Chapter - IV
Politics in society does not hang in the air. Many forces operate in the shaping of politics and politics in itself is a force, which leaves its impact on the society. This dual character of politics is its essence and relationship between politics and society reveals multiple complexities and contradictions. A few salient features of politics in India may be identified to grapple with its specificity. First, India was subjected to colonial exploitation and in the process it was structurally linked with the world capitalist system. Second, during its long anti-imperialist struggle Indians evolved a new level of consciousness and the goals of freedom, which defined in a broad manner helped in raising the levels of participation and awareness among the Indian masses. Third, the democratic experiment of the last four decades has revolutionised the levels of consciousness and aspirations of the Indian masses and it has created competitiveness among all classes, social groups and strata to compete for a share in the state power. Fourth, the model of capitalist development has brought supporters and opponents with serious development have brought supporters and opponents with serious political conflicts, which are resolved through accommodation or suppression of the movements of the poor.¹

Since independence, India has operated an open democratic political system based on universal adult franchise. Elections have been held at regular intervals, and political parties have competed and participated openly in electoral politics. The actual operation of the democratic process in India has brought into sharp focus the complexity of the relationship between politics and society. The framework of politics in any democratic society is characterized by the general and specific features of the interaction between politics and the social structure. The general feature of politics in all democratic societies is that it intervenes to influence society and that it also reflects the social reality. This interventionist and reflective character of politics cannot, however, be taken for granted. It has been empirically observed that instead of playing an activist role in society, politics becomes passive and reflective of social forces. The activist and reflective roles of politics in society can also lead to a conflict between politics and society.²
Indian politics, by and large, is caste ridden. The caste factor is dominant in every sphere of life. It has reduced the bulk of society to serfdom. The plight of untouchables has deteriorated with the passage of time. Even during the freedom struggle, they were neglected by the British, the Congress and the Muslim League and none of the political and social movements have touched the problems of the untouchables. It was Ambedkar who raised a banner of protest against the practice of untouchability questioning the very social order. He did so with a deep sense of duty and devotion, unmindful of the opposition from the orthodox section of the Hindu society. He played a very significant part at a crucial period in the history of this country and offered solutions to the several ticklish problems India was confronted with during the struggle for political reforms. With a passionate zeal and relentless fight he hammered out Constitutional provisions for the upliftment of the depressed classes. Ambedkar believed that the Constitution of society prescribed by purushasukta a part of veda, as a chaturvarnya. He was of the view that chaturvarnya provided the base for the caste-system which has ruined the Hindus. According to him, the portions of Vedas, at any rate, particularly the purushasukta were fabrications by Brahmins intended to serve their own purpose.

According to Ambedkar, the Purushasukta has elevated real to ideal, and that class composition is natural and therefore sacred and divine. And that the Purushasukta provides for a fixed and permanent gradation of society, with an ascending scale of reverence and descending scale of contempt. Such a classification has compartmentalised the society and converted the de-facto state of affairs into a de-jure connotation of an ideal society. According to Ambedkar, the attempt of Parushaukta to realise the ideal was a kind of political jugglery, the like of which was not to be found in any book of religion. Almost all the Hindu books are replete with the concept of Dharma. Both Manu and Yajnavalkya, learned Hindu seers, refer to Dharma as compulsory duties and obligations of the different varnas. The concept of Dharma as has
been included in the *varnashramadharma* has completely destroyed the concept of social solidarity.\(^5\)

The ideal of *varnashram* as an embodiment of Dharma gave more privileges and immunities to the Brahmans than the people from the rest of the varna. Dutta in his book *"Beginning and Growth of caste in India"*\(^6\) writes that during the period of Brahmans, the Brahmin had become the lord of the whole creation. He further writes that the Brahmin is by right the lord of the whole creation. Whatever exists in the world is his rightful property. He has a special claim to be honoured if he goes as a guest to any householder. He has thus various privileges in society. But that is not all. Even the king must give him preferential treatment. While emphasizing the king's duty to act with justice, he enjoins upon him to be lenient towards Brahmans - it is a privilege of the Brahmin to investigate law suits and the *shudra* is explicitly debarred from settling the law. Thus, virtue is assumed to be the possession of Brahmin, while the shudras are looked upon as essentially sinful. It is this attitude that reveals itself in the graded punishment prescribed for four *varnas* for the same offence.\(^7\)

All were living in deplorable condition. Therefore, Ambedkar vehemently criticised the Hindu civilization and called it an infamy. He blamed the intellectual class that is the Brahmans for the deplorable conditions of the masses because they could not change the state of degradation in which they were placed. He writes, "Under the old Hindu law the Brahmin enjoyed the benefit of the clergy and could not be hanged even if he was guilty of murder, and the East India Company allowed him the privilege till 1817. His profession has lot of nobility. The Brahmin systematically preyed on society and profiteered in religion. The *Puranas* and *shastras*, which he manufactured are used to fool, beguile and swindle the poor, illiterate and the superstitious. Ambedkar was critical of Gandhi for his adherence to the caste system inspite of the fact that he, himself, was not his own ancestral profession of *bania*. Gandhi was *bania* by caste but he did not become a businessman. He
abandoned trade and business in favour of law and politics which are meant for Brahmins.

Gandhi considered Ambedkar as a challenge to Hinduism. He praised Ambedkar as the most competent critic of Hinduism and as the most uncompromising and the oldest among such critics. He writes about Ambedkar, "no Hindu who prizes his faith above life itself can afford to under-rate the importance of the indictment. Ambedkar has not done is his disgust. He is the most uncompromising exponent and has ablest among them. He is certainly the most irreconcilable among them. Thank God, in the front rank of leaders, he is singularly alone and yet as a representative of a very small minority. But what he says is voiced with more or less vehemence by many leaders belonging to the depressed classes, only the latter, for instance, Rao Bahadur M.C. Rajah and Dewan Bahadur Srinivasan, not only do not threaten to give up Hinduism but find enough warmth in it to compensate for the shameful persecution to which the vast mass of Harijans are exposed. When Ambedkar was asked by his critics, that when he did not want caste, what was his ideal society. Ambedkar replied that, "My ideal would be based on liberty, equality and fraternity. Ambedkar criticized Gandhi's theory of chaturvarya as impracticable in this age and there was no hope of revival in the future. Further he said that Gandhi was doing a great disservice to social reform by advocating his imaginary utility of division of varnas, for it created hindrances in our way."

Ambedkar disagrees with the western theory that during the vedic period there was unity of race. Secondly, he refutes the theory that the Aryans were fair and others were dark. Ambedkar quotes Rigveds 1.117.8;(I), 117.5; (II).3.9 and writes that these instances show that vedic Aryan had no colour prejudice. How could they have? The vedic Aryans were not of one colour. Their complexion varied, some were copper in complexion, some white and some black. Ram, the son of Dasharath has been described as shyam i.e. dark in complexion; so is the Krishan, the descendent of Yadu, another Aryan clan.
The name of *Rishi* Dirghatma who is the author of many *mantras*, was given to him due to his complexion. Karva is an Aryan *Rishi* of great repute who according to the description given in Rigveda X-32-11, was of dark colour. According to Ambekdar, the dispute between Brahmins and Kshatriya centred round the right to receive gifts, the right to teach the *vedas* and the right to officiate at the sacrifices, which were considered as monopoly of the Brahmins. ⁹

According to Ambedkar, caste problem is the most complex. Practically, it is an institution that pretends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but capable of much wider mischief, for "as long as caste in India does exist, Hindu will hardly inter-marry or have any social intercourse with outsiders" and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem. Theoretically, it has defined by many scholars who have taken upon themselves, as a labour or love, to dig into its origin. The people of India form a homogenous whole. The various races of India occupying definite territories have more or less fused into one another and do possess cultural unity, which is the only criterion of homogenous population. Ambedkar maintained that the caste is a parceling of an already homogenous unit. and the explanation of the genesis of caste is the explanation of this process of parceling. ¹⁰

As regards the position of Brahminism in the Indian polity, it had its dominance in most of the field - social, political, economic and educational. According to Ambedkar, the legislature, executive and judiciary were completely controlled by Brahminism. According to him, the Indian administration was completely controlled by the caste-Hindus. The position of power and authority was concentrated in hands of the Upper strata of society. During the days of the British, the two deliberately maneuvered to exclude the *shudras* and the untouchables from the Army and, education and from acquiring property. Ambedkar observed that Brahmin and the *bania* protected their privilege and position of power and authority at the cost of the poor
people. Writing about the attitude of the governing classes of India (the brahmin and the bania), in 1945-46, towards the weaker sections of the people regarding reservation policy, he said, "The argument used by governing classes to oppose the demands of service classes (the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes classes), for reservation is based on doctrine of efficiency.... But it can not be right from the point of view of servile classes? Could the 'best' German be 'best' for the French? Could the 'best' Turk be 'best' for the Greeks? Could the 'best' pole be regarded 'best' for the Jews?

There was also another anti-brahminism movement led by Jiyotiva Phoolai. It flourished during second and third decades of this century. Shahu Maharaja of Kolhapur was an active supporter of this movement. This movement was based on the ideology of Phoolai. The non-brahmin leaders regarded the Brahmins as enemies of the Nation. Javalkar published a pamphlet named "Enemies of the Nation", Ambedkar remarked that it was a god book written in bad taste. A suit was filled against non-Brahmin leaders Jedha, Javalker, and Bagade. Ambedkar defended the accused and they were set free. This movement also fell prey to brahminism and as a result failed. After analyzing the causes, Ambedkar said, "Many of the non-brahmins party men tried to become second class brahmins, they have not abandoned brahminism. They are holding it as an ideal. He further said, "you people always abuse brahmins but you never imitate their virtues. Brahmins change their ideas according to the exigencies of the time. They pursue knowledge and money... Remember! Brahmins have brains within brains. If you want to fight the brahmins, you must be more intelligent than them. You do not unite, instead you fight among yourselves and chew the poison pills given by the Brahmins that Mahars are inferior to Marathas". This was the reason why untouchable could not become one with Marathas.11

As observed by Aristotle, man is by nature and necessity a social animal. Hence he lives in society. Thus, society is quite natural, essential, eternal and universal. It is instrumental in evolving such an atmosphere, which
would be conducive not only for the satisfaction of his primary wants, but also for the development of his personality. However, the structure of society is not common everywhere. Whatever might be its nature, it is primordial in shaping economic and political structure which obviously decides the future of individuals in a given society.

Ambedkar believes that the Indian society is a caste society. The Hindu society, a major component of Indian society is but "a collection of castes. Each caste is conscious of its existence". And that there is no 'common consciousness' among the castes. "The caste-system", he states, "prevents common activity and by preventing common activity it has prevented the Hindu from becoming a society with a unified life and a consciousness of its own being". Even, the Hindus in his words, "are not merely an assortment of castes but they are so many warring groups each living for itself and for its selfish ideal."

Ambedkar, put his demand of separate electorate for the depressed classes at first in 1919 while giving evidence before the South Borough Franchise Committee. In his report submitted to the Simon Commission in 1929, he recommended for adult franchise, and joint-electorates with reserved seats for almost all the communities except the Europeans. While giving evidence before the Simon Commission in 1928, he replied to a question, "if there is no adult franchise?" saying that, "then we would ask for separate electorate".

In order to decide the nature of future Constitution and settle the communal problem, the British Government convened the Round Table Conference in London consisting of the representatives of India, the British Government and the British political parties, on November 12, 1930. It met under the chairmanship of Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister of England. The Conference was adjourned on 19 January 1931. The second Round Table conference began on September 7, 1931. It was adjourned on December 1, 1931. It is during these conferences that Ambedkar demanded separate
electorate for the depressed classes. The British Government, however conceded that demand of separate electorate under the communal award, but due to antagonistic attitude of Gandhi in that respect, he had to relinquish it and accept joint electorates with reserved seats under the Poona Pact, 1932. The third Round Table Conference was convened on November 17, 1932 to confirm and finalize the minutes of the previous conferences. It adjourned on December 24, 1932.\textsuperscript{13}

What is electorate and separate electorate is a pertinent question. The electorate is the entire body of voters in the state. They exercise their right to vote in favour of any candidate in their respective constituencies. Where separate electorate is in operation in respect of any community, voters list of such community is separately maintained. The voters of such community vote separately for a candidate of their own community in their respective constituencies. Thus, the voters and candidates belong to the same community and the voting takes place separately.

The obvious purpose of separate electorate is to secure adequate and effective representation to a minority in order to thwart any probable attempt to impose tyranny by communal majority over the communal minority. Due to historical and other reasons there was reasonable apprehension in the mind of the people of minorities that the majority people might impose their communal tyranny over them at their whims. Therefore they thought to enter into power structure in order to protect the interests of their brethren. Ambedkar also thought that separate electorate was the best method of securing true representation of the \textit{dalits}, thereby protecting their interests.

He lost all hopes in the British Government due to their indifferent attitude towards the problem of the \textit{dalits}. He said at the Round Table Conference, "no share of this political power can evidently come to us so long as the British Government remains as it is". It is only in "\textit{Swaraj}" they might be able to protect their interests. He however thought that political power would be possible to them only through their real representatives, and they would be
real only when they are elected by the depressed classes themselves through separate electorate.14

Ultimately Ambedkar demanded inter-alia separate electorate for the depressed classes through a memorandum submitted to the Round Table Conference jointly by himself and R.B.R. Srinivasan. What was the actual demand and what was its nature is a very curious question. The memorandum submitted to Round Table Conference bears, inter alia, the following demand:

"The depressed classes must be given sufficient political power to influence legislative and executive action for the purpose of securing their welfare. In view of this they demand that the following provisions shall be made in the electoral law so as to give them -

(i) Right to adequate representation in the legislatures of the country, provincial and central.
(ii) Right to elect their own men as their representative, (a) by adult suffrage, and (b) by separate electorates for the first ten years and thereafter by joint electorates and reserved seats, it being understood that joint electorates shall not be forced upon the Depressed Classes against their will unless such joint electorates are accompanied by adult suffrage".

The main purpose of Ambedkar in demanding separate electorate to the depressed classes was "to destroy monopoly in every shape and form" enjoyed by the so called high castes. "Our aim is", he stated, "to realise in practice our ideal of one man one value in all walks of life, political, economic and social. It is because representative government is one means to that end that the depressed classes attach to it a great value and it is because of its value to us that I have urged upon you the necessity of making your declaration subject to its fulfillment". Thus, in the words of M.P. Mangudkar, he wanted "to share political power with others mainly to transform the Indian society".15

It was, however a period of political transition. Power was being transferred from British Parliament to Indian legislature. The nationalist forces in India were consistently demanding self-government to India, but at the same
time they were not ready to share power with the hitherto under privileged people. Those who were saying that no foreign country had any right to rule over other country like India, he exchanged to them in the same coin that "No country was good enough to rule another and it was equally true that no class was good enough to rule over another". Thus he was against the imperialism of one country over another at the same time he was against the monopoly of one class over another class.

What was Gandhi's attitude towards the demand of separate electorate is an important question. It is true that Ambedkar could ably convince the Aga Khan (Muslims), R.B. Pannir Selvam (Indian Christians), Sir Henry Gidney (Anglo-Indians) and Sir Hubert Carr (Europeans), the Indian delegates to the conference. Even he could convince the British delegates, including the Prime Minister. However, Gandhi who participated in the Second Round Table Conference as a representative of the Congress was not convinced of the demand of separate electorate. He opposed this demand tooth and nail. He said very emphatically that, I would not bargain away their rights for the kingdom of the whole world. It will create a division in Hinduism, which I cannot possibly look forward to with any satisfaction whatsoever. "I do not mind untouchables, if they so desire, being converted to Islam or Christianity, I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. I would resist it with my life".16

In order to foil the efforts of Ambedkar in demanding separate electorate, Gandhi played some foul tactics. They were (a) He argued that almost all the delegates to the Round Table Conference were not elected by the parties or groups whom they were to represent; but they were nominated by the Government. Hence they were not properly authorised by their respective parties. On the other hand he argued "the Congress claims to represent the whole nation". Thus he vainly tried to demoralise all the delegates and tried to create an impression that only Congress delegates represent the whole nation.
Ambedkar, however ably said that, "I am a nominee or not, I fully represent the claims of my community". Regarding the claim of Congress to be representative of whole nation, he said that, "I can only say that it is one of the false claims which irresponsible people keep on making, although the persons concerned with regard to those claims have been invariably denying them". The British Government did not see any substance in the argument of Gandhi and continued the proceedings of the Round Table Conference uninterruptedly.

He was, in fact, very firm on not conceding the demand of separate electorate. It was his firm conviction that the Depressed Classes do not need political right at all. He said very categorically before the Round Table Conference that "what these people need more than election to the legislatures is protection from social and religious persecution". In order to win over the Muslim delegates to its side so that they may oppose the demand for a separate electorate for the Depressed Classes, he tried to convince the Agha Khan but in vain. Further he agreed to concede "fourteen points" put forth by the Muslim League, which included that India should be federal with residuary powers vested in the provinces, 1/3 representation to the minority in the central legislature, full liberty of belief and worship, 1/3 Muslims in the central or Provincial cabinet etc.

When the British Prime Minister realised that there was no compromise on the minority problem, he asked all the members of the minorities committee to authorise him to settle the problem on his own. Gandhi signed the pledge to agree with the premier. Ambedkar however did not sign the pledge as he believed that his demands are just. The Prime Minister then adjourned the conference on 1st December 1931. The British Government finally declared the Communal Award on 4th August 1932, which inter alia stated separate electorate for the depressed classes. Gandhi who was in jail in those days finally resorted to go on "fast unto death" on 20th September 1932. Although he signed the pledge to be bound by the verdict of the premier on the issue of communal problem, he did not stick up to his own words.
Gandhi began his epic fast unto death in Yerwada Jail, Pune on 20th September 1932 in protest against the separate electorate for the depressed classes provided under the communal award. The political atmosphere in the country became grim and tense. Several letters threatening Ambedkar, poured in and demands were made to save the life of Gandhi at any cost. Ambedkar was very much firm on his stand. He said categorically that, "I shall not deter from my pious duty, and betray the just and legitimate interests of my people even if you hang me on the nearest lamp-post in the street". Hence tension was mounting day by day. He was caught in a big dilemma either to save the life of Gandhi or to lose the special safeguards in the form of separate electorate which he achieved after a long struggle fight against many odds.

Eventually, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru evolved a scheme of primary and secondary elections for the reserved seats in place of separate electorate. Accordingly, the depressed classes - qualified voters in their respective constituencies were to select a panel of not less than three candidates and then out of those three candidates one was to be elected by the joint electorate. Ambedkar, however expressed his willingness to accept the proposal provided the number of seats was increased. It was acceptable to the Hindu leaders. In the negotiations the Hindu leaders accepted to allot 148 seats to the depressed classes in the Provincial Assemblies. In the central legislature 18% of the seats allotted to the general electorate were to be reserved for them. Gandhiji consented to the agreement. The agreement was signed on 24th September 1932 at Poona, as such it is known as "Poona Pact".

Why did Ambedkar accept the Poona Pact ? Was he not fully aware of the disadvantages of the Poona Pact ? It is of course true that he was fully aware of the disadvantages, which the scheduled castes were to sustain due to joint electorates. The scheduled caste candidate contesting reserved seat under joint electorate was to win only on the strength of majority caste Hindu votes. In other words the majority caste Hindus who had but malice for the scheduled castes were to decide the representative of the scheduled castes. They, however
elected such candidates from among the scheduled castes who were to serve the interest of the majority caste Hindus and not of the scheduled castes. Therefore Ambedkar has rightly observed that, "Poona Pact has completely disfranchised the scheduled castes". Gandhi and the Hindu leaders agreed to joint electorate only because it was to serve their interests in a better way. They must have thought that they would be able to impose Hindu cracy on the scheduled castes, that too with the easy consent of the 'stooges' of their community. Ambedkar was fully aware of this fact, therefore he tried his best to secure separate electorate for the scheduled castes since 1919 onwards. He was fully aware of the inter-relationship between separate electorate, representation, political power and welfare of the scheduled castes. He said very categorically that the Poona Pact was "fraught with mischief". It was accepted because of the coercive fast of Gandhi and because of the assurance given at the time that the Hindus will not interfere in the election of the scheduled castes".18

With due respect to all these interpretations of that great event, it could be said that in the given critical situation Ambedkar moved by the principle of "politics is the game of possible", and the spirit of democracy. Later, Ambedkar was elected as chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly on 29th August 1947. He, however, refrained from raising the issue of separate electorate in the Constituent Assembly, which was dominated by the Congress. On the other hand it was going to accept universal adult franchise. The whole nation was still alive to the shock of partition, which it has woefully sustained in the recent past. Therefore, Ambedkar who believe in the politics of principle, power and possibility in a given situation kept strategic silence over the matter.19

The increasing consciousness of the fact that the British were leaving India prompted Ambedkar to have some compromises with the Congress. The partition of the country made it clear that Congress was the only political organisation, which would be able to command confidence and rule the country. He made clear that on the inauguration of the Constitution, India has
attained equality in politics but he warned that there was still inequality in social and economic life. He urged for the removal of this contradiction at the earliest moment. "or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so laboriously built up". The problem before the country was whether people would place the country above their creed or creed above the country. "But if the parties place creed above country, our independence will be put in jeopardy..... and probably be lost forever".20

Gandhi tried to close the communal issue by bringing about a settlement among the Hindus, Muslims and the Sikhs. He had been carrying on negotiations privately with them before the Minorities committee met, but Gandhi failed in his mission. Knowing this as a detrimental move, Ambedkar told the committee that whatever may be the representative character of Gandhi or of the parties with whom he wishes to negotiate they, certainly are not in a position to bind us - certainly not - I want to make that absolutely plain".21 The Minorities pact was in no way anti-national or even anti-independent document. It simply provided human rights to all with some special claims, which could be modified in the national interest. Besides, Ambedkar and Rao Bahadur Srinivasan put a supplementary memorandum asking for special representation for the depressed classes in the federal and provincial legislatures in proportion to their population in India. It demanded separate electorates but added that if the system of joint electorates was to exist with reserved seats, it should take place only after a referendum but that also not until after 20 years and until universal adult suffrage has been established. It emphasized that the Depressed Classes should not only have right to their own separate electorates, but they should also have the right to be represented by their own men. Gandhi's reaction, however, was strong and vehement. He was particularly against the recognition given to the untouchable as a separate political entity. He said, "I would resist it with my life". Thus Gandhi blocked the inclusion of the necessary safeguards for the depressed classes. At the
Round Table Conference, Gandhi's argument was that the Hindus had seriously taken up the course of the untouchables and therefore, there was no reason to give them political safeguards. Outside, however, he gave a different version and before he returned to India he said:

(a) The Muslim and the Sikhs were well organised. The untouchables were not. The separate electorates would make their lives miserable. It would throw the apple of discord between the touchable and untouchable Hindus.

(b) The question of separate electorates for untouchables is manufactured by the Government. The only thing needed was to put them on the voting list and provide for fundamental rights for them in the Constitution. In cases, the depressed classes were unjustly treated and their representatives were deliberately excluded, they would have the right to special election tribunal which should provide them protection, and

(d) The separate electorate to the untouchable would ensure their bondage in perpetuity. It would keep them 'untouchables' forever. What was needed was destruction of the untouchability and not their separation from the Hindus.  

The Poona Pact was accepted by the British Government thereby nullifying the communal Award, much to the Gandhi's satisfaction. The main points of pact were; the increase in the number of seats; the voting on the basis of joint electorate; the termination of reserved seats after ten years; and adequate representation was to be given to the depressed classes in public services.

The scheduled caste political leadership at the Government of India level has remained a monopoly of an individual from the time of the Constituent Assembly (1947) and even before, when Congress was voted to power at provincial levels during 1937. Gandhi was groomed to fight against Ambedkar and he is anti-Ambedkar. This old Congressman, a veteran freedom fighter was in fact disapproved of by his party leader for having received a sword in token
of his success as a Defence Minister in the liberation of Bangladesh during 1971-72.

The scheduled caste men have to attach themselves to some upper caste men, if they wish to be in politics is a truism. Since their representation in the Assembly, Parliament and Ministry is almost a Constitutional gift, they are seldom tolerated to be original and vocal. They should toe the line of the party bosses both within and outside the party and legislature. Also the social values which have survived and to some extent directly fortified by the political machinery always try to associate caste status with behaviour pattern and occupation. In this way scheduled caste political leaders are constantly watched by the party bosses and the public, commented and admonished for lapses.

While the generation of freedom fighters is nearly extinct, the lingering few are left away in Congress Organization after the great split of 1969, when the party was divided more as a result of personality clash than of differences in ideologies as was made out. This entire process can be aptly put in Merton's terms as follows: "The periodic efforts at 'political reform' turning the 'rascals out' and cleaning the political house' are typically (though not necessarily) short lived and ineffectual. The reform may for a time bring new figures into political limelight; it may serve the casual social function of reassuring the electorate that moral virtues remain intact and will ultimately triumph; it may actually affect a turnover in the personnel of the political machine, it may even for a time to curb the activities of the machine as to leave unsatisfied to many needs it has previously fulfilled. But inevitably, unless the reform also involves a 'reforming' of the social and political structure, such that the existing needs are satisfied by alternative structures or unless it involves a change which eliminates these needs altogether the political machine will return to its integral place in the social scheme of things". 23

Gandhi tried to sideline the interests and provisions of political rights of the untouchables and wanted to make a settlement with the Muslim and Sikh Communities at the cost of untouchables. "This was nothing but a declaration
of war by Gandhi and the Congress against the untouchables. In any case it resulted in a war between the two". At this juncture the ever vigilant saviour of the downtrodden, Ambedkar rose to be equal to the mischievous situation and thundered his point before the Minorities Committee when it met on 28th September to conclude:

"... I have no quarrel with the question whether any particular community will get weightage or not, but I do want to say most emphatically that whoever claims weightage and whoever is willing to give the weightage, he must not give it, he cannot give it - out of my share. I want to make that absolutely clear ... I have made my position absolutely clear".24

On this, J. Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister of England who was the Chairman of the Committee declared:

"Dr. Ambedkar's position has been made absolutely clear; in his usual splendid way he has left no doubt at all about it and that will come up when this body resumes its discussion. What I would like to do is to get you all to feel that we are cooperating together for a general settlement, not for a settlement between any two or any three, but a complete settlement".25

Ambedkar accused Gandhi of being lost in his double role of Mahatma and politician. As a Mahatma he may be trying to spiritualise politics. Whether he has succeeded in it or not, politics has certainly commercialised him. A politician must know that society cannot bear the whole truth and that he must not speak the whole truth; if he is speaking the whole truth it is bad for politics. The reason why the Mahatma is always supporting caste and varna is because he is afraid that if he opposed them he will lose his place in politics. Whatever the source of his confusion the Mahatma must be told that he is deceiving himself and also deceiving the people by preaching caste under the name of varna.26

Political reservation at higher levels so far has functioned as a family preserve. Only a handful of ambitious persons are fighting to retain the glory. How can this help the cause of scheduled castes in general? Even those who
put forth their life mission as service of the downtrodden do not see the contradiction between their life style and that of scheduled caste masses. Many of them do not know the utterly dependent conditions of scheduled castes in rural side. For the masses, scheduled castes politicians are as unapproachable as anybody else. The ignorance of the scheduled castes is exploited by the scheduled caste political leaders. Given this, the deliverance of the scheduled castes is no longer in the hands of scheduled caste political leaders. Political reservation has become redundant and it has and will serve another kind of vested interest. The sooner it is replaced by a different system when scheduled caste problems are the direct concern of those getting elected from reserved seats; better it is. Some tangible results could be then expected.27

A structurally heterogeneous society reflects its conflicts at multiple levels such as caste versus caste, class versus class and the multiplicity of socio-cultural and socio-political conflicts have been taking place because of the existence of multiple diversities, competitive casteism and peaceful co-existence of the communities has been a great causality. We must not lose sight of the fact that the higher castes have traditionally used force to put down the lower cases and not allowed their "serfs" to raise their voice. Now the poor lower castes have been activated by militant political leftist groups and challenging the feudal structure of rural areas. This has led to the growth of Naxalism and formation of several underground guerrilla units to protect the interests of the lower castes and prevent their exploitation. These units have frequently clashed with the private armies formed by the upper castes/class and threatened to put the democratic and secular identity on the edge of a precipice.28

At that time Ambedkar was seriously considering becoming a Sikh. He had discussions with other untouchable leaders. Keer mentions that Ambedkar was advised by some of them to also seek the backing of the Hindu Mahasabha. It may have appeared to some of them that the choice of a religion which stood in conflict with Hinduism would only embitter social relationship
without serving any spiritual purpose because, whatever their religion, the vast majority of the untouchables would still in largely Hindu villages.  

Another major development in 1936 was the establishment by Ambedkar of the Independent Labour Party. If the decision to given up Hinduism had, at least partly, been the consequence of the failure of the Nasik satyagraha and growing disenchantment with the reformist movement under Gandhi, the founding of the Independent Labour Party was a result of the realisation that if the interests of the untouchables had to be protected in the era of electoral politics that was about to begin, the untouchables needed to be organised as a political party. But if a political party were to be created, it would not be effective by being limited to just the untouchables. It had to have broader affiliations, without losing its central focus - the protection and furtherance of the interests of the untouchables. Ambedkar thought that the group with which the untouchables would have some community of interest was that of industrial and agricultural labour. The party was founded in August 1936 and it was named, significantly, the Independent Labour Party. It sought to establish an identity separate from the communist-led trade unions in the labour field and from the Indian National Congress in the political arena. The party declared itself in favour of working the Government of India Act, 1935, in spite of all its limitations. The Congress took some time deciding whether or not it would fight elections under the new legislation. Ambedkar characterised the Congress as a curious combine of exploiters and the exploited.  

The conversion move towards Buddhism has been picked up tremendously almost in every state of India there are reports of mass conversion to Buddhism. The Asian Age Monday, 28th September 1998 reports, "the figure published by the Gujrat govt. in its socio-economic review: 1998 reveal that the growth rate of Hinduism in the last one decade in the state was 21.12% of Christianity 36.96% and Islam 24.05% compared to these, the growth rate of Buddhism was 53.84%. These figures have been provided by the commissionerate of population studies. Delhi. The trend towards Buddhism is
more discernible in the age group of 18 to 30 years and is also reflected in the increase in sale of books on Buddhism and Zen.31

The untouchables alone got bewildered and shuttered with their broken backbone after partition of India. Though they alone could not fight and annihilate casteism of the supremacy of the Brahmins, they did not drop their scheme to conquer back their motherland. As a consequence, gradually the Republican party lost its charm and strength. The untouchables gradually overdepended upon the Constitutional policy of reservation, political as well as service. As a consequence they lost their independent political aspiration, in the reserved seats it became impossible to get elected without the support of the governing castes. Ambedkar was the glaring example of this. The democratic movement of the untouchables, the political aspirations of the untouchables and the movement of the annihilation of castes by the untouchables remained dormant for a long time.

In a recent study conducted in the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration, Mussoorie, it has been analyzed, "till the formation of the RPI in 1958, the dalit politics in U.P. kept swinging between the accommodative policies of the Congress and the revolutionary politics of the Federation. These two tendencies of integration and separatism were to remain within the scheduled caste movement in the post-colonial India. The phase of the RPI lasted merely a decade. The influence of the party was confined to UP and Maharashtra. The party won 3 parliamentary seats and 8 assembly seats in U.P. in the 1962 General elections. Its performance was marginally better in 1967 when it won 10 Assembly seats. After winning only 2 Assembly seats in 1969 election, the RPI finally declined to almost a non-entity in the subsequent election. The decade of the 70 is described by Sudha Pai as "a phase of integration and a hiatus between two periods of separatist political activity by the Scheduled Castes in U.P. The Congress was able to co-opt both of them.32
The Government had launched a political campaign to build his and Janta Dal's support base among scheduled castes and backward classes, which divided the country apart and led to widespread violence. The caste conflicts in the rural areas have increased and they have become extremely violent. The first anti-reservation stir in Gujarat in 1981 left 40 dead and property to the tune of several crores of rupees burnt, in the course of one hundred furious days. The bloody five-months-old anti-reservation movement in Gujarat in 1985 had taken a toll of 335 lives, injury to 904, destruction to 5,323 houses and establishments and property losses of over rupees 40 crores. It left the people frightened, the government shaken and the social fabric in the state totally ruined. Long duration of curfew resulted in business losses of around Rupees 2.375 crore. Finally, Madhav Solanki, the then Chief Minister was forced to resign. Panic ruled the mixed localities and when the disturbances spread hundreds of caste Hindus living around Harijan localities migrated to other areas fearing a backlash. The worse was the anti-reservation stir turned into communal riots between the Hindus and Muslims. The caste conflicts also engulfed the state of Bihar resulting in violence and loss of public property and the Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur had to resign.

There were divergent opinions whether caste is the basic denominator of backwardness. Time and again, commissions on backward classes have come out with purely caste-based reports that satisfied none. There was no justification for the Congress (I) in granting the Momin, a group among the Muslims, the backward status in Bihar creating castes, where there were none. The feeling was why should the son of Jagjivan Ram, one of the richest Harijans, or sons of many other rich Harijans be given the benefit of reservation. In a bid to woo backward votes, Congress (I) ruled states propose, through a Constitutional amendment, to remove the restrictions imposed by the Supreme Court. The biggest election sop is the move by the centre to amend the Constitution in a bid to circumvent the restrictions placed by the Supreme Court on the reservation policy. Some states have been affected by the
judgment because they had for years provided quotas much higher than the quotas fixed by the court. This led to violence throughout the country. The residents of Dalal Chock and Baghaura under Madanpura police station in Bihar are mostly Thakurs. On the night of 29 May 1987 an armed mob of over 700 persons descended on the two settlements lying at the foot of the Umga hills, situated 25 km from Aurangabad (Bihar) men, women and children were pulled out of their beds, their hands and feet tied before they were either shot dead or brutally hacked to death. Their houses were set on fire and children hurled into a makeshift pyre. The mob mostly Yadavs left the place, leaving 55 men, women and children dead. It was a revenge carnage as earlier the Rajput had killed 7 yadavs in the neighbouring villages. In a massacre on July 11, 1996 in Burki Khargaon and adjoining villages of Bhojpur district in Bihar which left 22 people dead and more than 50 injured mostly women and children, in the course of a four hour long violence perpetrated by the pro-upper caste landlord "Ranbir Sena", consisting mostly of Bhamihars and Rajputs suggests the collapse of the law and order administration in the lawless state. The victims of the tragedy are the poor scheduled castes and backward classes.

The situation of the violence prone districts of South and Central Bihar has been largely out of control, over the years, but the government and the political leadership deeply entrenched in caste politics has refused to heed the danger signals that have been hoisted. Internecine pulls and pressures resulting from the politics of caste that dominates the Bihar scene have only added to the woes and travails of the police leaving them in no position to restore order anywhere. Caste politics, thus became highly criminalised.

In Maharashtra, caste tension had been endemic. Mahars, a scheduled caste had their resentment against the upper caste since 1972. There was large scale violence during Marathwada agitation in 1977-78. During the agitation, a total of 227 villages, comprising scheduled castes were attacked and 153 atrocities against them were reported. Police opened fire to control the
situation and registered 153 cases covering six districts. In most cases some government functionaries joined hands against the scheduled castes.34

The history of the party system in India is linked with the struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. During the struggle for freedom, the Indian National Congress emerged as a kind of united front of all regions, religions and linguistic and caste groups: the nationalist leadership mobilized the Indian masses under that umbrella organization. After independence, the Congress became a political party and regularly participated in the democratic electoral process. It now based its strategies on the experience that its leadership had gained during the struggle for national freedom. During all elections held for the Lok Sabha, the Congress party nominated its candidate on the basis of caste arithmetic. After winning the elections, the Congress Chief Ministers and Ministers, whether at the centre or at the state level, continued to operate on the basis of caste. The caste factor thus linked the party, the Government and the elections. One's caste became a ladder by which one reached the heights of power in politics. The Congress is a multi-caste, multi-religious and multi-linguistic party, whereas the Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP), the Lok Dal and the Janta Party are essentially based on narrow social constituencies. The Bhartiya Janta Party is essentially a party of high-caste Hindus, and the "untouchables" castes have not been attracted towards it.

The Janata Party has an important component of the erstwhile socialists whose ideologue was Ram Manohar Lohia. Lohia believed that a socialist transformation could be achieved in India by mobilizing the 'backward', 'depressed' castes in the rural areas, and the Janata Party has adopted his strategy of caste mobilization. The Lok Dal was established by Charan Singh on the basis of 'backward' peasant castes. Charan Singh has posed a formidable challenge to the Congress in northern India by mobilizing the 'backward' peasant castes against the Congress multi-caste coalition. Caste in India has been employed as a factor in achieving political power. One consequence of this has been the growth of competition and confrontation
among the various castes. Since politics protects caste interests, the caste factor in politics has been solidified irrespective of its growing confrontational and competitive role.35

The policy of reservation in India was quite firmly established during the decades of the British rule but such a policy was designed more to redress communal inequalities in the representation in public services rather than a social engineering device to redress the deep rooted socio-economic inequalities of the disadvantaged sections of the society. The British Indian Government had introduced special provisions and concessions for the educational advancement of backward classes which was later, converted into caste reservations for jobs. The entry of a scheduled castes into educational institutions in the country was recorded in 1856. It was in June, 1856 that a scheduled caste boy applied for admission to a Government school in Dharwal, Bombay Presidency, which created furore in the administration attracting the attention of the rulers. The Board of Directors were then forced to formulate an educational policy where it was stated that as long as the schools are maintained by government the classes of its subjects are to be given admission without any distinction of caste, religion and race. This policy was further strengthened with the enactment of the Caste Disability Act of 1872.36

Political representation as a means to emancipate the backward sections of Indian society from the age old disabilities was not given recognition during the nineteenth century. Thus, the Government of India Act of 1858 and the Indian Council Acts of 1861 and 1892 did not recognise the special claims of the depressed classes. The dawn of twentieth century also did not herald their recognition as a political entry. For the first time the census report of 1910 divided the Hindu into three categories: (a) Hindus, (b) Animists and Tribals, (c) the depressed classes or untouchables. This resulted in acquiring a new political dimension to untouchables by giving separate importance to them. On the basis of representations received from the Depressed Communities, in 1918, the Maharaja of Mysore appointed in the
same year the Miller Committee to recommend steps for adequate representation of non-Brahmins in the services of the state. 37

The untouchables do not constitute a homogeneous group. They belong to different ethnic and cultural groups. But segregated together on the basis of untouchability, they all are often pushed to live in a distant part of a village or ghettos of a city. It is an accepted phenomenon that the Scheduled Castes are still lagging behind in almost all fields and undergoing hardships, sufferings and oppressions, but a consciousness was downed on them during the freedom movement about their plight. National leadership was already worried about them. Long before the era of struggle for recognition of human existence and socio-political rights (1920-50), attempts were made to emancipate them from the clutches of upper caste exploitation and degradation by various saints and social reformers. But they tried to do so on the basis of philosophical and religious grounds. But failed as they insisted on the continuation of the varna system. Basic challenge to this exploitative and inhuman system came from emergence of Buddhism and Jainism, which more or less did not believe in the philosophical tenets underlying the caste system. 6

The British Raj, as usual was not concerned with social reforms, or removal or untouchability or the amelioration of the condition of depressed classes. Their policy was to divide the people and rule over them. It was more concerned with preserving their power, maintaining law and order, and collecting taxes. 38

The Government responded in a very cool and slow manner to the reformers, when they introduced progressive bills like the Hind Gains of Learning Bill and the Temple Entry Bill in the central Legislative Council. This complaint was re-echoed by progressive Englishmen like H.N. Brailsford, and by the untouchable leaders like Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Actually, the British often preferred to exercise a restraining function over the untouchables in order to appease the upper castes. It did not like to displease the upper castes in introducing social reforms to improve the conditions of the untouchables. 39
The attachment of Untouchables to Congress during the 1930's and 40s was far less than is sometimes assumed. In the years after Independence Untouchable support for Congress clearly strengthened. From 1952 until 1989, with the exception of the post Emergency election of 1977, untouchables tended to function in both national and state elections as a 'vote bank' for Congress. Their vote for Congress was a vote for the party of government, a party that had committed itself to a program of action on untouchability and poverty. While the untouchables were a crucial Congress vote bank in India as a whole and in a majority of individual states, even before the recent flux they did not cling to Congress in regions where another party of movement rose to dominance. The major examples of long-term non-Congress dominance are West Bangal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. A number of Ezhavas associated themselves with the fledgling Communist party from the early 1940s, but with increasing prosperity the caste vote has been split along class lines between communists and Congress. But in the state of Kerala, the scheduled castes were more inclined towards the left parties. In West Bengal, the communist movement was slower to gain control of the state: the first United Front Government came to power in 1967, a decade after the first such government in Kerala. The untouchables of Kerala and West Bengal have behaved according to the logic of their class position within a political culture more directed to considerations of class than anywhere else in India. But from another perspective the Untouchables of these two states have been doing little different form their counterparts elsewhere in India. They have simply aligned themselves with the majority party - It is doubtful that most of these untouchables have been affected with any special passion for Marxism.40

Within Congress the importance of the untouchable vote did not translate itself into great influence for individual untouchables. In particular, the building of the compensatory discrimination system arose more from the arithmetic of elections and the goodwill of sections of the elite than from the efforts of dalit parliamentarians. Jagjivan Ram was alone as a scheduled caste
politician in becoming a genuinely national figure through Congress. A small number state and national politicians gained a measure of political recognition but there is no substantial change.\textsuperscript{41}

The Congress framework rested a bit too heavily on the personality factor and on 'networking' through the state apparatus, handing out privileges and promises and thus patronising its support-base. The politics of cooption was thus central to the Congress party, but the ever-mounting aspirations of emergent social groups, like the intermediate castes, put the 'inclusivist' system under great strain. In the specific case of Uttar Pradesh even when the Congress for a good two decades managed to use the levers of power to keep the various components of its support base reasonably contented, this success became less and less pronounced in later years due to a combination of factors. For one, as Kothari and others have pointed out the Congress kept uprooting influential state-level leaders to induct them at the Centre, thereby creating a vacuum at the top leadership level. Stalwarts like Gobind Ballabh Pant signify that tendency most vividly, because even before he could settle down in his chief ministerial assignment in Lucknow, he was called upon to 'assist' the party and Government at the Centre. Sucheta Kriplani, Hemwati Nandan Bhauguna, N.D. Tiwari, Kamalapati Tripathi and so on - they were all shifted from New Delhi to Lucknow and back.\textsuperscript{42}

In the general election of 1984 Congress won eighty three out of eighty-five U.P. seats 51 percent of the total vote. But five years later the party won only fifteen seats with 32 percent of the vote. In 1991 the Congress vote slipped further to 18 percent, and it won five seats. This was also its tally of seats in 1996. Congress dominance had been built on a strong command of the Brahmin, Muslim and Untouchable 'vote banks', together with considerable but variable support form the other upper castes and also the backward castes.

The electoral politics of the Congress was affected by rise of two other parties - the Janta Dal and its offshoots, including Mulayam Singh's Samajwadi Party, and the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP). These parties gained
prominence partly because of the vacuum caused by the unpopularity of the Congress and partly because of their own efforts to divert the voters. The Janata Dal and the Samajwadi Party draw their major strength from the backward castes, whereas the B.J.P. has traditionally been strongest among the upper castes of the towns. The Janata Dal and Samajwadi Party attracted a large share of the Muslim vote disenchanted with Congress after the destruction of the Babri Masjid. And the BJP has picked up considerable backward caste support, partly because it has had a strong backward caste (Lodhi) leader in Kalyan Singh.43

The practitioners of populist politics are consciously dividing Indian society by following an unprincipled policy on reservations for public services and entry to educational institutions. The Biju Patnaik Government in Orissa has sharpened social conflicts by an abrupt announcement to increase the reservation of seats in educational institutions for Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students from the present quota of 22.5 percent to 38 percent. The decision sparked off violent agitations by a large section of students.44

The National Front in its election manifesto of 1989 supported substantial reservation in employment, education and public offices to Backward Classes observing at the same time that the recommendations of the Mandal Commission will be implemented expeditiously. This intention of the V.P. Singh Government was also reflected in the President's address to the joint session of both the Houses of Parliament. While delivering his address to the joint session of both Houses of Parliament on 20th December 1989, the President of India, R. Venkataraman said:

"The scheduled castes and scheduled tribes continue to be victims of social and economic injustice. The Government's primary aim will be to ensure economic and social justice to them so that they can lead their lives with dignity and honour. The reservation for the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes in the legislature will be extended by a further period of ten years. The Government will take appropriate steps to implement the recommendations of
the Mandal Commission”. But the timing of its acceptance by the V.P. Singh Government came as a complete surprise to all including even the MPs of ruling Janata Dal. On 7 August 1990, V.P. Singh stunned the entire nation by announcing the Government's acceptance of some recommendation of the Mandal Commission Report in Parliament.

The Mandal Commission was set up by Janata Party Government. But it is worth-noting that Indira Gandhi did not outrightly reject the Mandal Report, nor did she take it up for consideration. Discreetly she shelved it and equally discreetly the leaders of the opposition let it remain on the shelf. Later, Rajiv Gandhi also did exactly the same thing. The Report was taken up by the National Front after a lapse of ten years and V.P. Singh projected himself as the saviour of backward classes by declaring that the Mandal Commission Report will be implemented. This sparked off anti-reservation movement throughout the country. In Delhi, the student community took to the streets and organized bandhs and rallies. Though the lack of co-ordination between the various student groups spear-heading the stir made some of the bandhs somewhat farcical, the agitation clearly put the Government in dock. In Bihar, though Laloo Prasad Yadav, the Chief Minister who stand to gain the most form the implementation of the Commission Report, yet his state had witnessed some of the bloodiest anti-Mandal protests which claimed several lives. The upper castes in Bihar was so angry that an organisation called the Rastriya Swarna Mukti Morcha was set up in Bhumidhar-dominated Muzaffarpur district to demand a separate ‘swarna Rajya’ comprising areas in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, west Bengal and Haryana. The other big beneficiary of the Commission Report Mulayam Singh Yadav had to face less music.

The Mandal Commission Report was politicized for electoral gains by the Janata Dal. The party has decided to launch a countrywide Mandal Yatra from August 25 to November 7, 1992, with a view to mobilise the backward castes on the issue of reservations in jobs. The caste approach of the Janata Dal is quite clear when it wants a "caste census".
The Narasimha Rao Government inherited the agenda of the Janata Dal on reservations, and it modified to give some representation to the poor. Every major political party has come to agree on the policy of reservations, but each wants to take the sole credit for it. They are championing the cause of reservation without accepting the responsibility of initiating genuine socio-economic programmes for the real poor. The legitimate role of politics is to provide opportunities for upward mobility of the suppressed sections of society. Governments must launch direct attacks against poverty. But Mandal based reservations are a short-cut adopted by politicians to seek votes.

On August 19, 1993, the Times of India, reported about a meeting of the dalits and Indigenous political leaders belonging to the ruling Congress party. The dalit movement was recognized as a force to reckon with. The report noted, the leaders of the backward castes (including dalits) and tribes in the Congress (ruling party)... have raised their voice against the neglect of these section of society and demanded firm measures to redress their grievances. They recently held a one day meeting.... It was demanded that the party should project a candidate from this section as the chief minister during the campaign for the assembly election. The idea was mooted by Mr. Ajit Jogi (a Christian dalit) Rajya Sabha member .... Almost all attributed the rise of the Bahujan Samaj Party (a dalit political party) in certain regions of the state (Madhya Pradesh) to the discontent in this section.... The Dalit Panthers were recognised as a new force in the politics of India. Panthers released a manifesto, which indicated Marxist influence. Dhosal was one of the main leaders of the dalits. Most of the Panthers owing allegiance to Ambedkar were against communists. The Panthers got split and many of them were involved in criminal cases, because of the violent acts committed by them. The Panthers often criticised the RPI leaders for their intemperate habits, anti-Ambedkarite activities, going around with Congressmen and so on, those involved in criminal cases individually approached Congress leaders for help and managed to get the cases withdrawn.
**Dalit Panthers Movement: An Appraisal**

_Dalit_ Panther provided courage to fight against the ghastly incidents perpetrated on the _dalits_ and exploded the myth that the untouchables are mute and passive. They vehemently attacked the unjust caste system. They acted as a check and balance against the power politics and Republican party leaders. They initiated a debate on Ambedkar's ideology. They compelled the government to fill the backlog. They made popular the term 'dalit', in preference to terms like Harijans and untouchables. And they captured the imagination of the younger generation, projected a militant image through a policy of confrontation. However, it has its own limitations.

There is a substantial gap between their goals and the efforts to achieve them due to lack of organizational infrastructure. They also failed to link themselves with other parallel movements. The programme was largely inconsistent. It was marked by absence of cadre building programme. Lack of funds also pose a problem in building an effective organization. No substantial efforts were made by the Panthers to understand the rural position of the _dalits_. It is punctuated by lack of coordination between the _dalit_ intellectuals and panthers.\(^{52}\)

**The Rise of Bahujan Samaj Party**

Kanshi Ram, the founder of the party, was himself a victim to caste discrimination, launched this new outfit with the lofty objectives of confronting social discrimination and establishment of a just social order. He found an ally in Mayavati whose dynamism and energy was considered an asset to the organization. Consequently, in North India several branches were opened and committed persons were given the key positions. Soon the B.S.P. emerged as a political force. Numerous _dalits_ thronged under the banner of Kanshi Ram who apprised them of their basic and fundamental rights and advised them not to rest until their goal was achieved. They could understand soon that here was a leader who could do much for them.
The results of his efforts were quite favourable. Mayavati became Chief Minister of U.P. twice. In the Parliamentary election Kanshi Ram and B.S.P. could capture a few states which gave them same political clout. They are very hopeful that they would do better in the coming years and would like to act either independently or would have coalition with another party of their choice. The Bahujan Samaj Party has generated new spirit in other states with the enthusiasm of Kanshi Ram. Again people were apprised of their basic and fundamental rights, which indeed could elevate their socio-economic status. The main idea is to make the dalits realise their social worth and put in efforts to elevate their status.53

The Election Commission's data shows that B.S.P. did improve its vote percentage in M.P. from 3.5% in 1991 to 8.18 per cent in 1996. Another state where the B.S.P. performed reasonably well is Jammu and Kashmir (Jammu region) where it shared 5.95% of the polled votes. Since the party draws its strength mainly from among the scheduled castes its scheduled caste vote share in these states is considerably high. In U.P. it shared 59.5% of scheduled caste votes; 22.9% in M.P., and 12.2% in Haryana. Due to the under-representation of scheduled caste voters in the sample of Punjab, scheduled caste vote percentage cannot be calculated constituency wise. Though the party failed to get any seat in Haryana, on the 6 seats that it contested, its vote share varied from 5.01% to 20.58%. On Jammu seat, the party got 16.14% of total votes. In M.P. the party polled more than 20% of votes in as many as 6 seats, and between 10 to 20 per cent of votes in 7 seats. Obviously, the share of scheduled caste votes in these seats must be very high.54

The rise of B.S.P. in the four states seems to be linked with the decline of the Congress. In U.P. the Congress has been reduced to a peripheral party and the main players are now B.J.P., S.P. and B.S.P. The B.S.P. is firmly rooted in the Jatavs, the largest caste grouping among the scheduled castes in U.P.73.8% of its voters belong to this caste group. Parsi constitute 45.7 per cent and other scheduled castes 60.6% of its electorate. The scheduled castes have
almost deserted the Congress and switched over to the B.S.P. In Haryana and Punjab too the Congress has been reduced to a diminutive force and the scheduled caste voters no longer repose total faith behind it. In M.P. the B.S.P. could spread its influence only in the areas adjoining U.P. and in the Chhatisgarh region which has a long tradition of political mobilisation of marginalised groups. In Jammu also, the Congress has taken a back seat and the B.J.P. has taken over but scheduled caste votes have not gone in favour of the B.J.P. There seems to be a close association between the decline of the Congress and the emergence of the B.S.P. as the representative of scheduled caste interests in these states.

The figures presented above also dispel the commonly held belief that the B.S.P. has a powerful electoral appeal only among the urban educated middle class of the scheduled castes. The voters background figures of UP reveal that the B.S.P. draws 62.7% of its votes from non-lettered voters though they constitute only 44.8% of the total sample of respondents. The next large share to B.S.P. votes comes from the voters having education up to middle level constituting 27.4% of total B.S.P. voters. Voters having completed graduation or above constitute only 2% of B.S.P. voters though their representation in the sample has been 5.6%. In fact, only 6.3% of the graduates preferred to vote for the B.S.P. whereas this figure is as high as 51.3% for the B.J.P. Occupation-wise BSP's voters mainly belong to the unskilled workers, agricultural and allied workers, and artisans and small and marginal farmers. Persons engaged in business and white collar jobs constitute only 2.6 and 1.6 per cent respectively of the B.S.P. voters. The all India figures also resemble the trends as observed in U.P. for example, the all India figures reveal that 85.3% of B.S.P. votes come from the lower class alone.

The only other party known for representing mostly the scheduled castes is the Republican Party of India. In 1996 Parliamentary elections, the party emerged as obvious choice of the scheduled caste voters wherever it contested elections in Maharashtra. Of the 11 seats it contested in the state,
though without a win in 5 seats, its vote share has been more than 20% and in 4 constituencies between 10 and 20 per cent of the polled votes. The party could poll more than 2 lakhs of votes in 2 constituencies”.

The study reports also has disclosed the truth that with the emergence of their own political party, the dalit Bahujans who were merely used by the Brahmnical political parties as their stored votes in their vote banks refused to be used as mere ballot in favour of the Brahmnical social order and in detriment to the lower stratum of society.

The most important feature of the recent upsurge in dalit politics has been change in their party preference, since independence, the Scheduled castes had been considered the "committed" vote bank of the Congress. It was the Congress in the pre-independence period, which first of all provided the political space for the scheduled castes to participate in a political activity in form of the freedom struggle. This participation had a pan-Indian character and it gave them, at least in the political sphere, the opportunity to stand somehow at par with the upper castes. This is not to deny the role of power, hegemony and dominance exercised by the upper caste people who dominated the upper layer of the Congress leadership. No wonder, at times we also find that the scheduled castes waged anti-feudal struggles against the local landlords. At many places, it were the communists who attracted them. Ambedkar too had a following among them. Nonetheless, it was the strength of the Congress that it could hold the majority of the dalits within its fold and made them believe that the political system in the independent India would offer a bright future for them. The Republican Party of India (RPI) did try to challenge this dominance in most part of the sixties, but its influence was restricted only to Maharashtra and U.P. that too only in a few districts. By the end of the sixties, even the RPI lost its attraction. The scheduled caste voters remained loyal to the Congress even in face of the troubled times of 1967 and 1977 (the percentage of Scheduled Caste votes polled by the Congress was 45.2% in 1967, 47.8% in 1971, 52.8% in 1980. It was only in 1977 that the congress could barely
manage 35.7% of the scheduled caste votes which 53.0% of the scheduled caste votes going to the non-Congress parties). Some fluctuations notwithstanding, never in the past the Congress faced any serious threat to this "captive" vote bank except in a few states under the left rule. However, signs of decline in its scheduled caste vote share became the order during the elections held in the late eighties (1989) and the early nineties (1991). The Lok Sabha elections of 1996 finally present a changed electoral landscape. There is a definite trend of desertion of the Congress by the scheduled castes in many states like U.P. and Bihar. This is also one of the reasons why for the first time the Congress failed to become even the single largest party in the Lok Sabha. Except a few states the Congress no longer remains the choice of the majority of the scheduled castes.57

The overall emerging pattern is that wherever scheduled castes could find a viable alternative they preferred it to the Congress. The B.S.P. was their first choice, in its absence the Left Front and the regional parties were preferred in states where they had dominance. However, on account of its all India presence, the Congress could still pull the largest share of the Scheduled caste vote (31.4%) though scheduled castes shared only 21.6% of its total polled votes. As compared to this, in 1971 the Congress was able to get 57.8% of the scheduled caste votes. In 1996, the left parties together polled 11.6% of scheduled castes. The B.S.P. polled their 12.1% votes. The B.S.P. mostly depends on the scheduled caste vote as 67% of votes polled in its favour came from the scheduled castes. None of the other parties solely relies on scheduled caste votes as the case is with the B.S.P. The B.J.P. could corner around 13% of the scheduled caste votes as against 45.6% of its votes coming from the upper castes. The Congress, the Left Front and the B.S.P. together accounted for 55% of the scheduled caste votes polled all over the country. These are the parties. which pulled larger percentage of the scheduled caste votes as compared to their overall vote sharing in 1996 elections.58
The shudra and tribal voters have started realizing the teaching of their leader, Kashi Ram. "Toomlog Jiski Piche Khare Hojate Ho, Ohi Sasak Banta, Islie Pichlagu Banna chodke Apna Payer Par Khare Ho Jao. Satta Tumarhi Hogi". (The political party behind whom you people stand and support, become the rulers. Therefore, Rally on your own identity and become the Governing class of your country). This is not just an emotional statement but also a hard fact of Indian politics. The dalit bahujan have been electing government with their immense majority support by casting valuable franchise.

The party which is supported by the lowest stratum of the dalit bahujan, who are of late better known as scheduled castes is invariably installed on the wheel of the government. The ruling political parties were launched by the brahmins in collaboration with other castes like baniyas, kayasth etc. They organised, manned and managed the policies of those political parties. The members of the Dalitbahujan samaj neither had any initiative nor contributions to make for those parties. They therefore, enjoyed no privileges out of those political parties. These parties representing upper castes give false assurances to low caste and untouchable people. The gullible, illiterate and helpless masses depend on them. The parties secure their votes and forget about their assurances.

Blatant caste politics, which catapulted the Mulayam Singh-Kanshi Ram, combine to power proved divisive and dangerous in Uttar Pradesh. But nobody expected the conflict to erupt so soon within the walls of the Assembly, on the very first sitting of the newly constituted Assembly in 1993, legislators fought pitched battles. As many as 33 legislators, 6 staff members and a few home guards, on duty, were injured. Among them were women legislators. So vicious was the cross-fire that of the 221 microphones provided in the House only 16 remained functional by the time the troubles was brought under control. The most visible examples were, of course, the removal of T.S.R. Subramaniam as the State's Chief Secretary and that of Surendra Mohan as the Home Secretary, after B.S.P. leader Kanshi Ram publicly rebuked the
Government for allowing the "Brahminical order" or upper castes, to dominate the higher tiers of bureaucracy. With the B.S.P. leaders insisting on filling up senior posts with scheduled caste officers, and Mulayam feeling obliged to cater to his main constituency of other backward classes and Muslims, the state machinery resembled the vote bank of the two parties.60

Can our political parties bring a harmony in our society by demolishing the caste system at present? Not at all because the main aim of any political party is not to bring political unity but to get capture political power to serve its own interests. Every political party meticulously avoid the changing of status quo for fear of wrath of its voters. Indian party politics by and large, is not committed to the philosophy of social change. The base of some political parties is religion, some have casteism and regionalism and still others believe in capitalism. The multi-party system has added to the confusion. Every political party has a vested interest in sustaining the caste system.61 Democratic participation in governance, a strategy for development, search for social justice, is a far cry. In order to capture votes, the politicians pit caste against caste, religion against religion. The wedges driven by religion, caste and caste can be neutralised by redefining secularism. The question of secularism does not apply only in the case of Hindu-Muslim relations; it holds good for caste as well.62 During the agitation against the implementation of the Mandal Report no political party was prepared to condemn it or support it directly and openly for fear of alienating the vote banks.63 However, the policy of reservation fractured Indian society besides affecting efficiency. Seen in this consent, the observations of Jawaharlal Nehru in his letter to Chief Ministers in June 1961, still hold conviction, "I dislike any kind of reservation, more particularly in service. I regret strongly against anything which leads to inefficiency and second rate standards.... the only real way to hold a backward group is to give opportunities for a good education... but if we go in for reservations on communal and caste basis, we swamp the bright and able people and remain second rate or third rate.... It has amazed me to learn that even promotions are based sometimes on communal or caste considerations. Let us hold the backward groups by all means, but never at the cost of efficiency".64
References
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29. Ibid., p. 155.
32. Ibid., p. 77.
34. Ibid., p. 226.
37. Ibid., p. 15.
39. Ibid., p. 27.
45. Cited in Ibid., p. 60.
46. Ibid., p. 67.
48. Ibid., p. 99.
51. Ibid., p. 152.
53. Ibid., p. 326.
55. Ibid., p. 75.
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57. Ibid., p. 80.
58. Ibid., p. 83.
59. Ibid., p. 86.
64. Times of India, New Delhi, November 17, 1990.