CHAPTER 5

DALIT POLITICS: PROBLEMS AND ALTERNATIVES

In the previous chapter, we looked at Ambedkar’s second level of (societal) intervention in Indian society to protect Dalit interests from the Hindus. We observed that only a society that can foster cohesion among all its members can ensure and promote social justice. For this purpose, an intervention in the cultural processes is needed. Whereas in the third chapter, we looked at the context in which Ambedkar situates the minority problem, and the means to tackle this problem, in this chapter, we look at how keeping the Indian context in mind, he suggests political safeguards like separate electorates for minorities rather than Reservation in the political representation, as the most effective means to safeguard their interests. We also looked at his arguments for Reservation both in the second and third chapter; where we discussed that Ambedkar advocates Reservation, not with backward-looking arguments, but with forward-looking arguments. A backward-looking argument is one which justifies a Reservation policy based on past injustices and demands compensation, for example, reparations. A forward-looking argument is one which justifies the policy based on the results its produces.1 In other words, it is a consequentialist defense of the policy. These Reservations are meant to ensure the effective and minimum representation of all groups in a democratic setup; representation of all being the essence of democracy. In the process, we came across his notion of Minority as a group that lacks effective and reliable means to ensure its representation in the legislative process in a society. He also extends this argument on Reservation for minorities in the executive, so that laws which have been passed to protect the minority are executed efficiently. Apart from this, Reservation is needed for socially and economically backward minorities in education so that they can learn the skills to both reflect and protect the interests of the group they represent. Having said this, we need to understand Ambedkar with the hindsight we have gained from the fifty years of experience. since his death in 1956. There is also a need to critically assess the

---

arguments put forth by him and, at the same time, learn from the insights given by him to deal with the present situation of minorities in India.

One of the main arguments in this chapter is that the minority problem not only continues to persist in India, but in terms of its complexity, has increased manifold. Nevertheless, it continues to exhibit the same contradictions that Ambedkar grappled with during his own lifetime, principally that, Indian society is as casteist as it ever was. As Ambedkar would argue old habits die hard. We know that a lot of Ambedkar’s proposals were not accepted by the upper caste dominated Constituent Assembly, such as the demand for separate electorates for Dalits or, for that matter Muslims, under the pretext of amounting it to separatism. In the second chapter, we dealt at length with Ambedkar’s responses to this criticism. And, more importantly, the manipulation of the reserved seats, agreed in the Poona Pact for Dalits, by the Congress to its own advantage. He also writes as to how this manipulation happens, the methods and the means the Congress employs to capture the Dalit constituency. The Congress, according to him, in order to capture the reserved constituency, puts a Dalit who is not a true representative of his community, but is more an agent of the Congress. This makes the whole purpose of Reservation meaningless. Ambedkar calls this kind of representation a sham. This chapter argues that this criticism of Ambedkar holds good even today as it did in his lifetime, in case of political representation. In fact, in some sense, the situation has worsened considerably. One area which Ambedkar could not properly observe and assess was the effect of Reservation in the executive and other services. He, however, certainly sensed and foresaw certain problems and offered insights into the understanding of our modern day problems with Reservation. Hence, we will look at these problems, and the dynamics behind it.

Next, one of the important things that we need to understand in our broader concern with Dalits and the culture question is the fact of plurality within Dalits. In the first chapter, we argued that one of the unique features of Dalits is that they are not an ‘encompassing group’ in the traditional sense. But they have some unity in experiencing a similar treatment from an encompassing group [Hindus], with which they also share some cultural features. Dalits are divided into many languages and faiths. Ambedkar’s attempts
at unifying them on a common platform of Buddhism ultimately failed. Dalits are divided by their allegiance to different faiths and sects. Broadly, within them there are those who converted to different faiths like Christianity, Buddhism, and Islam as a sign of protest or getting away from Hinduism; and there are those who want to pluralize Hinduism itself. The latter kind of group is not seriously interested in getting away from Hinduism, but is more interested in social mobility within the Hindus. They want to get accepted as good Hindus by the Hindus. This seriously challenges Ambedkar’s understanding of liberation from the oppressive system of caste. Therefore, we will delve into this issue in detail, and try to explore the alternatives with some of our contemporary values such as pluralism. Is pluralism good? Is it possible to unite Dalits by keeping their plurality intact? What would be a possible ‘Ambedkarian’ response to such a situation? These will be the major concerns of this chapter. Apart from this, we also need to understand the various problems that Dalits face as a minority. We need to look at and assess the legal safeguards that are provided to protect them. We know that many of the legal safeguards that are meant to protect them have failed miserably; the upper caste establishment has managed through various means to circumvent all the safeguards that were given to protect Dalits. In the final section, we try to understand the oppression that Dalits undergo by taking the five categories of oppression as developed by I. M. Young in her work *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Here, we will concentrate largely as to how culture plays an important role in oppressing Dalits and see as to how legal protections given by the Constitution have not been able to work due to the culture of domination in society. The only success story seems to be the Reservation in the government services and educational institutions, and creation of a class of Dalits who are more conscious of their rights, and are increasingly becoming assertive enough to claim them. Ambedkar’s efforts have helped Dalits in an indirect and unexpected way. Let us begin with the examination of Reservation policy and the problem it has thrown up in the last fifty years.
Reservation: The Problem of Inner Exclusion

Reservation for Dalits, as we saw in the previous chapters, begins with the compromise that emerges out of the Poona Pact. This compromise has done a serious damage to the representative character of Dalits in the legislature. A large section of Dalits leaders who win from reserved constituencies do not represent the true interests of the group. They are divided among themselves along party lines. Mostly, their loyalty is to the party they belong to rather than to Dalit interests, thereby, making their representation in the legislative process a sham. On the contrary, they play the negative role of giving the upper caste dominated parties a legitimacy to maintain the status quo. One interesting phenomenon in relation to this issue we need to look at is, parties organized and run by Dalits themselves. The Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) is one such case. The party, launched by Kanshi Ram challenges Brahminism. Its new leader, Mayawati, who became the first Dalit woman chief minister in independent India, did try to bring some symbolic changes in the state, in the brief period that she was in power and seems to have strong support from Dalits. She managed to pull Dalits, who traditionally voted Congress, towards the BSP successfully. This reflects a higher awareness of their (Dalit) identity and assertiveness. This also shows that Reservation in legislature has played some minimal role in helping to create and sustain a party, led and supported by Dalits; against a strong party like the Congress. This is what Oliver Mendelsohn and Marika Vicziany, have to say regarding Dalits and their political consciousness, “while the untouchables have enjoyed little success in formal politics, they have conversely failed to disappear as a political force. It is possible to detect a strong untouchable consciousness bubbling away below the surface of Indian political life.” By and large, we can say that Reservation in legislature has not helped to bring about effective representation for Dalits. Mendelsohn and Vicziany commenting on this aspect write,

“Reservation in parliamentary seats has been particularly disappointing. Under the scheme arrived at in the Poona pact and refined in the early 1950s, the untouchables are guaranteed legislators in proportion to their share of the population. Constituencies are

---

set aside for Untouchable candidates but not for the Untouchable voters: the whole of the population chooses between the untouchables candidates. This scheme is criticized for not allowing an independent untouchable voice to emerge. The argument is that the candidates are forced to be mainstream party figures without any particular identification with the minority Untouchable population from which they come.

But, this is not to say that Reservation of parliamentary seats is either useless or even counter productive. The same writer, further says that,

"without Reservation there would have been precious few Untouchable legislators - what pressures would have induced the political parties to select untouchables? The proposition that a discriminatory absence of untouchable legislators might have disturbed the minds and therefore concentrated the political energies of the untouchable population is implausible. Moreover, it would be to cynical to suggest that untouchable legislators have accomplished nothing in value to their communities. Particularly in recent years, there has been a trend for the legislators to be increasingly assertive, as for the example, on the issue of continuing violence against untouchables, the Harijan atrocity issue.”

Reservation has failed as a means of effective representation for Dalits, but it is not entirely redundant. This forces us to find means either to improve them or to replace them with a more effective system. For improving Reservations, the suggestions made by some Dalit legislators like S. Nagappa can be considered. Demanding the fixing of a minimum 35% of votes from Dalit voters as a means to ensure the authentic voice of this group within the existing Reservation policy, he says, “provided that in the case of the scheduled castes the candidate before he is declared elected to the seat reserved for the scheduled castes, shall have secured not less that 35 per cent of the votes polled by the scheduled castes in the election to the reserved seats.”

In the second chapter, we dealt, at length, with Ambedkar’s critique of Reservation in Parliament. Nagappa is here trying to rectify these loopholes by demanding a minimum percentage of votes from Dalits to ensure the candidate has some authentic grounding. He further explains his position, which is worth quoting:

“For instance there are four candidates that are seeking election to the reserved seats. Now let us take it there are 100 Scheduled caste votes and let us assume all the Scheduled Caste voters come and vote. A gets 36 and B gets 35, this comes to 71. Only 29 are there for the others. Now you need not take that man at all into consideration who has polled only 29 percent. Now again you need not have two elections. You can distribute two

---

4 Ibid., p. 96.
5 Ibid., pp 97-98.
colored papers to the voter come and vote. A get 36 and B get 33. this comes to 71. Only placed only for the Scheduled Caste candidate and if one gets more than 35 percent, of the Scheduled Caste votes, or colored votes, you need not take the other man into consideration at all.

Sir, even if he gets 36 percent but does not get the highest number of votes in the general election he should not be declared elected. As it is, if x get 36 percent of the votes of the community and Y gets only 35 percent, if the former does not get the majority of votes of the other communities at the election he is declared to be defeated and the latter thought he gets only lesser number of his own community, is declared elected. After all the election is completely in the hands of the general constituency or community. According to the Poona pact you have allowed four candidates to be elected at the primary elections. That is almost separate electorate I do not want separate electorate. But, while seeing that joint electorates are there, let us not put the Harijan representatives in disfavor with their community who, as it is, call them show boys of the general community. If provision of the kind I am advocating is adopted, we can face the people of our community and tell them “look here, we have been elected also by a majority of 35 percent of the members of our own community. We are not show boys.”

The suggestion that Nagappa gives is a brilliant way to avoid separate electorates and, at the same time, to make Reservations more representative in character. Or else, the old solution of separate electorates that Ambedkar argues for needs to be revoked, to get it out of this impasse.

Linked to this, we need to ask and understand why suggestions that came from Nagappa or Ambedkar were not accepted by the Constituent Assembly. The Constituent Assembly itself was largely composed of upper caste members from the Congress. We need to remind ourselves of the kind of politics that the Congress played as discussed in the third chapter; where we discussed Ambedkar’s critique of the communal politics as practiced by Congress. The Congress played the politics of Assimilation and Nationalism to deny the existence of minorities; further, this was done in order to deny their interests. Due to such politics, the Congress held on to the Gandhian argument that Dalits are a part of Hindu society; and Reservations are only meant to improve their social and economic position, ignoring the strong and challenging arguments provided by Ambedkar. Though, Ambedkar was given formal recognition by inviting him to be the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, much of what he said was ignored as empty moralizing. Moreover, a sustained effort was made by some of the key conservative Congress members like Patel to downsize and parody Ambedkar’s arguments. Not only were separate electorates

7 Ibid.
considered a serious hindrance to unity and integrity of the country, even Nagappa’s suggestions were put down with a similar argument. This chapter also argues that by denying Nagappa’s suggestions, the Constituent Assembly seriously undermined the interests of the Dalit minority. Moreover, by denying separate electorates to minorities (including Muslims) with the lopsided argument that separate electorates were antithetical to national unity or communal harmony, a serious and fundamental compromise was made by the Constituent Assembly.

We will now move on to understand the problems related to Reservation in the executive services. But, before that, we also need to understand their positive contribution to improvement in the situation of Dalits. Mendelsohn and Vicziany write, “Reservation of public employment for the scheduled castes has had greater impact than electoral Reservation. Ten of thousands of Untouchables have benefited from the quota of public jobs made available to them. When the wider impact of this employment on families and whole communities is computed, the beneficial impact has been considerable.”

There are two kinds of problems associated with Reservation in the executive services. (Regarding problems with Reservation, the reader must be reminded here, it does not mean a critique of the Reservation policy per se, but the problems that are associated with it, the purpose for which it was enacted and its true realisation.) One, those who go into the services with the aid of Reservation policy either do not represent Dalits, or are selfish enough to bother only about their own self interest. Second, those who manage to get into the services are marginalized into a minority and go through various form of oppression. In fact, in some cases both kinds of problems might overlap. The first kind of problem, which in our times has become a misnomer, is the problem of the ‘creamy layer’. Ambedkar, in a speech at Agra in 1956, stated,

“There is some progress on education in our society. By acquiring education some people have reached to the higher positions; but these people have deceived me. I was hoping from them that after acquiring higher education they will serve the society; but what I am seeing is that a crowd of small and

---

8 In order to look at the insinuations against Nagappa and the arguments that were used to put down his proposals, refer to the debates themselves. *Ibid.*

9 Mendelsohn and Vicziany, n.3, p. 67.
big clerks has gathered around, who are busy feeding themselves and their families.\textsuperscript{10}

Ambedkar's reference here to small and big clerks keeping our context in mind, can be expanded to all government officials from Dalit background. Gyan Pandey refers to this as the "late middle class" by which he means the Dalit middle class.\textsuperscript{11} According to him, because of the Reservation policy a new class has emerged from Dalits and this class finds itself stuck in a situation which is neither able to get accepted into the upper caste middle class nor able to associate itself with Dalits who could not benefit from such a policy.

Next, we now know that the Dalits who managed to get in to the government services with the help of Reservation are a marginalized group within. Though, they have benefited economically and gained some social esteem due to the prestige that government services have in Indian society, they are almost powerless in influencing the policy decisions. The key decision making posts are still in the grip of the upper castes. Due to upper caste control over key posts, the effectiveness of the policies that are supposed to benefit Dalits gets diminished to the point of redundancy. In the academia, for example, there is meager presence of Dalits, and even when present they are a marginalized lot. Apart from this marginalization there is oppression, and 'repression of their voices' in all the spheres. Their representation has turned out to be only nominal. In other words, they are now converted into internal minorities in all the spheres of society. As said, in the first chapter, Dalits still tend to be minorities perennially wherever they exist. They are minorities not just in geographical, linguistic and political terms; they are minorities in various spheres in the social life of modern India. They are minorities in bureaucratic setup; they are discriminated in the academia; almost invisible in judiciary; in political parties they are given token representation, and overall in the cultural life of the country they go absolutely unrepresented. Hence, in today's India, Dalits face not just exclusion and oppression in rural areas, but also in urban areas. Urban areas create new forms of oppression and marginalization. Ambedkar's understanding that urban areas are secular, modern, and relatively better in comparison to rural areas seems to be challenged by these new forms of oppression. Due to the assumption that urban areas are

\textsuperscript{10} B. R. Ambedkar, from a speech at Agra, 18 March 1956
\textsuperscript{11} In a paper presented at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, March 2006.
not seriously susceptible to caste discrimination, scholars have not been very sensitive to 
the way caste discrimination works in these areas. Because a large part of governmental 
institutions are situated in urban areas, Dalits who get into government services, 
education institutions, and Dalits who join municipal services go through severe 
oppression in an urban setting. Coming back to the issue of ‘internal minorities’ and 
‘inner exclusion’ of Dalits. By ‘internal minorities’ is meant groups that can be included 
in the system but remain a marginalized section within that system. In other words, it is 
exclusion in an indirect manner. This is what Charles Taylor refers to as, ‘inner 
exclusion’. He writes of ‘inner exclusion’, as “the creation of a common identity around a 
rigid formula of politics and citizenship, which refuses to accommodate any alternatives, 
and imperviously demands the subordination of other aspects of citizens’ identities.” 12 
Reservations, hence, have only been instrumental in getting Dalits into the system, but 
they have not helped to give them enough power so that they can have a distinctive voice 
to change the system. Therefore, other and more effective means to get a substantive 
representation must be explored. Ambedkar, himself, did realize the manner in which the 
dominant groups managed to bypass protections and safeguards granted by the system. It 
is for this purpose, as we discussed in the previous chapter, Ambedkar resorted to what 
he thought to be a more effective agenda: conversion.

Next, prejudices against Dalits have also taken new forms, and these prejudices can be 
manipulated by vested interests to stereotype and stigmatize them. This stigmatizing 
process is used to humiliate and deny them their rights. For example, those who benefit 
from Reservation are stereotyped as unmeritorious, lazy, and selfish by upper castes, only 
to humiliate them and to sap the effectiveness of Reservations. Upper caste academia is 
the major culprit in this regard. Recall the arguments, from the section titled 
‘Stigmatizing Reservation’ in the third chapter, where Ambedkar cites similar cases 
which he saw in his lifetime. He talks of the educated classes writing ‘lampoons and 
parodying Reservation’. In our time, writing lampoons in an academic tone has become a

12 Charles Taylor; “Democratic Exclusion,” in Rajeev Bhargava, Amiya Bagchi, R. Sudarshan, (eds.) 
common practice.13 More importantly, these writings have become a means to perpetuate prejudices rather than eliminating them. One of the reasons for writing academic lampoons is that due to legal and political pressures, it has become increasingly difficult for upper castes to write against Dalits and minorities openly. At the same time, it has become extremely important to be 'politically correct' in modern day academic and political practices. Commenting on the risk in placing restrictions on people prejudices, Avishai Margalit,

"If culture in a decent society involves imposing restriction on humiliation collective representation, wouldn't that turn the decent society into a puritanical one that doesn't let its members curse other, a society where purity of heart is taken to be purity of mouth? After all, the present secular version of this sort of puritanism is the 'political correctness' expression.

"The risk in placing restriction on humiliating styles of expression is the creation of a hypocritical society with an outward appearance of respectability whose members think derogatory thoughts that they refrain from expressing openly. The fear is that people in such a society are bound to express their nastiness indirectly. This might be worse than expressing it openly because it would be shrouded in respectability."14

Another, important reason for prejudice to exist both against Reservation and groups that benefit from it is because of distorting the message behind Reservations. On the table, in the Constituent Assembly debates, it was agreed that the reasons for accepting and granting special safeguards, in the form of Reservation, was to ensure a minimum representation for this minority (Dalits) in all the important spheres of government. But soon many who accepted Reservation in principle gave a different and distorted justification for such provisions. More importantly the arguments furnished by Ambedkar were totally ignored or distorted. They defended Reservation mostly as 'affirmative action' policies and the arguments were largely based on some kind of charity rather than on representative rights. We dealt with at length the problems with 'charity' in the previous chapter. The term ‘Affirmative action’ is a term that originated in the United States of America and has its own history. It has been used by many to justify various policies or programs for promoting blacks, women and other minorities in educational

13 P. Radakrishnan talks about how the dominant castes stigmatize these reservation in, “Sensitizing officials on Dalits and Reservation”, Economic and Political weekly, February 16 2002, pp. 653-59.
institutions. They are not based on the right to representation as Ambedkar argues in India.\textsuperscript{15} Thomas E. Hill Jr. in his paper, “The Message of Affirmative Action”, argues that the message that goes behind these policies is as important as the policies themselves. Commenting about the relation between actions and the message they convey, he writes,

“Actions, as the saying goes, often speak louder than words. There are times when only actions can effectively communicate the message we want to convey and times when giving a message is the central part of the purpose of action. What our actions say to others depends largely, though not entirely upon our avowed reasons for acting; and this is a matter for reflective decision, not something we discover later by looking back at what we did and its effects. The decision is important because “the same act” can have very different consequences, depending upon how we chose to justify it. In a sense, acts done for different reasons are not “the same act even if they are otherwise similar, and so not merely the consequences but also the moral nature of our acts, depends in part on our decisions about the reasons for doing them.”\textsuperscript{16}

Based on our discussion in the previous chapters, we can say that the message that Ambedkar gives through his argument for Reservation is that Dalits are a minority in society largely dominated by Hindus. But the message that was given by national leaders, particularly Gandhi and Nehru, among others, was that Dalits are Hindus and they are an essential part of Hindu society. Reservations or affirmative action policies are a means to assimilate them into Hindu society; away from other groups. Before we move any further, we need to understand that the word ‘assimilate’ is used in a negative sense. Young, succinctly, writes of the theoretical and political problems that are associated with assimilation,

“The strategy of assimilation aims to bring formerly excluded groups into the mainstream. So assimilation always implies coming into the game after it already begun, after the rules and standards have already been set, and having to prove oneself according to those rules and standards. In the assimilationist strategy, the privileged groups implicitly define the standards according to which all will be measured. Because their privilege involves not recognizing the standards as culturally and experientially specific, the ideal of a common humanity in which all can participate without regard to race, gender, religion, or sexuality poses as neutral and universal. The real differences between oppressed groups and the dominant norm, however, tend to put them at a disadvantage in

\textsuperscript{15} Ambedkar ultimately justifies Reservation based on his understanding of minorities and their right to representation in the political process of society. See his “States and Minorities” for his defense of Reservations.

\textsuperscript{16} Hill, n. 1, p. 108.
In this sense, assimilation of Dalits into Hindu society puts them at a disadvantage in relation to many groups within it. This strategy of assimilation is also linked to making them 'internal minorities', as we discussed earlier in the chapter. Coming back to the issue of the importance of the message that goes behind these policies, the Reservation policy has certainly given a wrong message both to those who do not benefit from them and those who benefit. As Hill points out in the above statement, the reasons that are given to justify an action change the meaning of that act. Gandhi’s support of Reservation, was part of his belief that Dalits are an essential part of Hindu society, and to uplift their social condition would ultimately help them becoming ‘good Hindus’. Gandhi however still believed that Reservations compromised efficiency. Nehru, who had a different view of things also believed that Reservations were a big impediment to efficiency. Both these leaders had great faith in the Hindu majority and strongly disagreed with Ambedkar that Hindus are communal in nature, and that a much stronger protection was needed for Dalits or other minorities from this group. Because of such an understanding, they agreed to them reluctantly and thereby laid the foundation for a general apathy towards Reservation and the people who benefit from them. With the hindsight of the last fifty years we can clearly and confidentially say that Indian society, as Ambedkar understood, is deeply communal in nature. And Reservations are the only possible means to ensure minimum representation for Dalits in the political process of the country. Our experience also tells us that Reservations have not further contributed to the communalization of politics. In such a situation, what are the remedies for the problems associated with Reservation? A possible Ambedkarian reply would be, this chapter argues that we need to clearly identify the loopholes present in the policies and study how these policies are circumvented by the dominant groups and then demand a complete new structuring of these policies, without fundamentally rejecting the policy itself. For ensuring an effective representation of Dalits in the legislature we need to go back the separate electorates that Ambedkar so furiously fought for. Some scholars like

Mendelsohn have argued that separate electorates might not necessarily help in bringing about a more authentic voice of Dalits. He writes,

"The separation of Untouchable electorates from general seats would not of itself have created a separate untouchable political voice. In the absence of other forces working in that direction, the tendency would still have been for an assimilation of Untouchables into mainstream party politics."

Through there is some truth in this comment regarding the absence of other forces, the idea of separate electorates as Ambedkar articulates and justifies needs to be looked at once again in the light of our experience with Reservation in Parliament. Regarding Reservations in public services and educational institution where there is some progress, there is a need to explore and find methods to ensure that those who get into the system are not marginalized and silenced because in the long run it defeats the very purpose for which Reservation is given to them. As the dominant groups find ways to sabotage these policies, a more informed approach is necessary to ensure that these polices become effective. Last, but most importantly, the message that goes behind these polices must be positive and support the basic principles on which these policies are based. For this purpose universities need to take special responsibility to fight false beliefs and prejudices against the disadvantaged groups rather than encouraging them. For example, educational institutions should give, as Thomas E. Hill, Jr., writes, the following message:

"whether we individually are among the guilty or not, we acknowledge that you have been wronged- if not by specific injuries which could be named and repaid, at least by the humiliating and debilitating attitudes prevalent in our country and our institutions. We deplore and denounce these attitudes and the wrongs that spring from them. We acknowledge that, so far, most of you have had your opportunities in life diminished by the effects of these attitudes, and we want no one's prospects to be diminished by injustice. We recognize your understandable grounds for suspicion and mistrust when we express these high minded sentiments and we want not only to ask respectfully into the university community and ask you to take a full share of the responsibilities as well as the benefits. By creating special opportunities, we recognize the disadvantages you have probably suffered, we show our respect for your talents and our commitments to the ideal of the university, however, by not faking grades and honor for you......it is an opportunity and a responsibility offered neither as charity nor as entitlement, but rather as part of special effort to welcome and encourage minorities and women to participate more fully in the university at all levels."

18 Mendelsohn and Vicziany, n. 3.
In a similar manner, Ambedkar would give the following hypothetical message to both Dalits and the dominant groups regarding Reservation:

"We are Dalits and we are not Hindus. We are a minority in this country. A minority like us needs special safeguards and provisions to protect and promote our interests. For this purpose, Reservations are the only available and best means to provide the above mentioned safeguards and to promote our interests. We believe in efficiency and efficiency is the criteria with which vacancies and educations seats should be filled; but this efficiency should not be understood in absolute terms and keeping our case in mind there should be a limits applied to it. When applied, these vacancies and seats must be filled applying a differential criterion of merit. This will ensure a minimum representation of our community in both the spheres. We will demand these safeguard unless we are convinced that they are not needed anymore to secure and promote our interests."\(^{26}\)

Before concluding this section, it needs to be said that, one important post-independence experience has been that Judiciary, which is largely dominated by upper castes has played almost a regressive role in addressing Dalit atrocities.

**Reservation in Judiciary**

The absence of Reservation and its negative effects are clearly visible in this sphere. The Supreme Court decision to restrict the benefits of Reservations only to Hindu Dalits in reality forces Dalits to remain in the Hindu fold to benefit from Reservation. The only exit they have is to convert to Buddhism as in this regard Supreme Court regards Buddhism as part of Hinduism. This creates a serious problem to those Dalits who want to convert to religions other than Buddhism. A large section of Dalit population which has converted to either Islam or Christianity is denied the benefit of Reservation. Many appeals to Supreme Court have been rejected. Apart from this few Dalits are visible in the higher levels of judiciary. A demand has been made by some groups to include Reservation in the judiciary as well. The former president of India K.R Narayanan was in the forefront in this regard. He observed:

"While recommending the appointment of Supreme Court Judges, it would be consonant with constitutional principles and the nation’s social objectives if persons belonging to..."\(^{30}\)
weaker sections of society like SCs and STs, who comprise 25 per cent of the population, and women are given due consideration.\footnote{21}

He further added,

"Eligible persons from these categories are available and their under-representation or non-representation would not be justifiable. Keeping vacancies unfilled is also not desirable given the need for representation of different sections of society and the volume of work which the Supreme Court is required to handle."\footnote{22}

In the Uttar Pradesh, Reservation has been introduced at lower levels of judiciary. This is a good move and must be replicated in the higher level of judiciary. Though Ambedkar does not mention Judiciary in his "States and Minorities," we can extend his argument for Reservation in government services to the judicial services also. Ambedkar, would, endorse such a view if he could witness the way judiciary has played its role in the last fifty years.

Reservations in the Private Sector

We, also, know that Ambedkar did not talk about reservation in the private sector. His politics largely concentrated on the State and its apparatus. He also largely accepts the liberal distinction between public and private spheres. Because of this, though he finds the presence of Dalits in private sphere very meager and menial, he does not advocate reservations. Ambedkar had made only a few jottings on this issue, but he expresses his concern about Dalits and their condition in the private sphere. Apart from this, because of the political necessities of his time, Ambedkar did not press hard for reservations in this area. In our times, the State, which has been a major source for Dalit employment, is shrinking in an alarming rate due the liberalization and privatization process. Ambedkar, in such a situation would certainly object to this privatization process. If inevitable, he would extend his demand for reservation in the private sector too. Private sector has become a bastion of the upper castes, where all kinds of casteism is rampant. Dalits are the first and major victims in this sector. With the decrease in state sector and increase in private sector Dalits have not place to go. In such a case, a reservation for Dalits in the

private sector is immediately needed. Ambedkar would give the same criticisms of efficiency and merit when employed to denounce reservation in private sector as he as done with the public sector. Hence, we can conclude this section by saying that the Reservation policy, needs a thorough reevaluation along Ambedkarian lines; and this reevaluated policy must be applied to both the public and private spheres.

**Fragmented Dalits**

We argued in the first chapter that Dalits are not an encompassing group like other groups in India. They are divided among themselves on linguistic, geographical and religious lines. Ambedkar tried to forge a common identity by pleading to all Dalits to convert to Buddhism. In fact, Amebedkar's final vision was to transform the whole India into a Buddhist society, and, further, if possible, the whole world. In the previous chapter we discussed the reason why he wants such a transformation. We now know that this dream of Ambedkar remains as distant to us, as it was to him in his own lifetime. Apart from this it has thrown up many problems to modern day Dalits. Though Ambedkar has gained a prominent place in most Dalit communities, his ideology of converting to Buddhism has not appealed to many groups. Due to this forging a common identity for all Dalit groups has become a herculean task. In this section, we will try to understand this problem and find an alternative to break the dead lock that exists between different Dalits communities.

It is now well known that the Mahar community along with Ambedkar converted to Buddhism in 1956 at Nagpur. The Jatav community of Agra, also, accepted Buddhism along the lines of Ambedkar. These are the two major communities that converted to Buddhism. Apart from these two, a few groups have converted to Buddhism in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. There are also a handful in the rest of India. But, the Mangs, another Dalit community, in the state of Maharastra consider Ambedkar as a Mahar leader and

---

except for few did not covert to Buddhism. Mendelsohn and Vicziany commenting on this phenomenon write.

"In Maharashtra Ambedkar’s movement failed to attract lasting support from other Untouchable castes, particularly the large Mang and Chambar castes. There were leadership difficulties- Ambedkar was not a deeply talented organizer- but also more traditional rivalries about relative ritual status. Similar splits were present in the movement in Hyderabad state during the same period." 4

The writers are here referring to the rivalries that existed between Malas and Madigas in Andhra Pradesh. We will deal with the issue of internal hierarchies among Dalits later. Most Dalit groups throughout India remain and call themselves Hindus. In southern India, though conversions did happen, they happened to be conversion towards Christianity rather than Buddhism. Interestingly, though Dalits are divided in their allegiance to different faiths, Ambedkar seems to have gained great respect from all the Dalits groups. He plays a significant symbolic role in their political consciousness. For example, among the Chamars of Lucknow, as R.S Khare points out,

"the Lucknow Chamars followed him [Ambedkar] with awe and inspiration. Still his political achievement has to be remarkable for their ambiguity: when he drove a hard political bargain he had only mixed results. When he “exited” from the Hindu order, he landed in the related alternative that was both weak and defunct on the subcontinent." 5

Khare here points out that Chamars have an ambiguous relation to the ideology of Ambedkar. Though they are awestruck by his personality and leadership they are not entirely willing to yield to his goal of conversion to Buddhism. Because of Ambedkar’s influence, a section of Chamars did embrace Buddhism among whom some are followers of an ascetic called Ravidas, and call themselves ad-Hindus. In Punjab, which has the highest percentage of Dalits compared to any state in India, they are divided into many sects. In all there are 29 castes among the Scheduled Castes, out of which ad-Dharmi, Chamar, Balmiki, Mazabi, Dom, Kabirpanthi, Sansi and Bhanjara are among the most numerous. 26

---

24 Mendelsohn and Vicziany, n.3. p. 113.
Apart from these, some members of the Churha caste converted to Christianity. But among them the Ad-Dharmi’s are the most powerful and numerous. This group is a part of the movement of Ad-Hindu that had begun long before Ambedkar started his movement against Hinduism. They claim that they are the true Hindus in north India, while in south India they called themselves ad-Dravida and ad-Andhra in the states of Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. The ad - prefix refers to the native status of the groups.

In Punjab, the ad-dharmis challenged mainstream Hinduism which did not accept Dalits and instead venerated alternative traditions and gurus who talked more about social equality of all humans. Apart from ad-dharmis there are Balmikis, who venerate and worship the famous epic author of Ramayana, Valmiki as a Dalit who has risen to the level of a great saint. Ambedkar, who was impressed by Sikhism, was not in favor of ad-dharmis. Mark Juergensmeyer, commenting on Ambedkar’s attitude to this movement writes,

“Dr. Ambedkar did not favor Ad Dharm. He wanted to join, not a separatist religious tradition, but rather an egalitarian one, which would embrace the whole of society. For a while Ambedkar expressed interest in Sikhism, and he is said to have explored the idea in discussion with Sikh leader in 1936. Moong Ram also welcomes that idea, since he felt that if Ambedkar became a Sikh he would also venerate Ravi Das, which is included in the Sikh scripture, and that would at least indirectly enhance the standing of Ad Dharm. But Ambedkar ended up doing neither, and it was some years before he recognized the importance of placing religious symbols at the centre of social identity and began encouraging mass conversion to Buddhism.”

It is clear from what Juergensmeyer says that Ambedkar was not in favor of a religious tradition within Hinduism which only limits itself to a separate status. He was in search for something that encompasses the whole of Indian society and transformed it. This means that Ambedkar would not have lent support to the worship or veneration of Dalit saints like Ravidas and Valmiki. We also know that Ambedkar was opposed to worship of some of the Dalit saints in Maharashtra like Chokamela, etc. He found them too limited for his project. He would also be critical of the Satnamis of Chattisgarh and Namasudras in Bengal who have their tradition of worship of some Hindu deities. These examples are sufficient to prove that there is an internal plurality among Dalits in their attitude to their religious faith and Ambedkar’s framework cannot accommodate all these

27 Ibid., pp. 162-63
differences. Among Dalits, some like to be part of Hinduism, and exploit some traditions which are more egalitarian, while some would like to move away from Hinduism. To sum up, as Mendelshon and Vicziany say, “despite the fact that Ambedkar is something of an inspiration icon for untouchables activists throughout India, his movements only developed lasting strength among his own Mahar community.”

In such circumstances to demand that Dalits convert to Buddhism as Ambedkar advocates would be problematic. The radical transformation of Indian society into a Buddhist society that Ambedkar envisages becomes almost a distant dream. Criticizing Ambedkar’s perspective on religion and its limitation to accept plurality, Valerian Rodrigues argues. Ambedkar’s religion is, “vitiated by modernism and its totalizing goals”. He goes on to explain with reference to Hinduism that.

“This Ambedkar’s understanding of Hinduism was too one-sided, selective and from the caste perspective. Such a myopic perspective did not let him see the richness, the complex strands and the alternative visions of life that is presented. Further, his approach towards it was to reductive. It did not let him perceive its subaltern traditions and establish a bridgehead with them and eventually network with such traditions. Further, his understanding of Hinduism was too stamped with Orientalism rather than based on any original perception of lived experience. It did not let him appreciate the fundamental experiments that Gandhi was carrying out within Hinduism. The critique of a stereotyped Hinduism confined him to the Dalit constituency without making Hinduism itself critical.”

This is not the place to debate whether Ambedkar’s understanding of Hinduism was limited or not. However, what clearly comes out of Rodrigues’ comment is that Ambedkar did not value pluralism within and had a tendency towards homogenization of differences. Keeping also the old ‘linguistic heterogeneity’ in mind, which has become a ‘formidable’ barrier to untouchable unity, we need to find means to accept differences within, without giving up and loosing sight over the fundamental goals of Dalit liberation. As Young sees it, differences are not necessarily negative, and moreover, can be positive in our contemporary politics of justice. She writes, “contrary to the assumption of modernization theory, increased urbanization and the extension of equal formal rights of all groups has not led to a decline in particularistic affiliations. If

28 Oliver Mendelshon and Marika Vicziany, n.3, p. 112.
30 Ibid.
anything, the urban concentration and interaction among groups that modernizing social processes introduced tend to reinforce group solidarity and differentiation. " And she writes further. "Attachment to specific traditions, practices, language, and other culturally specific forms is a crucial aspect of social existence. People do not usually give up their group identification, even when they are oppressed." 32

Based on the discussion in this section, we can come to certain conclusions. Dalits are not an encompassing group. They are fragmented on various lines. Of these the most formidable have been the religious differences. In this case, there is a need to forge a common identity based on common suffering and mistreatment by the Hindus, and slowly, and only through rational persuasion, as Ambedkar did, try to convince groups to move towards Buddhism. Until this happens, we need to respect the differences that exist and see that these differences need not be a major obstacle to attain solidarity among all groups. One important problem that we did not discuss in the process is the problem of hierarchal differentiation that exists between Dalit groups. In almost all the states, Dalits are divided among themselves in claiming superiority over other Dalits. This has been one of the major obstacles to Dalits solidarity. The Mahars in Maharashtra claim a superior status over the Mangs, the Malas in Andhra Pradesh over the Madigas, and the Chamars over the Balmikis or Churahs in Punjab. Groups who are relatively better of than others claim such status. Keeping this in mind, Ambedkar calls for a conversion to a religion that does not accept high or low and accepts equality as its fundamental value. If we keep such ills in mind, Ambedkar's diagnosis of conversion to Buddhism scores much better than any other solution.

**Dalits and oppression: old and new**

In the earlier part of this chapter, we mentioned that Dalits experience newer forms of oppression, along with older forms, with their entering into mainstream society. We also talked of them becoming 'internal minorities' as a part of their assimilation process in the Hindu society. In this section, we will see as to what it means to be 'internal minorities'.

31 Young, n. 17, p. 163.
32 Ibid.
and to experience ‘inner exclusion’. To suffer from ‘inner exclusion’ is to face oppression of a different kind than exclusion in general. Scholars have written extensively on the kinds of oppression that exclusion comes with, in relation to Dalits but have not concentrated much on this. ‘Inner exclusion’ that takes place in modern, secular, urban settings. But, what is oppression? According to Young, it has five faces. These are exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

Let us first look at exploitation.

*Exploitation*

Exploitation is the most common form of oppression that Dalits face throughout India. Because they belong to the poorest communities in the country, who are largely landless agricultural laborers, they are the most exploited group in the country. In agriculture, untouchables are almost always paid laborers or sharecroppers, rather than self-employed landowners. Mendelsohn and Vicziany, write, “What we can say is that there is no category of persons of comparables numerical weight with the same clear identity as laborers tilling fields for the benefit of others. Throughout India if the man tilling a field and the women cutting the crop are not of the legal proprietor's family, then there is a strong likelihood that they are untouchables.” Young commenting on exploitation writes, “The central insight expressed in the concept of exploitation, then, is that this oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the result of the labor of one social group to the benefit another.” In other words, Dalits who labour mostly for the benefit of others are exploited in the process, and this further creates a social relation with their exploiters. Young further writes,

“Exploitation enacts structural relations between social groups. Social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and social process by which the results of work are appropriated operate to enact relations of power and inequality. These relations are produced and reproduced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-not are continuously expanded to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the have.”

---

33 Mendelsohn and Vicziany, n. 3, p. 80.
34 Young, n. 17, p. 49.
35 *Ibid.*, p. 54
In this sense, Dalits through their own labor continuously create their own exploiters as well thereby, recreating their own condition of oppression.

**Marginalization**

Dalits will rank first among all other groups who get marginalized. But, what is marginalization? Marginalization, as Young defines it,

"is the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and this potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination. The material deprivation marginalization often causes is certainly unjust, especially in a society where others have plenty."

Dalits as a category of people are expelled from useful participation in the social life of the village and are subjected to material deprivation. Commenting on what it means, she writes, "It involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutional conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction." Dalits are certainly deprived of cultural, practical and institutional conditions for exercising capacities in context of recognition and interaction with the Hindus. One, because of their social exclusion from the village life, and two because of their economic deprivation they lack the means to develop cultural institutions to develop their own culture. As far as recognition is concerned, we argued in the first chapter, they had to suffer from misrecognition due to the cultural practices of the Hindu majority. Even, in urban settings they lack institutional conditions to promote or develop their own cultural practices, while the dominant groups exploit the State's resources to develop and promote their culture. In other words, the resources of the State are also used unjustly by the dominant groups to further and strengthen their cultural hegemony. It helps to maintain their cultural imperialism over other groups in the society. We will come back to this later. Before that we will try to understand important facet of oppression, the feeling of powerless among the oppressed groups.

---

36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., p. 55.
Powerlessness

Ambedkar, in his writing often uses the term ‘depressed classes’ to refer to Dalits. This term defines the mental state in which these groups actually exist. Due to the overpowering nature of the culture of domination and their helplessness to change their social conditions, Dalits experience this feeling of powerlessness. Due to lack of economic and cultural means to fight out their domination by the upper castes, and due to repeated failure to overthrow the dominated and the frustration that comes from it, they experience powerlessness. Not only are the social conditions humiliating, the dominant groups constantly mirror this feeling back at them. We now move on to one of the most powerful instruments though which Dalits are made to feel powerless, that of ‘cultural imperialism’.

Cultural imperialism

Dalits are the major victims of ‘cultural imperialism’ by the Hindus in Indian society. Caste domination is nothing but cultural imperialism. Nicholas Dirks defines caste “as the cultural construction of power”. Power, in Indian society operates through caste and caste as a cultural construct is well established by anthropologists. Ambedkar, as we discussed in the previous chapter, also endorses such a view. But, what is cultural imperialism? What does it mean to experience it? Young writes succinctly,

“To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the other.”

And, answering the question of what it involves, she writes,

“Cultural imperialism involves the ‘universalization of a dominant group’s experiences and culture, and its establishment as the norm. Some groups have exclusive or primary access to what Nancy Fraser calls the means of interpretation and communication in a society. As a consequence, the dominant cultural products of the society, that is, those most widely disseminated, express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these groups. Often without noticing they do so, the dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such. Cultural products also express the

---

dominant group's perspective on and interpretation of events and elements in the society, including other groups in the society, insofar as they attain cultural status at all."\(^{40}\)

Dalits experience this "universal domination of a group's experiences and culture" throughout India. At least in rural areas due to its own dynamics there is some resistance by Dalits to accept this phenomenon. But in urban areas, Dalits who are still within the Hindu fold experience this cultural domination without any resistance. In universities and other major educational institutions, this cultural imperialism is deeply rooted. Students coming from subaltern backgrounds experience this phenomenon in well-established institutions. The teachers who largely come from the dominant group understand and judge the students from this privileged experience. This has been one of the major reasons that students coming from minority backgrounds are not able to get good grades or marks. And only those students who confirm to the dominant groups value system get accepted and promoted as standard bearers of excellence. This phenomenon can be observed in non-academic backgrounds as well. It is visible in the general public culture of the society. But to the minority groups, this stunts and their natural development becomes a means of oppression. Young, talking about how this becomes oppressive, writes,

"The culturally dominated undergo a paradoxical oppression, in that they are both marked out by stereotypes and at the same time rendered invisible. As remarkable deviant beings, the culturally imperialized are stamped with an essence. The stereotypes confine them to a nature which is often attached in some way to their bodies, and which thus cannot easily be denied. These stereotypes so permeate the society that they are not noticed as contestable.... Those living under cultural imperialism find themselves defied from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them. Consequently, the dominant culture's stereotyped and inferiorised images of the groups must be internalized by group members at least to the extent they are forced to react to behavior of others influenced by those images. This creates for the culturally oppressed the experience that W.E.B. Du Bois called "double consciousness"—"this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of world that looks one in mused contempt and pity."\(^{41}\)

Earlier, in the context of our discussion over problems of Reservation, we talked about the problem of stigmatization. Cultural imperialism is one of the main sources and means

\(^{40}\) Young, n. 17, p. 59.

through which stigmatization happens in society. Stereotyping, people from minority
groups is a common practice in Indian society. Not just Dalits but other groups are also
victims of this process. But Dalits have taken the worst form of stereotyping in Indian
society. This is well documented but importantly this stereotyping has taken new forms in
modern day politics of Reservation. The common stereotype is that Dalits are dirty. In
educational institutions as a process of stigmatizing these groups, they are termed lazy
and irresponsible. Because of this stereotyping these groups, as Young writes, have
developed an inferior image of themselves. It also creates what Du Bois calls “double
consciousnesses.” Commenting about how this double consciousness emerges, she
further writes,

“Double consciousness arises when the oppressed subject refuses to coincide with these
devalued, objectified, stereotyped visions of herself or himself. While the subject desires
recognition as human, capable of activity, full of hope and possibility, she receives from
the dominant culture only the judgment that she is different, marked, or inferior.”

Du Bois, who talking from his own experiential understanding of being a black thinks
that the minority group is not a passive receptor of images as projected by the dominant
group. They resist this stereotyping, but in the process they develop this “double
consciousness,” and a lot of their mental energy gets sucked into fighting this dual
consciousness. Dalits, like blacks and other minority groups, suffer from this problem of
dual consciousness and this is a source of their oppression. But Dalits, unlike blacks or
other minorities, do not have any specific culture, so the question that immediately
emerges is that from where does the ‘second’ consciousness emerge, if they do not have
any minority culture. Young argues that though some groups might not have any specific
historical culture, they still have a culture of ‘the other’. She writes,

“the group defined by the dominant culture as deviant, as stereotyped other is culturally
different from the dominant group, because the status of otherness creates specific
experiences not shared by the dominant group, and because culturally oppressed groups
also are often socially segmented and occupy specific positions in the social division of
labor. Members of such groups express their specific group experiences and
interpretation of the world to one another, developing and perpetuating their own
culture.”

42 Young, Ibid., p. 60.
43 Ibid.
Dalits in this sense constitute the 'cultural other' and develop a counter-culture. Because of this counter-culture they can challenge the mainstream culture. Since this mainstream culture is powerful and intimidating, there emerges a tension between the two cultures. Double consciousness, then.

"occurs because one finds one’s being defined by two cultures: a dominant and a subordinate culture. Because they can affirm and recognize one another as sharing similar experiences and perspectives on social life, people in culturally imperialized groups can often maintain a sense of positive subjectivity."^{44}

There is also another aspect to this ‘cultural imperialism’ as a source of oppression that Young talks of. It makes the subordinate culture ‘invisible’ yet ‘marked’. She writes,

"Cultural imperialism involves the paradox of experiencing oneself as invisible at the same time that one is marked out as different. The invisibility comes about when dominant groups fail to recognize the perspective embodied in their cultural expressions as a perspective. These dominant cultural expressions often simply have little place for the experience of other groups, at most only mentioning or referring to them in stereotyped or marginalized ways. This, then, is the injustice of cultural imperialism of social life find little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposed on the oppressed group its experience and in interpretation of social life."^{45}

This interesting phenomenon of getting marked and at the same time remaining invisible is one the striking feature of Dalits in Indian universities. Dalits emerge in the public sphere only when the upper caste media decides to use it when criticizing Reservation policies. A lot of discussion on the Dalit situation and the emergence of creamy layer arguments is brought only to ‘mark’ them and stigmatize them. Gyan Pandey, also talks about how Dalit from the middle class get ‘marked’ by the upper middle class, when in normal times they are almost kept invisible in debates that are of general concern. Hence, we can conclude by saying that cultural imperialism is one of the main sources of Dalit oppression and it is through this the upper castes maintain their hegemony over them.

^{44} Ibid.
^{45} Ibid.
Violence

Violence is one of the most common and powerful means to humiliate and subjugate Dalits. As we have been saying, atrocities against Dalits have not lessened in the past fifty years. In fact, with the increasing assertion of their rights, they are subject to more violence. No amount of legal safeguards have helped in preventing and punishing those who have perpetrated violence on Dalits. Marc Galanter, in his paper, ‘Untouchables and Law’ brings this out clearly. He writes,

“The present situation is, then, characterized by a wide gap between the law and the books and the law in operation. As in many other areas, the government’s commitment to change greatly outrun its power to effect it. This disparity between aspiration and performances, between great commitments of principle and small deployment of resources, itself transform the symbolic as well as the practical use of anti-disabilities legislation.”

After talking about the inability of law to actually punish those who violate it, he talks of ‘change of heart’ by the perpetrators. He writes,

“The notion that Untouchability cannot be dealt with by legislation, but must await a change of heart on the part of its perpetrators, comports with a great deal of evidence on the difficulty of inducing social change by penal regulation. The dangers of laws becoming ineffective when it moves too far from prevailing public opinions are well know. It may be even more difficult to induce change in behavior which is not merely instrumental but is invested with deep expressive meanings for those concerned.”

Galanter, here, is not arguing that law is ineffective. He talks further of improving law by fixing the loophole. Important to our concern, is that as Ambedkar argues, the efficacy of law and the social values of society are deeply linked. Without a change in the social values that condemn violence and atrocities on Dalits, law can only play a symbolic role in society. Coming back to our discussion on violence against Dalits, we can say that social values or dominant cultural values have a significant role in perpetuating violence on Dalits. Talking of the relation between violence and cultural domination, Young, writes,

“Cultural imperialism, moreover, itself intersects with violence. The culturally imperialized may reject the dominant meaning and attempt to assert their own subjectivity, or. the fact of their cultural difference may put the lie to the dominant’s

47 Ibid., p. 287.
Therefore, we can conclude this section by saying, as Amebedkar argues, as long as cultural domination by the Hindus or dominant castes exist in the society, the oppression of Dalits and other minorities will continue. Hence, the only method of fighting oppression is to fight cultural domination or imperialism.

Conclusion

This chapter was an attempt to understand the condition of Dalits in the present. Here, we tried to look at the achievements and failure of policies that Ambedkar initiated. We began by focusing on the policy of Reservations in Parliament. We find that these Reservations as Ambedkar predicted did not give any positive results, in relation to Dalit representation. Mostly, it creates a negative effect of giving the Dalit and the non-Dalit the idea that there is some minimum representation for the Dalit in the political process of this country. It also gives legitimacy to the majority parties to claim that they have the confidence of Dalit community behind them. But, in fact, it is only a token representation for Dalits. To improve the representative character of this Reservation policy, we looked at the alternatives suggested by some Dalits leaders like S. Nagappa, and whose proposals were rejected in 1947. It is also suggested that there is a need to re-evaluate Ambedkar’s defence of separate electorates and that these with some improvements, keeping our modern-day problems be introduced. Next, we moved on to look at Reservations in public services and government services, where we find that the policy has given some benefit to the Dalit community. It has created a new middle class among Dalits but they are marginalized within the upper-caste dominated system. We talked of how while this policy brings Dalits into the system, nevertheless, creates an alternate exclusion within the system itself. We called it the problem of ‘inner exclusion’ and the creation of ‘internal minorities.’ One of the important problems that we discussed regarding Reservations is the kind of message that goes behind these policies about those who benefit and those who do not benefit. Because stigmatizing is a serious problem to

---

48 Ibid., p. 63.
those who benefit from the policy, both as an indirect means of stereotyping and of sapping the effectiveness of these policies, the message becomes a very important tool to fight stigmatizing. We also talked of how while Gandhi and Nehru differ in regard to the process of justification of Reservations, they go ahead with the assumption that Dalits are Hindus and these policies are only a means to fasten the process of assimilation. We also argued that Ambedkar’s justification of Reservation is based on the completely radical argument that Dalits are not Hindus and Reservation are a means to provide minimum representation to Dalits in all the major political and executive process of the State. This message of Ambedkar has been ignored by both academics and national leaders who defend Reservation but only keeping Gandhian and Nehruvian politics in mind.

Next, we moved on to discuss the internal plurality among Dalits in relation to faith and of ways to deal with this. After looking at different Dalit communities and their differences, we argued that differences as Ambedkar sees it are not an obstacle but can be a source of value. Here, we used Young’s arguments for celebrating differences without compromising on justice. We have also discussed that Dalits are not willing to give up their older affiliations even if they tend to lose from it in the longer run. Besides, we argued that Ambedkar’s idea of conversion cannot be imposed on those who are not willing to go by it. Instead, a much more tolerant approach needs to be adopted. Only through long deliberation can these groups be persuaded of the larger politics of conversion to Buddhism. We also talked of fighting internal hierarchies among Dalits and conversion to Buddhism since Ambedkar feels it can helping fighting these hierarchies.

Until then, new ways of finding solidarity among all Dalit groups should not be abandoned. Because, Dalits exist in a context of cultural domination these are subject to different kinds of oppression. Taking Young’s five facets of oppression, we argued that Dalits are subjected to all the five facets. Of this, the most important one is ‘cultural imperialism’. We went into details by answering the questions what this means; what does it mean to experience it and how do does it operate. Importantly, here we note in Du Bois’ words the Dalit has developed a “double consciousness”. One consciousness is base on the image that the majority culture gives him, and the other, his own sub-cultural consciousness. In the process, we came across the interesting argument by Young that
minority or subaltern groups do not have a culture, but something that is a result of majority culture. We also discussed that Dalits suffer other forms of oppression, like exploitation, powerlessness, violence and marginalization. Of these oppressions, violence is the most visible on Dalits. Here, we also discussed the link between cultural imperialism and violence. We discussed the inefficacy of law to curtail and punish atrocities on Dalits. Ambedkar’s argument that since no amount of legal restrictions can stop the majority in perpetrating violence on Dalits, the only solution is the need for a complete overhaul of society in a more democratic form. Hence, we can conclude this chapter by saying that the condition of Dalits as a minority today is the same as it was in Ambedkar’s times. A solution to this problem thus needs to be of the kind that Ambedkar suggests, with some minor changes, keeping modern developments in mind.