

POLITICAL PERSPECTIVE OF DALITS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

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Abstract

The political perspective of Dalits in contemporary India is characterized by a complex interplay of historical injustices, socio-economic disparities, and evolving democratic dynamics. Dalits, historically marginalized and subjected to social discrimination, have increasingly sought political empowerment and representation. The struggle for Dalit rights has found expression through various political movements and the emergence of Dalit leaders who advocate for social justice and equal opportunities. However, challenges persist, as issues of caste-based discrimination persist in political structures, hindering the full realization of Dalit political empowerment. The nuanced landscape of Dalit politics in modern India, emphasizing the ongoing pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable political representation for this historically marginalized community.

Keyword: Dalits, rights, politics, social justice.

Introduction

The term Dalit, first used in journalistic writings as far back as 1931 to connote the untouchables, did not gain currency until the early 1970s with the Dalit Panther Movement in Maharashtra (Michael, 1999: 12).¹ The term Dalit is a Hindi word which means oppressed. Since then the term has been subjected to countless interpretations, as to who should be called as Dalit? In 1930s the term Dalit' was first used apparently as a Hindi and Marathi translation of Depressed Classes, the term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Castes (OBCs). The word was also used by B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956) in his Marathi speeches. Since the early 1970s, the word has come into increasingly wider usage in the press and in common parlance where it is normally used in the original, caste-based sense. Scholars have written about Dalits in different ways. Basically two views predominate i.e., (i) Class analysis and (ii) Caste analysis. Those using a Class analysis of Indian society subsume Dalits within such class or occupational Categories as peasants, agricultural labour, factory workers, students, and the like. This can be seen in most Marxist historical writings, the subaltern studies volumes, and to a lesser extent, in the Dalit-Panther manifesto. To those using Caste analysis, Dalits are the people within Hindu society who belong to those castes which Hindu religion considers to be polluting by virtue of hereditary occupation. The histories of Dalit Movement by Kamble (1979), Gupta (1985), Pradhan (1986) and Trilok Nath (1987) are based on this premise (Michael, 1999: 68-69).

There has been a trend to identify Dalits with only those castes which were included in Scheduled Castes list by Government of India. The so-called mainstream sociologists used the term 'caste Hindus' to refer to all castes which are outside the Scheduled Castes. This terminology is absolutely a trap for the STs and OBCs. In their day-to-day lives the STs and OBCs are as oppressed as are the Scheduled Castes by the 'upper castes. Yet the term offers the STs and OBCs inclusion in the Hindu' fold but only as unequals. Some organizations like the Dalit Mahasabha of Andhra Pradesh did attempt to use the term Dalit' to denote Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes, but the popular press and the masses themselves never took up the usage to the extent it should have been. Confining the word Dalit' to denote only those castes which were included in Scheduled Castes list is absolutely unfair, unjust and amounts to gross distortion of 3000 year old oppressive history of shudras who gained upward mobility in modern times and have been included in OBC category. In Manu's 'Manusmriti and Kautilya's 'Arthashastra and other texts, it was the shudras who were condemned to subordinate and inhuman status. According to Manu, the very sight of possession of wealth by a shudra injures the Brahmin, an attempt made by shudra to acquire knowledge is a crime. If a shudra listens to a recitation of the Vedas his ears are to be filled with molten lead; if a shudra recites the sacred texts his tongue is to be torn out; and if he remembers them, his body is to be split. The Brahmin was divinely authorized to insult, beat and enslave a shudra but if shudra protests he would have a red hot iron thrust into his mouth. The killing of a shudra by a Brahmin was equivalent to the killing of a cat, frog, lizard, owl, or crow. All worst kind of treatment against shudras had been advocated by Manu. What the people of Scheduled Castes experiencing in contemporary period despite constitutional safeguards across India was experienced in much more brutal and cruel form by shudras who were included in OBC category and boast of their superiority over the people of Scheduled Castes. During Manu's and Kautilya's time the category of untouchables who are now included in Scheduled Castes category i.e., who were out of Varna fold did not exist. But Manu, certainly, did predict about this category but did not make elaborate provisions as to how they were to be dealt with. Manu and Kautilya concentrated mostly on shudras and made all possible worst and condemning provisions for them. But over the years the number of outcastes i.e., untouchables swelled into significant proportions out of miscegenation, which led the upward mobility of shudras. As a result shudras became touchable and outcastes became untouchable. Brahmins started entertaining and hinduising shudras in order to prevent them from associating with untouchables. That's why Mahatma Jotiba Phule made enormous efforts to unite both shudras and untouchables to take on Manuwadis. Ambedkar and Kanshi Ram took the legacy of Mahatma Jotiba Phule to new heights. Now Mayawati made it much broad based by including oppressed among Upper castes.

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Five criteria used to determine whether a caste or tribe was Dalit or not such as the denial of various services by Brahmin priests and access to the interior of temples to causing pollution by proximity or contact, as well as to the Dalit practice of eating beef and not revering the cow (Pradhan, 1986: 197).² This criteria was not taken for granted, though

widely accepted. Given this all the Castes which were included in SC, ST and OBC categories are called as Dalits. All so-called mainstream sociologists deny this claim. But by doing so they are negating the vulnerable position of ST and OBC castes during pre-independence period in particular and post-independence period in general. After independence Dalits had been further classified into STs and OBCs. Basically Dalit' is a word used to connote a person who is vulnerable to worst form of discrimination or oppression with an element of contempt and hatred. In pre-independence India among the prevailing forms of discrimination the worst form of discrimination with contempt and hatred was on the ground of caste. On account of birth in a low caste' a person becomes untouchable. He is treated worse than animal like cow and subject to indescribable ways of harassment and torture. All the castes which are now included in SC, ST and OBC categories by Indian Government were discriminated on the basis of caste until independence. It is only after independence through constitutional provisions the basic rights of the people belonging to these castes have been ensured. Despite enormous provisions made to ensure their rights in constitution under the able stewardship of B.R. Ambedkar they are still being subjected to vagaries of caste system. Therefore what I strongly feel and believe is that Dalits are all those who were brutally discriminated and denied forcibly all minimum rights as human beings on account of their caste in pre-independence India and modern times. Mahatma Jotiba Phule (1826-1890) also appeared to be endorsing this claim. Right from the beginning, though, a more fundamental challenge to Hinduism was taking shape, its earliest major protagonist was Mahatma Jotiba Phule, a shudra (peasant) caste social radical from Maharashtra, was the first man in modern India to launch a movement for the liberation of caste-oppressed, toilers, men and women, also founded the Satyashodak Samaj in 1875, which organised the non-Brahmins to propound rationality, the giving up of Brahmin priests for rituals and the education for children (both boys and girls). He spearheaded a multi-pronged struggle to rebuild society on the matrix of equity, justice and reason and also saw a close relationship between knowledge and power much before Foucault and Edward Said did. He Sought to unite all non-Brahmins who were subjected to discrimination on account of their birth in middle and low castes. He argued that all non-Brahmin castes together represented an oppressed and exploited mass, and compared their subordination with that of the native Indians in the Americas and the Blacks. (See Gail Omvedt, 1995: 19; Braj Ranjan Mani, 2005: 251).³

Prior to Jotiba Phule there were no efforts to initiate comprehensive scheme of social reform. There was only much hue and cry about political reform. At one time it was recognised that unless and until social reforms are introduced and evils in Indian society are removed it was not possible to achieve permanent progress in other fields of activity. Therefore untiring efforts have to be made to eradicate the evils plaguing Indian society. It was due to the recognition of this fact that the birth of Indian National Congress was accompanied by the foundation of the Social Conference (B.R. Ambedkar, 1936: 4-5).⁴ But there were very few people who associated themselves with Social Conference. Congress was very antagonistic to the idea of social reform to take precedence over political reform. Congress's attitude was clearly reflected in the speech delivered by Mr. W.C. Bonnerji in

1892 at Allahabad as president of the eighth session of the Congress which manifested Congress's severe antagonism to social reform. Bonnerji said:

"I for one have no patience with those who saw we shall not be fit for political reform until we reform our social system. I Jail to see any connection between the two... Are we not fit (for political reform) because our widows remain unmarried and our girls are given in marriage earlier than in other countries? Because we do not send our daughters to Oxford and Cambridge?" (Cheers) (quoted in B.R. Ambedkar, 1936: 5)

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar in one of his outstanding works Annihilation of Caste analysing political reform versus social reform explains the reasons for political reform taking precedence over social reform:

I have stated the case for political reform as put by Mr. Bonnerji. There were many who are happy that the victory went to the Congress. But those who believe in the importance of social reform may ask, is the argument such as that of Mr. Bonnerji final? Does it prove that victory went to those who were in the right? Does it prove conclusively that social reform has no bearing on political reform?.. How is it then, that the Social Reform Party lost the battle? To understand this correctly it is necessary to take note of the kind of social reform, which the reformers were agitating for. In this connection it is necessary to make a distinction between social reform in the sense of the reform of the Hindu Family and social reform in the sense of the reorganization and reconstruction of the Hindu Society. The former has relation to widow remarriage, child marriage etc., while the latter relates to the abolition of the caste system. The Social Conference was a body, which mainly concerned itself with the reform of the high caste Hindu Family. It consisted mostly of enlightened high caste Hindus who did not feel the necessity for agitating for the abolition of caste or had not the courage to agitate for it. They felt quite naturally a greater urge to remove such evils as enforced widowhood, child marriages etc., evils which prevailed among them and which were personally felt by them. They did not stand up for the reform of the Hindu society. The battle that was fought centered round the question of the reform of the family. It did not relate to the social reform in the sense of the break-up of the caste system. It was never put in issue by the reformers. That is the reason why Social Reform Party lost... the view that social reform need not precede political reform is a view which may stand only when by social reform is meant the reform of the family. That political reform cannot with impunity take precedence over social reform in the sense of reconstruction of society is a thesis which, I am sure, cannot be controverted (B.R. Ambedkar, 1936: 5-8).

Even though Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy and Dayanand Saraswati led social reform movements in British India they were confined to select areas of Hinduism. Since the efforts to reform Hindu society were confined to those areas which affected Brahmins like forced widowhood and child marriage, Hindu society did not get reformed. It was only Mahatma Jotiba Phule for the first time took on the comprehensive mission of reforming Hindu society in the truest sense of the term and tried to unite all Dalits who were distinct from Hindus. Kancha Ilaiah in his masterpiece "Why I am not a Hindu" also

distinguishes Dalitbahujans (Dalits) from Hindus. He starts with a premise that Dalits are totally independent of Hindus in terms of everything. He says Dalits have nothing to do With 'Hinduism'. Both Dalits and Hindus are separate entities and different in terms of culture, lifestyle and all other mundane activities which make them distinct from each other. In the present paper I also go with the same proposition. Categorisation of castes into SC, ST and OBC categories and placing them one above the other in terms of purity-pollution is nothing but to divide Dalits and prevent them from getting united. Despite this categorisation most castes in these categories find themselves associated with each other. Having come from such background how and what Dalits want their perspective to be? There is a great debate as to whether Dalit perspective as such exists or not. Looking and analyzing issues from subaltern point of view is called as Dalit perspective and this tradition in India goes back to the days of Lord Buddha and continued by the subaltern saints like Kabir, Ravidas, and Tukaram in the medieval period to Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Narayana Guru, Iyothee Thass, Ramaswamy Naicker and Ambedkar in modern period. Of late there has been a great interest in unravelling and exploring various issues and aspects from Dalit Perspective in India. The narrative strategy from the subaltern point of view owes its origin to great Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1881-1937) and in India it was explicated in the writings of Ranjit Guha It is indeed of critical importance to find out if the Dalit community as such has distinct vision on various issues in general and Communalism in particular as the present paper is on communalism in India. In modern times Communalism and communal violence are rapidly spreading across the length and breadth of India with a greater intensity, and become more frequent in nature affecting more and more sections of people. Communal violence continues to be a matter of serious and sustained reflection within the academic community. For instance, the communal violence in the wake of Babri masjid demolition in 1992 and the state sponsored pogrom of Muslims in Gujrat in 2002 has generated fine and impassioned scholarship. However, the interwoven histories of violence against Dalits who actively participated in the above two incidents were commented upon but not integrated into analyses (Dilip Menon, 2006: viii).⁵ In India, often there has been a custom among the so-called mainstream writers and thinkers that whenever communal violence takes place they tend to look at it as conflict between Hindus and Muslims; Dalits are being taken for granted as Hindus. Dalits have always been kept out of communal discourse and there has been reluctance among the so-called mainstream writers to include Dalits in communal discourse. Caste violence which is more frequent and severe in nature has never been given due space in intellectual circles. Caste angle in the communal violence was completely ignored and has always been debated and discussed on religious lines. Dilip Menon in his the blindness of insight' explains how the violence against Dalits by Hindutva forces has been shifted to Muslims. There is a close relation between the discourses of caste, secularism and communalism. That Hinduism as religion, social system or way of life - is a hierarchical, inegalitarian structure is largely accepted, but what goes largely neglected in academic discourse is both the casual brutality and the organised violence that it practices towards its subordinate sections. The inner violence within Hinduism explains to a considerable extent the violence directed outwards against Muslims once we concede that the former is

historically prior. The question in this paper is: how has the deployment of violence against an internal Other (defined in terms of inherent inequality), the Dalit, come to be transformed at certain incidents into one aggression against an external Other (defined primarily in terms of inherent difference), the Muslim? Is communalism a deflection of the central issue of violence and inequality within Hindu society? (Dilip Menon, 2006: ix-x). Given the historical background of suppression and worst form of discrimination on the ground of caste, Dalits naturally aspire for a society based on the principles of Equality, Social Justice and Human Dignity. With the emergence of Dalit perspective the old values related to caste and gender relationships are under great strain. It will not be an exaggeration to state that one of the profound changes taking place in contemporary Indian society has been the social transformation of Dalits heralded by Dalit perspective. Dalit vision of Indian society is different from that of upper castes. It enlightened Dalits and Women, gave a new sense of their humanity and forging ahead to shape a new modern India. Dalit perspective envisages a vision based on the values of democracy and secularism whereas, the Manuwadi perspective (so-called mainstream perspective) is based on inequality, tries to establish hegemony and maintain status quo. Manuwadi perspective does not believe in equality between human beings, equality between men and women and it is absolutely patriarchal in nature and content. Contrary to Manuwadi perspective Dalit perspective firmly believes in equality, liberty and fraternity and strives to establish an egalitarian society based on such principles. More than anything else it represents the aspirations of majority in India. But unfortunately Dalit perspective which represents majority enjoys minority status and the Manuwadi perspective which represents minority and reflects the hegemonic aspirations of Manuwadi castes (upper castes) enjoys majority status in India. The zeal to look at the things and issues from Dalit perspective among Dalit intelligentsia brought an edifice of Dalit literature which has become India's dominant literature sidelining traditional mainstream literature. Dalit literature is no more limited to any regional language. The energy created by the ideological wave of Dr. Ambedkar gave Dalit literature the identity of Indian literature. Dalit literature is based on 'experience which takes precedence over 'speculation'. For Dalit writers and thinkers, history is not illusionary or unreal as Manuwadi metaphysical theory makes us to believe. That is why authenticity and liveliness have become hallmarks of Dalit literature. Dalit Writers use the language and idiom of Dalits which is in total contrast with the language and idiom used by so-called mainstream thinkers. The expressions of Dalit writers are very sharp and blunt in nature which make earnest plea for a complete overhaul of society. They refute the conventional representation of themselves in history and culture. The imperative to deconstruct and construct history is increasingly being felt by Dalit writers and thinkers. As Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer put it, "even the sun needs to be changed. Dalit writer Kancha Ilaiah emphasizing on the need for the Dalits to write their own texts and narratives, suggests that whatever has been written by Brahminical thinkers,- must be rewritten thoroughly for the simple reason that they cannot be at once judge and party to the lawsuit:

...the life-world of Dalit-bahujans of India has hardly anything in common with the socio-cultural and political environment of Hindu- Brahminism. The Dalit-bahujans live

together with the Hindus in the civil society of Indian villages and urban centres, but the two cultural worlds are not merely different, they are opposed to each other. Hindu thinking is set against the interests of Dalit-bahujan castes; Hindu mythology is built by destroying the Dalit-bahujan cultural ethos. Dalit-bahujan castes were never allowed to develop into modernity and equality. The violent, hegemonic, Brahminical culture sought to destroy Dalit-bahujan productive structures, culture, economy and its positive political institutions. Everything was attacked and undermined. This process continues in post-independence India (Kancha Ilaiah, 1996: 114; quoted in Braj Ranjan Mani, 2005: 19) ⁶

Almost all Dalit writers echo the same views as Kancha Ilaiah. Dalit literature is not only the weapon to fight against social exploitation, caste discrimination, 'chaturvarna' system and for struggle against the custodians of religion, but also the symbol of Dalit identity. That identity supports human freedom, equality and fraternity and stands against and opposes hollow religious rituals, blind faith, immoral values, and stands as a strong rebel against the established Indian inhuman social, religious and cultural values. Fight of Dalit literature is against man made discriminations of caste, colour, creed, gender religion and language. The so-called traditional Indian literature Sanskrit or otherwise was deeply immersed in the muddy waters of heterodoxy, spiritualism and was never the real mirror of society. The credit of representing real mirror of society goes to Dalit literature, it being rich in content and not only of pleasing presentation meant for cheap entertainment. Dalit literature criticises the projection of so-called mainstream literature or Manuwadi literature as a symbol of progress. According to Dalit literature the so-called mainstream is the stream of those who strived for bringing in hegemony of one caste; their wishes and hates, their likings and disliking became the value systems.

Their stream is not only narrow, cruel and inhuman but also it uses all tricks, dishonest deceptions, fraud and cheating in order to preserve its hegemony. This so-called mainstream does not recognise Dalits and Women as humans who constitute more than three fourths of the society. The literature of this so-called mainstream is broken away from the gross realities of society both by time and space, as if it belongs to some alien planets. This so-called mainstream is a dirty stream of Manuwadi ideology and hegemony. In this stream there is no space for equality, liberty, fraternity, love, compassion and concern for fellow human beings. Entire Manuwadi literature from Vedic period to till date bear evidence to this claim. The Purusha Sukta of Rig Veda says that the Brahmins were created from God's mouth, Kshatriyas from arms, Vaishyas from thighs and Shudras from the feet of God. Thankfully and luckily, the untouchables were not created from this God at all. Untouchables were the result of miscegenation which in turn always takes place out of love. Thus untouchables were the products of love. But unfortunately Manu, the cruel law giver condemns untouchables who were the result of love to inhuman status and thereby denies the right to have love. Dalit perspective "critiques the sensibility which equates Indian tradition with Hinduism and Hinduism with Manuwadi ideology or Brahminism; which considers the Vedas as the foundational texts of Indian culture, and discovers within the Aryan heritage the essence of Indian civilization" (Gail Omvedt, 1995: ix). Dalit perspective questions this way of looking

at Indian society, its history and looks at alternative traditions nurtured by various Dalit movements. The task of Dalit perspective is multi-dimensional, to address and redress the aspirations of Dalits on the issues covering socio, political, economical, cultural and spiritual as Indian political system and political parties inspired by Manuwadi ideology did not make efforts to ensure the rights and safeguards of Dalits enshrined in the constitution. Its purpose is to alter the terms of dominant culture and order set by Manuwadi ideology. It declares as Gail Omvedt says "that war has to be fought, at the level of culture and symbolism and not simply that of politics and economics; and not simply with the weapons of "secularism" but over every inch of the terrain of Indian history and identity that the Hindu-nationalists have staked claim to (Gail Omvedt, 1995: vii).

All the Dalit movements from the days of Mahatma Jotiba Phule to till date are inspired by the ethos of Dalit perspective. Some Dalit movements in the words of Gail Omvedt "asserted a Dalit identity within terms set by Brahminical Hinduism: fighting for Kshatriya status and the right to enter temples. Others like the Ad Dharm in Punjab, Adi Hindu movement in Hyderabad, Adi Dravida in Andhra and Adi Karnataka in South India - traced the history of their oppression to Aryan conquest and claimed that the non-Brahmins were the original inhabitants of these different regions. Influenced by Marxism, Ambedkar sought to build a unity of non-Brahmin castes which would be both a class and caste unity against the Brahmin-bourgeois congress" (Gail Omvedt, 1995: x). Dalit perspective challenged the centralizing tendencies of Manuwadi ideology; linking blood, territory and language and projection of Hindi and Sanskrit as the quintessential Indian languages. Gail Omvedt further says "For most people, even scholars in India, "Hinduism" has been a taken-for-granted concept. Hindus are the people of India. Hinduism is their religion. Beginning with the Rig Veda to the philosophers and even contemporary political leaders, it has been seen as a unique phenomenon of spirituality linked to a practical life; and with a solid geographical base in a diversified subcontinent... Its greatest virtue has been its elasticity, its pluralism its lack of dogma. Hinduism, it is said, has no 'orthodoxy. With a core in the religious tradition going back to the Vedas and Upanishads, it has brought forth other sister/child religions -Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, all born out of the Same fertile continue of tradition, all part of India and Hinduism's contributions to the world. This image, encompassing the cultural diversities of the subcontinent and subordinating them to a Vedantic core, has pervaded both popular and scholarly writings on India" (Gail Omvedt, 1995: 1).

What is more astonishing, though, is that behind the posture of flexibility and diversity is a hard core of an assertion of dominance...This assertion leads to the political line of Vishwa Hindu Parishad that there may be various manifestations of what is defined as the "Hindu tradition but there is no question that the core is "traditional" Hinduism Sanathan Dharma (Gail Omvedt, 1995-2). Today large sections of left, secular and democratic forces and all new social movements are trying to argue and organise against the increasing influence of Hindu-nationalism or Hindutva which is a fundamentalist form of Hinduism, the undefined, unidentified formless non-existent religion of the Hindus. In other words Hindutva

is a cunning backdoor attempt by hardcore Brahmins to preserve perpetuate and extend the supremacy of the Brahmins and in the larger sense an exploitative effort by the fundamentalist Brahmin-Baniyas to fool the masses and rule the nation. The majority of left, secular and democratic forces have taken a position against Communalism but not against Hinduism as such. The secular" version of this opposition argues that Indians must come together beyond their religious identities, as citizens of a nation and as human beings. It is exemplified in the popular anti-communal song Mandir-Masjid:

In temples, mosques, gurudwaras

God is divided.

Divide the earth, divide the sea,

But don't divide humanity.

The Hindu says, The temple is mine,

The temple is my home'

The Muslim says, Mecca is mine,

Mecca is my loyalty

The two fight, fight and die,

Get finished off in fighting..

The song goes on to describe the machinations of political leaders and the perpetuation of exploitation through Communalism, but interestingly enough, even its appeal to a common identity draws on (and reproduces?) the notion that India is the home of Hindus while the Muslims find their loyalties elsewhere and reminds the Muslims that they don't belong to India. (Gail Omvedt, 1995: 3). In contemporary times the "two forms of opposition to Hindutva, the "secular and Hindu reformist" versions draw respectively upon Nehruvian and Gandhian traditions. While there is no reason to doubt the authenticity of their attempts to oppose the aggressive politics of the Hindutva forces, one can question the validity of their picture of Hinduism: the validity of general identification of "Hindu" with Bharatiya", of Hinduism with the tradition of India (Gail Omvedt, 1995: 4). The above two forms of opposition to Hindutva were half-hearted, inadequate and lack sincerity because they were inspired by Manuwadi perspective and tacitly support the perpetuation of Manuwadi hegemony. Both try to show Hinduism as pan Indian religion, social system or a way of life. Beyond these two forms of opposition to Hindutva, it is Dalit perspective which not only queries the BJP/VHP interpretation of Hinduism, but also contests the very existence of Hinduism as a primordial force in India.

The Dalit movement, based on ex-untouchables and widening to include non-Brahman castes of many southern and peripheral areas, has in recent times brought forward

most strongly this ideologised challenge, this contesting of Hinduism. Indeed the impetus to challenge the hegemony and validity of Hinduism is part of the very logic of Dalit movement and Dalit perspective. In India right from the colonial days itself all political spaces, be it left, right and centre were occupied and dominated by Brahmins. All these political spaces tried to uphold and maintain Hinduism with Brahminic hegemony. Though differed in their functioning, they were common in their goal of suppressing Dalit leadership aspirations. Brahmins in left and Right wing parties did not succeed much in holding sway over Dalits. It was the Brahmins who were in centrist Congress party could able to succeed in keeping Dalits with them from the days of anti-colonial struggle to the days of early 1990s.

In the early 1990s the project of 'Hindutva' was engineered and launched by the Brahmins of right wing organisations like RSS, VHP and BJP under the leadership of L.K. Advani who started his Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya with the purpose of mobilising Dalits in the name of 'Hinduism' and 'Ram and gained political mileage. This process of mobilising Dalits in the name of religion has roots in colonial days. Bal Gangadhar Tilak started a tradition of celebrating Ganesh Festival and mobilised both Hindus and Dalits with the twin purpose of bringing Dalits in Hindu fold and to take on British Empire. Since then to till date the process of mobilising Dalits in the name of Hinduism is continuing. It was only in the early 1990s it took a more vigorous and aggressive turn. Turning the project of Hindutva into aggressive form was also a part of conscious and deliberate strategy to counter the rise of Dalits in Indian politics in the wake of Mandal politics. The OBC leaders like Mulayam Singh Yadav, Lalu Prasad Yadav and Sharad Yadav whom I call Dalits in this paper were instrumental in making V.P. Singh government to take a decision to implement Mandal Commission Commendation to provide 27 percent reservation to OBCs in central government jobs. Nation and nationalism were defined in hegemonic cultural terms and thereby tried to impose Hindutva or Brahminic hegemony in modern time. Those who opposed Hinduism and caste system and demanded socio-cultural reconstruction were accused of mounting an attack on Indian custom and tradition. Patriotic credentials were judged by parameter of praising Varna ideology (G.Aloysius, 1997).⁷ In reality the process of constructing nationalism in terms of culture began in colonial days itself. And all these attempts were also met with resistance.

Conclusion

The privileging of Brahminic hierarchy as history and legacy by the Hindutva forces triggered multiple reactions from the political nationalists working in different cultural regions. What was glorified and upheld as the ideal for the future by the Hindutva forces was now painted as plain horror, to be combated at all costs Numerous attempts by Dalits made to bring out a different yet more homogeneous and inclusive history and legacy, at regional and local levels. Dalits despite heavy odds made an all-out bid to emerge by creating autonomous myths and histories, challenging the elite dominant vision of the leading groups who expected the continuation of the silence and subservience of the masses. The great political nationalist ideologues of modern India- Mahatma Jotiba Phule, Ramaswamy Naiker, Ambedkar and

Swami Achutanand- incessantly and systematically exposed and condemned Brahminical Hinduism as a religion and culture of social slavery and therefore an enemy of the people struggling to emerge as a modern nation (G.Aloysius, 1997: 163-4).

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