

Caste and Class in the Identity and Movement

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Introduction

Asymmetry with regard to distributive process implies a scarcity of social goods and services. Inequality emanating from the legitimisation of the distribution of scarce goods and services causes social unrests, upheavals and even overthrow of such a system. Social movements all over the world, in essence, despite their varying forms, aim at the deligitimisation of the inegalitarian distributive processes and the establishment of a desired type of society which can ensure egalitarian and humanitarian social order. Thus, all social movements strive for a new 'social language', in fact, new parameters for sustaining the altered social relations. A threat to the persisting 'social stock of knowledge' through an advocacy of new cognitive categories and orientations is seen by the forces of status-quo as well as by the harbingers of new ideological moorings. Ultimately, the objective of a new social language is to produce new forms of power and dominance by altering and rejecting the persisting policy and society.

A new social language equips the aspiring groups of people with new beliefs, values and norms. A powerful conceptual tool is thus created for examining dominance in everyday life in all aspects. A social movement is successful if its ideological/cognitive apparatus is powerful enough to bring about commensurate structural changes in society. Hiatus between cognitive and structural processes of change would mean both the power of the status quo forces to persist and to resist the new ideologies, and the limitations of the latter to challenge effectively the entrenched power-wielders.

Persisting Inequality and Emerging Equality

Bryan S. Turner writes about the contemporary situation in South Africa as follow: "The forms of equality we enjoy in modern democracy are to some extent the consequences of violent or radical reaction on the part of subordinate groups to achieve a more equitable distribution of wealth and power.¹" Quintessentially, this may be true about the movements launched by the weaker sections and the other Backward Classes in India. But the change has not simply been there due to the movements and struggles energised by these sections of society. India's National Movement and its leadership, legislations and the Indian States after Independence have made significant contribution in attacking the established socio-cultural, economic and political hierarchies in India. The contemporary efforts towards equality can be seen mainly in terms of 'social consciousness', which is produced historically and nationally.

No debate on inequality can ignore the element of equality as an important component of all human societies and social movements therein. Legal derecognition of power and privileges based on birth and caste rank created a sense of equal citizenship and equality of opportunity. Such a major step had a history of 150 years of struggle against the British Raj. The Indian Nation – State gets mirrored too through this constitutional provision. A check on the traditionally privileged

people on the one hand and encouragement to the sections aspiring for equality to demand their share in national resources on the other become salient features of the post-independence era. So long as the institutions of private property, family inheritance and recognition of social honour remain, inequality would continue to emanate from them despite constitutional safeguards and provisions for the betterment of the weaker sections. A new vocabulary, a language of equity has considerably made equality as a value², that the achievement of equality is desirable and feasible for the future of Indian state and society.

However, the debate about equality is not a recent one. 'Equal exchange' or 'just exchange' were in a way part of the traditional arrangement of socio-economic ties. Despite patron-client or jajman-karmin relations, there were 'contra-priests'³, who signified the role of the lower caste functionaries and the value of their relative equality and power of bargaining.

The question was how they were treated by their patrons. If the expected treatment was not meted out to them what steps they could take to safeguard their social honour. Thus, despite rigidity of caste-based inequality, there were some inbuilt mechanisms for grievance redressal in the system. All anti-caste movements during last one hundred years or so have sought destruction of the established hierarchies and hegemony of the erstwhile privileged sections of society. Replacement of the persisting social order is being sought by a new distributive process and empowerment of the depressed castes and communities by alienating the entrenched groups of people from positions of power and privilege. Can this be done? How it can be done? What has been our experience since 1950? What are the stumbling blocks in the creation of a desired type of society?

Let us understand the meaning of inequality. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *magnum opus* – The Social Contract and discourse on the Origin of Inequality observes that 'freedom' is an instrumental value, and it ensures man's happiness.⁴ "The independence of natural man assures his freedom and his happy existence. The imposition of society on this natural man created a situation of conflict, inequality, distorted values, and misery".⁵ The 'natural man' of Rousseau is considerably similar to Sigmund Freud's 'libido', the innate energy in man, which can prosper if 'culture' keeps itself away from him in the form of an alien control. Such *spontaneity* is seen as a virtue in man's reflection towards his objects. Articulation of innate consciousness for achieving equality can be realised against oppressive collectivities and individuals.

Rousseau discusses about the origin and the foundation of inequality among men. He writes: "I conceive two species of inequality among men; one which I call natural, or physical inequality, because it is established by nature, and consists in the difference of age, health, bodily strength, and the qualities of the mind, or of the soul, the other which may be termed moral or political inequality, because it depends on a kind of convention, and is established, or at least authorised by the common consent of mankind. This species of inequality consists in the different privileges, which some men enjoy, to the prejudice of others, such as that of being richer, more honoured, more powerful, and even that of exacting obedience from them."⁶ For Rousseau "morals and politics are inseparable. Both become politics, and every phenomenon has a political significance. Nothing is neutral or indifferent"⁷. Thus, Rousseau emphasises on 'social contract' as a way out for conflict and misery created by political inequality.

What R.H. Tawney observes about inequality seems to be relevant to understand the position of the underdog in the Indian society. He writes: “There are certain gross and crushing disabilities – conditions of life injurious to health, inferior education, economic insecurity.... which place the classes experiencing them at a permanent disadvantage with those not similarly afflicted.”⁸ Certain services can mitigate crucial disabilities to a considerable extent to bring about equality. Turner identifies four types of equality. These are: 1) Ontological equality of the fundamental equality of persons. 2) Equality of opportunity to achieve desirable ends. 3) Equality of condition(s) of life equal for relevant social groups, and 4) Equality of outcome or equality of result.⁹ All these forms of equality imply totality of equality in social life. However, the last one refers to the practice of the first three prescriptive formulations, namely, equality of all men, equality of opportunity and of condition(s). The last refers to the outcome of all the above three postulates. What is tangible or measurable in some way is the equality of outcome/result.

Defining Dalit

If *dalits* is to be seen in Marxian sense, it has to be a *class* emerging from the dissolution of all classes, a class in civil society and not a class of civil society. Such a class has a universal character because its sufferings are universal, the *wrong* done to it is also general and not a particular wrong. Such a class has no *traditional* status but only a *human* status. It is a class, which seeks a total emancipation from the chains of domination and control. This particular class is the class of proletariat. Although consciousness is determined by the existence and not vice-versa, and yet consciousness becomes a means of uniting and mobilising the proletariat. Does such collective consciousness commensurate with the existential conditions of the proletariat? Lukacs puts this point as follows: “For a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interests and consciousness enable it to organise the whole of society in accordance with those interests. The crucial question in every class struggle is this: which class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive moment? This does not preclude the use of force. It does not mean that the class-interests destined to prevail and thus to uphold the interests of society as a whole can be guaranteed an automatic victory. On the contrary, such a transfer of power can often only be brought about by the most ruthless use of force...But it often turns out that questions of class consciousness prove to be decisive in just those situations where force is unavoidable and where classes are locked in a life-and-death-struggle.”¹¹ Can one perceive the dalits and caste Hindus in such a situation of class struggle? In recent years the questions of ‘social justice’ and ‘empowerment’ of the weaker sections and the OBCs by providing reservations in jobs have been made central concerns of power politics in India. Social divides and tensions arising out of the articulation and the opposition of these questions have tormented the Indian political scene. Social and cultural deprivation of the backward sections of society prevented them from having access to their anticipated share in the national resources and heritage.

Can *dalits* be treated as a thing, a component of Indian society? Gandhiji gave the name ‘Harijan’ to the ‘untouchables’. A sense of compassion and empathy is reflected through the use of the word *harijan* as they are God’s gift like any other human-beings. Compassion and sympathy though are not taken kindly by the leadership of the Harijans, it helped them immensely by way of the policy of ‘protective discrimination’ and special provisions for their advancement. Thus Gandhiji’s harijans, a human entity, became a legal entity, namely, the scheduled castes. A new class of beneficiaries (‘creamy layer’) emerged from among them. The articulate leadership of the

scheduled castes thought it necessary to create ideological and political militancy, hence *dalitism*. The word *dalit* thus refers to ideological transformation of the scheduled castes indicating their heightened protests against the upper caste domination by way of rejection of the upper caste cognitive paradigms and creation of their own cultural idioms, literature and ethnic harmony.

Though it is quite unclear whether the dalits can be referred as a *class*, but if they are understood as such, What E.P. Thompson observes about 'class' seems to be relevant for analysing the emergence of dalits. He writes "By class I understand an historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that it is an *historical* phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure', or even as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown to have happened) in human relationships."¹² Dalits imply a notion of a class (social) in terms of historical relationship. Thompson observes: "This relationship must always be embodied in real people and in a real context".¹³ He further writes: "And class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests articulate the identity of their interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs. The class experience is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born-or enter involuntarily. Class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodies in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms."¹⁴

For dalits their relationship with the upper castes/classes, who have socio-economic and political dominance, determines their interests and consciousness. However, interests and consciousness are not the same phenomena, nor they have one-to-one relationship. At different times and places consciousness may differ despite interests remaining the same. In the context of *dalits* consciousness is different from what one can see in the case of the scheduled castes and harijans. Consciousness is now being projected as a main instrument of assertion of the rights of the oppressed people through cultural objects and activities. The question is not simply of bread and butter for the scheduled casts, *izzat* (social honour), 'life-style' or 'social standing', and 'life-chances',¹⁵ have become serious concerns of the dalits. Dalits may be referred as a *consciousness community*.¹⁶ Though, Mahahars, Mangs and Chamars, for example, have never enjoyed the same status before or after Independence, nor they have been benefited in an equal measure. Since they constitute the class of dalits, hence dalits as a class are not a monolith. However, it does not imply that class and status are unrelated phenomena either conceptually or substantively. What is important to note is that a new 'field of cultural production', 'symbolic goods', mental structures, in other words, what Bourdieu calls 'symbolic power', 'symbolic capital' and 'cultural capital'¹⁷ are being created by the dalits to enhance their economic and political empowerment.

Caste-class and Dalit

The question of 'social status', at least apparently, has been central with regard to 'untouchables', though their economic standing and political power continue to remain substantive issues in determining their position in Indian society. According to Louis Dumont and several other scholars the principle of purity-impurity is a scalar yardstick, and it operates to keep different castes separate from one another.¹⁸ Differences in the degree of pollution thus create closed

segments in terms of inclusion of some and exclusion of other members.¹⁹ All interactions and ties, commensal and connubial, are guided by the principle of pollution-purity. Anti-caste movements were launched initially against such pollution-purity based hierarchisation of caste-groups. Violation of the cultural restrictions imposed upon various lower castes resulted in the imitation of the styles of life of the upper castes by the lower castes, and this process of imitation is characterised as sanskritisation.²⁰ What norms could be violated and to what extent? Who from among the 'untouchables' came forward to imitate and thereby threaten the dominance of the upper castes? What was the reaction of the upper castes to such moves of the lower/ 'untouchables' castes? What were the structural, manifest as well as latent, implications of such symbolic acts for both the upper and the lower castes? These and some other questions still remain to be analysed adequately.

A study of two villages by Jan Breman in South Gujarat highlights caste-class nexus and patterns of social mobility among the landowning and the landless communities.²¹ Traditionally, there were ideal patron-client relations between the landowning Anavil Brahmins and the landless Dublas, a tribal caste, also known as *halpati*. After the disintegration of the *halpatipratha*, the Dublas are mostly employed as farm servants. Anavil Brahmins have also diversified their occupational base. Dublas have changed much less than their masters. Depersonalisation and de patronisation have occurred as the Anavils are lured by urban occupations and salaried jobs. The traditional right of the Dublas to remain attached to their Anavil landlords is no more considered legitimate. The social security guaranteed by the landlords has disappeared. The Dublas have been changed from subjects to objects.²² But dependence and subordination of the Dublas persist vis-à-vis the Anavil landlords. Breman writes: "The Dublas are increasingly aware of the fact that their subjection is one of the main causes of their low social status. Economic disadvantages aside, weakness and dependence are looked upon as dishonourable and deplorable."²² They resist the inhuman-treatment meted to them and their womenfolk, and yet they feel constrained to remain under the control of the dominant landlords. Subjection of the lower castes has become particularly the main object of contention in the recent dalit movement. Today untouchability and economic exploitation are not the main issues as they used to be before and around the time of Independence. What is being asked is empowerment and social justice as a right for the dalits and other backward sections of society.

Discourse on Untouchability

Untouchables account for about 16% of India's population. The disabilities imposed on them in the past included residential segregation, confinement to polluting and mental occupations and denial of access to temples, wells and other civic amenities.²⁴ The constitution of India under article 46 promotes educational and economic interests of the weaker sections of the people. Article 17 abolishes the practice of untouchability.²⁵ Beteille mentions about three principal rights to equality. These are: 1) equality before the law; 2) prohibition of discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth; and 3) equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.²⁶ The most important of the three is equality of opportunity. But this becomes a value where a high value is placed on the individual²⁷, but this has not been the case in Indian history and society. Hence, quotas in education and employment for the weaker sections in Indian society. Equality is therefore more a policy than as a right. Equality as a policy requires special case for its implementation with regard to the depressed sections of society. It is this policy, which finds its

execution in the constitutional provisions for the Welfare of the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.

No lower 'untouchable' castes are willing to accept their lower status in the caste hierarchy, but all of them have accepted special favours for their upliftment. In fact, movements have been launched for securing more quotas in education and employment by the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes.²⁸ The same provision are now being made for the Other Backward Castes as per the recommendations of the Mandal Commission Report.²⁹ Marc Galanter, considers the compensatory discrimination policies as systematic departure from norms of secular equality, a departure from formal equality.³⁰ The preferences have been extended on a 'communal basis', or as what Beteille considers equality as policy and not as a right has found preference in post-independent India. Galanter refers to three basic types of preferences: 1) reservations, 2) programmes or provision of services, and 3) special protections.³¹ Certain such preferences and provisions for the depressed sections attack frontally the causes of the persisting system of social stratification, and hence the structure of the distributive system is inflicted upon by the dynamics of the distributive processes.³² Is all this enough? If not, what more? Why this pattern has emerged and come to stay? These questions constrain us to go deep into the debate on India's ex-untouchables.

Discourse on untouchability, harijans, the scheduled castes and dalits brings in centrally Gandhiji and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Gandhiji was accused of subverting the Hindu social order by way of patronising the Harijans, and he was accused by Dr. Ambedkar for making only token concessions to the untouchables.³³ Gandhiji is blamed for advising the harijans to find solutions to their problems by remaining under the fold of Hinduism. Opposition to a separate electorate to the untouchables was vehemently criticised by Ambedkar. Lack of earnestness and sincerity, encouragement to the Hindu hegemony, hypocrisy are attributed to Gandhiji with regard to his treatment of the harijans. B.R. Ambedkar, himself an 'untouchable', talented lawyer, the father of India's constitution, and India's first Law Minister, had serious differences with Gandhiji on the question of the harijans and the strategies for their upliftment. Ambedkar died on December 5, 1956. Before his death, he adopted Buddhism on October 15, 1956 along with hundreds of thousands of untouchables particularly from the state of Maharashtra. The Buddhist movement and the neo-Buddhism are mainly an offshoot of Ambedkar's disenchantment with Gandhiji's perception of India's 'untouchables'³⁴ in particular.

Untouchability was essentially perceived by Gandhiji as a moral problem, and hence it could be mitigated by changing the heart and mind of the caste Hindus. Gandhiji thought of untouchability as a matter of 'shame', 'guilt' and 'sin' for the upper castes rather than simply an ordinary evil. Struggle against untouchability was more than securing equal rights and economic betterment; it was a moral and spiritual struggle.³⁵ Gandhiji asked the caste Hindus to undertake activities for the upliftment of the untouchables to minimise this guilt/sin. Thus, Gandhiji was not so much in favour of legislations for the upliftment of the untouchables as he was for regeneration of the value of equality. The organisations and newspapers founded by Gandhiji are testimony to this effect.³⁶ Bhikhu Parekh writes: "Gandhi's contribution was considerable and greater than that of any other Indian leader. No one before him had mounted a frontal attack on untouchability and launched a vigorous national campaign."³⁷ He combined moral, religious and political appeals and his own personal example in creating an anti-untouchability ambience. But Gandhiji failed to shake social,

economic and political roots of untouchability.³⁸ One can infer that Gandhiji was not for bringing in militancy in the anti-untouchability movement, and in fact, he preferred moral and social programmes rather than legislative enactments for the upliftment of the harijans. However, in post-independent India, the policy of protective discrimination has become a corner stone of India's constitution.³⁹

The shift from the moral and spiritual explanation of untouchability given by Gandhiji is seen in the constitutional safeguards and subsequent amendments therein and other legislative enactments. The discourse has acquired a cultural and political character. Competing claims for furtherance of 'Ambedkarism' by different political parties more for political mileage have surfaced during last one decade or so. The nearly forgotten Ambedkar has suddenly become politically alive and vibrant. He is now everywhere, in parliament, political parties, central secretariat, universities, research institutes and NGOs. Statutes of Dr. Ambedkar have mushroomed both in small and big towns. Efforts are on to monopolise Ambedkar by one political party or other, by one group or other. Distortions in the discourse have throttled creativity and reflection with regard to a thinker, ideologue, reformer and activist. The hypocritical showering of praises on him have done a great harm to him and the cause for which he fought during his lifetime. Humiliating observations about Gandhiji have been equated with the promotion of Ambedkarism. Kanshi Ram, the supremo of the Bahujan Samaj Party one observed:

"What has Gandhi done? He fought tooth and nail against the interests of the downtrodden people. In September 1932, he went on fast against reservation. Later it was propagated that Gandhi was responsible for reservations. He was a great hypocrite, to my mind. He lived in a sweepers' colony and he told them: "Your job is a very good job, you are doing a very good job. If I am to be born again I would like to be born as a sweeper." He was told: 'If you want to be a sweeper, you can fulfill your desire in this life. Come on: But he never came. He was a hypocrite just fooling innocent people."⁴⁰

Similar rather more harsh observation was made a couple of weeks ago by Ms. Mayawati; a Member of Rajya Sabha and National General Secretary of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). She gave a call for finishing Gandhism, and described Gandhiji as the biggest enemy of Dalits. Coining the name 'Harijan; for the oppressed class he did the maximum damage to them. If the word Harijan meant the 'children of God', then Mahatma himself was the 'son of demon' (Shaitan). Why leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Pant did not add 'Harijan' to their names, she asked in a raised voice. Mayawati roared for finishing Gandhism and asked for introducing Ambedkarvad.⁴¹

Though the BSP was not an effective political party until recent assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh; its militant anti-upper caste articulations and expressions, particularly against Brahmins, Rajputs, Vaishyas and Kayasthas lured the lower castes towards it in these elections. In Maharashtra, however, the Dalits still comprise of the ex-untouchable castes. The non-dalit lower castes are, however, getting attracted towards the BSP. Dr. Ambedkar's efforts to transform the 'untouchables' were less reactive and more constructive, whereas the above two assertions by Kanshi Ram and Mayawati are merely reactive. In fact, Ambedkar in essence agreed with Gandhi. He said: "Rights are protected not by law but by the social and moral conscience of society."⁴² Ambedkar also said: "If social conscience is such that it is prepared to recognise the rights which law chooses to enact, rights- will be safe and secure."⁴³ Further he mentioned that if the "rights are

opposed by the community, no law, no parliament, no judiciary can guarantee them in the real sense of the world.”⁴⁴

Dalit Movement and Identity

Dalit movements are, in fact, the harijan/scheduled castes’ movements. The word ‘the oppressed’ is closest to the world dalit. As it has been stated earlier – from ‘harijan’ to ‘scheduled castes’ and from ‘scheduled castes’ to ‘dalit’ mark the process of the emergence of the word Dalit. Thus, dalits are the SCs and they constitute nearly 16% of the India’s population. Most of them are manual and agricultural workers. Many of them are engaged in their traditional occupations, and some are engaged in white-collar government and public sector jobs.⁴⁵ In Maharashtra, Dr. Ambedkar mobilised the Mahars and other ‘untouchables’ for launching socio-political movement against their persisting depressed status. Some scholars have compared the dalits of India with the blacks of the USA.⁴⁶ Barring some studies such as by Bharat Patankar and Gail Omvedt⁴⁷ and Ghanshyam Shah,⁴⁸ most studies have emphasised on the process of sanskritisation among the SCs.

Ghanshyam Shah classified dalit movements as 1) reformatory, and 2) alternative. The reformatory movements focus mainly on the study of changes in the caste system and the institution of untouchability. The issues related to conversion to other religions (for example, Buddhism, Islam, Christianity) and education, economic status and political power are taken up in the study of the alternative movements.⁴⁹ However, Patankar and Omvedt mention that the dalit movements are 1) caste-based, and 2) class-based.⁵⁰ In essence all the dalit movements are anti-Brahmin, anti-Upper castes and anti-caste. The movements such as the Satyashodhak Samaj, the Self-Respect, the Adi-Dharma, the Adi-Andhra, the Adi-Hindu, the Namashudra, the Nadar, the neo-Buddhist etc, emphasised on discarding of Brahminical ways of life and practice of untouchability. In the process of these movements the ‘untouchables’ discarded their traditional occupations too far claiming social status equal to the ‘clean castes’. In fact, sanskritisation has been observed as the main consequence not clearly intended of most of the dalit movements.

The most significant consequence of the dalit movement is the formation of various voluntary organisations for the Welfare of the poorest of the poor from among the dalits. Some of these are: The Rural Community Development Association, The Harijan Labourers’ Association, The Agricultural Workers’ Movements, The Rural Harijan Agricultural Development Association, The Association of Rural Poor etc. The main objective of these organisations is to mobilise the agricultural poor from among the dalits to make them conscious of their socio-economic and cultural oppression and subjugation. For Peter Robb all the movements of labourers both tribal and non-tribal including SCs are dalit movements.⁵¹ These organisations have so far remained active in the states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu.

The message which Ambedkar gave to the bhikkhus was of becoming as models of ‘self-culture and self-service’. The supporters of Ambedkarite Buddhism and the dalit movement consider Ambedkar’s writings on Buddhism as a ‘religion of the oppressed’, or a form of ‘liberation theology.’⁵² Ambedkar’s contribution is seen as a shift in the debates from religious to secular discourse having the emancipatory exercise at its core. ‘Ambedkar cult’ is perhaps in the making. A sense of liberation and freedom through the act of conversion to neo-Buddhism has captured

attention of dalits more than any other idea. Impact of Kabirpanth and Jyotirao Phule on Ambedkar created a sense of repulsion and hatred in him against Hinduism and traditional caste-hierarchy. He distanced from Gandhi and closeted with Marxism.⁵³

Since the early 1970s, the word dalit has become ‘a positive, assertive expression of pride in Untouchable heritage and a rejection of oppression.’⁵⁴ ‘Dalit’ refers to all forms of social and economic oppression and it also applies to other oppressed groups like tribals, religious minorities, women and the economically oppressed of all castes.⁵⁵ Many scholars, however, prefer to use the term ‘untouchable’ rather than ‘Dalit.’⁵⁶ Ambedkar’s message for the downtrodden was ‘be a lion’, ‘be your own light’⁵⁷ He attacked the established Indian order by giving a call for destroying culturally defined inequality and persisting economic inequality. Creation of a counter-culture, a culture of protest was his goal. Ambedkar’s strong advocacy was for a cultural revolution and a radical social democracy.⁵⁹ Labour must control government and not the people inspired by self-serving Individualism. He asked for protection against exploitation as a fundamental right.⁶⁰ Gandhian moral reform, orthodox Marxism, Western economic developmentalism (both the capitalist and socialist types) even put together would not equal to an indigenous dalit tradition. It represents a “community of communication within which individuals and organizations argue and evolve.”⁶¹

Approaches for the study of Dalits

Two distinct approaches are found with regard to Dr. Ambedkar’s basic formulations about Indian society. As illustrations of these approaches we propose to highlight briefly the views of M.S. Gore⁶² and Gail Omvedt.⁶³ Gore analyses Dr. Ambedkar’s thought system from the functionalist standpoint of knowledge, whereas Omvedt examines the Dalit revolt from the historical materialist viewpoint. Gore and Omvedt have published more or less at the same time, in 1993 and 1994, respectively. Let us sum up the salient point of their perspectives on Ambedkar.

Gore considers Ambedkar’s thought and action as an ‘ideology of protest’. According to Gore, Ambedkar clearly identified the outcaste untouchables distinct from the intermediate castes of Marathas and Kunbis, and the backward castes of Telis, Tambolis, barbers and artisans.⁶⁴ Before the Simon Commission, he declared that the ‘depressed classes’ referred to untouchable caste groups as well as tribal communities, but he preferred to plead on behalf of the untouchables only. He was also aware of the fact that the untouchables had several sub-castes as unequal status groups within Maharashtra and elsewhere. Despite intra-untouchable distinctions based-on language, cultural context and economic standing, Ambedkar tried to create a sense of common identity among the untouchables on India. Ambedkar identified Brahmins as the real adversary of the untouchables as they not only were priests, they were most important elite group in society controlling public life by holding positions in education, administration and professions. A counter-protest from the Brahmins was a natural consequence in the defense of the established social order.⁶⁵

Ambedkar hinted at the ‘graded’ inequality in Indian society as the root cause of persisting oppression of the lower sections. Gore applies the Mertonian paradigm of sociology of knowledge

to the understanding of the ideology and to its social context.⁶⁶ The 'communication Paradigm' is also found useful by Gore in addressing questions like who protests against whom for What Reasons with What objectives and with What Means. The nationalist/larger political context inspired mobilisation, but the internal division and stratification among the untouchables created obstacles in the movement.⁶⁷

The main aim of Ambedkar was to evolve a definite perspective on the problems faced by the untouchables of India. To register their protest and to seek an effective participation in the power structure of Indian society were his main concerns. The untouchables of India were seen by Ambedkar different from the underdog elsewhere all over the world. To elevate the untouchables from the underdog position, Ambedkar emphasised on the role of both 'law' and 'moral order.'⁶⁸

Gail Omvedt focusses on the Dalit movement as a part of a broader anti-caste movement in the colonial period. The Dalit and non-Brahman anti-caste movements can be classified as 'anti-systemic movements', or as 'value-oriented movements' as opposed to 'norm-oriented movements.'⁶⁹ Omvedt writes: "That is they (movements) challenged and sought to transform the basic structure of the India social system, replacing caste and the accompanying social oppression, economic exploitation and political domination by an equalitarian society."⁷⁰ There were also reformist trends in the anti-caste movements particularly represented by Gandhi, Jagjivan Ram etc. The anti-caste Dalit movement imparts a revolutionary message, a will to act against exploitation, a rise from oppression, from death to life, from darkness to light.⁷¹ Thus, the spirit of militant Marxism and Naxalism is close to the ethos of the Dalit movement. The Dalits for steering such a movement must have a power of thought to challenge and destroy Brahminic hegemony and Hindu nationalism. Anti-caste radicals are thus distinguished from the reformers.⁷²

According to Ambedkar the Indian National Congress was controlled by Upper castes and capitalists (as "Brahman and burgeois). Phule gave the name of the '*Irani arya-bhats*', and later on others called them as Shetji- Bhatji or Brahman-Bania' raj.⁷³ The left-Dalit unity having workers and peasants as a core base only could bring about the empowerment of the exploited sections of the society. Dalit Panthers mention in their Manifesto: "We don't want a little place in Brahman alley. We want the rule of the whole country."⁷⁴ Dalit movements is seen by Omvedt as 'diversionary', and not simply in 'class' terms or as a second fiddle of the Congress-dominated national movement.⁷⁵ Omvedt suggests for formulating "a revised historical materialist understanding not only of the linkage between the 'economic base' and the 'superstructure', but economic processes themselves."⁷⁶ Alongwith 'economic subordination' Omvedt discusses the role played by cultural/community forms and force and violence in the agenda she set for the understanding of the anti-caste and Dalit movements.⁷⁷

Gail Omvedt's study provides a systematic socio-historical account of the Dalits and their movements in the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka from a well-knit neo-Marxist viewpoint. With regard to the patterns of Dalit Mobilisation and Ambedkar the following points may be mentioned:

- 1) The Dalit movement emerged in all regions as a result of Ambedkar's leadership with similar trends, though of varying degrees of strength.

- 2) The movement was genuinely anti-caste, and not merely a caste-reform movement.
- 3) Dalits as exploited workers, peasants and agricultural workers were involved with economic or 'class' issues everywhere, in all regions.⁷⁸

According to Omvedt "the Dalit movement emerged as a political force at the same time as the non-Brahman movement and about the same time as the working class and peasantry were creating their organisational forms".⁷⁹ With all this, 'Ambedkarism' is considered by Omvedt as 'the theory of Dalit liberation.'⁸⁰ 'Ambedkarism' outlines the following:

1. An uncompromising dedication to the needs of the Dalits, which required total annihilation of the system and the Brahmanic superiority it embodied.
2. An almost equally strong dedication to the reality of India-denial of the imposition of a 'Hindu' identity.
3. A conviction that the eradication of caste required a repudiation of 'Hinduism as a religion, and adoption of Buddhism' as an alternative religion.
4. A broad economic radicalism interpreted as 'socialism' mixed with and growing out of Ambedkar's democratic liberalism and liberal dedication to individual rights.
5. A fierce rationalism
6. A firmly autonomous dalit movement having the socially and economically exploited (Dalits and Shudras, workers and peasants in class terms) as an alternative political front to the Congress party which he saw as the Unique platform of 'Brahmanism' and 'capitalism.'⁸¹

In 1949, Ambedkar hinted in the Constituent Assembly that we were entering into a life of contradiction. "In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality..."⁸² Ambedkar was so disgusted with the situation that once he said, "I myself will burn the constitution."⁸³ In the 1970s, the followers of Ambedkar threatened to desecrate the national flag, burn the constitution as well as the Manusmrit. Ambedkar declared once Nehru to be 'just another Brahmin.'⁸⁴ Dalit movement is 'class-caste struggle.'⁸⁵ It is a movement for establishing an alternative identity which is explosive and revolutionary.⁸⁶ Creation of a new consciousness pertaining as a quality related to the existence and assertion of the Dalits is the ultimate goal of the Dalit movements. Dalit literature and Dalit writers have come to the Centre-stage in creating a sense of self-respect and dignity. A couple of years ago and also quite recently the controversy and ensuing conflicts (including killings and suicides) over the issue of renaming the Marathawada University as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University could be seen as a struggle between the upper castes and the Dalits.⁸⁷

Conclusion

The notion of Dalit is not the same as those of 'Harijan' and 'Scheduled castes'. The terms 'Harijan' and 'Scheduled castes' connote 'socio-cultural' and 'legal' meanings, respectively. The word 'Dalit' symbolises 'knowledge' and 'power' of the oppressed people particularly belonging to the untouchable castes/communities. It refers to the genesis and expression of their consciousness. 'Identity' as the 'oppressed people', is central to the term Dalit. Thus, the emergence of the identity of the Dalit has created a new social language, a language of protest and struggle, of deconstruction and reconstruction of meanings of social situations, contexts and status parameters. It is an 'oppositional' side in creation of new cognitive structures. Dalitism sets a new agenda for an equalitarian social order, new distributive just processes. 'Equality of outcome/result' is the most concrete and measurable yardstick of the envisaged new order.

Dalitism is a historical phenomenon. Dalits as a class can be seen only in terms of human relationships, and not as a category, a thing or as a fixed 'structure' at a given point of time. Dalitism implies ideological and political militancy of the dalits. They could be referred as a consciousness community. Acquisition and control of knowledge and power is treated as the most potent resource by the Dalits. Thus, Ambedkarian discourse on dalits and untouchability is said to be an alternative perspective to the Gandhian view about Harijans.

Dalit movement may be seen in terms of 1) the sociology of knowledge and communication paradigms, and 2) neo-Marxist view expousing class-caste approach. In the first case, the social context of Ambedkarism is highlighted; whereas in the second approach emphasis is on the understanding of the broad situation of the underdog mainly in class terms without losing the sight of the specific caste situation in India. As such, Dalit movement is an anti-systematic movement. Both manifest and latent consequences of the Dalit movement are observable in socio-cultural, political and economic spheres of life. Dalitism implies an 'ideology of protest', but of varying degrees and intensities.

Finally, 'caste' is the central phenomenon in the discourse on 'dalitism', but 'class' is also inherently present in it. Caste is used as an idiom for waging a 'class war' against the established and entrenched hierarchies of power and domination. However, Dalits are not just a constellation of untouchable castes, they are seen also as actual exploited workers, peasants and agricultural labourers in all parts of India. Emphasis is laid on their emancipation from economic bondage by bringing about 'economic radicalism' (socialism). Despite all these elements, which we have put together, the notion of 'Dalit' is a new arrival; it is an ad-hoc concept, it is a culture-bound construction; it is a reactive and not a generative 'concept'. Squeezing between caste and class reduces its 'atomistic' existence as a concept. It has more emotional affectual appeal than rational and logical message. Lastly, it is a concept in-making.

The problem of the dalits has invited world-wide attention. It is being raised as a question relating to violation of human rights. Practice of caste-based oppression and untouchability is equated with racism and racial discrimination. The sub-commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in its Forty-sixth meeting held in August 1994 at Geneva discussed measures to combat racism and racial discrimination in the context of the caste system and the practice of untouchability. The SCs and STs Commission report of 1991-92 also mentions that there were 21360 human rights violations of Dalits and Tribals. There might be several unreported violations too. It was suggested

in the UN meeting that all such violations be treated as crime against humanity. Failure on the part of the concerned agencies must invite imposition of sanctions. The gravity of the problem is such that immediate as well as far-reaching effective emancipatory measures cannot be avoided/postponed for posterity.

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