the plebians? The Changing face of Indian legislative assemblies.* New Delhi: Routledge, pp: 277-309, cited in K C Suri., 2004. Telugu Desam Party: Rise and Prospects for Future. *EPW, passim 2,* p.1490.

[595] Kohli, Atul. 1991. *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability.* Cambridge: CUP, p. 67.

[596] Kohli, Atul. 1988. The NTR Phenomenon in Andhra Pradesh: Political Change in a South Indian State. *Asian Survey,* 28(10), p. 996.

[597] Gundimeda, S. 2009. Dalits, Praja Rajyam Party and Caste Politics in AP. *EPW,* 44(21), p. 53.

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of the Kammas) and their relations with the Dalits. Their newly assumed political power added to their already existing social dominance and economic power. It was, in fact, as observed by Padmarao, strengthened the caste arrogance of the Kammas, and "almost every Kamma in the state virtually felt that 'the Kamma state' (*Kamma rajyam*) had been established."[598] With the state power in their hands, the Kammas in the rural areas began to harass Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalised sections. Particularly the Kamma youth pestered the young Dalit girls and women for sexual favours. When they were rejected, the youth would go to the extent of going directly to the houses of the girls and raping them right in front of the eyes of the parents or husbands. For instance, in Karamchedu village, prior to the Kammas' massacre of the Madigas, Venkatesh, a Kamma man, directly went to the house of Tirupataiah, who belongs to Erukula (Adivasi) community, and raped his young daughter. When Tirupataiah went to lodge a case against the Kamma man, the police refused to file the case.[599] It was in the context of the amalgamation of social power with political power that the Kammas organised the carnage in Karamchedu village.

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Karamchedu is a very prosperous village located 7 km from the busy commercial town of Chirala in Prakasam district. The total population of the village in the 1980's was around 13,600, of which the Kammas comprised 6,000. The two Dalits castes: Madigas and Malas, constituted the next major castes with a population of 1,100 and 900 respectively. Among the rest, Upparas, Dasus and Muslims were quite significant in number. The total cultivable land in the village was 9,000 acres. Most of this land was owned and controlled by the Kammas, who also owned another 2,000 acres in neighbouring villages. Benefiting from the paddy and tobacco cultivation, the Kammas, since the early 1970's, diversified their wealth into business, rice mills, contracts, transport operation and film production. A significant proportion of the Kamma farmers regularly migrated to far-off districts in the state and even to neighbouring states. They had a significant presence in Karimnagar and Nizamabad districts in Telangana region and Bellary district in

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[598] Katti, Padmarao. 2005. Karamchedu O Charitraka Malaupu (Karamchedu: A Historical Turn). In: Sambasivarao, U. ed., *Dalita Rana-ninaadam* (Battle Cry of the Dalits), Hyderabad: Edureeta Publications, pp: 2-9.

[599] Interview with Koti James, a Dalit leader in Chirala 13 January 2005.

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Karnataka, where they cultivated tobacco, cotton and other commercial crops on leased or purchased land.[600]

Table 6.5: Percentage of Scheduled Caste Population in AP

Year	Population (in M)	Percent in Total Population
1961	4.9	13.8
1971	5.8	13.3
1981	7.9	14.9
1991	10.6	15.9
2001	12.3	16.2

Source: Human Development Report 2007: Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad: Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, p. 132.

Table 6.6: Principal Sources of livelihood among the SCs in AP

Sector	HH Type	1993-94	2004-05
Rural	SENA	5.9	7.5
	AL	69.1	60.7
	OL	9.2	11.5
	SEA	11.8	11.6
	Others	4.0	7.5
	Total	100	100
Urban	SE	20.0	24.5
	RW/SE	48.6	40.1
	CL	26.8	28.9
	Others	4.7	6.5
	Total	100	100

Note: SENA – Self-employed in non-agriculture; AL – Agriculture labour; OL-Other labour; SEA – Self-employed in agriculture; SE- Self-employed; RW/SE – Regular wage or salaried; CL- Casual labour.

Source: Human Development Report 2007: Andhra Pradesh. Hyderabad: Govt. of Andhra Pradesh, p. 136.

The economic condition of the Dalits, who comprised the bulk of the agricultural labour force, contrasted sharply with the Kammas. Indeed, it was not just the case of the Dalits in Karamchedu. As reflected in the above table, more than 60 percent of the Dalits in the state had been agricultural labourers. While the annual payment for a *paleru* (farm servant) was just Rs. 2000, the daily wages paid to male and female agricultural labourers were Rs.10-12 and Rs.6-8, respectively. These wages were much lower than the minimum wage rates legally prescribed. Over the course of time, some of the Dalits, especially the Madigas, improved their economic condition by cultivating the land of the Kammas as tenants. Their changed economic situation allowed the Madigas to send their children to schools and by the early 1980's some of the youth acquired jobs outside the agricultural sector. The changed economic circumstances and education among the

[600] Murali, K. 1995. *Upper Caste Violence on Dalits: Case Studies of Karamchedu and Chundur Massacres*. M.Phil. University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.

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Madigas gave them self-respect and made them socially conscious. They began to question the practice of untouchability and sexual exploitation of their women by the Kammas. In the backdrop of this questioning, the emergence of the TDP was seen as an opportunity both by the Madigas and Kammas. The former saw the party as "a clear Kamma party",[601] and felt the need to stand up against the emerging political power of the Kammas, and the latter saw it as the harbinger of their political domination, a domination that perpetuated their already existing social dominance.

Until the formation of TDP, the political contest in Karamchedu had been organised within the Congress Party (I).[602] But with the birth of the TDP, the scenario underwent a major change, wherein the Kammas in the village, as elsewhere in the state, shifted their loyalties to the TDP, while the Madigas continued allying with the Congress. The Kammas did not expect that, as they thought the Madigas whose economic survival depended on them, would simply listen to them. This led to some tension but did not escalate into a major conflict. Yet, as observed by Srinivasulu, "it caused sufficient injury to the cultivated pride of the dominant Kamma caste".[603] After the 1983 Assembly election the Kammas in the village were waiting for a pretext for retaliation and that pretext was a trivial incident that happened on July 16, 1985.

At about 3.30pm on July 16, a Kamma youth bathed his buffalo on the steps of the water tank that belonged to the Dalits. He sullied the water in the tank which was the source of drinking water for the Dalits in the village. Watching this was a lame Madiga boy who immediately objected to the act. The Kamma youth reacted angrily to that and whipped the Madiga boy with a cattle leash. A young Madiga woman, Suvaratha, who had come to fetch water from the tank, protested when she saw the Madiga boy being whipped. When the arrogant Kamma youth turned to beat her as well, she retaliated by threatening to throw the water pot at him.. This act of courage by a Madiga woman infuriated the

[601] My interviews with the survivors of Karamchedu massacre, Chirala 23 January 2005.
[602] Incidentally, until the early 70s the Kammas in the village were strong supporters of the Communist parties. See Ajay, Gudavarthy. 2005. Dalit and Naxalite Movements in AP: Solidarity or Hegemony?, *EPW,* pp: 5410-5418.
[603] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class…., ,* p. 38.

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Kamma youth, but he could not do anything as another Madiga man had come to their rescue.[604]

The Kammas in the village, instead of rebuking the youth from their community for his misbehaviour with the Madigas, turned their ire against the woman for taking on a member of their fold. "Why do we call ourselves superior if we cannot teach these Madigas a lesson and put them in their place,"[605] was the general reaction of the Kammas. The news of their *humiliation* at the hands of the Madigas spread through the Kamma community in the neighbouring villages and they were asked to join hands to avenge the humiliation."[606] More than 200 Kammas gathered from seven neighbouring villages, and an attack was meticulously planned and executed on the morning of July 17. It was stated that the attack was planned by Daggubati Chenchu Ramaiah, father of N.T. Ramarao's son-in-law Daggubati Venkateswararao.[607] Armed with axes, crowbars, spears and clubs, the Kamma mob attacked the *Madigapalle* (Madiga locality) from all directions. They took revenge in the most debased and brutal form by smashing the heads of the Madigas with axes, breaking their limbs, digging spears into their groins and pushing sticks into female genitals.[608]

Apart from the Karamchedu carnage, several other assaults were organised by the upper castes against the Dalits in the state in the 1980's and '90s. In fact, the period 1983-91, for which there is detailed information, saw regular attacks on the Dalits. The following Table illustrates the point in question:

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[604] Fact Finding Team (1985) *Karamchedu.* Salaha: Hyderabad, p.5.
[605] Katti, Padmarao. 2005. Karamchedu: A Historical Turn…, p.4.
[606] Interview with Padmarao, Venkatasubbaiah, Ponnuru, 26 January 2005.
[607] Daggubati Chenchu Ramaiah was one of the key accused in the massacre, and subsequent to the massacre he was killed by People's War Group. See, 'SC convicts 31 in Karamchedu Dalit massacre', *Times of India,* (Hyderabad), 20 December, 2008.
[608] My interview with Koti James, Dalit activist, Chirala, 24 January 2005. See also, Balagopal, K. 1987. Karamchedu: Second Anniversary. *EPW,* 22 (33), pp: 1378-1381.

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Table 6.7: Major incidences of violence against Dalits during 1983-91[609]

Place of occurrence	Date of occurrence	Nature of the incident
Padirikuppam (Chittor)	5 January 1983	Four Dalits killed and 80 families rendered homeless following an attack by upper caste TDP supporters
Karamchedu (Prakasam)	17 July 1985	Six Dalits killed and three dalit women raped in a mass assault by hundreds of upper caste men of the Kamma caste
Hasnanpur (Adilabad)	13 June 1985, 8 July 1985	Reddy landlords, closely related to the Adilabad MLA killed two youth of the Dhobi and Barber castes on two days respectively, for refusing to procure a prostitute on their demand
Avdhapur (Medak	17 January 1986	Landlords belonging to the TDP set fire to 30 houses of Dalits
Neerukonda (Guntur)	15 July 1987	One elderly Dalit man murdered in a mob attack by men of the Kamma caste
Gudiada (Vizianagaram)	15 July 1987	One Dalit labourer killed in a dispute over a small patch of tank-bed land by a mob of backward caste farmers led by upper caste (Rajus) Congress party leader
Chirala (Prakasam)	13 August 1987	A principal witness in the Karamchedu violence was murdered by the Karamchedu killers
Dontali (Nellore)	27 August 1987	One person of a backward caste was killed in an assault by a gang of upper caste men
Bandilapalli (Nellore)	27 August 1987	Four Dalits beaten and stabbed to death in an assault by a group of upper caste men
Kodavatikallu	2 February 1988	Dalit labourer murdered by a landlord
Beernakallu (Nellore)	19 January 1989	A Dalit deputy-president of the village killed by TDP landlord
Gokarajupalli	16 January 1989	A Dalit labourer killed by a landlord
Tangutur (Prakasham)	3 March 1989	A Dalit woman raped and burnt to death by an upper caste TDP strongman
Jabbergudem (Ranga Reddy)	27 April 1989	One Dalit killed in a mass assault by the henchmen of a TDP landlord
Pippara (West Godavari)	4 June 1989	One Dalit killed in a mass assault by upper caste men led by village deputy- president
Kanchikacherla (Krishna)	19 March 1990	Dalit farm servant killed by the youth from a landlord's family
Gutlapadu (West Godavari)	19 May 1990	Two Dalits killed in a mass assault by forward caste men
Kothapulavandla Palli (Ananthapur)	6 June 1990	A Dalit burnt alive by upper caste men
Chillakallu (Krishna)	28 November 1990	A Dalit SI of Police shot himself dead due to casteist harassment from the CI
Moodurallapalli (Karnool)	18 March 1991	A Dalit labourer beaten and stabbed to death by a mob of upper caste men
Timmasamudram (Prakasham)	January 1991	Dalits driven out of the village by an attack of forward caste men owing allegiance to a TDP leader
Chundur (Guntur)	6 August 1991	At least 8 and up to 20 Dalits killed in a mass assault by forward caste men of six villages.
Gokarajupalli (Krishna)	3 August 1991	Dalit labourer killed by upper castes.

[609] Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Committee, 1991, cited in Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class….,* p. 43; also see Balagopal, K. 1991. Post-Chundur & Other Chundurs. *EPW,* 26 (42), pp: 2399-2401 + 2403-2405.

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The Dalits' response against the Karamchedu massacre, which was unprecedented in the history of the state, was spontaneous. Thousands of Dalits from all over the state gathered in the nearby town of Chirala, to which the victims of the carnage had fled. In Chirala, the 'All India Dalits Co-ordination Committee on Karamchedu', was immediately constituted under the leadership of Katti Padmarao and Bojja Tarakam. These two leaders were well known and respected in their own right over years, and they took the lead in fighting against the Karamchedu carnage. Padmarao, a Mala by caste, was a Sanskrit lecturer in a college in Guntur district. He belonged to the tradition of organised rationalism that had long been a significant movement in South India. At the time of the Karamchedu incident, Padmarao was one of the leading rationalists in coastal Andhra, and within the rationalist movement, he was a spokesman for the Marxist approach to the criticism of religion.[610] Tarakam, as mentioned earlier, was a government lawyer and was the founder of the *Ambedkar Yuvajana Sangams.* Earlier he was closely associated with the Communist movement, and for some time he was an activist in *Virasam* (the Revolutionary Writers' Association of AP).[611] Soon after the massacre, Tarakam resigned his lawyer's job and Padmarao, more or less, suspended his teaching activities. They organised the victims of the carnage, who refused to go back to their village, and built a colony for them in Chirala. Gradually, the protest against the carnage built itself up into a movement - the APDMS - whose formation on September 1, 1985 in Chirala was attended by about 300,000 Dalits and sympathisers.[612]

In the first APDMS convention at Tenali on February 16 and 17, 1986, Katti Padmarao and Bojja Tarakam were elected as general secretary and president, respectively.[613] Under their leadership the APDMS mobilised not only the Dalits, but also the other marginalised sections, especially the Adivasis, the lower Shudra castes (the Most Backward Castes [MBCs]), and women of all castes and communities, against the caste-based violence and discrimination. With the aim of achieving social equality and social

[610] My interview with Padmarao, Lumbinivanam, Ponnuru, 21 January 2005.
[611] My interview with Tarakam, Hyderabad, 29 January 2005.
[612] Balagopal, K. 1987. Karamchedu…, p.1378.
[613] It may be mentioned here that the stage on the APDMS's formation day was kept exclusively for the Dalits. No one from the upper caste backgrounds, however sympathetic to the Dalits, was allowed to share the dais. At this point of time the Dalits did not want any upper caste person to speak on their behalf; they expressed the confidence that they could manage on their own. See Ratnam, Y.K., 2008. *Op. cit.,* p. 21.

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justice for the marginalised, the APDMS mounted a strong critique of Brahmanism and domination of the upper castes. Also, drawing from the philosophies of Charvakas, Buddhist Sangha dharma and indigenous socio-cultural movements such as the Bhakti movements, and by synthesising the ideologies of Marxism and Ambedkarism, the APDMS offered alternatives in the socio-cultural domains. In the rest of the section I focus upon the ideology and activism of the APDMS.

6. IIB. Ideology of the APDMS: In February 1986, the APDMS held its first state-level conference in Tenali town (Guntur district). In this conference, it launched, 'the Dalit Manifesto', in which it took up issues with various political parties, especially with the Congress and Communists, for their evasion of the caste question. It also spelled out the objectives of the Dalit struggle and strategies to be employed in order to achieve those objectives. Since then the Manifesto had become not just an ideological bible for the movement, but also a lighthouse that guided Dalit activism. I attempt to engage with the three major aspects of the Manifesto: (1) Dalits and political parties, (2) Identity, and (3) Objectives of the Dalit movement. In this engagement, apart from the text of the Manifesto, I have drawn from various arguments put forward by the Dalits, arguments that appeared in their writings,[614]and also from the debates and discussions that have taken place around these arguments.

(a) Dalits and Political Parties: The two main political parties targeted in the Manifesto were Congress and Communists. Taking up issues with the Congress, the Manifesto observed that during the colonial period, the sudden concern of the Congress for the Dalits in the name of *Harijans* was the result of Ambedkar's demand for the Dalits' share in the emerging political power. Instead of giving their due share, "Gandhi's Congress transformed them from being social servants to political servants through the Poona Pact"[615] In this way, the Congress merely evaded caste questions, and more importantly,

[614]See, for instance, Padmarao, K. 1990. *Kulam Punadulu* (Foundations of Caste). Ponnuru: Lokayata;..., 1992. *Kulam-Pratyamnyaa samskruti* (Caste and Alternative Culture). Ponnuru: Lokayata; Kancha, Ilaiah. 1989. *Kula Nirmulana – Marxist Drukapatham* (Caste Annihilation and Marxist Perspective). Hyderabad: HBT; Bojja, Tarakam. 1996. *Kulam – Vargam* (Caste and Class), Hyderabad: HBT; Devarapalli, M., 1997. *Dalita Dasabdam* (Decade of Dalits), Ponnuru: Lokayata.

[615] 'Dalit Maha Sabha Dalita Manifesto', in Sambasivarao, U. ed., 2005. *Dalita Rana…,* p.13.

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destroyed the emerging independent leadership among the Dalits. The Manifesto further pointed out that in post-Independence India the socio-economic betterment measures espoused by the Congress for the Dalits, were undertaken not with the intention of transforming their socio-economic conditions but with an aim to grab the votes. "Whatever its aim", it was further criticised, "those measures, especially land distribution, land reforms Act, minimum wages Act and abolition of Untouchability – all remained paper tigers and were never implemented honestly."[616]

One charge levelled against the Communists was their negligence of the social inequalities suffered by the Dalits. The Manifesto points out: "For them (the Communists) the class is the base. Changes in the economic structure automatically result in changes in the social structure." This argument, the Manifesto stated, can be said to be true in the western society, but cannot be true in the Indian context, where caste is the foundation. "The sheer negligence of the caste factor by the Communists was simply because its leadership came from the upper castes".[617] If the Communists, it was argued, want to bring any changes in the economic structure, then they should have started with the social structure.

(b) Identity: Since the formation of the 'All-India Dalits' Co-ordination Committee on Karamchedu' that was constituted in the Chirala *Shibiram,* both Tarakam and Padmarao – the two main leaders of the APDMS - urged all the Dalits to give up their caste-based identities, such as Madigas, Malas, Rellis and other imposed identities such as *Harijan,* and Scheduled Castes, and take up the Dalit identity. The uniform Dalit identity was not only to forge unity among the lower castes, as a people that belonged to one community, it was also to reject the identities that were imposed on them by the Brahmanical society and its ideologues, especially Gandhi. "The claiming of Dalit identity", as stated by Padmarao, "was a symbolic rejection of the upper castes authority over them."[618]

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[616] Ibid., pp: 13-14.
[617] Ibid., p.14.
[618] Interview with Katti Padmarao, Ponnuru, 22 January 2005.

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Although at the time of the *Chirala Shibiram* the term Dalit was narrowly defined to incorporate the Scheduled Castes, at the time of the first state-level Dalit conference, the APDMS leadership expanded the boundaries to welcome all the marginalised sections under the Dalit nomenclature. Such a shift was reflected in the broader redefinition of the term Dalit in the Manifesto:

> All those people who have been victims of social oppression for centuries are Dalits. Dalits are not those people that belonged to one particular caste or religion….The slaves who were oppressed by their masters in slavery, the agricultural labourer and landless labourer oppressed by their feudal lords, the workers oppressed by the capitalists, and those people who are victims of social oppression in the caste system – all are Dalits.[619]

It is clear from the above definition that the Manifesto reflects the influence of Marxism, and that 'caste' not 'class' has been taken as the central focus of the movement. Of course, that does not mean that the APDMS was not going to take the caste factor into account. In fact, what it did was simply to add the category 'caste-oppressed' into the category of 'class-oppressed', and thus tried to expand the boundary of the latter. In other words, the broader definition of the term Dalit reflects that unlike the Communist leaders who come mainly from the Brahmin, Kamma, Reddy and other upper caste backgrounds and who are generally considered pseudo-Marxists by the Dalits and those oppressed in Indian society - the Dalit leadership tried to strike a balance between the Marxist and Dalit perspectives. That is to say, while the Marxist perspective with its central focus on class aims at ending class exploitation by paving the way for the annihilation of class only, the Dalit objective, on the other hand, was annihilation of caste. But in Indian society we have both class-based as well as caste-based oppression, and the fight against these two forms of oppression cannot be exclusive to each other. It is precisely what the Manifesto tried to do - blend the questions of caste and class. Reflecting on this Padmarao observes:

> If the Dalit movement has a caste(ist) perspective, it would instead of doing well, in fact, do harm. The movement should bring about a social revolution and incite casteism. In the process of resolving social contradictions, we must formulate a class perspective; those who want to destroy caste would not hang on to caste. To annihilate caste, the existence of caste should only be recognised.[620]

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[619] 'Dalita Maha Sabha Dalita Manifesto'…p.11.
[620] Katti Padmarao, quoted in quoted in Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class…,* p. 46.

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In conformity with this position the manifesto argued that the Dalit movement was a movement for land and livelihood (*boomi kosam, bhukthi kosam*), and should learn from the oppressed people's history of struggle. Further, it has also been stated that to understand the oppressed class, it is necessary to understand the theories of social revolutions and apply them to contemporary society. This could be read as a clear reference to the thought of Karl Marx. It thus said: "the theories, struggle sand practice of Mahatma Jotirao Phule and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar must be breathed into the movement. At the same time the class struggle theory which has emancipated the oppressed of the world must be balanced with." [621]

(3) Objectives of the Dalit movement: The blending of the Marxist and Ambedkar perspectives is further reflected in the APDMS objectives that were spelled out in the Manifesto:

- Annihilation of casteism
- Removal of untouchability
- Ending caste contradictions within the oppressed classes
- Preparing the oppressed classes for social revolution
- Making the cultural revolution a success
- Continuing the struggle for nationalisation of land and property
- Enlightening people about the exploitative policies of the ruling classes so as to advance people's struggle
- Making social revolution a success, and
- Striving for Dalit and human rights

It is clear from a cursory look at the above objectives that the Dalit leadership, in their attempt to blend the caste and class perspectives, was influenced by Ambedkar's arguments in his highly influential work: *Annihilation of Caste*. By placing annihilation of casteism as Number One in their list of objectives, the Dalit leadership, just as Ambedkar did before them, were arguing in clear terms that in India no revolution is possible until and unless caste is annihilated. But how did they propose to annihilate caste? How did they propose to prepare the oppressed for Social Revolution? What did they mean by Cultural Revolution and how could that be achieved?

[621] 'Dalita Maha Sabha Dalita Manifesto', p.7.

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The second question - preparing the oppressed for a Social Revolution - is connected with the first question - annihilation of caste. In a sense, we find victims of class across the caste hierarchy. Yet we do not find them uniting to fight against class oppression. In fact, we see the class-based oppressed joining hands with the oppressor in further victimising the oppressed, if the latter happens to belong to the caste of the former. The carnage in Karamchedu amply demonstrates this point.

Thus, what was preventing the oppressed from forging a united front against the oppressor was the caste factor, and if 'caste' were to be removed, then the way would be paved for unity among the class-based oppressed.[622] But how do we remove caste? The Dalit leadership reiterated what Ambedkar had said:

> Caste is not a physical object like a wall of bricks or a line of barbed wire which prevents the Hindus from co-mingling and which has, therefore, to be pulled down. Caste is a notion, it is a state of mind. The destruction of Caste does not therefore mean the destruction of a physical barrier. It means a *notional* change.[623]

Thus, for Ambedkar, and also for the APDMS, caste is not a physical objective that can be removed physically. It is in fact, a state of mind, whose destruction requires effecting changes in the way caste is understood by its practitioners. The ideas, such as *purity, pollution, upper, lower* etc., are pillars upon which the caste system has been built, and if those pillars are destroyed then the system automatically crumbles. And it is the *Shastras* of Hinduism that have been inculcating the ideas of caste. Therefore, "[T]he real remedy is to destroy the belief in the sanctity of the *Shastras."*[624] But how does one destroy the Hindus' faith in the *Shastras*? Ambedkar showed the way by converting to Buddhism. He also urged his fellow Dalits to follow the same path for, "If the new world has to be realised that is very different from the old, it must have a religion and if the new world needs a religion far more than the old world does, then it can only be the religion of Buddha."[625] In other words, Ambedkar by converting to Buddhism not only wanted to free himself and fellow Dalits from the ideological enthral of Hinduism, but importantly,

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[622] See Tarakam, B. 1991. Dr. Ambedkar – Social Revolution (in Telugu). *Nalupu,* 2 (20-24), pp: 31-36.
[623] Ambedkar, B.R. 1989[1936]. Annihilation of Caste. In: Vasant Moon (com.) *Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches,* Vol. I. Bombay: Education Department, Govt. of Maharashtra, p.68.
[624] Ibid.
[625] Sangharakshita, 1986. *Ambedkar and Buddhism,* Glasgow…, quoted in Omvedt, Gail. 2004. *Ambedkar: Towards….,* p. 148.

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he also aspired to construct a new society built upon the foremost Buddhist principle of Equality.

The APDMS leaders, following Ambedkar, also opted for Buddhism. Interestingly, they did not emphasise on the conversion aspect, but rather the idea of constructing an alternative culture. Padmarao was convinced that violence and inhumane treatment meted out against the Dalits and other marginalised sections in the Indian society were due to the hegemony of the Hindu culture. And that culture can be changed by replacing it with an alternative Dalit culture, a culture that draws from Charvaka's materialism, Buddhist humanism and its Sangha philosophy which recognise the fundamental 'human equality, fraternity and dignity'.[626]

6. IIC. Activism under the APDMS: As mentioned above, between 1985 and 1993, the APDMS mobilised the Dalits and other marginalised sections against upper caste atrocities and for justice and social equality. It may be pointed out here that prior to the formation of the BSP, an uninterrupted Dalit activism in UP was sustained first under the leadership of the BAMCEF and later through the DS-4. Dalit activism in AP, on the contrary, was not continuously organised. It came in waves, primarily in response to the atrocities against Dalits, especially in Karamchedu and Chunduru (more on the second given below), as well as in response to casteism articulated by the upper castes through the anti-reservation agitations in the early '90's. A lack of sustained Dalit activism was one of the main reasons why the Dalit movement in AP, unlike in UP, failed to transform itself into a political party and, thus it led to the eventual failure of Dalit politics in the electoral arena. My main concern in this sub-section is to examine Dalit activism after the Karamchedu carnage and until the entry of the BSP into AP politics in the early 1990's.

The first wave of Dalit activism took place after the Karamchedu carnage. Immediately after the carnage, a majority of the Madigas from Karamchedu fled to the nearby town of Chirala. A church in Chirala opened its gates to the victims. But as sympathisers began pouring in, the victims were re-located to a different place which had famously been

[626] See Padmarao, K. 1995. *Caste and Alternative Culture.* Madras: The GL Theological College, p. 143.

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called as *Shibiram* (a hut or a place for gathering). An important point that needs to be emphasised here was the moral support that came from the other Dalit castes, especially from the Malas. As soon as the Dalit villagers around Chirala town came to know about the carnage, all the Dalits, irrespective of their individual castes, came to the Chirala *Shibiram.* One of the visitors belonging to the Mala caste emotionally stated, "[t]his brutality of the Kammas is not just upon the Madigas, it is upon the entire Scheduled Caste community."[627] This kind of identifying the victims as part of the entire SC community eventually resulted in the consolidation of all the individual castes as one group and their assertion as Dalits. In order to look after the immediate needs of the victims, an 'All-India Dalits Co-ordination Committee on Karamchedu', under the leadership of Katti Padmarao, was formed.

One of the first things that this Committee did was refusing to accept charity either from the upper castes or from the government in any form.[628] "Every time the upper castes kill our people or rape our women, the government comes up with the offer of money as the solution…*The government of the upper caste vultures* has put a price for our lives and for our bodies. For the murder they give us Rs. 10,000 and for the rape Rs. 2000. No, not this time… We will not allow the upper caste-led government to put a price tag on our men and women."[629]

The second thing that the Dalit activists did was preventing the politicians, including the Dalit politicians (whom they call 'Dalit brokers' (*Dalita dalarulu*) of any party from entering the *Shibiram.* They even refused to meet chief minister N.T. Ramarao, who at the time of assembly elections declared himself as the 'Harijan among Harijans'. Viramma, a Madiga woman, refusing to accept a basket of oranges offered by NTR said, "Ever since you became the chief minister of the state, every Kamma in the village (Karamchedu) is behaving as if they are the chief ministers. Your relatives raped our women and your relatives killed our men. Don't you have any shame to offer us fruits?

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[627] Interview with Subbaiah, a Mala from Ponnuru on 13 December, 2005. He was one of the first Malas from Ponnuru, along with Katti Padmarao, to visit the victims in Chirala.
[628] Taraka, B. 1990. July Padihedu Karamchedu (17 July Karamchedu). *Nalupu,* 2 (2), July 16-31, pp: 9-10.
[629] Ibid, p. 9.

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…We do not want your fruits. What we need is not fruits but justice…justice that is what we want."[630] Inspired by Padmarao's call for, 'one meal, one street' (*putako peata*), Dalits in Chirala town and the nearby villages came forward and offered food both to the victims and the gathering.[631] The Karamchedu Coordination Committee, apart from its immediate response of assisting victims by providing food, shelter and moral courage, organised several mass protest rallies, *dharnas,* and road blocks, with the demand of immediate arrest of the culprits of the carnage and justice for the victims.

Owing to the massive agitations organised by the Karamchedu Coordination Committee, the state government, on behalf of the victims, filed a case in a district court. Yet, it failed to produce the culprits in front of the Court of Justice. One of the main reasons for that was, apart from the fact that the culprits were members of the Kamma caste, Daggubati Chenchu Ramaiah, a prime accused in the carnage was a relative of NTR. Chenchu Ramaiah's son, Daggubati Venkateswarlu, was married to N.T. Ramarao's daughter, Purandheswari. Against this gross injustice which was inspired by nepotism (by the chief minister) and casteism (of the Kammas), the APDMS filed a private case against 165 Kammas, including Chenchu Ramaiah.[632] After Alisamma, a Madiga woman from Karamchedu, deposed before the court how her son (Duddu Vandanam) was axed to death by the Kamma mob right in front of her own eyes, the APDMS and the victims of the carnage were almost certain that they would get justice. But Alisamma was murdered by *unknown* people in Chirala, and after dragging the case, the Court cleared all the suspects. The Judicial Inquiry Commission headed by Justice Desai stated it could not find any clear reason as the main motive behind the massacre[633] – another classic example of how the state and state institutions, which are dominated and controlled by the upper castes, can go to the extent of killing witnesses to deny justice to the Dalits.[634]

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[630] *Karamchedu* (Report on Karamchedu Carnage), Hyderabad: Hyderabad Book Trust, 1985, p.3.
[631] Interview with Padmarao, Ponnuru, 23 January 2005.
[632] *Salaha,* a voluntary organisation on legal matters, rendered a great help to the APDMS in filing the case in the Court of Justice.
[633] See Tarakam, B. 1989. *Rendu Hatyalu – Rashtra Prabhutvam* (Two murders and State Government), *Nalupu,* 1(6), pp: 9-10.
[634] In December 2008 the Supreme Court of India, after 23 long years, delivered its final verdict on the Karamchedu massacre case. It awarded life sentences to the main accused and three years of imprisonment to 30 others. 'SC convicts 31 in Karamchedu Dalit massacre', *Times of India,* (Hyderabad) 20 Dec. 2008.

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The second wave of Dalit activism took place in 1989-90, when the Janata Dal government under Prime Minister V.P. Singh, announced plans to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations of OBC reservations in education and public service appointments.[635] Inspired by the upper castes-based anti-reservation movement in northern India, the students from upper caste groups like Kammas, Reddy's, Velamas, Brahmins, Komatis and Rajus organised themselves under the banner of the 'Anti-Reservations Front' (*Jana Chaitanya Samithi*) against the reservations.[636] Arguing that reservations would destroy merit, the upper caste students destroyed public property and burned buses, trains and government offices. They also expressed their protest by acts that humiliated the lower castes and their professions. For instance, the upper caste students sat in buses and railway stations and polished the shoes of passengers, swept public roads and symbolically took out a funeral procession of the 'merit' concept, conducting its last rites in a public place. By these acts, the upper caste students were making a point that: firstly, the lower castes were fit only to polish the shoes of the upper castes and clean public roads and toilets, and were not entitled to education and employment; secondly, if the lower castes, who are supposed to earn their livelihood by serving the upper castes, take the place of the chosen people (the upper castes) in education and employment, then they do not have a choice but to do the jobs that were exclusively reserved for the lower castes; thirdly, 'merit' is the 'inherited property' of the upper castes,[637] and that is being destroyed by the government by giving education and employment opportunities to the lower castes.

In response, the lower caste (backward castes) students mobilised in favour of the reservations. Dalits and Adivasis, under the leadership of the APDMS, also joined the struggle for reservations. The lower castes, unlike the upper caste students, did not destroy buses or burn trains. They simply organised pubic *hartals* and *dharnas.*[638] When the media, led by the upper castes, refused to report on the protests and arguments put out

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[635] For details, see Bayly, Susan. 1999. *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the Eighteenth Century to the Modern Age.* Cambridge: CUP, pp: 266-305.
[636] 'Rejarveshan-la-pai ragada' (Brawl over Reservations). *Nalupu,* 2 (9), September 16-30, 1990, p. 3.
[637] Ibid.
[638] See Kancha, Ilaiah. 1990. 'Pratibha numdi praanahuti varaku' (From Merit to Self-Immolation), *Nalupu,* October, 16-31, pp: 22-24.

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by the pro-reservationists, the lower caste intellectuals, especially Devarapalli Mastanrao, Katti Padmarao, Bojja Tarakam, U.Sambasivarao, Ghanta Chakrapani, B.S. Ramulu, Kancha Ilaiah and others wrote extensively on reservations in journals, such as *Dalit Rajyam, Edureeta* and *Nalupu.*[639]

Of the many arguments put forward by the pro-reservationists against 'merit' and 'national unity' of the upper castes, the argument that reservations for the Dalits, Adivasis and other lower castes would lead to annihilation of caste is worth mentioning here. Kancha Ilaiah, in a brilliantly written essay, 'Struggles of Reservations – Student Movement' (*Rijarveshan-la Poratam – Vidhyarthi Udyamam*)[640], made this point by examining the students' struggles over reservations comparatively. First, he analysed the intentions of the upper caste students in polishing shoes, sweeping streets and washing clothes. What the upper caste students were in effect saying, Ilaiah argued, was that "if the reservations were to be implemented then they will have to polish the shoes, broom the streets and clean the toilets."[641] Secondly, he brought forth the intentions of the lower caste students who were mobilising for reservations. What the lower caste students were saying was that, "hereafter they are not going to simply stick to the caste-based occupations imposed on them by Brahmanical Hinduism". In a way, one of the main reasons for the continuation of the caste system was the continuation of caste-based occupations. While the upper caste students were trying to preserve that system, the lower caste students were determined to break it. "As long as the Brahmins continue to teach and as long as the Madigas continue to sew a sandal, the caste system will survive

[639] For instance, Devarapalli, Mastanrao. 1989. *Rejarveshan-lu,* (Reservations), Ponnuru: Purogami publications; Sambasivarao, U. 1990. 'Rijarveshan-la samasya' (The Question of Reservations), in *Edureeta,* October, pp: 15-19; Kancha, Ilaiah. 1990. '*Rijarveshan-lu vaddanadam samanjasamaa?* (Is it justified to say no to reservations), *Nalupu,* 1 (15), pp: 14-16; -----, 1990. 'Paranna bhukkulu pratibha gurimchi matladutunnayi' (The Parasites (upper castes) are talking about Merit), *Nalupu,* 2 (9), September 16-30, pp: 10-14. Some of the progressive people from the upper castes, particularly Balagopal, K., D. Narasimha Reddy, Cyril Reddy and others also joined the lower castes and contributed at leanth to the reservation debate. See Gundimeda, S. 2006. *Brahmanatva Malatvamaa…? Manavatva Ambedkaratvamaa…? – Vargeekarana samasya-pai charcha* (Brahmanical Mala casteism or Humanitarian Ambedkarism? Debate on the question of Categorization), Hyderabad: Rajyam Publications.

[640] Kancha, Ilaiah. 1991. Struggles of Reservations – Student Movement (*Rijarveshan-la Poratam – Vidhyarthi Udhyamam*), *Nalupu,* 2 (19), March 16-31, pp: 6-9.

[641] Ibid., p.6.

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and only perpetuate itself. The caste system can be annihilated only when the Madigas give up their needles for the pen."[642]

The Mandal episode was the one occasion where all the lower castes, irrespective of their caste status within their own hierarchies, united and raised their voice against upper caste domination in education and employment. The APDMS was at the forefront in organising the lower caste students in their struggle for reservations. Although the massive and united mobilisation of the Dalits, Adivasis and Backward Castes provided a glimmer of hope for the progressive politics in the state, it was soon destroyed by the strategies of the upper castes-based political parties and Brahmanism among the lower castes (we shall discuss these developments at a later stage).

The third and final wave of Dalit activism under the APDMS took place when the Reddy's organised a massacre in Chunduru village against the Malas. On August 6, 1991, a mob of about 400 persons belonging to the Reddy's caste attacked the *Malapalle* (the locality of the Malas) in the most brutal manner. The incident that triggered off this attack was trivial - like the one that triggered off the attack on Madigas in Karamchedu. a It was a minor altercation between youth of the two castes (the Reddy's and the Malas) in a cinema hall in the village. The Reddy's who were in political power,[643] took offense to a Mala boy's feet accidentally touching a Reddy youth. They hacked ten Malas to death and threw the dead bodies into the Tungabhadra Canal.[644]

Once again, the leaders of the APDMS, Tarakam and Padmarao, plunged into action. They were joined by two former leaders of the People's War Group (PWG) - K. G. Satyamurthy and U. Sambasivarao. Some of the civil and revolutionary organisations, such as the CPI (M-L) Liberation, CPI (M-L) Praja Pantha, UCCRI (M-L) Jana Shakti, Marxist-Leninist Centre, Indian People's Front, and Organization for the Rural Poor also

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[642] Ibid., p. 7.
[643] The political power of the Reddys through the Congress party was symbolically demonstrated when Anil Kumar, a key witness in the incident, was shot dead by the police within days of the massacres.
[644] See, Andhra Pradesh Civil Liberties Council: 'Fact Finding Report on Chundur', Hyderabad, 1991. The reality of the violence was so ghastly that the doctor who performed the post-mortem committed suicide soon after. See, Indian Express, 28 August, 1991.

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joined the APDMS. Together they formed a committee called Andhra Pradesh Chundur Porata Samithi (APCPS – the Andhra Pradesh Chundur Struggle Committee).

Two of the significant activities of the Committee worth mentioning here are: first, we noted that the victims of the Karamchedu carnage had fled the village *en masse.* But this time, the Dalit leadership did not want the victims to leave the village. They launched their struggle for justice from the place in which their people were hacked to death.[645] Most audaciously, they buried the ten dead people in a central area in Chunduru village and named the place *Raktakshetram* (land of blood). The grave would serve as "a grim reminder of the barbarity of the attack in the village – to those who lived through the violence, the generations that followed and to all the visitors."[646] Secondly, through a determined campaign, they made the government of AP not just set up a special Sessions Court under the SC & ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, but more importantly, shift the venue of the court proceedings from the AP High Court to Chunduru. As Kalpana Kannabiran observes: "For people who have undergone enormous suffering and loss, when required by the court to recount the loss in accordance with norms that are completely alien to them, norms that do not make space for trauma of the experience or the retelling of that experience, the physical location of the court becomes vital in reassuring survivors."[647]

One of the significant aspects about the Chunduru massacre was the Dalits' realisation of the nexus between social dominance and political power and perpetuation of the former with the help of the latter. When Kammas organised carnage against the Madigas in Karamchedu it was the Kamma-led TDP that was ruling the state, and again, when the Reddy's killed the Malas in Chunduru, it was the Reddy-led Congress that was in power. In both the incidents, the state organs, especially the politics, were used by the ruling castes not only to harass the victims, but also to protect the aggressors. Further, it must be recognised here that what provoked the upper castes to unleash violence of such a brutal

[645] Kranthi, 1992. *Aa roju chunduru ghatana oka-rojulo jaragaleadu* (Chunduru incident did not happen in one day). *Edureeta,* August, pp:12-13.
[646] Kalpana, Kannabiran. 2007. Chunduru: On the Road to Justice. *EPW*, 42 (39), p.3915.
[647] Ibid., p. 3916.

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nature against the Dalits was not the traditional demand of the economically exploited for higher wages, but a "demand to live with dignity and honour, and the assertion of their rights to be treated as social equals"[648] by the socially subjugated. Even this basic right was denied to the Dalits by the upper castes with the aid of the state, the so-called guarantor of liberal rights to its citizens. This recognition of the connection between political power, social dominance and social subjugation led the APDMS to shift focus from culture to the realm of political power. We shall discuss this shift in the next section.

6. III. Questioning the Domination: Dalit Politics through the BSP in the 1990's

In Chapter III we have noted that even before the emergence of the DS-4 with the slogan of *vote hamara, seat tumhara – nahin chalenge, nahi chalenge* 'political power' has been one of the key aspects in the BAMCEF campaigns. In a way, since the formation of BAMCEF until the emergence of the BSP, the limitations in the existing political representation for Dalits and the idea of political power have been communicated to the Dalits by the BAMCEF missionaries and later on by the DS-4 activists. These exhortations resulted in political consciousness among the Dalits and other marginalised sections in UP society and set the ground for the future success of the lower caste-based political parties in the state.

By contrast, Dalit activism in AP since the formation of the APDMS revolved around questions of 'social equality' and 'cultural revolution'. The idea of political power remained outside the boundary of 'the Dalit manifesto', at least, until the Chunduru massacre in the early 1990's. It was only after experiencing the effective use of political power by the upper caste Kammas and Reddy's in further victimising the victims of the Karamchedu and Chunduru massacres that the Dalit leadership began to clearly focus their energies on the idea of political power. It should also be mentioned here that, apart from their own recognition of the importance of political power, they were also inspired by the electoral success of the SP – BSP combination in UP assembly elections in 1993.

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[648] Srinivasulu, K. 1994. BSP and Caste Politics. *EPW,* 29 (40), pp: 2583-2586.

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The assumption of political power by the lower caste-based political parties in UP suddenly got the marginalised sections in AP (as elsewhere in India) enthused. And when the BSP entered the political arena of AP during the 1994 assembly elections, the lower castes were almost certain that the BSP would repeat its electoral success in UP earlier, in AP as well. Even some of the political commentators predicted the BSP's success in the elections. However, contrary to the aspirations of the lower castes and predictions of the political commentators, the BSP failed rather miserably in the electoral arena. Why did the Dalits in AP, unlike their counterparts in UP fail in the electoral politics? My main aim in this section is to answer this question. I, therefore, attempt to examine the entry of the BSP into the political arena of AP and explore the causes for the failure of the party in the electoral arena.

Although, since its inception, the APDMS had focused its energies around the issues of 'social equality, 'social dignity', 'land' and 'livelihood', by the late 1980's, it began to shift its focus to the question of political power. This change in focus was due to some important developments in the national picture. The BSP which gathered momentum in north India, sowed the seeds of political ambitions among certain sections of the Dalit leadership in the state. The visits of Kanshi Ram to AP in 1987-88 to establish contacts with Dalit leaders in the state had an impact on Dalit politics.[649]

The question of participation in electoral politics which was not central to the initial manifesto of the APDMS came up in its second state-level conference in 1988 in Chirala. The movement, whose chief objective was, building a 'social and cultural movement', shifted its focus to political power. Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padmarao were the facilitators of this shift. Apart from the lessons taught by the caste-based atrocities against the Dalits, they were profoundly influenced by the writings of Ambedkar. Following Ambedkar, they, like Kanshi Ram in UP, came to the conclusion that the Dalit problem is a political problem and that political power is the master key that can open any lock. However, they differed with each other on the idea of BSP - the entry of a North Indian party in AP politics.

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[649] Interview with Mandapati Ramarao, a BSP activist, in Vijayawada, 20 June, 2004.

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Tarakam welcomed Kanshi Ram and the BSP. Some of the notable Dalit organisations backing him were the Dalit Kala Mandir, Dalit Writers, Artists, and Intellectuals United Front (DWAIUF), and Ambedkar Youth Association.[650] Padmarao, on the other hand, boycotted the BSP and characterised it as a *dalita dalari* (Dalit broker or middleman). He argued that the Dalit movement needed to remain autonomous from all political organisations, and work as a front for 'social revolution' through agitations rather than transforming itself into a political party to take part in parliamentary elections.[651] Interestingly, Padmarao eventually changed tracks and formed the Poor People's Party (PPP) on the eve of the state assembly elections in 1989.[652] But his party's defeat in the elections compelled him to shift allegiance to the BSP in the early 1990's.[653]

This internal squabbles apart, the crucial phase in the history of the decade-old Dalit movement was the entry of the BSP into the electoral arena on the eve of state assembly elections in 1994, and the 'wave' it appeared to have created. As soon as it made up its mind to contest in the 1994 state assembly elections, the BSP organised a number of rallies and meetings in all the main cities and towns. Kanshi Ram, who had been the chief attraction as well as key speaker in those rallies and meetings, simply deployed the political slogans that were adopted in the UP context. Two key aspects of the BSP campaign were: (a) its strategy of mobilisation and (b) its discourse on the idea of political power.

First, it may be recalled that the BSP in UP, despite its *Bahujan* agenda, initiated its campaigns around the Dalit identity. After strengthening its Dalit base, it moved to mobilise the other marginalised sections around the *Bahujan* identity. But when the party started its campaign in AP it started with a dual advantage: firstly, the APDMS through its decade-long activism had already constructed and strengthened the Dalit identity. And so the party had to simply build on those already constructed and strengthened identities.

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[650] Gudavarthy, A. 2005. Dalit and Naxalite Movements in AP: Solidarity or Hegemony? *EPW,* 40 (51), p.5412.
[651] Ratnam, K.Y. 1998. *Dalit Movement…,* pp: 111, 117 & 119.
[652] See Manda, Janaiah. 1999. *Dalit Politics in Andhra Pradesh: A Case Study of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).* M.Phil. University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad.
[653] See Aatma rakshna numdi raajyaadhikaaram varaku (From Self-defense to political power') (editor), *Dalits Rajyam,* May-July (1996).

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Secondly, in the 1993 UP assembly elections the party succeeded as a party of the *bahujans,* and this success facilitated it to claim or identify itself outside UP less as a Dalit-based party and more as the party of the *bahujans.*

When the BSP entered into the electoral arena in AP, it was completely aware of this dual advantage.[654] And the party's strategy of mobilisation revolved around two main identities: the *savarnas* and *bahujans,* or the oppressor and the oppressed. The party, in its narration of Indian history and society, identified the three upper castes or *varnas:* Brahmins, Kshatriyas and Vyshyas as the oppressors and the rest of the Indian society as the oppressed. It is important to recognise here that this division of the Indian society into two clear-cut groups was not defined in terms of the socio-cultural and economic standing of these two groups, but primarily in terms of the 'humiliation' suffered by the *bahujans* at the hands of the *savarnas,* both historically and contemporarily.[655] "This is," as observed by Srinivasulu, "presumed to be a feasible and practically workable strategy, given the fact that the *bahujans* cannot be united on any other plank because of the absence of commonality or uniformity in their socio-economic profile or cultural identity, which is further compounded by linguistic variations in India."[656]

Secondly, in Kanshi Ram's argument of, "political power is the master key with which any lock can be opened", the concept of political power is seen as a control over the means of production.[657] From that perspective, the affluence of the upper castes was due to their possession of political power, and the economic deprivation of the lower castes was on account of the absence of political power which could only be addressed by capturing political power.[658] Interestingly, in Kanshi Ram's discussion on political power, there was no discussion as to whether political power rescues the lower castes from humiliation.

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[654] Interview with U. Sambasivarao, editor, *Edureeta,* February 2005.
[655] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class…,* pp: 53-54.
[656] Ibid., p. 54.
[657] 'BSP Evarikosam, endukosam' (BSP, For Whom and Why), pamphlet released by APDMS on the eve of 1994 AP assembly elections.
[658] See Devarapalli, Mastanrao. 2001. *Bahujanan voice* (in Telugu), Ponnuru: Purogaami Prachuranalu.

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One particular slogan that was particularly received by the Dalit and the lower castes in AP was: *vote hamara, seat tumhara – nahin chalenge, nahi chalenge.* While in UP, the Brahmins and Thakurs had been Kanshi Ram's target groups, the Kammas and Reddys had become his target groups in AP. He drew a parallel between political power in the state and the game of football, with Kammas and Reddys as the two players, while the rest of the population was confined to being in the audience. The political power either rested in the court of the Kammas or that of the Reddy's, and no other community and caste was allowed to participate in it. He insisted that political power should be distributed among all sections and that caste should be the basis for such a distribution. The rationale behind use of caste, it was stressed, was not only to annihilate the caste system, but also to contain the onward march of Hindutva. [659]

Besides its mobilisation strategies and political slogans, by distributing assembly tickets on the basis of caste, the BSP sent a message to other political parties in the state. As recourse to the dominance of the upper castes in the power structure, no tickets were allotted to upper castes. However, more than 50 per cent of the tickets, numbering around 150, had been given to the BCs, covering more or less all castes in that category. Some 80 tickets were given to Dalits and Adivasis; Muslims and Christians together were given 45 seats and 20 seats were left to the SP.[660] Huge turnouts at the BSP gatherings and its system of distribution of tickets, as commented by Shatrugna,[661] sent jitters among the mainstream political parties and forced them to emulate BSP's political tactics.

For instance, the Congress undertook certain unprecedented measures and activities. The Kapus, a middle caste between the dominant upper castes (Kammas and Reddy's) and the backward castes such as Gouda's and Padmashalis, had been demanding for over twenty years that the government should include them in the state's list of Backward Castes. Although the demand was never even heeded to by the previous governments, the Congress Party, as if waking up from a deep slumber, suddenly conferred the 'backward

[659] Padmarao, K. 1994. Ambedkar taatvika raajakeeya sakaarambham (The dawn of a new Era), *Dalit Rajyam,* 1 (5 & 6), pp: 4-6.
[660] Shatrugna, M. 1994. Caste Factor in Andhra Polls. *EPW,* 19, pp: 2958-59.
[661] Ibid. pp: 2958-59.

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caste' tag on the Kapus and Muslims. Of course, rejection of the status in the High Court of AP was a different matter altogether. Further, contrary to its earlier pattern of ticket distribution, the party had chosen 50 per cent of its candidates from the combined group of BCs, Dalits, adivasis and religious minorities. The social base of the TDP candidates was also interesting. Of the 200 candidates (for whom the details are available), the break-down was: Reddy's- 38, BCs -35, Kammas- 27, Dalits -25, Kapus -9, Velema - 9, and Adivasis - 8.[662]

What was significant by the BSP's entry into the political arena of the state was that the presence of caste in politics and in the power structure was, for the first time, explicitly acknowledged by the people in power. They gave up their earlier pretence that they had been dominating politics by virtue of sheer merit. And the Dalit and Backward Caste leaders in the ruling Congress and opposition TDP began to talk openly about the injustices done to the lower castes. Interestingly, the Brahmins held meetings in three main cities in the state, i.e, Vijayawada, Nellore and Hyderabad, and one of their main demands was that they should be given tickets in certain constituencies in which there was a sizeable Brahmin population. The Kammas in Congress, who had always felt overwhelmed by the dominance of the Reddy's in that party, held a meeting and resolved that all castes should be given tickets in proportion to their importance and not based on the strength of population. The word 'importance' is the key, because it translated to economic power. Such significant changes in the political fabric of the state led Balagopal to comment, "*Bahujana* politics had achieved the first victory that any rebel movement aspiresfor; to force the dominant groups to dump their myths and acknowledge the hidden aspects of reality."[663]

The BSP, through its caste-based mobilisations and distribution of tickets, was able to successfully create some kind of euphoria in the political arena of the state that forced the upper caste-led mainstream political parties to give up their earlier patterns of ticket

[662] 39 seats were left to the alliance partners, with CPI and CPI (M) sharing 37 seats and the Janata Dal getting 2. And there was no major shift in the social base of the CPI and CPI (M) candidates. For further details, see Ibid., pp: 2958-59.
[663] Balagopal, K. 1995. Elections: What Happened and What Did Not Happen. *EPW,* 30(3), pp: 136-139.

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distribution and include more candidates from the marginalised groups. Yet, it utterly failed at the electoral level. K.Srinivasulu, in his analysis of the election results, summarises:

> [T]hough the BSP has the potential of really becoming an alternative political force on the basis of *Dalit-Bahujan* concept, it failed mainly because of non-availability of political activists at the village level, lack of organisational structures and internal political feuds. It could not prepare a political economic plan keeping in view the experience of new social forces on the basis of the principle of political representation …(*and on their part*) the 'mainstream' ruling class parties could easily manipulate the caste/class contradictions in favour of those parties.[664]

The following are the four main reasons/causes for the failure of the BSP at the electoral level: first, the BSP at the time of its entry in AP had not done a proper assessment of the situation of various deprived communities, the political potential of the Dalit movement and the way various castes and communities were entrenched in mainstream political parties. By the time Bojja Tarakam, one of the leaders of the APDMS, tried to initiate a debate on the issue of converting the APDMS into the BSP, the leadership at the local level was not properly organised.

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Second, the BSP's ideology that had evolved in the UP context was simply transferred to AP, without any effort to modify it to suit the consciousness of the various social groups that have emerged as part of the Dalit movement in the state. On their part, the social groups also did not engage critically with the BSP ideology. For instance, Bojja Tarakam, one of the leaders of the BSP in the state, had his roots in Ambedkarite thought, his activism in civil liberties and was a sympathiser of the radical Left movement. K.G. Satyamurthy, another leader of the BSP, was a prominent member of the People's War Group (PWG). And when he came out of the Group, he, along with U.Sambasiva Rao, another prominent PWG member, formed the Marxist-Leninist Centre. It was at the Centre that both these individuals tried to combine the ideologies of Marx and Lenin with that of Ambedkar so as to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of Indian society with a view towards social transformation. Another prominent leader of the BSP, who had a Naxalite background, was Kolluri Chiranjeevi. And Katti Padma Rao, who was at the

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[664] Srinivasulu, K. 1995. Andhra Pradesh Ennikala Vishleshana (Review of Elections in Andhra Pradesh), *Edurreta* (Against the currents – a Telugu political journal), March, pp: 4-5.

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forefront of the APDMS, was a prominent member in the Andhra Pradesh Rationalist Organisation. Thus, the leadership of the BSP, though hailing from a common social background, joined the party while working in organisations which had different ideologies. The lack of co-ordination among these leaders was at the core of BSP's failure in the elections. Further, despite their incorporation into the party, none of these leaders were accommodated in the official structure of the party nor were they given any clear-cut responsibility.[665]

Third, livelihood resources of the majority of the people that explicitly or implicitly formed the support base for the BSP were still controlled by the two dominant castes in the state. Undoubtedly, there was an upsurge in Dalit consciousness, but because of their dependency upon the upper caste-controlled resources, they could not facilitate their freedom from the clutches of the upper castes. Of course, this did not mean that all the marginalised sections of the state were under the spell of the upper castes. A small section among the marginalised enjoyed education and access to modern jobs in urban areas, and were able to remove themselves from the bondage of the upper castes. And it was this section that constituted the voting base of the BSP, and not the mass workforce which was bonded to the upper caste.

Finally, the one factor that was at the heart of the electoral debacle of the BSP was the dark reality of casteism among its victims. Unlike in UP, the BCs in AP did not become part of the Party because joining a party of the Dalits and working under the leadership of the Malas was seen as not becoming of their caste status. [666] Even the Dalits, whose supposed social mission was to establish a casteless society, were caught up in caste competitions and antagonisms. The state leadership was predominantly drawn from the coastal Andhra region, neglecting the other two regions of the state. Even in the coastal region the leadership was given to one caste among the Dalits, i.e., the Malas, excluding another major Dalit caste, i.e, Madigas. Despite the presence of the Malas in the BSP's leadership structure in the state, majority of the Malas did not join the Party. They saw it

[665] Balagopal, K. 1995. Elections…., p137.
[666] Manda, Janiah. 1999. *Dalit politics…,* p. 86.

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was a party of the Madigas and not of the Malas (Madigas, whose traditional occupation was leather-making, were equated with the Chamars, who were also engaged in the same work in North India).[667] Interestingly, the Madigas, who were kept away from the party's leader slots, also stayed away from the Party. Thus, the BSP's poor show in the 1994 elections had a dramatic impact on the Dalit movement. The move away from the earlier stand that the Dalit movement is a movement for social transformation which did not get involved in electoral politics, where a different logic is operative, did enormous damage to the movement. The direct participation of the Dalit activists in the political campaigns led the Dalit masses to believe that their social leaders were being absorbed into electoral politics. This, in turn, led to a credibility crisis for well-known Dalit leaders. It may be noted that in UP we did not experience any such credibility crisis for the Dalit leadership. That was largely because unlike the AP Dalit leadership, in UP, the Dalit leaders, from the initial years of their activism, had focused on the idea of political power. In other words, the debacle of the Dalits in electoral politics was due to the failure of the social movement to transform itself into a movement for political power.

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In conclusion, in this Chapter my main aim was to examine and analyse Dalit activism in the social and political arenas and its relationship with the two dominant political parties in the State. Although there was independent Dalit activism in the immediate post-Independence AP, a majority of the Dalit leaders and so the Dalit constituency remained loyal supporters of the Congress and Communist parties in the state. The Dalit leaderships in those parties tried to carve out space for themselves, but the presence and the leadership of the upper castes in those parties prevented them from doing so. Despite taking advantage of the facility for Dalits in the political representation, both the parties did not pay attention to the concerns and problems of the Dalits in any substantive manner. In fact, the Congress used its power to suppress activities of the Dalit-based RPI, and on their part the Communists, in the name of unity of the proletariat, evaded the Dalit question completely. Scholars like Gail Omvedt, who examined the Dalit movement and politics in AP did not pay much attention to Dalits' relationship with the two dominant

[667] Ibid., p. 100.

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political parties, and it is expected that my examination and analysis will fill the gaps in what already exists.

In the early 1980's when the Kamma-based TDP gained political power, the social relationship between and among various castes and communities underwent dramatic changes, particularly the Kammas in the rural areas began to harass the marginalised castes and communities. When the Dalits in Karamchedu village questioned the social dominance and highhandedness of the Kammas, the later responded by unleashing violence in which several Dalits were brutally massacred. In the backdrop of this carnage, the Dalits organised through the APDMS for justice and equality. This is one of the most important contrasting points between Dalit activism in UP and AP. We saw that during the 80's in UP. The Dalits mobilised for political power, whereas in AP, Dalit activism focussed on the ideas of justice, equality and cultural revolution. It was not that the Dalits in UP did not focus on the questions of social justice and equality, but they consistently focused on the idea of political power for Dalits. For it has been argued that political power is the master key with which the locks of equality and social justice can be opened. Such a focus on political power led them to the seat of power in that state. Of course, in the early '90's the Dalit leadership in AP changed their path and tried to mobilise the Dalits and other marginalised castes for political power, first through the PPP and later through the BSP. In both the occasions they did not succeed in either bringing the marginalised sections under one umbrella or to draw them into electoral politics; and thus, Dalit activism in the state entered a crisis. It is from out of this crisis and gaining strength from the impasse in the movement that there emerged the Madigas' caste-specific movement for SC classification, for the purpose of reservations.

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***Seven*.....**

Social Justice and the Question of Sub-Classification of Dalit Reservations: The Dandora Debate in AP in the '90's

In Chapters Three and Four we have seen that since the early '90's Dalit activism in UP under the leadership of the BSP had concentrated on the idea of political power and thus directed all their energies at winning electoral battles. Once they assumed political power, the party leadership used that power to effect changes at various levels. In AP, however, after the BSP's electoral defeat in the Assembly elections in 1994, Dalit activism took a completely different path. The Dalit movement and politics in the state have since then been caught up in activism oriented towards reservations. On the one hand, there are certain Dalit castes such as the Mala and Adi-Andhra, who, owing to their proximity with the Hindu upper castes and having enjoyed reforms by Christian missionaries as well as Hindus, as well as the government's welfare efforts – both in colonial and post-colonial India, have acquired education, become socially and politically conscious and gained employment opportunities in the formal economy.[668] It is this group of castes that has been availing most of the reservations for Dalits in the state and has become dominant among the Dalits. On the other hand, there are Dalit castes such as the Madigas, Rellis and others which have not got the same opportunities and advantages as the Malas and Adi-Andhras, and are too poorly equipped to take advantage even of facilities extended through the policy of reservation. This has, in turn, resulted in their continuous incarceration in the traditional, caste-based socio-economic relations and occupations.

In order to counter this under-representation which is evidently one of the primary reason for their overall marginalisation, the Madigas organised under the banner of the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS) in the 1990's. Through the MRPS they questioned the over-representation of the dominant Dalit castes in the quota for SC reservations and demanded caste-based re-distribution or sub-classification of that quota. This method of classification was to enable every caste within the Dalit category to access their due

[668] On this point, see Ramaswamy, U. 1984. Preference and Progress: The Scheduled Castes. *EPW*, 19 (30), pp: 1214-1217; ..., 1985. Education and Inequality. *EPW,* 20 (36), pp: 1523-1528; …. 1986. Protection and Inequality among Backward Groups. *EPW,* 21 (9), pp: 399-403.

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share. But the Malas and the Adi-Andhras rejected this demand on the grounds that raised serious concern: first, they argued that the Madigas lacked the merit to compete against the Malas; and second, that the classification would destroy the unity of the Dalit community. They even formed the Mala Mahanadu, a counter-caste association, and organised a "no holds barred"[669] campaign against the MRPS.

This Chapter is an attempt to understand the Dalit activities and politics in AP, particularly after the electoral defeat of the BSP in the state Legislative Assembly elections in 1994. By examining and analysing the emergence of the MRPS and Mala Mahanadu, and the debate around the question of sub-categorisation, I will show how the Dalits in AP, unlike their counterparts in UP where political power has been deployed to transform the socio-economic conditions of the Dalit constituency, are caught in the web of sub-categorisation; and I will also show how the Mala Mahanadu's rejection of the just demand of the MRPS not just augmented caste-based rivalries among the Dalits, but more importantly, also destroyed space for Dalit unity in the state. By an examination and analysis of the sub-categorisation debate between the Malas and Madigas, the current Chapter once again highlights the earlier argument that the Dalits are not a homogenous category; they are also divided on the basis of caste and sub-caste. It is expected that this Chapter will give more inputs to existing literature on the Dalit movement and politics in AP in general, and on the question of sub-categorisation in particular. It is also expected that this Chapter helps us understand Dalit activities in AP and UP comparatively and the importance of a marginalised community having or not having political power.

Before we move any further, I suggest that we note three correlations of caste-based mobilisations launched by the Madigas and Malas around the question of classification. First, as the economic gap is continuing to grow between the dominant and marginalised Dalit castes (Malas and Madigas in this case), the former is continuing to become more dominant among the Dalits, while the latter is further marginalised. Second, as every Dalit caste is affected by the classification issue for the past fifteen years, the social community of Dalits is divided against itself, and thus is wasting precious energies – both

[669] Balagopal, K. 2000. A Tangled Web…, p. 1078.

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human and material. Third, politically, the caste-based conflicts have been a great blow to Dalit unity. That is to say, while Dalits have always been a marginalised group in the AP political scenario, the caste-based rivalries have further fragmented Dalit politics, which have, in effect, delivered the Dalits more clearly into the hands of the upper caste-led political parties, particularly into Kammas-led Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Reddy's-led Congress (I). While the TDP absorbed the Madigas by extending its support to the classification demand, the Congress (I) has absorbed the Malas by accommodating them in positions of power. For example, Jupudi Prabhakara Rao, leader of the Mala Mahanadu, was made a member of the AP Legislative Council. Such developments compels one to argue that such incorporation and accommodation has taken Dalit politics back to the pre-1980's phase, turning the Dalits, once again into vote-banks for the upper caste-led political parties.

Brief Background: What are main reasons for the Malas having an advantage over the Madigas in availing opportunities for reservation? There are 60 Dalit castes in AP. On the basis of traditional caste occupations and affiliations with each other, these 60 castes can be broadly divided into four major groups: Malas, Adi-Andhras, Madigas and Rellis. The ability of the former two castes, in comparison with the latter two, in availing opportunities for reservations is largely attributable to their traditional occupations and geographical spread.[670] AP is divided into three distinct geographical regions: coastal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema. Despite being one of the developed states in India, AP has great differences within its three regions and the socio-economic progress of the communities is invariably determined by their location in these three regions. This is more so among the Dalits, who were dependent on the landed castes. Rayalaseema, where a 6 per cent of the Madigas and 5 per cent of the Malas live, is a zone of precarious rainfall – the annual average being 69 cm. As the monsoon often fails in this area, it has long been known as the 'stalking ground of famines' (*kshamaseema*). The Reddy's are the most dominant caste in this region. They virtually control all walks of live in the

[670] More on this, see Suri, K. C. 2001. Dialectic of Social Justice: The Struggle of the Madigas for Categorisation of Scheduled Caste Reservations in Andhra Pradesh. In: Balasubramaniam, R., ed., *Social and economic dimensions of caste organisations in South Indian states,* Chennai: University of Madras; G. V. Siva Reddy. 2002. Competition and Conflict among the Dalits: Madiga Dandora Movement in Andhra Pradesh. In: Shah, Ghanshyam. ed., *Dalits and the State,* New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.

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region. Both the Madigas and Malas used to earn their livelihood, at least until the early 1980's, by working for the Reddys as agricultural labourers and tenants.

Coastal Andhra, where the Malas and Adi-Andhras are predominant, has historically been prosperous as well as culturally and politically active. The region was under British rule for nearly two centuries, during which major irrigation projects on Krishna and Godavari rivers were constructed. As a result of these projects the region had witnessed enormous development in the agricultural sector, which led to developments in other areas, particularly in the field of education.[671] In Chapter Four we noted that some of the Brahmins, such as Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu in Rajahmundra and Kasinadhuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu, became concerned about the plight of the Dalits. They launched numerous social reform movements that aimed at the emancipation of Dalits and other marginalised strata in the early 1920's. Throughout the region they opened a number of schools for the education of the Dalit children, both boys and girls, with free boarding and lodging facilities. These schools were famously known as Panchama schools. Most of the Dalit leaders in the state who emerged towards the end of the colonial era and at the dawn of Independence were products of these schools.[672]

In addition to British rule and efforts of the upper caste social reformers, the presence of Christian missionaries also helped the Dalits in this region. In 1895, the Government of Madras passed a bill, which was called the 'Magna Carta of Panchama education', allowing the Dalit children to study in government-aided schools. Apart from this bill, the British government had also introduced reservation facilities for the Dalits in government employment. The Christian missionaries, apart from converting a good many Dalits to Christianity, provided educational opportunities for them. They opened a number of schools exclusively for the Dalits in the region, and even offered employment opportunities for those passing out from the schools. These initial training opportunities given to the Dalits, particularly the Malas and Adi-Andhras in the region, prepared them

[671] Omvedt, Gail. 1994. *Dalits and the Democratic…,* pp: 114-118.
[672] Sundru Venkaiah, Kusuma Venkatramaiah, Kusuma Dharmanna and others were products of these schools. See Gautam, M.B. 1976. The Untouchables' Movement in Andhra Pradesh. In: *State Harijan Conference Souvenir,* Hyderabad: Government of Andhra Pradesh, pp: 10-12.

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well even before the implementation of reservation opportunities for Dalits in post-Independence India. Once those opportunities came into effect, the Malas and Adi-Andhras were the first to reap the benefits from them.

The Rellis, the most marginalised Dalits in the state, are, in addition to the Malas and Adi-Andhras, also concentrated in the coastal region, particularly in the two underdeveloped districts in the region – Srikakulam and Vizianagaram. Unlike the other Dalit castes, the Rellis did not have an assigned caste occupation. They took to selling fruits for a livelihood and moved to various urban centres. In the absence of North India's Bhangi-like caste in the state, some of the Rellis have settled in as sweepers and cleaners in public and private organisations.[673]

The Telangana region, where the Madigas predominate,[674] was a part of the erstwhile Nizam's Hyderabad state. Given the historical specifics of Nizam's rule, the nature of socio-economic change and political trajectory in the region took a different turn. We noted in Chapter Four a class of landed gentry consisting of Muslim jagirdars (holders of land awarded for services rendered to the Nizam) and Hindu deshmukhs (revenue collectors-turned-landlords) belonging to the Reddy's, Velama and Brahmin castes constituted the support base of Nizam's rule. In sharp contrast to the Presidency areas (coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema) the people in this region hardly enjoyed any civil or political rights during Nizam's rule. The landed gentry inflicted suffering on the rural masses through the illegal eviction of farmers, the extraction of free goods and services (known as vetti) and much more significantly, the denial of dignity and self-respect.[675] The Madigas, who are placed at the bottom of the Hindu hierarchy, have been the worst victims of the socio-economic and political dynamics of the region. It was these dynamics that were largely responsible for the disadvantages the Madigas faced, in comparison with the Malas and Adi-Andhras.

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[673] See Justice Usha Mehra. 2008. *National Commission to examine the issue of sub-classification of Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh* - A report submitted to *The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment,* New Delhi; Government of India, p. 37.
[674] Ramaswamy, U. 1974. Scheduled Castes in Andhra…, p. 1158.
[675] Srinivasulu, K. 2002. *Caste, Class…,* pp: 17-19.

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In addition to these regional variations, the traditional occupations followed by the Madigas and Malas also resulted in differential development between them. The traditional occupation of the Madigas had been leather goods work, removal of carcasses from the village, grave-digging, making footwear and drum-beating. Thus, though they were in a subordinate position, they were more integrated into village life. The Malas, mostly engaged in weaving and agricultural labour, were not as much part of the 'patron-client' relations, as the Madigas. The decline of weaving as an occupation forced sections of the Malas to look out for alternative sources of employment, such as agricultural labour, even during British rule. Further, the Malas who were faced with the uncertainties inherent in the field of agriculture, as well as stiff competition from the other lower castes, as pointed out by Uma Ramaswamy, "took more readily to formal education than the Madigas who were secure in leather work".[676] The Madigas, in contrast to the Malas, both due to the specialised nature of their occupation as well as the ritual pollution involved in leather work, were secure in their source of livelihood. "If one may hazard a generalisation", to quote Balagopal, "it is the very existence of a secure source of livelihood, for which other castes cannot compete even if low in the hierarchy, that is a factor inhibiting the exploitation of secular opportunities for mobility."[677]

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Sub-Classification of SC Reservations: The Dandora Debate[678]

In this section my main aim is to analyse the arguments and counter-arguments concerning classification of SC reservations in the debate between the Madigas and Malas. While the former was represented by the Madiga Reservation Porata Samithi (MRPS), which is also popularly known as Dandora,[679] and the latter was represented by Mala Mahanadu. The main argument of the MRPS had been that Dalit reservations were not distributed equitably among all the castes within the Dalit group. A majority of the

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[676] Ramaswamy, U. 1974. Scheduled Castes in Andhra.., p. 1158.
[677] Balagopal, K. 2000. A Tangled Web…, p. 1078.
[678] For an extended discussion on this, see Gundimeda, S. 2006. *Brahmanatva Malatvamaa?...Manavatma Ambedkaratvamaa? Vargeekarana samasyapai charcha* (Brahmanical Mala Casteism or Humanistic Ambedkarism? Discussion on the Question of Categorization), Hyderabad: Rajyam publications.
[679] Dandora, which is literally 'announcing' in Telugu, was one of the traditional occupations of the Madigas. Before the entry of modern forms of communication, the Madigas were employed to make announcements either about the new policies or programmes of the government or any kind of new activity in the villages. And Madigas make their announcements by going around the village while simultaneously beating their drum and shouting out the announcements.

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opportunities were garnered by the already advanced castes, especially the Malas and Adi-Andhras. Such injustice against marginalised Dalit castes should be rectified by making four-fold sub-divisions of the Dalits in the state, and apportioning the reservations to the four sub-groups in proportion to each group's population. The Mala Mahanadu vehemently opposed this demand, surprisingly on the basis of similar arguments that had been used by the upper castes to oppose reservations, preferring the continuation of the existing pattern of group-based distribution of Dalit reservations. I have organised the debate into four key themes, with each theme analysed in a separate sub-section. In my analysis, I shall situate myself between the two contending parties and try to argue their case from their perspective. Eventually, however, I shall take the stand of the MRPS and argue for classification of the SC reservations as an effective means of distributing reservation opportunities among all castes within the Dalit category.

What was the context in which the Madigas placed their demand for classification of the SC reservations? Since the early 1990's India has aggressively pursued a new path of liberalisation in the economic sphere.[680] In what started as India's response to the crisis of 'balance of payments', the State has pursued a number of policies with "single-minded determination"[681] in reforming trade, financial and industrial investment sectors. Conspicuously, no attempts have been made to revive and improve sectors such as the rural economy, agriculture, non-agricultural employment, and social security.[682] Such a biased focus has led commentators to describe the process variously, for instance, as a "revolt of the elite"[683] and "elite politics".[684] Christophe Jaffrelot sees the single-minded determination from a different perspective. Complete domination of the upper caste in those sectors in which the reforms have been concentrated, and evidently an absence of

[680] A number of theories have been put forward by scholars on why and what compelled the Indian state to abandon its old path, a path that was influenced by the ideology of the makers of the Constitution of India, and jump onto a new path—a path that was laid out by the Bretton Woods institutions and endorsed by indigenous business houses. See, for instance, Bhagwati, J. 1993. *India in Transition: Freeing the Economy.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
[681] Varshney, Ashutosh. 1999. Mass Politics or Elite Politics? India's Economic Reforms in Comparative Perspective. In: Jaffrey D. Sachs *et al,* eds., *India in the Era of Economic Reforms.* Delhi: OUP, p. 249.
[682] For a different view point on liberalisation see, Kapur, Devesh *et al.,* 2010. Rethinking Inequality: Dalits in Uttar Pradesh in the Market Reform Era. *EPW,* 45 (35), pp: 39-49.
[683] Kaviraj, Sudipta. 1997. The general elections in India. *Government and Opposition,* 32 (1), pp: 3-24.
[684] Varshney, A. 1999. Mass Politics …., p. 248.

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reforms in sectors where a majority of the workforce come from the Dalit and Adivasi constituencies, led him to paraphrase the process in caste terminology. He sees liberalisation as part of an ongoing conflict between upper castes and Dalits in the political and social realms, and notes how the former saw in liberalisation a new opportunity where they alone could succeed:

> The upper castes are losing ground in the political sphere and in the administration but liberalisation of the economy – which coincided with the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report – has opened new opportunities for the upper castes in the private sector, and hence they may no longer regret their traditional monopoly over the bureaucracy being challenged.[685]

Though there is no clear evidence to suggest that the upper castes have opted for the course of liberalisation, especially after the Mandal episode, it clearly provided them with a new avenue to maintain their economic dominance. Liberalisation offered enormous and profitable employment opportunities in the private sector, where reservation quotas have not yet been implemented. Moreover, this means that the upper castes alone can accrue the benefits from the new opportunities. In a way, the policy of liberalisation marks a significant departure from the past. As P.G. Jogdand observes: "The much cherished principles of growth with justice, social responsibility and accountability, equity and self-reliance have been rendered obsolete with the new slogans of 'liberalisation', 'efficiency' and 'competitiveness'.''[686] Prevailing social prejudices, the absence of reservation quotas in the private sector, and the state's sudden departure from its old path all caused great apprehension among educated Dalits,[687] who equated the liberalisation of India's economy with "the retreat of the state" from the Constitutional promise of affirmative action.[688]

While the policies of liberalisation became a matter of grave concern for the educated Dalits in general, for the Madigas in AP they have a different meaning. Until the early 1980's a majority of the Madigas were eking out their livelihood as agricultural labourers. This livelihood was threatened by the slowdown of agricultural growth when

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[685] Jaffrelot, C. 2003. *India's Silent Revolution…*p. 494.
[686] Jogdand, P.G. ed., 2000. *New Economic Policy and Dalits,* Jaipur: Rawat Publications, p. 1.
[687] Mendelsohn and Vicziany. 1998. *The Untouchables…,* pp: 267-8.
[688] Shyam Babu, D. 2004. India's liberalization and Dalits. *Asia Programme Working Paper,* Chatham House, London, p. 11.

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governments, both at the centre and in the states, began to neglect the agricultural sector and concentrate their energies on the industrial sector.[689] These developments forced the Madigas to search for avenues of livelihood outside the agricultural sector. They were threatened by the sudden retreat of the State and an abrupt shrinking of employment opportunities in the public sector; they worried that without the reservation quotas it would be almost impossible for them to gain entry into the private sector.[690] It was in this economic context that Madigas had placed their demand for categorisation. Of course, it must be mentioned here that although the economic context served as the basis for the classification demand, it was actually triggered off by the casteist behaviour of the Malas against the Madigas.

In the previous Chapter we have noted that the BSP, whose coalition with the Samajwadi Party on the basis of an explicitly anti-Hindutva campaign in 1993, led to its astonishing victory in UP, had created a storm among the upper castes and euphoria among the lower castes when it entered the political arena of AP in 1994. One of BSP's chilling slogans, *Vote hamara, raj tumhara, nahin chalega, nahin chalega*, i.e., 'We (Dalits and the lower castes) vote, whereas you (the upper castes) hold the power. This cannot continue, this cannot continue' – had a strong impact among the lower castes with regards to how their votes were helping the upper castes - their historical oppressors - to consolidate power. The other slogan: *Jiski jitni sankhya bhaari, uski utni bhagidaari,* i.e., the share in power should be in direct proportion to the vote bank strength, raised great expectations among the lower castes in the state.[691] Yet, contrary to the expectations of many political commentators, the Party failed rather miserably in the 1994 state assembly elections. Previously we noted that one fundamental factor that was at the heart of this electoral debacle was the dark reality of casteism among its victims. Despite the presence of the Malas in the state BSP's leadership structure, a majority of the Malas did not even join the party, let alone vote for it. For it was the party of the Madigas and not of the

[689] On the decline of agricultural sector, see Bardhan, Pranabh. 1998. *The Political Economy of Development in India.* Delhi: OUP.
[690] Mallepalli Lakshmaiah. 'Udyamam vargeekaranakea parimitam kaaraadu!' (The movement should not confine to classification alone!'), *Andhra Jyothi,* (a Telugu daily) 07 November, 2004.
[691] Balagopal, K. 1995. Andhra Elections…pp: 136-139.

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Malas.[692] In a way, the BSP was seen in AP as the party of the Madigas and its electoral defeat was largely on account of this reason.

It was this casteist sentiment of the Malas against the Madigas that forced the latter to rethink the very idea of 'the Dalit share' in the political power of the country. Two questions appear to have set the agenda for future mobilisation and the politics of the Madigas: first, when there is no equality among the Dalits themselves, what is the moral basis for demanding equality with the upper castes?; second, in the eventual realisation of political power for the Dalits, would the power be distributed equally among all the Dalit castes or simply usurped by the Malas, as they had been doing in the case of SC reservations? The Madigas were convinced that the demand for political power for the Dalits should be preceded by internal equality within the Dalit category. Moreover, such equality would be realised only when there is equitable distribution of reservations among all the Dalit castes on the basis of the classification principle.[693] It was with this conviction that the Madiga youth in Edumudi village in Prakasam district launched the MRPS for classification of SC reservations on July 7, 1994, under the leadership of Krishna Madiga and Krupakar Madiga. In the rest of the paper I shall focus upon the Dandora debate on the classification of the Dalit reservations between the MRPS and the Mala Mahanadu.

1. Representation versus Merit**:** One of the key ideas around which the MRPS based its sub-classification demand was *representation*. It was argued that although reservation opportunities had been provided for the Dalits as a matter of representation, the Madigas were singled out by their under-representation in those opportunities. In all their pamphlets and political speeches, the leaders of the MRPS based their demand by presenting data pertaining to opportunities in education, employment and political sectors availed both by the Madigas and Malas. The data suggests *over-representation* of the latter and the *under-representation* of the former in reservation opportunities. Although the accuracy of the data in the field of education and employment is questionable, the

[692] Manda, Janaiah. 1999. *Dalit Politics in Andhra Pradesh*…p. 100.
[693] Interviews with Krishna Madiga on 22 August, 2005 in Hyderabad; and Krupakar Madigas on 12 July, 2005 in Guntur.

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data on political opportunities, especially in reserved seats in the State Assembly as well as Parliament, as this researcher verifies, clearly establishes the *over-representation* of the Malas. A pamphlet distributed by the MRPS in one of its mass mobilisation gatherings in Ongole town in 1995, presents the following statistics relating to political reservations for the Dalits in the state:

Table 7.1: Distribution of Reserved Assembly Seats between Madigas and Malas (1952-95)

Total SC seats	39	Total number of SC seats in the first ten Assembly elections	390
As per population Madigas share of seats	24	Madigas share in the total number of SC members in the State Legislative Assembly	240
Number of seats that Madigas actually got	12	Number of seats that Madigas actually got	120
Malas share in seats as per their population	15	Malas share in seats as per their population	150
Number of seats Malas actually got	27	Number of seats Malas actually got	270

Source: Madiga Rights – pamphlet distributed by the MRPS, Ongole, 31 May, 1995.

Table 7.2: Distribution of Reserved Lok Sabha seats between Madigas and Malas (1951-95)

Total SC seats	6	Total SC seats in the first nine Parliaments	54
Madigas share in the total seats	4	Madigas share in the total seats	36
The number of seats Madigas actually got	2	The number of seats Madigas actually got	18
Malas share in the total seats	2	Malas share in the total seats	18
The number of seats Malas actually got	4	The number of seats actually gained by the Malas	36

Source: Madiga Rights – pamphlet distributed by the MRPS, Ongole, 31 May, 1995.

The statistics in Table 1 were taken from the total number of Dalits elected to the first ten state Legislative Assemblies over a period of forty-five years. Of the 39 reserved seats, the Malas have been represented in 26 seats, while the Madigas have held a mere 12 seats. “If these seats were to be distributed between the Madigas and Malas on the basis of each caste’s demographic weight”, the pamphlet argued, “the Malas would get 15 seats and the Madigas would obtain 24 seats. Injustice had been done to the Madigas in the last forty-five years to the tune of 120 assembly seats”.

Table 2 presents the number of available reserved seats in Lok Sabha for the Dalits in the state and their distribution. Of the 54 seats (during the nine General elections between 1951 and 1995), while the Madigas represented 18 seats, the Malas succeeded in obtaining 36 seats. But, had these seats been distributed proportionally, the share of the Madigas and Malas would have been 36 and 18, respectively. “The under-representation

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of the Madigas", the pamphlet claimed, "is gross injustice against the Madigas and other similarly placed Dalit castes, an injustice that is against the equality principle of democracy".[694] In a similar argument Krishna Madiga, one of the two main leaders of the MRPS, observed:

> Of the 59 Dalit castes in the state, only the Malas, with their population of 45 percentage in the total Dalit population have appropriated 75 percent of the reservations, whereas the Madigas, whose percentage of population among the Dalits is 55 per cent, did not even get 25 percent of reservations. This is gross injustice against the Madigas and other unrepresented Dalit castes. When would we get our share in the reservations? We want our representation in the reservations.[695]

Two aspects are clear from this. First, injustice has been conceived in terms of under-representation of the Madigas in accordance with their proportionality in the opportunities accorded to the Dalit group. Second, proportional representation of the under-represented Madigas in these opportunities is associated with democratic equality, which in turn is envisioned as social justice.[696] Before we discuss these ideas let's examine the Mala Mahanadu's counter-argument.

The Mala Mahanadu's response against the argument of under-representation was grounded on the notion of merit. Two claims made by the members of this group are noteworthy. First, it was argued by the Mala youth that, "the Madigas eat beef, drink and loaf around, whereas we work hard".[697] Second, C. R. Sekhar, writer and a staunch activist of the Mala Mahanadu justifies the over-representation of the Malas as follows:

> The dominant presence of the Malas in the SC reservation is because of their self-respect and social conscience […] The Madigas were under-represented in the reservations because they neither have self-respect nor social conscience. This in turn endowed the Malas with intellectual ability and power not merely to recognise the social injustices but gave them the required courage to fight against those injustices… We have developed merit and power as part of our ongoing struggle against social injustices.[698]

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[694] 'Madiga Rights' – Pamphlet distributed by the Dandora in a mass demonstration in Ongole, Prakasam district, 31 May 1995.

[695] Krishna Madiga in *Vaartha* (The News), a Telugu newspaper, 10 October, 1997.

[696] During the Mandal debate a similar argument was put forward by the supporters of the reservations for the OBCs. For details, see Bajpai, Rochana. 2004. *The legitimating vocabulary of group rights in contemporary India*. D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, especially chapter 4: 'Social Justice and Quotas in Government Jobs for "Other Backward Classes": The Mandal Debate, 1990' pp: 182-229.

[697] Quoted in Balagopal, K. 2000. A Tangled Web… p.1081. From the point of sociology of caste it may be interesting to note here while the caste Hindus sometimes justified their discrimination against the Dalits on the basis of the latter's practice of 'beef eating', the same argument has been put forward by the upwardly mobile Dalit castes to claim their superiority over the marginalized Dalit castes.

[698] Sekhar, C.R. 2005. *Dalita shakthini amtamondinchea raajakeeya kutrea vargeekarana: pavulugaa marina Dandora nayakulu* (Sub-classification - A political scheme to destroy Dalit Power: Dandora Leaders – Pawns in the scheme) – Hyderabad: Bahujana Vignana Kendram, p. 22.

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Two underlying elements in this argument are: first, self-respect and social conscience are equated with merit, and second, over-representation and under-representation of the Malas and Madigas, respectively, in the reservation opportunities were justified from the standpoint of possession and non-possession of merit by the two castes in question.

In the context of being beneficiaries of reservations, the Malas' merit claim is most astounding. But let's examine their argument. The claim of merit, as Satish Desphpande succinctly argues, is a moral claim on society. "It is simultaneously a claim in the sense of an assertion about myself (my capabilities, my competence, and at the broadest level my moral worth); and a claim in the sense of an expectation or demand addressed to the rest of the world."[699] From the point of moral claim, the merit argument of the Mala Mahanadu provides sufficient justification for their over-representation in the reserved opportunities. But how does one acquire merit and how do we measure it, or to frame the question in a different light, are there any indicators to measure merit? Deshpande, drawing from Marc Galanter, points out three indicators of merit: (a) economic resources (education, training, materials, freedom from work, etc); (b) social and cultural resources (networks of contacts, confidence, guidance and advice, information, etc); and (c) intrinsic ability and hard work. It is the combination of these conditions that allows people to acquire merit.[700] When the Malas justify their over-representation from the stand point of merit, what is being justified is that economic and cultural resources are not important, but it is differences in intrinsic ability alone that make for differences between the Madigas and Malas. Such a position, however, cannot be defensible. For there is nothing called intrinsic ability or intrinsic disability, they are shaped and determined by availability or non-availability of access to economic and cultural resources.

Interestingly, what the Malas did not recognise is that their merit claim actually provides a strong case against themselves. For this could potentially exclude them from the

[699] Deshpande, Satish. 2006. Exclusive Inequalities: Merit Caste and Discrimination in Indian Higher Education Today. *EPW,* 41(24), pp: 2438-2444, here, p. 2442.
[700] Ibid., p.2443.

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purview of representation.[701] For one of the considerations in the institutionalisation of reservation opportunities for Dalits is that apart from compensating for historical inequalities heaped upon them by the caste system, it helped to eliminate inequalities so as to equalise their socio-economic conditions in relation to the upper castes.[702] Whether or not the Malas have improved their socio-economic conditions so as to be on a par with the caste Hindus, their very claim of merit implies that they already have improved themselves in comparison with the other members in the Dalit category. This means that the difference is not in merit, but in educational access, and principally this should take away the reverse discriminatory advantage that Malas receive. Otherwise, with their improved situation, they will continue to entrench themselves in reservation opportunities and thus minimise the opportunities available for the marginalised castes.[703]

Now let us examine the MRPS' argument. The issue of "under-representation of certain categories of people", according to Anne Phillips, "is often so stark that its injustice seems beyond question".[704] However, if one were to disaggregate injustice from under-representation and examine the latter on its own terms, the general claim that a lack of equal or proportionate caste presence in the administration constitutes an injustice as Rochana Bajpai argues, could be refuted on three grounds.[705] First, it might be argued that a certain group of people in comparison with some other group of people is under-represented in the administration because its members lack the education and required

[701] Khasim, a researcher from Osmania University, Hyderabad makes an interesting observation against the *merit* argument of the Malas: 'While the upper castes have been chanting the *merit mantra* for the last fifty to sixty years, today the Malas have joined this congregation. …According to this meritorious people (both the caste Hindus and the Malas), whoever have merit will have seat and employment. Then what is the need for the reservations at all? Let's discontinue with the reservation system, and let's allow the meritorious to get the seat and employment. Are the Malas ready for this?' (Khasim in Panthukala's film: *Dandora*).

[702] For a detailed discussion on the reservation provision for the Dalits and other backward groups, see Bajpai, Rochana. 2002. Minority Rights in the Indian Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946. *QEH Working Paper Series,* Working Paper number 30.

[703] Personally I do not suggest the idea of blocking of the Malas from availing reservation facilities. Except a small percentage among them, most of the Malas are equally poor as the Madigas.

[704] Phillips, Anne. 1998[1995]. *The Politics of Presence.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 21; ----, 2005[1991]. *Engendering Democracy.* Cambridge: Polity Press; see also, Pitkin, Hanna. 1967. *The Concept of Representation.* Berkeley: UCP; George Kateb. 1981. The Moral Distinctiveness of Representative Democracy. *Ethics,* 91(3); Will Kymlicka. 1996. Three Forms of Group-Differentiated Citizenship in Canada. In: Benhabib Seyla., ed., *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political.* Princeton: PUP.

[705] Bajpai, Rochana. 2004. The legitimating vocabulary of group rights…pp: 182- 229.

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skills for particular jobs. Second, it may be argued that the claim that a group's representation in the administration must be commensurate with that group's demographic weight is based on the assumption that members of the group share an equal desire for bureaucratic jobs. It is possible, however, that a group's members do not share a preference for the same jobs. In such a situation, "disproportionalities in group presence in the bureaucracy would reflect the diversity in preference between groups, rather than any injustice".[706] Third, it might be argued that since administrative jobs comprise mainly middle-class jobs, a group's under-representation in those jobs does not constitute injustices against that group. The bureaucracy would mirror the demographic profiles of the social groups, as suggested by Rosenbloom, "only if all major social groups are distributed equally, in proportional terms, along the social stratification system".[707]

The above three arguments, however, could be contested both from the point of view of social justice and democracy. To begin with, from the standpoint of social justice, first: in any given society, if one section or group of people lacks the requisite education or skills for administrative jobs in comparison with other groups or sections of people, that in itself constitutes structural injustice. In order to remedy such injustice, a structural solution, which ensures the presence of the disadvantaged group(s) in administrative jobs, is necessary. Second, an individual's choice or preference in any given society is always formed both on account of "what has been set as a norm",[708] and in consonance with the opportunities available to him or her. By conferring inferior occupations on the lower castes as well as by making their culture seem inferior, the caste Hindu society not merely misrecognises the human agency of the lower castes, but also damages the confidence that lower caste members acquire through their culture.[709] Furthermore, outside the boundaries of reservations, the opportunities available for the lower castes are so meagre that occupations beyond their traditional caste occupations are hard to imagine. It is the combination of structurally confined opportunities and socially moulded

[706] Ibid., pp: 194-5.
[707] Rosenbloom, D.H. 1977. *Federal Equal Employment Opportunity, Politics and Public Personnel Administration,* pp. 38-39, cited in Bajpai, Rochana. 2004. The legitimacy … p. 195.
[708] Sunstein, C.R. 1991. Preferences and Politics. *Philosophy and Public Affairs,* 20/1, cited in Phillips, Anne. 1998[1995]. *The Politics of Presence.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 44.
[709] For an excellent theoretical discussion on the politics of recognition and misrecognition see Taylor, Charles. 1994. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition.* Princeton: PUP.

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inferiority complex that destroys the motivation and confidence needed for lower castes to aspire for prestigious positions in employment and education. Moreover, "to take preference as given", as Bajpai observes, "would be to ignore the possibility that differences in preferences along group lines might be reflective of patterns of structural inequality, patterns that are themselves the product of the interaction of cultural and economic injustices, of the injustice of recognition and injustices of distribution."[710]

Third, while the number of prestigious positions in any administrative set-up is limited, the dominant presence of members of certain groups and a lack of presence of the members of other social groups clearly provide evidence of injustice against the latter.[711] In any case, what must be clearly recognised here is that the system of reservation is a "representational mechanism" to mirror the proportion of Dalits and Adivasis in society in the domains of educational and employment opportunities and legislative bodies.[712] And sub-classification of that representation is simply extending this concept of mirror representation within the Dalit category.

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2. Caste-based Justice versus Group-based Justice**:** The second key theme of the Dandora debate is what I call the unit of justice. The MRPS demanded sub-classification of the Dalit reservations taking caste as the main qualification, for every caste in the Dalit category to have an opportunity to access its legitimate share. The Mala Mahanadu strongly objected to the caste qualification, and favoured group-based justice or continuation of existing patterns of distribution of Dalit reservations.

In its demand for caste-based distribution of Dalit reservations, the MRPS has argued that although quotas were provided for Dalits as a group, Malas have been 'monopolising' those opportunities. As a consequence, marginalised castes like Madigas and Rellis were deprived of their legitimate share in common opportunities; and such deprivation, in turn,

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[710] Bajpai, Rochana. 2004. The legitimating…, p.195; also see William, Melissa. 1999. *Voice, Trust and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failing of Liberal Representation,* Princeton: PUP, pp: 16-17.

[711] Incidentally, Amitabh Kundu who chaired the second expert group to "examine and determine the structure of an Equal Opportunity Commission" argues that if a community (even if a minority) is already over represented in a given institution, it cannot claim any benefits. See, Kundu, Amitabh. 2008. 'Report of the Expert Group on Diversity Index', submitted to the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Govt. of India.

[712] Tharu, Susie *et al*., 2007. Reservations and Return to Politics. *EPW,* 42 (49), p. 40.

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resulted in their further marginalisation. For instance, Dr. P. Muttaiah, a member of the Madiga Intellectuals Forum argues: "[E]ducationally, the Madiga caste is far behind the Mala caste […] First generation educated [Madiga] youth will find it difficult to make a mark in the competition for reserved posts. It is time that this issue is considered in all its aspects and entry of the less advanced among SCs and STs should be enabled through a policy of Special Discrimination in their favour.'[713]

Two crucial aspects of the above argument are: (A) Caste is the crucial factor both in the monopolisation and deprivation of opportunities (for evidence see Table 6.3 below); as such, caste should be the basis for any re-distributional measures. For this would facilitate marginalised castes access to their legitimate share in the reservations. (B) There is a perceptible gap between the abilities of the dominant and marginalised Dalit castes. While the Malas, who have been garnering opportunities, are equipped with the required skills for competition, the same is not true for the Madigas who have just begun to enter the arenas of education and employment. Thus continuation of the existing patterns of distribution would continue to keep the most marginalised castes away from opportunities. In addition to these two, it may be recognized here that in the sub-classification demand there is no demand for justice/compensation for what the marginalised castes have been losing on account of the appropriation of opportunities by the dominant Dalit castes. They are only seeking justice in the present and future distribution of the Dalit quota.

Table 7.3: Representation of the Malas and Madigas in the total (state-level) SC Opportunities

	Malas	Madigas
Population	51.39 lakhs	60.74 lakhs
State Public Sector Undertakings	61.8%	31.0%
Educational Institutions	57.2%	38.18%
AP State Secretariat	59.5%	34.4%
IPS Officers in the State	76.92%	23.0%
IPS Officers in other States	86.21%	13.79%
Office of Deputy Collector	78.13%	21.18%
Magistrates	86.21%	13.79%

Source: Mehra, Usha. 2008: Report of the National Commission to examine the issue of Sub-classification of Scheduled Castes in Andhra Pradesh.

[713] My interview with Dr. P. Muttaiah, Madiga Intellectuals Forum, Hyderabad on October, 23, 2006.

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Mala Mahanadu put forward two arguments in its opposition to caste-based reservations. First, as Venkatarao Mallela, justifying Mala Mahanadu's position on the grounds of 'distributional dynamics' of social justice, argues:

> Social justice operates in stages. In the first stage, justice in the form of social equality, wealth and power must be distributed between the exploiter castes and proletariat castes; and the second stage is that of distribution among the oppressed castes. This is also a stage in which the internal inequalities of the oppressed will be sorted out.[714]

In his own theory of social justice, Mallela divides the Indian society into three primary groups: exploiter, proletariat and oppressed; and argues that the distribution of power and wealth among these three groups should be undertaken in a phased manner. In the first stage, the distribution of justice should be confined to the exploiter and the proletariat. Once such distribution has taken place, there comes the second stage, where the oppressed will be given their share of justice; this is also the stage at which the internal problems of the oppressed will be sorted out.

It is a plain fact that in order to ignore inequalities and differences within the Dalit group and to evade the MRPS' claim of caste-based justice, Mallela rather cleverly employs the idea of class-based groups and does not even acknowledge the existence of caste. Such an approach is nothing more than a strategy designed to reinforce the dominance of the Malas in reservation opportunities.[715]

Second, P V Rao, President of the Mala Mahanadu, rejecting the caste-based re-distribution of reservation opportunities as an erroneous and dangerous trend, argues:

> It may be true that the Malas enjoy a lion's share in the SC reservations. However, it is not correct to categorise Dalits into four groups and thereby divide the reservations into four shares. This is for two reasons: one, after sub-classification, the fruits of the reservations will be snatched away by the 'developed castes in each group'. Two, since the developed castes anyway would grab the reservations, differences within the same group are bound to occur, and this, in turn, would compel the under-developed castes to demand yet another categorszation. Once we begin the sub-classification process we

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[714] Mallela Venkatrao. *Vargeekaranato dakkeadi vatti-vistari* (Empty plate with categorization), in *Andhra Jyothi* 19 December, 2004.

[715] This argument is simply similar to the grounds of objections made by the Brahmins and other Hindu upper castes both in colonial and post-Independence India. A great body of literature is available on this. For a representative sample, see Eugene, I. 1969. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: The Non-Brahmin Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916-1929.* Berkeley: UCP, pp: 218-74; for a compelling discussion on Mandal debate see, Dirks, N. B. 2001. *Castes of Mind…* pp: 275-302.

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> would have to continue this process until the end of human race. Therefore, sub-classification is not only an erroneous principle but also a dangerous trend.[716]

Two main points of this argument are: first, sub-classification benefits the advanced sections within the marginalised castes; and second, sub-classification sets a dangerous precedent, for it creates space for further sub-classification demands.

Interestingly, this was not the first time that the argument that reservations benefit a few, especially the privileged sections within the group, was made. Initially this argument was made during the Constituent Assembly debates,[717] and later on during the Mandal debate.[718] Even the second point in P V Rao's argument was made during the Constituent Assembly debates by members like Damodar Swarup Seth and Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru in order to oppose the policy of reservations.[719]

In any case, the argument that fruits of sub-classification will be appropriated by the advanced sections within the marginalised castes applies equally to Malas' own case. In this sense, the Malas, along with the other Dalit castes, have been the victims of the caste-Hindus' practice of untouchability, political oppression and economic exploitation. Yet, if we compare the socio-economic and political standards of the Malas and Adi-Andhras with any other castes within the Dalit category, their standards are higher than other Dalit castes, and thus constitute the advanced castes within the Dalit category. Evidently, it was on account of their advanced position that they have at the forefront in appropriating the common opportunities of the Dalit group for themselves. In other words, the opportunities available for the Dalit category are limited, and even those limited opportunities were usurped by the advanced castes, a usurpation that forced the

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[716] My interview with P V Rao, President of the Mala Mahanadu in Hyderabad, May, 2004, Hyderabad.

[717] For Krishna Chandra Sharma argument, see *Constituent Assembly Debates: Official Report (CAD),* (1946-1950), Delhi: The Government of India, Vol. VIII, p. 516; and for Brajeshwar Prasad, *CAD,* Vol. IX, p. 629.

[718] Responding to Rajni Kothari's defence of the caste-based reservations for the OBCs during the Mandal debate, M. N. Srinivas, A.M. Shah and B.S. Bavaskar argued that caste-based quotas for OBCs would provide new avenues of exploitation for the elites: 'the ploy of caste-based reservations, encouraging caste-based politicisation, is not the solution […] For all we know, this will benefit only the rich and the influential in all the castes and leave the poor and weak where they are'.See, M.N. Srinivas, A. M. Shah, and B.S. Bavaskar. 1990. 'Kothari's Illusion of Secular Upsurge', *Times of India,* Letter to editor, October 17, quoted in Dirks, B.N. 2001. *Castes of Mind*…p. 287; for Kothari's arguments, Kothari, Rajni. 1990. Caste and Politics: The Great Secular Upsurge, in *Times of India,* op-ed. piece, September 28.

[719] For Damodar Swarup Seth, see *Constituent Assembly Debates: Official Report (CAD),* (1946-1950), Delhi: The Govt. of India, Vol. VII, p. 516; and for Pandit Hriday Nath Kunzru, see *CAD,* Vol. IX, p. 629.

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marginalised Dalit castes, such as the Madigas and Rellis, to demand caste-based redistribution of reservations. Undoubtedly, this pattern of usurpation of opportunities by the advanced will be repeated even after categorisation; for as there are advanced castes within the Dalit category, there are advanced sections or classes within every caste.[720] But this cannot be the justification for the continuation of the existing, category-based distribution of reservations. Because without the caste-based sub-classification of reservations, even those advanced sections, let alone the marginalised sections, within the marginalised castes would not be able to access the reservation opportunities which are their due share. While the castes that had been appropriating opportunities will continue to appropriate them, the marginalised castes will continue to be excluded.[721]

Arguably, the Mala Mahanadu's claim that sub-classification would only result in reproducing similar injustices is a valid argument, since the immediate beneficiaries from sub-classification would almost certainly not be the most disadvantaged among the marginalised. This is, in fact, one of the main concerns of the Madigas themselves. For instance, the Madigas of Telangana region have been expressing concern over the disproportionate advantage taken by the Madigas from coastal Andhra in the event of categorisation, since the latter already enjoys better educational opportunities than the former.[722] Similar concerns are also expressed by the Madiga women:

> Madiga women constitute half of the Madiga population. Of the total reservation benefits received by our men, we do not get even one percent of those benefits. As women we face triple discrimination against us, and that should be taken into consideration in the distribution of the reservations [...] we demand sub-classification of reservations on the basis of caste and we also demand sub-classification on the basis of gender.[723]

From this statement, it is clear that while the Madigas of the Telangana region, who are disadvantaged both on account of caste and regional backwardness, are seeking justice on these grounds, the Madiga women, who were disadvantaged on account of gender, caste, and class, demand that these three aspects should be taken into account in the distribution

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[720] For an interesting analysis on classes within castes, see Chaudhury, Pradipta. 2005. *Does caste indicate deprivation?, Seminar,* No. 549.
[721] My conversations with Srinivas Gurram, research scholar, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, 10 January, 2004.
[722] Interviews conducted by Pantukala Srinivas in his *Dandora* – a documentary film on sub-classification of the SC reservations.
[723] My interview with Mary Madiga, President of the Madiga Mahila Samakhya, 4 May, 2006, Hyderabad.

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of opportunities. This is neither the first nor the last time that we encounter this sort of demand from the marginalised sections, for, as Iris Young observes, "we live in a society with deep group oppressions… complete elimination of which is only a remote possibility"'.[724]

However, as a way out of this impasse we have two options. First, simply follow the advice of the Mala Mahanadu and do not take any action. In a sense, if oppression of groups is a permanent phenomenon, any initiative to redress those injustices would result in further injustices and thus, in either case we will continue to live with injustice. Second, we could constantly engage in finding ways to redress injustices, and thus strive to construct a just society. And if we were to follow this latter line of action, how would we ensure justice to the marginalised Dalit castes? Here there is no need to labour or discuss anymore the issue of why caste should be the basis for social justice, since it has already been concluded that if the basis of discrimination is caste then the "basis of preferential policy in favour of the lower castes needs to be based on caste".[725] In the following I shall probe the Mala Mahanadu argument that the present demand for sub-classification leads to several other such demands, and I tackle the issue with the help of the concerns expressed by Telangana Madigas and Madiga women.[726]

If categorisation of the SC reservations were actualised, the Madigas would, on the basis of their population proportionality within the Dalit group in AP, secure 7 per cent of the Dalit opportunities. As the State is divided into three regions (coastal Andhra, Telangana and Rayalaseema), to ensure that Madigas in each of these regions get their share of opportunities, the total Madigas share of 7 per cent will be divided into three shares. While coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema regions will be given 2 per cent each, the Telangana region will get 3 per cent, simply because a majority of Madigas live in this region. We need to combine the gender aspect in the regional distribution itself, that is – the share of the regions should be divided into two equal shares between Madiga men and women. Such distribution means that we have taken three aspects of backwardness into

[724] Young, I. Marion. 1989. Polity and Group Difference…p. 262.
[725] Thorat, Sukhdeo. 2006. Paying the Social Debt. *EPW,* 41 (24), p.2345.
[726] I thank Matt Nelson for clarifying my thinking on this point.

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account: caste, region and gender. In future, if rural Madigas, who are disadvantaged by lack of opportunities (educational and employment) in comparison with their counterparts in urban areas, demand further categorisation, then each region's share of opportunities would be divided into two equal shares. Thus, a further sub-classification of existing opportunities means dividing the share into four shares, where one percent of opportunities would be equally divided between Madiga men and women in urban areas and the remaining one percent to be distributed equally between the Madiga men and women in rural areas. In the future, even after such distribution, if some Madigas were to make a demand for sub-classification on the basis of a just cause, unequivocally that cause should be taken into account and further sub-classification executed. If one were to add a fifth element of difference or backwardness to the already existing four elements - that is, caste, region, gender, rural and urban differences -- the half a percent of opportunities would be divided into two quarters, a further addition in the existing list of differences means dividing the quarter share of opportunities into two equal shares. Thus, each additional element would reduce the share of opportunities and finally we would arrive at a stage where group differences would be replaced by individual differences, and this means each person will stand for his/her opportunities. Thus, the argument that one sub-classification sets a norm for other categorisations in future is logically valid. But unlike the Mala Mahanadu, I would like to treat this as a path towards a solution for tackling inequalities among Dalits rather than as a barrier.[727]

3. Modern Opportunities versus Traditional Occupations: The third key theme in the Dandora debate concerns opportunities for economic empowerment. While the MRPS grounded its demand for sub-classification on the idea of accessing modern opportunities, the Mala Mahanadu countered such a claim by suggesting that Madigas should be given economic assistance in order to develop their traditional occupations, especially sandal-making. Vara Prasad, a MRPS campaigner, maintains:

[727] A similar proposal has been made by Justice Rajinder Sachar Committee. See, Sachar, Rajinder., 2006. 'Report on Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community of India, New Delhi: Government of India; for an analysis of this report, see Khaitan, Tarunabh., 2008. Transcending Reservations: A Paradigm Shift in the Debate on Equality. *EPW,* 43(38), pp: 8-12.

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> Just like the Malas or any other caste in society we also want to send our children to schools, colleges and universities. […] Unlike most of the Madigas, who toil throughout the year as agricultural labourers or sandal repairers, at least some of our children would have the opportunity to go to colleges, become educated and get some jobs.[728]

Prasad's observation mirrors a genuine aspiration of a community of people who have been historically disadvantaged on account of the systemic oppression inflicted upon them by the caste-Hindu society, to access modern opportunities and improve life conditions. Before we examine the justification of this argument, let's examine the Mala Mahanadu's counter-argument.

The response of the Mala Mahanadu is typical. "Since the Madigas were into leather-making," it was argued by C R Sekhar, "the best way for their empowerment was to give them help so as to develop their traditional occupations, especially the leather work."[729] On the surface, this is an argument for economic assistance. But deep down there is a casteist argument as well. Let's examine these two aspects below:

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The Mala Mahanadu's economic assistance argument is problematic for three reasons. First, it was true that leather-making was the caste occupation of the Madigas. But that was during pre-Independence, when society was heavily dependent on agriculture. As agriculture required various leather instruments, the Madigas developed the making of leather goods as a cottage industry. But as society advanced and with the development of modern agricultural practices as well as modern leather technologies, the Madigas lost their cottage industry and joined the other Dalits and lower castes as agricultural labourers. Second, although some of the Madigas have survived by skinning dead cattle, tanning and repairing footwear (sandals) in post-Independent India, this has not liberated them from the clutches of poverty. As leather work gives poor rewards, the Madigas who work with leather are continuing to live in wretched economic conditions.

Moreover, recognising the profits in the business of footwear, the Kammas in the state and Marvadis from Rajasthan and Gujarat have set up huge leather industries throughout

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[728] My interview with D. M. Vara Prasad, a sitting Congress (I) MLA - Tadikonda constituency, Guntur district, 13 July, 2006.
[729] See, Sekhar, C.R. 2005. Sub-Classificaiton: A Political scheme to destroy Dalit Power…' p. 22.

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the state, especially in coastal Andhra districts. As these industries were able to produce fashionable sandals cheap, consumers turned to these factory-made sandals. And this led to the Madigas have completely lost their traditional occupation. Interestingly, despite leather-making being their caste's occupation, it was not the Madigas who joined these factories but, rather, the Malas, who joined as leather workers.[730]This was due to the socio-economic development of the Malas. As the Malas among the Dalits in the state had been the first to take to education and move to urban centres, they became aware of the opportunities available through these factories. In a way, the Madigas lost their cottage industry to the upper caste capitalists and lost their traditional occupation to the advanced Malas.

Second, of the 80 lakhs (or eight million) Madigas in the state, as Venkatesh Madiga informs,[731] only 1 percent Madigas engage in their caste occupation. But this engagement with the caste's occupation does not mean that they own footwear shops. They are just cobblers, repairing old or broken sandals. If the government assists the Madigas to develop their caste-based occupation, only this 1 percent of Madigas will benefit from such assistance. By implication the remaining 99 percent of the Madigas, who are not engaged in the caste's occupation, are left out from this economic assistance, thus, resulting in the further marginalisation of the entire caste. Finally, making footwear manually is definitely a skill and an art. Yet, there is no due recognition accorded to it in a society whose attitude towards work in general, and leather work in particular, is derived from the Brahmanical notions of purity and pollution. Thus the Madigas skill in making footwear carries a stigma. Therefore, economic assistance, instead of liberating the Madigas from the clutches of a traditional occupation - and by implication from Brahmanical ideology - will victimise them in that inherited occupation and imposed ideology. Further, it must be recognised here that the economic assistance argument is one of the most potent casteist arguments. Balagopal retorts, "Uplift them from their poverty and give them economic assistance to improve their traditional occupations […] but do not breach our preserve of expanding knowledge and the status and opportunities

[730] My field interviews with some of the leather workers in those factories in Vijayawada, 26-29, October, 2004.
[731] My interview with Venkatesh Madiga in Vijayawada, 3 May, 2005.

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it carries."[732] In other words, the premise of Malas' arguments is that while they should work their way out of the structure of caste-determined occupations, Madigas should continue to live within the structure.

Problems and inconsistencies in the arguments of the Malas aside, the Madigas' argument of sub-classification of SC reservation in order to access modern opportunities is a justifiable argument. This can be supported from the arguments put forward in the Constituent Assembly debates.[733] The provisions of reservations in educational and employment opportunities for the Dalits and others were justified on the grounds of fairness and welfare, which are fore-grounded on the notion of equality. On the idea of fairness, it was argued that without some form of special provisions it would be impossible for historically disadvantaged groups to access educational and employment opportunities. Without their participation in these opportunities, the constitutional provisions of equality of opportunities for all citizens would remain mere paper declarations. Here, a distinction was being drawn between formal and substantive equality of opportunity or as supporters of reservations put it, between 'paper' and 'real' equality. In other words, the idea behind this argument was that equality cannot be achieved between a group that was advantaged by its historical monopoly of access to opportunities and a group that was disadvantaged by lack of access to opportunities. Reservations were essential not only to rectify the structural forms of discrimination but also to overcome persisting practices of discrimination, even after such practices were outlawed and equality of opportunity had been formally instituted.

The welfare type of argument was found in K. T. Shah's observation:

> …any special discrimination in favour of (Scheduled Castes and 'backward' tribes) may not be regarded as violating the basic principles of equality for all classes of citizens in the country. They need, and must be given, for sometime to come at any rate, special treatment in regard to education, in regard to opportunity for employment and in many other cases where their present inequality, their present backwardness is only hindrance to the rapid development of the country.[734]

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[732] Balagopal, K. 2000. A Tangled Web…', p. 1078.
[733] I have taken these arguments from Bajpai, Rochana. 2002. The conceptual vocabularies of secularism and minority rights in India. *Journal of Political Ideologies,* 7 (2), pp: 179-197.
[734] See *CAD,* Vol. VII, pp: 655-56.

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Thus, in the above argument, justification for reservations as a matter of general welfare was made at two levels. First, the reservation measures were a necessity so as to reduce the vast socio-economic disparities between groups. Second, although reducing inequalities among groups was in itself a necessity, the tackling of inequalities was an essential pre-condition both for national integration as well as general progress and development of the country.[735]

Two key ideas in the above two justifications for the system of reservation in the debates of the Constituent Assembly are: (a) tackling historical disadvantage, and (b) empowerment of the marginalized for the larger progress and development of the country. Let's look at Dandora's demand for sub-classification in order to access modern opportunities in the light of these two ideas.

First, as has been shown above, although both the Malas and the Madigas had been part of the larger Dalit category, there has been a huge gap between the two castes in terms of socio-economic conditions and access to modern opportunities, which include educational, employment and political. Here one should not label the Malas villains for taking advantage of the reservation opportunities earmarked for Dalits as a group as their advantage was initially determined both by historical reasons as well as the occupations imposed on them by the caste system. Similarly, the present disadvantage of the Madigas was determined by the initial disadvantage in the form of their physical location in the Telangana region and occupations pursued by them on account of their social location in the caste hierarchy. In a way, the present advantage and disadvantage of the Malas and the Madigas, respectively, were not of their own accord, but simply on account of certain historical as well as socio-structural factors. Yet, those factors came to determine their present abilities and inabilities in accessing the opportunities for reservation. Hence, there is need to take these factors into account and in this respect, the Madigas' demand for sub-classification to access modern opportunities is justified.

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[735] For further analysis on the questions of political representation and reservations in employment for minorities in the debates of Constituent Assembly, see Jha, Shefali. 2002. Secularism in the Constituent Assembly Debates, 1946-1950. *EPW,* 37(30), pp: 3175-3180; --------, 2004. Representation and Its Epiphanies: A Reading of Constituent Assembly Debates. *EPW,* 39 (39), pp: 4357-4360.

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Second, based on the idea of empowerment of a certain caste/community for the larger development of the country, the Madigas' demand for sub-classification in order to access modern opportunities can be justified on two grounds: (a) as the Madigas are one of the most disadvantaged castes among the Dalit category, they cannot be empowered unless every part of it is empowered; and (b) as the Dalits are also part of the country, any progress and development of the country is contingent upon the progress and development of the Dalits. In other words, unless the Madigas are empowered the country cannot be developed. From the standpoint of the larger goal, the Madigas demand is also further justified.

4. Unity versus Uniformity: Two other key ideas in the Dandora debate are: unity and uniformity. While the Mala Mahanadu rejected the sub-classification from the point of view of Dalit unity, MRPS, on the other hand, built its demand for sub-classification upon the idea of uniformity of the Dalit group. First I shall analyse the Mala Mahanadu's arguments, followed by the MRPS.

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The Mala Mahanadu, in its rejection of categorisation, had conceived four arguments around the notion of Dalit unity:

1. Malas and Madigas are all Dalits; all are oppressed and exploited in the Brahmanical caste system. The Manuvadis (the upper castes) are jealous of our unity, and sub-classification is their political conspiracy to divide and rule Ambedkar's family.[736] (Gutam Swamy, a Mala Mahanadu activist).

2. …at present, whenever there is any incident of atrocities against any caste among the Dalit community, all the Dalit castes together face the tyranny of the upper castes and agitate against such incidents unitedly. However, after the castes are divided into groups, members of other castes or groups will not come forward to protect the victims if the latter do not belong either to the caste or group of the former.- (Mala Mahanadu in a memorandum to the National Commission for SCs & STs, 1998).

3. ...after sub-classification people would give their vote to their caste's candidates only…there will be unprecedented political competitions, which will lead to social animosities among Dalits as every Dalit caste would field its own candidate in the reserved constituencies. - (Suryarao Gollapalli, a Congress MLA).

[736] Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who was a Dalit himself, was at the forefront in fighting against caste discrimination against the Dalits in modern India; and as the chairman of the drafting committee of the Indian Constitution, he was instrumental in getting reservations for the Dalits. As such Dalits all over India, irrespective of their caste affiliations regard him as 'the Father of the Dalit *jati* (nation)'.

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4. Fighting for sub-classification is a sheer waste of energy. Madigas, Malas, Rellis, Adi-Andhras and other Dalit castes should join together to demand reservations in the private sector. - (Jupudi Prabhakara Rao, in Andhra Jyothi, 14 April, 2005).

Four aspects are clear from the above arguments. First, both the Malas and Madigas are considered part of the Ambedkar family (Dalit category), and the Madigas have nothing to do with the demand for categorisation, as it was a political conspiracy by the upper castes to destroy the unity of the family. Second, two negative consequences of Dalit disunity are: (a) all the Dalit members would not be obliged either to protect the Dalit victims or protest against atrocities if the victims do not belong to their caste or sub-caste. In other words, sub-classification would trick Dalits into thinking and acting towards realisation of narrow, caste-based interests rather than the lofty goals of the larger group; and thus, such lack of obligation will adversely affect the security of individual Dalit castes; (b) disunity among Dalits would perpetuate the rule of the upper castes. Third, it has been assumed that sub-classification results in unwanted political competition and social animosities among Dalit castes. This implies that such competition and animosities did not exist among Dalits prior to the sub-classification demand. Finally, all the Dalits, irrespective of their individual caste backgrounds, are urged to join the movement for reservations in the private sector.

Interestingly, the MRPS also used the language of family and Dalit unity. For them, however, unity will be achieved only when the reservation opportunities are equally (i.e., proportionally)[737] distributed among all the 'children' of Ambedkar. The MRPS put forward three arguments on the notion of uniformity among the Dalits:

1. Ambedkar, a father-figure to both Madigas and Malas, advocated that property should be equally distributed between two sons rather then appropriated by one son. - (Krishna Madiga).[738]

2. First and foremost, distributive justice must be done to the Madigas and its sub-castes, Rellis and its sub-castes. Distributive justice among all the castes is an indispensable step before we join other Dalit castes for political power. We recognise the importance of Dalit unity to fight against social and political Hindutva ideologies; and Madigas would certainly join the Malas and the other Dalit castes in that fight provided the Malas support the sub-classification demand.- (Krupakar Madigas).[739]

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[737] In the Dandora debate, the words 'proportionality' and 'equality' have been used inter-changeably. Although conceptually they are two different terms, nevertheless, I shall also use them inter-changeably.
[738] Krishna Madiga, in his address to the Dandora activists in Ambedkar Bhavan, Hyderabad, 20 February, 1999 - Participant observation of the researcher.
[739] Krupakar Madiga's interview in Pantukala Srinivas's *Dandora* – a documentary film on categorization.

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3. How is it possible for a person at the ground level to join hands with another person standing on the terrace to forge friendship, unity, or work together or even fight against the Manu dharma? Is unity possible between two unequal individuals? […] Unity is possible between equals and not between unequal.-Jupaka Subhadra.[740]

In the above three statements two arguments put forward by the MRPS in its support of the sub-classification are: (a) equality in distribution, and (b) Dalit unity to fight against the Hindutva/Manu Dharma.[741] In his argument Krupakar Madiga unequivocally recognises the importance of Dalit unity in the fight against the forces of Hindutva, both in the social and political realms. But such a fight for him needs to be preceded by justice for all castes in the Dalit group. Jupaka's argument has also similar elements. First, she points out the common enemy, i.e, the Manu dharma of both the Madigas and Malas; second, she recognises the need for a united front against that common enemy; and third, she emphasises the conditions required for unity. Unity can only be achieved between two equal parties. Thus, both the Mala Mahanadu and Madiga Dandora have sought Dalit unity on similar grounds, i.e., to fight the common enemy and to secure common interests through political power. The one crucial difference between them is that, while the latter asks for the sorting out of any internal problems before taking common action, the former sees such action as unnecessary. For them, the enormity of the threat posed by the enemy is sufficient condition for seeking unity.

Now let us analyse the normal claims involved in concepts of family and unity. First of all, we need to recognise that what is being claimed in the concepts of the Ambedkar family and Dalit unity is in the self-interest of both the Malas and Madigas. This can be explained from two perspectives. First, both the Madigas and Malas, as the castes at the bottom of the caste hierarchy, are vulnerable to caste-based atrocities and discrimination against them by the caste-Hindus. No caste can fight against the upper castes on its own strength, and support of the other Dalit castes is *sine qua non*. Interestingly, it may be mentioned here that whenever the upper castes commit atrocities against Dalits, it is

[740] Interview with Jupaka Subhadra, in Pantukala Srinivas' *Dandora* – a documentary film on sub-classification of the SC reservations. *Anveshi* – Research Centre for Women's Studies, Hyderabad.
[741] Although there is great difference between Hindutva and Manu Dharma, most Dalits tend to equate one with the other. While Hindutva does not recognise caste identity and thus caste occupations, the Manu Dharma strictly wants people to observe caste and practice the occupations assigned to them.

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always strategically against an individual Dalit caste rather than Dalits as a group. For instance, in Karamchedu village, despite the presence of the Malas and Madigas, the Kammas organised a massacre against the Madigas alone; and in Chunduru it was against Malas alone. Thus, unity between both castes serves the interests of each caste.

Second, on the political front also unity is in the common interest of all Dalit castes. As Anne Phillips points out, "partly this is no more than efficiency: to change the world we need the weight of numbers".[742] No individual Dalit caste on its demographic weight alone can win elections. Phrases such as Dalit family and Dalit unity, are simply veils of social courtesy designed to hide the ugly face of self-interest. Of course, it is true that sometimes 'members of families are bound by ties of sentiment and affection and willingly acknowledge duties in contradiction to self-interest.'[743] But in the case of the Madiga Dandora and the Mala Mahanadu, it is not affection for an individual family, but for their own socio-political interests. Third, it is difficult to see any rationale in the Mala Mahanadu's argument that sub-classification leads to competition, inter-caste rivalry and animosity among Dalits. In fact, the prevailing inter-caste animosities are due to the domination of one caste or few castes over the reservation opportunities provided to the group as a whole. To my mind, sub-classification should lead to amity in the group, to camaraderie rather than competition or animosity. In other words, competition among the Dalit castes is due to disproportional appropriation of opportunities by a few castes, and if that condition is eliminated, there is no reason for inter-caste rivalries and competition.[744]

Finally, on the question of reservations in the private sector: With the economic liberalisation there is a shift in emphasis from public to private sector, which has vastly reduced employment opportunities in the public sector. This has, in turn, reduced the employment opportunities for the Dalits, Adivasis and Other Backward Castes

[742] Phillips, Anne. 1993. *Democracy and Difference.* Cambridge: Polity Press, p. 23.
[743] Rawls, John. 2006[1958]. Justice as Fairness. In: Robert E. Goodin and Philip Pettit. eds., *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology.* Oxford: Blackwell publishing, p. 187.
[744] I am aware that the initiation of sub-classification at one level seals the inter-caste competitions, but opens up the *intra-caste* competitions and rivalries among them. But this cannot be sufficient justification for the rejection of categorisation. In future, if there is going to be intra-caste competitions as a result of categorisation, we need to find a way to work this out.

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(OBCs).[745] Obviously this condition forced the Dalits and other marginalised castes and communities to demand reservations in the private sector. Two principles upon which this demand has been grounded are: *part of the whole and discrimination.* The Dalit nation is part of the larger Indian nation, and as part of the whole they are, like anybody else, entitled to equal opportunities (education, employment), resources and political power. But on account of discrimination against them by the upper castes, the Dalits are unable to access the common resources. This could be rectified by carving out a portion in proportion to the demographic weight of the Dalit nation from the nation's common portion, i.e, resources.[746] While the entire Dalit community is eager to take part in the new movement and gain reservations in the private sector, a majority of them are simultaneously concerned about what will happen to the Dalit portion once that portion is realised.

On this issue, we come across two types of response. On the one hand, we have self-proclaimed Ambedkarites without an understanding of what Ambedkar stood for, and Dalit associations like Mala Mahanadu that completely ignore the internal differences and inequalities within the so-called Ambedkar family and wh oppose any measure aimed at rectifying these inequalities. On the other hand, we have the Dalit middle class, a class that is essentially constituted by the elites of the dominant Dalit castes. This class, which has amassed a great amount of wealth primarily through reservation opportunities, arrogantly thinks that it has a 'larger vision' than the grassroot Dalits. The latter has, in the opinion of the former, a 'limited view of things', and hence, they turn out to be 'a liability for the Dalit movement'.[747] This group of elites, who are eager to become capitalists, wants to become the commander-in-chief of the Dalit movement so as to demand a share in the private sector. Now, whatever the pretensions of this class, can it mobilise all the Dalit castes for reservations in the private sector, especially the marginalised, without a prior understanding of what would eventually happen to that

[745] According to the *Report of the Working Group on the Empowering SCs* appointed by the National Commission on SCs, the Dalits lost about 1,13,430 job opportunities in the central government during the period 1992-97, constituting a decline of 10.07 percent. See Louis, Prakash. 2004. Affirmative Action in Private Sector. *EPW,* 39 (33), p: 3691-92.

[746] Thorat, Sukhadeo and Katherine S Newman., 2007. Caste and Economic Discrimination: Causes, Consequences and Remedies. *EPW,* 42 (41), pp: 4121-4124.

[747] Prasad, Chandrabhan. Problems over roots. *The Pioneer,* 7 March, 2004.

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Dalit share? Would that share be shared equally among all the Dalit castes or would it be appropriated by the dominant Dalit castes? Answers to these questions do not require any experience. Our experience with the present reservations in the public sector is enough to say that reservation opportunities in the private sector will be monopolised by the dominant Dalit castes, and thus the marginalised Dalit castes will be left out even from the opportunities through the private sector. In other words, the experience with reservations in the government sector will be repeated in the private sector.

In conclusion, this chapter was an attempt to examine the Dandora debate on the sub-classification of Dalit reservations in AP. The debate took place between the MRPS and the Mala Mahanadu. While the former, based on the evidence of over-representation of the Malas and Adi-Andhras in reservation opportunities for the entire Dalit group, demanded sub-classification as a measure of social justice for the marginalised Dalit castes, the latter vehemently rejected that demand mainly on the grounds of the idea of merit. In addition to providing the background and context in which the MRPS placed the sub-classification demand, I have critically examined the four key themes around which the Dandora debate revolves. While the MRPS justified its sub-classification demand on the grounds of 'representation', 'caste as the basis for social justice', 'accessing modern opportunities' and 'uniformity within the Dalit group'; the Mala Mahanadu rejected those grounds with the notions of 'merit', 'category as the basis of justice', 'opportunities in the traditional occupations for the under-represented', and 'unity of the Dalit group'. In my analysis, I have placed myself between the two contending parties and argued their case from their respective perspective. Eventually, however, I have taken the stand of the MRPS argument for sub-classification of the Dalit reservations on the basis of caste. Drawing from the arguments of Sunstein and Bajpai and others, I argued that the dominant presence of certain groups and a lack of presence of the members of other social groups in any administrative set-up clearly provide evidence of injustice against the latter. In other words, sub-categorisation of SC reservations on the basis of caste is an effective way of distribution of reservation opportunities among all castes within the Dalit group.

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In conclusion, this Chapter is an attempt to interrogate the issue of social justice and the question of categorization of Scheduled Caste reservations in Andhra Pradesh. Through that interrogation it aimed to bring-forth paradoxes in the system of positive discrimination for the Scheduled Castes in India. In order to understand and analyse the Dandora debate on the question of categorization in Andhra Pradesh critically, I have situated myself between the MRPS and MMN and argued their cases from their perspectives. Eventually, however, I have taken the stand of the MRPS and argued for categorization of the Scheduled Castes reservations as an effective method of distributing reservation opportunities among all the castes within the Dalit category. I have also noted the replication of the existing situation in the private sector, if the demand for Scheduled Caste reservations in private sector actualizes without the categorization of the existing reservations. This Chapter, apart from analysing the question of sub-categorisation, highlights a sociological phenomenon of caste and sub-caste based divisions within the Dalit category, a phenomenon that has so far been neglected by social scientists. Also, the analysis presented in the Chapter was helpful not just in understanding Dalit activities in AP, it actually placed us in a better position to understand the current Dalit engagement in AP and UP comparatively. This, in turn, helps us to understand the importance and consequences of having and not having political power by a marginalised social category like the Dalits.

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***Eight*……..**

Conclusion

In retrospect, this thesis aims to analyse Dalit politics in contemporary India. The politics of the Dalits, both in colonial India or post-Independence India, has been shaped by their position in the Brahmanic hierarchical social system, the *Chaturvarna vyavastha.* As the very name of the system clearly demonstrates, the system comprises four *varnas* only, and Dalits have neither a designated space nor a recognised position within it. Such systemic exclusion means that the Dalits have to live in the margins or outside the boundaries of the *varna* order. This exclusion, in turn, resulted in their exploitation in the economic arena, oppression in the political arena and a lack of recognition of their humanness in the cultural arena. How did Dalits respond to these systemic exclusions both in colonial and post-Independence India? This is precisely what this thesis has set up to answer. It is an attempt to understand the contours of Dalit politics and their mobilisations for social equality and political power in contemporary India. It sets for itself three principal axes of enquiry: (i) comparatively, by looking at the situation in both North and South India, (ii) historically, by looking at the anti-caste movements and Dalit protests from the late 19th century onwards and (iii) thematically focusing on caste, domination and democracy. On the basis of the trajectories of Dalit mobilisations this thesis recognised three stages in Dalit politics: (1) colonial, (2) post-Independence until 1970's, and (3) politics since the 1980's. In order to capture the nuances of Dalit mobilisations cross-regionally, this thesis examined Dalit politics in UP and AP from an Ambedkarite perspective.

As noted, the Ambedkarite perspective quintessentially draws from Ambedkar's ideas of caste oppression and degradation of the marginalised in all walks of life - democracy, equal rights, the State etc. Yet, at the same time, an Ambedkarite perspective does not necessarily confine itself to the ideas of Ambedkar, ideas that had evolved in a particular socio-political or economic context. It involves a dynamic and critical re-interpretation of Ambedkar's ideas in any given context. Such an active re-interpretation is definitely not retrograde in nature, but is an enlargement of the democratic space and the democratisation of society at large.

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I

The British colonial government's proposal for the devolution of power to Indians propelled heightened political activism, wherein the Indian political arena witnessed unprecedented mobilisations around caste, community and religious identities. Political scientist Varshney, who argued that politics in northern India was exclusively organised around the religious identities or what he calls the 'Hindu-Muslim cleavage', was largely blind to the significance of caste in North Indian politics. As in the politics of the South and West of the country, in the politics of North India also the role and position of caste were, and still remain very important. The politics of the lower castes, especially the Dalits, was mostly organised around their caste identities, and any study on the politics of North India that does not take the 'caste' factor into its analysis will be inadequate.

At the turn of the twentieth century Dalits in northern, southern (and western) India were organising themselves with two demands: *recognition and representation.* While the idea of representation means a share in the emerging political power, the idea of recognition contains two aspects: recognising the Dalits as people with some self-worth and social equality. The Dalits' claim of *achut* identity in colonial UP, 'Adi-Hindu' in Nizam's Hyderabad and 'Adi-Andhra' in the coastal region of Andhra signify the emergence and embracing of that ideology by Dalits across the regions. It also signals the similarities in their demand for recognition and social equality. But the demand for recognition is not simply for social equality or for recognition of their self-worth, rather it is a demand by the Dalits to recognise their *difference from* others, particularly with the other castes or with the 'Hindu community'. Recognising their difference is important as it was the only way through which they could claim their share of representation in the emerging configurations of political power.

It is important to recognise here that the Dalits were placing the twin demands of recognition and representation at a time when the Brahmins and other upper castes in the Indian National Congress were claiming their right for power on the basis of their Aryan origin. This was an ideology that sought to exclude the Shudras, Dalits and Adivasis from the emerging power. The Dalits' invention of the *Adi-Hindu* ideology is a fascinating

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moment in the history of Dalit assertions. By claiming *adi* identity – *mula bharatavasi* (original inhabitants of India) the Dalits not merely sought to project the Brahmins and other upper castes as *outsiders* – thereby disqualifying them from ruling the country, but also, more importantly, they put forward their own strong claim to rule the country.

We have seen the assertions of independent Dalit activism under the leadership of Swami Achutaanand of the Adi-Hindu movement in UP and Bhagya Reddy Varma of the All India Adi-Hindu Conference in AP in the early decades of the twentieth century. But that situation changed with the entry of Gandhi and his formation of *Harijan Sevak Sangh.* This placed Dalit activism and their demands in the above two regions in two separate tracks. It was not that Ambedkar's ideas and his struggle for separate Dalit representation in the emerging political institutions and power did not influence the course of Dalit activism in the two states. But between Ambedkar and Gandhi, whom did the Dalits in those respective states choose? This decided and set the agenda of their activism and laid the foundation for the future course of Dalit politics in UP and AP.

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Drawing inspiration from the Adi-Hindu movement and its agenda, the Dalits in UP acknowledged Ambedkar and his leadership during the proceedings of the Round Table Conference and during the course of the Poona Pact and followed his mode of politics in their region. They also established a branch of Scheduled Castes Federation. Thus, the idea of *political power* was strongly rooted in their activism and politics. In AP, although some of the educated Dalits were influenced by Ambedkar and his activism, they were handicapped by the fact that they were few in number. A majority of the Dalit leaders in the state were mainly operating under the shadow of the Brahmins, especially the Congress Brahmin benefactors. They were drawn into the politics of *social reform* and could do precious little for their share in the emerging power. It was as if the Brahmins would look after them forever and sort out everything on their behalf. The patronage of the Congress Brahmins resulted in the induction of the Dalits and their leaders into the *Harijan Sevak Sangh* and turned them into activists of the temple-entry campaign. Thus, the idea of *social equality* and the demand for *representation* that had been forcefully articulated through dalit activism was pushed to the bottom of the Dalit agenda. The

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differential importance given to the idea of political power by the Dalit leaders of UP and AP led them on different paths and gave results which become clearly visible in the post-Independence UP and AP.

II

The second phase of Dalit activism took place in post-Independence India. In this phase Dalit politics and activism can be analysed broadly in two periods: (1) from India's Independence to until the late 1970's, and (2) from the early 1980's to the late 1990's. In the first period we can see two important aspects about politics in post-Independence India. Firstly, there was the establishment of Congress dominance in most parts of India, including UP and AP. Due to the dominance of the Congress in the first stage, Dalit political activities were organised around the reference point of the Congress regime in these two states; it was organized in terms of being either for or against the dominance of the Congress. Secondly, political representation for Dalits in post-Independence India, just as it was in colonial India, had become a farce due to the inherent drawbacks in the system. A majority of the Dalit candidates that won in those seats of representation belonged to the Congress Party and so the Congress was the major beneficiary of political representation for the Dalits. Yet, there was a small but strong presence of the RPI in UP and AP and the Dalit leadership also sought to ally with the Muslims in UP and the other lower castes in AP. But the RPI could not continue for a long time, especially after the 1967 elections, due to the politics of co-option by the Congress. With the co-option of the Dalit leadership into the Congress-fold, independent Dalit politics experienced a long hiatus.

The Congress has primarily followed two strategies in the appropriation and marginalisation of Dalit leadership. First, for the reserved constituencies it selected those Dalit candidates who do not speak their mind, or who simply parroted the language of the Congress. In fact, they were "non-militant and ha[d] no power in the local or state Congress organisations."[748] Secondly, it appropriated the Dalit leadership from the RPI

[748] Brass, R. Paul (1965) *Factional Politics in an Indian State: The Congress Party in Uttar Pradesh,* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, p. 105.

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by providing material benefits, such as sending B.P. Maurya to the USA. By doing so the Congress not merely weakened the independent Dalit leadership, but also made the "numerous organisations in Uttar Pradesh for the advancement of the Scheduled Castes and "depressed classes" ... content to serve as agencies for the distribution of Congress patronage."[749]

Meanwhile social relations have undergone a huge change. To a large extent this is due to the developmental activities in the State. Two of the most important activities that affected a permanent change in rural India in general and rural Uttar Pradesh in particular were a) the Zamindari Abolition Act and subsequent land reforms and b) the Green Revolution. The Zamindari Abolition Act took away a large proportion of land hitherto held by the Zamindars, who primarily came from among the Brahmins, Thakurs and Ashraf Muslims, and distributed it mainly among the peasant communities. These beneficiary communities were predominantly drawn from the upper castes within the larger Shudra category. The activities undertaken through the Green Revolution brought about commercialisation of agriculture by encouraging facilities, such as better irrigation, high-yielding varieties of seeds, subsidised fertilizers and market accessibility. Due to these developmental activities of the State we have witnessed the emergence of a class of 'rural capitalist farmers'[750] from among the traditional upper castes as well as from among the rural dominant castes that have come to constitute the upper layers in the Shudra category.

Although the Dalits were, in the name of not being peasants, excluded from these developmental activities, they were to benefit from and through other programmes and policies. For instance, government-owned land has been distributed among the Dalits for housing, as also a small proportion of surplus agricultural land under the land ceiling laws. The reservation facilities not only produced a class of political leaders, but more

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[749] Ibid., p. 105.

[750] See Hasan, Zoya. 1998. *Quest for Power…* especially, chapters 2 & 3: 'Social Conflict and Political Discontent: The Historic Decline of the Congress', and 'Agrarian Change and Rural Unrest: Farmers in the Forefront', pp: 17-120; Lietan, G.K and Ravi Srivastava. 1999. *Unequal Partners: Power Relations, Devolution and Development in Uttar Pradesh,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, esp. chapter 2: 'Land, Politics, People', pp: 38-82.

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importantly, resulted in the emergence of a small section of educated and employed people among them, who in turn, constituted a Dalit middle-class. It is true that a vast majority of the Dalit masses neither benefited from the developmental activities of the State, nor from the reservations. But all this generated tremendous awareness among the Dalits and resulted in their conscientisation. They are now, to give two examples, able to question the social discrimination against them by the Brahmins, and social domination as well as economic exploitation by the Thakurs. It is, indeed, this Dalit questioning of the traditional as well as of modern caste power - acquired through the augmentation of the class position, that has led to social conflict in UP since the early 1970's. We have noted some of the incidents of violence against the Dalits and the response of the latter.

During the same period the Dalit leadership in AP was completely domesticated by the Congress's upper caste leadership, especially the Reddys. Of course, Damodaram Sanjeevaiah, a Congress Dalit leader was made chief minister of AP, but it was more to pacify the infighting among factions of the Congress' Reddys rather than from a real zeal to give the reigns of power to a Dalit. Except in the political arena, Dalit politics and their activism in AP simply followed the path of UP, particularly in the programmes of land distribution and Green Revolution. In the sense, just as in UP, in AP also the non-Brahmin upper castes, particularly the Kammas, Reddys, Kapus benefited from these programmes and further marginalised the lower castes, especially the Dalits. And one important outcome of these programmes was the consolidation of power in Telugu society and the economy by the Reddys and Kammas, the two dominant upper castes, which were already dominating the political sphere of AP. As the Dalits were more or less excluded from these developmental activities, the impact of these programmes was rarely felt by the Dalits. However, they benefited from some of the exclusive programmes undertaken for the development of Dalits, such as the distribution of waste-lands, and housing sites for the rural Dalits etc. A section among the Dalits also benefited from the reservation policy.

By the late '70's and the early '80's, the Telugu society could witness the changes brought in by the developmental activities both at the top and bottom of the social

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hierarchy. While the upper castes managed to consolidate their power and domination in the socio-economic and political spheres, there was a tremendous surge of consciousness among the Dalits of their oppression and exploitation. This in turn, led to a strong zeal to improve their condition. And so wherever and whenever there was upper caste oppression and discrimination against them, the Dalits began to question it. The upper castes, who were habituated to oppressing and discriminating against the Dalits, could not reconcile themselves with the growing consciousness as well as questioning by the Dalits. 'The Malas and Madigas are forgetting their position, they needed to be taught a lesson so that they know their position' – had been the attitude of the upper castes towards the Dalits. This attitude led to increased incidences of violence by upper castes against the Dalit in the late '70's and the early '80's. A few of the horrific cases of violence were, Karamchedu, Chundur, Neerukonda and Padirikuppam. These incidents of violence, instead of resulting in the suppression of Dalit consciousness – as hoped by the upper castes - resulted in stronger determination by the Dalits to question and fight against socio-political domination and casteism of the upper castes. And this led to the formation of the Andhra Pradesh Dalit Maha Sabha, under the leadership of Bojja Tarakam and Katti Padma Rao.

The period of Congress dominance in UP (1951-89) and AP (1956-83) marks the first stage in the second phase of Dalit activism. We can summarise the following aspects as important to this phase:

- In post-Independence India, the Congress emerged as the most dominant political party and the Congress became the major beneficiary of the system of political representation for Dalits. Dalit activism during this period of Congress dominance was either in favour of or against the Congress.
- Despite the dominance of the Congress, there was a small but strong presence of RPI-based independent Dalit activism in UP and AP. But that presence was eroded due to the politics of co-option by the Congress.
- Despite benefiting from Dalit representation, the Congress did little to improve the socio-economic condition of the Dalits. The Dalits might not have benefited from these measures, such as land distribution and Green Revolution, but

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reservations for Dalits in education and employment resulted in the emergence of a small but assertive section of the Dalit middle-class, which in turn would become funding agents for Dalit politics.

- Their general development and increased levels of education led to the rise of Dalit consciousness in the rural areas. And with this consciousness Dalits in the countryside became assertive and began to question the dominance of the upper castes and others which resulted in the violence against Dalits both in UP and AP. In the context of the acts of violence and discrimination against them, the Dalits took to organisational mobilisations in the form of BAMCEF in UP and APDMS in AP.

The third phase is emergence of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Dalit socio-political activism under the banner of that party. This phase, both for convenience and for the purpose of capturing the nuances in the trajectories of Dalit politics, was examined in three parts. The first part was about the formation of BAMCEF under the leadership of Kanshi Ram and the emergence of the BSP from out of that formation. After Independence it is not just the political space, but more importantly, the institutional space also that has been occupied and dominated by the Brahmins and other upper castes. The formation of BAMCEF with exclusive membership of the Dalits, Adivasis, Minorities and other lower caste employees from the central as well as various state government organisations and institutions demonstrate the domination of the upper castes as well as a sense of alienation and exclusion that the Dalits and other lower castes and communities experienced. In a way, it is not just the Dalit Congress political leaders that felt alienated by the domination of the Brahmins, but Dalit government employees as well. Interestingly the BSP was not the outcome of the efforts of the Dalit political leaders but an outcome of the concerted efforts by the Dalit employees.

There are similarities in the two Dalit organisations, BAMCEF in UP and the APDMS in AP. They both emerged in the context of severe oppression and violence of the upper castes against the Dalits, the leadership for these organisations was provided by the middle-class Dalits and both the organisations rose against the domination and hegemony

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of the upper castes over the socio-economic, political and cultural spheres in their respective states. Yet, one could notice qualitative differences between these two organisations in terms of their activities, and the ideas generated from those activities. For instance, BAMCEF's two most important activities, 'Ambedkar Mela on Wheels' and 'Denunciation of the Poona Pact', was not only to awaken the Dalit public against the injustices done to them by Gandhi and Congress through the Poona Pact, but more importantly, to propagate the ideas and ideals of Ambedkar, especially the importance of political power for the oppressed. This actually led to a major exodus of the Dalit masses from the fold of the Congress to become a support base for the BSP.

Dalit activism under the leadership of the APDMS did not take a similar course of action. It emphasised ideas of *social equality* and sought to fight annihilation of caste; and also sought to fight for land and livelihood (*boomi kosam, bhukti kosam*). Undoubtedly these are all important questions which aimed to strengthen the Dalits and other marginalised castes and communities socially, economically and culturally. But they could not succeed in achieving those objectives in the absence of political power. In other words, political power is *sine qua non* even to strengthen the socio-economic condition of the Dalits. Thus, we saw that there is a qualitative difference in the approaches adopted by the Dalit leadership in the two states, i.e., while the Dalits in UP adopted the approach of *revolution from above,* that is – giving political power into the hands of the oppressed and with that power worked to reconstruct the socio-economic condition that produces the oppressor and the oppressed. By contrast the Dalit leadership in AP followed the path of *revolution from below,* i.e., they sought to strengthen the Dalits and other oppressed masses even before they acquired political power. Of course, it must be stated here that it is not that the Dalit leadership in AP did not emphasise the need for political power at all. They did this by forming the Poor People's Party, renewing the Republican Party of India and also by inviting Kanshi Ram to launch the BSP in the state. But the lack of unity among the Dalits, especially between the Madigas and Malas, on the question of social justice, and lack of support to these Dalit political formations from other oppressed sections in the state, resulted in the failure of all these efforts in acquiring political power. Moreover, by the time the Dalit leadership began to direct their energies towards political

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power, the consciousness raised through the activities of the APDMS among the Dalit masses had nearly withered away, especially since the government policies of liberalisation had begun to threaten their livelihoods. For an ordinary Dalit, fending for his daily meal is more important than political power for the oppressed.

III

Dalit politics in the third stage (since 1990's) revolves around the idea of *social justice,* both in UP and AP. One must note here that after relentlessly pursuing the politics of *political power* for the oppressed and on the assumption of political power, the BSP, a Dalit-based party, is in a position where it can use the State to pursue the programmes and activities that would achieve *social justice*. But Dalits in AP because of their overwhelming emphasis on ideas of *social equality* and *annihilation of caste* find themselves still at the stage where they are seeking *social justice* from the state. Apart from these differences in position, there are also differences regarding the constitutive elements of social justice as advocated by the Dalits in UP and AP. The idea of *social justice* advocated by the BSP mainly contains two elements: *horizontalisation of the vertical order,* and *democratisation of the undemocratic political order.* The two elements in the idea of social justice by AP Dalits are: *recognition and representation.* The idea of recognition contains two broad elements: recognising the Dalits as equal human beings, i.e., social equality, and annihilation of caste. The idea of representation also contains two components: firstly, the representation for Dalits at all levels in the structures of political power – this aspect is pursued by all the Dalits, and secondly, the distribution of Dalit reservations among all the Dalit castes. The latter aspect is pursued by the marginalised Dalit castes, particularly the Madigas and Rellis.

After years of considerable study in understanding the caste system and attitudes of the upper castes, the BSP leadership came to realise that before the annihilation of caste there is greater need for the horizontalization of the vertical order and in achieving equality among castes. Caste equality, in turn, would result not just in changing the casteist mind of the upper castes, but more importantly, would help in rooting out caste itself. Towards the realisation of this objective, the Dalits and the BSP leadership took to acknowledging

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and adopting Dalit titles. This is one of way of making positive the hitherto abused identities and forcing the significant others to recognise that positivity and consequently, treat them with respect and dignity. Madigas in AP also followed a similar strategy and succeeded in easing out humiliation contained in that identity. Whether adoption of such caste-based identities by the Dalit castes leads to annihilation of caste is something that cannot be answered just yet, surely the Dalits feel more confident about themselves through the adaptation of such caste-based identities. Thus, one can confidently claim the arrival of social equality among castes. At this point, it may be recognised here that while a majority of Dalit castes in UP have been adopting their caste names, in AP it is largely the Madigas who have taken this strategy. Other Dalit castes, particularly the Malas and Adi-Andhras are not in favour of adopting caste identity.

Until the late 1980's, the Indian political arena had witnessed the dominance of upper castes through various political parties. The BSP, whose second objective is its social justice agenda, i.e., democratisation of the undemocratic political order, is set to change such political dominance of the upper castes by increasing the presence of the lower castes and reducing the presence of the upper castes. As a way of achieving this objective, the party made caste the basis in the distribution of seats for political representation. That is to say, with an avowed aim to bring in more and more hitherto marginalised castes into the political arena the party employed the strategy of caste-wise distribution of the representative seats. Although this method of distribution certainly results in the inclusion of the hitherto marginalised castes and communities in the democratic process and political power, it also marginalised those castes that did not have a sufficient percentage of population, for it was not just caste, but weight in terms of the population of castes that became the yardstick in the distribution of representative seats. In any case, we have to recognise the differences that the Dalits brought into the upper caste-dominated polity and society through their political engagement with the BSP. There are tremendous changes in the relations between the Dalits and non-Dalits in UP. The old forms and patterns of discrimination against the Dalits had become somewhat antique, and invitations are exchanged between the Dalits and non-Dalits on the occasions of marriages and social gatherings. Separate seating and separate dining during

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such occasions have also got substantially eroded, in fact, they have become a thing of past. In a word, Dalits, who have been denied recognition and respect, have acquired political power, which in turn has resulted in new confidence in themselves and more importantly, respectable recognition from the caste-Hindu society.

Interestingly, the two elements of social justice of AP Dalits are not quite fundamentally different from those ideas advocated by the BSP. For instance, the idea of *recognition* is nothing but recognition of their *difference* with others in the Dalit category. It makes provision for a share within the Dalit quota of reservations on the basis of their proportional percentage within the total size of the Dalit population. Although there are no differences in the principles of social justice as advocated by the BSP and the Dandora, the BSP's rejection of Dandora's demand for classification of Dalit reservations at the national level and by the Mala Mahanadu at the state-level has placed Dalit politics and activism in a tangled web.

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