

# BJP to field more Dalits in Uttar Pradesh polls

HT Correspondent  
Lucknow, November 29

MANY SITTING BJP MLAs in the State may be denied tickets following the party's restored focus on accommodating as many candidates as possible from among the 'most backwards, most Dalits and women' to prove that the BJP is really keen on their uplift.

Another aim of the move is to counter the Kalyan Singh factor, which is sure to take away a large chunk of the traditional Lodh votes from the BJP.

The decisions were taken at the two-day marathon meeting of party leaders and office-bearers at the Chief Minister's residence.

According to sources, all 403 constituencies of the State and prospective candidates were discussed at length and a panel of one to three possible nominees was finalised for each constituency. There was consensus at the meeting over increasing the quota of the 'most back-

## SAME TURF FOR RAJNATH

CHIEF MINISTER Rajnath Singh will contest the Assembly polls from his adopted constituency of Haidergarh (Barabanki) and not from his home district Mirzapur. His intended whirlwind tour of Haidergarh on Thursday quashes speculation that he may leave the constituency for safer pastures. But some other ministers, including those of the BJP, are in search of safe constituencies. These ministers failed to nurse their constituencies to the satisfaction of their voters.

HTC, Lucknow

wards' and 'most dalits' in distribution of tickets in a clear departure from the BJP's policy of fielding as many upper-caste candidates as possible. However, some leaders expressed fears that this change in the ticket distribution pattern might alienate the BJP's traditional upper caste vote bank. BJP State president Kalraj Mishra said today that all efforts

would be made to give due representation to every caste, community and region, but the main criterion would be the candidate's public standing and capacity to win elections.

Meeting the media after the two-day meeting, Mishra said the Chief Minister and he himself had been entrusted with the job of negotiating with allies and Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal over distribution of tickets.

He said no applications from ticket-seekers had been invited this time, but a panel of one to three prospective candidates for each constituency had been prepared on the basis of feedback from party office-bearers, leaders and independent sources. The final list of contestants would be prepared next month in consultation with all senior party leaders in Lucknow and Delhi, he said.

He said the BJP and its allies might go in for a common manifesto and discussions were underway in this regard.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 NOV 2002

## Bill on SC/ST promotions<sup>28/11</sup> passed in LS<sup>Sr</sup> *caption of print*

NEW DELHI, Nov. 28 — The Lok Sabha today unanimously passed the Constitution (Ninety-second Amendment) Bill guaranteeing “consequential promotions to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in government service”.

The Bill was moved by the minister of state for personnel, Mrs Vasundhara Raje, and seeks to amend Article 4A relating to “equality of opportunity in matters of public employment”. It will substitute the words “in matter of promotion to any class” in Article 4A by “in matters of promotion, with consequential seniority to any class”.

It will nullify the official memo dated 30 January 1997 to review or revise the seniority of government servants. — SNS

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THE STATESMAN

29 NOV 2001

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# Reservation policy not implemented in full: report

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 17. Despite the Indian Constitution being the first in the world to provide for affirmative action, the vision with which this provision was made remains a distant dream half-a-century later. Be it in educational institutions or government jobs, Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe representation, according to the Sixth Annual Report of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, is far below the 22.5 per cent provided for under the reservation policy.

Releasing the report at a press conference here, the chairman of the commission, Mr. Dileep Singh Bhuria, said the representation of Scheduled Castes on January 1, 2000, was 11.29 per cent in Group A services of the Central Government and 12.68 per cent in Group B as against the stipulated 15 per cent. In other areas such as public sector enterprises, public sector banks, insurance companies and central universities, the situation was even more bleak.

Since such a situation has arisen because the scheme of reservation is based on Executive Instructions — violation of which does not entail penal action — and judicial interventions, the commission has urged the Government to bring the reservation policy within an appropriate legislation and place it in the 9th Schedule of the Constitution to avoid "judicial interference".

While "legal loopholes" is part of the problem, the commission has identified lack of access to quality education as another contributing factor to their low representation in government services. In the absence of quality education, their ability to compete for senior level positions in the Government has been affected.

The commission has called for extending the policy of reservation in appointments and admissions to private institutions which

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of the fact that there are several States with no incidence of atrocities/exploitation, it laments the delay in disposal of cases.

availability of facilities like land at concessional rates and funding from financial institutions and nationalised banks. Another aspect that the commission has laboured upon in its report submitted to the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, on Friday, pertains to atrocities and exploitation by other communities. Though there has been a decline in such cases, the practice of untouchability continues in many overt and covert forms.

Providing statistics for 1999, the report states that Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh accounted for 65.4 per cent of the total number of atrocities against the Scheduled Castes. While 6,122 cases were reported in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan had 5,623 cases and Madhya Pradesh 4,667 cases. As for Scheduled Tribes, Madhya Pradesh topped the list with 1,976 cases followed by Rajasthan with 1,221. While the report takes note

of the fact that there are several States with no incidence of atrocities/exploitation, it laments the delay in disposal of cases.

Citing the example of Uttar Pradesh where 74,307 cases are pending at present, the commission has urged the Government to strengthen the investigation and judicial machinery, create exclusive special courts in the States with a heavy pendency, and have a monitoring mechanism to ensure the implementation of protective legislations.

Given the fact that tribals in many a State have been stripped off their land with the coming into force of the Forest Conservation Act, the commission has sought the review of the National Forest Policy and Forest Laws by the Ministry of Environment and Forests so that they are made compatible with the development of tribals.

## 'Jogi cannot contest from ST constituency'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 17. The Chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), Mr. Dileep Singh Bhuria, today once again challenged the Chattisgarh Chief Minister, Mr. Ajit Jogi's ST credentials and asserted that he cannot contest an election from a constituency reserved for STs merely by claiming to be one.

Replying to questions on the controversy that began with the commission asking the Chattisgarh Government to verify the ST certificate of Mr. Jogi at a press conference here, Mr. Bhuria questioned the Chief Minister's tribal status as his entire family continued to remain within the Satnami caste that is included in

the SC list of the State. "Mr. Jogi embraced Christianity in 1967 for some benefits," Mr. Bhuria said adding that this did not give him the right to contest from a constituency reserved for STs. Refuting the Congress charge that he had opened the issue to settle a political score, the chairman said the commission had acted on a complaint.

Further, Mr. Bhuria said, the Chief Minister's ST status had been challenged twice in the past in court.

The matter was reopened recently when the commission ruled that Mr. Jogi did not belong to the Scheduled Tribe and had been "fraudulently" claiming that he belonged to the Kanwar community for the purpose of getting an ST certificate.

THE HINDU

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An aerial view of the conversion ceremony in New Delhi on Sunday.

# Thousands of Dalits convert to Buddhism at Delhi rally

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Thousands of Dalits from all over the country congregated at the Ambedkar Bhavan here on Sunday, barely few hundred metres away from the RSS office, and embraced Buddhism, shouting slogans against the upper-caste hegemony in Hinduism, polity and society.

The venue had to be changed at the last minute from the Ramlila grounds as the police withdrew the permission granted earlier to the organisers of the event, the All-India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations (AICSSO). The permission was withdrawn after information was received that the occasion would be "misused", the

police said.

The mass conversion was led by Ram Raj, the protagonist of the present movement and chairperson of AICSSO. The first to be converted, along with his wife and children, he adopted the name Udai Raj after going through a tonsure ceremony amidst the chanting of mantras.

He then administered the vow to the thousands who had managed to reach the Ambedkar Bhavan grounds.

Bhante Buddha Priya Rahul conducted the ceremony of *sangha-diksha* followed by the 22 vows B.R. Ambedkar had taken more than 45 years ago—on October 14, 1956.

The mass conversion was followed by a series of fiery speeches. Buddha Priya Rahul, the monk who has been travelling with the Dhamma Rath since April this year, attacked the RSS as well as BSP leader Mayawati for criticising the conversions.

Criticising the government for withdrawing permission to hold the event at Ramlila grounds, Udai Raj claimed the Viswa Hindu Parishad was behind this move.

Union minister Arun Shourie came under attack for calling Ambedkar "a British agent" in his book *Untouchable Freedom*.

Most of the Buddhist monks present were themselves first generation converts.

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# Caste, race and sociologists — II

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Caste & Pariahs  
By Gail Omvedt

IN WEBER'S argument about the role of religious legitimisation in the development of caste, India provides an important backing for his thesis of a necessary (if not sufficient) causal role of ideas in history. "This well-integrated, unique social system could not have conquered and lasted without the pervasive and all-powerful influence of the Brahmans. The combination of caste legitimacy with karma doctrine — in its way a stroke of genius — plainly is the construction of rational ethical thought and not the product of any economic conditions. Only the wedding of this thought product with the empirical social order through the promise of rebirth gave this order the irresistible power over thought and hope of members and furnished the fixed scheme for the religious and social integration of the various professional groups and pariah peoples" (131). It is an analysis that Ambedkar would have appreciated, just as Phule would have applauded his recognition of "Aryan conquest". Dalits and OBCs would also appreciate Weber's arguments that caste is a barrier to economic development, though many Indian social scientists have contested it.

There is indeed much to dispute in Weber's analysis. Romila Thapar, for example, has criticised him for an uncritical use of source materials, and a bias especially in regard to Buddhism, which he depicted as extremely other-worldly. It can also be argued that his underlying question — why didn't Asian societies develop capitalism? — is no longer relevant today, when so many of them have produced capitalist societies as vigorous as those of Europe, when today social scientists are analysing how Confucianism supports capitalist development! With all his flaws, though, and in spite of the fact that he never set foot in India but worked with material available in Europe, Weber's analysis remains well worth reading and debating almost 90 years later.

However, Indians may well ask: what is after all the relevance of these studies of caste in pre-British or "traditional" India? Hasn't it changed significantly today? Weber, Marx, Dumont also, of course, believed that caste was changing, with Marx taking the strongest position that it would crumble under the impact of industrial-

isation. Dumont, however, also emphasised change and even gave a theorisation of it: in modern India, caste was becoming "substantiated", that is, caste groups were organising as large blocs — for instance, all the Yadavas in a given State, or an even wider territory — mobilising to confront other large caste blocs. Dumont argued that such a transformation of caste into ethnic-like groups represented a fundamental shift from hierarchy, a change in the system itself.

But how fundamental is it? The idea of the innumerable *jatis* in hierarchies being transformed into ethnic-like blocs seems to fit much experience (the caste-based

For instance, while in the U.S. there is not only official data on race linking it with economic position and other criteria, but race/ethnic relations has been the subject of much research, including studies showing the rates of inter-marriage among different ethnic groups. In India there is nothing: we can search our experience, look at matrimonial ads in newspapers and make guesses that, well, some things have changed but most marriages remain traditional — but we have absolutely no scientific surveys to test any hypotheses. There are no studies of actual inter-marriage rates, almost no studies in a region larger than a village that test the correlation of *jati* with economic position.

**Suppression of data on caste can no longer be justified...  
A serious, sustained effort at empirical research and theorising is needed so that social scientists can contribute their expertise to the comprehension of one of India's most severe problems.**

"voting blocs" of politics), but are these really competing on a non-hierarchical basis? Have these larger caste blocs (Yadavas as a group, Brahmans as a group, Pariahs as a group, etc.) really changed their places in a hierarchy, or moved into a position sufficient to say that a hierarchy no longer exists? Or is there still a broad correlation between economic position and caste status? Is inter-marriage occurring at a significant enough rate to really transform the system? Have the equalitarian policies of the Indian state — as Srinivas and Beteille argued over 30 years ago for the prestigious journal *Scientific American* — joined with the forces of industrialisation wrought a fundamental change in caste traditions? Or are Dalits right in claiming that their oppression and exploitation is as bitter as ever?

The sad fact about the state of Indian sociology today is that we have no empirical data to answer such questions. The Indian state and its supporting intellectuals have been antagonistic to gathering caste data, as indicated by the continuing refusal to collect data on "caste" identification in the census — and sociologists have, if anything, been more backward.

In terms of historical sociology, the situation is even worse. While Weber before 1920 could attempt an analysis of the development of caste using original sources (Sanskrit and Pali literature) in translation, Dipankar Gupta's monograph of the 1970s, "From Varna to Jati", uses only secondary sources. They are good sources (Romila Thapar, D.D. Kosambi, etc.), but superficial and eclectic tapping of such secondary sources cannot substitute for a comprehensive knowledge of the original material. Today Indian social scientists have many more methodological tools available to them, much more material, and a supposedly deeper understanding of their own society than Weber had in his time — then why can they not surpass scholars such as Weber in doing historical sociology? Why are there only attacks on the whole idea from fashionable post-modernist pedestals?

The development of sociological theories of caste in the post-Independence period, whether by Indians or by Europeans and Americans, has often seemed to involve the kind of speculation that would be pleasing to the most ardent advocate of Hindutva. Anthropologists such as McKim

Marriott, for example, have attempted to develop theories that would understand caste in the light of traditional Hindu, that is to say, Brahmanic texts. Ronald Inden in his "Imagined India" has not simply criticised British racism, but argues that caste is almost a creation of western efforts to orientalise their conquered subjects. Such themes — that caste hierarchy, or at least its severity, is a colonial creation, that its social impact has been exaggerated, that it has had no major effect on economic and political structures — have understandably become quite popular.

Such theories, of course, need to be grasped and debated as much as the classical positions of Dumont, Weber and Marx. The most haunting lacuna of contemporary Indian sociology remains the lack of data with which to do this, the apparent lack of concern for even gathering data. As Dr. Satish Deshpande has put it in a paper for a Pune University seminar, "What needs to be emphasised is that unlike other comparable situations, the paucity and poor quality of this data (on caste) is due to wilful if well-intentioned neglect: the state and academic community refused to collect such data because it was believed that it should not and need not be collected. But, however high-minded the motives, the irony is that the end result is not very different from what might have been the case had there been a conspiracy to suppress evidence of caste inequality".

Today, this suppression of data on caste can no longer be justified. Dalits and other oppressed sections are finding a voice; their charges cannot be countered by mockery or superficial journalistic flats. A serious sustained effort at empirical research and theorising is needed so that social scientists can contribute their expertise to the comprehension of one of India's most severe problems. Admitting a problem, analysing it and opening up a debate on it paves the way for its enduring solution. There is no reason why an Indian state and academic community, supposedly committed to equality, should be reluctant to undertake this task.

(The writer is Senior Fellow, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Teen Murthi House, New Delhi.)

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THE HINDU

19 OCT 2001

# Caste, race and sociologists — I

By Gail Omvedt

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**N**OW THAT the dust of Durban is dying down, the Indian and American establishments are undoubtedly both breathing a sigh of relief that demands for social justice from historically exploited peoples are being superseded by simpler crusades against terrorism. But the issue of caste and race will not so easily vanish. While the "Durban discourse" may or may not endure as a crucial part of the Dalit self-understanding, the World Conference against Racism has among other things brought forward the barrenness of contemporary social sciences, especially sociology, in providing genuine intellectual input on the issue.

roduction textbook in sociology, by John Macionis, classifies caste in India along with apartheid in South Africa (admittedly the most severely structured racist system) as forms of "caste systems", that is closed stratification systems, contrasted with "class" or open stratification systems. Many sociologists will find such typifications oversimplified, but they do provide sophisticated versions of the common-sense understanding that caste and racial systems of stratification have many similarities.

Let us look at what the major sociolog-

ty/pollution, encompassing/encompassed, the extreme purity of the Brahmins at the top requires as its antithesis the extreme pollution of the Untouchable at the bottom. In insisting on this core role of Hinduism in defining caste, Dumont in fact has much in common with Ambedkar.

It also has to be noted that in spite of his insistence on the uniqueness of caste in India, in spite of his refutations of those sociologists who attempted to analyse "caste" and "race" as inherently similar stratification systems, Durkheim does

He followed up his analysis of the "Protestant ethic" in Europe with a far-ranging comparative analysis of religion and economy in India, China and elsewhere. It was in his *Religion of India*, published in 1916-17, that he dealt with caste — and race, and religion.

Aside from his points about the social-economic effects of caste, his section on the development of the system is interesting. It was understandable that Weber, writing on the background of debates on the Aryan theory (but before the discovery of Mohenjo-daro), should ask the question of the role of racial relations in the origin of caste. He rejected the "Aryan theory of caste" as such, the inheritance of racial differences and the idea that castes could be explained by deriving upper castes from Aryans, Shudras, Dalits and Adivasis from non-Aryans. (He did, however, make occasional comparisons with the position of Blacks in the U.S., noting in a way similar to Dumont that "caste enhances and transposes social closure into the sphere of religion"). But he did believe that the Aryan incursion had led to relations between lighter-skinned conquerors and darker-skinned conquered, and that the role of visibly distinct "racial types" added force to a tendency of aristocracies the world over to put barriers on intermarriage with "despised subjects".

***The Durban conference has brought forward the barrenness of contemporary social sciences, especially sociology, in providing genuine intellectual input on the issue of caste and race.***

The question of "race and caste" is simply the issue of the comparative analysis of caste as a form of social stratification. To say that two social phenomena are similar is, after all, not to say that they are identical: it is to raise the question of analysing how, in what ways they are similar and in what specific ways they are different. Since "race" is not a meaningful biological category, we are in reality dealing with "racism" — that is, a system of social differentiation based on an ideology that certain groups are genetically/biologically inferior. Ideologies or belief systems need not be "true" to be socially significant. Among the social sciences, this issue of hierarchy or social stratification has been above all the province of sociology, which deals with social systems generally. (Cultural anthropology also formulates general theories, though in the conventional separation between the two disciplines, anthropology has tended to concentrate on pre-industrial and often pre-state societies; this has meant a limitation of comparativeness. However, the disciplines share many themes and scholars and are often clubbed together in academic institutions. Prominent scholars of caste such as Louis Dumont and M. N. Srinivas have been identified as both anthropologists and sociologists).

It is not surprising, then, that the classic "founding fathers" of sociology had a good deal to say on caste (and caste-and-race), while debates on caste and race waged especially strong in the 1950s and 1960s. Even the most recently popular in-

ical trends have had to say on the issue. The "founding fathers" of sociology are generally taken to be Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. Marx understood caste as a form of division of labour connected with the specific Indian form of the Asiatic village, and believed that it would wither away under the impact of industrialisation and modern transport and communications. Unfortunately, his Indian followers, especially Marxian sociologists, have taken this as a license to completely ignore caste — though Marxist historians, from R.S. Sharma to the brilliant D.D. Kosambi, have made important contributions.

Durkheim also wrote little on caste; he did not consider himself a specialist in the area, and discussed most often pre-state societies in his major contrasts with modern industrial societies. However, one of the most important sociologists on caste, Louis Dumont, comes out of the Durkheimian school with its emphasis on the role of religion and values as binding and defining forces in society. Dumont's major work, *Homo Hierarchus*, takes caste in India as a unique system, intimately connected with Hinduism. He views it as the supreme example in the world of the recognition of hierarchy as a fact of social life, and in its shifting levels and logics of puri-

have much to say on their comparability, and as a sociologist he accepts comparison as a crucial goal. "Racism represents a contradictory resurgence in egalitarian society of what finds direct expression as hierarchy in caste society," he writes (*Homo Hierarchus*, p. 214). In other words, caste is justified by the inherent values of Indian society; racial discrimination, in contrast, is against modern values of equality of all human beings and so is justified by assuming the oppressed are not quite human. It is an important insight, shared by almost all sociologists. Even anthropologists such as Gerald Berreman, who analyse caste and racial systems as similar, mention this point of legitimation as a distinguishing feature.

Dumont, though, is a relatively recent sociological writer on caste. Among the classics, it was above all the German sociologist Max Weber who dealt with the issue as part of his broad ranging comparative studies. Weber is known for seeking to supplement Marx's emphasis on economic class and the mode of production with the role of ideas and ideologies in history. In asking about the origins of capitalism, he pointed to Protestantism as a crucial historical phenomenon (it has to be noted he never sought to deny economic factors, only to supplement them).

However, he saw this as only one factor among many in the developing complex society of India in the first millennium BC — others were an intermixture of many different ethnic groups in the vast continent leading to an interethnic specialisation of labour, new rulers rising to replace the old kshatriya class, and the conflict between these rulers and a then-vigorous urban-based society of guilds.

In this situation, it was the legitimising role of Brahmanic theory which was crucial. As Weber describes briefly the development of caste, he sees it as expanding for a thousand years from about the 2nd century AD to the beginning of Islamic rule, noting that "Brahmanical theory served in an unequalled manner to tame the subjects religiously" (*Religion of India*, p. 130).

# Caste and social structure — I

By Satish Deshpande

AS A social group, the Indian intelligentsia has always been embarrassed by caste. This embarrassment runs much deeper than any uneasiness about unearned privilege that an overwhelmingly upper-caste group might be expected to feel. For, though it is similarly privileged in class terms — hardly can any of its members claim to be poor — the intelligentsia is not in the least embarrassed by poverty. Thus, rational discussion and debate on poverty has not only been legitimate, it has been almost an obsession. In sharp contrast, the thinking classes preferred not to discuss caste inequality, and were curiously defensive when forced to deal with it. With rare exceptions, intellectuals in Nehruvian India firmly believed that Gandhi, Ambedkar, and the Constitution had effected a permanent settlement of the caste question.

This powerful consensus was built on the liberal upper-caste belief that, as a shameful relic of our past, caste needed to be erased from our present. The need to atone for past inequities was reluctantly accepted, but the dominant classes were determined to confine this distressing deviation from the (Western) ideal of equal individual citizenship within the *lakshman rekha* of the two Schedules created by the British in 1935 and included verbatim in our Constitution. Beyond this boundary, caste was taboo. As a result, the secular state refused to collect data on caste (except for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes), although it continued to do so for religion and language. Indeed, this refusal was not seen as a refusal but as the self-evident sequel to the legal abolition of caste. The innocent optimism of the post-Independence years obscured the fact that only the upper castes could afford the desire to forget about caste: for the overwhelming majority, memories and experiences of caste subordination became a potent source of social identity and political mobilisation.

When this Nehruvian naivete was finally shattered by the Mandal conflict of 1990-91, acrimonious debates on the sta-

tus of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs) broke out, but they were conducted in a data vacuum. Most social scientists (including sociologists, who ought to have known better) were not only deriding the methodology of existing data sources (such as the Mandal Commission report) without offering alternatives, but were also opposing other proposals for the collection of caste data (as mooted before the 2001 Census).

Given this rather eventful background, the National Sample Survey Organisation

are very plausible numbers, but since the NSSO estimates of the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes have generally been 2-3 per cent higher than those made in the Census, it is probable there is a small upward bias here as well. They should also prompt some rethinking from those who assured us (before the 2001 Census) that collecting caste data on a large scale was impossible, and if attempted would lead to widespread unrest and yield unusable data.

However, the main significance of the

***The National Sample Survey Organisation has collected data that allow rational debate on a question that has generally been prejudged by both sides: whether and to what extent, the OBCs are really 'backward'.***

is to be congratulated for having made a landmark contribution to the cause of social analysis by producing, for the first time in independent India, detailed nationwide data on the OBCs. Until now, data on this scale have only been available for the Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes, or by religion. This has meant that the vast majority of the population has remained opaque to analysis, being lumped together as "Others" (i.e., neither Scheduled Tribes nor Scheduled Castes) when caste data is presented, or as "Hindus" when religion is the criterion. The recently published data — in NSSO Report no. 469, *employment and unemployment situation among social groups in India 1999-2000*, based on the 55th Round survey — provide a more disaggregated picture of the social structure in contemporary India.

This report suggests that the OBCs form about 37 per cent of the rural, and about 31 per cent of the urban population. Like other caste and community data in the NSSO, the OBC data are also self-reported, i.e., it is based solely on the response of the head of the household surveyed without reference to any official criteria. These

55th Round data is that they allow rational debate on a question that has generally been prejudged by both the sides: whether, and to what extent, are the OBCs really "backward". Neither proponents nor opponents have bothered with evidence.

The monthly percapita consumption expenditure (MPCE) data from the 55th Round allow us to do this. They provide an overview of the internal class structure of all the major caste groups: Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, OBCs and the problematic residual category of "Others", which clubs Hindu "forward" castes with non-Hindus. This data shows that: (a) the OBCs are generally positioned between the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and the "Others"; but (b) they seem to resemble the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes more than the "Others"; although (c) this resemblance is much closer in urban than in rural India, and at the upper end of the class spectrum than at the lower end.

In rural India, 34 per cent of the OBCs fall below the poverty line compared to 51 per cent of Scheduled Tribes and 43 per cent of Scheduled Castes but only 24 per cent of "Others". This places them in the

middle of the gap separating the Scheduled Castes from the "Others". However, only 6 per cent of the OBCs are in the top two MPCE classes in rural India, a figure much closer to the 3 per cent for both the Scheduled Tribes and the Scheduled Castes than to the 12 per cent for the "Others". In urban India, the resemblance of the OBCs to the STs and SCs is more pronounced, and it holds at both ends of the class spectrum. Roughly 43 per cent of both Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are below the urban poverty line compared to 36 per cent of the OBCs and only 21 per cent of the "Others". At the other end, 6 per cent of the Scheduled Tribes, 2 per cent of the Scheduled Castes, and less than 4 per cent of the OBCs are to be found in the top two urban MPCE classes compared to 12 per cent of the "Others".

The land ownership data in the 55th Round survey paint a broadly similar picture. The OBCs are ahead of the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes but lag behind the "Others", and this lag increases with holding size. Seven per cent of the "Others" are found in the largest size-class (above 4 hectares) compared to 4 per cent of OBCs, 3 per cent of Scheduled Tribes and 1 per cent of Scheduled Castes. The same is true of education: 37 per cent of rural male OBCs are illiterate compared to 48 per cent of Scheduled Castes, 52 per cent of Scheduled Tribes but only 24 per cent of the "Others"; and among urban males, 23 per cent of the "Others" have graduate or higher degrees compared to 9 per cent of OBCs, 6 per cent of Scheduled Castes, and interestingly, 11 per cent of Scheduled Tribes.

Such broad-brush comparisons are, of course, subject to many caveats. The most crucial of these concern the hold-all category, "Others", which understates inter-group inequality by mixing up the most privileged groups — the upper castes among Christians, Sikhs and especially Hindus — with underprivileged groups such as the Muslims.

(The writer is Reader, Institute of Economic Growth, New Delhi.)

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## REACH OF RESERVATION

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THE BILL PASSED by the Lok Sabha in order to fortify reservation in promotions for employees belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is also an important legislative effort that explicates the more substantive implications of the provision of positive discrimination in public employment under Article 16(4) and 16(4A) of the Constitution. As spelt out in the 77th Amendment enacted in 1995, in addition to providing reservation for posts to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in state services, such quotas should also be extended to matters of promotions. The operative principle here is that of ensuring adequate representation to these communities at various levels. In other words, if equality of opportunity is to be realised, it should be done from the time of recruitment to all the subsequent stages. Such an interpretation could hardly be faulted in view of the persistence of discrimination at the work place and the bogey of non-performance and efficiency raised in connection with reservation. The present legislation is especially significant considering that notwithstanding the 77th Amendment, the Supreme Court has ruled against applying the principle of reservation in relation to promotions.

Although a number of Government circulars dating back to the 1970s have held the domain of promotions to be an appropriate arena to extend reservation to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, the subject has nevertheless continued to be deeply contested. What has given rise to increased litigation over the years is the indeterminate nature of the criteria that govern promotions. Seniority, departmental examination, direct recruitment or a combination of these which make up the criteria are not always well-defined and engender deep resentment among different caste and communi-

ty groups of employees. Judicial interpretations in given disputes have by no means been uniform. But the ruling of the Supreme Court in the landmark Mandal Commission recommendations case against reservation in promotions held considerable sway in the 1990s, even though the question received only cursory treatment in that judgment.

*of caste discrimination*

Viewed from a different standpoint, contestation over the validity of reservation in the area of promotions is ironically a vindication of the policies of positive discrimination pursued in the last five decades. For instance, the need to legislate on a proposal such as the one currently under active consideration of Parliament could not have been anticipated at a time when the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had no representation in employment. On the contrary, evidence of pockets of deep resistance — as with respect to promotions — reinforces the traditional arguments for policies of compensatory discrimination. While the Dalits and the Adivasis have achieved remarkable progress in the realms of education and employment, the record on their representation has by no means been even in the arenas of state, public sector and autonomous institutions, where reservation is operative. The case for extending positive discrimination to decide promotions rests squarely on the need to give adequate representation to these communities in the higher echelons of public policy-making. To that extent, the principle has come to be defined not narrowly as an avenue for the creation of employment, but as a means of ensuring the equal and full participation of these communities in the task of nation-building. It is in carrying forward this underlying spirit in the 77th Amendment that the future of weaker sections could be secured.

THE HINDU

6 DEC 2001



# Police will help Dalits enter temples in Andhra Pradesh

Ashok Das  
Hyderabad, October 2

*HT-6*

POLICE OFFICERS in Andhra Pradesh will now accompany members of the SC community when they visit temples in their villages. Or when they go to the neighbourhood chai shop to have tea. The policemen are expected to ensure that the Dalits are served tea in the same glass as the upper caste men and are not humiliated by being asked to wash their glasses.

The State Cabinet, acting on the recommendations of the Justice Punnayya Commission, on Monday, approved a series of measures to undo the injustices to Dalits in the State.

Caste discrimination and untouchability are rampant in over 300 mandals spread over 12 districts in the State, including Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu's native Chittoor district.

Paturu Ramaiah president of Kula Viveksha Vyatireka Porata Samiti (Anti-caste discrimination committee), said, the SCs are discriminated against in var-

*29/10*

ious ways. They are not allowed to work or earn wages, their harvest is forcibly taken away, false cases are lodged against them, women are molested or raped and even murdered.

Most culprits are rich and powerful and escape police action. In about half a dozen out of the 250 cases registered last year, policemen and paramilitary personnel were perpetrators of the crime, he said.

The Government has agreed to depute one police officer not below the rank of sub-inspector in each village, where Dalits are maltreated. The officer will visit the Dalitwada once a week on a fixed day along with the Mandal Revenue officer, Mandal Development Officer, Sarpanch; self-help groups and a representative of the social welfare department. The police officer will "take the SCs to temples, direct the hotel keepers to remove the separate glass system in the hotel and provide access to public wells/bore".

The Cabinet, however, rejected the recommendation to create a

*9-caste discrimination*

special mobile police squad in each district as in Tamil Nadu and that one police officer visit one Dalit village every day.

It was also agreed to set up a SC & ST commission with judicial powers. A Dalit protection cell headed by the Director General of Police will also be set up.

Police officers are required to register cases of atrocities without delay. The collector or the Superintendent of Police should visit the place within 24 hours of the incident, ensure that FIR was registered and relief provided in cash or kind.

Special officers will be appointed in 12 districts for effective monitoring of cases of atrocities on SCs/STs. Landlords would be evicted from Government banjar lands and their possession would be transferred to the SCs. Dalit lands would be restored. The Dalits would also get back their burial grounds.

Dalit victims would be promptly compensated and rehabilitated. A job will be given to one eligible member from the family of those dead or incapacitated.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 OCT 2001

# Dharna against atrocities on tribals, Dalits

By Our Special Correspondent

**AHMEDABAD, NOV. 30.** The minorities, tribals and Dalits staged a dharna in the city today to highlight the alleged atrocities against the weaker sections of society in Gujarat, often "in collusion" with the BJP Government in the State.

The demonstrators expressed concern over the appointment of a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh activist, Mr. Narendra Modi, as Chief Minister, which, they said, could add to the woes of the minorities.

Several Congress leaders, including the state office-bearers, besides representatives of various non-government organisations engaged in the welfare of the weaker sections participated in the dharna, held under the auspices of the All-India Christian Council.

According to the Council's joint secretary, Mr. Samson Christian, it has sought an appointment with the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Delhi on December 4 to submit a memorandum detailing the plight of the weaker sections and the minorities in the country, with particular reference to the recent Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), which was "more awesome" than the erstwhile TADA that could be used as a tool by

the police to harass the minorities.

The speakers criticised the BJP Governments in the State and at the Centre pointing out that the minorities were living under constant fear. In Gujarat, the tribals were being driven away from their lands in the forest areas with the BJP Government openly violating the previous Congress Government's decision to allocate forest land to the tribals who were cultivating the same land till October, 1980. There had also been discrimination in giving government jobs to the tribals and the Scheduled Castes and the reservation norm was being overlooked, they alleged.

They said that though the State Government had acquired 93,817 acres of land under the Agricultural Land Ceiling Act for distribution among the landless tribals and Dalits, the scheme had only remained on paper.

They expressed concern over the condition of the minorities, holding the Sangh Parivar activists responsible for their woes with the BJP Government either giving indirect support to the attackers or ignoring their complaints.

Mr Christian claimed that since 1999, there had been 417 cases of attacks on Christians in the State in which 33 persons were killed and 203 seriously injured. In the

last year, Gujarat topped the list of attacks on Christians in the country with 65 cases recorded followed by 62 cases in Tamil Nadu, 55 in Kerala and 50 in Orissa.

The Hyderabad-based organising secretary of the Council, Mr. Sam Paul, questioned the sincerity of the Government in implementing the POTO in the light of the support it provided to the Bajrang Dal and other Sangh Parivar members.

Questioning the amendment to the Foreign Contributions Regulation Act (FCRA), Mr. Paul demanded that the Government publish a white paper on the funding to the Sangh Parivar organisations, including the BJP. He alleged the amendment was only intended at choking foreign funds to various welfare organisations for the tribals, Dalits and minorities.

Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission has issued a notice to the Director General of Gujarat police to submit a report within a month on the death of a Christian woman, Markiben, who was allegedly gang-raped and killed and her body left hanging from a tree in Bokadiya village in Danta taluka of Banaskantha district on September 30. The complaint was filed by Mr. Christian, who alleged police involvement in the incident.

# UP Cabinet okays quota for MBCs

HT Correspondent  
Lucknow, September 14

HT-5  
15/9  
weaker sections among upper castes has been referred to the Union Government, as its implementation would need a constitutional amendment.

THE MUCH-AWAITED report of the Social Justice Committee today received the State Cabinet's nod with an amendment. The approval has paved the way for promulgation of an ordinance to provide separate quotas for the Most Backward Classes (MBCs) among the quotas of Other Backward Classes and Dalits. But the Cabinet rejected the committee's suggestion of depriving the reservation facility to the creamy layer among the Dalits.

The Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Hukum Singh said the Cabinet authorised the Chief Minister to give final clearance to the ordinance that would be promulgated within a day or two.

Some ministers allegedly opposed the SJC's creamy layer formula for the Dalits. Singh said the creamy layer formula suggested by the SJC for the Dalits was not approved by the Cabinet as it felt further discussions were needed on the issue. Adopting the amendment at this stage would have looked discriminatory, he said.

The creamy layer formula for the backward classes would, however, remain in force, he said. As suggested by the SJC, the Cabinet approved the proposal of raising the income limit from Rs 1 lakh to 3 lakh for the creamy layer among the backward classes. He said the SJC's recommendation of providing 5 per cent reservation to the economically

weaker sections among upper castes has been referred to the Union Government, as its implementation would need a constitutional amendment.

The Cabinet also agreed to raise the OBC quota from 27 to 28 per cent. This raise in the quota has been possible following the decision to bring down the quota of scheduled tribes from two per cent to one per cent. Under the new quota system, the OBCs have been divided into three groups of A, B and C comprising of backward, most backward and extremely backward classes.

The A group includes yadavs/ahirs who have been given five per cent reservation. The B group comprising of eight castes has been given nine per cent and the C group with 70 castes 14 per cent. Similarly the Dalits have also been divided into two groups, A and B. Under this category, 10 per cent reservation has been given to one caste in groups while 65 castes in group B have been given 11 per cent reservation.

Meanwhile, a senior Minister said the percentage of reservation suggested for the backward classes was also not acceptable. He said the various castes among the backwards have not been given proportionate reservation.

On five per cent reservation for the yadavs in A category and nine per cent reservation to the eight castes in category B of the backward classes, he said seven castes with 61.69 per cent population have been given only 14 per cent reservation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 SEP 2001

# NGOs censure Omar for Durban speech on caste

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, Sept. 10:** Minister of state for external affairs Omar Abdullah on Monday was lambasted for his statement on caste-based discrimination at the world conference on racism at Durban by the non-governmental organisations representatives who attended the conference.

In his speech at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Mr Abdullah had said in the run-up to the world conference, there has been propaganda, highly-exaggerated and misleading, often based on anecdotal evidence, regarding caste-based discrimination in India.

"We in India have faced this evil squarely. We unequivocally condemn this and, indeed, any other form of discrimination. The issue has remained at the top of our national agenda," he had said.

Lashing out at Mr Abdullah's remark, Dr James Massey, of the All India Christian Council and who was present at the Durban conference,

said, "The position there was that it is our internal issue. Every issue taken up at the conference was actually local. Be it the Palestine problem or any thing else, every issue was internal in that sense." Other activists said that it is basically in the interest of the politicians and the government if

the caste-based discrimination continues in India. Ignou professor Vimal Thorat and another representative who went to Durban for the conference, said, "The people who represented the government of India were those who have had no experience of

casteism. The castes resent vote banks to the politicians and they want this discrimination to

continue." Talking on the issue of caste, Mr Abdullah had said, "We are firmly of the view that the issue of caste is not an appropriate subject for discussion at this conference... We are here to engage in social engineering within member states. It is neither legitimate nor feasible nor practical for this

World Conference or, for that matter, even the UN to legislate, let alone police, individual behaviour in our societies. The battle has to be fought within our respective societies to change thoughts, processes and attitudes; indeed, the hearts and souls of our peoples."

On this "attitude" of the minister, Ms Thorat said, "Mr Abdullah's statement is a clear indication that the government's attitude towards 16 million dalits is biased." Most of the activists were of the view that with the "shameful" speech lacked interest in the issue. "How can anybody call it 'anecdotal'?" questioned Dr V. Mohini Giri, chairperson of Guild of Service and who had attended the conference.

## SPOTLIGHT

THE ASIAN AGE

11 SEP 2001

# Dalit takes woe to UN forum

Durban, September 7

THE UN conference against racism here heard a heartbreaking story of how an attempt to rise above being an "untouchable" in an Indian village ended in a violent death.

Manimegalai Murugesan, a resident of Mevalavu village, about 400 km from Chennai, related in Tamil the tale of her husband's rise to the presidency of the village council, and his subsequent death at the hands of upper caste men from the village.

Several delegates were in tears on the last day of the conference as interpreter Monica Vincent, herself a Dalit, translated Manimegalai's story in English.

"I will always remember the faces of my husband and his seven friends who were beheaded after the bus they were on was stopped and the Dalits separated from other villagers," Manimegalai said with tears in her eyes, holding up her right arm with her husband Kannaga Karuppan Murugesan's name tattooed on it.

The tattoo was inscribed when they were married seven years ago, a custom in their village.

"My husband wanted to better the lot of our people through the opportunities that were created for everyone to fairly elect a leader for the village. While the rest of the village was rejoicing at his election, upper caste members of the community said he would not last even six months in office," Manimegalai said.

"We lived in constant fear with daily death threats, and on the very day that the six months ended, they carried out their promise, leaving me a widow with four children.



AP PHOTO

A file picture of Dalit villagers grieving over the bodies of relatives massacred at Jehanabad last December.

"I am here to tell my story for the world to hear. The Indian Government and the upper castes are turning a blind eye to the suffering of the 160 million Dalits in our country who are oppressed and denied peace and security."

Manimegalai was glad that the United Nations was now taking note of the plight of people like her.

"We are living in conditions worse than those in the apartheid era in South Africa. Our villages are not only divided along the same lines, but we are also banned from praying at the

same temples or drinking water from the same wells."

In a statement submitted to the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs said over 200 million Dalits have been subjected to discriminatory practices and violence because of socio-economic factors.

Dalits, whose numbers are variously estimated at 160 million to 300 million, are mostly landless agricultural labourers. In many areas, they are constrained to live in segregated quarters because they are considered untouch-

ables. The caste system, though banned, is still prevalent in many places in India.

Earlier in the conference Indian Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah said it would be foolish to think that caste discrimination could be wished away overnight.

He said it would take education to change attitudes, which were centuries old. Omar, who led the Indian delegation at the conference, said India did not support the Dalit plea for caste to be placed on the agenda of the conference.

IANS

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 SEP 2001

## Mandal & Kamandal <sup>for</sup>

Years ago, when V P Singh announced the acceptance of Mandal commission recommendations on reservations for the other backward castes, he became the target of vitriolic criticism from across the political spectrum. Among his myriad critics, there was none more vociferous than the BJP. By his cynical political manipulation of caste fissures in Hindu society, the party argued, Mr Singh was risking the balkanisation of the Indian polity. Indeed, the then party president L K Advani justified his Rath Yatra — undertaken soon after the Mandal announcement — as a necessary step towards healing the caste wounds allegedly opened by Mr Singh's chicanery. Political history in this country has since come the proverbial full circle. The original party of the Mandir is now trying hard to change its political colours. It might not have given up on the Mandir, but it wants a share in the politics of Mandal too. Far from being a divisive political ropetrick, Mandal has now become a laudable instrument of state policy; to promote, what else, but social justice. Rhetoric apart, however, it is the same old story of rank opportunism. Faced with a dismal prospect in the upcoming UP elections, chief minister Rajnath Singh has been clutching furiously at the straws for an electoral plank which might save the party the blushes. So while the prime minister tries to woo the Hindutva constituency with his promise of a solution to the Ayodhya dispute before election-time next year, the chief minister has set out to woo the Mandal 'votebank'. Or a substantial part of it.

With this end in mind, Mr Singh had appointed a social justice committee, headed by one of his ministerial colleagues, to identify those communities in the OBC segment which hadn't benefited from the fruits of mandalisation. The unspoken motive was to break up the Mandal pie of 27 per cent reservations — which had thus far disproportionately benefited the Yadavs and the Ahirs — in a way which would hurt the political chances of his principal opponent, Mulayam Singh Yadav. The committee was also instructed to examine how reservations for the SCs could be re-jigged so that communities other than the Jatavs — which are known to back his other political rival Mayawati — could partake of the reservation pie. In an exemplary display of state efficiency, the committee has submitted its report in record time. And against all odds, including lack of reliable census data. While it has recommended a one per cent increase in overall reservations for OBCs, the reservation pie has now been trifurcated: with the Yadavs and the Ahirs being given a mere 5%. The rest has been divided into Most Backward (9%) and Extreme Backwards (14%) categories. Similarly, the Jatavs have been restricted to a 10% share in reservations for scheduled castes. Not satisfied with this, the committee has favoured reservations for 22 extreme backward castes among Muslims. There is even talk of a 5% reservation for the poor among the upper castes. Clearly, Mr Singh has adopted the Mandal creed with a vengeance that would put the Raja of Manda to shame. Whether this will help him reverse the erosion of support for the party is questionable. For one, Mandal and Mandir are contradictory political idioms. For another, the desire to mean all things to all people has been the undoing of many a clever politician in the past. Mr Singh might well find that he is no exception.

Four Letter Word

ONE

SUP

# All castes scramble for most-backward tag

Umesh Raghuvanshi  
Lucknow, August 31

AS THE castes listed under Dalits and Other Backward Classes with the State Government continue to vie with each other to get classified as the Most Backward Classes (MBCs), the Social Justice Committee (SJC) faces an uphill task in Uttar Pradesh.

The SJC, set up by Chief Minister Rajnath Singh to make recommendations on the induction of various castes in the MBC category, has been flooded with requests and representations from various caste organisations.

As per reports, the SJC has received 3,232 representations to date. More representations may be received in the next two days, as the SJC is expected to submit its report tomorrow. The number of representations has shot up as the MBC category is turning into the most lucrative class in the reservation category in view of the benefits promised to it by the Chief Minister.

Committee Chairman and Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Hukum Singh said almost every caste listed as Dalit or OBC has made a representation to be brought under the MBC category. He said finalising

the recommendations was proving to be a difficult task with all castes vying with each other to make it to the most backward bracket.

Singh said at present 79 castes are registered in the category of Other Backward Classes (OBCs), while 66 castes are registered under Dalits.

Meanwhile, the proposed reservation for MBCs has already turned into a major political issue in the State. While the Opposition remains largely divided on the issue, the Chief Minister is already promising some of the downtrodden classes that their caste would be included in the MBC category. Singh has handed out the bounties at caste rallies or while meeting delegations of various caste groups.

The Chief Minister addressed a rally of Binds, Nishads and Kashyaps at Ravindralaya here on Monday to promise that these castes would soon be declared most backward.

On Tuesday, the Chief Minister addressed a convention of Pasis organised under the banner of Akhil Bharatiya Pasi Samaj Swabhiman Sammelan.

He may address more such conventions in the coming days

to mobilise public opinion on the issue.

Significantly, the impact of the SJC report would be felt just before the coming Vidhan Sabha elections here.

Rajnath Singh has already indicated that the report of the SJC would be implemented by September 15, 2001. A process to provide jobs to 30,000 youths has already been started.

Singh has indicated that the appointment letters for the first phase of recruitment would be issued from October 1 to October 7, 2001.

This indicates that Singh is in a mood to corner the Opposition on the reservation issue. He has promised around 1 lakh more jobs in the next one and a half years. He has also supported the demand for raising the reservation quota beyond 50 per cent.

Launching an attack on the Opposition for its criticism of the SJC, Singh said even the demand for raising the quota limit of 50 per cent could be considered at a later stage. Whether such promises will make an impact on the political scene in the coming Vidhan Sabha elections, is a million dollar question. And the answer could be coming in the next few days.

# DALIT CHALLENGE-II

## A Cultural Revolution In The Making?

By SOUMITRO DAS

OF course, the actual contours of the most violent caste conflict in independent India are much more horrifying than the bare recital of massacres would suggest. Women are raped, their breasts cut off, men and children are shot at random, and, since Dalits live in segregated ghettos, all their houses are attacked simultaneously so that no one gets away. The state is at best a guilty bystander, at worst an accomplice. It knows this is not a law and order problem and its correct accommodation within the norms of parliamentary democracy would lead to a major upheaval whose dimensions are, as indicated at the outset, more than political.

The proof of this proposition was given by the emergence of what is possibly the most successful Dalit political formation yet — the Bahujan Samaj Party. The uniqueness of the BSP has to be measured against what went before and the rival claims made upon Dalit consciousness. It is the first Dalit political entity that speaks the language of caste, with a strong Dalit accent.

### DITCHED

There was Ambedkar, of course, who, in December 1927, burned a copy of the *Manu-smriti*, to widespread indignation even among his own caste Hindu followers, converted to Buddhism in 1956 along with a million of his Mahar followers, recognised that Dalit solidarity must be founded upon their common exploitation at the hands of the upper castes and, therefore, required a direct ideological challenge addressed to Hinduism itself, a challenge he took up in two different texts, *The Untouchables* written in 1948 and *Riddles in Hinduism*, never published in his lifetime.

Yet, the style and rhetoric of Ambedkar's leadership was by and large regulated by the norms of liberal, democratic discourse. This was partly because of his extraordinary qualifications, abilities and background which made him a natural interlocutor of the upper caste nationalist leadership and the colonial government on the Dalit question, but also because militancy taken beyond a certain threshold would be seen to be jeopardising the nationalist cause.

Unlike Jinnah, he didn't have the option of inventing an alternative nationalism. He gave in to Gandhi on the issue of separate electorates for the Dalits and realised his mistake when the Congress walked away with the most of the general seats Gandhi had promised to reserve for the Dalits. This is the obstacle that most Dalit parties find very difficult to surmount: how to give expression to Dalit oppression in a system that is based on major

ity rule and, therefore, requires a certain degree of collaboration with the oppressors.

The party that Ambedkar began, the Scheduled Caste Federation which later evolved into the Republican Party of India, failed to either mobilise the Dalits on any significant scale or to radicalise their consciousness, while the strategy of conversion to Buddhism was an absolute failure, because all it did was to distance the Dalits

the virulent attacks on Gandhi, the staging, in Madhya Pradesh, of *The Ramayana* rewritten by the Dravida ideologue EVR Ramaswamy Naicker to portray Rama as an effete and delinquent villain and Ravana as a virile hero, became, for a time, the most visible expressions of militant, non-communal anti-Hindu politics in the country.

Ironically, it is the reservation policy pursued by the government of India, in favour of the Scheduled Castes, which created a Dalit intelligentsia sufficiently aware of the nature of the Indian state and the functioning of the government. Kanshi Ram, the founder of the BSP, began his political career by organising Scheduled Caste government employees into the All India Backward and Minority Employees Federation (BAMCEF). The ideal of Dalit empowerment, which necessarily implies a direct attack not just against caste as power structure, but against Hindu-

ism as an ideological construct, is derived from this awareness of caste prejudice inside government and the administration.

### EMANCIPATION

The future is not radiant with promises. The BSP subsequently thoroughly compromised itself with the BJP, an essentially upper caste formation, and seems to have lost its militant sting. Like most other mainstream Dalit parties, it represents only a few Dalit sub-castes, such as the Jatavs in UP. The sub-caste factor has also played an important role in the failure of the reservation policy: only those sub-castes, such as the Malas in Andhra Pradesh, the Mahars in Maharashtra, the Ezhavas in Kerala, who had access to education have benefited from job reservation.

Even though Dalit literacy has been constantly rising and now stands at a little over 37 per cent, governments still find it difficult to fill vacancies reserved for the Scheduled Castes and have to launch special recruitment drives from time to time. In any case, as the example of Kanshi Ram and the BSP shows, reservation is not an answer to the Dalit question: who will pay for all this oppression and when?

This is not a question that can be answered even by a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It touches the very heart of our civilisation, of our personal identities, our value and belief systems, our way of life, of everything that we are and believe in. This is what sets it apart from Apartheid in South Africa and Racism in the United States: Dalit emancipation will necessarily require a cultural revolution.

(Concluded)



from Hinduism without providing them with a modern ideology against caste oppression or creating opportunities for social and economic advancement. Christianity has been much more successful in taking Dalit identity out of the ambit of caste by providing them with a messiah with whose suffering they can identify, a social philosophy where the poor and the oppressed are central to the practice of faith and an education that humanises them and helps them to understand their condition, even if it does not make them equal. It is this successful model of emancipation through religion that arouses the spite, rancour and jealousy in the VHP.

### CASTE PREJUDICE

The Naxalites see in the Dalits a rural proletariat and, therefore, do not even bother to address the symbolic and religious dimensions of their situation. Their challenge, in a way, is addressed more to the Indian state than to the upper castes whom they see as no more than landlords. As a response it is inadequate.

The BSP is the first party to understand that Dalit militancy needs its own political rhetoric based not on the norms of liberal parliamentary discourse, but on the prevailing idioms of caste politics. It must be a language that talks to the Dalit masses rather than to the upper caste elite.

It is not a concession-seeking language, it is a rights-seeking language, a language of empowerment. The ideological attack on Hinduism must obey the same logic of anger and aggression, not just of rational discourse. Slogans such as "Brahmin, Bania, Thakur Chor, Baki sab hein DS-4 (Dalit Soshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti)" or "Tilak, Taraju aur Talwar, Maro unko joote char",

2001

THE STATESMAN

SEP 2001



# DALIT CHALLENGE-I

## No Change In Pattern Of Oppression

By SOUMITRO DAS

**B**R Ambedkar was right. It is impossible to speak of poverty in terms of class in this country, because the worst forms of economic exploitation and social degradation are a product of ritual and symbolic hierarchy that is specific to this country and which goes by the name of caste. The Dalits are not only the poorest of the poor, they are also the lowest of the low and their eventual emancipation has consequences that are not simply economic or political in the narrow sense of these terms, but, and above all, cultural, since it implies either a dissolution of Hindu social structures as we know them today or their thorough and complete renovation on egalitarian lines. This is the issue.

It is clear that the Dalit condition is no longer what it used to be, there has been some progress. We shall come to this later. It is, however, also clear that this progress has generated conflicts and tensions for which Indian parliamentary democracy is yet to find appropriate answers, such that, in many places, the worst forms of subhuman degradation survive, while in others, the element of repression has increased manifold.

### EXPLOITATION

According to a Human Rights Watch report published in 1998, there are around 40 million bonded labourers in India, including fifteen million children, and most of them are Dalits. In spite of the Employment of Manual Scavengers and Construction of Dry Latrines (Prohibition) Act 1993 and Article 17 of the Constitution which abolishes "untouchability", which means that the occupation of the Dalits is irrelevant, there are roughly one million manual scavengers in this country, many of them employed by municipalities and state-run institutions like the Railways.

We quote from the report mentioned above: "Scavengers are actually lowered into filthy gutters in order to unclog them; they are fully immersed in human waste without any protective gear. In Bombay, children made to dive into manholes have died from carbon dioxide poisoning". Scavengers employed by official institutions get a salary and other benefits, the others survive as best as they can. Martin Macwan, founder of the NGO Navsarjan which works with the Dalits, says it is very difficult to find alternative employment for Dalits. In the countryside, most of the ritually polluting tasks, such as scavenging, leatherwork, disposal of the dead are still carried out by Dalits.

According to the latest Census report, the Scheduled Castes number around 140 million. Most of them live in the coun-

tryside and it is in the countryside that the various nuances of the Dalit condition find their fullest expression. According to the last census, about 25 per cent of all Dalits owned land and another 25 per cent were engaged in non-farming activities. The rest, that is half the Dalit population, work as landless labourers. Most of them are not paid the minimum wage as prescribed under the Minimum Wages Act 1948.



The economics of farming may have something to do with this. About 80 per cent of all farmland in this country is owned by small farmers owning less than four hectares of land and the payment of minimum wages is said to have an impact on their profits, in spite of the more than generous procurement prices fixed by government for their produce. Redistribution of land to the Dalits has been a failure, mainly for political reasons. Over 225,000 acres of land, much of it grazing land, not very suitable for cultivation, were redistributed to Dalits during the Emergency, but most of it was taken back by upper caste landlords through court action.

The rise of the backward castes has not made much of a difference to the Dalit condition, the pattern of repression and exploitation has been maintained, since the political fortunes of the backward castes like the Yadavs and the Kurmis, have been built on the gains made by them after the abolition of zamindari and the first round of land reforms immediately after independence. They were at the time, registered as principal tenants who let their land out through an elaborate system of sub-tenancy, so that the actual tillers of the soil happened to be Dalits, in many cases.

### EMPOWERMENT

It is the conflict over land that has turned the former undivided state of Bihar into the principal theatre of caste violence in India, although in terms of sheer repression and exploitation, other states, such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra, are no better. In Tamil Nadu, the Dalit grievance was, at least initially and to some extent, recuperated by the Dravida parties and their fierce anti-Brahminism, such that the Dalits there have a greater sense of empowerment than

their counterparts in the north. This is reflected in the importance acquired by some mainstream Dalit formations in regional politics.

In Maharashtra, the Republican Party of India has provided an established political platform for Dalit grievances. What acted as a catalyst in Bihar was the overall underdevelopment of the state of which the Dalits are the worst victims and the emergence of a Maoist rural guerrilla in neighbouring West Bengal, which, thwarted perhaps by the land reforms programme undertaken by the Left Front government there after 1977, quickly found a more appropriate setting for their revolutionary aspirations in the districts of central and north Bihar.

According to the Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes 1979-81, between 1967 and 1974, Bihar was not among the first 12 states in terms of caste violence. In 1974, it was sixth, third between 1976 and 1979 and has remained at the top of the class ever since. The circle of violence, which began with the massacre at Belchi in May 1977, has turned vicious, with atrocities and retaliations following in regular succession. Things came to a head with the formation in 1996 of the Ranveer Sena, a particularly brutal successor to many previous upper caste militias, with the stated purpose of taking on the Naxalites who were trying to organise agricultural labour in their areas.

### UNFULFILLED

Between 1995 and 1997, the Sena killed over 300 Dalits. It has connections with almost all major political formations in the state and its leader, Barmeshwar Singh, is known to be a BJP activist. They are armed with sophisticated weapons which, though often unlicensed, are never seized by the police. To date, not a single Sena member involved in these atrocities, has been prosecuted, let alone convicted. Indeed, in many instances, the police, dominated by the upper castes, were seen facilitating the Sena's task.

In the Ekwari massacre of April 1997 in which ten people were killed, the police "pried open the doors of lower-caste homes and watched the Sena kill eight residents", and in Shankarbigha and Narayanpur, where the Sena killed over 30 people in seventeen days in January-February 1999, the attack was announced in the local papers before it was carried out. In contrast, Dalits and Naxalites have often been put in prison or killed in fake encounters. The state government announces compensation packages after each massacre, but follow up inquiries by human rights organisations have revealed that the promises made are rarely fulfilled.

(To be concluded)

The author is a Senior Leader Writer, The Statesman.

THE STATESMAN

24 SEP 2001

SEP 2001

# India says no to casteism

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

DURBAN, Sept. 2. - India today strongly rejected the campaign for inclusion of casteism in the on-going World Conference Against Racism even as its Draft Declaration incorporates reference to discrimination on the basis of "work and descent" which New Delhi may not approve.

Maintaining that the first UN conference wasn't the appropriate forum for engaging in "social engineering," the leader of the Indian delegation Mr Omar Abdullah said: "We are here to ensure that states don't condone or encourage regressive social attitudes."

"We are not here to engage in social engineering within member states," he said and described the campaign by Dalit activists and Indian NGOs in the conference run-up as a "highly exaggerated and misleading propaganda" which was often based on anecdotal evidence regarding caste-based discrimination in India.

On the third day of the eight-day conference it was unclear

## 'MASS CONVERSION'

DURBAN, Sept. 2. - About one million Dalits will embrace Buddhism in a mass ceremony in Delhi on 4 November, Ram Raj, leader of the All Indian Confederation of SC/ST Organisations, claimed here today. - PTI

whether New Delhi would object to paragraph 73 of the Draft Declaration which refers to discrimination on the basis of work and descent. The NGOs said the paragraph in effect refers to casteism and alleged oppression of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Former chairperson of National Commission for Women, Mr Mohini Giri, who is part of the NGO forum, said the Dalits would not object if caste per se is not mentioned in final declaration but demanded that paragraph 73 be retained.

Foreign secretary, Mrs Chokila Iyer, has arrived here and would take over the leadership of the Indian delegation after Mr Abdullah leaves on Tuesday.

# 'Caste discrimination can be raised at international fora'

## Interview of the Week

KOTA NEELIMA meets JUSTICE J.S. VERMA

JUSTICE J.S. Verma has never fought shy of controversies. As chief justice of Supreme Court he heard the Jain Hawala case, which exposed political corruption. His landmark ruling in the Vishaka case set the guidelines for dealing with sexual harassment at the workplace. His ruling on Hindutva was no less controversial with some finding saffron shades in it.

As chairman of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), Justice Verma may not evoke the same awe, but his interventions have broadened the definition of human rights. He holds that caste discrimination and starvation deaths are human rights violations. Earlier in the week the NHRC had issued notices to the Central and Orissa governments taking cognisance of starvation deaths. Nor does he mince words when he attacks the government's position on amnesty to security officials accused of human rights violations. Excerpts...

### ■ The NHRC has taken a view contrary to the government's on caste. Why?

No one can dispute that discrimination based on caste or any form of casteism is a serious violation of human rights. And in the Indian context, it is a flagrant violation of the Constitutional guarantee of equality. Article 15 expressly mentions both race and caste as grounds of discrimination. So for practical purposes, I don't see any need to go into the question whether casteism amounts to racism or not. Whether it does or not, it is something that needs to be eradicated and it is the job of every institution of governance to work in that direction.

### ■ But should it be taken to an international fora?

This being a human rights issue, the violation being there in practice and since human rights issues are not confined to national boundaries alone, all human rights issues can be discussed at international fora as well. I personally have no problem with this issue being discussed at



Durban. I don't consider the need to go into the semantics. It is a serious human rights violation and we are concerned with human rights issues.

### ■ What was the reason behind the government's stand?

The Government of India may have many other reasons, political considerations, etc. I am only concerned about the human rights issue. And the real solution to that is economic empowerment to people at all levels.

### ■ Why do you think people hide behind semantics?

Actually it is because of the mindset. Therefore, what you have to combat really is the evil within all of us. When I was the Chief Justice of Rajasthan High Court in 1988, Harijans were not being allowed in Nathdwara temple. In a writ petition, I made an order on these constitutional provisions to hold that it was a case of serious discrimination and asked for the director general of police and made him understand. The Harijans were then permitted without any discrimination.

### ■ You have now held that starvation deaths are also violation of rights?

Godowns are overflowing and rodents are consuming more food than what would have been sufficient for feeding the people who are dying. We (the NHRC) can only monitor, we can only tell them what is happening and what can be done.

### ■ Who is to be blamed?

Those who distribute food should be held responsible.

### ■ And those responsible should be pulled up?

Yes, that is accountability. An effective mechanism for enforcing accountability is the best check for ensuring performance. Ultimately, we (the NHRC) end up making recom-

mendations. We are constantly making our presence felt by breathing down their neck and speaking loudly, that is all.

### ■ Is it easy to enforce accountability, especially when the state governments do not respond to cases of human rights violations?

There is a general tendency to evade as long as possible, if I may use that expression. In the case of the J&K, I have, after practicing great restraint for quite some time, in March visited the state. Then they promised better performance. But the situation has remained the same.

A similar case happened in Madhya Pradesh. We ordered an immediate interim relief in a case but the state administration feels that they should wait till the end of the court case. Then what does interim relief stand for? Moreover, it is a case where the state itself felt that the police officials involved in the case were high-handed. So I have written to the CM and we are waiting for a response.

### ■ What is the general attitude of officials towards human rights violation?

It is like when you are at the receiving end then you appreciate everything. But

when you are on the other side, then you feel talking of human rights is a nuisance.

### ■ What is your opinion on the proposed move to provide amnesty to those in the armed forces facing complaints of human rights violations?

Insurgency should be fought but within the Constitutional provisions. Even in a war, the prisoners of war are protected under the Geneva Convention. The position of Indian citizen within their own country cannot be worse than a prisoner of war.

### ■ Do you feel that raising issues of human rights violations can demoralise the security forces?

No. But it is clear that one man cannot act as the investigator, prosecutor, adjudicator and executor, all rolled into one. Yes, for instance, if a hijacker who is holding up hostages is shot dead to save their lives it is understandable. But the allegations we are talking of are about fake encounters. These excesses are against civilians, who are the masters.

### ■ But won't raising rights issues abroad show India in a bad light?

That is only if there is an irrevocable basis to think that instruments of governance and agencies here are lax. But not when the judiciary and the NHRC are monitoring human rights situation and punishing the guilty.

### ■ Is it possible that the human rights scenario in the country worsens to the level where international human rights organisations have to intervene?

There is no justification for any international intervention in this field. But then we have to be more careful about the efficacy of the machinery of detecting human rights violations, like the NHRC. That is why we proposed amendments to the NHRC act (which gives NHRC powers to investigate human rights violation cases pertaining to armed forces and paramilitary forces). It would facilitate us in monitoring the human rights situation better.

Think of the credibility of the NHRC, which is headed by a former chief justice and two judges of the Supreme Court. When we examine a complaint with full facts then it holds a lot of credibility.

# Quotas and benefits

By P. V. Indiresan

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HD-12  
21/8

**T**HERE IS much excitement about the U.N. conference on racial discrimination. Many Dalit activists are chagrined at the refusal of the Government of India to concede that caste discrimination too is a form of racial discrimination. In the United States, it is accepted that the Whites, the Blacks, the Red Indians, and the like belong to different races. Are the Brahmins, the Vaishyas and the Sudras of different races in the same manner?

At any rate, are the Scheduled Castes a race apart from caste Hindus? Whether that is true or not, that the Dalits are discriminated against is a fact. Hence, even if the Indian dirty linen is not washed in the international forum, it must be washed clean at least at home.

Even after 50 years of Independence and Constitutional preferences, the Scheduled Castes trail far behind the others in education, in income and in social status. Draconian laws notwithstanding, untouchability is still being practised in many parts of rural India. Not surprisingly, Dalits have become embittered, and in places have turned violent. Hence, for the sake of social stability, every attempt should be made to redress their genuine grievances and to bring them into the mainstream.

The basic issue here is one of social mobility, which can occur at three levels: the individual, the family and the clan. The burning question in India these days is about the social mobility of the clan rather than that of the individual or of the family.

That is why all legal and Constitutional correctives are directed at the Scheduled Castes as a group and are not directed at them as individuals or families. As a result, over the past 50 years, relative incomes of the Scheduled Castes have increased, and so have their opportunities for social advancement.

However, those benefits have gone only to a few. So, though the Scheduled Castes have enjoyed upward social mobility at the caste level, and that upward

movement has also been relatively faster than for other castes, at the individual/family level, and in absolute terms, that improvement has been unsatisfactory.

The Indian Constitution assumes that the Scheduled Castes are monolithic. That was possibly true 50 years ago but does not hold good now. Some sub-groups (sub-races?) among the Scheduled Castes have taken better advantage

## *That the Dalits are discriminated against is a fact... The basic issue is of social mobility.*

of the amenities offered to all members of the community.

If there had been enough and more for one and all, that would not have mattered. Unfortunately, all these privileges are concentrated at the top end of the social and economic pyramid. With the best will in the world, there can be one and only one President of India or Speaker of Parliament. The number of top level officials in the Government is barely 1,000. Even at the level of clerks, the number will be less than one per cent of the total employment in the country.

Hence, while the present system has undoubtedly corrected some injustice at the top level, it has left more than 99 per cent of the afflicted untouched. While economic (even social) disparities have decreased between the Scheduled Castes and the others, intra-Scheduled Caste disparities have increased not decreased. That is why bitter differences have started erupting among the Scheduled Castes themselves.

There is a lucrative international market for those who abuse the society in which they live. Such people get invitations for international jamborees that are not available for more objective academics. The more abusive they are, the higher the glamour they enjoy. Quite understandably, some Dalit activists have been exploiting this international win-

dow of opportunity. However, there is a price to pay: they lose the goodwill of the rest of the community.

Fifty years ago, at the time of the framing the Constitution, there was genuine shame among the upper castes at the way the Scheduled Castes had been treated for thousands of years. For that reason, special privileges were enshrined for them in the Constitution. That goodwill the Scheduled Castes

commanded, that concern for their welfare, has now eroded.

Even in the Christian community, many are getting disillusioned about the manner in which Dalit activists have been fighting their cause. However, these activists, instead of being concerned at this erosion of goodwill, are revelling in the notoriety they have acquired.

Currently, the Scheduled Castes hold the balance of power between rival majority communities in the country, and that gives them clout in excess of their numbers. That may or may not last. It is a cardinal principle that a minority prospers best by commanding the goodwill of the majority and not by exercising political clout. That goodwill it will earn only by contributing to the society more than what it takes out.

Dalit activists have no doubt described in detail how bad the majority community is. By the same token, how good are they themselves? Have they contributed more to society at large than what they have taken out? At any rate, how much have they contributed to the actual (e.g. educational) uplift of their own community?

It is sad to say but if must be said that poverty is big business. There is much money to be made, much power to be acquired by being active on poverty issues. That makes poverty a resource; re-

moving it a loss of capital. So, for India's politicians (including the several hundred Scheduled Castes among them), Scheduled Caste votes are valuable but not their welfare.

One suspects that the self-appointed Dalit activists are in the same boat. They prosper only so long as the people, whose cause they claim they are espousing, do not. The old order has to change or else, as the poet feared, the world is liable to get corrupted. For 50 years, we have practised a system of preferences that Dr. Ambedkar wanted for 30 years and no more, which the Constitution thought would work within 10 years.

It is now suffering from the Law of Diminishing Returns. An aristocracy has emerged among the Scheduled Castes and, with the existing mechanism of Scheduled Caste welfare, that aristocracy will perpetuate itself; benefits will not percolate to those who are still languishing. Rightly or wrongly, a feeling has developed, even among those who are sympathetic to the Scheduled Caste cause, that some among the Scheduled Castes are getting a double privilege — the privilege of lower standards on top of the privilege of high social/economic status.

As a corrective, let me make a suggestion in an area where I have some experience — admission to professional colleges. Let the Scheduled Caste students be allowed to take their tests, say, one week after the rest but with the same question paper. Then, they will get to know their questions one week in advance, will get one full week to prepare for the specific questions they have to answer. However, to get admitted they should score as well as the others do. That will remove the stigma they now bear that they cannot even understand the subject.

All Scheduled Castes will enjoy social mobility when they are treated not as a caste but as people. The problem with Dalit activists is they see the mote in the others' eye but not in their own. Would they sacrifice the privileges they enjoy to benefit their own people?

THE HINDU

31 Abu 22

# Dalit jolt before UN meet

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, August 30

INDIA'S resolve to keep caste-based discrimination out of its agenda for the United Nations Conference on Racism, which takes off in Durban tomorrow, got yet another jolt today when a Dalit minister went public with his protest.

In a stinging letter to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Minister of State for Consumer Affairs V Sreenivasa Prasad warned that opposing discussion on the subject "would lead to further invisibility and exclusion of backwards and force them to return to silence".

Prasad's protest may have a lot to do with the post-tehelka dispute between the BJP and the Samata Party. Not only did Prasad trip attempts to build a

code of conduct for the NDA which asks MPs to discuss their differences within the alliance and not go public with them, he also chose to circulate copies of the letter to the Press.

The minister exposed a running sore within the Government over the way the Ministry of External Affairs handled the caste issue.

The MEA, like the US State Department, has been criticised by liberal thinkers and leaders of discriminated groups of allowing diplomacy to hijack the UN meet which is essentially a forum for social issues.

The National Human Rights Commission too has debunked the Government's stance that caste is a "domestic issue" and does not constitute race. Eduardo Falerio, former Minister of State for External Affairs, said

the Government has misunderstood the nature of the conference because it is also poised to discuss "related intolerance".

The Indian delegation, led by Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah, will face tough resistance from representatives of NGOs when it makes its presentation on October 3.

Gearing up to make things difficult for the Indian team are several Dalit organisations and human rights groups who hold that caste is not uniquely Indian and exists in many names in a large number of countries.

Eager to project India's "resolve to combat casteism", the MEA has included Bangaru Laxman and three Dalit MPs in the delegation. Laxman's inclusion is controversial because of the allegations made against by him tehelka.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 AUG 2001

# Caste Consciousness

## Initiate an Open Discussion in Durban

By ANDRE BETEILLE

*(Handwritten: coming from 19-10)*

DALIT activists and human rights *gurus* have joined hands to press for the inclusion of caste discrimination and the practice of untouchability on the agenda of the UN conference at Durban on racism and racial discrimination. This is wrong because caste is not a form of race and untouchability, no matter how reprehensible, is not a form of racial discrimination. The Indian government is determined to prevent this, presumably because it does not want its dirty linen to be aired outside. This is futile because in a democracy there is no effective way of preventing the discussion outside the country of social evils that are known to exist within it.

There is no harm in discussing, whether inside or outside India, the discriminatory practices of caste, including untouchability, and I have done so myself in papers and articles published in India and abroad. But the discussion should be in good faith and not under false pretences. Some of those who wish to include caste discrimination in the agenda at Durban know very well that caste is not a form of race, but they are not averse to stretching the point somewhat in the service of a good cause.

One must not misuse the metaphor of race even in a good cause — and who will deny that the abolition of untouchability is a good cause? Extensive misuse of the metaphor of race has had tragic consequences in Europe. Once it is conceded that caste discrimination is a form of racial discrimination, there will be nothing to prevent religious — or linguistic — minorities from saying that they too are victims of racial discrimination. It is well to remember what the noted geneticist and biometrician, J B S Haldane had said: "As for the word race, it has so many different meanings as to be useless in scientific discussion, though very useful for getting members of the same nation to hate one another".

I am convinced that the government of India is not in favour of caste discrimination or the practice of untouchability. They are not in its own interest. To represent the government as being opposed, or even indifferent, to the abolition of untouchability is to act in bad faith, whether one does it in Delhi or in Durban.

I do not wish to suggest that the government of India itself acts in

good faith in all matters, because it does not. Its basic instinct is to brush all unpleasant things under the carpet, and to filter out every hint of dissent — no arguments please, we are all Indians. Bureaucracy can be particularly obdurate. Some 30 years ago, I was briefly involved, along with the late Professor V M Dandekar, in a project sponsored by a UN agency to study the economic and social implications of the Green Revolution. The project required clearance from two government ministries. At the first meeting, there were two joint secretaries who told us they had no objection to the economic side of the project because India was doing well economically but that they were worried about the social side since it was bound to deal with caste and other practices which

### IN BRIEF

- Caste is not a form of race, but many may equate the two
- However, this does not mean the issue must be swept under the carpet
- NGOs are filling the vacuum left by the government in the social sector
- Most human rights gurus are not committed to a more humane society

would show India in a bad light. I was appalled. But I need not have worried, because Professor Dandekar, who did not suffer fools gladly, wiped the floor with the two joint secretaries.

It is the same obstructive mindset that leads the government to issue *fatwas* from time to time to restrict the entry of foreign scholars into India or their participation in seminars and conferences. I am not talking now about restrictions imposed on particular individuals whose *bona fides* may be in question, but a blanket ban on foreign scholars on the ground that they may hear or say things that could damage India's reputation abroad. This is bizarre for the simple reason that Indian academics are, in general, better equipped than Indian bureaucrats to deal with foreign critics of India. And they are no less patriotic.

The government has been caught on the wrong foot by a combination of elements that seems to have no hesitation in embarrassing it. When it comes to media atten-

*(Handwritten: 20/8)*

tion, the NGOs can beat the government hands down, nationally as well as internationally. The NGO explosion is a phenomenon of the last ten or 15 years, and nobody really understands how the NGOs have grown or what role they will play in the society of the future. At one level, one can say that they have expanded in response to the failure of the government on the social front, just as the market has expanded in response to its failures on the economic front.

The ascendancy of NGOs, like the ascendancy of the market, is a worldwide phenomenon, driven in some respects by the same forces. The NGOs are not only a worldwide phenomenon, there is a strong international presence in them though this may be less visible in India than in smaller countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Again, this is not necessarily a bad thing, and, certainly, in a large and self-confident country such as ours there is no need to be paranoid about it.

At the same time, there must be wider public scrutiny of what the NGOs are actually doing. The getting together of Dalit activists and human rights *gurus* may have a lesson to offer, but it is doubtful that the government of India will learn it. Such an alliance might not have been possible or effective without the abundant presence of NGOs ready to take on the government in the cause of social justice. The activists provide the youth, the energy and the dynamism, and the *gurus* the wisdom often gathered in the corridors of power in national and international agencies.

Personally speaking, I have some sympathy for the Dalit activists even when I find their approach wrong. Their movement is driven by a genuine passion to break free from a monstrously oppressive social system. I cannot say the same for the human rights *gurus*. Their social and occupational background is very different. They are usually much older persons often with successful careers in the civil service, in diplomacy or in the judiciary behind them. I do not envy them their frequent visits abroad at public expense. What I deeply regret is that there is so little of intellectual worth in what they say or write about the creation of a more just and humane society. And as to their passion, it is often a simulated passion.

of touring the state. The other...

# NHRC for dalit debate at UN meet

## 'Government might have political reasons for opposing it'

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 27: Taking a stance right opposite to that of the Union government, the National Human Rights Commission on Monday stated that the forthcoming UN conference on racism at Durban provides an opportunity to debate on human rights issues. These include eradication of discrimination based on race, caste and descent. The NHRC added that the UN meet can contribute constructively to the promotion and protection of such rights.

In a statement issued here the commission stated, "The exchange of views on human rights matter,

whether at the national, regional or international level, can all contribute constructively to the promotion and protection of such rights and that this conference provides a singular opportunity to the international community to deal openly and courageously with the vexed issues of discrimination and inequality as they exist all over the world." The views of the commission, which is participating in the "World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerances" to be held in Durban, assumes significance as the government has been maintaining that caste should not be discussed at the international

fora. "The commission is convinced that discrimination on any of the grounds contained in the Constitution of India, and these include race, caste and descent, constitute an acceptable assault on the dignity and worth of the human persons and an egregious violation of human rights," the NHRC said.

"It will not be fair for NHRC to comment on why government was opposing the deliberation on casteism at the international fora. There can be political reasons for government to do so, but for NHRC it is a matter of human rights and we don't have objections if they want to discuss it in Durban conference," NHRC chair-

person Justice J.S. Verma said.

Admitting that there were plenty of legislative policies to curb the problem of caste system, the menace was still prevalent, Justice Verma said, "The problem has to be tackled at home. But if somebody comes up with bright suggestion how to overcome it, what is the harm in implementing it."

Meanwhile, the national chairman of All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations, Mr Ram Raj, said, "Caste discrimination is worse than Apartheid. We know that inclusion of subject will not make it mandatory for the government to do anything but it will put some moral pressure on it."

THE ASIAN AGE

28 AUG 2001

# Dalits and Durban — I

By P. Radhakrishnan

189-12  
27/8

*It may be your interest to be our masters, but how can it be ours to be your slaves? — Thucydides*

**T**HIS QUOTE with which Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who exposed the numerous Hindu myths, mysticisms and mumbo-jumbo justifying the injustices of Indian society, and tried to instil in the vast masses of India's 'outcasts' a sense of confidence, defiance, dignity, freedom, and hope, began his controversial work, 'What Congress and Gandhi have done to The Untouchables', is as relevant today as in 1945 when he wrote it.

However, convinced as he was that India's pernicious caste practices have been part of the malignancy of Hindu society which can be extirpated only on Indian soil and only through social reforms and constitutional means, it cannot be gained that in India's changed stature as a sovereign democratic republic Ambedkar himself would have found it ludicrous and even abhorrent to showcase caste, even as tableaux, in an alien land and through a world body of which India is a member-country. More so, as it was mainly because of Ambedkar's initiative as the chief architect of the Indian Constitution that the numerous safeguards for the untouchables and the other weaker sections were enshrined in the Constitution.

The reference is to the United Nations' World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, to be held in Durban, South Africa, from August 31 to September 7, the confusion and controversy about caste and race as discriminatory categories, and the furore in India and abroad on inclusion of caste in the conference.

Understanding the fallacies underlying this confusion and controversy, and their fallout for India calls for understanding the widely varying postures on caste and race by the proponents and opponents for inclusion of caste in the conference, and the role of the U.N. as a global "do-gooder".

Going by press reports, there has been widespread support through social mobilisation, meetings, conferences, and writ-

ings in the press for inclusion of caste in the conference. The most prominent and vociferous proponents are the "Dalit activists", who are a heterogeneous ensemble. The organisations purportedly representing them include the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights, the Republican Party of India, People's Watch, the National Council of Churches in India — the highest body in the country representing different denominations of the Protestants — and so on. Whether the "Dalit activists" are leaders from among the Dalits, or non-

of the long-dormant liberation theology, ignoring for the time being the Hindutva monster, one might ask what the Church-related organisations have been doing to overcome the discriminatory practices among the Indian Christians, in particular Christian converts of Scheduled Caste origin, the persistence of whose disabilities and plight as "twice alienated" have necessitated their organised demands for at least the last ten years for treatment as Scheduled Castes so as to enable them to take advantage of the State's affirmative

vastly different, for which reason, they should not be collapsed into a single analytical category. Important among the differences are the caste system is about 3000 years old, extremely complex based on multiple hierarchies, characterised by the pervasive purity-pollution dichotomy, and graded discrimination. In contrast, racism is of recent origin, and as race is based on phenotypic criteria there can be no dispute about where one belongs in the race hierarchy.

Caste has been under extensive debate and indepth research for several decades now, and the literature on it is probably much more burgeoning than on race. Though race has also been under extensive debate and indepth research and Gunnar Myrdal's 'American Dilemma', followed by Oliver Cromwell Cox's 'Race: A Study in Social Dynamics' are still probably the most important works on racism, racism is predominantly an American and South African problem, and even here race relations have undergone tremendous changes during the last three decades. So, a U.N. Conference on caste or race or both may not add up.

Two, equating the caste system with Dalits, as if it comprises only Dalits and none else. This is political appropriation of the caste system by "Dalit activists". Though Dalits are certainly the worst victims of discrimination, and account for about one-fourth of India's population, their existential problem cannot be isolated from that of the rest of society.

Other traditional caste groups barring Brahmins and probably a few other upper castes have also been victims of the caste system. It is recognising this pervasive nature of discrimination, disparities, and disabilities, that the first all-India Backward Classes (Kaka Kalelkar) Commission of the 1950s recommended reservation for a separate category just above the Scheduled Castes; and it is in keeping with this recommendation that some States such as Tamil Nadu have created the Most Backward Classes category for reservation purposes.

(The writer is Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai.)

## *The justification for inclusion of caste in the U.N. Conference that it is to 'internationalise' Dalit discrimination raises several issues.*

Dalits feigning to be self-appointed Dalit leaders of pressure groups, or both is a moot issue. This issue is, however, very important for at least two reasons. One, if the Dalits could spawn such aggressive, articulate, globetrotting, and internationally acclaimed and influential leaders, they would have overcome long ago their precarious plight as the despised and the damned, the depressed and the downtrodden of the caste-ridden Indian society. Two, if evidence and experience are any indication, the "Dalit cause" is hard currency for "Dalit activists" operating in developed countries, though it is questionable how far the Dalits themselves have been beneficiaries of the Western dole.

Sources would have it that in Geneva several NGOs in special consultative status with the U.N. have been spearheading the movement for inclusion of caste on the agenda for the conference, and a number of organisations have joined forces to form the International Dalit Solidarity Network.

As notable among them are the World Council of Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and similar organisations from Europe and the U.S., their involvement and vociferous claims are certainly grist to the Hindutva mill. While the initiative of the Church-related organisations is laudable and hopefully indicative of the revival

and special treatment programmes, though here again the initiative of the Church-related organisations has been commendable.

Whether by the Church Council or other organisations, the claims for inclusion of caste in the conference are of two broad streams. The first would have caste as race, caste as worse than race, caste discrimination as racism and more, and so on. The second would have Dalit oppression as worse than racial discrimination; Dalits as victims of centuries-old polluting and stigmatising occupations such as scavenging, persistent discrimination and atrocities, untouchability, social segregation and denial of access to public places and spaces forcing them to live at the margins of society; the history of Dalits as a genealogy of pain captured in the very etymology of the word, and so on.

While all this is true, the claim that the justification for inclusion of caste in the U.N. Conference is to "internationalise" Dalit discrimination, raises several issues. One, equating caste with race. As Professor Dipankar Gupta observed in his work 'Interrogating Caste: Understanding Hierarchy and Difference in Indian Society', despite some commonalities between caste and race, particularly between the bottom end of the caste system and the segregationist racism, caste and race are



Casteism & Racism

# India's apartheid

By Rajeev Dhavan

HD-12 29/8

*If 'casteism' is not the same as 'racism', it must be deemed to be similar.*

IT IS no disservice to the heroic struggle in South Africa against apartheid to compare it with the struggle of Dalits and tribals to fight the cumulative injustice of centuries. In doing so we salute the struggles of all peoples to fight racist and related ideologies which imprison and brutalise their lives.

It is unfortunate that we have to remind ourselves about India's apartheid through the aegis of the United Nation (U.N.) Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance due to be held in Durban from August 31 to September 7, 2001. It is doubly unfortunate that a cruel and ungainly controversy exists in India over whether casteism which plagues the everyday lives of Dalits, tribals and others is the same as or akin to racism? And, if misfortune can be compounded three times over, the Indian Government has obdurately taken the stance that the fight against the casteism has no place in the U.N.'s agenda to combat racism and related phenomenon.

It was at Durban over a century ago that Mahatma Gandhi began his struggle against racism and related intolerance. It is at Durban, too, that India refuses to follow his example to confront the biggest curse that plagues around 300 million, if not more people in India with one of the most vicious ideologies and permanent social diseases the world has ever known: casteism. It was early this month that a couple from different castes were hung whilst an entire village watched the spectacle. This is not an uncommon event. Nor is the permanent isolation of Dalits who are brutalised everyday through beatings, rapes, ostracism, land grabbing, deprivation and endemic disadvantage. Casteism is not a social preference, but an ideology that effects inter-generational injustice to condemn certain castes and communities into subordination and a cycle of deprivation for decades to come.

Why is Durban important? The 20th century was remarkably creative and destructive. It enabled political but not social democracy. It moved from the bicycle to cyber space, without bypassing nuclear destruction. It created a manufacturing bonanza but perilously threatened the environment. It transmitted good and evil on

an enormous scale into our time. We carry into the 21st century four critical agendas: (i) the quest for an equitable global economy, amidst the exploitative regime of the WTO; (ii) the Rio and Kyoto agendas to protect bio-diversity and all living creatures; (iii) the fight against poverty and socio-economic inequality; and (iv) the struggle against racist related and similar ideologies which victimise whole peoples on the basis of their colour, race, ethnicity or descent.

Durban is concerned with the fourth agenda to confront the ideological social enslavement of entire peoples through ideologies that viciously discriminate

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against them under conditions of hate and endemic social disadvantage. This is an continuing evil. Indians should know better; look at the plight of Indians abroad. In 1968, Indians were thrown out of Kenya. In 1971, Idi Amin unleashed a reign of terror against Uganda's Asians. In 2000, in Fiji, a Prime Minister of Indian origin was dethroned whilst his community lived in terror. In 1968, in England, Enoch Powell, provoked and predicted that 'rivers of blood' would flow. They did. In 2001, riots took place in the north of England. John Rex's research shows how housing patterns of immigrants perpetrate permanent disadvantages. In America, 'dot-busters' attack Indian women who wear bindis on their forehead or Indian clothes. Of all peoples, we cannot afford to ignore racism-related phenomena being the pointed target of the global agenda.

Why do we resist the inclusion of casteism in this global agenda? For this we have to understand the global agenda; and, indeed, India's own. We are concerned here not with race but racism. Not caste but casteism. Racism is not just a socio-biological phenomenon but a colonial legacy. Like casteism, it is a social construct. It exists amongst and within White communities. Spielberg's Schindler's List reminds us of the struggle of the Jews in our time. The English outcasted Anglo and

other mixes. The Dutch did not. The Durban Conference is directed against entrenched racism and related practices which contain the following characteristics: (i) a socially constructed ideology; (ii) founded on notions of superiority (or, inversely, inferiority); (iii) directed against entire peoples; (iv) on the basis of descent, ethnicity, colour, or physical characteristics; (v) manifesting violent expressions of hostility, including vicious and violent attacks, hate and bias; (vi) to perpetrate endemic social disadvantage; and (vii) effect inter-generational injustice.

Sociologists may quibble — as, indeed, Prof. Andre Beteille and others

have — over academic dissimilarities between 'race' and 'caste' as heuristic 'ideal types' to throw the baby out with the bath water. But apply the seven tests which, perforce, underscore the global agenda. Caste is based on descent and birth. This is recognised as part of India's human rights constitutional dispensation in its equality provisions (Articles 15 and 16), the abolition of untouchability (Article 17), the temple entry provision (Article 25), special provisions for an SC and ST Commission (Articles 330-342 and 46), and in the scheme of Indian federalism (Articles 164 (1), 371 A-G, Vth and VIth Schedules). Thus, the Indian Constitution has a priority constitutional commitment to fight a descent and birth based struggle against casteism and tribalism.

Our Constitution recognises that 'casteism' is a centuries-old vicious ideology founded on hate, violence and exclusion from equality, opportunity, empowerment and resources. The Protection of Civil Rights Act 1955-1976 and the SC and ST (Atrocities) Act 1989 underlie this commitment. Yet, after 50 years, despite affirmative action and other agendas, casteism continues. Rapes, beatings and deprivations reflected in Government reports are the tip of the social inferno. Temple entry is accompanied by purification ceremon-

nies before and after entry. Humiliation accompanies violence. By inclusion in the global agenda, the fight against casteism will be enhanced.

It was at India's insistence that 'descent' was included in the Convention against Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 1969. By 1996, India argued that 'casteism' was not part of CERD, but was, in effect, overruled by the U.N.'s Human Rights Committee. Today, India flounders. It does not want to admit that 'casteism' is India's apartheid which will continue in its most vicious and persistent forms for decades to come. Even if India's stance is linked to its quest for a seat in the Security Council of the U.N., this cannot mortgage human rights priorities for Dalits and tribals.

If 'casteism' is not the same as 'racism', it must be deemed to be similar. Article 25 of India's Constitution uses such a deeming provision for temple entry for Dalits by including Buddhists, Sikhs and Jains as Hindus. 'Casteism' is not a social preference, but India's apartheid. We stand on the brink of history; and, we quibble over words on whether to include 'casteism' as a related phenomenon similar to 'racism'. Durban is not just about what is included in the U.N.'s remit on racism and related phenomenon. It is about how to fight these social diseases. India should concentrate on these prescriptive programmatic dimensions. Fundamental issues remain. These include fighting hate propaganda while mindful of free speech. India's programmes have concentrated on self-betterment avenues for education and jobs as part of affirmative action, and some element of administrative and political empowerment through reservation. But it has failed to distribute economic resources including land and capital which are critical for inter-generational justice. The fight over tribal lands, the Samta judgment and Balco are examples of this — as, indeed, the resourceless denotified tribals. Anti-atrocity legislation lies relatively unenforced. The police do not investigate. Courts do not convict violators. We have progressed on paper but not in fact. We should recognise and stop the horror of India's apartheid, not brush it under the carpet.

THE HINDU

# Caste, untouchability sure to figure at meet

By M.S. Prabhakara  
CAPE TOWN, AUG. 21. Despite lobbying and pressures from official India, there is no way in which the issues of caste and untouchability can be kept out of focus during the World Conference against Racism (WCAR), taking place in Durban between August 31 and September 7.

Even if official India finally succeeds in getting the issues out of the formal agenda, these will certainly figure prominently in the three-day NGO forum planned to take place before the WCAR proper begins.

This is so even with the far more contentious issues of equation of Zionism with racism, the situation in West Asia, and the question of reparations for slavery to be paid by erstwhile colonial countries to the colonised countries, in particular on the African continent.

These issues have a greater immediacy in South Africa than the relatively remote issues of caste-based discrimination or the minority problems in India.

A rally organised in Durban on Sunday by a South African organisation called 'Palestinian Support Movement' called on the Government to use its influence to isolate Israel internationally.

Reports from Geneva, confirmed by the spokesperson for South Africa's Department of Foreign Affairs on Sunday, suggest that the issue of reparations for slavery and colonialism will not be on the agenda of the WCAR.

The apparent *quid pro quo* is that the developed countries will support the so-called 'Millennium Africa Recovery Programme', whose authorship is attributed to the South African President, Mr. Thabo Mbeki.

However, speaking over the SABC TV on Sunday, the South African Foreign Minister, Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, said that it was unrealistic to expect that the WCAR would not discuss the situation in West Asia or the issue of reparations for slavery.

Even Zionism, the one issue over which the U.S. has threatened to boycott (or at least downgrade its representation) at the Conference, was still on the agenda, she said.

The U.S. stand has been criticised by the SACP and the trade union federation, Cosatu, both partners of the African National Congress in the tripartite alliance.

Indeed, the freewheeling debates on these issues in the NGO forums outside the formal agenda of the Conference are bound to be more lively and attract more

media attention than the more formal deliberations of the Conference itself.

An Independent Media Centre supported by various South Africa-based pressure groups linked directly and indirectly to international lobbies will be covering the deliberations of the NGO forum. In so far as South Asia is concerned, 79 of the nearly 1,500 NGOs that have been accredited to the WCAR, appear to have a stake in South Asian social and political issues.

46 of these are based in India and one more, Global Organisation of People of Indian Origin, is U.S.-based.

The remaining 32 are from Nepal (12, including one which has an explicit Dalit orientation), Sri Lanka (7), Pakistan (5), Bangladesh (4) and Bhutan (4). Many of them are expected to come to Durban.

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# Caste and the U.N. meet

By Kancha Ilaiah

*We can see a very strong racist psyche in constructing symbols of sacredness and nationalism based on colour and caste.*

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**N**OW THAT the World Conference on Racism is allowing caste discrimination on the agenda as "work and descent based discrimination", the semanticists must stop hair-splitting debates on caste and race and allow the U.N. to focus on eradicating all forms of discrimination. The National Human Rights Commission must help in strengthening the agenda and see that caste discrimination is abolished in India in spheres, social, economic and spiritual.

It is laudable that the NHRC decided to take an independent stand. Its chairman, Mr. J. S. Verma, refused to join the national committee constituted by the Prime Minister, headed by Mr. Ranganath Mishra, to assist the Government in formulating its position on the question of inclusion of caste in the agenda of the Durban conference. The NHRC can and should formulate its own position on whether caste, as an institution that constructed descent-based intolerance and xenophobic discrimination, was a problem of human rights or not. Once the NHRC formulates its position and suggests instruments to eradicate this pernicious practice, steps by the Government of India have to follow.

To ascertain informed opinion about the caste-race relationship, the NHRC conducted a national seminar on August 3 at the National Law School, Bangalore. A public hearing on the intensity of caste discrimination was organised by it at Bangalore University. It also conducted a national seminar in New Delhi on August 11. Studies showing the historical relationship between caste and race and those holding that the caste system had no relationship with race were presented. However, it is important to look at the mindset of the Brahminic castes in clinching this issue.

Many reform movements including that of Swamy Dayananda Saraswati used the hegemonic racist notion of Aryan (the brown race of India) to construct an upper caste nationalist ideology. The social forces that joined these organisations even in South India came from hegemonic castes. The movements that sprung up

from the South owning the Dravida (black) racial identity were joined and owned by social forces from Sudra and Dalit castes. The South Indian Brahmins and Vaisyas who share dark skin with other lower castes named their organisations Arya Brahmin Samajam and Arya Vaisya Sangham. We can see a very strong racist psyche in constructing symbols of sacredness and nationalism based on colour and caste.

Take, for example, the notion of the sacredness of the cow. The cow became a sacred animal with the Brahminic Aryanism that got constructed as hegemonic in civil society. Even now, the average Brahminic psyche treats the cow as sacred, but not the buffalo. The cow was the prime sacrificial animal when the priests were beef-eaters; it remains a sacred animal even after the priestly class gave up beef-eating.

In both the Gandhian and the RSS mode of nationalist thought, though both of them are vastly different, the cow not only remains sacred but is constructed as a constitutional animal as well. It is a known fact that in economic terms the buffalo contributes more to the Indian milk economy than the cow. Why then does the buffalo remain a non-sacred and most invisible animal? Why did it not get constitutional protection as the cow did in the Directive Principles of State Policy? Simply because the cow belongs to the white race in the animal kingdom and the buffalo belongs to the black race. This is an Indian variety of racism. All white races constructed their colour as superior, the Indian Aryans also made the colour sacred. The colour black in general and dark people, buffaloes and other animals, irrespective of their utility or beauty were/are condemned both in social and spiritual realms.

This psyche was not only ancient and historic but is continuously operating in our day-to-day life rendering black hu-

mans and animals unworthy of occupying national and international space. The Western mode of racism did not sink into the spiritual realm. It is this Indian racist spiritual and social psyche that is at the core of the caste system. Indian civil society, the state and the institutions such as the NHRC that operate as negotiating agencies between the state and civil society must address this racist and casteist psyche.

The Indian Government took an undemocratic stand and the national committee has failed in telling the nation, even after so many days of its Hyderabad hearing, what its opinion is. The NHRC being an independent body did well as Mr. Verma himself said that it did not mortgage its mind to any preconceived notion or thought on this issue. By formulating both short term and long term policies on the question of caste, as a historical institution of oppression, it can help the nation and keep the morale of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes up.

Human rights organisations in this country have not so far realised that civil societal oppression and systemic subjugation of SCs, STs, OBCs and women have more dangerous implications for social change and development than state oppression. With the help of U.N. bodies, the Government of India must evolve more instruments to tackle this historical problem.

If the NHRC takes a position on the question of caste and defines its very existence and day-to-day operation as a problem of human rights, it then becomes the bounden duty of the state to work out much stronger instruments to abolish this institution in all its forms. In fact, the NHRC should have formulated its position and educated the Government of India much before the world forums took it up.

It is an absurd argument that Govern-

ments, even though elected democratically, become responsive without pressure from both national and international agencies. The oppressive institutions that came into operation through the process of civil societal structuring need the pressure of outside agencies such as the U.N., because it is more difficult to address the civil societal agencies than the Governmental agencies from within. The U.N. Human Rights charter has been worked out to serve that purpose also. It hence thought of addressing the civil societal oppressions that emanate from race, religion, language, gender and so on. Unfortunately, caste as an institution of social oppression was not included in the charter at that time.

A body like the NHRC should have realised this and recommended to the Government of India a long time back that caste discrimination has many traits of racial discrimination and, hence, must become part of the U.N. Human Rights charter. Then the World Conference on Racism would have automatically included caste in its agenda. In this respect, the National SC, ST Commission and the Backward Class Commission have failed in putting caste discrimination on the U.N. agenda. The SC, ST and OBC MPs and political leaders have not shown any maturity in understanding the role of U.N. bodies in resolving certain historical problems and have remained blissfully indifferent to this process. They could have easily forced the Government of India to avoid all somersaults in the meetings of the Preparatory Committees of the World Conference.

Caste will be discussed in the inter-Governmental Conference at Durban under para 109 of the agenda which reads: "to ensure all necessary constitutional, legislative and administrative measures, including appropriate form of affirmative action, are in place to prohibit and address discrimination on the basis of work and descent and such that measures are respected and implemented by all states, authorities at all levels". The Government and other state bodies such as the NHRC must tell the nation that they will abide by the mandate of the U.N. Conference.

## Tommy on the brink

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# Caste discrimination is worse, say Dalits

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By Our Special Correspondent

**HYDERABAD, AUG. 13.** A training programme for delegates attending the U.N. meet at Durban was inaugurated here on Monday with speakers asking them to be well-prepared to effectively voice the outrage faced by Dalits in the country.

Earlier at a meeting, the speakers said the inclusion of para no. 109 in the agenda for the Durban meet was a triumph in itself. Criticising the Government's efforts to prevent caste from being included in the agenda, they said the "cosmetic assurances" given in Article 14 and Article 17 of the Constitution had not been able to change the ground realities, and discrimination based on descent and work continued unabated.

Mr. Ramdas Athawale, MP, said that caste discrimination was worse than racial discrimination. The living conditions of Dalits had not changed despite Government claims to the contrary. A majority of Dalits — over 65 per cent — had no land of their own and an equal number depended on wage labour in rural and urban India.

Discrimination in employment continued and

though the literacy rate had gone up a little, the number of Dalits undergoing higher studies was a dismal two to three per cent, he said. Till date, one lakh cases of atrocities had been booked in the country, which went to show that Dalits continued to be at the receiving end despite Constitutional provisions.

Mr. Bojja Tarakam, president of the State unit of the Republican Party of India, Prof. Chalam of Andhra University, Prof. S.K. Thorat of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mr. Kannabiran, president, People's Union for Civil Liberties, Mr. Martin Macwan, national convenor of the National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), Mr. Henri Tiphange, executive director of People's Watch, Mr. Paul Divakar, secretary for advocacy and lobbying, NCDHR, and Prof. Vasanthi Devi, former VC, Madras University, detailed the persecution of Dalits. They felt the Durban meet was only the beginning of the long struggle that the Dalits would have to wage.

The three-day training programme would impart skills to the participants in advocating the Dalit cause properly and to seek a covenant for Dalit human rights.

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## FAIR IS NOT ENOUGH

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The new mould of Dalit politics  
of caste & power

THE BJP probably understands that as a party with mainstream ambitions it cannot do without an authentic leader of the Dalits and the backward castes and some people, such as Uma Bharati, think that Ram Vilas Paswan, who has broken off from Sharad Yadav and his joke of a party, and has some following among the Dalits in Bihar, may fit the bill, at least as a coalition partner. Bangaru Laxman was a Dalit, but he could hardly be projected as a credible leader, in the way Jagjivan Ram was or even Ram Vilas Paswan can be, and this mainly because he was from Andhra Pradesh whereas the locus of Dalit politics within the parliamentary framework is situated mostly in the Hindi heartland — partially, and in a more militant form in Maharashtra — and has to be situated within the context of overall inter-caste rivalry to be properly understood. In Laxman's own state, the Dalit cause has been, to a considerable extent, recuperated by ultra-Left wing militancy and is less sensitive to the appeal of political leadership of the mainstream variety. Bangaru Laxman didn't really adapt himself to the style of north Indian Dalit politics, primarily because he wasn't meant to. He was meant to tell the people that the BJP did not have any caste bias, which carries the promise of fair treatment without touching the status quo, but is a totally different political exercise from actually going out to the villages of Uttar Pradesh and telling Dalits that a BJP government can bring about the radical changes in administration to change power equations.

That, no BJP Dalit leader is able to do, so there is no point in saying they have a person called Sanghapriya Gautam, why should Uma Bharati talk about Paswan. The truth of the matter as far as Uttar Pradesh is concerned is that the BSP has brought about such radical alterations in Dalit politics as the Dalit situation demanded in that state, even though their methods grossly violate parliamentary norms. They have pushed the frontiers of mainstream politics further perhaps than any other political formation in recent years — which other party could be so openly and vituperatively critical of Mahatma Gandhi — and the challenge they addressed to upper-caste domination had a genuine militant edge to it. When Kanshi Ram and Mayawati spoke, they sounded like authentic Dalit leaders speaking of the oppression of their people and demanding radical political change rather than just fairness. Symbols of fairness — Bangaru Laxman, Jagjivan Ram — will not do under the present circumstances. The BJP being inherently conservative on social issues is unlikely to come up with a plausibly radical leader. The old days, when client-patron relations tied the upper castes to the Dalits in relatively smooth social coalition within Nehru and even Indira Gandhi's Congress, are gone forever.

# Left for including caste at U.N. meet

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 4.** The Left parties have supported the demand of various Dalit and non-government organisations urging the Government to take up the issue of caste oppression as part of the agenda at the U.N.- sponsored 'World Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance' at Durban, South Africa, later this month.

The CPI(M) politburo said caste could not be equated with race or casteism with racism. While there were elements of racial outlook in Varnashramadharma, the basic oppressive features of the caste system were wider than race and colour. The oppression of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was unique since it consisted of untouchability and exclusion of various kinds — a practice still prevalent in the country.

Countering the Centre's stand that caste did not fall within the

framework of the conference on racism as "untenable", the party said there was a proposal to include "Zionism" on the agenda and discrimination based on descent such as "caste" could certainly be included.

The party said it would be wrong to argue that this issue fell within the national purview and should not be taken up at an international forum. "Caste oppression is an affront to basic human dignity and its practice in India and elsewhere is a fit subject for a conference of the type called by the U.N. Commission on Human Rights".

The Communist Party of India also echoed similar views and said the issue of caste and social oppression required international focus.

The CPI national secretary, Mr. D. Raja, said the atrocities against the Dalits was inhuman and it continued even 50 years after the country achieved independence. "This pernicious system needs to be fought".

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# Tackling discrimination

By N.R. Madhava Menon

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**E**QUALITY MEANS many things to many people. It continues to capture the imagination of people everywhere in varying degrees of appeal and intensity. The pursuit of freedom and liberty in liberal democracies did not diminish the importance of equality as a universal value to be cherished for social solidarity and human dignity. The struggle for an egalitarian social order has assumed many forms and shades and invited varied responses from law and legal institutions. Yet the ideal seems to be as distant as ever and legal systems are proving themselves inadequate for the tasks and challenges to fight the social reality of inequality and unfair discrimination. The result has been continuing conflicts and social tensions taking their toll in terms of life and property besides inhibiting peace and development.

Ever since the adoption of the Universal Declaration and the two Covenants on Human Rights, the international community has been working overtime to evolve norms, standards and procedures to put down discriminatory conduct violative of basic human dignity. Country after country wrote into constitutions the guarantee of equality and non-discrimination and evolved different instruments to operationalise the right. While there has been some discernible progress in the political and economic sphere, the source of social inequalities persist in some form or other. Racism and xenophobia (hatred or fear of people who are different) are two manifestations of such attitude still prevailing in different parts of the world tending to generate forces of potential conflicts. Basically it is an issue of tolerance of differences. The world is full of differences and promises to remain so in future as well. The question is how do people react to those who are different from themselves in colour, descent, sex etc. — a question which arose from the beginning of human civilisation.

Let us examine whether caste-based discrimination in India today can at all be equated with racial discrimination elsewhere or the phenomenon of xenophobia we see in some places. It does not need

much research or ingenuity to establish that caste and race are two distinct social constructs which happened in different social environments in different periods and with different consequences. Of course, both are discriminatory in practice and irrational in construction. Both deserve to be put down for the sake of human rights and equality. Racism is a phenomenon across political boundaries and the world recognised early its perni-

the matter, one may consider the history of treatment of the subject by the world community since 1948. A dozen times or more during the last 50 years the international community deliberated the subject of racism and made declarations against it. Caste and caste-based discrimination was not equated with racist discrimination if any of these initiatives in the past for two obvious reasons. The U.N. had declared three decades of action to com-

the General Assembly Resolution of December, 1997. If caste can be equated with race there is no difficulty in the subject finding a rightful place in the agenda of the proposed conference. But if they are distinct categories unrelated to each other excepting perhaps in similarity of consequences, they deserve to be treated differently. The onus is on those who contend that caste is part of race, in view of the historical fact that it was never treated so in earlier discourses on racism and U.N. resolutions on the subject.

Racism is a belief system that views groups of people (identified by various physical characteristics) hierarchically in terms of superiority and inferiority. They are constructed on pseudo-biological terms such as skin colour and are highly subjective and suspect classifications. Nonetheless, one can find similarities between caste and race in respect of what they did to their respective societies. Though they both stigmatised groups of people and allowed unfair discrimination against them, the process has been different.

While in India caste is clearly a social construction, race is believed to be an immutable and obvious physical condition as well. Unlike the case in racial discrimination, the process of stigmatic differentiation among castes developed after the disadvantages began. To mark the disadvantages, stigmatisation was resorted to. It is for this reason that one cannot find visible physical characteristics to distinguish the higher castes from the lower castes, whereas in racist societies it is the basis for stigmatisation.

Be that as it may, one may successfully establish that caste is different from race in conception and practice. Does it resolve the problem of inequality and unfair discrimination? Certainly not. They both need to be addressed; but not by confusing essential concepts and neglecting facts and processes peculiar to different cultures.

(The writer is Vice-Chancellor, West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences, Kolkata.)

***Discrimination based on caste and race both need to be addressed; but not by confusing essential concepts and neglecting facts and processes peculiar to different cultures.***

cius influences and resolutely fought against it through international instruments and collective action. The present fear is whether the process of globalisation and the information-communication revolution now under way would strengthen the forces of racist intolerance and whether the existing control mechanisms are adequate to put down the possible revival of racist differences and conflicts. The first three themes of the five-point Provisional Agenda of the proposed World Conference in South Africa speak of manifestations of racism, causes therefor, measures for its prevention, the plight of victims of racism, etc. Themes 4 and 5 speak about "strategies to achieve full and effective equality and provision for effective remedies, compensatory and other measures at the national, regional and international levels."

India's contribution is important as themes 4 and 5 are very relevant to the struggle for equality in the Indian setting. Perhaps for those who find similarities between caste-based and race-based discrimination, the agenda provides accommodation in the expression "... and related intolerance." Is the relatedness in respect of discrimination indicated in the Conference title or is it with reference to race and racism? To support this view of

bat racism and racial in discrimination and to ensure support for people struggling for racial equality. In short, there is a long history of U.N. action on racism of which the South African Conference is a natural culmination.

However, if the issue to be discussed is equality or discrimination in general there is every reason for an omnibus approach to all forms of violations of equality and dignity. But when the issue being discussed is racism, racial discrimination and racism-related intolerance, it is inappropriate to take on board all forms of intolerance or all types of inequality. If that were so, gender discrimination or sex-based intolerance would have become a major focus of the agenda. This is not to say that caste-based discrimination is any less important or not condemnable. In fact, some manifestations of caste-based discrimination can be more serious than even racist discrimination.

There are experts from social and cultural anthropology who will argue on the alleged relationship between caste and race and canvass on the legitimacy or otherwise of discussing caste in a conference relating to racism. It is difficult to comprehend how it could be taken on the agenda given the seven-point objectives of the World Conference as set forth by

# Quota within quota sparks strife in Rajnath backyard

Sunita Aron  
Lucknow, July 25

UNITY CONTINUES to elude the Bharatiya Janata Party in Uttar Pradesh. The party, yet to come out of the decade-old backward-forward caste syndrome, has been afflicted by yet another malaise — OBC (Other Backward Castes) versus MBC (Most Backward Castes).

The tussle has its genesis in Chief Minister Rajnath Singh's move to grant a quota for the MBCs within the existing OBC quota.

Ironically, the Chief Minister's move to secure "social justice and harmony" has resulted in disharmony among a section of OBC leaders. They question the modus operandi adopted to give quota benefits to the MBC.

Meanwhile, ministers such as, Om Prakash Singh, Ashok Yadav and Ram Kumar Verma are up in arms against this move. Former Bajrang Dal leader and MP, Vinay Katiyar, is also extending support.

They say even party veterans like Kushabhao Thakre and Pyare Lal Khandelwal are ag-



RAJNATH SINGH

ainst the CM's decision.

The reason for their dissent is obvious. Belonging to two prominent backward castes - Yadavs and Kurmis, these ministers feel that they won't be able to guard the interests of the constituents.

But the UP Government and the Social Justice Committee are busy identifying the MBCs and their percentage of reservation in government jobs. The general perception here is that the large chunk of the quota cake has been swallowed by these two prominent castes.

The third backward caste,

Lodh, which was likely to be affected by this decision as already been declared MBC.

Unable to criticise the party's decision to go ahead with "quota within quota" policy, the OBC ministers today blame the Chief Minister for his unilateral move.

"The Chief Minister should have discussed the issue with senior party leaders as well as the opposition before constituting the social justice committee", says both Om Prakash Singh and Ashok Yadav.

While Om Prakash Singh is cryptic in his criticism of the Government's move, Ashok Yadav is belligerent.

He was summoned by BJP chief Kalraj Misra for his diatribe and has been advised by the party high command to raise such contentious issues on party forums.

On the other hand, the six MBC ministers gearing up to face their onslaught include Dharam Pal, Nepal Singh, Mangal Singh Saini, Hari Narain Rajbhar and Bahoran Lal Maurya. Ram Vilas Paswan is said to be leading them.



## DEMOCRATISATION OF CASTE

### Why the BJP is feeling left out in UP

IT depends on whether Mayawati has forgotten the manner in which goons belonging to the Samajwadi Party laid siege to her at the Secretariat in Lucknow, more than five years ago, since the indications are, even according to an assessment made by the BJP, that the next Assembly in Uttar Pradesh will be hung drastically between the three major formations. Ideological proximity should not be played up too much either, simply because both the SP and the BSP are backward caste formations (grosso modo). As Ram Vilas Paswan pointed out recently, the Yadavs constitute a good portion of the peasantry in Uttar Pradesh and their relations with Dalit landless labourers are not exemplary, even though as much can be said about the Brahmins and the Thakurs among the landowners. The BSP really doesn't have any reason to choose between the three in terms of sympathy for its cause. Remains opportunity. The BSP is looking more and more impressive because, as one BJP MP put it, its hold on the Dalits is rock solid — just as Mulayam's is on the Yadavs — and it can provide a secure base for any Thakur or Brahmin candidate unwilling or unable to go along with any upper caste formation that might exist. There are, in fact, none actually.

The democratisation of caste is such that even the BJP, ideologically the most proximate to the upper caste, is missing Kalyan Singh and his Lodhs and Koeris and Tellis and Sonars sorely, after having seen their vote share go down five percentage points between 1996 and 1999, although the logic of a general election is not coincident with that of an assembly election.

In any case, no one is willing to show his or her cards at the moment and strenuous professions of independence are being made all around. Kalraj Mishra and Rajnath Singh say no truck with the BSP, Mayawati says no truck with the BJP which, to boot, she holds responsible for the killing of Dalits in Aligarh and Fatehpur. Only thing is that the BJP realises it has to be seen making a serious pitch for the backward and Dalit vote only because, in the absence of a pan-Hindu appeal, the upper castes tend to go with whomever they think might win and at this juncture, the BJP isn't looking like a winner. So, Rajnath Singh announces the setting up of a Committee for Social Justice to look into various aspects of the job reservation policy for the SCs, the STs and this curious category he calls "more backward castes". Mayawati had earlier made a similar demand. If one understands this subtle political terminology at all, they are probably referring to sub-groups within the broad categories of backwards and Dalits who have not benefited as much from affirmative action as other, numerically superior or more politically organised sub-groups. It is obvious that caste battles will gradually reach down and downer in order to exploit the last dregs of hostility within this rotten hierarchy. Besides which, Singh knows that if the BJP were to ultimately embrace the BSP in a post-poll alliance, he would have to give his chair to Mayawati. He is looking pretty desperate, giving sops in as many directions as possible.

What the disappearance of Hindu politics in Uttar Pradesh — a good thing otherwise — means is that caste politics, driven essentially by the backward castes and the Dalits, is home. Everyone is into it. It's more powerful than the Ram temple and, despite all the reservations one can legitimately have about it, it is a sign of democracy.

# Dalits protest outside embassy in Washington

DESIKAN THIRUNARAYANAPURAM  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, July 4 - Representatives of various Dalit organisations protested outside the Indian embassy in Washington yesterday against India's government's decision not to discuss caste-based discrimination issues at a forthcoming UN world conference in Durban.

The groups say the Dalits continue to face discrimination in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka but the governments chose not to discuss the problems at the UN Conference on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, to be held in August.

The Dalit groups presented copies of a memorandum to embassy officials, signed by the Ambedkar Memorial Trust of America chairman, Dr Laxmi Berwa. The protesters addressed copies of the memorandum to the President, Mr KR Narayanan and Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"India has become a suspect in the eyes of the world by vehemently opposing caste-based discrimination at the upcoming conference. With this type of attitude, India cannot stand on the high moral ground when it confronts the issue of human rights violations by other countries" at the conference, the memorandum says. Dr Berwa had organised the first Dalit protest outside the White House when Indira Gandhi met President Reagan in 1983.

THE STATESMAN

# Dalits plan dharna outside UN summit venue in Durban

BY OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, July 3:** The dalit community living across the globe, specially in countries outside India, plans to stage protests outside the venue of the United Nations world conference, scheduled for September 2001 in Durban, South Africa.

The community is staunchly opposing the countries decision to "deliberately exclude the discussion on caste discrimination from the UN agenda."

The national chairman of All India Confederation of SC/ST organisations Ram Raj said he was in touch with other dalit members living in South Africa, Malaysia and Europe and have decided to protest in front of the venue till their demands are met.

"A delegation from India will also go to Durban to protest outside the venue. But we are sceptical whether the external affairs ministry will grant us a visa to travel. In case they don't, we will inform our brothers in other countries like Malaysia where

there are more than 8 lakh dalit residents, who will be all prepared, to leave for Durban," Mr Raj said.

The global conference, which is one of the biggest in the world of its kind will have delegates from United States, Germany, Japan, Sri Lanka, Denmark, South Africa, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sengal, Uruguay and Switzerland. The theme of the UN World Conference this year has been decided as "United to Combat Racism and Caste Based Discrimination for Equality, Justice and Dignity."

AICOSCSTO sources said: "When USA, Russia, Japan and even Nepal have boldly and gracefully accepted discrimination in their own countries, then India should not all shy of accepting the reality. How can India deny facts like the brutal killings of minorities, discrimination, dilution of reservation and prejudices against dalits in the country. The argument that is generally offered is that our internal problems will get international focus making our country weak."

THE HINDU

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## Dalit leaders to attend Durban meet 'unofficially'

By Our Special Correspondent 4/3

**HYDERABAD, JULY 3.** Dalit organisations in the country and their leaders have chalked out a programme to "unofficially" attend the U.N.-sponsored "World conference against racism, racial discrimination and related discriminations and intolerances" in Durban, South Africa, from August 31 to September 7, in a big way to complain against the caste-based discrimination in the country.

The leaders are busy seeking passports or making arrangements for visas to visit Durban and raise the Dalit voice at the international forum.

Speaking to *The Hindu* here on Tuesday, Mr. N. Paul Diwakar, national secretary, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, said they were able to get visas easily but faced problems obtaining fresh passports. About 25 leaders may attend the conference from Andhra Pradesh alone and the list includes himself, Mr. Bojja Tharakam, state Republican Party president and human rights activist, Mr. Manda Krishna Madiga of Madiga Reservation Porata Samiti and Mr. K. Ilaiah, a political science professor in Osmania University and author of *Why I am not a Hindu*.

The "unofficial visit" is being planned as the Union Government did not accept the representations made by the organisations that caste discrimination should be officially acknowledged as existing

the country as a social evil, that it be included by the Government in the official agenda of the Durban meeting for discussions, and Dalit leaders, accordingly, be allowed to speak at the conference.

The Dalit leaders not only resent the Government's stand that caste is not similar to race, that it is an "internal matter" and that Constitutional solutions exist to tackle the problem but also the way the "public hearings" were held by an External Affairs Ministry committee, Mr. Diwakar said. They bill these in-camera meetings as "eyewash", pointing out that those who participated in the hearings were "selected by the committee" and that they never knew the real issue.

As a precursor to the Durban visit, a core committee, led by Mr. Diwakar, would visit Geneva to place the problem of the issue not being taken up officially, before the Prominent Citizens' Group constituted by U.N. with personalities such as Mr. Nelson Mandela and Mr. I.K. Gujral, to process such problems. The Group is meeting on August 3 and 4.

The Committee of the External Affairs Ministry, headed by Mr. Justice Ranganath Mishra, is holding the last round of public hearing at Bangalore on August 3.

Meanwhile, hundreds of Dalits took out a procession here under the aegis of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, protesting against the official stand of the Central Government.

# Reservation in the corporate sector — I

By Gail Omvedt

100-12 37/5

HERE IS a story about Shahu Maharaj, the anti-caste non-Brahman ruler of the state of Kolhapur in the early decades of the 20th century. The Maharajah helped one Gangaram Kamble, a Mahar, to set up a teashop, and then after returning from hunting with his sardars, he began the habit of stopping at the shop, and not only taking tea himself, but forcing all his proud high-caste Maratha companions to take tea from the hands of a Dalit! The Maharaja's actions symbolise the various types of programmes of "social justice" needed to overcome the heritage of the caste system. For it is necessary, metaphorically, for Dalits not only to have the right to drink tea wherever they want, but also to have employment in the tea shops, and even more important, to have the capacity to own them and freely do business with them! And for this, state intervention is necessary.

Unfortunately, social justice or "compensatory discrimination" programmes in India have gotten stereotyped around the theme of "reservation" in the public sector. And so much of a complex has been built up around the subject that there are major assumptions, which everyone takes for granted, but which are mistaken and need to be overcome. Among these two are important: first, that social justice programmes are more or less equivalent to reservation and that reservation is limited to employment in the public sector as well as seats in educational institutions. Second, even more debilitating, is the pervasive idea that reservation is in some way at odds with "merit", that we have to give up on or "relax" certain standards of merit in order to do social justice for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Castes.

Today, as privatisation is frightening Government employees, Dalits are also worried about loss of the one area they have seen as a haven for employment. One result is that the idea of "reservation in the private sector" has been brought forward by a number of Dalit political

leaders. There has been some limited discussion of this, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has given an initial very negative response to the idea. However, the issue of reservation in the corporate sector (I use this term specifically because no one, after all, wants reservation in the informal private sector!) does not depend on the degree of disinvestment. Regardless of whether existing public sector companies are "privatised" or not, it is still true that the corporate sector is a growing and dynamic sector in

***If liberalisation is to be successful, the private corporate sector cannot remain an island of 'upper' caste privilege.***

India, and the question of who runs it and is employed in it is a crucial one.

In fact, reservation in the private corporate sector could have been legislated in India from 1947 itself. And after all, a state claiming to be a welfare state, concerned for the poor, regulating at the time every aspect of the way companies carried on their business, including adoption of new technologies and hiring and firing, could well have pushed for hiring policies that included jobs for the main discriminated against social groups in India, Dalits and Adivasis. There is certainly no legal bar on doing so. Any company, domestic or foreign, doing business within a nation has to obey the laws of that nation. However, hiring Dalits and Adivasis on a wide scale in the corporate sector was one very conspicuous bit of legislative restriction excluded from the scope of the otherwise all-pervasive "license-permit raj".

The reason is not far to seek: for all the socialism proclaimed by the nation's elite at the time, their mood was firmly against reservation policies, and what came to be included in the Constitution was done so only through the pressure of the anti-caste movement. The movement however, was not strong enough to push further. Thus, in 1947, the question of "other backward castes" was left hanging, and it

was only the direct Government sector that was seen as an appropriate place to insure opportunities for employment.

In the United States, the story has been different. There, for decades even after the end of slavery, the employment situation for African-Americans was even worse than for Dalits in India. Prejudice excluded them from all but the lowest jobs; inferior education only worsened their situation, and they were taken into factories on a mass scale only when large scale industrialisation made this neces-

sary, and even then they got the lowest and worst paid jobs. They were discriminated against in the professions, in land-holding, and in Government service. If we compare Dr. Ambedkar's position with that of one of the greatest of early Black leaders, W.E.B. DuBois, the difference appears stark: Du Bois had been up for a rather minor Government post (as assistant postmaster) in Washington D.C., but could never get it, whereas Ambedkar could rise to the highest political posts in India.

In the U.S., it was only after the militant and massive civil rights movement of the 1950s and the 1960s that the Government began to take up the issue, and start the process of desegregating schools and removing the economic discrimination against African-Americans through programmes of what were called "affirmative action". And when it did so, "affirmative action" did not simply include Government employment, but also comprehensive programmes of promoting and legislating employment in the private corporate sector, and aiding minority businesses and professions. For instance, in the U.S. today there is good representation of African-Americans, Hispanics and other minorities in colleges and universities, in spite of the fact that most are not Government-run but "private" institu-

tions. There is also a much better representation of minorities in TV and the media, in spite of the fact that these are entirely private. Finally, African-Americans are quite visible now in fields such as the military (the current Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell, is the primary example) — whereas in India it seems that no one has even hinted at the question of the caste composition of Army officers. Many of these changes have come about in the last decades; they involved Government programmes and Government pressures; but none of them has come without struggle.

And it might be noted that these programmes have included efforts to build up minority-run businesses. Leading African-American politicians have also tried to sponsor efforts in "Black capitalism", but notably Government programmes have included not only access to credit and training, but also requirements that a certain percentage of Government contracts be awarded to African-American and other minority businesses.

Clearly, compensatory discrimination efforts, or social justice programmes, need not be limited to education and the public sector. In fact, today as India is "going global" faster than many sections of the society want, it is important to realise that a truly modern society requires the conscious creation of opportunities for all of its citizens, and a truly competitive society cannot afford to waste any talent. This means that social justice programmes are not only in the interest of Dalits and Adivasis, but in the interests of the nation as a whole — and they require policies that take account of every sector in a modern and growing economy. Universalising education and health care is a crucial part of this; access to land and other property is necessary; but so are special programmes ensuring access to employment — in the "private" as well as the "public" sector. If liberalisation is to be successful, the private corporate sector cannot remain an island of "upper" caste privilege.

THE END

## RACE, OR CASTE?

9/1/5 The two cannot be delinked SFB

THAT India has chosen to make the case in world bodies that caste does not come under the purview of racial discrimination shows that the government is more concerned with international image and prestige rather than addressing long-standing systems of discrimination based on hereditary disadvantage. Caste derives from the Portuguese word *casta*, which indicates the feudal European notion of estates - one is born into a certain estate, or condition, and one is confined to it for life, which is precisely what is so abhorrent about racism. *Varna*, a Sanskrit word for caste, also indicates colour - the notorious colour sensitivity of Indian society is perhaps a by-product. The Indian case that caste is based not on race but on a division of occupations is specious. Division of occupations is an important dimension of race as well - in South Africa under *apartheid*, surgeons and heads of companies were white, while janitors and petrol pump attendants were black. India does deserve credit for helping isolate the South African *apartheid* regime. But since the dismantling of *apartheid*, hardly any government legislates explicitly against its citizens on ethnic grounds. That is a battle that has been fought and won. It is other kinds of social discrimination which need to be looked at now, and since Indian delegates are involved in many committees on racism, it can hardly point to, say, discrimination in Guatemala while exempting itself from scrutiny.

Official solicitude about human rights comes across as pious humbug, therefore, when Soli Sorabjee, as India's Attorney General, contends before the Human Rights Commission in Geneva that caste is not an issue of race, it is a very limited argument. The name of the game is discrimination and caste is nothing if not discrimination on grounds of denial of human rights. Or when Indian delegates argue that discriminatory practices in India be excluded from the purview of the upcoming world conference on racism and related intolerance at Durban, South Africa. The government may take the line that beyond a point it cannot help practices of discrimination in society, but the same line of argumentation is open to other governments, which would make the holding of such conferences futile. In reality there are things the government can do if it wants to eradicate caste discrimination in society, and we do not have in mind reservations, which benefit only a creamy layer and discourage merit. The government could implement a system of universal education, which would have a twofold benefit. One, literacy would give lower castes greater access to opportunities and ability to organise. Two, schools themselves would serve as a crucible for integration and the mixing of castes, so that casteist attitudes of this generation could be challenged in the next. This, of course, is easier said than done - it is simpler to blow hot air and put on the moral crusader act in international conferences.

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# UP Opp slams govt over reservation panel

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, June 29. — The Opposition parties in Uttar Pradesh have criticised the state government's decision to constitute the "Social Justice Committee" to rectify flaws in the implementation of the reservation policy.

They termed it a conspiracy to instigate caste riots and a "political stunt in view of polls." The chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, had announced

the formation of the committee to be co-chaired by two Cabinet ministers. The Committee has been asked to submit its report in two months. While announcing the committee's formation, Mr Singh said majority of the people belonging to the sections covered by the reservation policy, benefited by the arrangement. But certain groups and castes, falling in these categories, remained deprived of the benefits. He, however, did not

identify these castes.

The three major Opposition parties — the BSP, the SP and the Congress have come down heavily on the government. Ms Mayawati described the move as "a dangerous conspiracy". "The move could lead to caste riots and so the party demands that the decision to constitute the committee should be immediately withdrawn", she said at a press conference. The BSP was not going to tolerate this "low lev-

el of politics by the BJP". If the government really wants to something good for the "Dalits and extremely backward" sections, it should not think in terms of reservation for them but implement strictly the programmes and plans for their benefit. The government should increase scholarship and arrange for proper coaching for Dalit students, she said.

Ms Mayawati said there should be 20 per cent reservation for the Dalits and another six for extremely Dalit population. The SP chief, Mr Mulyam Singh Yadav, described the government's move as "an election stunt". It was a ploy by the BJP to split the different communities and fulfil its own vested interest.

The Congress said the BJP move proves that the party had realised it was losing its support base even among the upper castes. It is now trying to create a "new vote bank" for itself. In the last five years, the BJP led government failed to do anything for the downtrodden, it said.

The chief minister was trying to divert attention from the government's failure, Mr Yadav said. But he said the government move would not have any impact on the elec-

THE STATESMAN

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# BJP joins caste quota war

FROM ANAND SOONDAS  
IN LUCKNOW AND  
KAY BENEDICT IN NEW DELHI

June 29: The BJP has raised a storm by jumping on to the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party's bandwagon of a more "fair and equal" reservation policy.

Chief minister Rajnath Singh, who has already kicked off the BJP's election campaign by announcing a host of packages for almost every section of society, is now hinting at a reservation policy for the poorest among the scheduled castes and tribes and the most backward among the other backward castes.

Maintaining that the "fruits of reservation" have not been shared equally by all and that the policy has remained skewed, Singh said the BJP would soon deliberate on a fresh reservation package. "I will see to it that all within the SC/STs get the benefit of reservation equally," he said.

The party will soon conduct a comprehensive review of the "entire reservation policy", the chief minister said. A social justice committee to look into the "missing aspects" would be formed at the earliest, he said, adding that immediate action would be taken on the committee's report.

Hinting at the Samajwadi Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party, Singh said only the two major and vocal sections among the Dalits have been able to take advantage of reservations and that the appropriation of the system must stop. The chief minister, however, iterated that the 27 per cent and 22 per cent reservations for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes would stand.

Singh's announcement that a committee will be formed to review the reservation policy has raised the hackles of the Samajwadi Party, which is fighting for a bigger share of the OBC cake. The party today accused the chief minister of dividing society along caste lines with an eye on polls.

"If the BJP-led government was so concerned about the most backwards, why was it sleeping for the last five years and why has it woken up only when the elections are round the corner?" asked Samajwadi general secretary Amar Singh.

"If the BJP was so keen on championing the cause of the most backward castes, why did the party oppose the Samajwadi Party on the floor of Parliament on the demand for sub-quota for them and women from minority community in the women's reservation Bill? What happened to the chief minister's concern when they were killed in Fatehpur and Aligarh recently?" he asked.

Asked if his party was opposed to a quota for the most backward castes, the Samajwadi leader said he welcomed it but was opposed to the "timing" and the "manner" in which Rajnath had announced it.

The Samajwadi leader said the BJP had in the past tried to divide society in the name of religion. "Now that there are no takers for the Ayodhya card, the BJP is trying a new experiment," Singh said.

"Now that there are no takers for the Ayodhya card, the BJP is trying a new experiment. They can do anything. Engineer riots and split the backwards and extremely backwards," Singh charged.

THE TELEGRAPH  
MADRAS  
JUNE 29 1996



# UP panel to look into flaws in reservation

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, June 28. — In a politically significant move, the Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, today announced setting up a "Committee for Social Justice" to look into the "flaws" in the reservation in government jobs for the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes and the backward castes. The idea was to facilitate reservation for the people belonging to the extremely backward castes and to the extremely Dalits castes who have remained deprived all these years.

"The benefits of reservation have not been well spread and have remained concentrated in some sections of these castes," the chief minister making the announcement said.

"It is true that people belonging to these sections benefited by this arrangement (reservation) and there has been improvement in ensuring social justice. But, it has to be admitted that certain groups and castes falling in these categories remained deprived from benefits," Mr Singh said.

It was obvious that he was targeting the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, and the Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Ms Mayawati.

Without naming the two leaders, Mr Singh said that these political leaders have always talked about the plight of the backward castes but have not done anything for them and never thought about them. "You all know who they are. I don't want to name them," Mr Singh said in reply to a question adding, "these leaders have benefited on this account".

Mr Singh said there was strong resentment among those who have remained deprived. "It was not politically motivated. It has been done in accordance with my earlier pronouncements," he maintained.

The committee, co-chaired by the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Hukam Singh, and the health minister, Mr Rampati Shastri, will have five



Mr Rajnath Singh

members. A senior IAS officer, Mr JP Vishwakarma, will be the committee secretary. The committee has been asked to give its report within two months which would be "implemented immediately".

The five-point terms of reference of the committee are:

- Examination of all arrangements and facilities in schemes formulated for SC/ST and the backward classes.

- To recommend necessary amendments in accordance with the population of ST and various sections following changes in their numbers after creation of Uttaranchal state.

- The position of SC/ST and backward classes in the state government services against the reserved posts.

- Progressive account of participation of SC/ST and various sections of backward classes in employment.

- To make recommendations in reservation arrangements for the SC/ST and backward classes from the point of view of ensuring social justice.

**BSP for 37 % quota to 'most backward':** The BSP today demanded 37 per cent reservation for "most backward" classes in Uttar Pradesh, saying they should be accorded the quota proportionate to their population, PTI adds from New Delhi.

The BSP vice-president, Ms Mayawati, told reporters here that her party's agitational campaign to be launched from 20 July would press for, among other things, this demand also.

# 5 dalits clubbed to death in UP caste war

## Victims are 2 women, 5 children □ Police officer suspended

By AMITA VERMA

Lucknow, June 18: Exactly five days after the Aligarh massacre, five more dalits were clubbed to death by upper caste members in Hasnapur village of Fatehpur district on Sunday.

The victims include two women and three children. One of the accused, namely, Ramakant Bajpai, has been arrested while the remaining three — Devideen Singh, Shivraj Singh and Haribhan Singh — are still absconding. Cases under the SC/ST Act have also been registered against the four

named accused. The police have been deployed in the village to prevent any escalation of violence.

One police station officer has been placed under suspension for his alleged failure to sense the build up of tension between the two communities and take preventive steps.

According to reports reaching here, the incident is a result of an old enmity between the members of the two communities. Devideen Singh, an influential thakur of the village had a minor dispute with Kallu Raidas three months ago.

Kallu's children allegedly were using Devideen's backyard as a toilet and the latter's children reportedly objected to this.

When Devideen other family members intervened, a scuffle ensued after which Kallu Raidas lodged a report under the SC/ST (Prevention of atrocities) Act against Devideen and four other family members, including his minor daughter.

Devideen had been repeatedly asking Kallu Raidas to withdraw his complaint and settle for an out-of-court settlement but Kallu refused.

On Sunday morning Devideen

and three others, armed with lathis, accosted Kallu's wife Tejana and grand-daughter Lalita who were working in the fields and beat them till they collapsed on the spot.

The assailants then went to Kallu's house and beat up daughter-in-law Jagpatia, her daughter Pooja (6) and son Ashish (2). An enraged Devideen kept beating the three till they breathed their last.

Devideen then came on the main road with his accomplices and snatched a motorcycle from a government employee and sped away.

The bodies of the five victims were cremated on Monday morning and a compensation of Rs 1.5 lakhs for the two adult victims and Rs 75,000 for the three minor victims has been paid to their kin.

The incident, coming close on the heels of the Jahrana massacre, is bound to acquire political overtones since it indicates the growing divide between the upper castes and the dalits.

On hearing of the incident, Bahujan Samaj Party leader Ms Mayawati rushed to Fatehpur on Monday and met with the villagers of Hasnapur.

# Narayanan backs relaxation for SCs/STs in medical entrance tests

By Our Staff Correspondent

**BHOPAL, JUNE 12.** The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, has supported the contention of the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh, regarding the need for relaxation in the qualifying mark in entrance examinations for medical colleges in respect of candidates belonging to the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes.

The President has written to Mr. Singh, saying he was in agreement with the point raised by him in an earlier letter regarding the need for lowering the qualifying mark for SC/ST candidates for admission to post-graduate medical courses. The President said he was taking up the matter with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Singh had written to the President as well as the Prime Minister in April, drawing attention to the "anti-reservation attitude of bodies such as the Medical Council of India". In his letter, he said that 16 per cent of the population of Madhya Pradesh consisted of the SCs and 20 per cent of the STs. Most of them were residents of non-urban areas that were yet to see the first rays of modern civilisation. These students, especially the ST candidates, might be having a higher level of intelligence and knowledge but they lacked modern competitive techniques and concepts.

Hence they were handicapped when compared to students from urban institutions. It was to meet this handicap that the framers of the Constitution and policy-makers had given them leverages such as reservation to balance social inequity. These included

relaxations to qualify on the basis of marks obtained in competitive examinations for entrance to professional courses.

Mr. Singh said the Constitution-makers had directed the States through Article 46 to protect the weaker sections, especially those belonging to the SCs and STs, from social injustices and all kinds of exploitation. This, read with Article 335, enjoined the lowering of standards of evaluations and relaxation in qualifying marks in entrance examinations. Even the Supreme Court had observed in P. Shrivastava's case (AIR 1999SC2894) that the "disparity between marks fixed for the reserved and general category should not be big".

However, the court had left it to expert bodies such as the Medical Council of India to determine what this difference should be. The Council in its first directions on August 17, 1999 had clarified that the percentage of qualifying marks for SC and ST candidates may be lowered by 10 per cent, up to 40 per cent of the total.

But unfortunately, Mr. Singh wrote, the Council had not only failed in complying with the Directive Principles enshrined in the Constitution but also fell prey to the "anti-reservation forces" in framing the Post-Graduate Medical Education Regulations, 2000, which stipulated that the minimum marks for admission to the courses should be 50 per cent. Consequently, most SC and ST candidates might not qualify for entrance to the post-graduate courses.

# CONTROVERSY SHOULD CASTE VIOLENCE BE RAISED AT THE UN

## In search of a new cast

IT IS an unequal fight" intones P L Mimroth, advocate, Supreme Court, and national co-convenor, National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR). The Campaign is at the helm of the demand by various Dalit groups to raise the issue of caste-based discrimination in the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, from August 31 to September 7.

Mimroth's apprehensions are entirely in order. Though the Indian government has set up a 15-member National Committee to evolve a consensus on the official position at the UN, its mind is already, firmly, made up. Regretting the "deliberate attempt by some to dilute the focus of the conference by broadening its scope to bring all forms of discriminations within the ambit of the conference," External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh told the Committee in its first meeting on February 7 at Delhi's Hyderabad House, "we are opposed to discrimination in any form. But racism should not be confused with discrimination in general. Nor is it within the purview of the world conference." Those who have been fielded to make the government's case at UN fora in the elaborate run-up to the conference have argued that caste is an "internal" matter, and that India has enough constitutional, legislative and judicial instruments to "settle" it.

As Dalit groups make representations abroad and the government deploys a series of diplomatic manoeuvres to block their moves, a debate has hesitantly taken off on the issue back home. It is, first of all, about whether caste is equal to race.

Sociologist Andre Beteille, who resigned as chairperson of the National Committee earlier this year because he wanted to be free to express his views "as an independent academic", is categorical the twain do not meet. Stating his position in an article in a national daily, Beteille cites Franz Boas, widely regarded as the father of American anthropology, who "established conclusively with a wealth of empirical evidence the distinction between race which is a biological category with physical markers and social groupings based on language, religion, nationality, style of life or status". The UN's attempt to "revive and expand" the idea of race, says Beteille, is "an act of political and moral irresponsibility" which will open up "a Pandora's box of alle-

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The Indian government's position that caste is not an issue to be discussed at a global platform has divided the intelligentsia. VANDITA MISHRA reports on the debate

gations of racial discrimination throughout the world."

The battle is joined with Beteille on the "scientific" ground by Kancha Ilaiah, author of *Why I am not a Hindu*. He believes India is home to three races, Aryan, Dravidian and Mongoloid, and that Brahmins belong to the Aryan race and the lower castes to the Dravidian. "Caste", he says, "has a clear racial character. It has roots in the racial division of society. Therefore, caste must be fought on the same plane as race."

But others dismiss the biological argument as a red herring. Says Chandrabhan Prasad, who writes a weekly Dalit Diary in a national daily, "His (Beteille's) objections are like those of a Shastri Bhavan babu who questions why two xerox copies have been brought to him instead of one. The end result, in caste as in race, is the same, even worse. You might come across Blacks in American society who have done very well for themselves, but you won't find a single Dalit in the membership rolls of the India Habitat Centre (IHC) or the India International Centre (IIC)."

Both the 'biological' and 'internal matter' arguments are terribly suspect, points out Aditya Nigam, fellow at the Sarai CSDS. "This is not a conference on science or biology, there are clear parallels in the two kinds of oppression. Also, we have obviously failed to sort out the problem by ourselves".

That latter contention is borne out by the reality of continuing caste discrimination more than fifty years after Independence, es-



BSP leaders, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati, at a rally. The party is yet to take a stand on the issue. Express photo

There are apprehensions about whether it wouldn't be better for the Dalit movement in the long term to demand that caste be discussed and understood as a specific problem at the UN instead of clubbing it with race

pecially against the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. It continues, despite the plethora of constitutional commitments and special laws, and in spite of the much-touted policy of reservations. Social segregation, and the 'two glass' system, survive in many parts of the country. The pitiful conviction rate bears witness that the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities Act) 1989 exists mainly on paper.

The overwhelming majority of the rural Dalit population is still outside the pale of land reform. The literacy gap between Dalits and the rest of the population has been consistently maintained over the years. SC/ST representation in teaching jobs hovers around 2 per cent though affirmative action provides for 22 per cent. "Constitutionally, we have absolved our

conscience", points out Imtiaz Ahmad, Professor at the Centre for Political Studies, JNU. "For the rest, we seem to think that if we close our eyes to it, it will cease to exist."

But how will taking the issue to the UN help? This question is immediately countered by another: In an increasingly globalised world where every discourse matters, why rule out the UN? "International pressure and support have helped the black movement against apartheid in South Africa and the civil rights movement in the US. It has certainly benefitted the women's movement. We're looking to the UN conference to chalk out and monitor a concrete programme of action for the 240 million affected by caste discrimination in South Asia," says Martin Macwan, national co-convenor of

NCDHR. Others are less ambitious. At least some moral and political pressure can be built upon the state to fiddle with various options as in the case of child labour, they say.

Significantly, even as the battlelines are being etched increasingly sharper over the last many months between the Dalit activists and the government, politicians in general, and Dalit politicians in particular, have been uncharacteristically reticent. When contacted by *The Indian Express*, BSP chief Mayawati admitted her party had not taken a position so far. "This is the first time I'm speaking on this issue". But, "of course, caste discrimination must be talked about at the UN since successive regimes have failed to improve the condition of the Bahujan Samaj," she said.

A clue to the Dalit politician's reluctance may be revealed by a closer look at the Dalit movement perhaps. The 'movement' is not one, explains Imtiaz Ahmad, there are different concerns. One battle is afoot to cobble alliances with other groupings to forge a 'Bahujan Samaj'. This is a fight, a la Kanshi Ram's, to achieve political power; the rest, it is believed, will follow. Whether or not caste should be discussed in a UN conference on race is unlikely to be an overweening question here. The demand may not find ready advocates in another section of the Dalits as well, which is preoccupied, like Maharashtra's Mahar movement, with carving out a strictly Dalit identity counterpoised to the brahminical.

It is a third strand, on the margins of the movement, not numerous enough to count politically or to be overly preoccupied by questions of identity, that makes the demand for caste-based discrimination to be discussed in a UN conference, even if the subject is race.

It is not the Dalit politicians alone who are reticent though. This reporter found that a notably large number of academics/intellectuals were unwilling to take a position on record.

Could it be a pointer to the fact that the issue is, indeed, much too complex? Or is it an indicator that Dalit issues continue to receive only the wary 'corner of the eye' attention from an overwhelmingly non-Dalit intelligentsia? Or could it be that in a sharply polarised debate on a 'sensitive' issue, there is very little space left over for the 'yes, but's' and the 'no, but's'? There are apprehensions, for instance, as yet unrecorded, about whether it wouldn't be better for the Dalit movement in the long term to demand that caste be discussed and understood as a specific problem at the UN, with its specific solutions, instead of clubbing it with race. That the Euro-centric UN vocabulary be challenged in a more forthright way.

As the August conference draws nearer, then, there are two questions. The first — whether or not Dalit activists will finally succeed in including caste on the UN agenda this year — is more or less settled. As Mimroth and his co-campaigners in the NCDHR already apprehend, they most probably won't. It is that other question — what is the nature and reach of the debate that the issue provokes — that continues to fester.

# The Dalits to Durban 178

By Garimella Subramaniam 119-12

Denial is deadlier than the crime, and thwarting attempts to debate caste-based discrimination in the 'coming United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance' will cause far greater embarrassment to the Government than any possible fallout of the deliberations at the world meet in Durban coming September.

That apart, India's consistent stand in the campaign against the apartheid regime in South Africa, and its subsequent enthusiastic response to the return of that country into the world community of nations, is too recent a memory for the hypocrisy

## NEWS ANALYSIS

underlying the resistance to the so-called "internationalisation of caste discrimination" — supposedly an internal matter of India — to go unnoticed.

Similarly, it is futile to seek shelter under the claim that while apartheid in South Africa was a state-sanctioned ideology of exclusion, untouchability is an ancient socio-cultural relic that is crumbling under the weight of modern constitutional mechanisms and therefore it is unnecessary to raise caste discrimination at the global arena.

### Dodging ground realities

Such posturing merely dodges the continuing realities of occupations based on descent and inhuman conditions of living for millions. The country's recent human rights record has been glaring; and the world can easily see through the constitutional gloss sought to be put over some of the uglier aspects of India's social mosaic, especially those pertaining to minority communities.

At the very bottom, practices of social discrimination raise basic questions of human dignity and should ideally elicit concomitant political responses from the highest quarters in the land. This is especially urgent for a country like India where social mobility (or disadvantage as the case may be), determined by one's position in the caste hierarchy, continues to characterise practically every walk of life. But the prelude to the Durban world conference has revealed a distinct lack of sensitivity to the underlying issues by deliberate digressions from questions of social discrimination to the meaningless discourse on the demerits of conflating caste and race. The matter, however, would have to be viewed as settled ever since the United Nations opined way back in 1996 that the situation of Dalits and Adivasis in India fell within the scope of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

### Failures at home

At a broader level, the context of the Durban conference should be seized upon to direct the spotlight on the trajectory of the Dalit movement in the country. A point to ponder here is the failure of the movement to acquire a pan-Indian character and leadership like its parallel in the African-American movement in the United States. At least part of the explanation for the prevailing scenario would have to be traced to the civil rights movement in India which had none of the synergising of resources as its European and American counterparts.

The example of all-round gains made by the black and women's movements elsewhere through mutual solidarity would have to be replicated with conviction and imagination for the lofty goals set out in the chapters on fundamental rights and directive principles of state policy in the Indian Constitution to be translated into reality.

# Durban, caste and Indian democracy

By Kancha Ilaiah

H10-12  
11/6

**T**O ASCERTAIN public opinion on the question of inclusion of caste on the agenda of the United Nations World Conference on Racism being held in Durban, South Africa, a national committee was constituted by the Prime Minister headed by Mr. Ranganath Mishra, former Chief Justice of India. The chairmen of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Commission and the Minorities Commission are its members. The national committee held its hearing in Hyderabad on June 4. Unfortunately, it was held *in-camera* and initially it planned to hear only the version of carefully chosen organisations. But several (about 30) SC, ST, OBC and women's organisations of Andhra Pradesh sensed this move and forced the committee to hear all opinions, which it did subsequently.

All organisations, except the few chosen ones, told the committee that caste must be allowed to go on the U.N. agenda. Unfortunately, the officially chosen and invited organisations had no idea about the Durban conference and what it would be all about. Only the organisations that went on their own made informed and forceful presentations. Several mass organisations gave concrete reasons why caste should be included in the Durban conference. Let me sum up some of the arguments.

The conference at Durban is against race, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The question is whether caste fits into this definition and India should allow caste to be debated at the U.N. conference. The argument of the Union Government is that the U.N. should not interfere in our internal affairs. That India has evolved enough tools to handle the caste question. That the attention of the U.N. conference should not be diverted from the question of race, about which India is deeply concerned. All these arguments sound hypocritical.

When the issue of race was put on the U.N. human rights agenda, Britain and America, where racial discrimination was being practised, were permanent members of the U.N. and had strongly rooted constitutional democracy in their nations. The public opinion within those nations was forcing them to enact laws that could establish mechanisms for

handling racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance. India at that time argued that racism was too major an issue to be left to the respective countries to evolve tools to handle. Nehruvian intellectuals, who argued for pushing racism on to the U.N. agenda, based it on their own experience of xenophobic/intolerant treatment by whites of all coloured people, including Indians, in the West. This colonial experience of the Indian Brahminic elite itself was one of the grounds for asking for abolition of unequal race relations. The Indian upper caste elite suffered such xenophobic intolerance for about 200 years and at that time the distance between the white rulers and the lower castes was too far and was mediated by many castes in between.

Gandhi's experience in South Africa and the argument that Gandhi built against racism were India's strongest

drawn out suffering without much hope.

Even now the Union Government wants an undiluted debate on racism because many NRIs are suffering racism in many Euro-American countries. All NRIs have painful stories to narrate to their parents back home; many of them are either politicians or bureaucrats even in the present ruling dispensation. Is it not true that the vast majority of NRIs are from the upper castes? Do they have the patience to listen to the Dalit narratives of pain back home? What is wrong if such Dalit narratives of suffering are talked about in all forums, national and international? When the upper castes feel relieved of some pain by merely talking about it, should they not concede that much to the Dalits also in all forums?

Is it not ironical that the experience of sufferings of the Indian upper castes abroad is taken as sociologically real and

America suffer in any way? While being permanent members of the U.N., by allowing racism to be debated and measures worked out their democratic credentials have been strengthened. It helped the white communities examine their own self in the context of the international critique. It gave confidence to the Blacks. They began to respect their democracy more.

The Third World countries that asked for a debate on race only shared the moral agony of the Blacks. Whereas in the case of caste and the kind of atrocities, ignorance and poverty the lower castes suffer, the capitalist West owes a moral responsibility to uplift them as much as the upper castes of India do. The colonial world benefited from the cheap labour of the adivasis, Dalits and OBCs. If the Union Government does not even concede the existence of caste how can these communities, in the context of globalisation, raise globally relevant questions of compensation? The white rulers of Britain and America, could have easily vetoed any proposal on race. But that would have resulted in their democratic credentials becoming suspect in the comity of nations. More importantly, the victims of racism would have lost confidence in their own governments. But by conceding the truth of racism they gained on all fronts. Their democracies are surviving without facing any major threat.

If the Government of India conducts public hearings such as the one held in Hyderabad and uses them as an eyewash, the international community will laugh at our hypocrisy. The masses who are victims of the caste system will lose confidence in Indian democracy. It is known that at all levels of government the upper castes are holding the positions of decision-making. The representatives of the victim communities, who get an opportunity to sit in such committees, may be made to endorse the decisions. How does that convince the educated among the victims? Particularly, when this Government is backed by organisations such as the VHP and the RSS, which keep arguing that abolition of caste is detrimental to the Indian tradition of Varna Dharma? The day the Dalits lose faith in it because that they cannot speak out their agony Indian democracy will begin to crack.

## *The day the Dalits lose their faith in it because they cannot speak out their agony, Indian democracy will begin to crack.*

points. It is also true that Nehru and a host of other Indian leaders who studied in England carried their memories of racist treatment in their everyday life as students in the West. Nehru and other Indian leaders were strong votaries of the proposition that race must be included on the U.N. human rights agenda. But except Ambedkar, who had had the double experience of caste xenophobic intolerance at home and racial intolerance abroad, all other Indian leaders, who experienced racial discrimination and were angry with it were upper caste men and women.

They never realised that similar, in fact more horrendous, intolerance was practised in India because of caste. They never thought that the pain they suffered was much less than the pain the Indian lower castes suffered. The caste oppression continued for thousands of years. The Indian upper caste elite who suffered racism abroad had a liberative channel from that treatment when they came back home, but for the lower castes there was no such liberation at all. It was/is a long

the sustained suffering of the indigenous people, like that of the Blacks in the form of caste, does not become a sociological reality. Even if such a thing is acknowledged they do not want it exposed. When victims of racism want to draw international attention and seek aid and help, why can the voiceless not seek such an attention, aid and help of the world community. Taking the caste issue to the U.N. forums is not only for the sake of debate. It would draw the attention of the world community so that more aid might flow in for taking up educational and empowerment programmes. Such programmes will go a long way in our development. Instead of taking a loan even for causes such as primary education for millions of lower caste children why not ask for charity for primary education by telling about the historical magnitude of the caste problem?

What will happen to the prestige of our democracy among the comity of nations if we talk about caste, is another question that all our ultra-nationalist theoreticians ask. By allowing the race question to be raised did the prestige of Britain and

# We, the other people

By K. G. Kannabiran

THE SAGA of "the other people" has not ended. It is shifted to the international arena. They do not appear to be part of "we the people". Serious efforts to bring these "the other people", who are rotting as non-persons in a caste-ridden society, to the status of persons were on for some time prior to Independence. The people emerged from subjects to citizens after August 15, 1947. After the coming into force of the Constitution all of us attained a political status with well-defined rights. The most articulate representative of the other people wrote into the Constitution human values and gave it a human face. There was recognition in the Constitution that for the other people to truly become "we the people" specific safeguards and positive measures were necessary. Caste was not abolished by the Constitution. Provisions were made to treat all castes on a par with each other. But the other people, even after 50 years, have remained "the other people".

Constitutions and Gods have always been good. The problem has always been with the interpreters, lay and judicial. The Constitution makes untouchability an offence. And it persists. Bonded labour and child labour come from the ranks of the Dalits. Both the practices have been made penal and abolished by the Constitution and yet they persist. The entire administrative, judicial and political systems are still exercised by the "upper" castes despite large-scale movements against these hegemonic practices. A few are allowed to climb the social order as political leaders or as judges in the subordinate judiciary or as High Court Judges. In education and Government employment, the Constitution has introduced reservation as a principle of ensuring equality for the Dalits. The present ruling party at the Centre attacked reservation as the prime cause for diminishing merit and efficiency in administration, and by stoking the anti-

reservation stir brought down the Government headed by Mr. V. P. Singh which stood for reservation and secularism. Thus the bogie of reservation blown out of all proportion with the reality at the ground level has created a feeling of hatred for the Dalits among the middle class intelligentsia. The rights the Dalits secured after prolonged litigation appear to offer them a quasi-freedom and a teasing illusion that they are reaching the stage of genuine acceptability into the

why the Scheduled Castes want the conduct of upper castes to be made an international issue.

The law was intended to afford speedy justice, the component of speed was to act as a deterrent. The lebensraum provided by the law to evade, defeated the law without any necessity for open defiance. The assault on Dalits is legitimised by the acquittal of assailants in courts. The offences under the Act were made triable by a Special Court whose presid-

***The 160 million Dalits are demanding that untouchability and other forms of discrimination based on descent practised in India be equated with racial discrimination.***

social order as equal members. It is more difficult to fight this teasing illusion than to fight downright subjugation and the status as non-person.

In the rural areas, violence against the Scheduled Castes continues unabated. Recognising this, Parliament enacted the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, a law creating special offences which were made triable by special court. Look at the practices which continue to exist and which Parliament has identified as offences under the Act. Very few of us would have gone through the definition of "atrocities" in the Act; nor would many of us have heard about or witnessed the indignities to which Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are subjected continuously. Where social reformers have failed a Constitution may not succeed unless the words in the Constitution are transformed into deeds. Section 3 enumerates 22 categories of atrocities which are made punishable. Unless we read the enumeration of the atrocities set out, we may not be in a position to understand why Ambedkar wanted to get out of the Hindu system,

ing officer shall be a sessions Judge. This is entrusted to the Special Court for purposes of speedy trial, an aspect of Article 21 of the Constitution. This was interpreted by the apex court to mean that like all other criminal offences it should pass through the committal proceedings before a magistrate. This enactment now remains only in the statute book and will slowly fall into desuetude. All this is achieved without the help of a loaded jury system as in the U.S. Thus we have laws, constitutional provisions showcased to tell international bodies through the obliging Attorney-Generals that the caste of the Dalits cannot be equated with race.

James Baldwin, the African-American writer, in one of his essays "Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation", sets down the condition of the Blacks which is no different from the untouchables in India. He points out to his nephew, "you were born where you were born and faced a future that you faced because you were Black and for no other reason. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a so-

ciety, which spelt out with brutal clarity, in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being. You were not expected to aspire to excellence; you were expected to make peace with mediocrity." This is what the caste system tells the untouchable. The slaves were not transplanted in the United States to give them democracy. The promise of democracy was not made to them. In India, despite the grandiloquent declarations in the Constitution, birth and descent is the criteria. The identification of this targeted collective of 160 million is not difficult; nor is it the issue. Racial discrimination targets the Blacks for trying to rise above the subservient status allotted to them. They and the Dalits are needed for the performance of hard labour in the fields and for performing menial chores. They should be, to better function in their allotted status, quarantined and rendered invisible. Every society has such collectives who are targeted for such discrimination and violence and the perpetuation of such a collective can only be by descent. The principle of power is at issue and not some sociological definition or description of caste which does not tally with the meaning of race.

The 160 million Dalits are demanding that untouchability and other forms of discrimination based on descent practised in India be equated with or included in racial discrimination and other related intolerances. Arguments based on sovereignty to bar scrutiny of obnoxious and obscurantist practices violating human rights and dignity are irrational. Identification have never been an obstacle to employing discriminatory practices and violence against Dalits.

The caste system in India and the hereditary untouchability and the irrational and violent conduct these practices engender are crimes against humanity under the International Criminal Code.

(The writer is national president, People's Union of Civil Liberties.)

THE HINDU

# CASTE AND RACE

## Physiological Difference And Alien Origin

By SOUMITRO DAS

ONE can understand why the Government of India is not too keen on having the caste system discussed in a world conference on racial discrimination, the reasons are mostly political. It is an embarrassing feature of our history and our social life which we do not wish to put on display lest it damage our credentials before the liberal democratic world.

For the Dalits, caste is exploitative, discriminatory and appallingly cruel, besides being perhaps the single biggest impediment to social and political transformation and therefore, needs to be discussed in a human rights perspective. But, whether caste is a racist phenomenon or not is an altogether different question. It is true that there is some kind of a racist kernel within the notion of caste, all upper caste people have a clear sense that the Dalits are, in some inscrutable way, physically inferior human specimens.

### ORIGINS

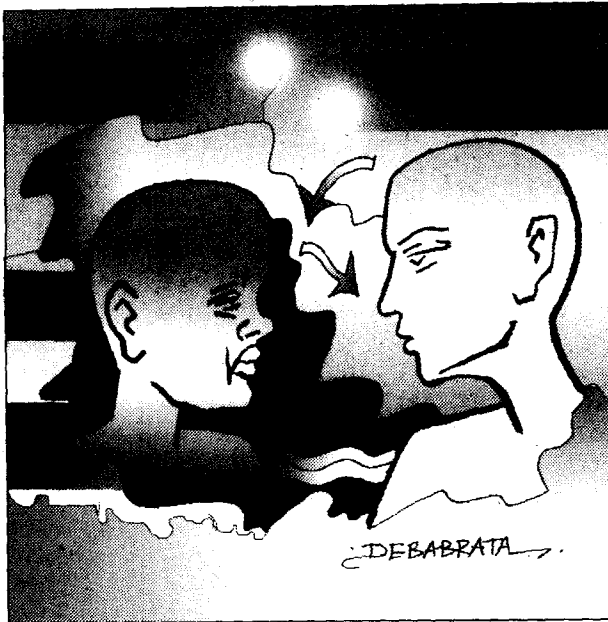
The origin of caste itself is rooted in a diffused racial consciousness born out of the encounter between the Indo-European migrants from the Central Asian steppes, usually called Aryans, who were generally fair in complexion, and the native inhabitants of the south Asian subcontinent whom they called Dasas or Dasyus, who are described as "dark-skinned" "full-lipped" and "snub-nosed", all these terms being both racial and pejorative.

However, it is not certain that quadripartite division of Aryan tribal society into the superior, twice-born warriors and priests and the symbolically degraded commoners was coextensive with the racial divide between Aryans and non-Aryans. There is enough evidence to suggest that, even in the initial period of its formation, the development of caste was subordinate to two important influences that cut across the racial divide: one, that in the constant warring that characterised the gradual penetration of the Aryans into this land, the distribution of booty determined social status and created inequalities even among the Aryans, many of which subsequently ossified into caste status; two, that there was a significant amount of miscegenation (cross-breeding, if you

The author is Senior Leader Writer, The Statesman.

like) between Aryans and non-Aryans even at the highest echelons.

This continued well after caste society had taken on the shape that we recognise today, which is why Manu is at great pains to allot the caste status of



people born of union between one higher caste and one lower caste parent and that status is not, in every case, inferior. Moreover, caste, in spite of its hereditary nature, was not frozen in perpetuity, the original quadripartite division underwent a diversification and an expansion such that new groups were incorporated into existing castes and new castes were created. We quote DN Jha, an authority on the period: "...a post-Gupta Puranic text mentions 100 castes as against the 61 noted by Manu in the earlier period. The kshatriya caste swelled with the influx of Huns and subsequently the Gurjars who joined their ranks as Rajputs. The increase in the number of shudra castes and untouchables was largely due to the absorption of forest tribes into settled varna society."

### COMPLEXITY

What can be said is that, although there was never any sense of racial purity among the Aryans, the notion of caste retains the idea of Aryan racial superiority: the clearest reflection of this is to be found in the demand for fair-skinned brides and grooms in our matrimonial columns and also in the anti-Brahmin Dravidian movements in South India, principally in Tamil Nadu.

All this is to say that caste is much more complex than race. For there to be racism, there must be a sense of absolute difference, of absolute otherness based not just on physiology, but on something more fundamental — alien origin. This is the case with the Blacks in the United States and in

South Africa, this is the case with Indians in Fiji and in the United Kingdom, this is the case with Turks in Germany or north African Arabs in France, this was the case with Jews in certain parts of Europe, not so long ago. In each case there was a physiological difference, whose degree may vary enormously — many Turks and north African Arabs are close to the European racial type — compounded by an alien origin. This is certainly not the case with Dalits. The physiological difference has been attenuated by a long history of racial mingling and no Brahmin will ever say that Dalits do not belong here, only they must lick Brahmin backsides on command. There is one other crucial factor, pointed out by the American scholar

Michael Moffat and represented in this quotation: "Untouchables are a regular part of Hinduism and share in its common culture and ideology."

### UNITY

Subordination and oppression of those at the bottom of the system should not obscure the essential unity of Hindu society, which is to be viewed on its own rather than in comparative terms. So, oppression of low-caste Hindus should not be treated as a phenomenon comparable with, say, racism directed to African-Americans. That racism stands as a contradiction to the egalitarian principles of American society, whereas the principle of hierarchy is intrinsic to Hindu society."

No Brahmin will ever say that Dalits are a separate race, only they must be conscious of their ritual status and observe the codified rules of caste society as laid down by Manu and as local custom ordains. We would assign to the Dalits a status similar to the serfs of medieval Europe: both were drawn mainly from conquered populations and had their status determined by a social theology that was, in its time, not open to further social evolution. The Dalit militant never speaks of the colour of his skin, as militant Blacks do in the United States, he speaks of land and his cause is often defended — in Bihar and in Andhra Pradesh — by an ultra-Left peasant guerrilla of Maoist inspiration. He is an economic slave damned by the religion of his ancestors, not a racially inferior human being or an alien presence.

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# Caste, race same in India' 96

By Our Special Correspondent

**HYDERABAD, JUNE 4.** The Government of India's stand on caste came in for criticism by a large number of Dalit and voluntary organisations in the context of the U.N.-sponsored Durban world conference against racial discrimination.

They expressed their views at the public hearing held here on Monday by the National Preparatory Committee of the conference headed by Mr. Justice Jagannatha Mishra.

In their petitions, the SC, ST and BC organisations insisted that caste and race were "one and the same" in India, citing bonded labour and practice of untouchability as the manifestations of caste discrimination.

The venue, Jubilee Hall, had banners and placards filled with anti-Government slogans. The Union Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr U. V. Krishnam Raju, had the inaugural function advanced by two hours and left the place soon after making a speech which, according to leaders of these organisations, was to avoid any possible gherao.

However, the day-long hearing by the panel, which consisted of 10 others including Mr Dileep

min, <sup>9. C. Anil Kumar</sup> chairmen of National Commissions on SCs and STs, BCs and Minorities respectively, went on peacefully with each of the 75 petitioners given time to speak.

Prominent among them were Swamy Agnivesh who pleaded that he be sent to the Durban meeting as an official Indian delegate in place of the Minister who "never knew what the problem of discrimination was", Mr. John Dayal, Secretary-General of All-India Christian Council, who argued that "caste is worse than racism", Prof K. Ilaiah of Osmania University, the author of the book *Why I am Not a Hindu* and Mr. Paturu Ramaiah of CPI-(M), who heads the Committee for Struggle Against Caste Discrimination.

Leaders of non-Governmental and SC/ST/BC organisations who were invited to the hearing, from Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Tamil Nadu, and Bihar submitted to the Commission that the Durban meeting was the "best chance" to ventilate their grievances.

They said the Government of India should ask for the inclusion of caste in the draft agenda of the meeting.

Mr. John Dayal and Prof. Ilaiah

at the Centre as "right reactionary". The Minister of State for External Affairs Minister, in his speech earlier, said caste was not within the ambit of race as was being understood.

## Sinha visiting U.S. for treatment

**NEW DELHI, JUNE 4.** The Union Finance Minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, is leaving for the United States for treatment. He is expected to be away for a week to 10 days.

Last year too, Mr. Sinha had gone to the U.S. for treatment in early September. He later joined the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was in the U.S. for engagements at the United Nations in New York, followed by a State visit to Washington. — Our Special Correspondent

**HONOLULU, Journalism fellowship:** The East-West Center, Honolulu, Hawaii, has invited applications for the Fall 2001 Jefferson Fellowships, a programme of professional dialogue, study and overseas travel for mid-level print and broadcast journalists from the United States, Asia and the Pacific. The East-West Center

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# Reservation in the corporate sector — II

By Gail Omvedt

110-12 1/6

**W**HILE RESERVATION in the corporate sector is now a very strong possibility, a major factor hampering all programmes of social justice in India has been their extremely reluctant acceptance by the ruling elite. In spite of Constitutional guarantees and official policies, ideas are still widespread that somehow "reservation" and "merit" are opposites, and that programmes to achieve "social justice" will slow down the development of a truly open, caste-free, merit-based society.

The reality is that in a caste (or race)-affected society, only by recognising the disabilities of caste or race can true openness and mobility be achieved. In a genuinely open and dynamic society, people of talent from every social group, and from rich and poor alike would have a chance to rise to the top. Such a society, however, has never truly existed in India; it exists only as aspiration and hope. It has never truly existed in the U.S. either, which is why programmes of "affirmative action" have had to be taken up there why the fight for racial justice still goes on. For that matter, nearly every country in the world has some form of discrimination, and the upcoming United Nations Conference on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination in South Africa indicates that the effort to build a world-wide open society still has to go on.

In India, the barriers to openness and merit have taken two main forms, that of patriarchy or gender discrimination and that of caste discrimination. Since the Indian form of patriarchy is largely affected by caste, we focus on caste discrimination here. It is easy to understand how in the past birth was a determining factor in a person's life chances: those of castes considered "low" had little right to education, little political power and small access to property. Those classified as "untouchable" were even worse off than the ones considered "shudras" in the official varna classification; they had no land, were excluded from participation in

nearly all public spheres of life, had not even the glimmerings of a right to education, and had work opportunities limited to the most polluting and arduous jobs.

But social justice and the creation of an open society is not really about the past; it is about the present and the way discrimination operates today. India has moved ahead in many ways in the 20th century; it has opened up education and employment opportunities. Yet caste continues to be a determining factor in social life, and caste and kinship networks very of-

publicly discussed the issue of how company ownership and company employment works in India. While the sociological data on caste and economic achievement is rather minimal, what studies we have show a heavy domination of upper castes. Strikingly, Brahmans seem to be outdoing even the traditional "bania" groups in industry today! Not only are people such as Mr. Gurudas Deshpande and his brother-in-law Mr. Narayan Murthy among the richest of Indians, but a study by Santosh Goyal of the

evidence for a good deal of intermingling between social groups in spite of formal caste barriers.

What this means is that the apparent difference in "intelligence" and "achievement" between "upper" and "lower" castes is a result of social factors — of poverty, ill health, lack of education and all the other factors that have served to smother the abilities and potentials of people from Dalit, Adivasi and OBC backgrounds. The result is that those from "higher" caste backgrounds, with long traditions of education and intellectual activity behind them, have advantages in developing their potential that the masses of people do not have. This situation means that there is a vast wastage of "human resources" in India. It should be of concern not only to Dalits and OBCs themselves, but to any true nationalist.

It is often argued that globalisation means that issues such as "social justice" and programmes to develop the talents and skills of the deprived no longer have relevance. But the opposite is true. A closed-in nation with little involvement and trade with the rest of the world can afford to move along slowly, to stagnate, to let the talent of its vast human population go to waste while a few take on responsibility for "guiding" the society. But an open nation has to stand the test of competitiveness. And the fact is that trying to compete with so much human deprivation continuing to exist is like trying to engage in trade or become a world power with a population of only a couple hundred million, instead of a billion energetic, talented, people.

This is why programmes of social justice, including the universalisation of education, access to property and resources, and the "talent search" which we otherwise describe as reservations, all of them essentially programmes to develop the talents and potentialities of the entire population, should be of concern not only to Dalits and other deprived groups, but to policy-makers and business leaders as well.

*There is a vast wastage of 'human resources' in India. It should be of concern not only to Dalits and OBCs themselves, but to any true nationalist.*

ten play a major role in access to employment. People of "low" castes, and particularly the ex-"untouchables" still are deprived in many areas of rights to equal participation in public life in simple things such as the right to drink tea in a public tea shop — leave alone the question of owning the shop!

Employment is only partly the result of merit even in examinations and interviews; it has a large element of "influence". And for those trying to run businesses, even very tiny ones, the role of influence and access to power is even greater. These are direct factors of discrimination; indirectly, the limited spread of education and the vast discrimination in land ownership and property rights means that Dalits and the former "Shudra" castes (especially those classified as "most backward") do not even share the same starting line as those from families and castes who have as background generations of education, intellectual and entrepreneurial orientation and the economic resources to back it up.

Those industrialists who have talked about a "level playing field" for Indians in the sphere of international business competition, who have wanted support to compete with multinationals, have rarely

caste composition of top corporate officers in 1979-80 showed that out of 2082 whose caste could be identified (of a total of 3129), 858 or 41.2 per cent were Brahmans; Khatri and Vaishyas were a poor second and third with 18.5 per cent and 17.9 per cent. Only 4.2 per cent were "Shudra" of any type. It is doubtful if this situation has changed significantly.

Many of the readers of this article will, consciously or unconsciously, continue to think that such a situation has come about because in fact people from the "upper" castes are more skilled, more talented. There is still even a tendency to think in genetic terms, in spite of the fact that nearly all scientific studies show little "natural" or "biological" distinction among different social groups. In fact, it might be said that if there is a genetic distinction between "upper" and "lower" castes — which would assume that there has been almost no intermingling of genes between the two groups over centuries — the advantage would be for the latter: the arduous life that the deprived sections have faced would mean that only those who are stronger and more intelligent would survive to pass on their genes! However, there is little evidence for any such separation in India, rather there is

THE HINDU  
MADRAS

# Caste cloud on business hope

TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Ranchi, May 24: Six Jharkhand ministers will lead a massive Kurmi rally here tomorrow against their government's pro-tribal policies—in a show of strength that could change the identity of the new-born state from a fertile investment destination into a seething caste cauldron.

The protest march has been called by the Kurmi-Mahato-Muslim lobby to rally around the backward castes against chief minister Babulal Marandi's pro-tribal reservation policies. The key players are from the Janata Dal (United) and the Samata Party—constituents of the NDA government in the state—and a section of BJP Kurmi leaders.

Sources say the lobby is desperate to protect its economic interest so that their dominance in agriculture is not jeopardised by the pro-tribal policies of the BJP-led government. But Sarau Rai, Jharkhand BJP party affairs chief, said the BJP was committed to the empowerment of tribals and would have to pursue a pro-tribal line to honour its promises.

Sparks flew in the charged air of the state capital after the government passed the panchayat Act by which tribals got 100 per cent reservation in key posts of rural bodies in districts where they are in majority. Angry Kurmi ministers argued that there were pockets where the tribals were outnumbered by Kurmis and other caste groups.

They also protested another decision offering 60 per cent job reservation for tribals.

Spearheading the anti-tribal movement are six ministers led by power minister Lalchand Mahato, who is from the Dal (U). Two are from the Samata Party—Jaleswar Mahato and Madhu Singh. The fourth, Suresh Singh, is an Independent who was made a minister. The remaining two—Ramtahal Chowdhary and Abha Mahato—are from the BJP. Both are Kurmis.

The Kurmis backed up their demand for greater reservation on the basis of the 1931 census. Caste leaders claimed they were originally aborigines but were wrongly classified as backward caste in the census. "In 1931, Kurmis were 27 per cent of the

population. So the Kurmi percentage of reservation should be revised," said Lalchand.

He said if the tribals, who made up 27 per cent of the state's population, got 100 per cent reservation in key posts in rural bodies, the Kurmis should also get an equal share. An all-party meeting called by the government yesterday to decide on quotas for caste groups failed to arrive at a consensus.

"If we have to give more reservations to the Kurmis, we have to cut down on that of the tribals," said a senior member of Marandi's Cabinet. "This would affect tribal empowerment."

Rally organisers got a shot in the arm after the Muslims and Vaishyas decided to throw in their lot with them.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 MAY 2001

# Bihar government's job quota revision under fire

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, May 24. - The Bihar government has revised the job quota scheme for the backward classes, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes generating a fresh controversy in the state.

The state Cabinet yesterday approved the Ordinance bringing down the reservation in government jobs for the STs from 10 per cent to one per cent and raising the same for the Most Backward classes, the backward classes and the SCs from 14 per cent to 18 per cent, 10 per cent to 13 per cent and 14 per cent to 15 per cent respectively.

The government has ostensi-

bly done it "in view of the change in the nature of the state's demography" in the wake of the division of Bihar and carving out of Jharkhand. "The state is now left with little population of STs. So it has brought down the quota for the STs," a Cabinet Spokesman said and added: "The quota for other beneficiary sections have been raised in proportion of their population."

But Dalit and upper caste community leaders find the move as Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav's "game-plan" to "expand" his support base among the MBCs and the BCs to "compensate the consistent erosion"

in his vote bank over the years.

Dalit leader and state land reforms minister, Mr Ramai Ram, has revolted against the Ordinance. He alleged that the Cabinet "at the behest of the RJD chief" has raised the quota for the MBCs and the BCs by four and three percent against the raise of only one per cent for the SCs, who still constitute 15.40 per cent of the state's population.

Mr Ram demanded 16 per cent reservation for SCs in government jobs and called upon the Dalit legislators from all political parties to launch a campaign against the government's decision under the banner of the Ambed-

kar Sena that he heads.

He said the government should have convened an all party meeting to discuss the "sensitive" issue like reservation before taking a decision on it.

Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti has stated that the government should have carried out a caste census to ascertain the actual proportion of various caste groups in the state. "How has Mr Laloo Yadav come to know about the proportion of various caste groups present in the state after its division without carrying out a census," a senior Lok Janshakti leader, Mr Pashupati Paras, said.

The implementation of the

Mandal Commission report by the then V P Singh government in 1990 catapulted Mr Laloo Yadav as a powerful leader of the backward classes. He, however, suffered a major loss in his backward class vote bank, when Mr Nitish Kumar deserted him in 1995 taking away the Kurmi votes with him. Since then several small and big BC and SC leaders have parted ways with the RJD chief, who finds himself now "over dependent" on the Muslim-Yadav combination which constitutes about 27 per cent of the state's population.

"The revision of the job quota scheme is a well calculated

move by Mr Laloo Yadav to regain his lost support base", a sociologist, Mr Sashibhushan said and added: "The move also indicates the direction in which the RJD chief is willing to take the politics of the state in the days to come."

The former chief minister and Nationalist Congress Party state president, Mr Jagannath Mishra, said Mr Laloo Yadav has backed out from his own promise to ensure reservation in jobs for the economically weaker section in the upper castes. He said that the government should have adopted "Karpooori Thakur formula" while amending the job reservation scheme.



Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 2001

# DALIT IDENTITY

## The Search For Equality And Dignity

By FELIX RAJ

THE last 200 years have seen the emergence of a new consciousness and a new identity among the 200 million people who have been considered "outcaste" or "untouchables". Today they call themselves Dalits, a new name they have coined for themselves, and demand aggressively their share in shaping the destiny of the nation. It is not a mere name or title, it has become an expression of hope.

The term Dalit in Sanskrit is derived from the root *dal* which means to split, break, crack and so on. When used as an adjective, it means split, broken, burst, destroyed, crushed. It is said that Jotiba Phule (1827-1890), founder of the Satyashodhak Samaj, a non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra, a social reformer and revolutionary, used this term to describe the outcastes and untouchables as the oppressed and broken victims of the Indian caste-ridden society. It is also believed that it was Dr BR Ambedkar who coined the word first.

### HARIJANS

The Dalits of today were known as "untouchables" and "outcaste" for centuries. These degrading terms were changed by the British administration into "Depressed Classes" in 1919. Gandhiji called them harijans (people of God), his favourite term to be used in the place of untouchable. Ambedkar did not accept Gandhi's term, he demanded a separate electorate for the "Depressed Classes", and proposed the term "Protestant Hindus". In 1935, the British government defined them as the "Scheduled Castes." It was during the 1970s that the followers of the Dalit Panther Movement of Maharashtra gave currency to the term Dalit. Today the term is used frequently and has become popular among the Dalit people of various religions and protest movements.

The origin of the Dalits goes back to 1500 BC. Studies about their origin tell us that they were a people without a name and without a place in the social organisation of the time. They were not only ostracised from the mainstream society and relegated to the status of "untouchables" but were also subjected to various forms of exploitation and oppression which have always been supported by religion directly or indirectly.

According to an Indian historian, SK Chatterjee, the original Indians were the Sudras (the serving caste people), today's Dalits. These were the pre-Aryan people who lived for

thousands of years on the Indian soil. The Aryans are said to have come into India around 1500 BC and made the local people their servants and slaves. The Dalits are the descendants of the earliest settlers of India. Because of the long history of oppression, they have lost their self-identity as full human beings.



Religion has been one of the tools people have used as an agent of bondage or liberation. For centuries, India has been a cradle of religions. Many religions found the Indian soil fertile and flourished here. Some like Hinduism, Christianity and Islam came from outside and others like Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Lingayatism were born here. Dalits joined religions that preached equality. The conversion of Dalits, in large numbers, to Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism was also a search for equality and human dignity.

### EMANCIPATION

Dr Ambedkar's long and arduous search for religious emancipation is enshrined in his magnum opus: *The Buddha and His Dharma*. He rejected Christianity and Islam because, though formally egalitarian religions, they did not have to fight the caste system. The only Indian religion, for Ambedkar, which arose and grew out of the struggle against the caste system and never succumbed to it was Buddhism. Ambedkar was the first to characterise it as a revolutionary and the most egalitarian religion of India. Ambedkar noted that the Buddha created his Sangha as a model of a casteless society.

During the Vedic period, the low caste people were denied the right to education and even the right to live. The caste system placed the Dalit people at the bottom of society with the least wealth or power. They were the most exploited and oppressed lot, condemned to labour freely or for little remuneration.

Both Vedic ritualism and gnosis (supremacy of Brahmins) were bound to be called in question by the common people. The popular discontent found expression in dissident

sects like Jainism (540-468 BC) and Buddhism (563-483 BC).

There is no doubt that Jainism and Buddhism were the first attacks or revolts in general against the caste system.

Lord Buddha initiated a radical critique of contemporary religion and society. He was forthright in repudiating the caste system and the notion of ritual purity associated with it.

One of his famous sayings runs

like this: *No Brahmin is such by birth, / No outcaste is such by birth. / An outcaste is such by his deeds, / A Brahmin is such by his deeds.*

From out of the struggle between Vedic religion and heterodox movements like Jainism and Buddhism was born what is today called Hinduism, which reached its golden age in the Gupta period (300-700 AD). Many factors were responsible for this new development. Brahminism succeeded in integrating

within itself popular religions. Popular deities were absorbed into the Vedic pantheon through a process of identification of subordination. Even Buddha was given the status of a vishnuite incarnation.

### MOVEMENTS

After the exit of the Buddhist religion from India, there were other religious and anti-caste movements that arose and functioned within the jati system and hence they were assimilated by it sooner or later — for examples the Lingayat religion led by Jangam intellectuals, the Sikh by Khatri intellectuals and the medieval Bhakti movement.

The Bhakti movement, a socio-religious expression of the revolt of the masses originated in Tamil Nadu but soon spread to Karnataka and Maharashtra, and eventually swept through the whole of north India. It is undeniable that the Bhaktas represented the aspirations of the downtrodden masses as against the interests of the twice born.

The Bhagavata Purana, the main scriptural authority of the movement, comes out with the startling idea of a God who is partial to the poor: "Hari, fond of those persons destitute of wealth and whose sole wealth is himself, and knowing their affection, does not accept the worship of evil-minded persons who by their conceit about their Vedic learning, wealth, family, and deeds bestow harm on good people who are poor".

Saints of the Bhakti movement came from all castes and the movement had mass support. Unfortunately it could not maintain its initial thrust and was domesticated by Hindu orthodoxy. As Dumont observes, "A sect cannot survive on Indian soil if it denies caste".

The author is the Vice Principal of St Xavier's College, Kolkata.

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 2001

# Oppression pushes Dalits towards conversion

HEMENDRA NARAYAN  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

last week. His strong words  
against the Brahmin landlord  
are approved by a local BSP  
leader Mr Radheshyam sitting  
beside Zalim and other villagers.  
The "reconversion" didn't  
cause any tension among the  
villagers but ever since the op-  
eration of the RSS and VHP, a  
sense of mistrust has crept in.  
One finds Shabhupati Shukla  
sleeping in his huge house.  
The door leading in has a  
sticker that says: "Hame hin-  
du hone per garva hain ( We  
are proud of being a Hindu)."  
He had been sanchalak with  
the RSS. Though, Mr Shukla  
was not directly involved in  
the "reconversions", he was  
happy that the RSS and Vish-  
wa Hindu Parishad leaders

had saved the Hindu society  
"from splitting and getting  
weakened."  
Anil Kumar of Ratanpur, who  
was given a certificate of be-  
coming a Hindu by the the  
RSS and VHP leaders said:  
"Why should one not become a  
Christian when the lower  
caste people get no respect in  
society."  
Ram Sagar, an old man, did  
not become a Christian but he  
had seriously considered the  
idea. There is a sense of hurt  
among these people. The pros-  
pect of escaping oppression as  
lower castes is alluring to  
them.  
Nasir Ali, has the same things

to say about the oppression.  
The landowners pay the barest  
possible wages to the labour-  
ers. They get paid just four to  
five kg of wheat for working in  
the fields. The labour inspec-  
tors and other officials visiting  
the village are in collusion  
with the landlords, say villag-  
ers.  
Villagers are cynical when  
one of the landlords of the area  
BN Singh claims that he him-  
self works on the field and  
there was no question of viola-  
tion of the statutory minimum  
wages for the labourers.  
Sadhuram had also become a  
Christian but is back in the  
Hindu fold now. One reason

for his decision to convert was  
that he had not been given a  
loan of Rs 2,500 by the govern-  
ment to purchase a loudspeak-  
er.  
He has the loan documents  
on him but the grant has still  
not come his way.  
Many others like Sadhu Ram  
hold the government's inabili-  
ty to counter the unjust treat-  
ment meted out to them by the  
upper caste Hindus, responsi-  
ble for their decision to become  
Christians.  
"There is a question of *roti*  
(food), *kapda* (clothes) and *ma-  
kan* (home) - and also un-  
touchability," the villagers  
say.

Talking about the "reconver-  
sions", the gram pradhan,  
Ramashray says:  
"This is the first time the RSS  
and VHP leaders have shown  
concern about us."  
Since he is a Dalit there had  
been a number of petitions  
filed for his removal as gram  
pradhan.  
After the "reconversions" by  
the RSS and VHP in the twin  
villages of Jamua and Rantan-  
pur, Shampat alias Baba, an-  
other Dalit who became a  
Christian in 1992 has become  
the focus of attraction. One  
room of his house doubles as  
the church where the Christi-  
ans of the area gather on the  
Sundays.  
On the wall of his room a

cross has been drawn with  
praise written in name of Je-  
sus in Hindi.  
Shampat's wife Dharna com-  
plains that the government  
has not done anything for the  
Dalits especially regarding the  
poor wages paid by the land-  
owners of the area. "Nobody  
comes here. The place you are  
sitting will be flooded during  
the rainy season. Even today  
you had park your car half a  
km away from my house. But a  
well brick road leads to the  
house of Shabhupati Shukla  
which is built on a higher  
land" she says. It is perhaps  
justified then that Dalits have  
their own vested interests be-  
hind the decision to convert to  
Christianity.

THE STATESMAN

24 APR 2001

# 50,000 Orissa Dalits to become Buddhists

Himansu S Sahoo  
*Bhubaneswar: April 19*

8/19

THE All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations, presently propagating Buddhism in the country, has announced that 50,000 dalits of Orissa would embrace Buddhism on October 14.

A Dharma Vahan (chariot) of the organisation, which will travel across the country to make 10 lakh dalits embrace Buddhism, will visit Orissa along with senior members of the organisa-

29A  
tions. Announcing this at a Press conference in the city on Thursday, Confederation's chairman Ram Raj said Buddhism is the only religion where caste and creed have no room and where all classes of human beings are given equal treatment.

The drive, if successful, will give a new status and freedom to the dalits who have been subject to inhuman torture in the name of casteism and communalism, he said.

Though Prime Minister Atal

Bihari Vajpayee has promised several times to withdraw the anti-reservation orders, issued by the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) in 1997, during the United Front Government at the Centre nothing concrete has taken place in this regard till date," the chairman said.

Doubtless India has the potential for development, but the caste-ridden society and faulty reservation policy hindered all-round development and stood in the way of national growth.

9-Casting Review  
While two stringent anti-reservation policies were withdrawn in the face of opposition by the Confederation, the other faulty orders are still in force. On conversion and re-conversion issue Ram Raj took a dig at Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangha (RSS) saying that the RSS must mend its principles. Raj found nothing wrong in willful conversion to Christianity or any other religion. If conversion opens up better livelihood, there is nothing sinful in such practice, he added.

# Bangaru resurfaces at Dalit meet

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 13. — A

month after the Tehelka episode, Mr Bangaru Laxman made an attempt to re-enter the political arena. He attended a programme of the BJP scheduled caste morcha on the eve of Dr BR Ambedkar's birth anniversary. He put a brave face in what was tipped to be his comeback programme. But, Mr LK Advani, a couple of seats away from him, was visibly embarrassed.

Mr Laxman's entry into the auditorium was greeted with whispers among the audience and this put BJP leaders on alert. Mr Laxman's speech, his first since the Tehelka episode, didn't sound apologetic. It was more of an attempt to put the record straight.

He said whatever he did was for the party's sake and the money he was seen stashing away was deposited in the party account. "Since the government has set up a commission to investigate the whole thing, I don't want to say anything further on that. But I would certainly appear before the commission and then I will give all the details," Mr Laxman said.

Mr Advani and senior BJP leader Mr Sangha Priya Gautam sensibly avoided eye-contact with the followers.

Mr Laxman said no political leader in India can afford to run the party without accepting donations. He said the problem in India was that there is no common guideline on accepting funds, unlike in the USA, where recently a

law was passed setting terms for political donations to leaders and parties. "Here there is no attempt to frame a national guideline on political funding. The Parliament, which should have been discussing these matters, has no time to focus on these issues. So what to do. I call for a national debate to frame guidelines or laws on the mode of political funding."

Mr Laxman also recalled how the autobiography of late



Mr Bangaru

Nijalingappa narrated the fund-mobilisation of SK Patil during the days of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. "In fact, SK Patil himself said at least during Nehru's time the suitable cases in which the money was delivered used to be returned. But by Indira Gandhi's time, after taking the money not even the suitcases were returned. Some in the audience cheered, but Mr Advani's silence was more resounding.

Mr Laxman played his Dalit card at the function organised by the BJP SC morcha, a forum that rallied around him when many party leaders trained the guns on him. He urged the government to consider the private sector also offering social protection (read reservation) to Dalits, more so when the number of jobs are decreasing. There were occasional "Bangaru zindabads" from the audience.

Mr Laxman's re-entry clearly indicates that the BJP leadership is under pressure from his supporters not to sacrifice him. In fact, the organisers of today's function also included Mr Ram Nath Govindh, the SC morcha leader. It also shows the keenness of the BJP to satisfy the dalit vote-bank by not treating Mr Lax-

man as a political untouchable.

Mr Advani's speech, which followed Mr Laxman, was striking not for what he said, but what he did not. There was not a single reference to the Tehelka issue or to Mr Laxman's speech.

The home minister limited himself to Ambedkar's role in shaping the Constitution and thus India's destiny.

He said Ambedkar's contribution in the making of the Constitution will be a challenge for those "who have to review it in view of the new realities". Mr Advani, at the beginning of his speech while greeting the fellow speakers, preferred to refer to Mr Laxman as "my colleague in Parliament", not as former party president.

THE STATESMAN

14 APR 2001



# Himachal, Haryana governors form a new SC/ST trust

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 13: Himachal Pradesh governor Suraj Bhan announced floating of a national-level trust to cater to the educational and other welfare needs of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The trust, Babasaheb B.R. Ambedkar Mission of India, has Haryana governor Babu Parmanand as one of its patrons.

Mr Bhan said the trust will be run with one-day annual subscription of well-to-do and successful members of these communities. "For last 53 years, some people from these communities have no doubt benefited due to welfare measures undertaken both at the Centre and state levels. Now it is time to repay back to our community," he said.

He said that the trust will work as a watchdog to oversee effective implementation of the welfare schemes. It has a host of politicians, irrespective of party affiliations, as patrons and trustees. Among these are Mr Buta Singh, Mr Sushil Kumar Shinde, Mr B.P. Maurya, Mr Satyanarayan Jatiya and Mr Karia Munda. According to Mr Bhan, its patrons also include Justice K. Ramaswamy (Retd.), former Mizoram governor A. Padmanabhan and Punjab Speaker Charanjit Singh Atwal.

Mr Bhan said that the trust will have its units in all the states at both district and block levels.

Both Mr Bhan and Babu Parmanand maintained that there is no constitutional impropriety in their floating the trust. However, they also admitted that they have not consulted or discussed the matter with President K.R. Narayanan.

Mr Bhan said, "There are several things that one does in personal capacity and this is one of those." When asked whether he would resign if the government raised any objection over his action, Mr Bhan said: "I would cross the bridge when I reach it." Mr Bhan, who is also a member of the governors committee on SC and ST, said the committee has found a sorry state of affairs in the implementation of Special Component Plan and Prevention of Atrocities Act against members of the communities.

The panel headed by Maharashtra governor P.C. Alexander will submit its report on April 30, he said, adding that the decision to set up such a trust was prompted by the continuing deterioration in the living condition of the people of these communities. Mr Parmanand said globalisation and the privatisation of education will have adverse affect on SC and ST population.

THE ASIAN AGE

10 APR 2002

# Revolt with record conversion

FROM KAY BENEDICT

**New Delhi, April 8:** After the cycle of conversion and re-conversion, a rebellion is brewing in India in the shape of the world's biggest crossover to a religion.

One million Dalits are expected to embrace Buddhism on October 14 in an articulation of anger strikingly similar to Black America's march against the White mainstream.

The day — 45 years ago on October 14, B.R. Ambedkar had renounced Hinduism and found solace in Buddhism — has been chosen with care to hammer home the Dalit rage against the social stratification.

The objective behind the mammoth conversion is not only to rebuff the caste Hindus and the Brahminical order but also to re-

move the internal contradictions dogging the Dalits, who are divided into various camps representing the Balmikis, the Paswans, the Chamars and so on.

The decision on mass conversion has been taken by the All-India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations, which groups four million Dalits.

"This is for our survival as humans," said K. Ramankutty, president of the confederation's Kerala unit. "Buddhism is a casteless religion. That is the primary reason why we want to embrace it. We have no enmity with anyone. It (the conversion) is for human rights."

However, if the conversion plan comes through, it is certain to raise the hackles of the Sangh parivar.

Sangh hardliners who have op-

posed conversions have often found it difficult to answer charges that they have done little to dismantle the numerous social barriers in their religion. The one-million conversion will be seen as further proof of their perceived failure to nurture reforms.

The conversion is also expected to equip the Dalits to fight the Constitution review, which is being viewed by some sections as an affront to Ambedkar, one of the founding fathers of the statute.

Ramankutty lambasted the BJP-led government for trying to review the Constitution. "They are trying to bring Manu in place of Ambedkar. They are misinterpreting provisions of the Constitution to defeat the purpose of reservation and resort to largescale privatisation. We will soon have no place in the social

hierarchy," he said.

Ram Raj, the national chairman of the confederation, termed the conversion the "biggest cultural event in the world". He said "the most crucial decision" to embrace Buddhism has the concurrence of Dalits leaders from almost all Indian states.

The confederation is planning to organise a series of programmes, including *rath yatras*, to prepare the Dalits for a cultural change. The target is to convert the nation's entire Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe population (25 crore) in the country, Ram Raj said.

The confederation will chalk out an agitation programme for reservation in the judiciary, army and the private sector in view of the Centre's decision to disinvest in public sector units.

THE TELEGRAPH

9 APR 2001

# Dogged Bhumihars bay for Bihar DSP's blood

NALIN VERMA  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, April 1. — Ramshrestha Sharma can't be trusted because he's a Bhumihar! This is what the Kurtha Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), Mr Shafi-ul-Haque, has written in a supervision report sent to the Jehanabad SP on 8 March. Kurtha is a sub-division of Jehanabad.

"You can rely on a dog, hungry for three days, not to eat the food given to him if his master tells him, but never on a Bhumihar...", says the DSP's report, a copy of which is with **The Statesman**.

The DSP's remark against the powerful upper caste, which has a sizeable population in Jehanabad, has created a furore in the state. Bhumihars cutting across party lines came together to stall the legislative council's proceedings for two days last week demanding the DSP's "dismissal".

Mr Ramshrestha Sharma is a resident of Kurtha, against whom the DSP was investigating a case. The council chairman, Mr J Hussain, expressed "concern" over the "damning" observation against a "particular community" and asked the government to take him to task.

Known for their landed property and fighting a protracted war with Naxalite outfits in central Bihar, the Bhumihars observed a Jehanabad bandh and demonstrated in the town two days ago.

Mr Yashodanandan Singh, Mr Ramesh Singh and Mr Mahachander Singh (all Bhumihar MLCs) were not satisfied with the water

resources minister, Mr Jagdanand Singh's statement in the House that the government would take "proper action" against the DSP within 15 days. They said they wouldn't settle for anything less than his "dismissal".

Mr Ramesh Singh, an advocate by profession, said the government should suspend the DSP immediately and initiate the process to dismiss him. "Besides taking administrative action against him, the government should institute a case...", he said.

Surprisingly, the government hasn't taken any punitive action against Mr Haque. He has only been transferred to the state headquarters. And that hasn't assuaged the Bhumihars' anger.

An MLC said: "The government has transferred the DSP to ensure his safety and security... otherwise, the people of Kurtha would have lynched him for his slanderous remarks..."

Some Bhumihar MLCs feel Mr Haque's "observation" was to "please" Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, known for his "dislike" for the Bhumihars. "Besides, the DSP is a Muslim, who with the Yadavs make up the RJD's vote bank," an MLC said. "The government will do nothing against the DSP, for he has echoed what Mr Laloo Yadav feels about the Bhumihars."

The Jehanabad SP has, however, issued a show-cause notice to Mr Haque. The DSP now says his observation is "only against Mr Ramsreshtha Sharma and not against the whole community". But the Bhumihars are not ready buy that argument.

THE STATESMAN

2 APR 2001

# Are IITs biased against SC & ST students?

New Delhi, March 30

ARE THE Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) biased against Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students? Students from these traditionally backward classes are often handicapped in a certain social sense. But will higher technical education be closed to them on this count?

That would indeed be the impression if the negative comments in the 9th report of the Parliamentary Committee on Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (2000-2001) are any indication of the shape of things.

The report suggests strong dissatisfaction in the watchdog body over the Human Resources Development Ministry's indifference to SC and ST students' limited access to higher technical education facilities. There is even outright condemnation of the Government's inadequate response to the committee's recommendations.

A case in point is the fate of the committee's recommendation that there should be at least one SC and ST representative with necessary qualifications in the council of the Indian Institutes of Technology "in order to protect

the interests of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes." The recommendation took more than 18 months to be placed before the council of IITs and, needless to say, its implementation remains uncertain.

Apparently outraged, the committee feels if the Government merely notes down the recommendation it will not yield any fruitful result, this alone would not absolve the Government from its responsibility towards the reservation policy. As far as admission of SC and ST students into IIT courses is concerned, the picture is uniform. While there

are never enough seats in the unreserved categories, the reserved seats are always waiting for takers. Pointing out that the ministry has not progressed beyond noting its recommendations for filling up the reservation quotas, the committee urges the ministry to make all sincere efforts for admission of SC and ST candidates in all courses in the IITs "instead of (causing) such willful delay even for placing the recommendations of the parliamentary committee in the meeting of the council of IITs for their consideration and decision."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

31 MAR 2001

# BJP Dalits root for Bangaru

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 30. — Despite their best efforts, senior BJP leaders are finding it tough to put a lid on the Bangaru controversy within the party. Many Dalit leaders in the BJP say that isolating the former president would mean alienating the Dalits.

The party's Dalit Morcha has openly supported Mr Laxman and demanded action against the food and civil supplies minister, Mr Shanta Kumar, for making objectionable remarks about him.

Their main charge against Mr Kumar is that he demanded Mr Laxman's expulsion during the party's national executive meeting and even told so to the media. A team of Dalit MPs has asked the new party chief, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, to stop such remarks being made.

The first to fire the salvo was the Dalit Morcha chief and Rajya Sabha MP from Uttar Pradesh, Mr Ram Nath Kovid. He said Mr Kumar had made objectionable remarks against Mr Laxman though 159 of the 160 people who attended the BJP's national executive meeting did not support him.

Mr Kumar is reportedly hurt at the treatment which Mr Laxman meted out to him in dealing with the crisis in Himachal Pradesh when he was party president. He had reportedly told Mr Kumar to ask his supporters in the state Assembly not to create trouble for the chief minister, Mr PK Dhumal. He had also warned of strict disciplinary action if the dissidents did not fall in line.

Mr Kovid refused to go into inter-party dynamics but said the party would take note of Mr Kumar's remarks. No party member should say anything that goes against the official stand, he added.

He said it was wrong to create the impression that it all happened as Mr Laxman is a Dalit. The same thing could have happened to a person of another caste as an attempt to malign the BJP and not Mr Laxman had been made.

Mr Kovid said he would not question the right of a national executive member to air his views in the national executive. But by doing so, the party would send the wrong message.

At a BJP Dalit morcha conclave in Bhopal (March 18-20), many delegates reportedly said that the party should be extra cautious while dealing with Mr Laxman. They had feared that the party's Dalit base in Uttar Pradesh could shift to the BSP.

THE STATESMAN

# Bangaru Laxman plays the Dalit card, BJP looks for a face-saver

YOU SAID IT by Laxman

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: While former BJP president Bangaru Laxman is making a strong behind-the-scenes attempt to get himself reinstated, the party leadership is re-considering the appointment of K. Jana Krishnamurthy. Mr Krishnamurthy was first described as acting president, but later as permanent president. Mr Krishnamurthy only needs the technical approval of the national council.



Bangaru Laxman

Now, rural development minister M. Venkaiah Naidu is being considered as a compromise candidate for the post of party president.

Party sources indicated on Tuesday that Mr Laxman was very unhappy at being abandoned and was playing the Dalit card to the hilt. He is conscious

of the fact that there are as many as 45 SC/ST MPs in the 182-strong BJP parliamentary party in the Lok Sabha. He has also apparently told some close associates that he might consider leaving the party if justice is not done to him.

The BJP's SC/ST members are clearly agitated and are saying they will find it difficult to face their voters. On March 16, 17 and 18, when the party's SC/ST morcha met in Bhopal for a training camp, its members strongly voiced their resentment at the treatment meted out to Mr Laxman. They demanded that he should either be reinstated immediately, or, like former defence minister George Fernandes, be given the promise of reinstatement should an inquiry find him innocent.



Media has no sense or responsibility. You chaps report all that the honourable minister says without verifying!

# Dalit welfare schemes have flopped, say Governors

Sunita Aron  
Lucknow, March 14

DALIT WELFARE remains a far cry, even as 400 Government schemes for their uplift are being implemented all over the country.

The Governors' Committee, reviewing lacunae in the implementation of such schemes for SC/STs in the country expressed amazement with their finding that the target group was unaware of most welfare schemes.

"The fault lies with the schemes and not their implementation," Maharashtra Governor Dr PC Alexander said. Refusing to share their conclusions with the media on the plea that they were bound by a code of conduct, Dr Alexander said, "We have to think of new schemes to plug the leakage and reduce the number of schemes." The Committee's recommendations could vary from one State to another and one region to another, though the focus would remain on areas with large SC/ST population, he said.

Dr Alexander heads the three-member Committee of Governors now on a visit to Uttar Pradesh. During their two-day visit to the State, they held dis-

cussions with the Chief Minister, his cabinet colleagues, heads of SC/ST Commission and several NGOs. The team also included Himachal Pradesh Governor Suraj Bhan.

Their next meeting will be held in Bangalore Dr Alexander said, though the final conclusions will be drawn at their Delhi meeting. The Committee is expected to submit its report in April next.

He refused to comment on the state of affairs in Uttar Pradesh where the poor performance of the special component plan has been pointed out by the Planning Commission in mid 1990's, and later by Suraj Bhan, as Governor of UP.

**No Mirzapur inquiry:** The Government on Tuesday categorically ruled out setting up of a high level inquiry into the "encounter" killing of 16 persons by police in Mirzapur on March 9. It said, the slain persons were Naxalites, even though their identity is shrouded in mystery, reports our correspondent.

A 14-year-old class IX student of a Mirzapur school was among the 16 Adivasis killed in the encounter. Even four days after the incident, police has failed to shed any light on the criminal background of the slain Adiva-

sis. An official spokesman told mediapersons on Tuesday that a magisterial inquiry, mandatory in a police firing, had already been ordered. "The Government does not favour any other inquiry to dispel claims of a fake encounter, as made by human rights organizations," he said. The Government would take action, if necessary, basing on the magisterial inquiry.

When asked how the police identified the slain persons to be Naxalites, he said the police had recovered Naxalite literature, arms and ammunition from the houses of those killed. The spokesman also said, no family member of the slain Naxalites had come forward to claim the bodies, except the father of the 14-year slain boy. Five of the other slain Naxalites had been identified as Deonath Kole, Lalvat Kole, Sheshmani, Tyagi Kole and Kalloo alias Jagjiwan.

Police teams have been sent to some districts in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to gather more information about those killed. The spokesman gave no credence to reports by some human rights organisations that some of the slain Adivasis had killed two Muslims in Ahraura and escaped with their DBBL gun, which was recovered by the police.

## Arun Gawli released from prison

Mumbai, March 14

GANGSTER ARUN Gawli was released from prison on March 12 after a Supreme Court verdict acquitting him in a case tried under Tada for possessing a sten gun in a notified area.

Gawli was acquitted on March 7 by the Supreme Court, which gave him the benefit of doubt because of a discrepancy in evidence regarding recovery of the weapon from a person at his instance from the hideout at Dagdi Chawl in Mumbai. His appeal was allowed by the apex court which set aside his sentence of seven years rigorous imprisonment and Rs 10,000 fine.

Gawli is facing few criminal cases in which he has already secured bail. In some other cases, he has secured discharge because of lack of evidence. In a case of the murder of hotelier-cum-businessman Arvind Dholakia, Gawli's lawyers moved an application seeking exemption on behalf of his client for the day. Gawli did not come to the court.

They said Gawli faced danger to his life from rival gangsters and had approached police for armed bodyguards because he had to frequently visit the courts to stand trial in criminal cases.

# Race and caste

By Andre Beteille

*Treating caste as a form of race is politically mischievous; what is worse, it is scientifically nonsensical.*

40-12  
10/3

**A**S A student of anthropology in Calcutta in the 1950s, I was recommended a book written by the well-known physical anthropologist, M.F. Ashley Montagu, some of whose other works we also had to study. The book to which I now refer was entitled "Man's Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race". Ashley Montagu had overstated his case somewhat, but the basic point he was making, that the widely-used concept of race was politically pernicious and scientifically anomalous, had come to be generally accepted among anthropologists by the middle of the 20th century.

Some anthropologists attended to the political mischief caused by the idea of race while others exposed its scientific ambiguities. The most notable among the latter was Franz Boas, widely regarded as the father of American anthropology. In his book, "Race, Language and Culture", he established conclusively with a wealth of empirical material the distinction between race which is a biological category with physical markers and social groupings based on language, religion, nationality, style of life or status. Boas's conclusion may be regarded as the settled opinion on the subject among professional anthropologists the world over.

"Race, Language and Culture", published in 1940, was the culmination of systematic and painstaking research by two or three generations of anthropologists. In the 19th century, when anthropology was still largely an amateur pursuit, the concept of race was widely and loosely used to cover virtually every kind of social grouping. One read about the Aryan race, the Semitic race and the Irish race. The influential French writer Count Gobineau even proposed that the different social classes in France were composed of different races. In fact, race and class were linked together in Europe even before attempts were made to link race with caste in India. Pseudo-scientific theories of race abounded in late 19th and early 20th century in Europe and America. They made no small contribution to Hitler's disastrous racial policies in Germany. Although the English, the French and the Americans adopted a self-consciously virtuous attitude after 1945,

they too produced an abundance of pseudo-scientific theories of race before World War II.

At about the same period of time, the Indian Civil Service counted a fair number of amateur anthropologists in its ranks. Some of them have left behind valuable accounts of the tribes and castes in India. Others took an interest in race that at times amounted to an obsession. The obsessive ones found evidence of race wherever they looked. Their main confusion was between race and language, and they wrote freely about the 'Aryan race' and the 'Dravidian race'. Some treated Hindus and Muslims as belonging to different races, and others expressed similar views about the upper and the lower castes. These views, based on a confusion of categories, are now regarded as worthless from the scientific point of view.

It is not as if there was no serious scientific effort by the ICS anthropologists to study the racial composition of the Indian population. Several of them attended to the problem with patience and care, combining the study of physical features with that of social customs. The most notable was Sir Herbert Risley who produced a comprehensive classification of the races of India into seven types. But the principal 'racial types' in his classification — Aryan, Dravidian, Aryo-Dravidian and Mongolo-Dravidian — were linguistic or regional categories in disguise and not racial categories at all. The subsequent classification by B.S. Guha, made in connection with the census of 1931, was less ambitious, for it did not speak of 'racial types' but only of 'racial elements' in the population of the country.

In the mid-1950s when I was a student of anthropology, most anthropologists had lost interest in the racial classification of the Indian population. Although there were many different racial elements in it, it was difficult, if not impossible, to sort them out into distinct racial groups. In the 1970s, I took some initiative on behalf of Oxford University Press to update

Guha's work on racial elements. I approached a number of physical anthropologists, but they either declined or said that they would do it but failed to deliver. I am now convinced that identifying the races in the population of India will be an exercise in futility.

Despite all the hard work done by anthropologists from Boas onward, the idea of race dies hard in the popular imagination. That is understandable. What is neither understandable nor excusable is the attempt by the United Nations to revive and expand the idea of race, ostensibly to combat the many forms of social and political discrimination prevalent in the world. It is sad but true that many forms of invidious discrimination do prevail in the contemporary world. But to assimilate or even relate them all to 'racial discrimination' will be an act of political and moral irresponsibility.

Not content with condemning racism and racial discrimination, the U.N. now wants to take on 'racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance'. It has in its wisdom decided to expand the meeting of racial discrimination to accommodate exclusion or preference 'based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin'. In doing so it is bound to give a new lease of life to the old and discredited notion of race current a hundred years ago. By flying in the face of the distinctions between race, language and culture, it is seeking to undo the conclusions reached by the researches of several generations of anthropologists.

Interested parties within and outside the U.N. would like to bring caste discrimination in general and the practice of untouchability in particular within the purview of racial discrimination. The practice of untouchability is indeed reprehensible and must be condemned by one and all; but that does not mean that we should now begin to regard it as a form of racial discrimination. The Scheduled Castes of India taken together are no more a race than are the Brahmins taken

together. Every social group cannot be regarded as a race simply because we want to protect it against prejudice and discrimination.

In the past, some groups claimed superior rights on the ground that they belonged to the Aryan race or the Teutonic race. The anthropologists rejected such claims on two grounds: first, on the ground that within the same human species no race is superior to any other; but also on the ground that there is no such thing as an Aryan race or a Teutonic race. We cannot throw out the concept of race by the front door when it is misused for asserting social superiority and bring it in again through the back door to misuse it in the cause of the oppressed. The metaphor of race is a dangerous weapon whether it is used for asserting white supremacy or for making demands on behalf of disadvantaged groups.

If discrimination against disadvantaged castes can be defined as a form of racial discrimination, there is no reason why discrimination, real or alleged, against religious or linguistic minorities cannot be phrased in exactly the same terms. The Muslims and other religious minorities will claim that they too, and not just backward castes, are victims of racial discrimination. The initiative taken by the U.N. is bound to encourage precisely that kind of claim.

The U.N. initiative will open up a Pandora's box of allegations of racial discrimination throughout the world. The latitudinarian attitude of the U.N. will encourage religious and other 'ethnic' minorities to make allegations of racial discrimination not only in India, but everywhere. The Catholics in Northern Ireland can claim that they too are victims of racial discrimination. The French Canadians, whose grievances are real enough, can also make the same claim. One can multiply examples from every corner of the world. By treating caste discrimination as a form of racial discrimination and, by implication, caste as a form of race, the U.N. is turning its back on established scientific opinion. One can only guess under what kind of pressure it is doing so. Treating caste as a form of race is politically mischievous; what is worse, it is scientifically nonsensical.

THE HINDU

10 MAR 2001



# India to block efforts to include caste in racism meet agenda

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, Feb. 28:** With the government adamant on blocking efforts to include caste in the agenda of the world conference against racism and racial discrimination scheduled to be held at Durban in South Africa later this year, a non-government organisation is organising a four-day conference in New Delhi to highlight the issue.

The National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, in a major exercise to galvanise support for the cause, is organising the global conference against racism and caste-based discrimination. The conference is expected to be attended by more than 100 delegations from various countries. It will also include victims of caste and other racial discrimination, professionals and activists from various human rights organisations.

The convener of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights, Mr Martin Macwan, told reporters on Tuesday that the government was blocking the entry of some of the foreign participants in the conference. "The government should have accepted it (the inclusion of

caste as a form of racial discrimination) with grace and an open mind. It consistently maintained that caste was outside the purview of the conference. Opposing it has only proved counter-productive and lowered the country's image before the international community," Prof. Sukhdev Thorat of Jawaharlal Nehru University said.

The government representatives and the NGOs clashed at the recently held Asian preparatory conference in Iran. The preparatory conference took place ahead of the world summit scheduled for September.

"We urge upon the government to address the issue rather than oppose it," Mr Macwan said. Justifying the "internationalisation" of the issue, he said, "If the government itself can take up labour and gender issue to the global fora, why this hue and cry over our raising a problem affecting 90 per cent population."

The Indian government had decided to put up a strong defence against the attempt by certain groups to include caste discrimination in the agenda of the world conference.

- 1 MAR 2001

THE ASIAN AGE

# Dalits angry over inability to register caste

BY RAJEEV KHANNA

New Delhi, Feb. 28: Various dalit groups are up in arms on the issue of ongoing Census, alleging that the dalits have not got a fair deal in the exercise. They are upset over the fact that the dalits, who have migrated from their native places, are unable to register their castes and tribes in the census on account of segregated lists being provided to the enumerators.

They alleged that the list of castes provided to the enumerators at a particular place does not include all the castes of dalits.

Hence, a dalit from one state might as well not be recognised as a dalit in the other.

Citing the example of President K.R. Narayanan, whose caste was not covered under the list provided to the enumerators in Delhi despite Mr Narayanan being the first citizen of India, the dalit leaders are airing the apprehension that this way the population of dalits will be suppressed.

Talking to *The Asian Age*, the chairman of All India Confederation of SC/ST Organisations, Mr Ram Raj, pointed out, "The enumerators have no list in case of Scheduled Tribes.

Hence, in case of Delhi alone a large number of migrants from other states who actually fall into the category of SCs or STs will just be recorded as belonging to the general category."

On the other hand, various Christian organisations, including the CBCI and the AICC, are fighting for recognition of dalits other than Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists as SCs although this has not received widespread support within the dalit community with leaders having mass base not convinced of the Christian viewpoint.

The executive secretary of the CBCI Commission for SCs, STs

and BCs, Father S. Lour-duswamy, feared, "This will establish that dalits belong to only these three religions. It will put an official seal on the matter. This is in violation of various articles of the Constitution as all the Scheduled Castes should get the privileges and safeguards."

He said, "We believe that religion and social structure are two separate things and hence we have asked people to get themselves enumerated as Christians as well as SCs. Since we have got no response to the legal notice served to the census commissioner, we are going to

file a case before the court of law. We are also considering filing of a public interest litigation on the lines that dalit has no freedom to embrace any religion."

However, constitutional expert and senior lawyer in the Supreme Court G.L. Sanghi differed on the issue and said, "As a matter of law Christian and caste are contradictory. If the Christians want such a provision, they should get it from the Parliament or the Constitution." He said that there is even an old Supreme Court judgment on the matter of who can make claims of being a Scheduled caste.

THE ASIAN AGE  
THE ASIAN AGE

1 MAR 2001

# Christians to fight for Dalit status

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 23. — Christian leaders have threatened to go to court with demand that the Census should recognise the Dalit status of Christians of schedule caste origin.

They will, however, not boycott the Census.

Christian leaders have written to the President, Prime Minister and the Census Commissioner, highlighting their apprehensions and demands. They may also launch an agitation for their "fundamental right".

But a census official said: "We are strictly adhering to the constitutional provisions according to which a member of scheduled caste can be either Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist. If a person of a schedule caste converts to Christianity or any other religion, he loses his SC status."

Since the enumeration process has already begun, the no such complaints will

## COPS STOP CONVERSION

BHUBANESWAR, Feb. 23. — Balasore police reportedly asked six members of a tribal family in Nilgiri to defer their plans of converting to Christianity till the reason for the proposed conversion is probed.

Orissa Freedom of Religion Act says a person, who wishes to convert, has to submit an application to the district magistrate expressing his intention to convert to other religion. The district magistrate will then ask police to investigate into the reasons before granting permission. — SNS

be entertained, he said. "The census commissioner will soon issue an official statement."

Archbishop of Delhi, Vincent Concessao, today said: "In the manual form for Census 2001, question 8 states that schedule

castes can be only among Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists". He said this violates Articles 14, 15 and 25 of the Constitution, denying freedom of conscience, faith and equality among the citizens.

"This also puts into question schedule caste in other religions who are denied their schedule caste status" he said.

The Archbishop said: "Why should a schedule cast citizen be forced to choose between these three religions only. What happens if he belongs to Muslim or Christian community?"

Doubting the motive of the census, he said: "In a multi-religious society to reduce the country into six religions is not correct."

"We're planning a mass movement for this cause and are also thinking of taking legal remedies.

"We have the support of the mainstream churches, the Christian community in general and all secular groups for our cause... (but) we do not intend to boycott the census."

THE STATESMAN

24 FEB 2001

# Kerala may be in for caste-based ballots

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, Feb. 22. - The Kerala elections will witness a high percentage of caste-based voting this year, eroding the legacy of political polling in the state to a large extent.

Caste organisations like SNDP, with strong backward class support, have already finalised their positions. The SNDP declared - send in the maximum number of Ezhavas and support the cause of making Mr VS Achuthanandan the next chief minister.

If the CPI-M and allies win, Mr Achuthanandan will be the first chief minister from backward class to lead a Left Front government.

This open declaration of the SNDP compelled the Nair Service Society to review its earlier stance of equi-distance between the rival fronts.

NSS has historic reasons not to support the Left and has developed bitterness with Congress and allies. In the last elections, they made decisions on a case-to-case basis, supporting candidates based on their relationship with NSS. This time, NSS would be forced to take a statewide political position.

The CPI-M and allies, though happy with SNDP's stance, are also worried about the possible backlash. Most of the Ezhavas have been anyhow voting for the Left and SNDP's push would be of great use. At the same time, the Left does not want a reversal in Nair strongholds.

The caste conscious Nairs are upset with the projection of Mr Achuthanandan as the next chief minister. The Marxists never had a chief minister from backward classes and excitement caused in Ezhava camp is counter productive in Nair circles. The Nairs would rather prefer Mr AK Antony as the next chief minister than Mr Achuthanandan.

THE STATESMAN

1971

# Quake fails to give caste system the jolt

By Bharat Desai  
The Times of India News Service

AHMEDABAD: Did you hear it said that the killer quake which struck Kutch was a great leveller? If so, think again. The devastating earthquake of January 26 flattened parts of Gujarat, but it failed to make any dent in a caste-ridden society.

In fact, caste has begun to cast its shadow over the long-term rehabilitation of the quake survivors. Not only are families coming forth to adopt a boy or a girl of a particular caste, but officials say they are facing problems with the rehabilitation of affected villages at particular locations because people belonging to different castes do not want to stay in the same community. What is more, some of the proposals received by the Gujarat government from childless couples and other families—who would like to adopt a boy or a girl orphaned by the disaster—sound strangely like matrimonial ads. 'Preferred, a Patel boy in the age group of 1 to 2 years', says one. Another proposal from a

Navrangpura couple with four daughters states, 'Boy up to 2 years, preferably Jain'. Similar preferences have been expressed for Brahmin boys. Officials say it is striking that "while all caste-



THE AFTERMATH

based preferences have come from upper caste families, none of the families which want to adopt a girl have indicated caste preferences'. However, the official co-ordinating the efforts

for adoption, S.K. Nanda, claimed that "those who have stated their caste preferences are only a handful". But when *The Times of India* made inquiries from some Ahmedabad families—who have not put down their preferences on paper—many did admit that they would prefer the orphan to be from their own caste.

"It would not have mattered so much to us, but the child will get greater acceptance in our extended family and community if he belongs to our caste," explained a father who already has two daughters and now wants to adopt a boy. He did not want to be identified.

The state government is now inclined to hand over these orphans to institutions which have proposed to set up rehabilitation centres in and around Kutch rather than to allow families living in remote areas in Gujarat or in other states to adopt them. "This way, it will be easy for us to monitor the progress and well-being of the orphans. It could be that these centres may be integrated with homes for orphans as well as old women, so that there is a family atmosphere," said an official.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 FEB 2001

# MERIT, NOT CASTE

HF 15  
18/2

**I**HAD, WHAT you might call, a sheltered childhood. At no stage did my parents tell me what my caste was, nor did it seem at all important. Admittedly, this may have had something to do with the fact that I grew up in Bombay, which is less concerned with caste and ethnicity than the rest of India. But at the age of nine, I went to a boarding school in North India (in Ajmer) and even here the only caste-oriented distinction we made was between Rajputs (who were more interested in cycle-polo than books) and the rest of us.

In 1979, when I took my first full-time job, I was horrified to find that the company I worked for (a publishing group that is liberal in most other respects) wanted me to fill out a form that asked for my religion and caste. Full of educated middle-class righteousness, I proudly scrawled 'none of your business' in the religion column and 'outlawed by the Constitution of India' in the space meant for caste. (This bravado was partly born out of necessity; I genuinely did not know what my caste was.)

My attitude was suited to those times. Political scientists had spent two decades documenting the influence of caste on electoral politics before admitting that if the 1971 general election proved anything, it was that caste did not matter. All of India voted as one. In 1977, the only divide was geographical: the north voted for

Janata, the south for the Congress. In 1980, Mrs Gandhi's vote bank cut across caste lines and in 1984, the mandate was so comprehensive that it was hard to identify a caste that had voted against Rajiv Gandhi.

All this changed in the 1980s. In the post-Mandal phase, caste returned to the centre-stage of Indian politics. The old middle ground between the Congress and the BJP vanished. As Janata died, its place was taken up by parties devoted entirely to caste: the Samajwadi party for Yadavs and backwards; the Bahujan Samaj Party for Dalits etc.

At least in north India, politics came to revolve more around caste than either leadership or ideology. If Laloo Yadav had the Yadavs, then Nitish Kumar had the Kurmis. If the *thakurs* had become disillusioned with VP Singh, then perhaps they would turn to the Samajwadi Party. The Congress would lose out because the upper castes had defected to the BJP while the Harijans had been stolen away by the BSP. And so on.

Almost all of this has to do with reservation. The big change in north Indian politics came about after VP Singh re-wrote the Janata Dal's centrist agenda in caste terms, turning what had been a liberal alternative to dynasty into an up-market — if ineffectual — version of the Bahujan Samaj Party. It didn't do the Raja much good but as he says, his agenda won even if he lost. From that point

on, caste resumed its place at the centre of Indian politics.

You need only to read the stories about the gaps in the census mechanism to realise that the only issue that obsesses critics of the procedure is caste. Why isn't President KR Narayanan counted as a Dalit, for instance? Well, basically because the community he belongs to may be listed as a scheduled caste in Kerala but doesn't appear on the list of scheduled castes in Delhi.

Once upon a time, we would have argued that this was a good thing. After all, the founding fathers of our nation wanted a society in which caste and creed were of no consequence. Even the reservation for Harijans was only a time-bound measure. The idea was to give them a few decades to catch up with everybody else before going on to an egalitarian society. Mr Narayanan's most distinctive characteristic is not that he is a Dalit. It is that he is a scholar and a statesman. It should not matter that census enumerators do not recognise him as a Dalit. It should be a source of pride; a sign of how far we have travelled since 1947.

But the problem is that it *does* matter. And it matters only because of reservation. The sad reality of modern India is that we are becoming a society where merit plays second fiddle to caste. Now, *everybody* wants reservation.

Five years ago, so-called Dalit

## COUNTERPOINT



VIR SANGHVI

The big change in north Indian politics came about after VP Singh re-wrote the Janata Dal's centrist agenda in caste terms, turning what had been a liberal alternative to dynasty into an up-market, if ineffectual, version of the Bahujan Samaj Party

Christians demanded reservations. They organised a *dharna* and a relay fast, which was inaugurated by Mother Teresa. (Later, when the issue blew up, the canny old dear claimed, straight-faced, that she thought that they were demanding world peace. This despite the whole issue being explained to her by the organisers and big 'We Demand Reservation' banners being displayed on the site.)

The Christian protest grew so vociferous and so tasteless that I began to wonder if they had hired BL Sharma 'Prem' as their Vulgarly Consultant. 'Dalit' Christians re-enacted the crucifixion of Christ for press cameras and claimed that the denial of reservation provided yet another instance of religious discrimination. When people pointed out that for centuries, missionaries had attacked Hinduism for its caste system and had extolled the virtues of Christianity as a religion where all men are equal, the protestors claimed that this did not matter — they had their own Dalits, anyway.

I mention the Christian example to show that it is not just the Mulayams and Laloos of the cowbelt who have turned caste into the central issue of Indian politics. All parties and nearly all communities are almost as guilty. The last Prime Minister of India who did not give a damn about caste was Rajiv Gandhi. (I would have added Inder Gujral to the list if he had last-

ed longer.)

My favourite Rajiv Gandhi story — told to me by one who was present at the time — concerns him showing a speech to his close aides. In true Rajiv fashion, he had included a para about creating an India where caste did not matter. The countries in attendance were fulsome in their praise; ML Fotedar was the most complimentary. "Oh, really", said Rajiv. "If you agree with all this then why are you always sending people to me saying things like 'He is a Kurmi so we should give him a ticket' or 'We need to appease the *brahmins*'?"

Since those days, all Prime Ministers and all parties have been guided by caste. You cannot even urge them to do otherwise in the post-Mandal scenario. Worse still, the situation that our grandfathers dreamt of — when we would all be just Indians, not *baniyas*, *brahmins*, *thakurs* or whatever — will now never come to pass. Because reservation now counts for so much, everybody *has* to know his caste; his children's educational and professional future could depend on it.

At this rate, not only will we never create the egalitarian, cohesive, all-inclusive India that our founding fathers visualised but we will face further demands for reservation. It isn't just the so-called Dalit Christians. Women want reserved constituencies in Parliament (even though they form 50 per cent of the electorate)

apparently on the grounds that women will not vote for other women (if they did, there would be no need for reservation) unless they are forced to do so. The Muslims have at least as good a case as Dalits for reservation: they face appalling discrimination and the overwhelming majority are poor.

If all this goes on — and it shows no signs of abating — then we risk becoming a deeply divided society where only caste, religion, gender and ethnicity matter, not merit.

The only solution is the tough one — which means no political party will take it. We must end all Mandal-type reservation. And the existing SC/ST reservation — which seems to have only helped the creamy layer anyway — should be phased out within the next five years. As for those who want further reservation, we must hold firm and tell them that a new India will be built on merit, not quota.

And incidentally, I did eventually find out what my caste is. I am a Gujarati *vaaniya*. It is not a category that entitles you to reserved job or a special seat in Parliament. But when an earthquake devastates our state, we ignore the corrupt politicians who okayed the collapsing buildings and steer clear of the quota-based bureaucracy. Instead, we get on with the job and rebuild Gujarat our way — on the basis of merit, not reservation.

# 13/2 Concocting enemies 9/8

Ensure egalitarianism, not casteism, in relief work

**T**HE list of "anti-national activities" in this country gets longer. A new addition has come to light in the rubble of Kutch thanks to Nalin Bhat. He is a senior Bharatiya Janata Party leader and it is a wonder how even in the midst of death and catastrophe, and with his heavy responsibilities as chairman of the state electricity board, he manages to keep a sharp eye open for "anti-national" mischief. But he does and the method he uses is, unfortunately, quite common. The easy way to spot trouble is to start with the preconceived notion that anything the minorities do is suspicious. So Bhat decides it is "anti-national" for a journalist to report and, by implication, for a minority group to protest about unfair treatment in relief operations. It does not matter that the report is accurate and can help remedy possible shortcomings in relief operations by bringing them to wider notice. The mere writing of such a report offends Bhat and he takes action. He prevents the journalist, an *Indian Express* correspondent, from filing any copy from the Bhuj media centre and he tries to justify this egregious act of censorship later on by saying Kutch is a sensitive border district.

If only Gujarat's political leaders were more sensitive to real social problems instead of concocting enemies. Someone should ask Nalin Bhat what he thinks of caste segregation and prejudice in the Kutch town of Adhoi also reported in this paper. For all the heightened concern that he and others express for the nation, they have not been

heard to condemn caste practices such as those observed among the quake affected in Adhoi. Those who perpetuate caste differences and discriminate between people on grounds of caste or religion do terrible harm to the social fabric of this country. It is deplorable that separate kitchens have to be set up for Dalits, Patels and Brahmins and that Dalits have to sleep in the cold in the open because the upper castes object to sharing tented space with them and, being powerful, get the first choice of tents.

Social prejudices are not going to disappear even in the midst of common suffering. Therefore, the Gujarat government should take special steps to ensure that there is no discrimination, no double standards, no false priorities in the relief operations. Money and material have been pouring into the state from official and private sources, corporates, individuals and charities. Many donors will monitor the use of their funds directly. Many others are not in a position to do so. Taxpayers must be assured that funds will be efficiently and fairly spent. It is essential for the government to prepare a rehabilitation policy and to make it public as soon as possible. This has been found a necessary and useful practice in other areas of major disasters such as Latur in Maharashtra. A declared policy will help in the coordination of relief work and of the rehabilitation plans of the public and private sector. The people of Gujarat ought to know exactly what the government is doing today and planning to do tomorrow.

INDIAN EXPRESS

12 FEB 2001

# You thought death was the great leveller? Ask these Dalits

■ In village after ravaged village, lower castes are kept out of tents and pushed to margins of relief while upper castes blame them for 'their shameless begging'

**MILIND GHATWAI & JIGNESH VASAVADA**  
ADHOI, RAPAR (GUJARAT), FEB 10

THE earthquake has killed thousands, razed every conceivable structure in the nation's most prosperous state but hasn't made even a dent in the caste barrier.

In the Kutch town of Adhoi (pop: 10,000), over 400 have been killed, not one house stands intact but rows and rows of tents lie empty. Reason: Lower-caste residents, including Dalits, are braving the night chill in shelters they have rigged up with bamboo poles and tattered bedsheets. For, the upper-caste landowners, the Patels and Jadejas,

refuse to live alongside them.

Unfazed, Army personnel are pitching more tents hoping that sooner rather than later, villagers will move in.

But the villagers aren't ready so used they are to living in segregated colonies for ages. "If we force them to stay together, it might become a law and order problem," admits Sanjay Kumar Singh, Deputy Commandant of the Rapid Action Force unit here. That's not a surprise since before the quake, in this Patel-dominated town, they lived in two different worlds.

So today even the relief kitchens are separate. Swami Muktanand of the Sureshdham Ashram

came to the rescue of the Dalits by starting a community kitchen for them. For the Patels, his volunteers have set up another kitchen that is 100 feet away. The Swami says he didn't have an option but to give in to "local sentiments."

The administration knows how delicate the situation is. Already there have been instances when it became apparent that caste skirmishes might break out over relief.

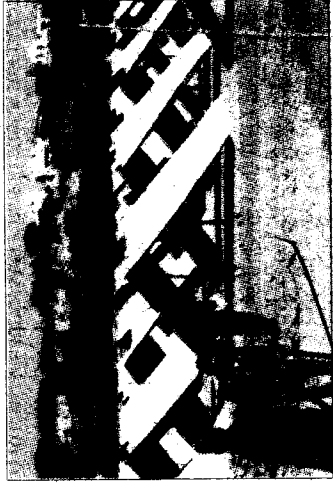
Pravin Bharwad, a member of a lower caste, alleges the Patels have diverted relief vehicles to their localities, asking them to avoid going to the "disease-ridden people." His fellow caste member, an angry Madhoji Dahamji Bharwad, says: "If

they don't want to live with us, why should we bend?"

"It's a big problem. What can we do? This is what they have learnt from their forefathers and have been following it for ages. The divide simply can't vanish in a fortnight," says B. S. Joshi, a Brahmin resident. He says the communities worked together when it came to removing the dead and the debris, but when they found the natural calamity would force them to dine and stay together, they said no.

Villagers suggest the only way the administration can make them move into tents is to segregate

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



Will someone please move in?

INDIAN EXPRESS

11 FEB 2001



# Caste war in carnage belt

FROM OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Patna, Feb. 9: Two members of the CPI(ML) Liberation were killed today in a group clash at Sikrahata village in Bhojpur district, reviving the protracted war between Ranbir Sena supporters and CPI(ML) activists.

Armed Sena cadre attacked a group of backward caste members in the village in Etari block this morning when the latter were returning from Muftibazar. The attackers fired a volley of shots on a group of five men. Two of the five belonged to the backward Benia caste and the others to the Mahato caste.

Two of those fired upon — Ramkumar Gupta and Lakhanlal Gupta — died on the spot. The others were rushed to hospital. One of the injured, who was rushed to the Patna Medical College, was said to be in a critical condition.

Police sources said the Ranbir Sena had reignited caste passions to make their presence felt in Etari block.

"We have been the target because we are fighting the feudal mindset of the Sena activists in the district who have unleashed a reign of terror in the district with the co-operation of the ruling party," said Prabhat Kumar, CPI(ML) office secretary in Patna.

Ever since the Mianpur massacre in July last year, which led to the arrest of many hardcore members of the organisation, the Sena has been maintaining a low profile. It has been content with sporadic killings of its Marxist enemies in Ara.

Sources said the Sena had recently held a secret meet in Danapur and decided to strengthen its organisation.

THE TELEGRAPH

10 FEB 2001

# Keep Dalits in the fold

MUKUL KESAVAN

9-10-11  
14/11

Up to 1947, several kinds of communities (not necessarily defined by religion) were given reserved political representation in India: Muslims, women, Europeans, Dalits and so on. With two exceptions (Dalits and Anglo-Indians) such reservations were abolished after independence. Communal representation, it was argued, had been divisive. Hindu polemicists who routinely accuse the state of pampering Muslims would be incensed by any move to restore reservations for Muslims. Given this republican allergy to communal reservations, it comes as a surprise that the Constitution has been operating a system of Hindu reservation for half a century.

Dalit reservation is Hindu reservation. The only Indians eligible for scheduled caste reservations are those whom the census records as Hindu or members of religious communities that are treated by the Constitution as Hindu by a kind of default: Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains. Muslims and Christians are excluded.

The reasoning behind this distinction is that untouchability (the rule of thumb used to define scheduled castes) is peculiar to the Hindu caste system. Dalits suffer disabilities because caste Hindus consign them to an existence beyond the Hindu pale. Since Dalit reservation is meant to redress this uniquely Hindu wrong, the question of Muslims and Christians sharing in this reservation does not arise.

This is a deceptively simple argument. The injustice that Dalit reservations address is a history of degradation and deprivation, a denial of education and access to employment, a vicious segregation, a denial of the physical space and basic amenities that make for honourable living. Dalit reservations in the domains of politics, academics and employment try precisely to make up for this loss of opportunity in the secular domain: jobs, political power, and education. When well-meaning upper-caste Hindus campaigned to open temples to "untouchables" as a way of expressing their concern for them, they missed the point. Dalits wanted action that acknowledged their humanity, not their Hindu-ness.

Now consider this. A Dalit, sick of upper-caste discrimination, decides like Ambedkar to formally renounce his Hindu identity in protest. Unlike Ambedkar, who converted to Buddhism, this hypothetical Dalit converts to Christianity. He is automatically disqualified from every kind of reservation. Why? Are we to assume that by becoming Christian he has emancipated himself materially, has transcended epochs of exploitation? He may not want to worship in Hindu temples any more, nor sup with Hindus, but he still needs access to education, employment and political representation. He is denied them because the Constitution does not allow Christians of Dalit origin to apply for reservation.

If this denial is based on the dodgy argument that Christianity and Islam are



**“A Dalit, sick of upper caste discrimination, decides like Ambedkar to formally renounce his Hindu identity. Unlike Ambedkar, who converted to Buddhism, this hypothetical Dalit converts to Christianity. He is automatically disqualified from every kind of reservation. Why?”**

egalitarian faiths and therefore their adherents have no need of reservation, why does this not apply to *mazhabi* Sikhs, who belong to a faith as fiercely egalitarian as any? Because Sikhs are considered Hindus for constitutional purposes. It isn't much of an answer but it is the only one on offer. It is based on the curious assumption that religions of "Indic" origin are basic-

ly Hindu.

The *sangh parivar* lives by this assumption. This should surprise no one. That the Constitution shares this assumption and makes it operational in the business of scheduled caste reservation should raise a few eyebrows. Seen from this point of view, scheduled caste reservations could be construed by a "Muslim"

polemicist as a gigantic inducement held out by the state to keep Dalits Hindu.

But let us, for the sake of argument, accept that the reasoning behind the exclusion of Muslims and Christians from scheduled caste reservation is sound. Let us accept that scheduled caste reservation exists to compensate one set of Hindus for their historical oppression by another set of Hindus. This raises another question: why should Muslims and Christians help pay this compensation? Why should they share in the costs of compensating scheduled caste Hindus when they can't share in the benefits of reservation? That they are made to share in the costs is self-evident: when, from the general pool of jobs, academic places and electoral seats, a percentage is reserved for Dalits (defined as Hindus) they become unavailable to everyone, not just upper caste Hindus.

Let me illustrate this: a teaching position, say, a readership in modern Indian history, is reserved for Dalit candidates. A Christian can't apply even though he has no responsibility for the condition of Dalits in this country. So he is made to suffer a loss of opportunity because of something one lot of Hindus did to another. That doesn't seem fair. Perhaps a "Christian" rhetorician could argue that there should be a Hindu quota of opportunity from which the Dalit share should be subtracted, given how keen the Constitution seems to be to keep Dalit reservations Hindu.

Apart from discussing the injustices internal to the mechanism of reservation, I'm trying to make a larger point. "Hindu" ideologues consistently argue that the Indian state panders to minorities, pampers Muslims and generally goes out of its way to accommodate exceptions to a republican norm (such as monogamy) when the sensibilities of minority communities are at stake.

By demonstrating how, in the matter of scheduled caste reservation, the Constitution makes exceptional arrangements (extensive reservation) for beneficiaries specifically defined as Hindu, I want to show that this stereotype of the minority-loving, Hindu-baiting state doesn't fit the reality of the republic.

I am not seriously trying to press for a Hindu quota out of which Dalit reservations should be subtracted; I am trying to explain that in a complex, plural and unequal society such as ours, the state can't always appear to be even-handed, or make the assumption that one size fits all, or always apply a principle uniformly and consistently. Every attempt to make special or exceptional arrangements is vulnerable to the charge of bias or favouritism.

Muslims and Christians could (as I have shown) plausibly argue that scheduled caste reservations discriminate against them or, conversely, favour Hindus. That they haven't made this argument is greatly to their credit. The next time you hear a muscular Hindu working himself into a lather about how soft the state is on Muslims, how it subsidizes *haj* pilgrims or tolerates polygamy, you could tell him that.

# Delhi missive for Dalits and women judges

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, Jan. 3: The Centre has written to state governments and Union Territories to submit a list of suitable candidates from among the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women for appointment as judges in high courts and the Supreme Court.

The move follows pressure from President K.R. Narayanan and the parliamentary standing committee on the issue.

The letter from the Union law ministry has requested chief ministers and chief justices of high courts to "identify" persons from the SC/ST, OBC and women cate-

gories and hand on the list, law ministry sources said. The entire exercise is along the lines of the President's view on the matter.

The letter is significant in the wake of the parliamentary committee openly accusing the Supreme Court in its report of "practising untouchability" and Narayanan's note on a file. The committee's criticism came after the apex court refused to divulge information on the number of SC/ST and OBC judges in the court.

Narayanan put a note on the file pertaining to the appointment of judges that there were "eligible" candidates among the back-

ward categories and women, which the Chief Justice of India should keep in mind while making recommendations for the appointment.

The then Chief Justice, M.M. Puncchi, did not act on the file as his term was coming to an end and the present Chief Justice, A.S. Anand, declared during the golden jubilee celebration of the Indian judiciary that merit alone should matter in the appointment of judges.

The parliamentary standing committee report followed the remarks of the Chief Justice at the golden jubilee celebration.

Law ministry sources said the

government did not mention any quota for these categories or whether there would be sub-categories within the quota in the letters dashed off to the chief ministers and high court chief justices, but was "keen" that more judges from these categories should be appointed.

The law department said Articles 124 and 217 of the Constitution, which deal with the appointment of judges, do not provide for reservation for any caste or class and the law commission also did not make any recommendation for caste, class or gender-based reservation in the judiciary.

According to the government's estimates, there are about 10 women and 20 SC/ST judges among the 610-strong judges in various high.

"Therefore, the government is keen that weaker sections are represented in the judiciary and that the state governments and the chief justices of all high courts who recommend candidates for judgeship in their respective high courts recommend suitable persons from these categories to the Centre," law ministry sources said.

In its second report, the 31-member parliamentary committee said: "It is abundantly clear

that the SC/STs have dismal representation in the judiciary and other equally important wing of the state either in the administrative side or in the judicial side".

The committee also criticised the apex court of "practising untouchability". The committee said there was no bar on caste, class and gender-based reservations in the judiciary and certainly there was no constitutional bar.

The Centre has also received representations from several states, particularly Tamil Nadu, requesting it to provide for the appointment of judges from the SC/ST and OBC categories.