

Dalit lynchings blame on cops

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Chandigarh, Dec. 9: A Haryana government report on the October lynching of five Dalits in Jhajjar has indicted police for failing to prevent the killings.

The government has decided to chargesheet the errant policemen.

After the Dalits were lynched for allegedly skinning a cow, the government had ordered an inquiry on October 18. Rohtak divisional commissioner R.R. Banswal was told to submit a report within a month. Later, on his request, the government extended the deadline to December 5.

In his 383-page report, Banswal, recounting in details the events that led to the lynching, has said the 145 personnel posted at the police post failed to gauge the situation's sensitivity and acted casually.

They were lax in allowing a mob to gather at the police post, the report says. Later, they failed to rush the Dalits to a safe place or a hospital.

According to the report, the policemen, instead of cracking down, tried pacifying the mob and pushing it back from the post.

None of the policemen had helmets, safety jackets, rubber bullets, teargas, floodlights or an ambulance at hand. Neither did they inform the Jhajjar district

commissioner or superintendent of police about the shortage.

Earlier, minister of state for home I.D. Swami had said in the Lok Sabha that the lynchings occurred over the mistaken impression that a cow was being slaughtered. Twenty-three people were arrested.

Banswal had kicked off his inquiry with advertisements in leading dailies, urging villagers and others to provide information, either personally or in writing.

He examined as witnesses the members of bereaved families, policemen and executive magistrates. Banswal also inspected the spot in Farukhnagar town where the cow was reportedly found dead. The workers of Rashid Ahmad, the contractor authorised to remove dead animals from the block, had lifted the cow from there.

Banswal also toured nearby villages.

Official records of verbal transmission messages and police deployment, the Dalits' and the cow's autopsy reports, medico-legal reports, case diaries, and various photographs obtained from the police and the people were examined.

Banswal also scanned the DC's and SP's reports on the incidents, sent to various authorities.

Conversion a damp squib

GC Shekhar

Chennai, December 6

**DALIT
ISSUE**

A MUCH-HYPED mass conversion by 3,000 Dalits to Christianity and Buddhism turned out to be a damp squib as less than 100 Dalits turned up for the conversion ceremony.

While the organizers blamed police clampdown on volunteers en route to the venue in a Chennai suburb, the cops said that no one had been stopped. "More than 40 vehicles carrying Dalits wanting to convert had been prevented from entering Chennai. Also the police threatened workers who were putting the pandal and a contractor who came with chairs for the ceremony," complained G Ranganathan,

president of the Scheduled Castes Forum, which organised the conversion event.

The ceremony was aimed at challenging the new Anti-Conversion law of the Jayalalithaa Government. Till 1 pm the function looked like any other evangelical meeting with pastors taking the mike and a huge banner proclaiming "whoever comes to me I will never drive away—John 8:37" welcoming the sprinkling of Dalit Christians from Tamil Nadu, Andhra and Karnataka.

As speaker after speaker lambasted the caste ridden

Hindu system as an abominable curse on hapless Dalits, who were the true sons of the soils, it appeared that there would be no conversion. A few organizers took a media team to the nearby highway to prove that Dalits were being stopped but the cops were checking all vehicles as part of Babri Masjid anniversary's security alert. And even the cops posted outside the meeting venue said that they were protecting the venue as some "anti-conversionists" had threatened to disrupt the meeting. Just as the media teams were about wind up about 100 people from Thiruvananthapuram district arrived and amidst cheers from the tired and hungry gathering Ranganathan announced that

the conversion ceremony would take place.

A talk with a handful of the neo-converts revealed they were the spouses of Dalit Christians and had decided to embrace Christianity only now.

Asked how the Government would view the event the local Revenue Divisional officer said that the organizers or priests had one month's time to intimate the authorities about the conversion under the new law. "We'll decide on further action only after this," the RDO said. But Ranganathan made clear neither he nor the Bishop had any plans to communicate the conversion to the RDO. "This conversion is purely voluntary and no law has been violated".

Caste politics key in Gujarat

BJP not banking on Hindutva hype

VHP leader
fired at

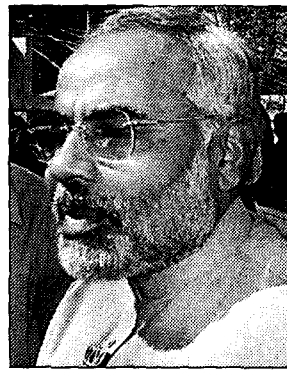
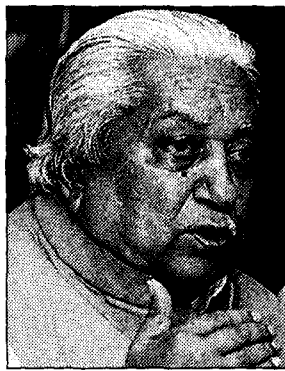
Rathin Das
Ahmedabad, December 3

THE BJP may claim to work the Hindutva hype to its advantage, but the party is clearly not banking on it to win, given the prevailing caste equations in the State.

Though the BJP was all along known to be a Patel-friendly party, this time the largest single group to get the party tickets is OBCs, followed by Patels, Kshatriyas, Brahmins and Banias. The Congress, too, has given the largest number of tickets to the OBCs — 57, but that is attributed to Sankersinh Vaghela's influence as well as the party's tradition.

Out of the total 182 seats, the BJP has given as many as 56 seats to the OBCs, while only 46 Patels have got the party tickets. The figure of BJP's OBC nominees is close to that of Congress candidates (57) in the same category, but the number of Patels in their list is five less than the BJP has fielded.

Political analysts believe that the OBCs outnumbering the Patels in BJP list has much more to do than the mere Modi-Keshubhai tus-



Keshubhai Patel & Narendra Modi
Realpolitik of caste equations

sle. The realpolitik compulsion of caste equations is supposed to be the main reason behind the BJP's OBC-friendly stance this time.

Explaining the reason behind this Hindutva party's sudden love for the OBCs, a senior Congress leader said, "All parties have now recognised the importance of OBCs. With growing awareness among the OBCs about their rights and voting strength, they have also started demanding a bigger share in power."

This argument explains BJP's compulsions as the OBC community is in decisive strength in certain ar-

reas of Saurashtra and north Gujarat where the party finds itself in a weak position due to the power and water crises. A BJP spokesman said it always favoured the backward classes and it was only a perception that it is an upper caste party.

Former Law Minister Navinbhai Shastry said the BJP is doing in 2002 what the Congress had done in 1980's — giving more representation to backward classes. The very fact that the BJP is publicising the caste break-up of its candidates is proof that the party has realised the limitations of Hindutva in fetching votes.

HT Correspondent
Ahmedabad, December 3

STATE GENERAL secretary of the VHP, Jaideep Patel, was seriously injured when he was fired upon here this evening. The incident occurred around 5.10 pm in the Naroda area, when two persons riding on a motorcycle shot at him from close range and fled. Jaideep Patel, who was travelling in his car, was hit in the left jaw.

He was immediately admitted to Anand Surgical Hospital in Naroda. Doctors said his condition is stable. Later he was shifted to another private hospital in the city. Health Minister Ashok Bhatt told *Hindustan Times* that Jaideep Patel probably requires surgery.

Condemning the incident, Prime Minister AB Vajpayee appealed to the people of Gujarat to maintain peace and harmony at all costs. VHP working president Ashok Singhal alleged the murderous attack on Jaideep Patel was the result of a "deep-rooted conspiracy of jihadi forces" to silence the Hindus.

4 DEC 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Dalit report toes government line on Jhajjar

By Akshaya Mukul
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Toeing the Haryana government's line on the lynching of five dalits in Jhajjar on October 15, the National Commission for SCs\STs in its report on the incident has said that the "killing took place out of mistaken identity". Giving details of the report, to be submitted to the government soon, commission chairperson Bizay Sonkar Shastri, a former BJP MP, told this newspaper that the "mob was given the wrong identity of those skinning the cow. The mob was told they were Muslims".

At the same time, the report has come down heavily on the police. According to Mr Shastri,

"The police was part of the conspiracy. They knew that the victims were dalits but did nothing to save them. Instead, they joined hands with the mob and helped in the lynching."

But Mr Shastri sticks to his line that there was "no preconceived desire on the part of the mob to kill the dalits". Giving a new twist to the incident, he said the mob consisted of dalits as well. "The mob was confused. It was an accident," he said. Asked if he was justifying the killings just because the victims were mistaken for Muslims, Mr Shastri said, "No killing can be justified. I am just explaining what happened in a surcharged atmosphere."

According to Mr Shastri, despite the tall claims by the Haryana government, compensa-

tion has not reached the relatives of the five dalits. Therefore, the commission has recommended immediate compensation to the victims, restoration of law and order in Jhajjar and the neighbouring areas and action against police personnel involved in the incident.

In an obvious attempt at damage control, Mr Shastri said that "too much is being unnecessarily made out of Jhajjar". He also criticised such organisations as were involved in converting relatives of the Jhajjar victims to Buddhism. Drawing attention towards other pressing "dalit matters", he said, "Jhajjar has become a national issue but no politician is concerned about dalits dying of hunger in Rajasthan. Shouldn't it become a national issue?"

Tension after five held for Dalit killings

J. Carlos & P. Moh
By Our Special Correspondent

CHANDIGARH, NOV. 13. There was tension in the Surha and Dulina villages in Jhajjar district of Haryana after police arrested five persons on Tuesday night for the "lynching" of five Dalits on October 15.

Additional forces have been rushed to the area after angry villagers blocked the roads leading to Bahadurgarh, Badli, Gurgaon, Rewari and Rohtak protesting the arrests. Prohibitory orders have been clamped and educational institutions closed.

Official sources said the villagers lifted the blockade of Bahadurgarh Road after a strong police force reached there. The other roads were still blocked.

Initial reports said that those arrested belonged to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. It is reliably learnt that at least three of them are Jats.

Sources told this correspondent that the VHP did not have much of a presence in Haryana's rural belt.

1 4 NOV 2002

It's no use playing blind. A silent Dalit revolution is unfolding in invisible India

Buddha's smile

BY AMIT SENGUPTA

AS AN Indian 'secularist dog', thanks to my upper caste credentials, I don't have to skin a dead cow for a living. Nor are my 'community members' not allowed to enter temples or stopped from drinking water from village wells, or forced to use a 'marked' cup in the local tea-shop, or made to eat human excreta as divine punishment. Nor are women of my caste routinely stripped and paraded naked as a public spectacle, if not raped by a collective jury. Besides, our little children are not beaten to death, as in the killing fields of the Ranvir Sena's Bihar, because they might turn out to be 'rebel snakes' when they grow up, demanding social dignity and the right to vote.

Modernity's enlightenment has its flip side. Especially in the vast, fragmented, semi-feudal zones of 'below the poverty line' 'caste India', surrounded by pockets of affluence. There is no space for the 'organic intellectual' here, as Antonio Gramsci would say. Intellectuals exist only in vacuous bourgeois societies, he would argue. Because all those who use their intelligence, craft, creative skill, discipline and hard work to create a product are 'intellectuals'.

However, upper caste India has designed the paradigm of oppression with such precision, consistency and rigour that all other expressions of life-affirmation are crushed. The outcaste is an outsider, outside the anthropology of life and death; he is less than an animal, a false metaphor, born to be a slave by divine law, fated to be flogged, lynched, reduced into a daily caricature in his own eyes.

The truth is, as Kancha Ilaiah says, that the Shudras and Dalits (and *adivasis*) were the first intellectuals, the first designers, the first ecologists. They understood the earth and its flavours, because it was they who tilled the soil. They played with the seasons, because it was they who created the fruits of the earth. They celebrated the colours of nature, designed the fantastic fabric of folk craft. They mastered metals, fire, substances, rivers, barren land, turned a dead object into a work of beauty. They protected *their* ecology and the living beings who inhabited it (including the cow), because it was they who sustained the cycle of life through the zigzag of invisible time.

And others, the upper castes, the rulers, the children of god, the twice born — what about them? They were the super parasites of the superstructure of Vedic Hin-



GOD'S PARIAH: A Dalit with 'Ram' tattooed over his face in Chhattisgarh

duism, their flesh and soul nourished by the bonded labour of the poorest of the poor, the untouchables, the shadow which is neither human nor animal. So what's so surprising about Acharya Giriraj Kishore's prophetic claim that a cow is more valuable than five Dalits lynched to death?

In this code of Hindutva, a dead cow is more valuable than a living human being. Let there be no doubt, as in Pastor Neimolar's narrative on Nazism ("first they came for the Jews, I was not a Jew so I did not care..."), after the Christians and the Muslims, the Dalits and tribals will be next on their hit list. And, of course, 'liberal secularist dogs'. Unless they choose to be co-opted, willingly or unwillingly, as in the Gujarat carnage. As their leaderships have done year after election year in India's cowbelt. As what Mayawati is doing right now in UP, after having promised the Dalits and Muslims that come what may she will not break bread with the killers of Gujarat.

Despite this infinite pessimism, there is bad news for the fascists. The times they are a'changin'. In the interiors of India, outside the gaze of the urban intellectual, a silent revolution is unfolding. Thousands of Dalits are shifting the entrenched logic of time and space, rejecting the mental shackles which bind them to an oppressive religion which has only given

them hunger and humiliation, picking up weapons of liberation, seeking their fundamental right as enshrined in the Constitution. Around that little statue of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar in his perennial suit and tie, in those emaciated quarters of the Dalit ghetto, a new wave of self-realisation is redefining the contours of freedom and necessity. It's a slow and tiring process, and the enemy is too powerful, backed by the Hindutva State; but one thing's for sure, the wretched of the earth will not take it lying down anymore.

On November 24 last year, thousands of Dalits adopted the Buddhist 'Dhamma' in the heart of Delhi. They shaved off their heads and rejected their surnames and with it the mental slavery of the caste society. And who stopped them from converting into what is one of the most noble philosophies of emancipation in the subcontinent? The VHP, backed by the BJP-led government in Delhi.

If this regime's inherent totalitarianism could be witnessed in stark transparency, it was on that day, and weeks before that, when every coercive tactic in the fascist book was used. Dalits were assaulted and arrested, their right to assemble peacefully was denied despite prior official permission, lies and rumours were circulated, all roads to Delhi were blocked. It was the Police-State versus the neo-

Buddhist Dalit.

Why should a government stop what is a legitimate right and a question of private faith? And doesn't the VHP convert/reconvert tribals into Hinduism and hang it as a medal of a demographic revolution? It's because they don't want Dalits to break out of their vicious circle of condemnation. It's because they believe in the *Manusmriti*. It's because the Shudras, Dalits, women — they only deserve to be brutalised; in this torture itself lies their *moksha*!

This is the reason why the upper caste private armies kill the 'rebel snake' children in Bihar. They just can't accept the changed reality that Dalits can actually demand social and economic dignity. They refuse to accept the Constitution of India. They don't believe in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual egalitarian India. They don't want the untouchables to be touched by the freedoms of secular democracy.

Dalits are rejecting their mental slavery, adopting other religions by choice, especially Buddhism. The protracted circle of resurrection begun by Babasaheb Ambedkar is entering its final *chakravyuh*. Take my word, unlike Abhimanyu, the Dalits will break out of this rat-trap. Their symbols of liberation are Buddha, Ambedkar, Jyotiba Phule, Tukaram, Kabir, the Bhakti movement, the revolutionary tradition. They are waking up from this infinite insomnia. In a restless flux, they are ready for a great leap forward. This is happening. After Gujarat and Jhajar, they are all the more determined.

But if we still choose to be blind, then not even the holy cow can save us.

Then, as in Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's epic *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Dalits, like the Blacks, will one day gather around a fire, while we, like the White coloniser, will become outsiders, faceless, powerless; "they will see you perhaps, but they will go on talking among themselves, without even lowering their voices. This indifference strikes home... their fathers, shadowy creatures, *your* creatures, were but dead souls... Their sons ignore you; a fire warms them and sheds light around them, and you have not lit it. Now, at a respectful distance, it is you who will feel furtive, night-bound and perished with cold. Turn and turn about; in these shadows from whence a new dawn will break, it is you who are the zombies."

HD-10
2/11

Conversion politics — II

By P. Radhakrishnan

"The history of fundamental rights in this country is very interesting. In olden times under the Hindu kings there were fundamental rights only for two — the Brahmin and the cow — and the Puranas described the king as 'Go Brahmana Pratipalaka'. That was the duty of a king; whether the other sections of his subjects received any consideration at his hands or not, or whether animals other than the 'Go' had any consideration was a matter of no moment at all. So long as the Brahmin and the cow were protected, the king was destined to go to heaven." — B. R. Ambedkar.

EIGHT, IN the absence of hard data, the reference in the Ordinance to anti-social and vested interest groups exploiting the innocent people, and religious fundamentalists and subversive forces creating communal tension under the garb of religious conversions, is inane, tendentious and insulting to the sensibilities of all religious minded persons.

Nine, as the Ordinance is clear in its objective to prevent Dalit conversions, it raises a serious question. When the state has hardly any concern for them, and they are still victims of untouchability and social ostracism, why should it be a stumbling block to their regeneration with the help of other religions?

There are three answers to this: (a) What B. R. Ambedkar wrote of the "untouchable" legislators elected after the Poona Pact: "They were completely under the control of the Congress Party Executive. They could not ask a question which it did not like. They could not move a resolution which it did not permit. They could not bring in legislation to which it objected. They could not vote as they chose and could not speak what they felt. They were there as dumb, driven cattle." Though most Dalits are still like dumb, driven cattle that is the way Hindu society wants them — for

carrying its dirt and drudge. (b) Dr. Ambedkar's related observations on conversion: "Fortunately for the Muslims there is a large mass of non-descript population numbering about seven crores which is classed as Hindus but which has no particular affinity to the Hindu faith and the position of which is made so intolerable by that faith that it can be easily induced to embrace Is-

lam... This is sufficient to cause alarm among the elite of the Hindus... What would be their fate if their following was depleted by their conversions to Islam? Herein lies the origin of the Shudhi Movement or the movement to reclaim people to the Hindu faith."

When the state has hardly any concern for the Dalits, and they are still victims of untouchability and social ostracism, why should it be a stumbling block to their regeneration with the help of other religions?

(c) Seen against the above two, and given their numerical strength, a united front of the Dalits, a majority of the Hindus (who are not yet on the lunatic fringe), Muslims and Christians can halt the march of Hindutva.

The Advanis and the Malkanis are conscious of this danger of nemesis catching up with them.

Ten, if the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, did not repeal the Ordinance despite vociferous criticism and condemnation of it by the entire media, with the exception of the Sangh Parivar's, despite widespread protests by Christians and Muslims who found common cause in fighting against the Ordinance which brought them together on common platforms, despite the protest-closure of minority educational institutions, and despite a writ pet-

ition against the Ordinance admitted in the Madras High Court, it does not show her in good light. On the contrary, her total lack of sensitivity to the shrill and strong negative response of civil society raises at least two issues: One is, as the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill, 2002, was passed by the Tamil Nadu Assembly on October 31, despite

strong protests and by out-voting the combined opposition of the DMK, the Congress, the PMK and the Left parties, which lost the battle by 140 to 73, it raises a larger constitution question of the future of democracy in Indian States when a particular party having brute majority in the Assembly is bent upon destroying the very same democratic fabric.

The other is, while debating the Bill, Ms. Jayalalithaa claimed that the AIADMK would not move away from its Dravidian moorings. In this context, it is important to note that the anti-Brahmin, anti-Aryan, anti-North, anti-Hindi, anti-Sanskrit and anti-Congress acrimony and agitations, and the concomitant glorification and deification of Tamil and Dravidian culture by the Dravidian movement, especially during the 1930s and 1940s, were necessitated by certain socio-political and cultural contexts.

As though responding to another historical necessity, successive Dravidian parties have undone the legacy of this movement by diluting, distorting and discarding it. In his

exasperation with the failure of Hindu society to draw the Dalits into its honourable fold and its persistence with and perpetration of age-old injustices of untouchability, and exclusionary and discriminatory practices, despite his decades-long Self-Respect Movement, Periyar E.V. Ramasamy Naicker repeatedly exhorted the Dalits to leave Hinduism and embrace Islam. Eleven, even if it remains a dead law, it is not without its precipitant and pernicious consequences. Instances are (a) the claim by the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, who showered praise on Ms. Jayalalithaa for the Bill, which has the support of both the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, that banning conversions will be endorsed in BJP-ruled States; (b) along with Mr. Naidu, the BJP's L.K. Advani and Arun Jaitley voicing the need for an anti-conversion Bill similar to the Tamil Nadu one; and (c) the VHP's Praveen Togadia declaring that Ms. Jayalalithaa has done the nation proud; and so on.

Twelve, irrespective of how the Ordinance and the Bill are seen by the outside world, they make sense only when Ms. Jayalalithaa is placed in the larger political context of Hindutva.

On this, the observations from an editorial in *The Hindu* are relevant to note: "The Jayalalithaa Government... has taken a leaf straight out of the Sangh Parivar's viciously sectarian agenda and has, in a sense, 'outranked' even the BJP's own regimes that have stopped short of enacting such a regressive and patently anti-minority legislation with serious Constitutional implications for a citizen's fundamental right to personal freedoms affecting profession, practice and propagation of religion (Article 25)."

To conclude, Ms. Jayalalithaa's anti-conversion agenda is an attempt to play to the Hindutva gallery.

(Concluded)

THE HINDU

7 NOV 2002

9- Carlos & Palitina

A BARBARIC ACT

HD-10
31/10

THE COLLECTIVE RAGE unleashed by the caste Hindus of Satharasankottai village in Sivaganga district of Tamil Nadu against a Dalit agricultural worker a couple of days ago is only another instance reflecting how deep the odious caste system has permeated the socio-economic life in the region. Velu, the victim this time, was subjected to brutal violence only because he dared to question what authority the elite in the village panchayat had to import machines to desilt the water body against the norm that such works be carried out by farm labourers who are now out of employment due to the drought conditions. The social elite, as it appears, were in no mood to let a Dalit assert his rights for otherwise Velu would not have been thrashed, then dragged to the bus stand and let off only after his kin assured the "powers that be" that he shall not defy them henceforth. The people, predominantly belonging to the intermediate castes, stood watching when Velu was being beaten up, according to reports. The violence in Satharasankottai, hence, cannot be seen as merely an angry reaction by local politicians hand-in-glove with a civil contractor. Instead, the attack against Velu stems from the same attitude that led to the grisly killing of seven Dalits, including the panchayat president, at Melavalavu in Madurai district (not very far from Satharasankottai) in June 1997.

This larger context is what makes the incident a cause for concern and makes it necessary to highlight the legacy of the social reform movement in Tamil Nadu even before such ideas were thought of in various other parts of the country. The fact that such atrocities against the Dalits have been taking place in close succession and the involvement in such acts of the members belonging to the Other Backward Castes cannot be glossed over. The trajectory of violence against the Dalits in the southern districts of Tamil Nadu, for instance, has followed a pattern since the violence unleashed against the residents in Kodiyangulam (a predominantly Dalit village) in September 1995. The fact that

the law enforcing machinery in all those instances (in Kodiyangulam as well as in the violence that engulfed the region) was accused of having remained passive or even participated in the attacks reflects how deep the caste-based oppressive regime had percolated into the system both within the administration and in civil society in the region. It is this distortion in the mindset that has led to a situation where several village panchayats in and around Madurai — Pappapatti, Keeripatti and Nattamangalam — have been denied elected representatives since October 1996. These village panchayats fall in the category where the post of president is reserved for Scheduled Castes and the social elite in these villages has managed to ensure that the Dalits did not dare file nominations. The killings in Melavalavu, where the panchayat president, vice-president and five others were literally beheaded because they dared to defy the "norm" set by the village elders (who belong to the intermediate castes) and went ahead and contested the October 1996 elections to the panchayat, are a case in point to show how powerful the feudal vestiges are in this region.

Hence, the need to deal with it from a larger perspective. While the response of the civil administration to the Satharasankottai incident — cases have been registered against five persons under various provisions including the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 — has been adequate in the immediate context, the imperative for the political establishment is to launch a campaign against the mindset that leads the social elite to consider it their right to lord it over the Dalits. At another level, such incidents, taking place as they are at such regular intervals, are the basis for the Dalits to decide to convert themselves to other religions. The Tamil Nadu Government needs to direct its energies to ensuring security and dignity for the Dalits rather than enacting a law imposing deterrents on those who decide to convert to another religion, possibly to escape the punishing social framework.

Jhajjar dalits register their protest, renounce Hinduism

By Akshaya Mukul
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Gurgaon: Nearly 80 Dalits, including relatives of the five lynched by villagers in Jhajjar on October 15, converted to Buddhism, Islam and Christianity on a single stage here on Sunday.

On October 15, the five Dalits were taking hides and a dead cow in a mini-truck from Farruknagar to Karnal when they stopped outside the Dulena police station and decided to skin the cow as they could not stand its smell. Thinking that the Dalits were skinning the cow alive, the villagers lynched them. At Sunday's ceremony, Shankar Lal

Khairalia, a Valmiki by caste, caused a flutter when he announced he would embrace Islam. By choosing to call himself Saddam Hussain, he scored a bigger symbolic point. "He is a hero," he said seconds before he read the kalma along with Mohammad Rafiq Azad and got converted. Nearly 20 others followed in Khairalia's footsteps and embraced Islam. "I am in my senses. I challenge the VHP, Bajrang Dal and RSS to reconvert me. I will give up my life but never be a Hindu again," he said angrily.

Silence prevailed as people from the nearby Hanuman temple watched the Dalits renounce and desert Hinduism. The relatives of the Jhajjar victims

were the first to be converted to Buddhism. Udit Raj of the All-India SC/ST Confederation conferred the 22 vows that Ambedkar had administered on October 14, 1956, to half-a-million Dalits.

Watching the conversion was filmmaker Mahesh Bhatt, who had come to express outrage over the Jhajjar incident.

Udit Raj criticised VHP leader Giriraj Kishore, who had reportedly said he had no regrets over the Dalits' killing. He also criticised what he termed double standards of Hindus when it came to cows and sought to know why the cow, which is referred to as mother by caste Hindus, was neglected once it stopped giving milk.

Bhatt was, however, sceptical if the conversion would solve the problem. "This would not bring about any real change. The Dalits need to fight to become part of the mainstream," he said. There was a scuffle when a Valmiki represented some comments by upper caste Hindus from nearby shops. But the situation was soon brought under control.

Dissent came from within too. A section of Valmiki youth openly termed the conversions a "sham". "How will the conversions change our daily existence? Can we stop doing business with the caste Hindus?" asked Vijay Kumar. It is difficult to say if Sunday's conversion could become a mini-

Meenakshipuram. Yet, the event spurred by the Jhajjar lynching was the most potent symbol of protest that the subalterns have registered 21 years after 181 Dalit families converted to Islam in Tamil Nadu's Meenakshipuram.

Our Comment: The recent attempts to stop conversions through legislation would seem a cruel mockery in the face of this development. Terrible excesses such as what happened in Jhajjar must be stopped, not only by a stringent application of the law, but through the moral authority of the leaders of the majority community.

● See Edit: Democracy of Faith, Page 14

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 8 OCT 2002

Judicial inquiry sought into Dalit killings

By Our Special Correspondent

Handwritten: 100-11, 23/10

NEW DELHI, OCT. 22. The World Council of Arya Samaj today demanded that the Centre institute a judicial inquiry under a sitting Supreme Court judge into the alleged lynching of five Dalit youths in Jhajjar district in Haryana on October 16.

In a statement here, Swami Agnivesh, working president of the council, said the Government should ensure that the culprits are punished in an exemplary fashion. "Immunity to acts of crime, perpetrated in the name of Hinduism, is a shame and disservice to this glorious faith," he said calling upon people to oppose communal and criminal outfits that were attempting to "hijack" India to

pre-historic times.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal needed to be condemned as they were letting loose a wave of terror against citizens and their leaders deemed themselves to be above the law of the land.

"For centuries, the custodians of upper caste domination have deemed the life of Dalits to be cheap and dispensable. They continue to resist the basic democratic norm of equality of all in the eye of law. The conspiracy to cover up the criminality resulting from it by communal sentiments is utterly irreligious. Religion is a mandate to imbibe compassion and practice justice; and not a license to lynch," Swami Agnivesh said.

23 OCT 2002

Advani for probe into Dalit killings

By Anjali Modi

7. Ca. 2001
22/10

NEW DELHI, OCT. 21. Six days after five Dalits were killed by a mob outside a police station in the Jhajjar district of Haryana, the Deputy Prime Minister and Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, has said that the Centre would "urge the State Government to institute an inquiry into the incident." Mr. Advani's statement came at the end of a speech on Valmiki's role in popularising the ethos of Rama, on the occasion of Valmiki Jayanti at his home in New Delhi.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad held a demonstration in Jhajjar a day after the incident, demanding that no one be arrested for the crime.

The chairman of the All-India SCs/STs Organisations, Udit Raj, responding to Mr. Advani's statement, said that the Minister should address the real problem which was the atmosphere created by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, in which Dalits could be "killed with impunity." The CPI national secretary, D. Raja, said that Mr. Advani's announcement of his intention to "urge" the Haryana Government for a probe was meaningless. As the Union Home Minister, he should have instructed Haryana to act immediately, he said.

Describing Mr. Advani's statement as a "farce," the Lok Jan Shakti leader, Ram Vilas Paswan, said that the leaders of the VHP and the Bajrang Dal, who had "justified" the lynching should be arrested since the act amounted to an admission of guilt. His party would continue to campaign for a judicial inquiry into the incident and a Special Court to try the guilty.

Police and the VHP have claimed that the five men who were killed and then burnt by a mob of some 2000 people were caught skinning a live cow near Dulina police station in Jhajjar district. Media reports and independent investigations, however, have found that there is no basis for the claim.

Today, a delegation led by the Rajya Sabha MP and general secretary of the All-India Agricultural Workers Union, A. Vijaya Raghavan, which met the families of the dead and the District Commissioner, Jhajjar, Mohinder Kumar, also came to the same conclusion. Mr. Vijaya Raghavan demanded that the Haryana Government set up a judicial inquiry and suspend the police personnel, including the DSP, Jhajjar, and the city magistrate who allegedly witnessed the murders.

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ATROCITIES AGAINST DALITS IN HARYANA

PM should intervene: Paswan

20/10
By Vinay Kumar 11/10/1

NEW DELHI, OCT. 19. The controversy over the killing of five Dalit youths in Haryana does not appear to die down. Today, the Lok Jan Shakti president, Ram Vilas Paswan, demanded the intervention of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to check "the blatant spread of communalism."

Leading a demonstration of LJS workers and Dalit Sena activists here to protest the alleged lynching of the five Dalit youths in Jhajjar, Haryana, the former Union Minister described the incident as the "worst form of communalism." He alleged that the Dalits had, in fact, been killed by police after being tortured.

Addressing his party workers before courting arrest at Jantar Mantar, Mr. Paswan said that he had visited Jhajjar on Friday to examine the veracity of the allegations against the victims for which they had been reportedly lynched. "Prima facie, they appear to be victims of police atrocities. And it is police which appears to be spreading the story of lynching by the mob to save their own skin," he said.

"What is most disturbing is the fact that a local Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader reportedly extended support to the killers saying that those who killed the Dalits for skinning dead cows have done the right thing and cannot be arrested."

Describing it as the "worst kind of communalism," Mr. Paswan said: "After targeting people belonging to the minority community in other BJP and NDA-ruled States, they have be-

gun targeting Dalits in Haryana, which is being ruled by another NDA partner, headed by Om Prakash Chautala. The Prime Minister must intervene in the matter and see to it that the blatant spread of communalism is promptly checked."

Mr. Paswan had found that the Dulina police post still bore evidence of the torture. The five Dalit youths traded in animal hides and on the fateful day, they were intercepted by police who allegedly demanded money from them, he said. As they refused, they were allegedly beaten and tortured in custody resulting in their death.

Condemning the incident and demanding an impartial probe into it, the Lok Jan Shakti leaders later courted arrest in support of their demand. Besides Mr. Paswan, the former Union Minister, Arif Mohammad Khan, and the Haryana LJP chief, Shamsher Singh Mallik, also courted arrest.

Meanwhile, the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights demanded a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the incident. "The NCDHR warns those who defend such kind of activities and also gives a call for nationwide agitation to protect the honour, dignity and human rights of Dalits," the NCDHR national co-convenor, Vimal Thorat, said.

Rajesh Ahuja reports from Chandigarh:

The Jhajjar District Police are finding it difficult to make any headway in identifying and nabbing the members of the mob which allegedly lynched the five Dalits on Tuesday in Dulina, following tacit pressure

from the VHP activists who are believed to be shielding the perpetrators.

Reports said the Divisional Commissioner of Rohtak, R. R. Bainswal, had started his enquiry into the circumstances leading to the mob violence. There was peace in the district and no major political leader visited the area, barring a Bajrang Dal leader. The Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala, had said on Friday that some of the culprits had been 'identified' and would be arrested soon.

While there was no reaction whatsoever from the Haryana BJP leaders, the BJP national president, Venkaiah Naidu, sought to distance the party from the VHP stand by condemning the incident and demanding the "strongest possible punishment" for the guilty. According to reliable sources, Mr. Naidu also deputed Harshvardhan, party vice-president in-charge of Haryana, to visit Jhajjar and submit a detailed report.

Dalit girl 'raped, killed'

Meanwhile, unconfirmed reports said that a six-year old Dalit girl died after she was reportedly abducted and raped by unidentified persons in Dongra village in Narnaul district. Sources said that the girl was kidnapped while she was sleeping with her grandmother.irate villagers blocked several roads and demanded the immediate arrest of the culprits. The sources said that the incident could add fuel to the fire. However, there was no word from the State Government regarding this 'fresh incident.'

2 0 OCT 2002

They were skinning a dead cow, VHP spread rumour of cow-slaughter

5 Dalits lynched in Haryana, police watched

SONU JAIN
JHAJJAR (HARYANA), OCTOBER 17

LESS than two hours from the capital, this was the scene yesterday outside the Dulena police post in Jhajjar district: patches of blood on the road, a pile of smouldering ashes. This is where five Dalits, all in their 20s, were beaten to death Tuesday night, two of them torched. They were doing what they have been doing for years: skinning dead cows to sell the hide. This time, however, "someone" spread the word that the cow was alive.

So a mob, returning after the

Dussehra fair, dragged them out of the police post where they had taken refuge and lynched them to the cries of *Gau mata ki jai*. Watched by the City Magistrate, the DSP of Jhajjar and Bahadurgarh, the Municipal Corporation's husband, the Block Development Officer and at least 50 policemen.

Says City Magistrate Raj Pal Singh who saw the lynching: "We tried stopping them but got hurt ourselves in the process. I was dragged a few feet away, otherwise I would have been killed."

One FIR has been regis-



The blood stains near the police post. Express photo by Renuka Puri

tered against "unknown people," while a second has been filed against the victims under the Cow Slaughter Act.

Local office-bearers of the VHP and the Shiv Sena have submitted a memorandum to the local police asking them not to take any action against the guilty.

The Indian Express spoke to several eyewitnesses and district officials to reconstruct the incident. And they suggested this was no impulsive act, the frenzy built up over a good three and a half hours—the Dalits were first "spotted" at 6.30 pm, beaten and dragged to the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

5 Dalits lynched in Haryana

police post and then battered to death between 9 and 10 pm.

Five Dalits had bought what they claimed was a dead cow from Farooqnagar and were on their way to sell the hide—something which they traditionally do here to earn a living.

They were first seen 500 m from the police post by a group of men returning from Dusshera festivities.

This group reached Jhajjar, 15 minutes away, and informed the local Dharamshala that "cow slaughter was going on."

Within minutes, two vehicles with the District Magistrate, two priests from the temple and some local VHP leaders left for the spot.

By then, the five had sought refuge at the police post. The word spread in at least 10 nearby villages, and in an hour, the crowd swelled to 2,000.

"Local VHP workers and some anti-social elements were spotted at the scene," says District Commissioner Mohinder Kumar, who claims he reached late because of a traffic jam.

"The word spread by telephone, word of mouth and of course a tractor full of people returning from the fair stopped."

Local VHP office-bearers dare the police to take action. "If they can kill our mother then what if we kill our brothers who kill her," says Mahendra Parmanand, the priest of the local temple.

"I will say it in front of the police that what they were doing was wrong and they deserve to be punished," says Ramesh Saini, VHP office-bearer. Shishu Pal from the local Shiv Sena unit says that whatever happened was wrong but "could not have been helped."

18 OCT 2002

T.N. ordinance anti-Dalit'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 15. Dalit leader Udit Raj today demanded the withdrawal of the ordinance passed by the Tamil Nadu Government banning forceful conversions saying it was anti-Dalit.

In a joint statement with leaders of the All-India United Muslim Morcha, Mr. Raj said the purpose behind the ordinance was to divert the attention of the Dalits, the minorities and the backwards from the basic issues. It was also meant to give fillip to religious sentiments and push the forces of social justice to the background.

In contrast, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Ms. Mayawati's order extended Scheduled Caste facilities to the Dalits even after conversion to any religion. The Scheduled Caste status, which was given to Dalits of every religion till about half a century ago, was later restricted to those who professed Hinduism. "Mayawati's decision is

courageous as it is an effort to erase the religious ban of 1950," he said, urging other States to emulate Uttar Pradesh.

Meanwhile, the Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind today concluded its fortnight-long protest demanding a ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind president, Maulana Asad Madani, along with other leaders, met the Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, Vijay Goel, and submitted a memorandum in this regard.

The organisation appealed to the Congress to create a conducive atmosphere for the minorities in the States ruled by it. Only then would the minorities align with the party at the national level. Contending that a lot remains to be done in the Congress-ruled States, it said the instant penalisation of officials failing to control riots must be ensured and a law for compensation of riot victims enacted. Little was done on these lines after the Malegaon riots in Maharashtra, he said.

15 OCT 2002

15 OCT 2002

Dam Project in Deep Water

Less than a year after the Jharkhand Govt launched the Rs 650-crore plan, some of the dams are already in ruins

MANOJ PRASAD RANCHI

As far as grand schemes go, the Jharkhand government's Gram Bhagirathi Project doesn't lack anything: Rs 650 crore as budget, building ponds and check dams in every village as mission and 9,735 identified sites as starting points. If only that was enough. Since the project started this financial year, at least five dams built under it have been washed away, collapsing in the first rush of rains.

While the state government's Water Resources Department (WRD) is holding a probe into some of the cave-ins, Assembly Speaker Inder Singh Namdhari spelt what was on everyone's lips when he charged recently that these cave-ins were a result of the money being siphoned off by officials.

Among the first to fall was the Rs 95-lakh dam built at Chief Minister Babul Marandi's hometown Kodaibank, which survived for exactly 11 days after its inauguration on June 22. Many villagers, including Marandi's father, lost their paddy crops.

The latest incident happened in Kanke village, where a dam estimated to cost Rs 15 lakh and started on March 8 got washed away on September 14. Now all



The Rs 15-lakh dam in Kanke village which collapsed in September

that stands in its place are ruins. "We play hide and seek here," says Chakra Mahato, standing in the middle of the broken walls.

The dam was meant to enable 500-odd people of Kanke block in Ranchi district, including Chakra's parents, to reap more than one crop a year. Chakra's parents, who own two-three acres of cultivable land, were hoping the dam would ensure that they didn't have to migrate, like many others in their village have done, to Kanpur for a living. The night the dam fell, their dream crashed.

They aren't the only ones mourning. In the backward state of Jharkhand, 71 per cent of the 2.18 crore people are dependent on agriculture for survival. Farming is practised in 22.68 per cent of the land area, of which the irrigated area is less than 2

per cent, despite the fact that the state has innumerable rivers and streams and gets plenty of rain.

That is why the Gram Bhagirathi Project. "Under this project, it has been decided to build ponds and check dams in every village," Governor Vinod Chandra Pandey had declared in his speech delivered on the floor of the Assembly on February 15. In 212 blocks of the state, 9,735 sites were identified for construction of the water points at a cost of Rs 650 crore during the current financial year.

But what began at Kodaibank continued in other parts of the state as three more dams built under the project collapsed during July-August. They were coming up at a cost varying between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 11 lakh at Barorwa village in Palamau and Futan-

"The contractor mixed one bag of cement with seven bags of sand, instead of the prescribed four bags. This made the structure so weak that it could not withstand the first spell of rains"

CHOTU MARANDI, CHIEF MINISTER
BABUL MARANDI'S FATHER

wanallah and Huntergunj blocks in Chatra district.

Asked if Namdhari's perception about why the dams were collapsing was correct, WRD Minister Ramchandra Kesri says he had no knowledge about it.

Chief Secretary G. Krishnan adds: "We have decided to employ an independent agency to study the impact of the government-sponsored development scheme. By doing this, we will have data on the utility of the project. It will also prevent dams getting washed away in the future."

Chakra Mahato's grandfather, 60-year-old Naresh, finds that hard to believe. "Chakra's parents had hoped the dam would be completed soon and so they had even planned to undertake cultivation of wheat and potato during winter," he says. "But their dream was shattered, and they too have left for Kanpur."

A few metres away from his hut in Kanke lives Bhola Nath, a mason employed by the contractor to build the dam over river Jumar. He says: "Its site was selected and the dam built without taking into account the level of water and its current during the peak of monsoon. Moreover, the construction material did not contain iron at all."

But there is another person whose word will probably count more with the Chief Minister. His father Chotu Marandi of Kodaibank, who was among those who lost his crop to a dam collapse. According to Chotu, "In place of mixing one bag of cement with four bags of sand, the contractor preferred to mix one bag of cement with seven bags of sand. This made the structure so weak that it could not withstand the first spell of monsoon rains."

NORTHEASTNOTEBOOK

Arunachal Filmmaker or Way to UK

ARUNACHAL has reason to be proud. Moji Ribba, probably the first filmmaker from the state, has been chosen to screen two of his films in four venues in London, including the British Museum, later this month. Both the films are based on different aspects of tribal life. *Prayers for New Gods* is an exploration of the indigenous religions of the tribal people, who have developed a set of animistic beliefs and practices. The second film, *Between God and Me* portrays the relevance of the *nyibo* (priest) — the intermediary between the living and spirit world.

Monkey Trouble at Tezpur Air Base

AT the Tezpur Indian Air Force (IAF) station, residents are having a difficult time keeping out monkeys. Even barbed wire fences are falling to stop the monkeys, which are reported to have strayed out of the fast-depleting Goroimari reserve forest near the Assam-Arunachal border. The only option is to keep all doors and windows closed. Thankfully, the monkeys have not got anywhere near the advanced fighter planes so far.

Hope Blooms as Flowers Replace Guns

GUNS and roses — it may seem like an unlikely mix but that is what seems to be happening in Nagaland. Even as the government negotiates with the underground outfit, the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), for a peaceful settlement to the decades-old separatist struggle, a silent movement is on to wean the youth away from guns — towards flowers. And spearheading the move is Abou Khruomo, a student of Bachelor of Business Administration from Kohima, who has projected floriculture as an economically viable option to the state's increasing number of educated unemployed youths.

Now, a Dress Code for Manipuri Girls

IT has nothing to do with fashion. Girl students of colleges in Imphal are opting for the traditional Manipuri dress — the expensive, hand-woven *phaneik* — following an order issued by the KYKL, an outlawed group. While the girls may not be happy with the new dress code, college authorities are reportedly pleased as they have seeking this for a long time now.

— Samudra Gupta Kashyap

Mamata, the Author, Takes Over From Didi

Firebrand Trinamool leader now lashes out at opponents in her books

SUBRATA NAGCHOUDHURY KOLKATA

IN 1995, she wrote her first book. Today, she has 13 titles to her credit. And while she may be more well known for her firebrand politics, Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee is slowly, but surely, gaining ground as an author.

At the book release function of her two latest books last week, Mamata declared that "nobody will be able to stop my pen". However, even Mamata's most ardent admirer would be forced to ad-

night, I kept awake and wept alone. I didn't feel like talking to anyone. For a month, I almost stopped eating. I lost my will to be in politics any more. The mental turbulence almost brought me down with broncho-pneumonia..." she writes.

In the book, Mamata confesses, for the first time, that she knew she would not win the 2001 Assembly polls. "I didn't tell this to my party leaders and workers because their morale would be broken," she adds.

But the Trinamool chief has not quietened down — not yet. *Ashuva Sanket* has chapters on religious blindness and

pointed out that "it is not the quality of the writings that attract me. I am drawn to her by three virtues — honesty, courage and compassion."

According to Mamata's close associates, it was insomnia which drove the former railway minister to take up the pen. Most of her writing is reportedly done at night. She is also known to pen down her thoughts during long dharnas. "She has no ghost writer," said a leader close to her.

While a particular shop in her constituency of South Kolkata is known to supply the exercise books for her writ-

JANYALA SREENIVAS AHMEDABAD

WHEN the *dhol* builds up to a crescendo during the ongoing nine nights of worship across Gujarat, it may well obscure the dying notes of its parent art. After being patronised for 700 years by kings and commoners, Gujarati *lok sangeet* (folk music), of which Garba music is but a tiny branch, today has less than half-a-dozen exponents in the state.

"I know barely three-four people who are trying to learn *lok sangeet* and keep the art alive," says folk singer Diwaliben Bhil, a Padmashree awardee. "People still love folk music, but the younger generation does not appreciate the importance of the art. Also, artists have to maintain their originality in their compositions and presentations. This is essential for the survival of *lok sangeet*."

The form of music experienced its highest peak in recent memory between 1980 and 1990, when renowned poet Zaverchand Meghani's *Kasambi no rang* and *Halaji tara haath*, and works of anonymous 13th and 14th century poets found immediate takers when recorded to folk music. Sung in an easily comprehensible language, with emphasis on presentation and composition, the songs celebrate life, describe the valour of kings, the generosity of simple villagers, invoke nature's elements, praise honesty, integrity and uphold communal harmony and national pride. A decade down the line, says Abhaysinh Rathod, a *lok sangeet* artist who was at the forefront of the music movement of the '80s, "Folk music is dying."

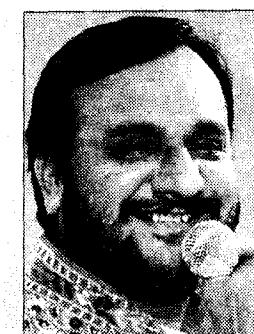
Artists blame the collapse on the commercialisation of traditional music. "Not only folk songs, original *ras garba* songs, too, have been shamelessly remixed as pop music.



Nilesch Pandya performing at a function

Folk Music Fades Away

Gujarati *garbis* may be as glorious as ever, but the parent art of folk music is slowly dying



"It is not easy to learn folk music in its original form. Gujarati singers are only remixing *garbis* and old Hindi songs which are popular"

ABHAYSINH RATHOD

sangeet programmes," says Pandya.

But that makes for a vicious cycle. The declining popularity of *lok sangeet* (as distinct from *garbis*) translates into less money, and fewer shows — and, obviously, a more limited reach — for the singers. "The shows are held mostly in the small towns, for 100-strong audiences," says Rathore. "Even the audience is greying. For the benefit of the few young people who come to the shows, some of us explain in detail what we are singing, its context and history," adds Pandya.

In this bleak scenario, the only bright spark probably comes from folk singers like Praful Dave and devotional singers like Hemant Chauhan, who are in great demand abroad among non-resident Gujaratis, especially in the festival season. Like many other indigenous arts, Gujarati folk music, too, may find a more congenial home in foreign lands.



"It (last year's poll debacle) was terrible. Night after night, I kept awake and wept alone. I didn't feel like talking to anyone. For a month, I had almost stopped eating. I lost my will to be in politics"



mit that her writings are too pedestrian to make a definite mark.

The last two books, *Ashuva Sanket* (*Ominous Signals*) and *Anubhuti* (*Feelings*) differ from the earlier ones in their tone and tenour. There is an evident tinge of sadness and a pronounced frustration at her failure to oust the Marxists in the last state elections. In *Ashuva Sanket*, she talks of the "planned moves" to prevent her party from being re-inducted into the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). The "vicious" plan was hatched just 15 days before she was supposed to join the ministry, she writes.

Anubhuti, as the title suggests, dwells on Mamata's feelings after last year's poll debacle. "It was terrible. Night after

political, electoral, judicial and administrative reforms. In one, titled "Do the Best", she unleashes her wrath on the police for yielding to their political bosses. Yet another chapter on "Black Money — Parallel Economy" is almost an abridged version of her earlier book, *Crocodile Island*.

"The views on each topic lack both depth and new thinking. The writings have a flavour of Kolkata's famous rock debates," said a Trinamool MLA, who wanted to remain anonymous for obvious reasons.

Nirendra Nath Chakravarty, the acclaimed Bengali poet who attended a couple of Mamata's book release functions — including the most recent ones,

ings, Mamata is reported to be particularly fussy about the pens she uses. Her nephew, Abhishek, is said to be her steady supplier of the latest "add gel" pens that hit the market.

Her publisher, Sudhanshu Dey of Dey's Publishing, a fairly well-known house behind many Bengali books, recalls how Mamata first agreed to write a book during a prolonged stay at a South Kolkata nursing home. Her first book, *Upalabdhi* (Realisation) had a print order for 30,000 copies. The entire royalty was given for charity, said Dey. "Subsequently, there was a slump in interest in her books. But the prospect for a revival seems bright with the last two releases," he added.

DALIT POLITICS

PLAYING SIDE ROLE ON C

of caste & politics

Maya puts up the biggest show Lucknow has seen in recent times but gets brickbats for having Advani by her side. Only after leaving NDA and Cong do Paswan and Meira Kumar come together. But that's a choice Dalit leaders have always had to make: either ally with mainstream parties for power, or risk being pushed to the margins. THE SUNDAY EXPRESS talks to Dalit leaders across the country to find out if there is a third option



(Left, above) The crowd and the leaders at the BSP's massive Dikkar Rally in Lucknow; (below) Lok Janshakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan with Meira Kumar at the samadhi of her late father Jagjivan Ram in New Delhi

AJIT KUMAR JHA & AMRITH LAL

THINK about this. Barely six months ago when BSP leader Mayawati gave 86 tickets to Muslims and romped home as the second largest player in UP politics, there was no end to the accolades from politically correct circles. Last fortnight, when Mayawati as the UP Chief Minister invited Deputy PM Lal Krishna Advani to the Dikkar Rally at Lucknow there was no end to the criticism from the same circles.

One can go on debating endlessly whether Mayawati is right or wrong. The moot point is that ever since Independence, Dalit leaders have always faced this cruel paradox: either ally with mainstream parties to come to power and risk losing their

identity, or go it alone but remain in the margins.

The Political Paradox

Babasaheb Ambedkar suffered as a result of this paradox when his Scheduled Castes Federation failed miserably in the 1952 general election. But his disenchantment with mainstream politics even grew worse in alliance with the Congress. With a million followers, he converted to Buddhism by 1956. The various factions of the Republican Party of India he founded have ended compromising their main agenda in alliance with the Congress (later even the Shiv Sena). Or have been pushed to the margins of Maharashtra politics whenever they have decided to go it alone.

Babu Jagjivan Ram faced this dilemma when he left the Congress and formed the

Congress for Democracy in 1977. After leaving the Congress, Ram's daughter Meira Kumar finds herself in the same jam. After resigning from the NDA Government, Lok Janshakti Party leader Ram Vilas Paswan faces a similar predicament in Bihar.

Cause of Dilemma

What is the principle reason for this dilemma? Paswan has the clearest answer: "The spread of Dalits throughout India is such that they are by themselves always in a minority. In a democracy, they can only benefit from an alliance with other social groups." Moreover, Paswan feels that the electorate has never seen him as a Dalit politician but as a national leader. He claims that he has always secured votes from all communities, and uses the

metaphor of the palm to explain his philosophy of 'social harmony'. Like the five fingers of a palm, different communities including Dalits must forge an alliance to hold the body politic together, he says.

Maya's strategy

Mayawati has a way out of this dilemma. "Give representative politics its due", is her simple and effective strategy. In the last UP assembly polls, Mayawati benefited enormously by providing disproportionate representation (more than their percentage population) in the distribution of tickets to Muslims and upper castes. The poll alliance among these communities has not only provided the BSP its highest number of seats in UP but helped Mayawati become CM.

Her answer to those who argue that taking the support of the Muslims and BJP at the same time is opportunistic and contradictory is: "Well, despite the BJP support, I have more Muslim ministers in my cabinet than Mulayam Yadav ever did."

Symbolic Power

Dalit leaders, however, see it as nothing more than opportunism. A senior Dalit intellectual of Delhi says: "Such an alliance provides symbolic power; it does not benefit the Dalit masses but only provides some Dalit leaders ministerial positions. This is in total variance with Ambedkar's notion of 'terminal power', of endeavouring to end all hierarchies between purity and pollution."

Mayawati's most vocal critic, Udit Raj lashes out: "She is dishonouring

Ambedkar by allying with the Hindutva forces." (See interview). Udit Raj believes in forging alliances with "like-minded communities suffering from similar problems", like Dalit Muslims, Buddhist associations and socially backward groups.

Asserting that one must not be impatient to make *bahujan* into *sarvajan* overnight, a Dalit professor says: "Dragging Pochamma (the southern Dalit Goddess) behind Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh, as Mayawati is doing, is not desirable."

Ambedkar's ideal

"Ambedkar dreamt of a moral conception of society based on the Buddhist ideal of *dhamma*," adds Professor Gopal Guru of Delhi University. "Despite facing defeat he had the moral stamina to endeavour to end all social



'Community-based parties are passe'

THE legacy of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, the Republican Party of India (RPI) has been riven by internal factionalism and has failed to make a mark in electoral politics in Maharashtra except when aligning with the Congress or the Nationalist Congress Party. Among those disillusioned is Ambedkar's grandson, 48-year-old Prakash Ambedkar, who left the RPI in 1999 and now heads the Bharipa Bahujan Mahasangha. Community-based politics are passe, he feels, and economic issues are the main concern now.

■ The RPI story seems to be a story of splits in Maharashtra.

After 1969, there was no strong leadership within the RPI. And so differences of opinion cropped up. Some of the leaders went with the Congress, others went else-

where. The absence of a strong leadership made the party and leadership vulnerable to all kinds of inducements.

■ There is a criticism that the RPI is a party of Mahars, and that other Dalit sub-castes support other parties, including the Shiv Sena.

I don't agree with it. This criticism came from Bal Thackeray. He has a vested interest in claiming that Dalits support the Sena. The RPI movement was very successful in raising certain issues which were crucial to the Dalits.

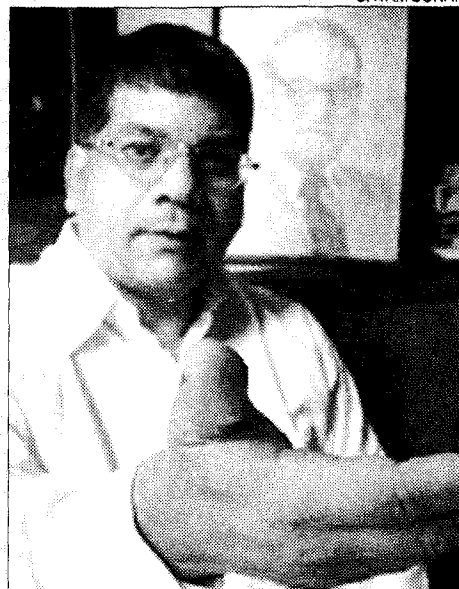
■ Do you think caste- or community-based

political parties are still relevant?

No. The phase of community-based political parties ended in 2000. The major issue for the rural masses now is agriculture — how to get protection from imports. Any

politician who can catch on to this slogan successfully is going to capture power. Economic issues are back in the forefront now, these only need to be codified.

■ But states like Uttar



"Henceforth, there will no longer be a national movement. There will be only state-level movements, working out arrangements to share power. One big party representing Dalit interests won't be there."

Pradesh belie your thesis.

There people are going back to community politics because they don't have an alternative.

■ Are you saying parties banking on one caste group or the other have no relevance.

Caste- or region-based politics has lost its relevance. Take the example of Sharad Pawar, where has he landed? His support base was the Marathas, but election results did not reflect this base.

■ What about the RPI?

The RPI has no relevance now.

■ What about you?

I am talking about the party, not myself.

■ What alternative do you have in mind?

There is no alternative. We will try to build it with new forces, new leadership. If people are given an alter-

native, they will take it.

■ How relevant are Dalit parties in this scenario

Instruments that are needed for the protection of Dalits are now in place. It is a case of implementation. Here it is a question of political power. Henceforth, there will no longer be a national movement. There will only be state-level movements. There they will work out arrangements for power sharing. One monolithic party representing Dalit interests won't be there.

■ Increasingly, Dalits seem to be a part of the Hindutva forces active, even in riots.

Gujarat riots were the creation of Patels. Dalits were part of the riots only in Ahmedabad. It is true tribals were involved, but they first looted Muslims, then turned to Hindus. And Hindu organisations had to withdraw them.

— AMRITH LAL

'Struggle by one cas

THE Dalit Panthers is a unique party in Indian politics. This was a movement that was as much political as it was cultural. Modelled on the Black Panthers of the US, it was led mainly by writers — Namdeo Dhasal, Arjun Dangle, Raja Dhale among others — and despite its urban origins, influenced Dalit politics across the country. Dhasal's political activism has since then went through many ups and downs, but his poetry has always remained as creative as it was when he first burst on the Marathi literature scene with Golpitha. If his Marxist leanings were one reason for the Dalit Panthers splitting in the mid-'70s, Dhasal (54) now is an ally of the Shiv Sena.

■ How much has the caste situation changed since 1972, when you entered politics with the

Dalit Panthers?

The basic issues have not changed, the way they are articulated has changed. Politics is no longer articulated in emotional terms. Say like the struggle over renaming the Marathwada University in the '70s may not be visible, but unemployment, land issues, the oppressive nature of the power structure, all of them still remain.

Again, visible caste oppression may not be seen in the metros, but social thinking on caste issues has not changed much. Look at the reactions that came up on the reservation issue. The caste elite still say the oppressed sections are getting benefits because of the Government's benevolence; they (the Dalits) have no skills, talent.

Mainstream political parties are still dominated

CENTRESTAGE



Photos RENUKA PURI

in the last assembly elections, however, drew a blank in terms of seats.

Lack of autonomy

Surendra Jondhale of Pune University says there has been no autonomous Dalit politics in Maharashtra in the past two decades as Ambedkar's followers ignored his message. "They did not realise that left-of-centre parties were their natural allies," says Jondhale.

Forget electoral politics, even the land grab movement initiated by Dadasaheb Gaikwad, a follower of Ambedkar, was appropriated by the Congress. Agrees Sujata Patel of Pune University: "There is no longer a Dalit movement but a Dalit voice. Dalit politics has become totally ingrained in mainstream politics."

Meanwhile, the harsh reality is that notwithstanding marginal improvement in their well-being, a majority of Dalits continue to be little better than untouchables.

Reality bites

Take a look at the Census statistics: while the literacy rate in the country is 52 per cent, that among Dalit males still hovers around 37. It is even lower among Dalit females. Dalits still constitute 48 per cent of those below the poverty line. While less than 20 per cent of the landless labourers belong to the general category, and 33 per cent are from the STs, over 49 per cent are Dalits. Massacres of the Dalit poor continue to be as frequent in Bihar and UP, as in TN and AP. In rural Rajasthan it still takes the form of violence over entry into temples, while urban areas practise "subtle forms of untouchability", says Guru. But if the reservation policy has had limited gains, the globalisation policy, Dalit leaders fear, will only replace it with pain.

Perhaps the answer lies in what BSP leader Kanshi Ram said during the Dhikkaar rally: "Dalit leaders from Phule to Sahuji Maharaj believed that education is the only liberating vehicle for the Dalits. By dint of his education and intellect, Babasaheb became the father of the Constituent Assembly."

Udit Raj concurs. "Give us mandatory education," he says, "and take away the policy of reservation." That may take them back once more to the centre-stage far away from the margins.

While the country's literacy rate has crossed the 50 pc mark, that among Dalits hovers around 37 pc; while only 20 pc of landless labourers belong to general category, over 49 pc are Dalits. If they continue to be massacred in UP and Bihar, in Rajasthan, they're still not let into many temples

hierarchies whereas today's Dalit leaders are rushing to forge alliances with anybody and everybody for the sake of power."

Economics Professor Sudhir Goel, however, disagrees: "The problems of Dalits are under-representation and socio-economic backwardness, not a clash with Hindutva. Only in power can Dalit politicians help the masses." Goel further argues that

"even in an alliance with the BJP, the BSP continues to follow its own agenda in politics — say welfare for the Dalit residents of Ambedkar villages."

Southern states

Even though the southern states have a longer history of political movements aimed at social transformation, only Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu have seen the

emergence of effective Dalit political parties. In Kerala, Karnataka and in TN, during the early years, the Communist parties were the political platform for Dalits. The Dalit-based parties in TN — the Putiya Tamizhagam led by Krishnansamy and the Dalit Panthers of India of Thirumavalavan — became visible only in the 1980s and 1990s. Like the BSP in UP, their alliance with the DMK



NAVEEN JORA

e group not enough'

by upper caste politics. They rarely think of an egalitarian society. But after the Mandal Commission, there is a new consciousness among the OBCs and Dalits over rights.

■ Why do you think the Dalit Panthers failed as a political movement?

When I came into politics, the Left was mainstream. It is no longer... I was a Praja Socialist Party worker in my younger days. The Dalit Panthers idea was broad-based. The splits in the Republican Party of India over who to align with — the socialists or the communists - af-

ter the Samyukta Maharashtra movement was also a reason. Later, I was accused of being a Marxist.

■ Your critics say you have sold out to Bal Thackeray.

Once the Sena was the



"What we need is an alliance of all similar minded people, including those from the upper castes. None of these leaders who lay claim to the legacy of Ambedkar's politics has a clue of what Ambedkar's vision was."

—AMRITH LAL

'I blundered in joining NDA but I'd no choice'

LOK Janshakti Party president Ram Vilas Paswan, 55, has tried both ends of the ideological divide. A part of the secular-than-thou V.P. Singh government that adopted the Mandal Commission report, he was till recently a minister in the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre. Now head of own party, Paswan is inching towards a tie-up with the leader of the Ravidas community in Bihar, Meira Kumar. In an interview with NIRMALA GANAPATHY, Paswan says above all he believes in social harmony:

■ What led you to strike an alliance with Jagjivan Ram's daughter and former Congress member Meira Kumar?

It has been this country's misfortune that whatever Dalit leaders have emerged haven't got national leadership status. Even Jagjivan Ram and B.R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar worked for upliftment of Dalits in Maharashtra, but he was labelled a Mahar leader. Jagjivan Ram worked for constitutional rights of Scheduled Castes and reservations started under him, but he was also known as a leader of the Ravidas community... They say I'm a leader of the Paswans... This is not right for the Dalit leadership.

Meira Kumar is like my elder sister. The main aim is *samajik samikaran* (social harmony). We want that SCs should be one caste. Dalits should be together and one force. I did this *sammelan* in Patna with Meira Kumar and this sent a message to those in the Scheduled Castes who didn't want to ally with Meira or me. The barrier has been broken down.

■ But doesn't this boil down to vote bank politics?

During the Mandal Commission agitation, reservation wasn't going to benefit me since my community already had reservation, but I supported it. Right now there is a need

for some leaders to come forward to bring together different groups. But there will always be criticism.

■ UP CM Mayawati's greatest innovation was combining Dalit and Muslim vote banks by rallying against those who demolished the Babri Masjid. Is fighting communalism on your agenda?

I believe ideology is thicker than blood. I believe in social harmony. My mantra is that India is a garden



RENUKA PURI

"It's this country's misfortune that whatever Dalit leaders have emerged haven't got national status. Even Ambedkar was labelled a Mahar leader. They say I'm a Paswan leader."

and in this garden, all flowers should be tended to equally... Social justice irrespective of caste and religion should be the ideal. But unfortunately, caste is a reality. You can change your religion and political party, and the poor can become rich. But you cannot change your caste.

■ In Bihar, you have also been

wooing the *bhumihars*, who are disgruntled with the NDA since C.P. Thakur's ouster as a Union minister.

Bhumihars are not only against the NDA because of C.P. Thakur's ouster but also because of the economic policies followed by the central leadership. It promised a clean administration but now is more corrupt than the Congress was. At the *sammelan* there were mostly Bhumihars and a lot of them have also joined us. They feel that Paswan is above being just a Dalit leader. Brahmins don't hate me like they hate Mayawati.

■ What about your efforts to win over the Muslims, and to project yourself as the third option?

I don't need to convince anybody about my secular credentials. Because of the BJP, the Muslims are with Laloo Yadav. And the Congress is with the RJD because of secularism. Now they have got a third option. The NDA in Bihar has no leader who can transfer votes... There are only two people who can transfer votes. One is Laloo Yadav and the second is Ram Vilas Paswan.

...The transferable votes are with the Dalits, Yadavs and Muslims. Muslims don't love Laloo, they hate the BJP; and the upper castes are with the NDA because they hate Laloo Yadav. In today's situation, if we get 20 per cent SC votes and 15 per cent Muslim, then that candidate will get 30 to 35 per cent votes and will be the winner.

■ How do you defend, as Laloo Prasad Yadav put it, sitting in the lap of the BJP?

I joined the NDA because of public pressure because Laloo Yadav and the RJD had to be ousted. And of course political considerations were also in favour. I made a blunder in joining the NDA but there was no option. And there is not just the one issue of communalism and secularism. I'm asking the Left and the Congress that they are welcome to fight communalism but there is also casteism.

'Post-Godhra, Muslims the new untouchables'

THE National Chairman of the All India Confederation of Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribe Organisations, 44-year-old Udit Raj (previously Ram Raj) is one of the youngest Dalit leaders of the country. Converted to Buddhism a year ago, this Additional Commissioner of Income Tax in Delhi is busy forging new alliances with Dalit Muslim organisations and other Buddhist associations. Although associated with one of the largest Dalit organisations in the country, his limitation is that he has not been able to form a political party yet. In an interview with AJIT KUMAR JHA, Udit Raj explains why Dalit politicians must forge alliances with minorities. Excerpts:

■ What do you make of Deputy PM L.K. Advani being the chief guest during the Dhikkaar rally of Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati in Lucknow recently?

I think it was *dhikkaar* of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar instead of Mulayam Singh Yadav. While Ambedkar crafted the Constitution, the Hindutva brigade is carrying on a review with the purpose of killing it. Ambedkar stood for reservation for SC/STs, the BJP stands for eroding it. Ambedkar converted to Buddhism, the BJP is thinking of introducing a provision against religious conversion. An amalgamation of Ambedkar with Hindutva is a dishonour of Babasaheb.

■ Why are you against alliances forged by Dalit parties?

I agree alliance politics in the past did help Dalits. Consider the Dalit alliance with the Congress. The policy of reservation, nationalisation of banks, and even the emphasis on largescale heavy industry by the Congress greatly helped Dalits in the past. With the Congress out of power and that historic alliance in tatters, today Dalits have to fend for themselves. The new policies of privatisation being pursued by the BJP-led NDA Government are hurting Dalits more than others social groups. Today, all politi-

cal parties are influenced by globalisation and as a result, the welfare state has withered away... Under these conditions, Dalits have to independently assert themselves.

■ Maybe Dalit politicians should encourage Dalit youths to become entrepreneurs instead of only bureaucrats via reservations.

Not entirely correct. Take the case of Jatavs: they have clearly benefited more from reservations than enterprise. Most Jatav cobblers of Kanpur and Agra (and their small tanneries)

SANJAY SHARMA



have today been replaced by Punjabi and Marwari owners of large tanneries. The preconditions for Dalits entering business in India have simply not been created. India, divided as it is among castes, culturally does not have the environment for globalisation and free enterprise to take roots.

■ What do you mean by saying that culturally we are not ready for globalisation?

Cultural barriers in India are worse than government barriers for free enterprise. Social taboos are worse than government regulations. The latter has loopholes, the former does not. Political and social equality is a pre-

condition for healthy globalisation.

■ So are you against alliance politics in principle today?

No I am not against alliance per se. But Dalit groups must be careful as regards the nature of the alliance. Dalit organisations must tie up with like-minded groups which face similar problems like, for instance, the Muslims. The truth is that today Muslims are even worse off than Dalits. The minorities have become a worse untouchable post-Godhra. The natural alliance of Dalits can only be with the Dalit Muslims and other backward Muslims.

■ What do you think of Mayawati's representational politics — seats according to population percentages?

The logic of coalition politics among social groups is very important — you cannot survive without such an alliance. But outside her symbolic politics,

"Dalit organisations must tie up with groups which face similar problems like the Muslims. Today Muslims are even worse off than Dalits. The natural alliance of Dalits can only be with Dalit Muslims, other backward Muslims."

Mayawati refuses to talk about basic governance or about issues of poverty.

■ What do you think about the other Dalit parties? Do you think a pan-Indian Dalit party is essential?

Frankly speaking, the only two relevant groups in Dalit politics are the BSP and our organisation. The rest are largely marginal groups fighting for mere survival. I personally prefer the RPI's Ramdas Athavale faction. In Tamil Nadu, the Pudiya Thamalgam and Panthers are a force to reckon with. We cannot build a pan-Indian Dalit party by forging alliances indiscriminately but by tying up on a broad strategy and agenda.

Ban on conversion

5.8 Jayalalitha excels Sangh Parivar ^{& casts provision} _{MJAD}

Article 25 of the Constitution lays down that "all persons are equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right freely to profess, practice and propagate religion". But in Tamil Nadu under Jayalalitha, only Hindus enjoy the protection of this constitutional provision. The Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance, 2002, promulgated by the Governor on 5 October, prohibits conversion from one religion to another by "the use of force or allurement or by fraudulent means". Force includes "threat of divine displeasure" and allurement means "grant of any material benefit, either monetary or otherwise". Section 3 of the ordinance stipulates that "no person shall convert or attempt to convert, either directly or otherwise, any person from one religion to another", and whoever contravenes this section shall be punished with imprisonment up to three years and fined up to Rs.50,000. Instead of signing on the dotted line, the Governor, Ramamohan Rao, could have advised the Chief Minister to introduce it in the Legislative Assembly which is already scheduled to meet on 24 October.

There was no immediate provocation nor rhyme nor reason to bring about this draconian legislation through the back door except to move closer to the Hindutva forces. An explanatory statement appended to the ordinance says that reports have been received by the government that conversion from one religion to another are made by fraudulent means. Starting with Meenakshipuram in Tirunenveli district in March 1981, entire villagers belonging to the Scheduled Castes have been embracing Islam to escape caste oppression. In many places in Tamil Nadu, Dalits cannot go to temples and schools. The services of barbers and washermen are denied to them. They have to draw water from separate wells. At Thinnuam village Tiruchirapalli district, two Dalits, Murugesan and Ramasamy, were branded with hot iron and forced to feed each other human excreta by caste Hindus on 21 May this year. No mainstream political party has gone to their rescue. Islam does not practice caste discrimination. No wonder the Dalits in Tamil Nadu find in Islam an escape from caste oppression. Jayalalitha should withdraw the ordinance before it causes irreversible damage to the social fabric of the state.

ILL-TREATED FOR DECADES / AT THE MERCY OF NEARBY VILLAGES

Koththankulam Dalits to go on indefinite fast

By P. Sudhakar

TIRUNELVELI, OCT. 6. Frustrated over the ill-treatment being meted out to them for decades, the people of Koththankulam village, a Dalit hamlet, 30 km from Valliyoor, have decided to go on an indefinite fast from October 9, protesting the official apathy and the alleged discrimination being practised against them by the caste Hindus of the neighbouring Arasarkulam.

The village, under the Vijayapathi panchayat in the Radhapuram union, with a population of just over 550, has been left at the mercy of nearby villages for every basic needs, including education, drinking water, hospital, transportation and, now, the ration shop.

The villagers have to walk about 5 km through thorny bushes to get the commodities from the ration shop at Vijayapathi. Following repeated pleas, a new ration shop has been sanctioned exclusively for these two villages.

Though Koththankulam has as many as 80 ration cards, the officials have given their nod for a new shop at Arasarkulam, which reportedly has only 67 ration cards.

"It is a blatant violation of norms by the officials as 10 out of the 12 councillors of the Vijayapathi panchayat supported the move to open a ration shop in our village. However, owing to political pressure, the offi-



Up in arms against discrimination, Koththankulam Dalits gearing for an indefinite fast. — Photo: A. Shaik Mohideen

cial have decided to give the shop to Arasarkulam village. How can we go there (Arasarkulam) when they treat our people like animals," asks S. Manuel, a councillor from Koththankulam.

Admitting that he was not consulted by the officials, the Vijayapathi panchayat president, T. Felix, said it was a classic example of discrimination practised by the official machinery, which had started joining hands with the "oppressive forces" to crush the Dalits, whose welfare had repeatedly become the casualty.

Koththankulam villagers say their children, who have to go to the primary school at Arasankulam, are not permitted to drink water from the common pot kept there, but have to take water from their houses.

"We have decided to stop

our children from attending the classes from tomorrow.

Because of these atrocities, some of the families have already moved to nearby towns such as Valliyoor, Nagercoil and Tirunelveli to ensure unhindered education for their wards.

The students have to walk about 3 km to take the bus as the only bus plying through our village was stopped three years ago.

And some of the families have admitted their children in hostels. We cannot tolerate this anymore and decided to start the agitation," Mr. Manuel said.

The villagers demand that the Government put an end to the atrocities against them and the Adi Dravida Welfare Department take steps for a school in their hamlet.

Keeping the faith

Dalits fear reprisals after conversion

Over a 100 Dalit families in the Chakwara area of Rajasthan have decided that enough is enough and they will not suffer any longer the unreasoning oppression, based on the accident of birth, from the upper castes in their own faith. Having taken the plunge of conversion they will not reveal their new identities or their adopted religion for fear of reprisals. These Bairwa families (of the cobbler caste among Dalits) are so scared that they refuse to return to their homes and are huddled at one place hoping to find security in numbers. Religion is a matter of personal faith and the right to choose is enshrined in the Constitution but even today Dalits are treated as so inferior that they are denied their constitutional rights by those who benefit from the oppression by recourse to terror and intimidation. Caste and its consequence, untouchability is an evil destroying Indian society.

More than half a century ago leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, BR Ambedkar and other reformers began the fight to eradicate untouchability, but it survives as a curse because the political and moral will to eradicate it is lacking. Instead we have entrenched the evil by reservations for jobs and education and a whole host of benefits which has served to create a vested interest in backwardness. Whereas the mandate is to eradicate the evil vested interests have succeeded in entrenching it to the extent that the oppressed themselves wish to perpetuate it and indeed extend it for a mess of potage. Dalits do not crave pity, they want respect. If Hindu society cannot or will not treat them as equals, they have every right to seek to join a religion that will. To stop them is to insist that that they must wallow in the mud where they lie for the greater glory of Hinduism. This is nonsense. By contrast Pravin Togadia, the international general secretary of the VHP condemns conversions as tensions which surface because of the "designs of the Church". Ironically he made the comment at a ceremony of his own — to convert Muslims families to Hinduism. As long as there is oppression there will be the understandable urge to escape it. This is the law of nature. Singhal, Togadia and company cannot escape it even as they seek to deny human rights to those they oppress on the ground of a faith that is false because it is inhuman.

28 SEP 2003

THE STATESMAN

Back to front

Class, status and political jingoism

BJP president Venkaiah Naidu says Dispur's formation of a committee to consider granting some religious communities Other Backward Classes status is a "reprehensible act" and goes against the spirit of the Constitution. Mr Naidu might have done better to look within, at his own party which has taken little interest in the unabated infiltration despite having made it a poll issue as late as 1991. The BJP's talk of scrapping the controversial Illegal Migrants (Determination by Tribunals) Act, 1983, has been aimed at feathering its own nest. To blame the Congress for the ills Assam faces today is unfair. The All Assam Students' Union, the main signatory to the 1985 Assam Accord, and its offshoot, the Asom Gana Parishad, which came to power on the foreigners' issue, did precious little to detect the thousands of aliens who came after the 25 March 1971 cut-off date.

As for OBC status, the Congress move is obviously aimed at appeasing religious minorities, which may well open a Pandora's box. There are some who genuinely deserve the classification, but stratification along religious lines is best avoided. The Koch Rajbongshis in the Bodo region are caste Hindus and do not meet certain criteria for inclusion in the Scheduled Tribes, yet the Congress put them in the listed classes only because they dominate 26 of Assam's 126 assembly constituencies and are in a position to determine the fate of 39 others. At one level it is reasonable to suppose that they can all be included in the ABC — All Backward Classes. Reductio ad absurdum? Perhaps.

26 SEP 2002

Dalits seek conversion escape route

Vijay Thakur in Jaipur

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Sept. 23. —Over 100 Bairwa families in Chakwara have decided to convert but are not sure about their new religion. The reason: They don't want to be treated as "untouchables". This comes a day after the Vishwa Hindu Parishad claimed that over 100 Muslim families in Beawar, Ajmer, had converted to Hinduism.

Bairwas (Dalits of the cobbler caste) are living in terror after upper caste villagers clashed with police in Phagi on Saturday to stop a Dalit *yatra* against untouchability. "Please do not ask about details ... we will decide in two or three

Koreans attacked

PATNA, Sept. 23. — Bajrang Dal activists attacked South Korean nationals allegedly involved in "converting" Hindus to Christianity in Begusarai yesterday, police said. They allegedly looted \$600, Rs 1,500 and three cameras from the Koreans when they were attending Mass. Three Dal activists were arrested today. — SNS

days ... we want to save ourselves from upper-caste violence," said Mr Hari S Bairwa. Others refused comment out of fear. "You will publish our names ... then they will target us," said a villager. Bairwa

families have been completely boycotted by the upper caste. But the Dalits have no option but to depend on them for their needs. To avoid being targeted, they are huddled at one place and are cooking their meals at a community kitchen.

VHP general secretary Mr Praveen Togadia, who was in Beawar for the conversion of 100 Muslim families, has refused to visit Chakwara because "there may be a law and order problem". There are some evils in our religion and we should fight them." He said caste tension had surfaced because of "designs of the Church": "The Church is instigating people of a certain caste to resort to violence, divide Hindus and facilitate conversions."

Cong. misled Dalits for 50 years, says Modi

By Our Special Correspondent

DHANDHUKA (GUJARAT), SEPT. 14. The Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, today launched a scathing attack on the Congress, saying it always considered the Dalits as its 'vote-bank' but only "misled them for the last 50 years".

Addressing a meeting at the Dalit pilgrim centre in Jhanjhar-ka village from where he launched the second leg of his 'gaurav rath yatra' this morning, he alleged that it was because of the Congress that the Hindus

and Muslims, who fought together in 1857, fell apart leading to the division of the country.

"The BJP or even the Jan Sangh did not exist at that time. Then who was responsible for breeding communalism?" He claimed that the BJP had initiated various welfare programmes for the weaker sections but "without hurting the interests of other sections".

Mr. Modi refrained from making any observation on the minorities. He said his Government believed only in "human bondage" and did not discriminate against people on the basis of religion or caste. "It does not matter whether one goes to temple, gurdwara or mosque, or

if one is an atheist, the BJP does not discriminate anyone." Unlike in the first leg, Mr. Modi did not name the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, even once and his attack was confined to the party's State unit president, Shankarsinh Waghela, whom he called an 'anti-national' for describing Kargil as a "BJP-sponsored" war.

Though the 'yatra' continued to attract a sizeable crowd at various towns, the audience was less enthusiastic. In Jhanjhar-ka, Mr. Modi failed to impress the crowd as the locals blamed the wrong policies of the BJP for joblessness. Most of the villagers are hat weavers and they said many power-

looms had to be closed down because of the withdrawal of power subsidy by the BJP Government. "Whatever he may say, we will not support the BJP this time," a leader of the weavers community said. The situation, however, was different at Dhandhuka where the people weighed Mr. Modi against coins which would be used for women's education in the State.

Mr. Modi shifted to his favourite "Godhra and post-Godhra" rhetoric as soon as he entered the Hindu-dominated areas, alleging that the Congress and other Opposition parties and the national and international media were "conspiring" to "insult the 5 crore people" of

Gujarat. Be it the Surat plague, the alleged attack on Christians in Dangs, the earthquake rehabilitation or the communal riots, the Congress exaggerated things to defame Gujarat, he charged. "But the Congress cannot come back to power in the State after painting its people black."

The second leg of the 'yatra' was flagged off by a host of Dalit leaders from the State and the Centre, including the BJP national secretary and former Delhi mayor, Anita Arya. Others present were the Union Ministers, Kshiram Rana, Satyanarayan Jatia and Ashok Pradhan, and the BJP backward class cell chief, Ramapati Shastri.

Interim ceiling on quotas in Jharkhand

OUR BUREAU

Ranchi, Aug. 22: Jharkhand High Court today passed an interim order directing the state government to make a maximum of only 50 per cent reservations in government jobs till the Supreme Court delivers a judgment on the reservation issue.

According to the reservation policy announced by the Babulal Marandi government last year, the Scheduled Tribes had a quota of 32 per cent, the Scheduled Castes 14 per cent and the Other Backward Classes 27 per cent. This was the highest quantum of job quota in the country.

The court ordered that the respective quotas for the three categories should be proportionately reduced. This means that the Scheduled Tribes will now have a quota of 22 per cent, the Scheduled Castes 9.5 per cent and the Other Backward Classes 18.5 per cent.

The five-member constitutional bench turned down the Jharkhand government's request for keeping its order pending till the apex court decided on the Tamil Nadu Act reserving 69 per cent.

A petition against the Tamil Nadu government's order to reserve 69 per cent of government jobs is pending before the apex court since 1993.

There is no separate petition challenging the Jharkhand reservation policy.

The specially constituted bench for hearing the state's "domicile and reservation policies" passed the interim order while hearing writ petitions filed by Rajneesh Mishra and others.

The petitioners have challenged the domicile policy and 73 per cent reservations.

The court directed that of the remaining 50 per cent, 27 per cent should be earmarked for general category candidates and 23 per cent for appointment on the basis of merit, irrespective of any category or class. But such appointments would be conditional and subject to the final order on the petition that would be based on the apex court's judgment.

Earlier, the state government's lawyers, led by senior Supreme Court advocate P.P. Rao and advocate-general A.K. Sinha, submitted an affidavit requesting that the case may be kept pending till the judgment of the Supreme Court is passed on the Tamil Nadu reservation policy.

The government requested permission for making appointments to the extent of 50 per cent of vacancies from reserved categories on a regular basis.

The remaining 23 per cent of reserved vacancies may be permitted to be filled up on an ad hoc basis from the list of selected candidates, the government said.

23 AUG 2002

Hindutva and caste

By Kancha Ilaiah

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Brahmin

WITH THE appointment of M. Venkaiah Naidu as party president, Vinay Katiyar as president of the Uttar Pradesh unit and Uma Bharti being asked to take over as chief of the Madhya Pradesh unit, an opinion has been created that there is a shift in the social position of the Bharatiya Janata Party. There have been indications, over a period of time, that the Sudra/OBC forces in the party have begun fighting for their share. In Gujarat, the Patels and OBCs under the leadership of Narendra Modi, himself an OBC, used their muscle power in the recent riots and gained an upper hand against the "dwija" forces that were controlling the organisational network in that State.

At the time of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the Sangh Parivar mobilised youth from among the Sudra/OBCs and the Dalits for muscle power. During this period, L. K. Advani was projected as the organisational inspiration. Most of those who participated in the demolition came from a non-Brahminical background as they were, and still are, seen as being most useful for physical energy-related activities.

When the BJP came to power at the Centre, the Brahminical forces got more power. Since then, the Sudra/OBC forces on the one hand and the Dalits on the other, within the organisation, have been getting bitter: they played a key role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid but had no major share in the power structure. This posed a challenge to Mr. Advani's authority as those who provided the muscle power had to be rewarded.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was the brainchild of Savarkar and Golwalkar, two Maharashtrian Brahmin ideologues. When it began to aspire for political power it was headed by Deen Dayal Upadhyay, a Bengali Brahmin. Now, several branches of the RSS such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal have come up. The parent organisation and its branches were quite consciously controlled by Brahmin leaders/intellectuals. When the RSS

began working out militant strategies, initially Brahmin youth were mobilised.

When the ideological congruence between the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS began to take place in the face of the contentious Partition question, the RSS began to transform itself into a mass militant organisation. To take up rioting campaigns and to defend its cadre from Muslim attacks it needed a large number of

them state patronage and urban luxury. At the same time, they were with the Sangh Parivar spiritually and ideologically. Many were not comfortable with Nehruvian secularism.

The Emergency gave a new life to the Jan Sangh. The RSS changed the party's name and tried to expand its social base in the larger towns, mobilising some service castes around it. Its strategy was two-fold: to mobilise the Sudra castes without invoking

The BJP is making a show of empowering Sudra/OBC forces within... But how will the Sangh Parivar resolve the caste contradictions within Hindu religion?

strong youth. At that stage it had to go beyond the "dwija" social base and recruit Sudra/OBCs and Dalit youth. Given the nature of the Baniyas, they could hardly be recruited into the RSS' militant wings. There are very few Kshatriyas in the Parivar outfits.

After the Jan Sangh was started, a section of Baniyas moved away from the Congress and the Jan Sangh began to emerge as a Brahmin-Baniya party in terms of spiritual ideology. Its social base was basically urban, supported as it was by these two castes which had urbanised themselves in the post-Independence period. The party mobilised enough money from the economy of temples and from the Baniya market and worked as a pressure group for traditional Brahmins and Baniyas. During that period the Congress expanded its social base into agrarian Sudra social forces and for a long time it came to be identified as a "kulak" party. The Jan Sangh never had such a social base.

There is a close nexus between the emergence of Sudra landlordism and the kulak class in rural India. As the Nehruvian state provided large-scale employment opportunities for feudal Brahmins they sold off their properties and moved into the urban economy. Most of the urban Brahmins were with the Congress as it provided

the caste discourse and to handle the Dalit question quite carefully because a lot of people within its fold still believed in untouchability and casteism. After the BJP was established, its resolve to overthrow the Congress and enter the power structure became stronger. In order to do so it had only one way before it — it had to mobilise the Sudra social forces that had acquired a considerable amount of landed property, and thereby control over labour castes and control over local and regional political power.

Unlike the Gandhian Congress, the BJP did not have any language of social reform because it went against the historical interests of the Brahminical forces that started the Hindutva movement. When a political party without a social reform agenda wants to come to power in a casteised country such as India, Kautilyanism is the only course available. In the context of Mandal social reform, the BJP worked out the Mandir agenda for which it needed a lot of muscle power. This was required for two purposes: to mobilise Sudra/OBC social forces as vote mobilisers and to intensify the rioting campaigns against the Muslims. A lot of Sudra/OBC elements involved in rioting activity get entangled in legal litigations; and after they are discharged in the cases, show their

"gratitude" by remaining with the Hindutva organisations. All organisations that believe in rioting as a vote and money-mobilisation activity expand their cadre base like this.

The Sangh Parivar had to handle the peculiar problem of using the Sudra/OBC and Dalit forces for communal activities without allowing them to aspire for spiritual power in the Hindu temple system and also in the "real power" of the Parivar organisations. In an unreformed Hindu social structure even a man such as Mr. Advani, a non-Brahmin, will not easily be allowed to become the Prime Minister. Perhaps to overcome this problem, efforts are now on to link Mr. Advani's heritage with that of Lord Rama.

As part of the process of its so-called social engineering, the BJP tried to establish credibility among the Dalits by making Bangaru Laxman party president. That experiment failed for internal and external reasons. Now, it is making a show of empowering the Sudra/OBC forces within. That is, perhaps, the reason why a Kamma kulak, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu, is its president. If Mr. Advani becomes the Prime Minister the share of Sudra/OBCs in the Government might also increase. But how will the Sangh Parivar resolve the caste contradiction within Hindu religion? The priestly class in Hinduism does not want any reform.

After the massive deployment of muscle power in Gujarat, the Sudra/OBC forces seem to have gained the upper hand. If the Ram temple is built with more deployment of muscle power the Sudra/OBCs may ask for a bigger place in Hinduism. But the priestly class will not allow it.

Organised religions survived and expanded only by establishing spiritual democracy within themselves. There are no indications that Hinduism will allow spiritual democracy within its structure. The Hindutva forces may pretend that the agenda is being Sudraised but Hinduism shall remain Brahminical. This is where Hinduism as a religion, because of the religious civil war conditions the Hindutva forces are creating, may meet its Waterloo.

'Dalits not given their due'

By Our Staff Reporter

9- Caste & Religion

HYDERABAD, AUG. 16. The "stonewalling" of the efforts of the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR) by the Government at a recent meet of the U.N. Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in Geneva on August 8 and 9 has not come as a surprise to the Dalit activists.

After all, they did not expect anything better than this "from the Hindutva forces," the NCDHR representatives said. But what piqued them was the "nerve displayed by the authorities" in making Mayawati and B.R. Ambedkar their mascots while doing so.

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister was brought into the argument to prove that had the Dalits been discriminated against, she would never have made it to the high office. The other "argument of convenience" was that B.R. Ambedkar himself had never said that caste was a race while drafting the Constitution.

The "brazen attempt" made by the BJP-led coalition had angered the NCDHR and it is planning to approach the NHRC seeking its intervention in forcing the Government to comply with the directive of the U.N. and to send the pending reports on discrimination at the earliest to the U.N.

Yet another affront to the Dalits, the NCDHR says, comes from the representative of the Permanent Mission of India to the U.N., Rajesh Prasad, who, in the informal thematic discussion on "descent" in the CERD on August 8 in Geneva, said that despite number of interventions being in place in the country to eliminate caste-based discrimination, efforts were on to digress from the main issue.

India's argument was as usual two fold — one based on the situation faced by the Dalits and the other, whether the discrimination could fall within the purview of the committee.

It also argued with the help of statistics that the

uplift of the Dalits to the extent that had happened in India would not have been possible without a sincere attempt by the Government. Another "irritant" the NCDHR said was that the Government took "shelter" behind the argument that if the Dalits could be called a different race then B.R. Ambedkar himself could have made the distinction.

"The concept of race in India, as recognised under our Constitution, is distinct from caste. The two are mentioned separately as prohibited grounds of discrimination. The principal architect of the Constitution, B.R. Ambedkar was a member of the Scheduled Caste. It is reasonable to assume that this towering legal intellect, one of the foremost constitutional experts of the 20th century, knew well the distinction between race and caste," Mr. Prasad argued.

The national convener of the NCDHR, N. Paul Divakar, who has just returned from the U.N., told *The Hindu* that such a development was unforeseen. It amounted to pitting the Dalits against Dalits.

What the Government forgot to mention in its argument was that literate or not, a Dalit remained a Dalit. That the percentage of SCs and STs in the top echelons of the Government services had grown from 4.5 per cent in 1965 to 22.8 per cent in 1995 did not exactly reflect on his social status. Or even the fact that 106 out of 544 seats were reserved in the Lower House of Parliament for the Dalits.

The NCDHR said that even the Constitutional Review Committee in its report in June 2002, said, "there is a misconception that the problems of the SCs and the STs and the Backward Classes are marginal. In reality, these are part of the central and core problems of the country."

Where then do Ms. Mayawati or B.R. Ambedkar fit into the argument? Or should Ms. Mayawati step down to prove that discrimination against the Dalits continues in the country, ask the NCDHR activists.

17 AUG 2002

17 AUG 2002

Rajbongshis demand ST status

OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Koch-Rajbongshis, who comprise a sizeable community in the proposed Bodo Territorial Council (BTC), may soon move court and resort to agitation if their demand for Scheduled Tribe status is not granted by the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

"The partisan role played by the commission is inexplicable, especially when other concerned agencies have accepted the fact and have submitted reports in our favour," said Phani Medhi, chief convener of the Sanmilito Janaghostiyo San-

gram Samiti and member of the community.

For the bill for the conferment of ST status to be tabled in Parliament, it is imperative that the recommendations of the state government, tribal research institute of the concerned state, registrar general and the National Commission is in favour of the community.

"While the first report submitted by the Tribal Research Institute was negative, the second was positive and has already been forwarded to the National Commission. The state government and the registrar-general's recommendations are also in our favour," said Biswajit Rai,

president of the All-Koch Rajbongshis Students' Union.

He said the Bills had been tabled in Parliament twice and on one occasion it was referred to a joint parliamentary select committee under Amar Rai Pradhan. All the 16 members were in favour of granting them ST status.

The issue assumes importance in view of the vociferous opposition of all major Bodo groups to the granting of ST status to the Koch-Rajbongshis and Adivasis. The proposed BTC will have 40 seats with only 10 reserved for non-tribals. "Bodos constitute less than 30 per cent in the proposed council and they

cannot be allowed to impose their whims and fancies over the majority," said Medhi.

Students stage dharna

Members of the Guwahati University Post-Graduate Students' Union and the Assamese Students' Association, Delhi, staged a dharna at Jantar Mantar here today in protest against the Centre's lukewarm attitude towards floods in the state and lack of adequate assistance offered to mitigate the devastation.

The students are also planning to submit a memorandum highlighting the importance of long-term measures to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

2007

Divide & drool

It seems Indian democracy's long leave of absence is allowing a shameless bunch of power-hungry, votebank-crazy politicians to whip up communal and casteist passions that threaten to rip the country apart, writes ANINDYA SENGUPTA

ECONOMIC depression and caste politics have one thing in common — both recur at periodic intervals to destabilise a country and reduce millions of its people to helpless onlookers. As things stand, it seems Indian democracy's long leave of absence is allowing a shameless bunch of power-hungry, votebank-crazy, politicians to whip up communal and casteist passions that threaten to rip the country apart.

Babulal Marandi is the latest example of this despicable brand of politicians. He has raked up an issue that has resulted in death and destruction. The nation bleeds profusely with the Jharkhand chief minister having wilfully driven a wedge between the upper and lower castes of a state carved out of Bihar.

Mr Marandi fell back on a 20-year old notification of unprivileged Bihar to put tribals in reserved categories for recruitment in factories and workshops, keeping the option of extending the ambit of jurisdiction to government offices and educational institutions open.

Beneath the veneer of championing the cause of the underprivileged, the Jharkhand chief minister has successfully been able to fan social unrest and inflame casteist passions. It has taken the gap of a decade for the country to witness a repeat of Vishwanath Pratap Singh's Mandal Commission, with Babulal Marandi seeing himself as the self-appointed heir of the former Prime Minister to effect divisions in the body politic in the guise of bringing the uneducated tribal and indigenous classes into the social mainstream.

Interestingly, India went into a prolonged slump during the years of the Great Depression which shook the world. But where, for the world, the depression was economic, for India it was social as well.

Babulal Marandi, like VP Singh, reminds one of Ramsay Macdonald and John Morley — both of whom left no stone unturned to divide India along communal and caste lines.

It was during the Second Round Table Conference that Gandhi and Ambedkar fell out on the issue of representation of the depressed classes. One has often got Ambedkar

wrong on the ground that he had advocated class divisions by asking for representation of the depressed classes. Actually, he had the vast multitude of untouchables in mind.

Working towards this end, he fought a valiant battle at the Second Round Table Conference chaired by Ramsay Macdonald, then British prime minister. Ambedkar argued that the depressed classes ought to be treated as a minority community, like Muslims or Christians, and provided with adequate safeguards — his prescription being that they be allowed separate electorates. Actually, he wanted legislation against social persecution.

But Gandhi differed, and vehemently at that. The Mahatma believed such a step would fragment the nation and said he would resist "with his life".

That he and Ambedkar could not see eye to eye was enough to provide the British with the opportunity of "divide and rule". And they were only too pleased by the bonus that the mantle of defending the rights of the depressed had unwittingly passed to Ambedkar from Gandhi, or to Ambedkar from the Indian National Congress.

Immensely satisfied at the developments, Macdonald announced the Communal Award in 1932 that called for separate electorates for the depressed classes. The Mahatma flew into an uncharacteristic rage and launched a fast-unto-death. Actually, he despaired of the British attempting to divide India along caste lines by exploiting his differences with Ambedkar.

Gandhi's fast resulted in the Poona Pact, but that was of little consolation to him. Separate electorates were done away with, but reservation of the depressed classes in legislatures was invoked.

There was more to add to Gandhi's mental agony as the pact was signed by Ambedkar on behalf of the depressed classes, while Madan Mohan Malviya did it for the upper castes. Inherent in this lay the sentiment that there were two Indias — one represented by Gandhi, the other by Ambedkar. The



Jharkhand chief minister Babulal Marandi (left) has whipped up tribal passions (above and right) to drive a wedge between upper and lower castes.



for a Brahmin and a Harijan India. Both he and Ambedkar were espousing the same cause, though they chose different means to achieve this.

Seventy years later, India is faced with yet another confrontation between upper and lower castes, forward and backward classes, fuelled by a notorious political class.

Frenzied, brain-washed youths indulged in self-immolation following VP Singh's revival of the Mandal Commission. Mr Marandi's politics of domicile saw disgruntled men ransacking offices, closing down shops, killing people and going berserk.

Ramsay Macdonald inflamed casteist pas-

sions; John Morley, in connivance with Lord Minto, offered a separate electorate to Muslims; VP Singh drilled additional holes into the caste fabric; and now Babulal Marandi feels free to play the disastrous domicile card. How long must the politics of surrendering to the infamous British legacy be allowed to continue? It's time Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sits up and pre-empt other states from being infected by the domicile virus. Why ignite the people of this country as the British once did for narrow gains?

(The author is a Special Representative of The Statesman, Kolkata.)

'Clean' leaders, please

A brisk Internet campaign, the first of its kind in the Indian context, has been launched against politicians for overruling the Election Commission order to make available contesting candidates' criminal antecedents, if any, their assets and liabilities and educational qualifications. An all-party meeting on 8 July rejected the order but resolved to pass a law — a law which will most likely provide sufficient loopholes to essentially nullify the SC ruling. The letter by Concerned Indians Worldwide said, "We believe the people of India have the right to know the background of the leaders to be elected to the highest offices in the nation." The petition asks Chief Election Commissioner JM Lyngdoh to make an affidavit part of the nomination under the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961. This online signature campaign will not close till the government fully enforces the SC ruling. The petition hopes to gather five million signatures and is available at http://www.petitions.com/campaigns/SupremeCourtIndia_Clean_Politics/appeal.htm. — SNS.

Kapil Dev

ONE of the greatest news for cricket fans is that Kapil Dev was voted Wisden Cricketer of the Century, despite the present generation wondering what's wrong with Sachin Tendulkar. Well, Kapil inspired a generation of cricketers with his fabulous career. In one just cares to note, Sachin was a 10-year-old practising the game with his elder brother in an open lot next to his housing colony when Kapil was accepting the World Cup at Lords. For a profile on the legend, visit http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport/cricket/2001/indian_legends/dev.stm. — SNS.

If you have interesting insights into the Net, or have discovered a great new site, e-mail the details to thestatesman@vsnl.com.

100 YEARS AGO TODAY

July 28, 1902
(News Items)

SEVERE EARTHQUAKE AT YOKOHAMA

THE following is the official report of an earthquake at Yokohama: On the 23rd June, 7.42 a.m., a strong shock of earthquake was felt in Yokohama. It was the strongest of the kind experienced here (Yokohama) up to date this year, and was remarkably sudden. The horizontal and vertical motions were concurrently developed. At first the horizontal motion was quick but slight, but after the lapse of seven seconds the highest point was reached, the motion being at the rate of eighteen millimetres per one and-a-half seconds, and the direction from north-west to south-east. The tremor then became remarkably strong and rapid, but was less than half the highest point before developed. The quick and strong shock continued for thirty-five seconds, and after that rather severe tremors were also experienced; but they became remarkably slow, and after the lapse of thirty seconds more or less palpable, and finally the shock entirely subsided. The total length of time during which the shock was felt was three minutes and fifty-six seconds. The vertical motion was observed from the initial stage, and when the horizontal motion reached its highest point, the vertical motion was also at its acme, being at the rate of 0.6 millimetres per 0.5 of a second.

Death Of Another Calcutta Pressman. — Within the short space of a week, another member of the Calcutta Press is dead. Sidney Joseph Heberlet, who died at the Presidency General Hospital on Friday evening in his fifty-fourth year, was the Chief Reporter of the *Englishman*, and, in fact, one of the oldest members of the reporting staff in Calcutta. Excepting a short interregnum, he was employed for the best part of his career on the *Englishman*, where he did useful work as a stenographer. He had been suffering from an incurable throat disease for the past six months, to which he eventually succumbed. He leaves a large family to bemoan his loss. His funeral, which took place at the Circular Road Cemetery last evening, was well attended. Nearly every member of the *Englishman's* staff being present.

Economy & ecology ~ the political paralysis

WHEREVER in the world people experience the consequences of ecological ruin, they say, "Things can't go on like this." Every time we hear of the extinction of some fragile creature whose name we scarcely know; whenever we learn that the past year has been one of the hottest 10 on record; when we see oil-coated seabirds rescued from a spillage on some unspoilt beach; each time statistics are published showing that the highest rate of growth in cancers is among those affecting the human reproductive system — cervix, ovaries, prostate, testicles, breast — we are roused to repeat, "Things can't go on like this."

But when the bills come in, when the mortgage payment is due, the next instalment, the credit card account, the holiday deposit must be paid; when we see how far a new generation is bonded to perpetual growth and expansion of the economy, we know that things cannot possibly not go on like this. They have to. Our income depends on it. We must find refuge in the contradiction of a world where livelihood is at war with life.

We have been living for a long time in this dual consciousness. The idea that change is vital for long-term survival must co-exist with the certainty that any change in the way we answer need is unthinkable. Conserving the resource-base on which all social and economic systems depend strikes against the even more compelling need to protect the system of wealth-creation, by the grace of which we buy our daily bread, or corn or cassava or rice.

This apparently insoluble dilemma has led to a terrible immobilism and political paralysis. People's feeling of powerlessness turns them away from politics. Apathy, in this context, should not be taken at face value. It represents, rather, withdrawal, disengagement. Discussions

on these issues, if they take place at all, do so inaccessibly, in cabals of experts, in secret places set apart from daily experience. When the basic concerns of humanity are excluded from a rigged and cloudy political "debate", what could be more rational than opting out of it? It isn't surprising that people find it impossible to live in this contradiction. Most desperately seek to escape. Anything is preferable to oppression and impotence. We are overwhelmed. We hope it will all go away, or will be dealt with by those more knowledgeable than we are. Maybe it can be postponed to some future date — just as we have filed away all the other unpaid bills, the pension credits, the...

But we know this is only buying time — that last commodity in the universal market. When George Bush the Younger refused to sign the Kyoto Convention on global warming on the grounds that nothing must be allowed to interfere with US economic interests, he was echoing the wisdom of George Bush the Elder, who spoke his famous words before the Rio Summit that "the American way of life is not up for negotiation". Their commitment to a fundamentalist economic salvation simply writes the ecological imperative out of the scenario.

Yet it was believed that the solution to the great clash between ecology and economy had been discovered in the 1980s: this was the idea of "sustainable development", triumphantly enshrined in the Rio declaration. Intra-generational equity would be balanced with inter-generational justice to ensure that we do not take more from the earth than we give back to it. The excitement generated by this formula concealed the possibility that it might be a contradiction in terms: when unlimited desire is unleashed in a world of limited resources, something has to yield. The "fruits" of industrialism turn out to

NEW VISTAS

JEREMY SEABROOK

be strange hybrids, perhaps, ultimately, inedible. Like all the brave concepts offered up by environmentalists, sustainable development was doomed to go the way of all the rest of the treacherous lexicon of developmentalism — empowerment, participa-

tion, poverty-abatement, inclusiveness, and so on: ideas absorbed and redefined in terms amenable to privilege. Sustainable now means what the market, not the earth, can bear; what originally meant adjusting the industrial technosphere so that it should not destroy the planet has now come to indicate the regenerative power of the economy, no matter how it may degrade or suffocate the "environment". Sustainable is what the rich and powerful can get away with.

And they have got away with a great deal, as the statistics of inequality tell. Capitalism, or under its many criminal aliases — globalisation, industrial society, the economy — must appear to reconcile growth with conservation. The political management of the contradiction involves reassuring people that we can painlessly have it all. We can all get richer and grow greener at the same time. It is even suggested that we need more wealth in order to protect the environment, when large tracts of the earth have been laid waste precisely by the extractive assault of a violent industrialism.

Globalisation is premised on the promise that the poor may become a little less poor, only if the rich become immeasurably, abusively richer: if it had been the intention of humanity to wreck the very fabric of earth, no more effective formula could have been imagined. If the industrial paradigm were to start with a recognition of the finite carrying capacity of the globe, this would immediately raise the issue of how resources are to be allocated; and distributive justice — that old spectre which wealth and power thought they had exorcised — would come back to haunt the world.

In the decade between Rio and Johannesburg, the conflict between economy and ecology has become more acute. Despite efforts to banish it from an increasingly banal domestic politics, it haunts the consciousness of the age. While some people have turned

away from politics, seeking a haven in private life, others have sought more plausible answers; to which the rise, both of the racist Right and of the anti-globalisers testifies. The far Right states with admirable lucidity: *We are privileged; they want in; we will not permit it.* The outlaw Left equally disturbs the orderly control of politics by conservatives of all hues. Xenophobic nationalisms are pitted against an internationalism of social justice. This is the new struggle; and it rises directly out of efforts to suppress it — the uneasy, and above all, unsustainable, truce between natural and human-made systems.

This is why we have much to thank the anarchistic and irresponsible anti-globalisers for, and, perhaps, even the racists, too. For in defiance of all the

If the industrial paradigm were to start with the recognition of the finite carrying capacity of the globe, this would immediately raise the issue of how resources are to be allocated; and distributive justice ~ that old spectre ~ would come back to haunt the world

carefully wrought conventions, they are defining issues declared off limits. Far from symptoms of impossible extremism, they are merely portents of the struggle to come. Whoever believed that economic globalisation would be without political consequences that would tear through the tensions and pretensions, and break out of the choiceless consensus of the new order? No doubt the powers at Johannesburg will do their best to dissimulate all this behind yet more commitment to sustainability, poverty-abatement and environmental integrity, the better to gain a little more time for the paralysing proposition that although things can't go on like this, nevertheless they must.

(The author lives in Britain. He has written plays for stage, television and radio, made TV documentaries, published more than 30 books and contributes to leading journals around the world.)



Greenpeace activists protesting outside the Paris headquarters of the French industrial group Alstom against a coal power plant project it is handling in the Philippines. — AFP

Caste

R.B. SINGH

LUCKNOW, JULY 7

MAYAWATI has kicked up another row in Uttar Pradesh, overturning yet another policy of the Rajnath Singh government. This time, it's over her decision to distribute free books only to the SC-ST students from Class I to Class VIII, instead of to poor students irrespective of caste, as done by Rajnath.

While Rajnath's decision had put a burden of Rs 50 crore on the state exchequer, as it brought 1.6 crore students under its ambit, he had argued that distribution of books only to Dalit students would create caste and class consciousness among young students.

Education Department officials are also against

come to schools."

Today, Samajwadi Party legislature wing leader Mohammed Azam Khan submitted a memorandum to Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri urging him to intervene in the matter and prevent Mayawati from changing the previous government's decision. It is in justice on the part of Mayawati to withdraw free book benefits to poor students belonging to OBCs, minorities and upper castes, he said.

"If Mayawati wants to reduce the government's expenditure, she should call an all-party meeting and prune expenditure on the *chat-parai* of the Chief Minister, ministers and officers," Khan said. "The Samajwadi Party believes in helping the poor irrespective of caste and it practised it during its governments," he said.



UP CM Mayawati and BSP chief Kanshi Ram at a rally in New Delhi on Sunday. Express photo by Ravi Batra

Mayawati's move. One of them says: "With the Rajnath Singh government's decision, the dropout rate had come down to 28 per cent from 50 per cent. Free distribution of books had helped motivate poor children to

latest chapter in UP education

MLA fasts over 'misuse' of Act

AMIT SHARMA

LUCKNOW, JULY 7

UTTAR Pradesh BJP MLA Puran Singh Bundela began a fast-unto-death hunger strike today here to protest against the alleged misuse of the ST/SC Act by Lalitpur police. Police had lathicharged his supporters demanding immediate release of eight upper castes booked under the Act.

Police had arrested the eight after upper castes refused to allow Dalits of Chipiana village to use a well under the former's control.

Bundela alleged police had acted in a partisan manner and beaten a teacher, Rajaram Goswami, before invoking the Act against him and seven others.

"I will not end the stir till those arrested are not freed and the local SP not transferred," he said.

CM Mayawati had after taking over asked state police to refrain from lodging complaints under the Act without proper verification.

Some 10,000 cases were lodged under the Act during her second six-month tenure as CM in 1997.

Dalits versus Mayawati

THE NEW BSP-BJP ministry in Uttar Pradesh is taking charge in circumstances that are even more unpropitious than what prevailed during their earlier stints. To the earlier stigma of opportunism has now been added the problem of internal dissension. Even more than the BJP, which is scared of its upper caste supporters being angered by the party's kowtowing to the BSP, it is Ms Mayawati who may have to cope with severe discontent within her party. There is little doubt that her difficulties have been accentuated by the Gujarat carnage. While the BSP's Muslim supporters may have earlier been merely unhappy about their party's betrayal of the pre-election promise not to align with the BJP, now many of them will be in a mood of revolt after what has happened in Gujarat.

They can hardly accept without protest the indignity of being the allies of a party which has been so keen to stand by Narendra Modi, the man whose 'failure' to save the Muslims in Gujarat has been widely recognised as deliberate. It is the feeling of grief, outrage and resentment within the Muslim community which has found

expression in the Dalit-Muslim rally held in Delhi on Thursday. It is not only the minorities and the liberals of other communities who have been dismayed by the BSP's unprincipled politics. The Dalits, too, who constitute the bulk of the party's supporters, may have begun to find Ms Mayawati's brand of politics too tainted for the good of the community.

Arguably, the Dalits have rarely been well served by their leaders. From the time of Ambedkar's Independent Labour Party in the pre-Independence period to the Scheduled Castes Federation and the Republican Party factions, the Dalits have been unable to make their political presence felt in any significant way. The BSP has been more of a success in this respect. But its politics has been sadly distorted by the familiar maladies of the Indian scene, including megalomaniacal tendencies at the top and a lust for power leading to shameless opportunism. Normally, the BSP's assumption of office in India's largest state should have been a cause for celebration. If it isn't even to many of its supporters, the reason is the party's negation of secular and ethical principles.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 MAY 2002

HD-10
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Caste and history ✓

By Alice Thorner

AN ARTICLE on caste and colonial rule by my good friend of many years, the distinguished sociologist, Andre Beteille, appeared in *The Hindu* (March 5). Although I cannot claim professional status in this field, I do have a long experience in trying to understand the significance of caste as one of the determinants of individual and group behaviour in India, past and present. I trust Prof. Beteille will forgive me if I set out the latest tentative conclusions in the course of 60-odd years of reading, discussions and observing with my eyes. I must begin by saying that I disagree approximately 100 per cent with Prof. Beteille's formulations. He has, of course, the advantage and disadvantage of looking at the question from the viewpoint of an Indian.

Turning to his position on the history of caste, I am taken aback by its illogicality. On the one hand he states that there have been significant changes in the past 50 years, in fact throughout the entire colonial period. "Colonial rule," he writes, "loosened the soil in which caste had been rooted for centuries." On what basis does he assume that through the millennia before the advent of the British Raj caste had remained a stable category, that there had been no notable change, no historical development? This is, of course, the classic Orientalist position. Marx expressed it in his scattered references to an "Asiatic Mode of Production". He took from Hegel the notion of "oriental despotism" characterised by an array of emperors, kings and courtiers, all resting on a base of tiny, widely-scattered "village republics". Each of these villages reproduced itself on its own pattern. A hamlet might hive off from the original unit to set itself up like the same model in a new location. At the village level, hierarchy was unknown. Each family tilled its own soil, produced its own food. A small number of artisans provided all non-agricultural requirements. In this never-never land of the "inscrutable East" no development could take place. We may recall that neither Hegel nor Marx had

ever set foot in India. They could only garner shreds of information from the accounts of 17th and 18th century European explorers, emissaries, adventurers, traders such as Sir Thomas Roe, sent from the England of James I to the court of Jehangir, Garcin de Tassy, a French botanist, De Nobilis, an Italian priest, and Raffles, founder of Singapore.

In effect, we have no basis for appreciating if and how the caste mass has operated in earlier centuries. We can consult without much profit the

getic Valley to the colonial period when the British took over from their European predecessors and subdued a multitude of local rulers. The wide range of communities — pre-Indus, pre-Buddhist, pre-Jain, — discovered by the British among the inhabitants of the territories now gathered into the Republic of India surely underwent vast social upheavals. Else why should four great world religions (Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Hinduism) have to be created at the same time in this fertile seed-bed of

tion in earlier centuries, agriculture was the sole occupation. Artisans and other specialists were few — lohars (ironsmiths), carpenters, weavers, dyers, well-diggers, dancers, musicians, priests, fakirs, barbers, midwives and the like. Cities might also have accommodated jewellers, flower, fruit and vegetable sellers, makers of elaborate trappings for royal horses and elephants, practitioners of traditional medicine, masseurs, schoolmasters and scholars of ancient languages. Possibly, but by no means surely, at certain times and in certain places these purveyors of goods and services may have been designated as members of particular castes. Men and women may have moved back and forth from one occupation to another. From reading the caste histories collected by ethnographers and census-takers over the last 100 years, we learn that memories of caste often include stories of migration. We know that today particular castes are said to be dominant in particular geographic and linguistic zones. Marriage arrangements aimed at preserving the continuity of the caste required that the bride and the groom — whatever their respective ages, their previous status as virginal, already married, widowed or divorced, their degree of consanguinity — be able to speak to each other in a common language.

The sub-castes we encounter in the Indian Union today cannot be cavalierly equated with the various aspects of inequality typical of earlier centuries, millennia. To assume that India had no social history until colonial status was conferred on it flies in the face of probability. The Indian soil, in Prof. Beteille's conception resembles a neatly-bound hard-frozen tundra which imprisoned the roots of the caste system until the hoe of the British Raj was able to loosen it. Should we not rather assume that the manifold manifestations of caste in the present day have evolved and will continue to evolve in a volcanic landscape characterised by instability and intermitted eruptions?

(The writer is a member of the Centre for Indian and South Asian Studies, Paris.)

The one thing about which we can be practically sure is that caste could not have taken the form of a universal unchanging phenomenon throughout the long haul of Indian history.

accounts of the two pilgrims who visited India in the 4th and 6th centuries, Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang. The Jataka tales bring vividly to life a rich and variegated urban landscape peopled by kings, courtiers, merchants and thieves. Little to learn from them about caste. The stone-carved edicts of Ashoka, contemporaneous with the beginnings in Europe of the Roman empire, give no grounds for deciding whether the newly reformed emperor was preaching to members of a caste-organised society. They do not tell us whether caste was a significant factor in the broad swathe of northern and eastern India which came under Ashoka's rule.

Trying to get answers with regard to caste from the hymns of the Rig Veda is like trying to milk a stone sculpture of Annapurna. Nor does the archaeological evidence collected at Indus Valley sites enlighten us. The one thing about which we can be practically sure is that caste could not have taken the form of a universal unchanging phenomenon throughout "la longue duree" (the long haul) of Indian history.

Inequality may well have been the characteristic throughout the length and breadth of what is today India, from the first settlements in the Gan-

faiths and philosophies. Far from the modern concept of the nation-state marked from its neighbours by agreed or contested frontiers, families and clans in former days moved freely, sometimes seasonally with their cattle along river beds, mountain trails, across flat lands. We keep finding new sites of the Indus civilisation as far east as Uttar Pradesh and as far south as Maharashtra. Ashoka's rule prevailed over parts of what is today Afghanistan as well as coastal Orissa. In all these constantly shifting centres and peripheries where could the limits of an incipient or full-blown caste system have been drawn. Were Prof. Beteille's roots movable from one location to another as successive dynasties shaped and reshaped the map of what came much later to be India?

We must indeed take caste seriously as a phenomenon today more characteristic of South Asia than of any other part of the known world. In recent colonial and post-colonial times, caste has certainly evolved in terms of its forms, its importance, its regional promoting variations, its employment as a means of promoting political ambitions, its relation to labour force recruitment and in its involvement with religious beliefs and customs. For the vast majority of the popula-

4 APR 2002

OFF HINCL

9. Carolis & Priti

HD-11
9/8

'Outside elements' may be involved in Godhra: Advani

Carolis & Priti

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, MARCH 3. The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, said today that preliminary investigations by the Central agencies indicated the involvement of some "outside elements" in the Sabarmati Express attack near the Godhra Railway station.

Talking to mediapersons after a visit to some of the affected areas in Ahmedabad and Godhra and discussions with the senior State officials, Mr. Advani said there was yet no conclusive evidence but the "needle of suspicion" goes towards "involvement of some outside elements" in the attack.

He said the swift way the train operation was carried out, gave indications of it being a "pre-meditated" attack and not being the handiwork of only the local people. He did not name what "outside elements" he thought was involved but said the reality would be known in the judicial inquiry into the incident ordered by the Gujarat Government.

Promises probe

He, however, did not agree that the inquiry into the Godhra train episode and the subsequent incidents of violence in various parts of the State could be clubbed together. Mr. Advani compared the burning of innocent women and children in Ahmedabad and some other parts of the State in the aftermath of the train tragedy as nothing but an "act of terrorism" like what was going on in Jammu and Kashmir which was sought to be described as "freedom struggle". But later replying to a question, he qualified the events in the State as "communal violence" since there was no element of causing "terror" among the people. He said he would advise the State Govern-



The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, speaking to a badly burned riot victim in a hospital in Ahmedabad on Saturday. — Reuters

ment to order an inquiry into the gory incidents in Ahmedabad, particularly the burning of houses in Meghaninagar and Naroda areas in which over 100 people were killed.

Describing both the Godhra tragedy and what followed as "reprehensible", the Minister said that the Gujarat incidents had also spoiled the four-year record of the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre of providing violence-free administration in the country. But he expressed the confidence that the situation would soon be brought under

control and assured necessary assistance to achieve it.

Mr. Advani, who was accompanied by the Union Home Secretary, Kamal Pande, and the Director-General of the Border Security Force, Gurbachan Singh, visited Meghaninagar and some other affected areas and called on the injured at the civil hospital before leaving for Godhra. On his return, he held detailed discussions with the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and senior officials on the situation. Mr. Advani later left for Hyderabad to pay tributes to the deceased Speaker of the Lok

Sabha, G. M. C. Balyogi, but said he planned to visit some more affected cities and towns particularly Baroda, Bhavnagar and Rajkot.

Mr. Advani, has reportedly communicated to Mr. Modi the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's instructions to take stern steps to curb the violence.

Without naming Pakistan, Mr. Advani said those who had been threatening the country's borders but were finding themselves "cornered" all over the world in the last few months, would feel "happy" over the turn of events in Gujarat.

He rejected the opposition demand for handing over Gujarat to the Army and said not enough personnel could be spared to take over the entire State. The Army's assistance was sought and provided to help the civil authorities restore law and order. Pointing out that the scale of violence was being tapered down since Army began flag march in the affected areas. He also denied that the Centre delayed in sending the Army.

Police 'not inactive'

He also did not agree that the State police was "inactive" and said he had been informed that on the first day itself at least 77 people were killed in police firing. He also disagreed that there was any intelligence failure to prevent the Godhra train tragedy. He had told the officials at Godhra that they must find out the culprits. He said he did not want to bring politics into it and added that he was not aware of the political affiliation of the four councillors of Godhra arrested in this connection.

He said he had also asked the officials to constitute peace committees and take out peace marches in the affected areas to instill a sense of confidence and security among the people.

HD-10
9/3

Caste and colonial rule

By Andre Beteille

Colonial rule loosened the soil in which caste had been rooted for centuries.

IS THERE a secular trend of decline in the strength of caste in Indian society? My assessment is that there is, although one cannot be categorical because there are many counter-currents that act against the main current. Further, I believe that the trend of change towards the weakening of caste began during the British rule around the middle of the 19th century and has continued, with many ups and downs, till the present. This view is at odds with the current enthusiasm for identity politics in which signs of the growing importance of caste are seen as indications of a progressive movement towards the attainment of social justice.

In the early years of independence, forward-looking Indians had their minds on development and modernisation, and when they thought of caste, they thought of it as an obstacle. Liberal and radical intellectuals alike believed that caste belonged to India's past, not its future. Marxists were particularly scornful of those who undertook to study and write about caste. They believed that it was a fit subject for bourgeois sociologists but not for those concerned with the real contradictions in society. They believed that caste consciousness was an obstacle to class formation.

But we cannot for that or any other reason wish it out of existence. Caste continued to receive the attention of sociologists and social anthropologists in the 1950s and 1960s, and they were joined by small numbers of political scientists and others. It was M.N. Srinivas who more than any other scholar pointed to the continuing, and in some respects increasing, importance of caste. Without taking anything away from Srinivas's foresight, it must be pointed out that in making his case about the resurgence of caste in independent India, he took all his examples from the field of politics. If we focus our attention on the political process

alone, we are likely to conclude that caste has grown stronger and not weaker since the time of the Emergency. Caste is now used more extensively and more openly for the mobilisation of political support than it was ever before.

If our objective is to assess long-term trends of change in caste, it will be a mistake to concentrate solely on politics, and that too on electoral politics. A serious weakness in the scholarly writing on caste in the last 25 years and particularly since the time of the Mandal agitations has been the neglect of all aspects of caste other than the political. The association between caste and occupation has weakened, slowly but steadily, while restrictions on marriage are still observed, the rules of endogamy are enforced far less stringently than before. As to the ritual practices of purity and pollution, which many regarded as the very cement of caste, all the evidence shows that they are clearly and decisively in retreat.

The changes that have been taking place in caste since Independence began at least a hundred years before Independence, under colonial rule. If the Constitution is a landmark in the history of caste, an earlier, though less conspicuous, landmark is the Removal of Caste Disabilities Act of 1850. Until then the life of a Hindu was so deeply embedded in his caste that expulsion from it amounted virtually to civil death.

Colonial administrators, like administrators everywhere, were inclined to take more than their due share of credit for bringing about beneficial changes in the country they administered. They exaggerated the rigidity and oppressiveness of the traditional social order and their own role in establishing liberal ideas

and institutions in India. Many of their acts did indeed lead to the weakening of caste, but some also led to its strengthening. On balance, however, the long-term consequence of colonial rule was the weakening rather than the strengthening of caste.

Many British administrators took an obsessive interest in caste, and their interest was not based only on natural or benign curiosity. Some of it arose from the desire to show how backward Indian society was and how incongenial it was for democracy. But we must not judge the British too harshly for, Dr. Ambedkar himself had said in the constituent Assembly that "democracy in India is only a top dressing on an Indian soil that is essentially undemocratic".

Having learnt about the divisive possibilities inherent in caste, the British were not slow to use it for their own political and administrative ends. Here they were only showing the way to the rulers of independent India who have out-classed their British predecessors in using the loyalties of caste for mobilising political support, particularly after 1977. And if our present leaders say that they are using caste only in the interest of social justice, the British too said that their main interest was to ensure fair treatment for the minorities, the depressed classes and the backward communities.

Colonial administrators wrote a great deal about caste, and much of what they wrote was biased as is indeed the case with official writing anywhere. For a hundred years they set about identifying, enumerating, describing, classifying and ranking the different castes and communities in the subcontinent. The decennial censuses played some part in bringing to public attention the division

and ranking of castes. It is for this reason that it was decided not to enumerate castes in the censuses after the new Government took office on Independence. But while the censuses and ethnographic reports may have created a new sense of rivalry among castes, the institution of caste itself had deep roots in Indian soil.

For all its fascination for the enumeration and classification of castes — inherited to some extent by our present census takers and official ethnographers — colonial rule loosened the soil in which caste had been rooted for centuries. It introduced new economic forces and a new legal and social philosophy. It established a new educational system and a new occupational system based on principles antithetical to the hierarchical principles of caste. It is true that the creation of new institutions under colonial rule was not a painless process; but those institutions helped carry India forward into the modern world.

It has now become increasingly common to represent colonial rule as the source and origin of every economic, political and social malady in contemporary India. Some smart American historians have even floated the idea that caste as we know it today is basically a creation of colonial rule, and that idea has naturally found many subscribers among Indians. There is no need now to white-wash colonial rule; but there is no need either to deny the advances in Indian society that started under it.

Today historians of the Left seem to vie with those of the Right in depicting colonial rule in the darkest of colours. This is completely contrary to the historical perspective of Marx who took the view, essentially correct in my judgment, that on balance colonial rule was a progressive force in 19th century India. We cannot get the history of independent India right if we are so wrong in our reading of what happened in the hundred years before Independence.

THE HINDU
4 MAR 2002

New agenda for Dalits — II

By Pratap Bhanu Mehta

PREPARING AN agenda for giving Dalits greater access to the market requires a three-fold strategy. First, there will have to be considerable investment in enhancing the marketable skills of Dalits through education. The report's emphasis on compulsory quality education is unexceptionable. The gap between the enrolment of Dalits and non-Dalits remained more or less constant between 1971 and 1991 at all levels though the gap in women's education actually increased. Although we do not yet have definitive figures for 2001, there is some evidence that the gap may be narrowing slightly. The declaration seems to speak in two voices over the question of reservation in education institutions. Point ten of the 21-point agenda calls for making quotas "applicable to all public and private institutions", but also says "every English medium school must implement Diversity in Admissions". The disappointing aspect of the discussion on education in the report is this. The objective should not only be to narrow the educational gap between Dalits and non-Dalits, but also to ensure that Dalits have access to high quality private institutions as well, in India and abroad. Such access can be ensured either through reservation or by giving both students and education institutions financial incentives. During the Ninth Plan, the Government sought to give scholarships to about 62 lakh Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students. Many private foundations have recently launched massive schemes to help students from these communities gain access to good private institutions. We do not, as yet, have a full assessment of the success of these schemes, but there is a need for more empirically grounded studies on measures that will in fact narrow the educational gap. In the absence of good causal accounts, reservation becomes the default option.

The second strategy for gaining

from the market economy is opening up access to private companies. The declaration does not recommend that reservation be made applicable to the private sector as whole, but to those companies that receive any form of Government assistance, in the form of tax incentives, subsidies etc. Most of the report lays great stress on the American model for creating diversity within the private sec-

plausible to think that Indian consumers would boycott those companies alleged to be engaging in discriminatory practices. Dalits may have to first acquire market power to make diversity programmes effective. Therefore, change in Dalit representation in the organised private sector is likely to be a slow process.

The organised sector in India is small, and any lasting Dalit participa-

objectives are often less clearly linked to issues of macro-economic sustainability than they should be.

Second, politics still centres round distributive coalitions. Merely producing growth never wins elections. Since 1991 all parties have been at a loss to craft a new distributive coalition. The dominant discourse of distribution, where the state generated the resources to distribute, is now exhausted. On the one hand, the state's capacity for generating revenue is limited by the power of dominant political coalitions. On the other hand, the distortions that the state produced in the workings of the market impeded growth. Now that liberalisation is the *de facto* economic imperative, how will a new distributive coalition be crafted? This report seems to suggest that there are ways of making direct links between liberalisation and Dalit empowerment. For example, it argues that most of the subsidies provided by the Indian state are directed at the well off. Cutting many subsidies can be made politically viable, if we make the case that this will free up more resources for investment in worthwhile things such as education and infrastructure. The tragedy of our politics is that no political party has had the imagination to make this link. Sustaining political momentum for liberalisation will require that Dalits, a key constituency in redistributive politics, be brought on the side of the market. In other words, more political work needs to be done to prevent, what some are calling, the "casteisation" of liberalisation.

Dalits are now the biggest defenders of our constitutional order, and there is no reason to suppose that they do not have great stakes in making a market economy prosper. And indeed, as the introduction to the report suggests, the market economy will also prosper only if we overcome the most debilitating of our social contradictions: the oppression of Dalits.

(Concluded)

The market economy will prosper only if we overcome the most debilitating of our social contradictions: the oppression of Dalits.

tor. This model, rather than insisting on quotas, lays greater stress on anti-discrimination legislation and diversity programmes. In principle this has two advantages. It is not incompatible with the requirements of quality and merit, and the report is salutary in its acknowledgment that the quest for greater representation ought not to dispense with these considerations entirely. Second, it is more realistic in its assumptions that quotas, once instituted, become almost permanent and can seldom be cut back. But the limited success the American model has had is predicated on two assumptions. First, the legal system was better equipped to deal with anti-discrimination cases. It had considerable power to accord damages, which acts as an effective deterrent to discrimination. It remains an open question whether anti-discrimination legislation will, in the Indian context, simply raise the cost of creating jobs, by providing courts with the means of constraining the labour market, without providing substantial benefits to Dalits. Second, diversity programmes were instituted by companies as much out of a sense that the loss of reputation would imply loss of revenue as out of a commitment to diversity. It is im-

tion in the market economy will have to pay greater attention to creating traders, small businesses and entrepreneurs, not just employees. Here our record is very bleak. The Government of India has over the years, through agencies such as NSFDC, SCDC and NBCFDC, provided loans to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes for small businesses. Again we do not have good evidence on whether such loans have had a significant and cost effective impact. The policy issues raised by the report ought to receive more attention. But it also raises two interesting questions about our politics. The first is this. Although the report is sometimes a sort of brief on behalf of Congress (I) Ministries, its main conclusion is that record of most Governments is at best mixed. Congress (I) Governments that perform well on land reform do poorly on education, and those that have managed to do well on human indicators, do less well on agrarian reform. It may be that there are real tradeoffs to make in the formulation of policy and while the report is very strong on the objectives of policy, it is less clear on the economics that would make such policy sustainable. It has been our weakness that our social policy

Reign of casteist politics in UP

Aloke Tikku in Khurja



**ASSEMBLY
2002**

Feb. 7. — It does not always pay to do all the 'right' things all the time. In caste-conscious Uttar Pradesh for instance, fielding a candidate from the dominant community in a constituency to woo them.

Specially when other political parties are thinking on similar lines.

Ask BJP's Mr Harphal Singh in Khurja, Mr Sardar Singh in Gokul or for that matter Mr Ram Vir Upadhyaya in Haathras.

All of them are from castes which constitute a significant chunk of voters in the constituency and are known to vote en-bloc on caste lines rather than party affiliations.

But with others catching up with the ploy, belonging to the 'right' caste just does not seem to be enough to contest the election and get a walk-over.

In the Thakur-dominated Khurja Assembly segment of Khurja Parliamentary constituency, it is not the sitting legislator, Mr Harphal Singh, who's expected to reach anywhere close to Lucknow but either a former MLA's wife, Mrs Anupama — who belongs to the same community but a different sub-caste — or the Bahujan Samaj Party's candidate, Mr Anil Sharma.

The latter is a Brahmin, a community which makes up for the second largest community in the segment, but he's the only one from the community in the fray.

Several Thakur-dominated villages have already pledged their support to Mrs Anupama after major political parties refused to give her a party ticket. This places her at a more comfortable footing than other candidates.

"The Thakur votes are going to split between the three candidates (the Samajwadi Party has also fielded a Thakur) and for the first time, we may finally have a legislator from our community," asserts Naresh, a prominent member of the Brahmin community.

"This time, we are not going to split our votes but have decided to back the BSP even though it is a dalit party," chips in Rajesh, who works in a hotel on the outskirts of the town.

It's a similar story elsewhere in parts of the state, where candidates from the majority community are running the risk of losing because of too many candidates.

"The problem is anyone with a semblance of support from the community thinks they can win," said Anoop, who's from the Thakur community. Anoop is worried at the possibility of the BSP's candidate winning the election in a constituency where they have always had the last word.

THE STATESMAN

8 FEB 2002

Caste upsets UP equations

Amitabh Shukla
Rampur, February 3

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY

THE CASTE arithmetic in western Uttar Pradesh has become so complex that no one quite seems to know who is cutting into whose vote. The NDA in itself is a good example of caste crosscurrents. Despite a show of unity, NDA allies are working at cross-purposes, confusing the voters.

The Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) led by Ram Vilas Paswan and groomed by the BJP to take on the BSP is contesting almost 50 seats in the entire belt. Whatever impact this has on the BSP, it is already clear that the BJP's prospects have been hurt. The misunderstandings between the two parties are obvious at the local level. For instance, the Rampur district president of

the LJP, Prem Pal Singh Saini, alleged that the "BJP had stabbed them in the back".

The Rashtriya Kranti Party of Kalyan Singh, banking on the votes of the Lodh community, has also adversely affected the electoral prospects of the BJP. It has given tickets to two BJP rebels - sitting MLAs who were denied nominations.

Expelled minister Ashok Yadav too has floated a regional party and given tickets to 30 candidates in the belt.

The SP faces a similar situation. One time ally and now bitter critic of party chief Mulayam

Singh Yadav, D.P. Yadav has floated the Rashtriya Parivartan Dal (RPD) to cut into the Yadav votes. The contest in Mulayam Singh's home turf in Sambhal is getting bloodier because D.P. Yadav is now showing his muscle power. Other SP rebels too are making life difficult for the official party candidates.

The Congress's meagre votes too have been divided. The Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) is contesting most of the seats and the Loktantrik Congress Party (LCP) of expelled UP minister Naresh Aggarwal is contesting around 30 seats in the belt.

The BSP too is affected the rebels and parties professing a similar ideology. The Republican Party is contesting two dozen seats and so are the splinter factions of the party.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

The Bhopal Dalit declaration

By Kancha Ilaiah

9-12-01
2001/12/09
Perin

FOR THE first time in the history of democratic experimentation in India, Madhya Pradesh, with the total involvement of the Chief Minister, organised a conference to prepare an agenda for socio-economic reform of the Indian state and civil society. Digvijay Singh's interest went beyond his day-to-day administrative problems. His inaugural speech made it clear that he wanted to combine politics and power with socio-economic reform as that alone can transform a backward country such as India and a backward State such as Madhya Pradesh. All these years, politicians made positive gestures towards Dalits only to win them over as electoral base, but never to set an agenda for their socio-economic transformation. The Dalit agenda of an average politician, so far, has been confined to affirming the reservation policy Ambedkar infused into the system. The process of privatisation began to dismantle the space of reservation. The deliberations at the Bhopal Dalit conference focussed on the Bhopal document, which charted out an economic agenda for transforming the Dalits' socio-economic conditions. The meet evolved a database for critical examination of Dalit progress based on the experience of 50 years of policy and located the Scheduled Caste and the Scheduled Tribe question in terms of policy and performance of the Indian state. Though the document did not contextualise the Dalit question by critiquing the socio-spiritual institutions that evolved in India, it tried to examine the relationship between political democracy and civil-societal democracy. It was pointed out that the document should have paid more attention to the institutional causes of untouchability. Untouchability in the spiritual realm led to social segregation of people who were not allowed to participate in agrarian capital in the feudal and the pre-feudal economy of India and also in the capitalist modernity of the nation in the present context. Dalits were not mere social untouchables but were kept out of the capitalist modernity.

The conference examined the Madhya Pradesh model of distribution of grazing land, empowering Dalits and tribals through decentralisation by devolving

powers to the panchayat raj institutions. It examined the process of making the tribals direct sellers of forest produce and direct buyers of necessary goods and commodities in a market where the system of middlemen from the business class was abolished. It, however, went beyond this model. This model, for that matter any model in India, had not worked out a blueprint for the full-blooded participation of Dalits in capitalist entrepreneurship and market. In other words, no

civil society, which would strengthen the political democracy, by creating conditions of social equality that become the backbone of national development? The answer to these two questions lies in the state repositioning its strategy in both economic and political spheres going far beyond the models of all schools of economic thought that the upper caste economists have so far worked out. No mainstream Indian economist has, so far, advocated active Dalit participation in en-

practices in all religious and educational institutions. For example, Hinduism and some Christian institutions practice casteism in temples and churches. The secular state that grants lands and other benefits cannot allow religious discrimination to be practised in the nation. Caste does not allow secularism to operate in any meaningful way because religions claim many assets from the state's collective property, which belongs to all people of that state. The Chief Minister's promise that the State shall make 30 per cent of its purchases from Dalit and tribal business establishments to begin with, starting from this financial year, is a great leap forward. Let us not forget that many upper caste entrepreneurs and business establishments prospered because of the support of the state and nationalised banks. All these years the upper castes have used the national assets as if they belong to them alone. Now Dalits are asking for a share in all forms of state property and the state must understand their aspiration on the basis of citizenship. The notion of citizenship gets institutionalised only when Dalits share all forms of national wealth equitably. The Central Government told the world at the Durban conference of the United Nations that India was working towards the abolition of caste within its national interest. But so far the Centre has not come up with any meaningful strategy to transform the casteist socio-economic and spiritual realms. Dalit intellectuals believe that the BJP does not have any reform agenda because it evolved its ideology within the bonds of Hindu Varna dharma. It, in fact, would negate all the fruits of socio-economic reforms that earlier Governments had achieved with some belief in Gandhian and Ambedkarite initiatives. The Dalit intelligentsia still seems to repose confidence in the Congress (I) and left-wing political formations as they have some agenda for social transformation on their cards. Digvijay Singh's initiative comes as reassuring process in the context of post-Durban developments. One hopes the leaders of all parties make some effort to see the Dalit writing on the wall and evolve a national agenda for total diversification of national wealth to avoid a civil war in the 21st century.

The Bhopal conference makes it clear that without a share in the liberalised private capital for Dalits, the state and civil society are bound to crack.

model has so far created a capitalist class from the country's quarter of a billion Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. No class of contractors, businessmen/women have evolved from these communities. This does not mean there are no administrative and managerial skills among the Dalits and the tribals. Their talent does not have the seed capital required to match the labour capital they possess. The Dalit bureaucratic class and the political leadership were unable to become a class in themselves to turn it into a social capital of the community as the upper castes have done.

The conference posed two questions: one, is it possible to adopt the American model by developing diversified assets, capital, entrepreneurship and skills, as the Americans have done by giving a share to African-Americans in all kinds of national assets? The American economy grew from strength to strength with the robust participation of African-Americans in every sphere of economy-capital ownership, business, capitalist farming and so on. By applying their skills, which had many innovative abilities that the whites lacked, the African-Americans contributed a whole range of new ethics to capital growth. Why does Indian capital not allow that kind of creative and productive diversification with Dalit participation? Second, is it possible to create a democratic

entrepreneurship and capital ownership. Why? The Dalit intellectuals felt that Dalit entrepreneurship and capital ownership should not be seen as a drag on the economy (as many have been seeing reservation in the job sector), but must be seen as a springboard for the whole economy. The truth in this argument can be realised if we understand that creative labour power still exists only among the Dalits and if that labour power owns the capital it has a tremendous ability to reposition the dignity of labour in India. The innovativeness of capital grows only when we combine the dignity of labour and capital. Since capital in India is arrested in the Brahmin-Bania culture, it suffers from an enormous indignity of labour. When capital and markets operate in the larger cultural environment of indignity of labour they can never take revolutionary leaps. The Bhopal conference makes it clear that without a share in the liberalised private capital for Dalits, the state and civil society are bound to crack. Further, the question of social democracy is related to establishing the spiritual democratic relations within all religions operating in India. Caste discrimination within the religious order structuralised the undemocratic relations within civil society which led to a casteisation of state, land, capital and development. The state must step in through the Endowment Departments to abolish caste

THE HINDU

30 JAN 2002

President calls for Dalit uplift

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 25. — The President, Mr KR Narayanan, today called for social uplift of the Dalits and other weaker sections of society and said emancipation of deprived sections of the society would be India's answer to terrorism.

In possibly what could be his last address to the nation before he lays down office this year, Mr Narayanan said in his Republic Day-eve address that "attention to the problems affecting the

9- Caste & position
masses of our society, our country will be strong and powerful to pursue the policy of peace and co-existence that we have followed in the world, especially with regard to our neighbours in the sub-continent and Asia. And that will be our democratic answer to the evil phenomenon of terrorism that we in India and the world in general are facing today."

On the discrimination being suffered by the women of Scheduled Castes and Tribes, Mr Narayanan said it "is a crying denial of the democracy that is enshrined in our Constitution."

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He also spoke about the recent call by a Dalit and tribal intellectuals' meet in Bhopal for providing reservation in the private sector. The Bhopal Declaration was charted out, the President said, to find out "a new course for Dalits and the tribal people for the 21st century... The declaration emphasises the importance of providing for representation for these deprived classes, not only in government and public institutions but in private corporations and enterprises which benefit from government funds and facilities."

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He added: "This is not to ask the private enterprises to accept socialism, but to do something like what the Diversity Bill and the affirmative action that a capitalist country like the USA had adopted and is implementing".

In a clear message to the political establishment, he said: "It is the extraordinary courage and heroism of the security personnel at the Parliament House that saved the seat of our democracy against the dastardly terrorist attack... Let us remember that our security is dependent on our common people like them."

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26 JAN 2002

'Quota-within-quota move motivated'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN 25. The attempt to create a quota for the most backward castes within the quota of jobs for the backward classes was not a move to right a social wrong, but one to divide the backward castes, socially and politically, and to create the most backward class vote-bank for the party, says Ashok Yadav, former Minister in the Rajnath Government of Uttar Pradesh.

He had filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the State Government's quota-within-a-quota reservation policy, and got the policy stayed. He alleged that the entire move was conceived and pushed through in a hurry sim-

ply with an eye on the elections.

Mr. Yadav is also contemplating moving the highest court for contempt proceedings against senior BJP leaders — Jana Krishna-murthi, Rajnath Singh and Kushabhau Thakre — for ignoring the Supreme Court's stay and insisting that the party would push through its new reservation policy.

"When the matter is in the court — the petition has been admitted and a stay has been granted — to continue to say that the Government will push through the policy is a blatant contempt of court," Mr. Yadav said today, addressing a press conference. After consulting his lawyers, he would move the court for contempt proceedings, he said.

Quoting BJP leaders' statements, which suggest that the reservation policy would be an election issue, Mr. Yadav pointed out that the Supreme Court had held in the Indira Sahney versus the Union of India case that to politicise the provision of reservations for communal support and the ends of the party "is to subvert the solemn undertaking of Article 16(1) of the Constitution".

The BJP had now brought out an aborted policy of reservations purely for political purposes. Its attitude towards the backward castes was there for all to see, he said. After the exit of Kalyan Singh as Chief Minister, there was not a single notable backward caste leader, he said.

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26 JAN 2002

President endorses extension of job quotas to pvt sector

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 25 JANUARY

PRESIDENT K. R. Narayanan on Friday used the deep concern over terrorism to make a strong pitch, albeit obliquely, for the extension of job quotas to the private sector. In his last Republic Day-eve address to the nation on Friday night, Mr Narayanan called for tackling the socio-economic disparities or the "root causes" of terrorism. He also endorsed the demand being voiced by Dalit and tribal leaders for bringing the private sector under the purview of reservations.

Mr Narayanan, however, didn't resort to a direct advocacy and instead, used the so-called Bhopal Declaration as a peg to signal his



GOING TO THE ROOTS

support to the controversial idea. "Indeed in the present economic system and of the future, it is necessary for the private sector to adopt social policies that are progressive and more egalitarian for these deprived classes to be uplifted from their state of deprivation and inequality and given the rights of

citizens and civilised human beings."

"This is not to ask the private enterprise accept socialism, but to do something like what the Diversity Bill and the affirmative action that a capitalist country like the United States of America has adopted and is implementing," he added. He then added to the demand made for extension of reservations by Dalit activists at Bhopal recently. Mr Narayanan's remarks will provide legitimacy to the demand for quota extension. The demand has failed to get consideration as many consider it to be out of line with the recognition of the need to free the private sector of regulations.

The President's prescriptions for combating terrorism are also out of step with the government's grow-



ARMS AND THE MAN

ing determination not to spare force for dealing with scourge. The "law and order" approach gained at the expense of the "underlying caus-

Ackerman, Pallone on honours list

New Delhi
25 JANUARY

TWO INFLUENTIAL US Congressmen Gary Ackerman and Frank Pallone, who have been in the forefront championing India's case on cross-border terrorism and other issues with the US administration, have been chosen for this year's Padma Bhushan awards. Both Congressmen are members of the "India caucus."

Soldiers on their way to the Indo-Pak border arrive at Jammu railway station on Sunday. — AP/PII.

Statesman News Service

BHOPAL, Jan. 13. — A 21-point action plan as part of the Bhopal Declaration was adopted here this evening, for the social and economic development of 250 million Dalits and tribals living in the country, at the concluding session of the two-day Bhopal conference on the Dalit and Tribal Agenda for the 21st century organised by the state government.

Several Dalit and tribal academics, intellectuals and activists participated in the conference. The chief minister, Mr Digvijay

Singh was also present at the conference throughout the day.

The 21-point action plan pressed for radical land reforms to ensure that each Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe family owns adequate cultivable land for their socio-economic well-being. "The government should pursue all possible measures, including distribution of surplus lands, government revenue land and temple lands within a specific time frame, for the landless

Dalit-tribal meet adopts action plan

SCs and STs," the declaration mentioned. The plan called for implementation of the law providing for complete abolition of bonded labour system. It also pressed for immediate elimination of manual scavenging involving mainly Dalits.

It demanded constitution of statutory committees at the national and state levels to identify within a time-frame all SCs/STs' lands illegally occupied by non-Dalits, in order to pave the way for their restoration to

them. The charter advocated legislation and its effective implementation to ensure decent living wages to SC and ST agricultural labourers, their job security, better working conditions and a gender parity in wages.

It stated that a mechanism be established to take stringent action against the guilty for non-utilisation or diversion of these funds.

All educational bodies must have due reservation for the SCs and STs and even the private sector must accept and put into effect

"diversity" in its workforce, the charter said. It stated that the State must protect the Dalits and tribals and ensure rigorous implementation of the SC and ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act 1989 and Rules 1995 to prosecute the perpetrators of various crimes and atrocities against the women and men of the two communities.

A Truth Paper within two years was also demanded, to deal with the status of reservation meant for SCs and STs. All backlog reserved vacancies in the public sector must be filled immediately, it said. The plan also wanted reservation for SCs and STs at all levels of the judiciary and defence forces.

No sweat over biased Dalit history

HEMENDRA NARAYAN in Lucknow

THE Union Human Resource Development Minister has been saying that the government has resolved to change distorted portions of India's history from textbooks. Murli Manohar Joshi has been blaming Communists under Western influence - who "wanted to project India as a country of defeated people" - for the "distortion".

Mr Joshi has been describing it as a British design to present India as a landmass rather than a nation.

But British administrators can be accused of distortion of history of another kind. And there has been a demand to rewrite it.

District gazetteers compiled rather painstakingly by British administrators contains "social bias". These gazetteers were updated by Indians writers who relied heavily on the earlier editions while copying from them "without bothering to correct the social and British bias".

The Uttar Pradesh government has accepted the demand to remove all "degrading" references to Pasis, a prominent Scheduled Caste, from the Sitapur gazetteer.

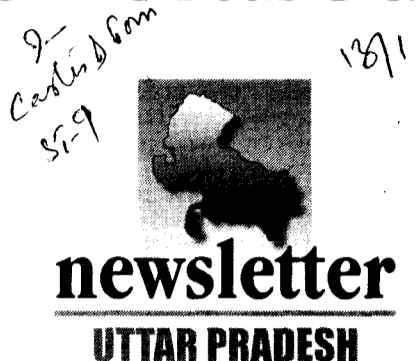
The state Revenue Secretary, Harish Chandra, told *The Statesman* that orders would be issued soon to "delete or expunge" all such references to the caste from the gazetteer. This was apparently an immediate solution for the state government as fresh compilation of the gazetteer was not on the cards.

This way, the government appears to be acceding to a politically sensitive demand, with

Assembly elections round the corner.

Mr Chandra said the same action would be taken if "similar mistakes" were brought to the notice of the government in other district gazetteers of the state. As it was difficult to delete references from gazetteers available on library bookshelves, the government has proposed orders be issued that the references "were not to be read".

The latest edition of the Sitapur gazetteer was published in 1961. It is known that these gazetteers are points of reference for a new



newsletter

UTTAR PRADESH

second part of the statement. Elsewhere, it refers demeaningly to the Pasis. Describing them as



BSP national vice-president Mayawati and Union HRD minister Murli Manohar Joshi.

officer posted to the district. On page 51 the gazetteer mentions: "At one time many Pasis were noted for their skill with bow and arrow and many of them are said to have lived outside the law." Objections were raised over the

the early settlers in (the) district it says "The Pasis have retained their former name and are to this day numerous in the district. But they have fallen from their high caste and were for centuries treated as inferior

people."

Leaders of the Pasi Samaj are said to have raised the matter with Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan. He in turn referred it to Chief Minister Rajnath Singh. As a follow-up, orders to "erase and delete" the references in the gazetteer will be issued by the Uttar Pradesh revenue department. The references to the Pasis had been taken from the gazetteer compiled by HR Nevill and published for the first time in 1905. But the same conclusion had been incorporated by Esha

negative and even insulting references to Pasi chiefs. There has been a long-standing demand to put things in the right and "socially-acceptable" perspective.

The idea was to correct the historical depiction of the Pasi chiefs' role during the British Raj. One such chief was Bijli Pasi. Allegations have been made that their positive role had been "consciously suppressed" from history books.

Political leaders have complained about the treatment meted out to such "rajas" by the historians. "The people who wrote our history wiped out all traces of Dalit rajas and maharajas.

For a long time now, our history has been wiped out," the Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Mayawati, had once said.

"The social system is such that someone like Bijli Pasi found no mention in our history books, while there is evidence that the Pasis at one time were ruling this area," she is quoted to have said.

The Union HRD minister, however, has not shown any interest in rectifying such bias against the Dalits by the historians and merely expressed his annoyance at certain references to the Brahmins.

"If a myth that Brahmins were beef-eaters could be taught, why can't the number of temples destroyed by Muslim rulers be a part of the syllabus," the Union minister said in Lucknow recently. The government will not allow students to learn a distorted version of history, Mr Joshi had declared.

(The author is The Statesman's Lucknow-based Special Representative.)

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1 JAN 2002

Renewed caste war

51-9
11/10
Whose side will Laloo take? *of Dalits & PM*

The massacre of nine RJD men of lower castes by Congress supporters in Sheikhpura shows that caste and class considerations continue to override realpolitik in Bihar. That Congressmen could perpetrate such a heinous crime despite their party being part of Rabri-Laloo's RJD Government shows that marriages of political convenience do not work when caste and social factors come into play. The RJD leadership has blamed the local Congress MP Rajo Singh and his son Sanjay Kumar, a minister belonging to the Congress in the Rabri government, for the killings and demanded their arrest. Although the immediate provocation for the massacre was the location of some development schemes in Sheikhpura, the reason real was caste dominance and related considerations. Rajo Singh and his minister son Sanjay belong to Bhumihar — an upper caste — which controls much of Sheikhpura's and Bihar's power, pelf and land. But the Yadavs and other backward castes belonging to the RJD resent this dominance. Caste loyalties and bonds ensure support for a local Dalit Congress minister Ashok Chowdhury who doesn't see eye to eye with his ministerial colleague Sanjay.

An interesting twist is provided by Sanjay resigning from Rabri's government since his name figures in the FIR. By this Sanjay and his father Rajo, who like Laloo has been charge-sheeted in the Rs 1000-crore fodder scam, are trying to send signals that charge-sheeting them for massacre might result in Congress pulling out from the RJD-led government. Not that Congress's withdrawal of support will destabilise the Rabri-Laloo Raj but such a step will sour Laloo's equation with the lady of 10 Janpath despite both being bound by a symbiotic political relationship at the state and national level. The thing to watch would be whose side the "great messiah" of the downtrodden takes. For more Dalits and backward people have died at the hands of upper castes during his raj than at any other time. And he has done nothing to check this.

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