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THE NEW FOOTSOLDIERS!

*The Ideological and Institutional Incorporation of
Dalits into Hindutva Maelstrom*

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There are many lower orders in the Hindu society whose economic, political and social needs are the same as those of majority of Muslims and they would be far more ready to make a common cause with the Muslims for achieving common ends than they would with the high caste hindus who have denied and deprived them of ordinary human rights for centuries.

—Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
Writings and Speeches Vol 8., P. 359

'[U]ntouchability, is a kind of disease of the Hindus..it is a mental twist... I do not know how my friend is going to untwist the twist which the Hindus have got for thousands of years unless they are all sent to some kind of hospital.'

—Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar
(1954 , Quoted in Bhagwan Das, 95 :53)

Introduction

Dalits, or ex 'untouchables', comprising one-sixth of India's population, a majority of whom still live at the bottom of the social hierarchy called caste system live a precarious existence. The plight of this section - which is routinely discriminated against and subjected to overt-covert violence of many forms - has of late been much discussed in the international fora as well.

There is no denying the fact that despite half-a-century of constitutional measures - which has helped a minority among it benefit from the affirmative action programmes and has helped emergence of a more vocal and assertive section among it - the system of exclusion in the form of untouchability continues in myriad ways and forms. Dalits till date are denied entry into temples or served tea in different glasses in hotels and restaurants or are not allowed to draw water from government wells which are situated in dominant caste areas or Dalit women are driven to prostitution thru' religious customs like Devadasi or are forced to do menial and polluting jobs like scavenging. And it is a sign of the longevity of this system that despite many a superficial changes due to the compulsions of modernity it has maintained the core of purity and pollution intact.

Of late one is witness to the growing awareness about the plight of this section of society. Individual researchers, political-social formations as well as national-international institutions have come forward to document the present lifeworlds of the Dalits in all its dimensions and present action plans to ameliorate their situation. The latest report submitted by the United Nations 'Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination' presented in its seventieth session (19th February - 9th March 2007) could be considered a classic case which has tremendous importance for the policymakers as well as activists.

The following writeup does not intend to summarise what is being said in all the earlier reports nor does it want to reemphasise the 'hidden apartheid' practised by the rest of the civil society towards the Dalits, which has yet to make a radical rupture with the ideology of purity and pollution even in the wee hours of 21st century.

One could say that one wants to take a dispassionate look at an emergent phenomenon in the lifeworlds of the Dalits themselves. And it pertains to what is popularly understood as growing fascination of a section of the Dalits towards Hindutva.

The genocide in Gujarat (2002) led by the organisations affiliated to the Sangh Parivar - which officially saw deaths of more than a thousand innocent people - has made us aware of this 'detour' in the trajectory of the Dalit movement. Close watchers of the Dalit scenario who have seen militancy of this section on various issues of social concern (may it be the street battles in Bombay between activists of the

Dalit Panthers and the Shiv Sena in early 70s or their long drawn struggle to rename a university to commemorate Ambedkar's contribution in the field of education) and their inbuilt hatred for the project for Brahminical fascism presented as Hindutva are baffled by the newfound bonhomie between forces of Hindutva and a section of Ambedkar's own followers.

It is no less significant that this phenomenon of inversion of Dalit consciousness and communalisation of the movement has occurred/is occurring in the backdrop of the greater Dalit assertion which had made its presence felt in the 90s - a phenomenon which has helped unleash the process of deepening and widening of democracy. It cannot be denied that wherever radical or democratic forces are strong, or Dalits are a dominant partner in the political arithmetic, one finds that a large section of the Dalit masses have aligned themselves with them and are engaged in struggles of dignity, livelihood and political power and seem to be aware of the designs of the Hindutva brigade. It has also been well documented that while a section of the thinking Dalits has shown affinity towards the Hindutva project or preferred to side with the marauders of the Hindutva brigade during the genocide, a significant section among them decided to side with the minorities despite heavy odds and helped save them from the impending attacks.¹

The conflation of Dalit identity with that of a Hindutva fanatic can be said to resemble the behaviour of a section of women in the aftermath of Babri Mosque demolition (6th December 1992). One very well knows how this period witnessed large scale participation of women especially Hindu women in the riots and

which posed quite a few uncomfortable questions before the women's movement itself. To quote Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia "...Politically and methodologically this assertive participation of women in right wing campaigns, pulled down many of our assumptions in a state of crisis for we have always seen women as victims of violence rather than its perpetrators ...” (*Women and the Hindu Right* : Ed. Tanika Sarkar and Urvashi Butalia, Kali for Women 1995, Page 3).

One could definitely raise a query regarding the extra attention being paid to the Dalits, while the role played by the different non-Dalit caste groups is not being discussed. There is no denying the fact that if the genocide in Gujarat in the year 2002 made us aware of the new detour in the Dalit movement, it also exposed the moral vacuousness of the middle classes -mainly belonging to the upper castes or to an extent backward castes - who were party to the crimes being committed against the minorities. Peace and justice loving activists and journalists have provided details in their reports about all such looting done by the middle and upper castes people who used all latest gadgets to 'invite' friends to this collective plunder.

There cannot be an iota of doubt that one needs to deliberate on all the dimensions of this phenomenon. It could be nobody's intention that while discussing the growing legitimacy to the politics of hate and exclusion among the oppressed sections, one should not talk about similar processes unfolding themselves among the so called upper and backward castes and the cleverness with which they rationalised their crimes.

It needs to be emphasised that Hindutva's ascendance in the Indian polity and society would not have been possible if different caste groups from the *Varna* to the *Avarna* category had not found a common cause with its *weltanschauung*. This definitely demands a closer look at the dynamic underway in all such categories. Also a lesser-explored aspect of the whole Hindutva juggernaut has been the role played in its genesis by the Brahminical reaction to the process of empowerment of *Shudras-Atishudras* unleashed by the likes of Mahatma Phule-Dr. Ambedkar.

But as far as the present write-up is concerned we aim to focus basically on the way Dalits and their movement(s) have negotiated their path in the burgeoning Hindutva project. It cannot be disputed that the growing bonhomie between Dalits (and tribals) and forces of Hindutva carries importance not only because it magnifies the threat posed by communalism but also because it weakens its potential resistance also. We also plan to look at the way Sangh Parivar has repackaged its hate agenda that despite its nearly half century consistent opposition to Ambedkar and his brand of social-political intervention, today it is in a position to attract a section of Dalit masse as well as intellectuals to its side. One also need to understand the whole concept of 'Samajik Samarasta' (could be loosely translated as social harmony) which the Sangh Parivar has fashioned to co-opt Dalits in its gameplan to usher into a *Hindu Rashtra*.

—Subhash Gatade

1

NAMDEO DHASAL :

NOT JUST THE NAME OF A POET-ACTIVIST

A picture is worth so many words. And definitely it was no ordinary picture. It showed the present Sangh supremo Mr. K. S. Sudarshan hugging and saluting Namdeo Dhasal,² the radical Dalit poet of the seventies. The next frame showed Dhasal returning the gesture in a similar manner. The occasion was a book release function where many other stalwarts of the Sangh Parivar were also present. But it was not just photo-op session. In his speech Dhasal underlined failure of the left to address caste question but simultaneously sang paeans to the RSS for its work among the Dalits and also declared openly that he had lot of expectations from this work. The said programme to release the book 'Samrasta ke Sutra' was held on 30th August 2006 at Hindi Bhavan, Delhi.

Keen watchers of the Dalit movement would vouch that it was unimaginable to even think of a similar photograph in the seventies. Times when its then Supremo Golwalkar had to face public wrath for

his glorification of *Manusmriti* - the age old scripture of the Hindus, which legitimised and sanctified the secondary status of the Dalits - in an interview to the Marathi newspaper *Navakal*. It was a period when the resurgent Dalit movement found itself in continuous confrontation with this Brahminical project of Hindu consolidation.

It is clear that the abandonment of a radical agenda by a person of Dhasal's stature and his ultimate cooption in the project of Hindutva brigade cannot be considered an exception. (After a long innings in the Shiv Sena, Mr. Dhasal left it last year to join a grand federation of disparate Dalit groups) It is rather a marker of the deeper malaise, which afflicts the post Ambedkarian Dalit movement.

May it be the case of Bahujan Samaj Party, a significant experiment espousing the cause of Ambedkar, joining hands with BJP thrice to form government in Uttar Pradesh in mid-nineties and early years of 21st century, or a section of the Dalits metamorphosing themselves into footsoldiers of Hindutva brigade in the Gujarat genocide of 2002 or for that matter the 'success' of the Hindutva brigade in pitting significant section of the Dalit masses against Muslims in the Eastern Part of UP, or the support a section of the Dalit intellectuals³ provided to the whole idea of Bhimshakti-Shivshakti peddled by Uddhav Thakre, the heir apparent in the Shiv Sena, before the last elections to the Maharashtra assembly, all goes to show the deep inroads made by the idea of Hindutva among the Dalits.

One could easily surmise that much water has

flown down the Ganga-Jamuna as far as the trajectory of the Dalit movement is concerned. Definitely it also shows the distance travelled by the RSS itself, which had since its inception, detested Ambedkar, the legendary son of the oppressed and his brand of social-political intervention to challenge the purity-pollution based regime of Varna-caste hegemony.⁴

Gone are the days when Ambedkar openly declared that 'He might have been born a Hindu but won't die a Hindu' way back in 1937 and led his followers to embrace Buddhism, today a section of his followers have no qualms in cosying up to a project which is engaged in furthering a particular brand of Hinduism based on the *weltanschauung* of the likes of Golwalkars and Savarkars.⁵

Question naturally arises why have things come to such a pass that the most oppressed section among the caste-Varna hierarchy is happy adorning the Saffron bandanna and busy joining one of those fanatic gangs. How does one comprehend this metamorphosis of the age old victims of graded hierarchy of Brahminism into perpetrators themselves?

Despite attempts to dwell upon into it and discern the different threads of the phenomenon⁶ there are still many unanswered questions. If Hindutva-isation of the Dalit consciousness is a worrisome thing, then how does one look at the process of Hinduisation of these subalterns, which has been an ongoing phenomenon? How does one look at the plethora of sects and jet-age Sadhus, many of whom have made deep inroads among the Dalits? Is it possible to establish any interconnection between the

two? How does one decipher the strategies used by the forces of Hindutva - mainly the Sangh Parivar - to co-opt the Dalits in their wider gameplan of reorganising the Indian society based on the *weltanschauung* of 'one people, one nation, one culture'? Does one notice any continuity in the methodologies adopted by it or one can see a clear break in its journey? Is it possible to draw on similar experiences of communalisation among other oppressed sections of society e.g. women, tribals etc?

2

DALIT'S FASCINATION TOWARD HINDUTVA: EARLY STIRRINGS!

It was year 2002 when the Indian Republic had to come to terms with many 'shocks' : A year which witnessed planned genocide of mainly Muslims in the western province of Gujarat in the aftermath of a tragic burning of bogey of a train which caught fire by accident.

It underlined the extent of brutality, which the Hindu right could engage in and simultaneously exposed the myth perpetuated by a section of the liberal intelligentsia that power could moderate it. In fact the brazenness with which the ideologues of the Hindu right glorified the planned genocide, wherein they talked of repeating 'the successful Gujarat experiment' elsewhere, came as a shock to many. All of us were witness to the tremendous communalisation of civil society which made it impossible to put any pan-Indian resistance to the machinations of the Hindutva brigade. The way the state machinery connived in the carnage rather vindicated the 'institutionalised riot system' in operation in the

country, a phenomenon made explicit by people like Paul Bremen.

But apart from many of these disturbing features, reports pouring in from different parts of the state also provided details of another kind of news - namely participation of a section of the Dalits and Adivasis in the mayhem. The way a section of these subaltern classes joined the marauders of the Hindutva brigade, has come out in many of the reports filed by reporters on the Gujarat situation. One such report was filed by an *Outlook* correspondent (date 1/7/2002). In the said report 'Poisoned Edge: The Sangh Exploits Dalit and tribal frustration to recruit soldiers for Hindutva's war' it was revealed :

*"...Of all the disturbing facts that emerged from the post-mortem of the communal carnage in Gujarat, the most baffling and alarming is the large-scale participation of Dalits and tribals in the rioting. Independent observers, researchers and social activists agreed that their involvement was unprecedented. Never before was the divide between the Dalits and Muslims so pronounced and so violent. Even more shocking: tribals, who have little in common with mainstream Hinduism, brandished weapons, looted and killed as they violently avenged the 'attack on Hindus'."*⁷

While one could easily find glee on the faces of the Sangh ideologues, who came up with readymade rationalisations of such acts, for a large section of the activists of the anti-communal movement, the very

piece of news itself was incomprehensible as well as baffling. The reaction of the Dalit/Bahujan intellectuals was no better. In fact, the only explanation of sorts which was resorted to by most of them, talked of the Dalits playing into the hands of the Hindutva brigade. It was told how they were lured into becoming perpetrators with simple promises.

Perhaps they did not mean it, but all these facile explanations were denigrating these subalterns further.⁸ They communicated an impression that Dalits were mere pawns who could be waylaid by anyone. At a deeper philosophical level, this also led to the question of agency ? Can the Dalits be considered mere victims who still remain at the mercy of the dominant castes or (to put it bluntly) whether the incorporation of the Dalits in the Hindutva maelstrom could be considered a matter of choice adopted by quite a few among them?

Of course, the simple sounding questions were not easy to answer.⁹

A related question on mind was whether Gujarat 2002 which awakened us to this phenomenon could be considered as its point of emergence or whether it had a 'history' of its own which needed to be recovered.

A cursory glance at few of the old reports on communal flareups in post-independent India, makes it clear that eighties happened to be the decade when one could see Dalits growing affinity towards communal elements or their participation in anti-Muslim violence.

It is a less reported fact that the infamous Moradabad riots in early eighties were marked by the involvement of Balmikis (a Dalit caste whose 'occupation' under the Varna hierarchy revolves around cleaning) in the carnage. One still remembers the event which had sort of triggered the flareup. The sudden (inadvertent or so) appearance of a pig from a nearby Balmiki basti in a religious congregation of Muslims held on one of their auspicious days had provided the initial spark.

The year 1984 witnessed eruption of anti-Sikh riots in major part of northern India - aided and abetted by local Congress leaders - in the aftermath of the killing of Ms. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. South India also saw similar flareups albeit with reduced intensity. Thousands of innocent Sikhs lost their lives and lakhs of people were displaced in the ensuing mayhem. Delhi, the capital of India, was one of the worst affected during these riots. The report brought out by different civil rights organisation like People's Union For Civil Liberties (PUCL) and Citizens for Democracy (CFD) etc. titled 'Who Are The Guilty?' which documented the carnage in Delhi provides a glimpse of the manner in which Dalits also joined the mayhem.

The oral submission before the Citizens Tribunal on Ayodhya (July 1993) made by Nalini Pandit, a retired Professor of Economics, gives us an idea about the thinking on the issue going on then. Her presentation before the tribunal focussed itself on 'attraction or otherwise of Dalits towards Hindutva', 'changing attitudes of Dalits to Muslims', 'effects of Hindutva on caste struggles' etc. In her submission

she gave few examples of the participation of Dalit leaders/activists in the December'92 riots in Bombay after the demolition of Babri Mosque.¹⁰ Of course she also observed that where the Dalits '[l]ived as consolidated groups and one or the other Buddhist Party had an influence, they remained aloof and even gave protection to Muslim families living amidst them.'¹¹

One also notices similar processes at work elsewhere. The activities of the likes of *Hindu Munnani* in the Dalit bastis of Chennai and the brutalisation of the *Khatik* community in Kanpur under some Kala Baccha (since killed) for use in the communal conflagrations during the Ram Janambhoomi movement are also part of the same process. V. Geetha in her perceptive essay on 'Dalits, Hindutva and Dravidian movement' (Ref . Hindutva and Dalits, ed. Anand Teltumbde) shares her experience of the Tamil society. According to her : 'In Tamil Nadu, since the late 1980s, Hindu political groups aligned to the Sangh Parivar in one way or another have attempted to, and partially succeeded in, recruiting Dalit youth to their ranks. This has been the case with groups in Chennai that have looked to swelling their ranks during the annual Ganesh Chaturthi processions with a posse of young Dalits from the city's various slums...'

Looking back it is clear that today the idea of Hindutva has quite a few takers in the Dalit movement. But there was a time when Hindutva was an anathema in the ranks of the Dalits. Articulate sections of the Dalit movement rightly knew that the essence of *Hindu Rashtra* is restoration of Brahminical supremacy and relegation of the Dalits to a secondary status much on

the lines of Manusmriti, the sacred edicts of the Hindus. People very well knew how the triumvirate of Hindutva Savarkar- Hedgewar and Golwalkar glorified Manusmriti.

3

HINDUTVA'S LOVE FOR MANUSMRITI

It was late '60s when Maharashtra witnessed a massive mobilisation of people, cutting across party lines, which was precipitated by a controversial interview given by Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar,¹² the then Supremo (Sarsanghchalak) of RSS, to a Marathi daily *Navakal*. Golwalkar in this interview had extolled the virtues of *Chaturvarnya* (the division of the Hindus in four Varnas) and had also glorified Manusmriti, the ancient edicts of the Hindus.¹³ Ofcourse, it was not for the first time that the Supremo's love and admiration for Manusmriti, which sanctifies and legitimises, the structured hierarchy based on caste and gender, had become public. In fact, at the time of framing the constitution also, he did not forget to show his disapproval towards the gigantic effort, claiming that the said ancient edict could serve the purpose.¹⁴

K.R. Malkani, a leading ideologue of the RSS admits in his book 'The RSS Story', that Golwalkar, the second supremo of the RSS, 'saw no reason why Hindu law should break its ancient links with the Manusmriti'.¹⁵ Similarly, in his 'Bunch of Thoughts,' Golwalkar, quoting

from the Rig Veda and echoing Manu, empathically declares, 'Brahmin is the head, Kshatriya the hands, Vaisya the stomach, and Shudras the feet. This means that the people who have this four-fold arrangement, the Hindu people, is (sic) our God'.¹⁶

In fact it would be more prudent to say that the very edifice of RSS, which yearned for a Hindu Rashtra based on Brahminical worldview, was built on an inbuilt antagonism towards the assertion of the *Shudras-Atishudras* and women. And Maharashtra which never had a significant Muslim presence became a home to this project as it was witness to the massive social-cultural movement challenging the stranglehold of Brahminism and Patriarchy under the leadership of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule.¹⁷ The Phule's struggle against the *Shetjis* and *Bhatjis* (Traders and Brahmins) got a new fillip with the emergence of Dr. Ambedkar whose first historic struggle for the dignity of Dalits culminated in the burning of *Manusmriti* itself in 1927. Interestingly most of the studies of the origin and expansion of Hindutva brigade have rather concentrated on the anti-minority aspect of its foundation and have inadvertently or so skipped the anti-Dalit or anti-shudra aspect of its formation which has led us to a situation where a concerted attack on the foundations of the politics Hindutva has not been possible. Although of late one does notice a significant change in the appraisal and also a growing realisation that anti-caste struggle needs to be made an integral part of anti-communal struggle.

Explaining the reasons behind the formation of RSS Dr. Hegdekar rightly tells his biographer

Mr. C.P.Bhishikar (considered the only 'official' biography, 'Sanghvriksha Ke Beej') two component parts of its emergence. Of course like any Sangh activist he does not say it so explicitly and one has to gather inferences from what he said. In it he talks about the rising communal tension because of end of Khilafat movement and secondly, the way non-Brahmin movement (which was founded by Phule) had raised its head.

It was not surprising that Golwalkar did not take kindly to the affirmative action programmes undertaken by the newly independent state for the welfare & empowerment of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. He expressed his disapproval by saying that rulers were digging at the roots of Hindu social cohesion and destroying the spirit of identity that held various sects into a harmonious whole in the past.¹⁸ Denying that Hindu social system was responsible for the plight of the lower castes, he held constitutional safeguards for them as responsible for creating disharmony.

Dr. Ambedkar had envisaged the special privileges for 'Scheduled Castes' for only 10 years from the day we became a republic in 1950. But it is going on, being extended. Continued special privileges on the basis of caste only, is bound to create vested interests in them in remaining as a separate entity. That would harm their integration with the rest of the society.¹⁹

It was the same period when attempts were made to give limited rights to Hindu women in

property and inheritance through the passage of the Hindu Code Bill, which were opposed by Golwalkar and his followers, with the contention that this step was inimical to Hindu traditions and culture. Looking back one could say that RSS was one of the leading force of this all India campaign to stop enactment of the bill. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, who later became the founding President of Jan Sangh - the mass political platform floated by RSS-, and who happened to be a minister in Nehru's cabinet then also expressed his opposition to the passage of the bill in no uncertain terms. It is now history how the bill could not be passed when Ambedkar was the law minister and he resigned from the cabinet mainly on these grounds only.

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, another leading light of the Hindu Right, who is supposed to be the pioneer of the idea of Hindutva, also expressed his admiration for Manusmriti in no uncertain terms. According to him :

Manusmriti is that scripture which is most worshipable after Vedas for our Hindu nation and which from ancient times has become the basis of our culture-customs, thought and practice. This book for centuries has codified the spiritual and divine march of our nation. Even today the rules which are followed by crores of Hindus in their lives and practice are based on Manusmriti. Today Manusmriti is Hindu law.²⁰

Although much water has passed the Ganges (and the Jamuna), it cannot be said that there is any

rethinking in the camp of Hindutva about Manusmriti or the social system sanctioned by it. The only difference which has occurred is that the critique of the present constitution - which at least formally (to quote Dr. Ambedkar) 'ended the days of Manu' - has become more sophisticated. Not a day passes when one of the stalwarts of the Sangh Parivar criticises the constitution for 'bearing colonial imprints' or supposedly 'not caring to local traditions and culture'. It was not for nothing that the BJP had even appointed a commission to review the constitution under some specious plea.

Of course there are occasions when the criticism does not remain so guarded and it manifests itself in a blatant manner. One still remembers how Giriraj Kishore, a RSS pracharak, who happens to be a leading light of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, had rationalised the killings of five Dalits in Jhajjar, Haryana (October 2002) by a mob for committing the 'crime' of skinning a dead cow by saying that 'in our religious scriptures (*Puranas*) life of a cow is more important than any number of people'.

It is now history how Uma Bharati (then a senior leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party) led M.P. government promulgated an ordinance for banning cow slaughter with an official statement which extolled the virtues of Manusmriti. (January 2005) It said : *Manusmriti ranks the slaughterer of cow as predator and prescribes hard punishment for him*'. As Shamsul Islam, in his piece 'Hindutva and Dalits' (Ed. Anand Teltumbde) writes '*It was for the first time in the legal history of independent India that a law was being justified for being in tune with Manusmriti.*' It had no qualms in declaring its commitment to *Manusmriti* although it

very well knew that it was in contravention to the basic principles of constitution.

It is the same BJP which helped install a magnificent statue of Manu in the precincts of Jaipur (capital of Rajasthan, perhaps the only state in India) highcourt in early'90s when Bhairon Singh Shekhawat - a longtime RSS worker and present incumbent to the Vice Presidents' chair- happened to be the Chief Minister.

Yoginder Sikand, a leading scholar on interfaith relations, in one of his perceptive writeup *Hindutva And The Dalit-Bahujans : Dangerous Portents* (www.countercurrents.org) shares his experience interviewing Hindutva leaders :

'Top Hindutva leaders are on record as arguing that the Hindu Rashtra of their dreams would, in emulation of the classical Hindu state that they so ardently espouse, be ruled according to the draconian Bible of Brahminism, the Manusmriti, that consigned the 'lower' castes and even 'upper' caste women to the most cruel form of slavery that humankind has ever devised.'

Interestingly, despite its fascination for Manusmriti, the RSS alongwith its affiliated organisations have been able to win over significant number of Dalits as well tribals to its side. Question would naturally arise how could it do it ?

Whether it is related to the dynamics of the Dalit movement itself which underwent splits after splits in

the post-Ambedkar era and could not figure out its correct bearings in the present polity ? Or it could be explained on the basis of the changed lifeworlds of the Dalits and the process of Sanskritisation which has slowly overtaken wider concerns among them? The ensuing discussion would remain incomplete if we do not take a look at the changes in the modus operandi undertaken by the Hindutva project itself to make itself 'attractive' for the subalterns.

4

UNFOLDING OF A MOVEMENT

Nineties happened to be a decade of great turmoil in the life of the nation. Apart from the neo-liberal changes undertaken in the economy under the canopy of globalisation, there were two parallel (at times overlapping) streams which made their presence felt in the socio-political arena - namely the phenomenon of Dalit-backward assertion and the ascendance of the Hindutva right. In popular parlance it was projected as 'mandal' versus 'kamandal' politics. The assertion of the subalterns was on the one hand a slow reflection of the coming into own of these sections as well as reflection of their growing frustration with the Congress, which had accommodated them under its typical paternalistic mode for quite sometime. The famous 'Congress system' was in fact a carefully carved out block of Brahmins, Dalits and Muslims mainly in northern India, which had proved to be one of its winning combination.

One could even say that the nineties which started with a bang wherein the whole phenomenon of Dalit- Backward assertion helped check the growth

of communal fascism at various levels ended in a whimper with a significant part of the Dalit-Backward swell submerging itself into the 'kamandal' politics. This despite the bitter fact that the Sangh Parivar, the fountainhead of BJP, had never deprecated the *Chaturvarna* system largely responsible for the plight of the Dalits nor apologised, nor have missed any opportunity to castigate Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar for his alleged 'pro-British' opinions or oppose the policy of reservations under one or the other pretext.

It would be opportune to look at the post Ambedkar Dalit movement and do a stock taking of the changes within the Dalit politics to understand the phenomenon. The ups and downs through which the Dalit politics passed through after the death of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar can be broadly divided into three phases - Rise and decline of the Republican Party of India, emergence of the *Dalit Panthers* and thirdly the growing assertion of Dalits for political power and their consequent refusal to remain satisfied merely with education and job opportunities arising out of the policy of reservation.

There is no need to underline the immense potentialities in the phenomenon of Dalit assertion in today's caste ridden polity. There is no denying the fact that it is a step ahead in the real democratisation of the Indian society and the polity dominated by Brahminical values and traditions despite fifty plus year experiment in electoral democracy. The impressive intervention of Bahujan Samaj Party under Kanshiram-Mayawati in the national politics underlines this third stage. It is noteworthy that while in the earlier two stages in the post Ambedkar Dalit

movement, the unfolding Dalit politics in Maharashtra guided its orientation, its role has been increasingly marginalised in the third stage. The success achieved by BSP has certainly encouraged emergence of similar experiments in different parts of the country.

It is noteworthy that at this stage there is another apparent groundswell in various Dalit castes also. One could say that the phenomenon of assertion of identities has trickled down to even subsections of the community/caste itself. These are organizing themselves under the banners of their respective caste and sub-caste for achieving their rights. Consequently their guns are trained besides the *Varna* system also on the so-called rich Dalit castes or the creamy layer in them which they feel have monopolised a large part of the reserved posts. The Mahar/neo-Buddhists vs. Matang and charmakar debate in Maharashtra, Mala vs. Madiga in Andhra Pradesh are symptomatic of this rising trend. So much so that in Andhra Pradesh the dispute between Malas and Madigas, both of them coming under scheduled category, gave rise to a militant agitation of the Madigas. The Madigas under the banner of *Madiga Reservation Porata Samity* launched a statewide militant mass movement for castewise categorisation of reserved seats in educational institutions and jobs etc. so that extremely depressed castes which could not avail of the quota for historical reasons could avail of it now.

It is indeed ironical that at a time when the issue of Dalit assertion has got acceptance even in the mainstream polity in the 90s a counter tendency has emerged which seem to fracture the new found identity. One could also perceive the whole process

as an explosion of identities hitherto suppressed by the hegemonic caste and class structure. In the beginning of the 70s the term Dalit denoted a broad, homogenous fraternity. This is no more the case. If you just say Dalit you are making an incomplete statement. It would be necessary to also specify whether he is a Mala or a Madiga or a Matang or a Charmakar. This process has thrown up new 'icons' from among the different castes and the subcastes as well. There is also a danger of the old leaders who earlier claimed pan Dalit status being reduced to their 'own' caste leaders. The emergence of Avantikabai Pasi in UP or of the famous author Annabhau Sathe in Maharashtra as new leaders of the Matangs underlines this ground reality. Incidentally it is interesting to note that Mr. Sathe remained a Communist Party worker all his life and was a leading light of the progressive writers movement. Nobody would have imagined in his lifetime that one day he would be projected as the leader of 'his caste' and a saffron alliance in power would present his selected writings before the people.

Parties opposed to Congress have skillfully used the persisting differences between different Dalit castes. For example, when the Shiv Sena-BJP government held the reins of power in Maharashtra in mid-nineties, it saw to it that there was representation of Matang and Charmakar in the ministry and the Mahars or Neo-Buddhists are kept out.

It is worth noting that within the Dalit movement especially among its intelligentsia there are three sets of opinions as far as alliance with the saffrons is concerned. Whereas one stream of opinion advocates such an alliance on tactical grounds and says that such

temporary unity would be beneficial in the longer run. Essentially its argument revolves round the inherent contradictions between the upwardly mobile backward caste people and the Dalits especially in the countryside. They feel that at the turn of the 20th century Dalits are more oppressed by these new kulaks largely coming from the backward castes and that their alliance with upper caste party like the BJP can save them from their onslaught. They clearly say that 'social fascism' (as represented by the emergent Kulak leadership) is more dangerous than communal fascism. They even belch out statistics to show the number of Dalits killed at the hands of the Kulaks in different parts of the country.

The other stream while categorically opposing any type of alliance with the saffrons even for a shorter period advocates that the Dalits should search for their natural allies which according to them can only be the leftists of various hues? According to them the fascist project is essentially aimed at the restoration of the Brahminical order and nothing should be done to sanctify such a medieval project.

The third stream advocates equidistance from both the opponents of 'communal fascism' or adversaries of 'social fascism'. It talks of developing a strong Dalit movement on its own strength and then only become a key player in the polity.

THE TRAJECTORY OF DALITHOOD

*Babasahebanchya Mage Kuni Kay Kele/ Kuni Jhale
MLA, Kuni Jhale MLC, Aamhi Rahilo Upashi*
(What we did after Babasaheb's Demise, Somebody became MLA, somebody became MLC, We remained Hungry)- A Marathi song famous in 70s.

The lifeworlds of the Dalits in the wee hours of 21st century present a contradictory picture.

On the one hand we have before us a majority which is poor, which is landless, which is subjected to deprivations and injustices of different kinds. Caste discrimination still persists in most parts of the country. Untouchability might have been officially abolished more than half a century ago but it still exists. Crimes against this section of society are rampant. Ranging from the police to the administration to the judiciary, one very well witnesses the continuing stranglehold of *Varna* mindset.

A number of-protective and developmental measures have been initiated in accordance with

Constitutional provisions by the government for providing protection to untouchables (Scheduled Castes or SCs) and the tribals. Under the 'protective' sphere, untouchability was legally abolished and its practice in any form forbidden by the Protection of Civil Rights (Anti-Untouchability) Act of 1955. To protect the category of SC and ST in a more effective and comprehensive manner a few other legislations were introduced. Policies of reservation and representation were adopted to improve the access and participation of these sections in the economic, educational and political spheres.

But as Justice V.K. Krishna Iyer, the legendary human rights activist and a former Supreme Court Judge puts it, all such 'half hearted legislation has proved to be impotent and ineffectual in practice'. He also added that the aim behind these attempts was to have a 'more effective, more comprehensive and more punitive provisions of law'. However 'the ruling classes saw to it that, at the functional level, the legislations were paper tigers' (All quotes from 'Forward by Justice Iyer to a book ' *Dalit Utpidan aur Vidhik Upchar*, by P.L.Mimroth, Nov. 2000, Delhi)

As it is clear from many other reports, the overall impact of all such measures leaves much to be desired. But there is no denying the fact that a minority among the Dalits has definitely benefitted from such measures instituted by the government. The affirmative action programmes - comprising of viz. seats in educational institutions, quotas in employment opportunities, political representation at various levels - undertaken by the state in the post-independence era, coupled with the changes in the economy has definitely impacted

the lifeworlds of a section of Dalits in very many ways. Despite the fact that the implementation of such schemes and policies has been tardy which still faces resistance at various levels, nobody can deny that a new middle class has emerged from among these oppressed communities, which was unthinkable in the pre-independence era.

The overall impact of Ambedkar's movement is noticeable in the fact that education has spread in almost all the Dalit castes. Quite a few of these educated Dalits have joined government services, public enterprises as well as teaching profession. A significant section of this middle class is not a first generation middle class. Of course, looking at the stranglehold of the ageold system of purity and pollution in the minds of the people, their entry into new vocations has not completely eliminated the possibility of their being subjected to discrimination.

The difference in class locations and consequent social-cultural attitudes has led to a state where despite coming from similar social origin, one does find a perceptible difference between the experiences, grievances and aspirations of the Dalit masses and that of the Dalit middle classes. The way in which the internal dynamic of the Dalit movement has unfolded itself, where radical transformatory slogans have given way to the idea of 'capturing power' in any manner, has also created an ambience which has reinforced this divide. The explosion of religiosity, which is evident among different cross-sections of society, has also impacted the Dalits.

Talking about Dalit middle class, Sandeep Pendse

puts it in one of his articles (The Dalits and Hindutva : Gainers and Losers, ed, Anand Teltumbde) : *It has now come into its own and developed distinct interests. It now aspires not for a distinct and separate identity but for assimilation and acceptance within the mainstream, including the Hindu fold. It no longer even promotes democratic, radical culture expressions. It wishes above all integration.*

In fact instead of wholesale rejection of the Hindu order, they seem to opt for this path in a belief that this would enable them to claim their due in matters of both faith and social status. As Nalini Pandit puts it in her above quoted writeup '*These middle class Dalits have a desire to assimilate with the upper caste middle class which at least in Maharashtra is extremely communal. Naturally the Dalits imitate them in their thinking and behaviour.*'

At general level the very dynamics of caste has also manifested itself. The caste system as is widely known is basically a system of social hierarchy based on the twin concepts of purity and pollution which is sanctified and legitimised by religion. Looking at the whole process of social mobility there are only two options open before the lower castes. They can either reject or renounce the whole edifice of religion which sanctifies this system and strive for an alternate identity or they can strive to climb the social hierarchy by imitating the way of life and ritual of the dominant castes.

Mr. M.N. Srinivas rightly explains : “The caste system is far from a rigid system in which the position of each component caste is fixed for all time. Movement has always been possible and especially

so in the middle regions of the hierarchy. A low caste was able in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in a hierarchy by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism and by sanskritising its ritual and pantheon. In short, it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites, and beliefs of Brahminism, and the adoption of the Brahminic way of life by a low caste seems to have been frequent though theoretically forbidden.²¹

It would not be incorrect to say that the cumulative impact of deradicalization of the Dalit movement coupled with the growing hiatus between the broad sections of Dalit masses and a stabilized Dalit middle class, the overall spurt in religiosity has led us to a situation where it is not easy to map the dynamic of Dalithood in a linear fashion.

One could even say that the dynamic of Dalithood has simultaneously traversed a terrain which has contradictory features. While one of its stream is showing a newfound enthusiasm for Hinduism or the political project of Hindutva, the second stream has aligned itself with democratic or radical forces and is involved in struggles of dignity or livelihood, including political power. The 'guest actor' role (to quote Prof. Gopal Guru) of the Dalits and their leaders in the unfolding dynamic of Indian polity is long passe, today they happen to be the most vibrant section of Indian society able to make choices for themselves.

Ofcourse apart from the internal logic of the Dalit movement which has created a basis for the spread of statusquoist ideas gain wider currency, there has been

a sea change in Sangh Parivar's whole strategem as far as coopting Dalits in its hate project is concerned. One can see for oneself that it has shrewdly modified its focus keeping its essential understanding intact. Gone are the days when Dalits were abhorred like during the reign of Hedgewar-Golwalkar and Ambedkar was a hated figure in the Sangh circles, today not only Ambedkar has found a prominent place in the Sangh pantheon (*Pratahsmaraniya* - worth remembering in the morning). The Sangh patriarchs have of late been talking about Hindu community getting organised under Dalit leadership. In an editorial in the RSS Hindi organ *Panchajanya* it said (The Statesman, July 24, 2006)

"So long as those believing in caste hierarchy continue to dominate among the Hindus, it would be difficult to instill courage in their spines ...Hindu society too can jump over this ocean of crises, challenges and self-ignorance if they start viewing Dalits as Ram and Hanuman, touch their feet, organise under their leadership and as disciples form an aggressive organisation. Only Dalits and the deprived can uplift us, this is an undoubtable truth."

6

GENESIS OF UNTOUCHABILITY - PEARLS OF WISDOM!

Notwithstanding the attitude of the Brahmin scholars, I must pursue the task I have undertaken. For the origin of these classes is a subject which still awaits investigation ... That the Hindus should not have undertaken such an investigation is perfectly understandable. The old orthodox Hindu does not think that there is anything wrong in the observance of untouchability. To him it is a normal and natural thing. As such it neither calls for expiation nor explanation. The new modern Hindu realises the wrong. But he is ashamed to discuss it in public for fear of letting the foreigner know that Hindu Civilisation can be guilty of such a vicious and infamous system or social code as evidenced by Untouchability...

—Dr. Ambedkar, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?*

The speech delivered by the Supremo on the foundation day of RSS has a special import in the eyes of its *Swayamsevaks* as well as the rest of the country. With the growing acceptability of RSS or the political project of Hindutva in a significant sections of Hindus, the message delivered by the Supremo on the day of *Dussehra* is deciphered for what it said and what remains unsaid. But the chilling message which the present Supremo delivered on *Dussehra* in the year 2003 had few parallels which underlined what was being played on the grounds in the RSS Shakhas and outside.

The longish speech presented a new 'theory' about the genesis of untouchability.

Mr. Sudarshan said :

...But the irony is, the descendents of that great saint - the Valmiki community - has been relegated into untouchable community today. How did it happen? In fact the people of Valmiki samaj were originally from warrior class.

Some historians maintain that the Islamic invaders used to place two options before the vanquished Hindu warriors; accept Islam or work as scavengers cleaning their toilets. While many so-called upper caste people opted for Islam, these warriors demonstrated their uncompromising commitment to their religion by opting for the mean jobs rather than giving up their religion...

Any layperson would notice that with this new

'theory' it tried to kill two birds with one stone. Forget *Manusmriti*, forget the age old Varna vyavastha which denigrated the Shudras-Atishudras and women to a less than human status, it plainly stated that the 'Untouchability' had its genesis in the 'Muslim rule' only. As a 'proof' of his sincerity he even 'apologised' for the behaviour of the Hindus.

Instead of bestowing them with the highest honour, tragically the Hindu society chose to accord them the lowest place only.

Sangh watchers would tell you that it was not for the first time that any higher up in the fraternity had given such a spin to the genesis of Dalithood. Another senior leader from the Sangh Parivar, who happens to be the International working President of VHP had stated in 'Organiser' (20th August 1995) that the Muslim rulers wanted that the Dalits embrace their religion, but with the consistent refusal by the Dalits, they confiscated their lands, expelled them from villages and thus the Dalit community came into existence.

People would remember that the six year BJP tenure at the centre was marked by a similar attempt vis-a-vis women on behalf of the Sangh Parivar where it had tried to 'discover' similar 'origins' to the secondary status of women. In one of the documents released on behalf of 'National Commission for Women' then, it had plainly stated that women in India enjoyed all rights before the advent of the Muslims and the situation drastically changed after 'Muslims entry into India'

Definitely neither Mr. Sudarshan or Mr. Ashok Singhal nor any of their other comrades in the Hindutva family could be considered innocent that they deliberately exhibit their ignorance about India's past and the manner in which this purity and pollution based graded hierarchy took shape. Neither they could be said to be oblivious of the ongoing struggle in Indian history challenging Brahminism and its rule which at times took shape of a religious challenge to the authority of the Vedas. An organisation which took shape basically to counter the *Shudra-Atishudra* challenge to Brahminism and which couched its struggle in the language of hatred of minorities could not be expected to forget all these relevant details. In fact, they very well know the ramifications of what they mean.

Any student of history or society can easily comprehend that if this understanding of genesis of untouchability is popularised and gains acceptability, then it serves multiple purposes simultaneously as far as the majoritarian Hindutva right is concerned.

- It absolves the custodians of *Varnashram* from any complicity in its construction and sustenance and thus refuses to even acknowledge lest incorporate any sort of anti-caste struggle in its agenda. The essence of this new 'theory' which externalises the origin of untouchability is that there is no need for reform or reconstruction (including annihilation) of the caste laden structure.
- It provides an important rationale for the further consolidation of the Hindutva chauvinist forces

which cannot brook any association of Hindus with Islam and Muslims.

- It brings into disrepute the rich local tradition of popular religion that defied the sternly Brahminical Hinduism that the Hindutva forces were so ardently seeking to impose on the country. Despite the ascendance of the majoritarian Hindutva right in our country since last around two decades one is still witness to Hindus-mainly belonging to the lower castes - still flocking to Sufi shrines in large numbers.
- It serves the purpose of striking at the root of the composite heritage by pitting two of its strongest pillars who also happen to be the staunchest opponents of the project of Hindutva against each other.
- It helps the Hindutva right in construction and imposition of a monolithic Hinduism- Brahminical Hinduism - which is self-contained, completely apart to other religions, in fact antagonistic to other religions.
- It paves the way for the cooption of Dalit icons into Hindutva pantheon and helps their projection as 'anti-Muslims'.

JAI HINDUTVA NOT JAI BHEEM :

ENTER THE FANATIC DALIT !

What is common between Rameshbhai Parmar, Valjibhai Patel and Anandi Parmar or for that matter Tikajibhai? Well, as the name signifies all of them are Gujaratis, but the more important aspect of their being is that they are that part of the Ambedkarite/Dalit movement in Gujarat which refused to be part of the 'genocidal politics' of the Hindutva brigade when the stakes were high. Definitely it has not proved to be a catwalk for them when the post Godhra mayhem organised by the Parivar with due connivance with the state machinery was at its peak. They had to bear the brunt of the Hindutva goons while some of their own people decided to either join hands with their perpetrators or just stood mute. Anandi Parmar, a veteran activist of the Dalit movement was himself attacked, Tikajibhai's, another senior activists' house was set on fire and Rameshbhai Parmar, one of the founders of the Gujarati Dalit Literature had to face prolonged alienation. As far as Valjibhai Patel, one of the founders of the shortlived Dalit Panther movement,

is concerned he received series of threats for not falling in line.

It need not be emphasised that such people who can think and act independently and yearn for an independent assertion of Dalits as envisaged by Dr. Ambedkar do not have any place in the Sangh gameplan. In fact, in the post genocide phase when sinister attempts were on to further intimidate, terrorize the religious minorities planned attempt were also undertaken to browbeat those sections of Ambedkarites or independent Dalits and tribals formally into the Hindutva fold who had refused to toe the line.

As opposed to Rameshbhai Parmar, Valjibhai Patel and Anandi Parmar Sangh prefers people who may be born into one of those oppressed communities but who are ready to peddle the Hindutva line. People like Ramesh Patange, Kishore Macwana and Madan Dilawar and many of their ilk represent this new Dalit 'face' of the Sangh Parivar. People who are ready to present a new sanitised image of Ambedkar as a Hindu social reformer, as someone who was opposed to Muslims. People who have found a new commonality between the ideas of Ambedkar and Golwalkar or who find Ambedkar to be an extension of Hedgewar.

At present Ramesh Patange is a senior leader of the *Samajik Samarasta Manch* floated by the Sangh Parivar and also part of the editorial team of their Marathi organ *Vivek*, Kishore Macwana formally edits the RSS journal *Sadhana* in Gujarat and Madan Dilawar, is a minister in Vasundhara Raje's cabinet and one

who was said to be instrumental in the anti-Christian tirade in his home district.

Of course the creation of Hindutvaised Dalits or devising mechanism for co-option Ambedkar, has not been a very easy affair for the Sangh Parivar. One can say that there was a transition period during which RSS tried its hands at different ways to deal with the Dalit issue. For the Sangh which had till then followed a very conservative, non-reformist type of Hinduism, which had no place for the Dalits, it had not been very easy for it to arrive at full proof single plan to deal with the challenge posed by Ambedkar. But the key thing to remember is that the man who led the RSS from a *Chaturvarnya* based exclusive type of Hindutva to a more inclusive type of Hindutva was Balasaheb Deoras, the third supremo of RSS. He gave a piece of his mind in 'Hindu Unity and Social Equality' (1974). In fact Deoras happened to be the first RSS leader to visit *Deekshabhoomi* the place in Nagpur where Dr. Ambedkar embraced Buddhism alongwith his followers in 1956.

Looking back, broadly one can say that RSS tried its hands in two different ways to deal with Phule-Ambedkar or defang the challenge posed by their ideas.

i. Stigmatising Phule-Ambedkar, opposing reservation or resisting any struggle for Dalit assertion

The book by Arun Shourie 'Worshipping False Gods' which tried to portray Ambedkar as pro-British politician could be said to be one such attempt of stigmatising Ambedkar. The book by a known Sangh

apologist witnessed tremendous uproar in the Dalit movement for factual inaccuracies and misrepresentation of Ambedkar. A few students of Ambedkar also exposed the manner in which Shourie had tried to concoct facts to suit his thesis and also quoted the legendary leader out of context to buttress his point. It was during this period only when another Sangh activist Bal Gangal, wrote a series of articles castigating Mahatma Phule in a Hindutva centred weekly called 'Sobat'.

The late seventies or early eighties witnessed tremendous mobilisation on behalf of Dalits and other democratic forces on the issue of renaming the Marathwada University. A large body of people wanted that the name be changed to Ambedkar University to commemorate the work in the field of education undertaken by Dr. Ambedkar. The year 1978 witnessed anti-Dalit riots in Marathwada when the then Maharashtra assembly passed the bill with a thumping majority. The stamp of approval by the assembly led to anti-Dalit riots in the region which witnessed enough participation of RSS and other Hindutva activists.

The RSS network was fully active in the 1981 anti-reservation riots in Gujarat also. One could find maturing of Dalit-Muslim solidarity during this period where Muslims had sheltered Dalits at many places. The year 1985 proved to be a repeat of 1981 when Dalits faced the wrath of the same combine. It appears that the growing bonhomie between the Dalits and Muslims prompted serious rethinking in the Sangh Parivar itself over its own strategem and it was compelled to change its track. Within one year, i.e., in

1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath rath yatra, when riots flared up the Dalits were found enthusiastically supporting the RSS-BJP combine. During the riots all over Gujarat in 1990 in the aftermath of L.K. Advani's rath yatra, Dalits continued their alliance with caste Hindus. The BJP strategy of thus winning over Dalits and thereby consolidating broad sections of Hindus and polarizing the population along communal lines at least bore fruits in Gujarat.

ii. Sanitising Phule-Ambedkar, supporting reservation including struggles for limited Dalit assertion but simultaneously constructing a new antagonism between the Dalits and the minorities.

Sangh realised that instead of attacking Ambedkar it would be fruitful to construct his new image which would suit its own worldview.

A few affiliated organisations were floated to suit the purpose. The year 1979 saw the formation of *Sewa Bharati* supposedly to promote educational initiatives among Dalits at an all India level whereas *Samajik Samrasta Manch* (1983) was launched basically to target the Dalits and their movement in Maharashtra. Other affiliates of the RSS, VHP, Bajrang Dal or its political platform Jan Sangh/BJP were also asked to focus their attention on these 'deprived sections of Hindu community'.

To gain wider acceptability among Dalit masses, RSS even supported the inclusion of 'Riddles in Hinduism' in the government publications when there was a great uproar in Maharashtra over this spearheaded by Shiv Sena. The Shiv Sena people

wanted that Ambedkar's booklet 'Riddles In Hinduism' should not be included in the Collected Works as it supposedly contained 'objectionable references about Ram and Krishna.'

The spatial strategies of Hindutva were skillfully employed to help generate new antagonisms between the two communities. And the target of attack had normally been the syncretic traditions of people where members of both the communities - especially belonging to the lower rungs of society - mingled easily.²²

SAMAJIK SAMARASTA :

NEW PRAXIS FOR COOPTATION OF DALITS

The nearly 25 year old trajectory of *Samajik Samrasta Manch* could be loosely divided into two phases.

In the first phase the emphasis was not on asking Dalits to join the Manch rather it was on convincing the non-Dalits especially the upper castes that they need to moderate their stand vis-a-vis Ambedkar. The idea was to present Dr. Ambedkar as a Hindu Social Reformer and convince the caste populace that he should also be included in the Hindutva pantheon. Emphasis was on to remove the stigma that the RSS has been an anti-Dalit organisation. Of course, during this initial phase also Sangh tried to attract individual Dalit intellectuals towards its activities. In fact the readiness with which Dr. Gangadhar Pantawane, a leading Dalit intellectual and editor of 'Asmitadarsh' addressed one of the conferences organised by Manch (1988) created a big furore in the movement. The Manch as well as many other affiliated organisations of RSS started celebrating 14th April as well as 6th

December at their own level.

To begin with, it would be worthwhile if one takes a look at a RSS activists own description of the genesis of *Manch*. In his writeup in 'Vivek' weekly ' Ramesh Patange tells us

It was the decade of 70s when the word 'Samrasta' was used as an idea in the theoretical field. And the credit should be given to Late Dattopant Thengdi. It was a coincidence that the year 1983 saw the birth anniversaries of Dr. Ambedkar and Dr. Hedgewar falling on the same date. This prompted him to launch a new Samajik Samrasta Manch in Pune with the understanding that it could be used a forum to further new ideas. Mr Thengdi gave a speech on this occasion which was later published as a booklet with the title 'Samarasta Bina Samata Asambhav' (Equality Impossible without Harmony).

(quoted in 'Samrasta Ke Sutra, 2006)

In the present second phase when the Sangh Patriarchs felt that enough groundwork has been done to present a sanitised image of RSS, it went all out to to attract even Dalit masses towards its activities. To propagate the message of Manch it brought out booklets, (e.g. Samrasta - Dr. Hedgewar, Dr. Ambedkar), held workshops, organised conferences, took out *Sandesh Yatras* throughout Maharashtra supposedly to propagate the ideas of reformers like Phule-Ambedkar. Interestingly it even organised exhibitions of Buddha's life when lakhs of people

gather every year to commemorate the 1956 conversion to Buddhism. But one of the most daring steps taken by the Manch was the support it rendered to the publication of 'Riddles In Hinduism'. Taking advantage of the birth anniversaries of Hedgewar and Ambedkar (1990) the said Sandesh Yatras throughout Maharashtra were organised.

Commenting on the 'Samrasta' experiment, political scientist Suhas Palshikar explains that the RSS wanted to consolidate its image by upholding Ambedkar and at the same time did not wish to lay claim to the radical transformative legacy of Ambedkar. According to him Sangh accomplished this feat in the following manner :²³

- a. To begin with, the RSS conceded that Ambedkar was a national symbol and an icon of national stature (not just a leader of Dalits)...
- b. Secondly, *Samrasata Manch* sought to project Ambedkar as being favourable to Hindu interests and Hindu unity...
- c. Having once asserted that Ambedkar was interested in the welfare of Hinduism, the *Samrasata Manch* further sought to depict Ambedkar as religious reformer within Hinduism...
- d. Having pushed Ambedkar into the Hindu reformist framework, the *Samrasata Manch* further strengthened Ambekdar's place as a Hinduist thinker by projecting that he was anti-Muslim...

It is for everyone to see that the appropriation of Dr. Ambedkar's radical legacy could not be resisted in any meaningful manner. The split within split in the Dalit movement and the confusions rampant in the Dalit intellectuals themselves created a situation that Sangh did achieve a limited success in its expansion.

RECLAIMING THE REAL AMBEDKAR - REINVIGORATING THE MOVEMENT

The saga of Hindutvatisation of a section of Dalits or the appropriation of one of the biggest leader of the oppressed does not end here.

It is a tragedy of epochal proportions that the section which has been at the receiving end of the Brahminical system for hundreds of years is today metamorphosing itself into the biggest defender of a project committed to building Hindu Rashtra

It is disturbing that a significant section of the Dalits (and the tribals) who would form the backbone of any revolutionary transformation in future seem to have crossed over to a camp which is engaged in furthering hate and peddling its exclusive agenda.

It is no less shocking that the man who fought all his life against the injustice structured in the Hindu religion and ultimately embraced another religion asking his followers to be ever vigilant about the use

of Hindu gods in any form, is slowly being turned into a Hindu reformer and a Muslim baiter.

It is disturbing to note that an organisation which opposed the assertion of Shudra-Atishudras and which is committed to such an exclusive agenda is today in a position to present itself in a 'new look image' couched in a liberal/sounding rhetoric.

For an external observer the absence of any significant theoretical-political challenge to the dangers posed by Hindutva may lead to the inference that the juggernaut of Hindutvatisation of the subalterns is unstoppable.

Nothing can be farther from the truth.

It is true that the internal dynamics of the Dalit movement coupled with the chronic weaknesses of the radical transformatory or other democratic movements, and an ascendant Sangh Parivar which has operationalised a multidimensional action plan to coopt the Dalits has definitely complicated things for all those forces who feel concerned about this new turn in the Dalit mindset. But with passage of time there is growing realisation in the ranks of the radicals within the Dalit movement as well as the progressive forces which are committed to a revolutionary transformation of society that they need to introspect their mistakes and forge long term solidarities to face the onslaught.

One is finding new commonalities of interest and purpose in all those formations/movements who are in one way or other opposed to Brahminism,

Patriarchy and Capitalism and want to usher into a society which has done away with discriminations, deprivations based on these categories.

They have realised that they need to reclaim the real Ambedkar, a legendary who asked the workers to fight against the twin enemies of Brahminism and Capitalism, a visionary who prophesised that "If Hindu Raj does become a fact it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with Democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost"²⁴ has never been so urgent.

Notes and References :

1. Ram-Rahim nagar a large jhuggi cluster in Ahmedabad which is inhabited mostly by poor Dalits and Muslims stand as a towering testimony to the spirit of communal harmony which they precariously maintained despite agents provocateurs from both sides .
2. For those unacquainted with the literary and political sojourn of Namdeo Dhasal, a person supposed to be more close to the left in his youth, it may be told that his collection of poetry 'Golpeetha' is supposed to be a milestone in Marathi literature. Inspired by the Black Panther movement in the US, Namdeo along with Raja Dhale, had rebelled against the opportunist politics of Republican Party of India, the political formation founded by Dr. Ambedkar before his sudden demise, and had formed Dalit Panther. (1972) The Panther experiment in channelising Dalit anger in Maharashtra had inspired similar experiments in other states as well.

It is now history how Dalit Panther itself broke into many factions on flimsy grounds and how it got itself involved in the cesspool of opportunist politics much on the lines of the

RPI. Dhasal later joined Shiv Sena, mainly Maharashtra based political formation, which also catered to the cause of Hindutva albeit in its own manner.

3. Raosaheb Kasbe, a leading Ambedkarite radical intellectual, who is supposed to be close to the progressive movement, became a leading protagonist of this idea then.
4. It may be noted that RSS had even questioned the formation of an egalitarian constitution based on one person-one vote and had publicly called for declaring the age old Manusmriti to be the new constitution.

No sane person would forget that RSS in general and Golwalkar in particular opposed the affirmative action programmes for the Dalits and other socially oppressed sections on the specious plea that it would divide the Hindus further. It was under Golwalkar's leadership that organised attempts were done to scuttle the move to confer limited rights to (mainly upper caste) Hindu women in matters of property and divorce which had been initiated by Dr. Ambedkar under the proposed Hindu Code Bill.

5. It is an established fact that Dr. Ambedkar was vehemently opposed to the idea of a Hindu Raj. In one of his historic books 'Pakistan or the Partition of India' (1946) he writes " If Hindu Raj does become a fact it will, no doubt, be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. On that account it is incompatible with Democracy. Hindu Raj must be prevented at any cost" (Ref . Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar - Writings and Speeches Vol 8., P. 358)

As Prof Nalini Pandit puts it further :

A Hindu Raj, he believed, can be prevented only by

establishing a new party, different from the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha, based on the co-operation of Hindus and Muslims. Such a Party having an agreed programme of social and economic regeneration can avoid the danger of both a Hindu Raj and a Muslim Raj. The formation of such a Party, he felt, would not be difficult. "There are many lower orders in the Hindu society whose economic, political and social needs are the same as those of majority of Muslims and they would be far more ready to make a common cause with the Muslims for achieving common ends than they would with the high caste Hindus who have denied and deprived them of ordinary human rights for centuries." (Ref. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar - Writings and Speeches Vol 8., P. 359)

6. Hindutva and Dalits : Edited by Anand Teltumbde, Samya, 2005, Calcutta
7. Conceding this phenomenon, as a caveat it also need to be added that many among these communities also proved to be the biggest defenders of the Muslims, which they did at great personal risk to themselves. It need be emphasised that their role in the genocide was not an all Gujarat phenomenon and was confined to a few districts only. There have been many instances showing that they risked their lives to save their Muslim neighbours from the hands of the marauders. Rather they played a key role in maintaining a semblance of sanity in the otherwise gloomy atmosphere which prevailed when the Hindutva storm troopers descended on the streets and created a helllike situation for the Muslim community. Secondly, apart from the Muslims it is the Dalits who, as a community, suffered most casualties and loss of property in this tragic aftermath.
8. For detailed discussions, See 'Inverting Dalit Consciousness

'Subhash Gatade, *Fascism In India*, Manak Publications, Delhi, 2003

9. Apart from the reaction on classical lines where the Dalits were said to have been lured by money, liquor and political prospects and were used like Jihadis by the Hindutva forces, one could also see the growing deterioration of harmonious relations between the Dalits and the Muslims because of economic factors. Economists like Jan Bremen tend to "...attribute it to globalisation and the manner in which capitalism has grown in the State. .. Sections among these marginalised workers, mainly Dalits, are part of the Sangh Parivar's lumpen elements." (Dione Bunsha, Frontline 12 May 2002)

An altogether different type of reaction to the entire gory episode was provided by the likes of Kancha Illiah, a Dalit-Bahujan scholar. While acknowledging that a gap does exist between the Dalits and Muslims in many parts of the state he indirectly blamed the Muslim elite for this state of affairs and asked them to make special efforts to bridge the gap. In his article 'Dalit, OBC and Muslim relations (The Hindu 29 May 2002) he put forward this position in no uncertain terms. According to him "The Muslim intelligentsia failed to establish a rapport with the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the OBCs at the ground level." He adds "...The Muslim intelligentsia must also be held responsible for showing indifference to the issues of caste and untouchability..." "

10. "There is evidence to prove that in Dharavi in the R.P.I.-Congress Corporator M. Y. Shinde led mobs in Chamda bazar in the December riots. Another Congress Tamil Corporator led a mob of Tamil Christian Dalits in the attack on Muslims...In Golibar colony in Santacruz where there

was a violent attack on Muslims the Shiv Sena shakha pramukh was a Buddhist...the A.C.P. was a Buddhist ..'(P. 62, P. 63, Nalini Pandit, Dalits and Hindu Communalism, Quoted in 'At Cross-roads : Dalit Movement Today, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Bombay, August 1994)

11. P. 63, Nalini Pandit, Dalits and Hindu Communalism, Quoted in 'At Cross-roads : Dalit Movement Today, Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Bombay, August 1994
12. Madhav Sadashiv Golwalkar, part of the triumvirate comprising of Savarkar and Hedgewar, who fought for a *Hindu Rashtra* on this soil. He led the fledgling RSS for a period of thirty three years (1940-1973) is said to have not only provided theoretical foundation for the project of *Hindu Rashtra* but also helped expand its influence through a plethora of affiliated (*anushangik*) organisations ranging from the purely parliamentary like the Bharatiya Janata Party to the purely extra parliamentary like the Bajrang Dals which has been charged with many unsavoury incidents in the past.
13. Manusmriti or the Laws of Manu is believed to have been codified by the second century A.D. It presents in totality the system of jurisprudence of Hinduism. Max Mueller, the famous German Indologist, got it translated as the 'Laws of Manu', which was first published in 1886 under the series *The Sacred Books of the East*. It need be noted that it was in the year 1927 that Dr. Ambedkar had burnt a copy of the book for its total disregard of the principles of equality, justice and humanism, as part of a massive Satyagraha held at Mahad.
14. 'Organiser' (November 30, 1949, p.3) the organ of RSS gave vent to his ideas :

But in our constitution there is no mention of the unique constitutional developments in ancient Bharat. Manu's laws were written long before Lycurgus of Sparta or Solon of Persia. To this day laws as enunciated in the Manusmriti excite the admiration of the world and elicit spontaneous obedience and conformity. But to our constitutional pundits that means nothing.

15. K.R.Malkani, *The RSS Story*, New Delhi: Impex India, 1980, p.73.
16. This quote appears in the first edition of the book, published in 1966, but curiously disappears in subsequent editions.
17. Jotirao Phule 1827-1890, founder of Satyashodhak Samaj, termed 'The Greatest Shudra of India' by Dr. Ambedkar was 'India's first systematic theorist of caste' and 'the most radical 19th century opponent of it' who desired nothing less than the complete smashing of its oppressive structure. He alongwith his wife Savitribai started the first school for shudra-atishudra girls in 1848. People like Tarabai Shinde - author of the tract 'Stree-Purush Tulana'- who has been termed the first 'feminist thinker of India' or Narayan Meghaji Lokhande, who formed the first labor organisation in India, were active workers of Satyashodhak Samaj.
18. Cited in N.L. Gupta, *RSS and Democracy* (Delhi : Sampradayikta Virodhi Committee, nd) : 17
19. M. S. Golwalkar,. *Bunch of Thoughts* (Bangalore : Sahitya Sindhu, 1996) : 363
20. V.D. Savarkar, 'Women in Manusmriti'. In *Savarkar Samagra* (collection of Savarkar's writings in Hindi), vol 4, edited by Nishikant M. and others (Delhi : Prabhat, 2000) : 415

21. M.N. Srinivas, *Social Change in Modern India* (Orient Longman, Hyderabad, 1996)
22. A corollary of this strategy has been to search for space among the Dalits 'by looking for Heroes of their communities, creating warring identities against Muslim invaders and relocating them in their broader project of constructing communal memories among Hindus as a whole, including the Dalit castes.' Quoted in 'Memories, Saffronising Statues and Constructing Communal Politics' - Badri Narayan, (*Economic and Political Weekly*, Nov 11, 2006)
23. Suhas Palshikar, Maharashtra : Dalit politics in Hindutva trap, *Hindutva and Dalits*, edited by Anand Teltumbde.
24. Dr. Ambedkar 'Pakistan or the Partition of India' - 1946, *Writings & Speeches Vol 8*, P. 358

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