CHAPTER-6

RESERVATION POLICY-
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES AND
POLITICAL ISSUES
Enactments with respect to "reservation" could be followed over to the pilgrim period. By the middle of 19th century there emerged reformers in many parts of India. One such reform was the by-product of proselytizing the natives especially the depressed classes by the Christian missionaries. This might have inspired the Hindus to effect social reforms or they might have felt ashamed to have such practices as caste discrimination. Consequently there were such moderate reform movements in many parts of the subcontinent. For instance a movement was started in the Madras Province in 1852. (Jagadeesan P.:1990) In 1858 the Government of Bombay Presidency declared that ‘all schools maintained at the sole cost of Government shall be open to all classes of its subjects without discrimination. But this policy was hardly enforced. For instance a Mahar boy was refused admission and the Bombay Education Department justified the action of the school by saying that ‘it would not be right for the sake of a single individual, the only Mahar who had ever yet come forward to beg for admission into a school attended only by pupils of higher caste, to force him into association with them, at the probable risk of making the institution practically useless to great mass of natives.’ (Galanter Marc: 198) By 1923, the same Government decided to cut off aid to educational institutions that refused admission to members of the Depressed Classes. (Panandiker V.A. Pai, ed., 1994) But often the reform movements addressed issues, which were considered anachronistic and superstitious. The reform movements were concerned not with the evils of caste system as such, but of broader social issues like widow remarriage and education of women and opposition to child marriage. As Galanter says they are issues, ‘which reflected higher caste practices, and options’ Caste system as such was not challenged. (Jaswal S.S.: 2000) Some authors tried to discover ‘Brahminism’ as the root reason for the discriminatory behavior. Jyotiba Phule, a social activist felt the necessity of reforms within the Hindu fold. In 1860 he called attention to the deplorable condition in which the depressed classes lived and also the discriminatory treatment meted out to them. In 1858, the Government of Bombay Presidency (present Maharashtra and Gujarat were parts of it) declared that ‘all schools maintained at the sole cost of Government shall be open to all classes of subject without discrimination.’ During that time the British Government took a serious view of the question of depressed classes. In 1880s, the British administration set up scholarships, special
schools and other beneficial programmes for the Depressed Classes. The progressive minded Princes in the native states like Baroda, Kolhapur, and Travancore took similar initiatives. (Jaswal S.S.: 2000) Tracing the historical evolution of the policy of reservation, the Committee on the Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes stated:

Realising the inequatious distribution of posts in the administration between different castes and communities, the rulers of some of the then princely states, who were genuinely interested in the upliftment of disadvantaged sections of the society, took initiatives and introduced reservations in the administrative posts in favour of backward castes and communities in their States as early as in the first quarter of 20th century. Mysore and Kohlapur were amongst the first to do so. Because of the movement for social justice and equity started by the Justice Party, the 77 then Presidency of Madras initiated the reservation in Government employment in 1921. It was followed by the Bombay Presidency comprised of the major portion of present states of Maharashtra, Karnataka and Gujarat. Thus the first quarter of the 20th century saw reservation in Government employment in almost whole of South India.

(Butler Sir Harcourt: India Insistent (1931) The census of 1910, classified the population into (a) Hindus, (b) Animists and Tribals and (c) The Depressed classes. Thus the plight of the depressed classes was addressed for the first time.

Eight years later in 1918, the Maharaja of Mysore, having received a petition from the depressed class people, appointed Miller Committee to go into the question of adequate representation of non-Brahmin communities in the services of the State. When the first World War started in 1914, the Britishers began to pay more attention to the war. And, perhaps to elicit the support of the people in India Britain thought about some Constitutional reforms. In the political History of India an association in Madras Province initiated representation to the depressed classes. There was also a strong public opinion in favour of this demand. A minute of dissent by Sir C. Sankaran Nair clearly reflected this trend in the political atmosphere of that time. According to him, “the non-Brahmin and depressed classes have awakened to a sense of their political helplessness and to their wretched condition, and no longer contend to rely upon the Government which has left them in this condition for the past hundred years, claim a powerful voice, in the determination of their future.” Thus increasing political awareness among the non-Brahmin Classes and Britain’s need to have Indian people’s cooperation in war efforts prompted the
British rulers to adopt a policy of encouraging the ‘gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British empire.’

After studying the views expressed by various organizations in India, it was decided to provide representation in the Provinces Assemblies and the Central Legislative Assembly. In the provinces ruled by the British a systematic attempt for the betterment of the Depressed Classes was started with the introduction of Montague-Chelmsford Reform incorporated in The Government of India Act, 1919. A demand for the adequate representation in the legislatures was justified on the ground that the depressed classes were subjected to the intellectual and cultural domination of Brahmin priest class. (Sattanathan A.N.: 1967)

**A significant Political Movement in Madras Province**

In fact the non-Brahman movement had organized into the South India Liberal Federation in 1916. Later on it came to be known as Justice Party after the name of its English newspaper, edited by T.M. Nair, a physician by profession. “As a first step, the party agitated for reserved seats for non-Brahmins in the legislative councils, ushered in by the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms.” (Sattanathan A.N.: 1967)

The main objective of the Justice Party was getting communal representation in the Government offices. In reply to a question raised in the Madras legislative Council in the year 1914 it was answered that the total of registered graduates of the Madras University was 650 out of whom 452 were Brahmins, 12 non-Brahmin Hindus and 74 belonged to other communities. The Madras legislative Council, the Senate of the Madras University and other local and public bodies composed of a large number of Brahmins and the non-Brahmins had hardly a chance of entering these bodies. Out of the 128 79 permanent District Munsifs in 1919, 93 were Brahmins, 25 non-Brahmin Hindus and the rest consisted of Muslims, Indian Christians and Anglo-Indians. Out of 1007 Gazetted posts 609 were filled with Brahmin as against 398 posts held by non-Brahmins, Muslims and Christians. Out of 17,225 clerical posts 9813 were held by Brahmins…(Venugopal P: 2003) Moreover not a single non-Brahmin was elected to the Legislative Council during the first three decades since it started functioning in 1882 when it was started to 1917. Thus it was no wonder that when under the Government of India Act 1919 elections were held the Justice
Party came out successful and formed ministry. The Indian national Congress had not participated in the elections. It was this Government of Madras that introduced what was later termed as ‘Communal G.O…’ It was after the Act of 1919 that the Scheduled Castes, popularly known as depressed classes became a ‘political entity’ for consideration in future set up of constitutional reforms. A thorough examination of the Report of the thirty second Indian National Congress shows that the Congress has mustered enough strength to pass a resolution to urging the people of India to remove all disabilities that were imposed by custom upon the depressed classes. In Madras Province Periyar E.V.Ramasamy spearheaded the non-Brahmin Movement. He declared that ‘communal justice’ was only a means to an end and the end would be casteless society. Periyar E.V.Ramasamy broke with the Congress in 1925 on the issue of dominance of Brahmins within the Indian National Congress in the Madras Province and started the Self respect Movement with a view to bringing about all round change in Tamil society.” So with the positive urge to protect the rights of depressed classes, there emerged the negative force of anti-Brahmanism. Often casteism was identified with 80 Brahminism and due mainly to the impact of Western ideals of equality and socialism the non-Brahmin, if not anti-Brahmin, movements emerged in different parts of India. The Government of India Act 1919 had a provision that a statutory Commission would be appointed after ten years to report on the matter of establishing a responsible government in India in keeping with this provision, the British Government appointed Simon Commission. The Commission did not have any Indian member in it and was ‘all-white’ one, in spite of protest from the Indian National Congress and Gandhi the Commission toured every Indian province. The Commission went through memoranda from Government of India, from Committees appointed by the provincial legislative councils and from non-official sources. Obviously the final report contained recommendations for reform. One of the recommendations was the need to safeguard the minorities and other depressed classes of people. The report of the Commission focused the issue of the depressed classes not only as a social issue of caste, but also as an issue with serious political ramifications. The Commission was of the opinion that the uplift of the depressed classes depended on their gaining political influence, if not participation in the governmental processes. Obviously the representatives of the depressed classes were to be present in the legislature. Many provinces like Bihar and Orissa suggested they would opt for ‘nomination’ because the depressed classes were too backward to
choose their own representatives. But the Commission did not favour this idea for it felt that depressed classes needed opportunities for getting used to ideas and practices of self government.

**IMPACT OF FREEDOM MOVEMENT ON RESERVATION POLICY**

The depressed classes demanded a separate electorate; But the Simon Commission did not favour this. However the Commission was not against reserving seats for them. The Commission recommended to reserve seats for the depressed classes in general constituencies and these seats would be filled by election in which both depressed classes and others would participate.

In 1923 the government decided not to give grants to those aided schools that refused admission to the children of the depressed classes. In 1928 Government of Bombay set up a Committee under the chairmanship of O.A.B. Starte to identify the Backward Classes and recommend special provisions for their welfare. In the meanwhile under the leadership of Ambedkar the Depressed Class people had begun to articulate forcefully their demands. The Simon Commission, which came to study and make recommendations for Constitutional reforms held negotiations and consultations with different groups of people. The representatives of the ‘untouchables’ participated in them. In the words of Galanter, “Dr. Ambedkar, by this time recognized as an important spokesman, appeared before the Commission to demand reserved seats for the untouchables in legislative bodies, special educational concessions, and recruitment to Government posts recommendations substantially accepted in the Commission’s report. (Galanter Marc: 1984)

He contended: ‘The depressed classes in India present definite problem in political and social evolution. They are the resultants of historical forces, religious, economic and social. They are the embodiment of exploded (sic) social ideas and the disabilities imposed on them by the original framers of Hindu polity have been aggravated by long centuries of segregation and neglect. The origin of these classes and the beginning of their woes rightly belong to the domain of historical research but their betterment, economic and educational, is an imperative problem. Their class-consciousness is growing, stimulated partly by the sympathy of the Government and partly by the belated awakening of the Hindu social conscience.’ In the Report submitted in 1930 backward people were categorized: (a) Depressed Classes, (b) Aboriginals and Hill Tribes and (c) Other Backward Classes. But there was stiff opposition to the recommendations of the Simon
Commission Report. Therefore the British Government convened a Round Table Conference in November 1930, to which delegates from different parties and interest groups were invited. Unfortunately the Indian National Congress, which claimed that it was the only organization that truly represented the people of India, did not participate for it was engaged in The Civil Disobedience Campaign against the Government. Though Gandhi, the unquestioned leader of the National Movement, was opposed to any kind of reservation, later changed his position and conceded to setting up separate electorates to religious minorities like Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. But he opposed vehemently separate electorate for the ‘depressed classes’. The Round Table Conference ended in failure. Subsequently the British Government appointed Lothian Committee in December 1931, to formulate a system of franchise whereby all sections of the people would be represented in the legislature. The Committee was specifically required to’ investigate the need, justification and methods to ensure adequate representation for the Depressed Classes.’ As one writer observes: The Hindu members of the Lothian Committee, the members of the provincial Franchise Committees, and the Hindu witnesses in several provinces conspired to minimize the number of untouchables. Perjuring themselves, the witness denied the existence of untouchables in their province. In the united Province, for example, the Franchise Committee reported the number of untouchable as just 0.6 million as against the 1931 (census) figure of 12.6. In Bengal the Franchise Committee figure was 0.07 million whereas the census figure was 10.3 million. Before the RTC the census figures of the untouchables had not been challenged. When the upper castes found that the untouchables would get representation and facilities based on their population, they resorted to lies to deny the existence of untouchables. Is not such a calculated conspiracy to deny the right of the untouchables going on in different forms even today? (Mathew Thomas: 1992)

**Simon Requisition Report and After**

In 1931, six months after the publication of Simon Commission Report, a Round Table Conference was convened in London to review the Commission’s Report and how a new Constitution for India could be worked out on the basis of the recommendations of the Commission. Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan represented the Depressed Classes in this Conference.
The center of the Meeting was the position of minorities later on structure of Government in India.

Requested separate electorate and mature person establishment. In any case the separate electorates were not to be a changeless characteristic. Anyway the dialog happened without arriving at an assertion. In this manner there was assembled the Second Adjust Table Meeting. This time Gandhi likewise partook; yet he fervently restricted to the arrangement of divided electorate for the Discouraged Classes. He condemned the separate electorate as a devise of the British methodology of 'partition and standard.

The Franchise Committee of the Conference was unable to reach an agreement on the representation of minorities. Thus the then Prime Minister of Britain Ramsay Mac Donald was authorized to make an award, announced in August 1932, it ‘granted their demand for separate electorates in areas where they were concentrated in addition to regular votes they would cast as members of general electorate.’ The award proclaimed: Members of the depressed classes qualify to vote, will vote in general constituency. In view of the fact that for a considerable period those classes would be unlikely by the means alone, to secure adequate representation in the legislature, a number of special seats will be assigned to them…These seats will be filled by election from special constituencies in which only member of the ‘depressed classes’, electorally qualified, will be entitled to vote. Any person voting in such special constituency will, as stated above, be also entitled to vote in a general constituency. It is intended that these constituencies should be formed in selected areas where the depressed classes are most numerous and that except in Madras, they should not cover the whole area of the province.

The Poona Pact

Gandhi was opposed to this award. After a month he started a fast unto death to resolve the issue of representation of depressed classes of people in the Assembly. A modern historian writes: …his (Gandhi’s) friends as well as his opponents wondered why he chose this particular issue for so terrifying a tactic, since it seemed directed more against the untouchables than the British Government. Gandhi considered this issue central to the very survival of Hinduism. However for that reason he was willing to concede more reserved seats to Ambedkar for his party than the British had done. All he asked was that the depressed classes should not think of themselves as
members of any religious community but Hinduism.” Gandhi openly declared, “I believe that if untouchability is really rooted out it will not only purge Hinduism of a terrible blot but its repercussion will be worldwide. My fight against untouchability is a fight against the impure in humanity.” The mediators between Gandhi and Ambedkar put in their effort and both of them met at Yervada jail where Gandhi had been a prisoner of the British Government. It was here that he started his ‘fast unto death’ against the separate electorate for Depressed Classes. Now the responsibility of saving the life of Gandhi fell on all sections of Indians. But Ambedkar has a different opinion. It did not seem that Ambedkar at first took the fast of Gandhi seriously. On 19 September 1932, he issued a statement focusing on the following points:

1. Why ought to Gandhi stake his life on a moderately little issue as the public inquiry?
2. Why were the Discouraged Classes singled out though at the RTC Gandhi contradicted exceptional rights to all with the exception of Muslims and Sikhs?
3. His inner voice was not stirred if the country was part by the course of action of exceptional electorates for classes groups other than the discouraged classes-Why?
4. In the event that there was any class, which merited exceptional political rights, it was the discouraged classes.
5. The main way for the discouraged classes to succeed in the battle against sorted out oppression was a stake in political force.
6. The Mahatma staked his life to deny the untouchables of the little they got.
7. The Common Grant itself was a bargain between the two standards of independent electorates and joint electorates.
8. At the time of RTC the Mahatma was restricted to any arrangement of unique representation to the Discouraged Classes even in an arrangement of joint electorates.
9. Gandhi had inferred a meeting based plan under which the losing untouchable hopeful might acquire a court verdict that he was crushed in view of untouchability and keep on challenging and continue getting court verdicts ceaselessly.
10. All Mahatmas had fizzled in the mission of evacuating untouchability and engrossing the discouraged class.

11. Reformers who liked to yield standards at developments of emergency as opposed to offend of their related couldn't be trusted by the discouraged classes.

12. The Mahatma's quick might bring about demonstrations of terrorism by his supporters against the discouraged classes.

Yet Gandhi saw the Honor 'an assault on Indian solidarity and patriotism and hurtful to both.' Yet that time Gandhi had become hero of millions in India and even the depressed class leaders like M.C. Raja thought it their duty to save the life of Gandhi. Hence the mediators between Ambedkar and Gandhi actively intervened and at last Ambedkar agreed to meet Gandhi at Yervada prison. After much haggling they reached an agreement. According to this historic agreement depressed classes would get 147 seats in the provincial councils instead of 71 promised in the Ramsay MacDonald’s award. The Depressed classes could get 18% of the seats in the Central Assembly also. The British Government accepted this agreement between Ambedkar and Gandhi and incorporated it as an amendment to the Communal Award of the Prime Minister of Britain. Subsequently Gandhi ended the fast and the following week was celebrated as Untouchability Abolition Week. It seems that Gandhi knew the rising political awareness among the backward classes and depressed classes. These developments reflected in the next Constitutional document namely Government of India Act 1935. The Government of India Act 1935 replaced the term ‘depressed classes’ with ‘Scheduled Castes’. Accordingly separate lists of Scheduled Castes were notified for various provinces in 1936. The Act also defined races or tribes which appear to His Majesty-in-Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as the depressed 88 classes as His Majesty-in-Council may specify'. Even though seats in the legislature were reserved both for the ‘minority’ communities and for the ‘depressed classes’, reservation in the public service was denied to the ‘depressed classes’, whereas the minority communities enjoyed ‘reservation’ in the public services. The reason stated for this was: “In the present state of general education in these classes the Government of India considers that no useful purpose will be served by reserving for them a definite percentage of vacancies out of the number available for Hindus as a whole, but they hope to ensure that duly
qualified candidates from the depressed classes are not deprived of their opportunities of appointment merely because they cannot succeed in open competition.

**Reforms by the Monarch**

Lord Curzon on his visit to Travancore in 1900 said, obviously having a reference to the memorial detailing the grievances of the Ezhavas that “in the history of States no rulers are more esteemed by posterity than those who have risen superior to the trammels of bigotry and exclusiveness and have dealt equal mercy and equal justice to all classes…including the humblest of their people.” T.K. Ravindran adds, ‘The Maharaja of Travancore was quick to act on the advice and a wave of reforms followed. But his officers were not ready to do away with the customary rules and that is why the schools declared open to lower castes still remained virtually inaccessible to them. It would not be right to say that the Travancore Government was not responsive to the demands of the backward classes. There are many occasions as when a representative of Ezhava community Kumaran Asan, the famous Malayalam poet, thanked the Government of Travancore for admitting the students belonging to depressed classes in 89 Government institutions. For instance Asan ‘thanked the Dewan for showing special attention in redressing the educational grievances of the Ezhavas…’ Gradually Communities other than Nairs, Kshatrias and Brahmins began to organize themselves. These Memorials demanded representations in the administration and in the popular Assembly.

**Communal Representation in Administration**

‘Communal Representation’ was as issue discussed in the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly as far back as 1925. The then Chief Secretary of the Government of Travancore explained the inability of the Government to give representation to each and every small community. At the same time the Chief Secretary placed before the Government certain broad principles regarding recruitment to public service. Weaker sections of the Travancore population were given representation even in the not so democratic Sri Moolam Popular Assembly (Sree Moolam Praja Sabha). Again this issue came up before the Assembly in the form of a cut motion on the budget in August 1929. The Government then appointed a Committee consisting of other official and non-official members. In September 1933 this Committee submitted its report that came up for discussion in the legislature in May 1934. Subsequently the Government realized the importance of the matter
and hence decided to study all aspects of the issue. The Government thus appointed, Dr. G. D. Knox, a former Judge of the High Court of Travancore, to examine all available material and make a report on the principles to be observed, in laying down Government’s policy. Based on the report, Government subsequently issued an Order on 25th June 1935. The Communities other than Nairs and Brahmins considered themselves isolated from the administration. The feeling made them unite against the Government, which was alleged to be dominated by dictates of the Dewan. The aggrieved communities came together to form a common political platform that came to be known, as Joint Political Conference later became Joint Political Congress. One of the demands of the Joint Political Congress was to have due representation of aggrieved Communities in the posts in Government services. With statistics the aggrieved communities argued for their cause. Thus reservation of posts in the Government service was a significant platform for the political movement in the erstwhile Travancore Travancore to meet up.

Protected Examinations and Common Representation

Travancore had a debating body called the Travancore Legislative Council established far back in 1888 and the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly in 1904. Even after the demise of Sree Moolam Thirunal, the Constitutional experiments continued and in 1933 a bi-cameral legislature came into existence namely Sri Mulam Assembly, the Lower House and Sri Chitra State Council, the Upper House. There emerged the question of due representation to different communities in this body, which became a vociferous demand. It is interesting to note that the Indian National Congress had only a negligible influence in the State. Since 1935 alleged autocratic rule of the Travancore Dewan (incidentally the Dewan Sir. C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, was a Tamil Brahmin lawyer and former member of Indian National Congress) became the core issue that united all Communities. For the time being forgetting the communal differences, politically conscious people came forward to form the Travancore State Congress. Popular figures form among the Nairs also joined the movement which gave it an all-community color. However, it was dominated by the former organization namely JPC. The political scene of the pan Indian politics was charged with the sentiments of anti-colonialism and in Travancore it was anti-Dewan. Since 1937 when Travancore State Congress was formed this struggle against the Government had been going on. In 1947 the British left Indian subcontinent. But as soon as the colonial rule ended and subsequently democratic institutions too replaced the princely rule, the question of
caste and community emerged as the most significant factor in deciding policy matters including the formation of ministries. Each community being organized and capable of acting as effective pressure groups, reservation in principle was something of a political reality to be reckoned with. Even the first ministry in the erstwhile Travancore represented three dominant groups. In the opinion of a contemporary political activist as the first ministry did not represent other minority or backward communities it did not last its full term. Had it been more representative of different Communities in the State, the first ministry would have had a longer life.

**RESERVATION BY PROMINENT POLITICAL LEADERS AND SOCIAL REFORMERS**

The dehumanizing effects of multi-hierarchical Indian social system and the challenging task of emancipation of the weaker sections in general and the oppressed classes in particular has inspired many humanities to cause relentless crusades against the social catastrophe since times immemorial. First Gautam Buddha and then the two great sons of the Indian soil, Mohandas Karmachand Gandhi and Bhimrao Ramoji Ambedkar involved themselves wholeheartedly, dedicating their lives with the innate concern for the humanity deprived of basic human rights. Driven by their irritable inner conscience and deep anguish, they took upon themselves the onerous task of raising an impregnable pitch of their objective, impassioned and rational interventions at the societal level. In the process, they sought to expose the intricate cobwebs woven underneath the Indian social structure. In order to drive home their socio-religious and revolutionary profiles to advantage of the societal system of their vision, they manifested the finest human instincts of a votary of the so-called modern monumental slogans of liberty, equality and fraternity through their philosophies, preaching and actions. Nobility of heart and revolutionized pragmatism were the two prime, besides many, quintessence of their charismatic personalities, which run parallel to all ages and space, not to be constrained by any specifics of thought, art and 97 culture. When judged in light of the contemporary socio-economic development, the three personalities, Buddha, Gandhi and Ambedkar, who between the first and the last two appeared on the scene with centuries apart, indicate that the quest for strategic approaches for service of the mankind has been endemic to the reformers, activists and the socio-religious revolutionaries throughout the evolutionary process of social transformation in India. More importantly, the social transformation taking place in the last century or so, coupled with
recent developments in socio-economic and political philosophies and current organization of reformative services have led to an intensified need for enlarging the base of emancipatory methods, techniques and practices. In recent times, empowerment of weaker sections has become a buzzword for political leaders, policy makers, academicians, social activists, etc. in India. Structurally, it has been regarded as a viable alternative to Weberian model of nation building that rationalizes the bureaucratic systems and procedures in order to deliver good to the society. Instead, empowerment of weaker sections establishes its credentials by enabling the local people to participate in the decision process at grassroots level. The disillusionment arose out of the experiences obtained during 1960s when the United Nations launched its First Development Decade on economic lines and the policy proved inadequate. In 1970 the United Nations changed its strategy favouring an equitable distribution of income and wealth for promotion of social justice and efficiency of productive systems. Greater equality in the distribution of income and wealth, as many development theorists argued, required expansion of facilities for education, health, nutrition, housing and the safeguard of human environment and habitat. This argument advances the importance of empowerment of the weaker sections to capture the socio-political and economic cleavages of a given society through qualitative and structural changes in the society along the lines of substantial reduction of regional, sectoral and social disparities. Thus, the goal considered development only as a 'means' and it clearly subordinated to the 'end' that was the human. In order to create conditions favourable to social justice, and specifically the elimination of poverty a changed strategy was required, i.e., raising the human capital instead of the money capital. Its ultimate objective was to empower the people with the help of a change in the power structure and granting power to those who are socio-politically powerless. The relevance of empowerment of the powerless was supported by the belief that granting powers to those who are powerless accentuates democratization and development of all sections of the population in an egalitarian way. It became fairly evident that a society that was characterized by a high degree of disparities-sectoral and social, empowerment as per the demographic composition of the society could only be attained through special measures and provisions intended to grant substantial socio-political space to the weaker and vulnerable sections of the population. The need for empowerment of weaker sections was, therefore, considered to be relevant in socio-political and academic circles in the country. Viewed in foregoing perspectives, the problem of weaker sections in India has been addressed in variety of ways in the post-
Independent India. The rural areas, which had greater preponderance of these sections their problems contained a much sharper edges in the villages. The framers of the Indian Constitution found it expedient to put the Article 46 under the Directive Principles of State Policy, which says, 'The State shall promote with special care the educational and economic interests of the 99 weaker sections of the people, and in particular of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and shall protect them from social injustice and all forms of exploitation. In 1960 the Government of India appointed a Study Group on Weaker Sections under the Chairmanship of Jayaprakash Narayan in order to spell out clearly the problem of weaker sections to be viewed in the framework of a hierarchical society- 'a ruling and exploiting class at the top and a large labouring and exploited class at the bottom. In India caste has been an additional factor that has further stratified, strengthened, and sanctified the divisions of class'. However, the terms of reference to this Committee were made limited to rural society only and thus the classification on weaker sections found among the urban population could not be included among the recommendations of Jayaprakash Narayan Committee and thus the vulnerable categories of the urban population, such as casual labourers, the seasonal migrants, the unemployed, and the destitutes like beggar, widows, orphans and handicapped, etc. were left out of the Committee's purview.

As for the categories of groups among the weaker sections neither the Constitution of India nor the Jayaprakash Narayan Committee termed the 'weaker sections' only for the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The latter had referred the term 'weak' in terms of both economic and social (caste, education, etc.) weaknesses. However, sadly enough. Whenever there is a reference to the weaker sections in a sense to include a wide range of groups, the focus shifts from the members of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes who because of their distinct socio-economic, political and religious characteristics constitute the bedrock of the weaker sections. The structural inequalities inherent in the system reduce such groups to permanent socio-economic and political handicaps. Considered against this perspective, economic development alone is found inadequate to render justice to them. Instead, introduction of some intensive structural reforms in the socio-religious domains of the contextual realities pertaining the social set up to be carried out by both official and non-official machineries are considered integral to tackling the problem of socio-economic and political handicaps of such groups. It is in this sense that the problem of empowerment of the weaker sections deserves a more meaningful and lasting approach as a part
of the general reconstruction problems of Indian society. Viewed in this perspective, a number of factors tend to influence this empowerment process. Political structure, policy making processes, local power structures, socio-cultural factors, adequacy of infrastructure, clarity and consistency of programme objectives, adequacy and control over funds and support of the national political leaders are some of the factors critical to the success/failure of the empowerment process for these groups of the population.

The Buddhist perspective

While analyzing the pertinence of Buddhism in the connection of enabling the weaker segments, one needs to dwell into the long history of India's all pervading consciousness that enabled diverse faiths and beliefs to make their meeting place in various periods of the land. The period between the Fifth and Seventh centuries, we saw the rise of one of the key religions of the world, known as Buddhism, which focused primarily on the supreme path of peace both at the individual and social levels. It laid down the fundamental principles of the human condition of suffering, imperfection and dissatisfaction (Dukha) and the factors behind the problem of human condition. In order to find the spiritual rapport with one's own self, Lord Buddha recommended, both in terms of attitudes and action, the four sublime states of life i.e., kindness, compassion, sympathy and even-mindedness (Samata) in principles and practice. At the social level, his philosophy preached for a society that was righteous, harmonious and equalitarian. In essence as well as in reality, the ultimate objective of Buddhist philosophy was to work for a society through the cult of service to free it from any form of exploitation and discrimination, manifest and latent. Thus, Buddhism has been hailed to be a social gospel in the backdrop of a set of doctrines and social reforms embodied in order to preach for a society that would be free from any form of oppression. But unfortunately Buddha’s teachings have not been interpreted properly and understood from the standpoint of India’s social consciousness to derive its relevance to the present as well as the emerging problems both at the individual and social levels; also that Buddhism has never been seriously studied as a social movement. Instead, for many of the centers, departments and institutions and as also to academicians and scholars it has appeared at best as a religion incorporating a set of religion-philosophical constructs, may be of a supreme order and kind.

The Gandhian perspective
As to the question of empowerment of the weaker sections, especially of the Scheduled Castes, Gandhi had his own distinct ideas and philosophy, which need elaboration and deserve our attention in the present context. Gandhi, even though brought up in a Vaishnava environment and subscribing to Varnashrama dharma, vehemently opposed the institutionalized inequality against the Scheduled Castes and their discrimination and regarded it as satanic activity and a sin. For him upliftment of such communities was not a political posture but an article of faith. The lower status of such communities and their powerlessness vis-a-vis the dominant castes was attributed more to the social structure and economic dependence than that of political participation. Political power in itself is dependent on social relationships. Thus, the question of empowerment is linked to social processes and social relationships. In the post-independent era of national developmental planning, the special measures meant to uplift these communities failed to deliver goods. Despite the increasing number of elites in such communities through special measures in the form of reservation in legislatures and Parliament, jobs and admission in educational institutions, etc. could not succeed in empowering them in all aspects of the term. The elected leaders among the communities have also failed to perform their expected role. Then the questions to be addressed in this context are:

What were the weaknesses of the policy pursued so far? And in that content what could be the alternative policy of empowerment of such communities under the Gandhian scheme? The Gandhian theory of social change provides an alternative approach and a strategy towards upliftment of such communities. In this context, he propounded a theory of liberation and not of development. He was continuously pleading for Swaraj for the masses, for the abandonment of the life of comforts for the elite, for the vertical co-sharing of resources and for liberation of the masses from poverty. According to Gandhi, liberation that sought the real freedom from socio-economic bondages was more appropriate than empowerment that only laid down a, de jure arrangement to grant powers to the powerless sections of the society. Liberation connotes a much wider horizon. In this sense, empowerment in the real perspective can only be realized after the goals of liberation have been achieved to a level that could generate a de facto participation of the weaker sections in political processes of the institutions at the grassroots. Before such a stage is reached, the approach towards the empowerment of such communities is bound to fail for want of liberation of such communities from the shackles of poverty and social deprivation. Further, empowerment relies more on the state-centric action without preparing the social fabric
conducive to upliftment of weaker sections. According to the Gandhian view, in many ways the state represents as an agency of coercion and oppression. The Gandhian concept of Swaraj or self-sustained self-development contends that it should be non-violent state in which continuous efforts should be made to free the governmental control because he was afraid of the fact that ‘the state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form’ and violence is bred in inequality. In respect of such social philosophy he opposed centralized socialism that, according to him, does some good by minimizing exploitation, but it does the greatest harm by destroying individuality that lies at the root of progress.

Ambedkar’s perspective

Both Gandhi and Ambedkar are part of India’s heritage and so was Gautam Buddha. In their contribution lie the national awakening and societal transformation. Both Gandhi and Ambedkar were rich in terms of weapons in their armoury and they used them with astonishing success, particularly in rousing the conscience of the forces they were fighting. Based on their purpose and the mission, both of them adopted different strategies in their crusades. They differed in their approaches on the question of the Depressed Classes. Radhakrishnan writes ‘Ambedkar was uncompromising and he was impatient about the slow progress in the dismantling of untouchability. His demand for separate electorate, separate area for the depressed classes were all part of his programme, whereas Gandhi was trying to play the role of an integrator who believed that any more class division of Indian society was harmful to the health of the nation. Like Gandhi, the steps undertaken by Ambedkar to shape the destiny of his men and the oppressed classes formed part of the wave which lashed at the shores and citadels of the Indian conscience and carried its legacy for the similar cause of the world humanity at large. Ambedkar’s vision was ever down to earth in its originality and approach be it to social, economic or to political issues. He had always something significant to contribute on virtually every important aspects of nation’s life, like caste system, the origin of Shudras, the salvation of untouchables, as well as democracy in India, Parliamentary system, Constitutional morality, Fundamental Rights and on the question of linguistic provinces. He always spoke with authority. He always displayed a strong conviction and depth of scholarship. In his personality he was uncompromising to truth and bore unceasing quest for knowledge and supreme confidence in his mental powers. Ambedkar dedicated his life to the service of the untouchables. He insisted on
calling the Panchamas (the fifth tier in Hindu social hierarchy) as “Untouchables” (unlike Mahatma Gandhi terming the affectionate appellation, Harijan—the children of God), to underline their inherited social plight. In the eyes of Ambedkar, untouchability was a kind of slavery and unlike Gandhi’s peaceful and gradual abolition of this evil, through the precept and example, he advocated the more radical solution of annihilation of caste system as such. The syndrome that Ambedkar catalogues about the root of cult of untouchability proceeded in the ascending line emanating from the caste to religion, to Varnas and Ashrama, to Varnashrama, to Brahminical religion and finally to authoritarianism of political power. Ambedkar, while rejecting Gandhi’s approach towards the problem of untouchability, which, according to him, was based on soothing names and soft palliatives, maintained that to ask the help of Shastras for the removal of untouchability and caste is simply to wash mud with mud’. He had little enthusiasm for social reform that did not go to the root of the matter. " .... It is necessary to make a distinction"; he said, "between social reform in the sense of the reform of the Hindu family and social reform in the sense of the re-organization and reconstruction of the Hindu society. The former has relation to widow remarriage, child marriage, etc. while the latter relates to the abolition of caste system". He wanted to abolish the caste because according to him, caste does not result in economic efficiency neither it improves the race. Instead, it has proved to be disastrous in consequences on Hindu society. It has killed public spirit and morality. To quote his own words: 'What efficiency can there be in a system under which neither men's hearts nor their hands are in their work. As an economic organization caste is therefore a harmful institution, in as much as, it involves the subordination of man's natural powers and inclinations to the exigencies of social rules. In his vision of the modern India, thus, there was no place for caste. He said," There is no doubt, in my opinion, that unless you change your social order you can achieve little by way of progress. You cannot mobilize the community either for defence. You cannot build anything on the foundation of caste". Thus, in order to bring about radical change in the Hindu social order he was all for a scientific and a rational attitude towards religion—which according to him will not be a religion of rules but a religion of principles. In his vision on the true concept of religion, he was influenced by the ideas of the political thinker and the great British Parliamentarian, Edmund Burke. Dr. Ambedkar commented, 106 'While I condemn a religion of rules, I must not be understood to hold the opinion that there is no necessity for a religion. On the contrary, I agree with Burke that true religion is the foundation of society, the basis on which all true civil government rests and
their sanction'. Terming the Hindu religion as a 'Religion of Rules', Ambedkar drew a distinction between a Religion of Rules and a Religion of Principles. He said 'Rules are practical; they are habitual ways of doing things according to prescription. But principles are intellectual; they are useful methods of judging things. Rules seek to tell an agent just what course of action to pursue. Principles do not prescribe a specific course of action .... The principle may be wrong but the act is conscious and responsible. The rule may be right but the act is mechanical. A religious act may not be correct but must atleast be a responsible act’. Ambedkar's concept of the religion finds roots in the liberty, equality and fraternity, in short, with democracy. As a Law Minister in the Nehru cabinet, by introducing Hindu Code Bill Ambedkar intended to liberalize the provisions relating to inheritance, marriage, divorce and the status of women. But because of the opposition by the vested interests within the ruling party itself, the Bill could not see the light of the day even after he set the ball rolling for its enactment. On the political front, Ambedkar's imprint is laid on the Fundamental Rights and juridical remedies enshrined in the Indian Constitution, just as was the chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy that owned its credence to Jawaharlal Nehru. Side by side underlining the shape and form of the political structure in post-Independent India, Ambedkar was vehement on prescribing the shape and form of economic structure of the Indian society. Ambedkar was opposed to the revival of the glories of Panchayati Raj of decentralized 107 planning and making 'village' as its unit in Independent India. According to him, the village republics represented the ruination of India. While drafting the Constitution of India he wanted to discard the village and adopt 'the individual' as the unit of planning in post-Independent India'. To him, to make democracy a success in India at the political level, twin ideals of social equality and economic justice were the essential prerequisites. All through his life he remained fearless “I shall be harsh and uncompromising”. Couple of years before his death, he told his men to educate, agitate and organize. He was convinced that this was the only path left for the untouchables to fight the battle for themselves and by themselves with conviction and commitment.

DALIT MOVEMENTS IN MODERN INDIA

Dadasaheb Gaikwad’s Perspective

After the death of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the mantle of leadership fell upon the shoulders of Dadasaheb Gaikwad. He appeared to be the natural choice, by virtue of his stature in the
movement as well as his age. He had grown up to be Ambedkar's trusted lieutenant through frontline participation in all the battles, right from the days of Mahad. He represented a typical activist of the Ambedkarian movement and had a mass identity. He seemed to know the exact pulse of dalit masses. It is interesting to note that the question of land that by and large constitutes the crux of the dalit problem was and could only be taken up by Gaikwad. It was the biggest and by far the most glorious event in the post–Ambedkar dalit movement. Even during the days of Babasaheb Ambedkar, the mass struggle for land had never materialized in direct terms and at such a scale. At any rate, as a mass struggle for land at the 108 national level, it did not have any parallel in Indian history. It was the first time that the economic dimension of the dalit problem was effectively integrated with their social oppression. It had gained an overwhelming support from the mass all over the country. However, although it had caught the fancy of dalit masses, the rest of the dalit leadership thought otherwise. They disproved Gaikwad's struggle as being communist and declared that it had no place in Ambedkarian agenda. They highlighted Ambedkar's statement that mass struggles were the grammar of anarchy in the Constitutional regime and should not have any place in a parliamentary democracy. They argued that if the land question was at all important, it could have been taken up judicially in the Supreme Court of India. Fortunately, none suggested parliamentary solution. In tacit terms, the other leaders were accusing Gaikwad of being intellectually incapable of comprehending the subtleties of Ambedkar's ideology and hence unsuitable to step into his shoes. Gaikwad, a rustic in the common man's Dhoti Kurta attire, and not embellished with university degrees, could not be accepted by these people. They considered themselves the true heirs to the leadership after Ambedkar on the sole criterion that they fitted the Ambedkarian mould better than Gaikwad. This mould was based on the contemporary middle class cultural norms that Ambedkar displayed in his attire and general demeanour. They would conveniently forget that his western attire was basically a counter to Gandhi's belaboured austerity and a representation of modernity as against Gandhi's anti-modern views. Instead, they aped him in all appearances. They would exhibit their law books as the key to the treasure left behind by Ambedkar. They could thus project themselves as better clones of Ambedkar to the gullible dalit masses. Gaikwad and 109 the people of his ilk could be activists but not the leaders! The first attempt to iconise Babasaheb Ambedkar and considerably successfully so, as the later times proved, is apparent in this early post-Ambedkar episode. That was the icon of a 'saheb' the
epitaph used for an Englishman but later used as an honorific for natives, who were educated, westernized and placed in bureaucratic authority. It denoted someone far above the masses, one who was endowed with authority and power. It was the icon of a saviour. It projected leader as the saviour incarnate who would liberate them from their bondage and lead them to prosperity. All that masses had to do was to stand solidly behind him. They did not have any specific role in the project of their own emancipation other than being meek followers of the leader. This particular icon distanced the dalit leadership from the masses in every way in terms of physical attributes like appearance, clothes, language and lifestyle. It promoted blind following and servile notions. The leaders were to be treated as their quasi-monarch. They could not be questioned on equal terms. They bestowed favours by their very existence. Without leaders the masses could not exist. Moreover, in so far as this syndrome reflected middle class aspirations and value associations, this icon helped petty-bourgeoisize the entire dalit movement. Although, later the Dalit Panthers brought in a change in this leadership model, certainly in its physical attributes and so made it more people friendly. This leadership model was certainly regressive as it reproduced the decadent feudal structure that dalits were so familiar with in real life; perhaps it was both, its cause as well as its effect. Paradoxically, its protagonists and promoters were the very people who seemed to claim a larger share of modernity. Thus, this early icon of Ambedkar certainly blocked the emerging mass orientation of the dalit movement.

Kanshiram’s Perspective

The development of Kanshiram particularly reflected an alternate system, which authored the ‘Bahujan’ identity encompassing all the SCs, STs, BCs, OBCs and religious minorities than ‘dalit’, which practically represented only the scheduled castes. Kanshiram started off with an avowedly apolitical organization of government employees belonging to Bahujana, identifying them to be the main resource of these communities. Purely, in terms of electoral politics, which has somehow become a major obsession with all the parties, Kanshiram’s strategy has proved quite effective, though in only certain parts of the country. He has given a qualitative impetus to the moribund dalit politics, locating itself into a wider space peopled by all the downtrodden of India. But he identified these people only in terms of their castes and communities. It may be said to his credit that he reflected the culmination of what common place icon of Ambedkar stood for. The religious minorities which potentially rears the sense of suffering marginalization
from the majority community could be easily added to it to make a formidable constituency in parliamentary parlance. Everyone knew it but none did how to implement. Kanshiram has seemingly succeeded in this task at least in certain pockets. The careful analysis will show that the combination of certain historical developments and situational factors has been behind this success. If not, one will have to constantly exert to recreate the compulsions for their togetherness and allegiance. In absence of any class-agenda, which is certainly the case of BSP, these compulsions could only be created through manipulative politics for which political power is an essential resource. BSP's unprincipled pursuit of power is basically driven by this exigency.

It is futile to see in this game a process of empowerment of the subject people as could be seen from the statistical evidence of the cases of atrocities, and of overall situation of the poor people under its rule. There should be no lament over this as essentially it is where any kind of political acrobatics is destined to end in the prevailing system. The imperatives of this kind of strategy necessarily catapult the movement into the camp of the ruling classes as has exactly happened with BSP. It seems to have sustaining support from the icon that BSP itself created, where Ambedkar was painted as the intelligent strategist who could turn any situation to his advantage, who used every opportunity to grab political power to achieve his objective. He is the person who saw in political power, a key to the woes of dalits and therefore exhorted them to grab it at any cost. He did not think highly of mass struggles except for tactical reasons to demonstrate the might of the leaders. For him, there existed only means not the values for securing one's goals. He is seen as the person endowed with State authority the sole source of his power to benefit his people. He was the sole arbiter of the interests of his people. Of course, he had disdain for all shades of communism. Kanshiram's reading of Ambedkar ignores the fact that Ambedkar had to carve out space for his movement in the crevices left by the contradictions between various Indian political parties and groups on one side and the colonial power on the other. For most of his time, he sought maximization of this space from the contending Muslim League and Congress, to name the predominant players, and eventually brought dalit issue to the national political agenda. Kanshiram stuffs his Ambedkar icon entirely with such kind of superfluity that it would look credible to the gullible dalit masses. This icon approves of his sole ideology that political power to his party could solve all dalit problems. His strategy till then has been to be in vantage position to decide who would be the king and thereby leverage his bargaining power. He did not care for democracy. To some extent this non-democratic stance spells his compulsions to
have unitary command over his party structure as without it, his adversaries would gobble it up. He did not have any utility for any programme or manifesto, no concern for any issue howsoever burning, no qualms about policy or principles because, his sole obsession is to maximize his power by whatever means. He never even spelt out what precisely ails his Bahujans except for highlighting their prejudiced social identities in worn-out castiest phraseology. That explains his entries into and exits from political alliances with anyone with the same alacrity. The underlying value of the movement of Ambedkar was represented by liberty, equality and fraternity. Kanshiram does not seem to respect any value than the political and money power. In Ambedkar, one cannot miss an overflowing concern for the oppressed and wrath against the perpetrators of oppression. Kanshiram's concern scarcely transcended his speeches in his electoral rallies. It was with this concern and commitment that Ambedkar kept on referring to Marx and Marxism till his end, something as a touchstone to test his alternatives. Kanshiram simply abhorred it. Ambedkar struggled to formulate the Dalit problem. Kanshiram either took it for granted or did not care for it at all For Ambedkar certain values, moral code etc. was paramount, and Kanshiram never seemed to be bothered by these issues. Ambedkar always foresaw plans and programmes; visualized appropriate structures for the downtrodden. Kanshiram expressed clear disdain for such things. For Ambedkar political power was a means, to Kanshiram it appears to be the end. The crux of Kanshiram can be traced to his superfluous attempt to replicate Ambedkar's movement of 1920s as if the times had stood still for the bygone five decades. Ambedkar's mobilization of Dalit masses through struggles is vulgarized by him as the 'agit-prop' tool to collect people behind him. When Ambedkar realized the potency of political power, he launched his Indian Labour Party that reflected his urge to bring together the working class, transcending the caste lines. It is only when the political polarization took communal turn that he abandoned his and launched the Scheduled Caste Federation. Although, he accepted the Congress support and offered to work in their government, he never tied up his political outfit to the Congress. It always appeared a politically expedient step for him as an individual without any organizational implication. Declaredly he would avoid the leftists of all hues and accept the friendship of the rank reactionaries of every kind. Ambedkar pointed at the capitalism and Brahminism as the twin enemy for his movement but Kanshiram enthusiastically embraced them without any pinch to his conscience. Ambedkar, in his own way, has been in search of suitable ideological carrier for the dalit movement. Kanshiram has no utility for such a thing.16 Apart from these broad political
trends, there are many regional outfits like Dalit Mahasabha in Andhra Pradesh, Mass Movement in Maharashtra, Dalit Sena in Bihar and elsewhere, etc., some of which dabble directly into electoral politics and some of them do not. They offer some proprietary ware claiming to be a shade better than that of others.