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## Editorial

*Dear Readers.*

Where are our women ?  
Where are our women?  
Where are our women?

As our movement for Dalit liberation continues, one of the most vigilant questions we can ask ourselves is, "where are our women?"

They are our mothers, our wives, our daughters and sisters. But do we recognize them as our leaders, our thinkers, and our visionaries?

I ask you again. Do you know where they are in our movement?

Hindu ideology has been extremely successful in dividing our base and blinding us to our essential truths. Under Hinduism, we have forgotten the ways of our matriarchal culture, and, how strong a foundations our families could have had if we had confronted patriarchy that divides us still.

As a united Dalit people, we must put at the center of our struggle those who are most oppressed by the hindu system.

Our women.

Dalit women face the double oppression of caste and patriarchy exacted by both men outside and within our own communities. In organizing and building our movement we must take heed that we do not perpetuate models of leadership that replicate the very systems we are struggling to defeat.

To recognize Dalit women's leadership in the field. D-Mag plans to launch a monthly interview column dedicated to Dalit women's organizations. This column will highlight the work of Dalit women organizers, who are establishing themselves as leaders in their communities and creating a new vision for the liberation of our peoples.

Please join us in recognizing these women, our women, and all women in struggle as we celebrate international women's day.

Thank You,

**Ms. Thenmozhi Soundararajan**

Editor Collective.

(Mr. Raju Kamble, Dr. Raghuthaman Opeh, Mr. Sashikanth Chandrasekharan)

## The Incomparable Mayawati.

- By Mr. Kanshi Ram, President, Bahujan Samaj Party

Ms. Mayawati has many qualities to deserve being called 'Incomparable Lady'.

In one of the public meeting in the Ram Lila Ground of Delhi, she declared her decision to dedicate her life to the cause of the people amongst whom she was born.

She opted for the movement initiated by Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, Shahu Maharaj and Baba Saheb Ambedkar. She joined the Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP).

Her father opposed her decision. So she was forced to move into the BSP office along with other office bearers. But, Being a Govt. School Teacher, she was economically independent. She got her a room in Karol Bagh from the party.

She taught in the School in the morning, worked in the office after it, and studied Law at the Law College in the evening. It was thus that she completed her Law Degree.

In the Movement, she was opposed by her seniors and had to struggle against them. Then she decided to contest in the Parliamentary elections held in December 1984. She was advised not to contest, for, being a govt. servant she was required to resign from her job. Yet, she resigned her job though Bahujan Samaj Party candidate didn't stand a chance in the elections.

She was given more responsibilities in the organisation after the elections.

In 1985, she prepared for the bye-election to the parliamentary seat of Bijnor. She went from village to village and swelled the votes for BSP from 5700 votes to 65,000 within a period of one year. Another bye-election in Haridwar was next. She got the second highest votes next to the ruling Congress Party at the hustings. By securing 1,36,000 votes she improved the votes of BSP 14 times (from 9,000 to 1,36,000).

I was happy with her performance in the elections. But the senior leaders in the party put pressure to block Km Mayawati. Some of them even left the movement. I do not know where they are today. But Mayawati kept surging ahead.

By 1993, BSP shared power in U.P. Mr. Mulayam Singh was made the Chief Minister and Ms. Mayawati the coordinator to run the alliance Govt. of U.P.

When I fell ill, Ms. Mayawati and Mr. Malhotra took me to Hospital. When she came to know that my illness was grave, Mayawati became very anxious. The nurse attending to me told me that Km. Mayawati was weeping outside my room. I called Mayawati.

*"Would you like to be the Chief Minister of U.P.?"*

She thought my condition had become serious. I showed her all the relevant papers and told her to go to Lucknow and hand over the papers to the Governor of U.P. He will give you the oath, and majority will be tested within 15 days on the floor of the house. The arrangement for winning the vote of confidence had already been made.

She won the vote of confidence on 1st June, 1995. But at the night of 2nd June, Mulayam Singh tried to put spanner in the works.

She survived the test and took oath as Chief Minister on the 3rd of June, 1995.

Her courage was put to test many times. She became victorious each time.

She became the Chief Minister of U.P. twice, Member of Lok Sabha twice and Member of Rajya Sabha once. Thanks to her Uncommon Courage.

# Role of Dr. Ambedkar in women's liberation

-By Mr. Raju Kamble

## Introduction

Lot is being talked about the liberation of women. Lots of women's liberation organisations have sprung up in India. From their style of functioning it appears that they are trying to give a symptomatic treatment to women's problem. None seems to have been trying to diagnose the real cause of the problem. In this paper, the real cause of the problem and its permanent remedy has been looked into. Dr. Ambedkar the revolutionary of 20th century has played a vital role in securing the basic human rights for the women in general and dalit women in particular. His role has also been discussed here.

## Status of women in Vedic times

Today's problem of women has its origin in the vedic times. Women those days were considered inferior to men. They were equated with the Shudras/ati-shudras, the fourth/fifth varnas of the vedic religion. Women were not considered fit for spiritual attainment as they were not allowed to read Vedas. All the law books of Hindus have very distinctly written about their degraded status. Few verses from these Hindu law books are mentioned here. There are many verses in the Vedas, Smritis, Puranas etc., which are very derogatory and obscene in nature and are avoided here:

**"Let a female child be born somewhere else; here let a male child be born"**

-Atharva Veda 6.2.3

**"The nature of women is like that of the hyena"**

-Rig Veda X.95.10

**"Women have no right to study Vedas"**

-Manu Smriti IX 3

**"It is the highest duty of the woman to immolate herself after her husband"**

-Brahma Puran. 80.75

**"If a wife, proud of the greatness of her relatives or (her own) excellence, violates the duty which she owes to her lord, the king shall cause her to be devoured by dogs in a place frequented by many"**

-Manu Smriti VIII 371

**"In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to the sons; a woman must never be independent."**

-Manu Smriti V.148

**"Shudra dhol pashu nari ye hai sub tadan ke adhikari (Eng. Shudras, drum, animal and women deserve beating)"**

-Ram Charita Manas

## Liberation of Women a Historical perspective

### Gautama Buddha's Role

As stated above the women were not allowed to read Vedas during the vedic times. Hence their last rites were also not performed by chanting vedas.

Gautam Buddha was the first master who gave women, status equal to men. Secondly he provided women access to knowledge and learning by providing them entry into the Buddha's order. He considered women capable of attaining spirituality. Many women under the Buddhist Order attained very high level of learning and intellect; so much so that their contribution in the name of "Therigathas" (The songs of the Buddhist Sisters) occupies a prominent place in the Buddhist Canonical Scriptures.

With the decline of Buddhism and subsequently its extinction from the land of its origin, position of women went back to its original low grade position as was in vogue during the vedic times. In fact it deteriorated further when brahmins imposed stricter derogatory and obscene laws through Manu Smriti and other Puranas.

These Hindu law books are full of derogatory remarks about women. And interestingly so, these laws, though superceded by the laws framed under the constitution of India, still rule the minds of the people in India. If any real improvement has to be brought in the status of women in our society, this mindset has to be changed or forced to be changed.

### **Mahatma Jyotiba Phule's Efforts**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some genuine efforts were made to bring about the liberation of women. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his Wife, Savitribai Phule did pioneering work for providing access to education for women. Jyotiba Phule first taught his wife at home and then she in turn started teaching in the school, which was started by Jyotiba Phule for girls. They are also the ones who started the school for the girls of untouchable communities in 1850; probably the first of its kind for the untouchable girls in the country.

### **Role of Dr. Ambedkar in women's liberation**

Dr. Ambedkar continued the pioneering work of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his wife. Right from the beginning of his struggle for the eradication of caste prejudices, he started involving women in the struggle. He realised that the real progress of the dalits could not be achieved without liberating the women themselves. He started motivating the women.

His first demand of adult franchise, which was met in the early 20s after resistance from the brahmins, gave voting rights to untouchables as well as to women. That was the beginning of an era of liberation for women.

Dr. Ambedkar then brought women, the dalit women in particular into the struggle. In December 1927 during the Mahad Tank struggle, on the first day (of the second leg) when the procession was taken out, women marched in the procession along with men. Second day, Dr. Ambedkar exclusively addressed women. He told them to participate in the struggle against the tyranny of caste system. He emphasized to them that men alone cannot fight this menace. The main theme of his speech was "Importance of participation of women in the struggle of dalits". He also wanted to prepare the women for a cultural change. He told them to change their style of dressing, to do away with unwanted ornaments, which they used to wear all the time and told them to send their girls to school, keep cleanliness etc. His speech was so effective that women dropped the unwanted ornaments in that meeting itself. Next day the women could be seen with their style of dressing changed completely. Thus Dr. Ambedkar brought about a revolutionary change in the attitude of dalit women. That gave an extra boost to his movement.

Dr. Ambedkar was an ardent supporter of family planning. He emphasized the need of family planning way back in 1938. At that time nobody even dreamt of it. He even criticised his own parents in public speeches because he himself was the 14<sup>th</sup> child in the family. This showed his concern for the well being of the women.

Dr. Ambedkar had also been encouraging women to organise themselves. One such historic women's conference was held on 20 July 1942 at Nagpur. Some 25,000 dalit women participated in the conference. Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was highly impressed by the large gathering. In his speech he told the women to be progressive and told them to abolish traditionalism, ritualism and customary habits, which were detrimental to their progress. He also advised them not to indulge in early marriages, not to infuse inferiority complex among the children.

Through the constitution of India, as the chairman of the constitution drafting committee, Dr. Ambedkar was instrumental in granting equal status to all the citizens irrespective of sex, religion etc. Thus the women, contrary to their low status as per Hindu law books, were for the first time got equal status lawfully.

### **Hindu Code Bill**

The next landmark, pioneering work, which Dr. Ambedkar did was the "Hindu Code Bill". He introduced this bill in the parliament on the promise from Jawaharlal Nehru that the bill will be passed as it is. He basically prepared this bill to empower women by way of giving property rights and giving rights in many other matters like marriage, adoption, divorce etc. However the orthodox Hindus who had the mindset of Manu Smriti did not allow this bill to be passed in parliament as it is. This bill was so dear to Dr. Ambedkar that he resigned from the Govt. in protest against the dropping of the bill. After his resignation, the bill was passed in bits and pieces. The property rights section was immediately passed. This itself was a landmark in empowering women. The entire credit for this goes to Dr. Ambedkar. The other sections of the Hindu Code Bill were passed in the form of following acts:

Hindu Marriage Act 1955

Hindu Succession Act 1956

Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act 1956

Adoption and Maintenance Act 1956

## Conclusions

The main reason for the suffering of women even today is the grant of low grade status to women in the law books of Hindu religion, like Vedas, Puranas, Manu Smritis, Bhagwad Geeta, Ram Charita Manas etc. Though these law books are superceded by the constitution of India in the last 50 years legally, the Hindu shastras still control the mindsets of the people.

Gautam Buddha was the first preacher who revolted against the discrimination against the women in the society. He then gave them equal status by allowing them to enter his Order. He allowed women to have access to knowledge and spirituality. Prior to his time, women were not allowed to read Vedas. Women were not considered fit for spiritual attainment. Buddha removed all these restrictions. Under Buddhist Order many a women attained high learning and spirituality. "Therigathas", meaning the songs of Buddhist Sisters, have found a prominent place in the canonical Buddhists scriptures.

After the decline of Buddhism, women were again degraded to their unequal and low status under the newly made laws of Manusmriti.

The equal status was again restored to women legally after Indian independence; particularly securing the property rights to women were exclusively through Dr. Ambedkar's efforts. Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and his wife Savitribai Phule provided the breakthrough for women in education in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## Way Forward

In spite of the legal equality status provided by the constitution of India, women in India are still being exploited in the society. If this problem of exploitation of women in our society has to be solved permanently, then a crusade against the law books of Hindu religion is required until it is wiped out from the minds of the people in India. This is the way forward for the women's liberation movement.

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## Towards The Empowerment Of India's Women.\*

*Women's property right.*

-By Tej Singh, Commander-in-Chief BSS

From time immemorial, the women in this land of ours were treated as private property. Her position in the society was not at par with male of the species. She has very limited rights. In Hindu Shastras, she has been branded just like animals. Tulsi Ramayan verse, " Dhol, ganwar, shudra, pashu, naari- Ye sab tadan ke adhikari," gives some idea as to how women were treated in the past. Similarly, we can understand that of Dropadi of Mahabharata was reduced to the status of a family concubine, being the wife of five husbands (Pandwas).

She was not only, the wife of five husbands; she put as stake in gambling by none else than the 'Dharmraj' Yudhishtar! In 'Manusmriti', the ancient Hindu Code-book, women were placed at the lowest rung of humanity. She was treated at par with the animals and as a slave by the perpetrators of Hindu Dharma. That is why Dr. Ambedkar was of the firm opinion that until or unless, by applying dynamite, the Hindu Dharma-shastras are not blown up, nothing is going to change. In the name sanskaras, women are tied up in the bondage of superstitions, which they carry till their death. These Shastras were passed on to the budding minds of their offspring. Even otherwise, the women a source of pleasure and amusement. She was used and misused by men to serve their base ends. She has been used as a machine for procreation.

It has also been mentioned in Hindu Shastras that the woman is the bond slave of her father when she was young, to her husband when she is middle aged and to her son when she is a mother. Of course, all the epigrams, aphorisms, proverbs, platitudes and truisms bear the naked truth about the stature of women in ancient India. It does not mean that no efforts have been made in the past to bring dignity to women. There is also a very long tradition of social reforms by our saints and other social reformers. Christianity inaugurated the Era of equality, liberty and fraternity by preaching that a prince and pauper are equal in the eyes of God. But the orthodox thwarted these efforts. In the absence of any legal sanction or authority, these efforts could not be sustained.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar has tried to brake down the barriers in the way of advancement of women in India. He laid down the foundation by codifying the common Civil Code for the Hindus, capable of being applicable other sections of the Indian society.

The two schools of Hindu Law viz., 'Mitakshara' and 'Dayabhag', created and sustained inequality. According to 'Mitakshara' the property of a Hindu is not his individual property. It belongs to what is called coparcenary, which consists of father, son, grandsons and great grandsons by reason of birth. The property passed under Mitakshara by survivorship to the members of coparcenary who remain behind, and does not pass to the heirs of the deceased, whereas, Dayabhag recognised the property held by the heir as his personal property with an absolute right to dispose it of either by gift or by will or any other manner that he chooses. The chaotic conditions of the Hindu law were reduced to neat propositions and codification was given legislative recognition and made into law.

Dr. Ambedkar explained lucidly the reasons for consolidation and codification. Article 25 of the Indian Constitution permits all the freedom. The reforms introduced by Dr. Ambedkar through "Hindu Code-bill" have been adhered to and have been accepted by and large. He, by codifying Hindu Law in respect of marriage, divorce and succession, rationalized and restored the dignity to women. Prior to the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and Hindu Marriage Act, 1955, the Hindu Law was un-codified to a large measure, though Hindu Women's Right to Property Act, 1937 was the subject of legislative intervention. The Sharda Act is also worth mentioning. It has set the seal of authority upon that piece of social reforms, which the heads of orthodoxy were, impeding. In Hindu Code Bill, the principles of codification covered: (i) Right to property, (ii) Order of succession to property, (iii) Maintenance, marriage, divorce, adoption, minority and guardianship. Needless to say, the Bill was a part of social engineering via law. It was by any standard of any time a revolutionary measure. It was really a first step towards the recognition and empowerment of women in India. Under these revolutionary measures, a woman will have property in her own right and be able to dispose of her property.

The Hindu Code Bill was introduced by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly on 11th April 1947. The debate continued for more than four years and still remains inconclusive.

Here once again, the orthodoxy prevailed upon the reforms. In the words of Dr. Ambedkar,

"..it was killed and died unset and unsung".

He felt that the then government led by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru was not eager to pass the Hindu Code Bill. He, therefore, tendered his resignation but continued to participate in the Parliamentary debates on the request of the Prime Minister.

Sharp criticism of this Bill in and outside Parliament led many to believe that it might inflict heavy damages on the Hindu society. President Dr. Rajendra Prasad was threatened to withhold his assent even if it had been passed by the Parliament.

The Times of India on 26th December 1950 carried a statement of Dr. Ambedkar. He said:

"The Bill aimed at removing the legal obstacles in the social advancement of women."

Justice P.B. Gajendra-gadkar while congratulating Dr. Ambedkar for the role he had played in drafting and piloting the Bill said,

"If Dr. Ambedkar gives us Hindus our Code, his achievement would go down in history as a very eloquent piece of poetic justice indeed."

Today, a hue and cry is being raised over the 'Women's Reservation Bill' by different sections of Indian society, including political and apolitical organizations. The political empowerment is a must for the all round development of the women. We must also concentrate on imparting social education to the women before giving any concrete shape can be given to their political empowerment. Without academic and social education, the political empowerment of women may proved inadequate.

It will not be prudent on our part to restore the rights of the women belonging to the affluent section of the society only. Our efforts should be directed towards all round development of every section of Indian women by giving their due share. Now the question arises as what sort of empowerment our women needed prior to



restarting their equal property rights? There are lot of nodal agencies including the national Commission for Women said to have been working for the welfare of the women apart from governmental efforts.

Except for a small number of urban and suburban women, the Indian women are still crying for justice.

Restoration of property right to women would be meaningless without making her mentally strong. We must allow them to think breathe and act independently and bring her out of the shackles of slavery. Free her from rites, rituals and superstition . Don't treat women your slave or servant who has come to this world just to cook your food, wash your dirty clothes, and fulfil your other needs. Only then we can achieve our cherished aim of empowerment of Indian women and restoration of their property and other rights in order to bring equality to her doorsteps.

This could be achieved only if we are able to blow up the heinous Hindu-shastras by using dynamite as affirmed by none else than Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the emancipator of the millions of Indian women and men.

\*This is the summary of paper presented during the workshop on "Women' s Property Rights" held on 26th Feb 2001 at Bhopal. The workshop was organized by National Institute of Public Cooperation & Child Development, a wing of Human Resources Department, Government of India, New Delhi,

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## News in Brief

### Vigil for Kamballapalli

Vigil for [Kamballapalli](#) victims took place at the Indian High Commission, London on the 12th March 2000.

Approx. 20-25 Dalit Solidarity Network members turned out to mark the first anniversary of the horrific murders in the village of Kamballapalli. The members held placards outside the Indian High Commission premises and leaflets were distributed to the public.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn MP, Revd David Haslam and Mr.Iqbal Singh met officials of the Indian High Commission.

Revd. David Haslam was briefly interviewed by Sunrise Radio. His interview was broadcast between 5pm - 5.30pm on Monday 12th March.

### Bangaru Laxman resigns

Bangaru Laxman resigned as Bharatiya Janata Party president Tuesday night, party sources said.

Laxman, who was shown by the website [tehelka.com](#) as accepting money for allegedly fixing a fictitious defence deal, took the decision to quit his post after a meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the sources said.

### Mayawati for quota in pvt. sector

New Delhi, March 3: Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Ms. Mayawati, has demanded reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe in the judicial service, the Rajya Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha in addition to quota in the private sector. Making a strong plea for affirmative action in the private sector, she has said her party will take to the streets if the Government failed to act in this matter.

Accusing the BJP-led NDA Government of being opposed to reservation for SC/ST. she told presspersons here this afternoon that privatisation of public sector undertakings was meant to "choke these sections economically". "This is nothing but an attempt to deprive us from getting jobs." Ms. Mayawati, who created a stir in the Lok Sabha on the day of the BALCO debate by charging into the well of the House to press for reservation for SC/STs in the private sector, today reiterated her position.

She criticised the other Opposition parties, mainly the Congress, for not supporting her on the reservation issue and said that their silence indicated that they were opposed to reservation for Dalits. She also called on the Government to inject a greater degree of transparency in the privatisation of PSUs or else the move would boomerang on it.

## **BSP to go it alone in UP: Mayawati**

New Delhi, March 3. (PTI): BSP leader Mayawati today asserted that her party would not tie up with any political party in Uttar Pradesh and go it alone in the next Assembly election in the State.

"There have been rumours off an on that BSP would tie up with this party or that party in the next Assembly elections. It would not tie up with anyone in Uttar Pradesh and go it alone," BSP Vice-President Mayawati told reporters.

The former State Chief Minister also dismissed suggestions that BSP would tie up with someone in case it failed to get absolute majority in the State expressing confidence that her party would form the next Government on its own.

Referring to the results of the three byelections in the State Assembly where her party had snatched one seat from BJP, she said BSP had done extremely well which would be a trend-setter for the Assembly elections too.

## **CM for quota for SCs in pvt. sector**

BANGALORE, MARCH 18. The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M.Krishna, has favoured reservation of jobs in the private sector for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the other backward classes (OBCs).

The Chief Minister, however, said he was for persuading the private sector to adopt such a policy and not through other means. Mr. Krishna was talking to presspersons at the media centre of the Congress plenary session.

## **Some More Dalit Website.**

Please visit [www.dalitindia.com](http://www.dalitindia.com), a new website launched by Social Study Circle, New Delhi.

Look out for a BAMCEF website to be launched soon, we will announce the launch in this magazine.

## **SC/ST Commission seeks more powers**

New Delhi, March 3: The National Commission for SCs and STs today sought more powers and demanded effective steps to ensure that the benefits of the special budgetary allocations and reservations do percolate down to the needy and deserving.

Backing claims with facts and figures contained in the fifth report for the Commission for 1998-99 submitted to the President, the panel chairman, Mr. Dalip Singh Bhuria, along with other members told reporters here that atrocities on the SCs and STs continued and a majority of the cases ended in acquittals.

They sought some powers to prosecute errant officials for the effective implementation of statutory provisions for protection of the weaker sections. "So far, our powers are confined only to summon people, but without prosecution powers there is no teeth and thus effective implementation remains a distant dream", Mr. Bhuria said. (He also) suggested that necessary amendments should be made under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution to prevent further litigation once the commission gave its directives

## **Destruction of Buddha statues condemned**

BANGALORE, March 5 Dignitaries from different fields who had assembled under the aegis of 'Bahumukhi' today strongly condemned the destruction of Buddhist monuments and artifacts by Taliban authorities in Afghanistan and urged the United Nations Organisations (UNO) to initiate disciplinary action against the Taliban government.

Memorandum: Maha Bodhi Society, Bangalore has submitted a memorandum to the President of India through the Governor of Karnataka condemning the destruction. In the memorandum, the members have appealed to the Afghan authorities to forbid the destruction of valuable artifacts of Buddhist heritage. Kannada Writers L N Mukavinda Raj and Dr Banjagere Jayaprakash and Ms Sujatha Kumuta of Bahumukhi who were present in the press conference also condemned the Taliban government for the barbaric act.



## The Budget 2001: Beginning

- By Dr. Anand Teltumbde

The budget 2001 earned for the Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha unprecedented encomiums from the businessmen, traders, brokers, industrialists and generally high-income people. As per their ecstatic reaction reeled off on the television the budget was a dream budget, it had exceeded even their expectations, it was the best budget in the decade etc. The economists of the establishment also used similar flowering language in praise of Sinha. Some had fallen to a ridiculous depth in giving the budget 11 out of 10. The software exporters' lobby even declared that the budget has exceeded their demands. In short the budget that marked the inauguration of the second phase of India's economic Reforms has showered all kinds of benefits on the elite classes.

In fact this euphoria of the ruling classes is enough to infer what havoc it would cause to the oppressed people. In the din of delight of these classes however, not a single voice taking cudgel for the people was heard in the mass media. The traditional sprinkling of decorative critique that made India a greatest operative democracy in the world also was conspicuous by its absence. It has created an impression as though this budget was sans class- universally good to all the people. It is imperative therefore for the ones who consider on the side of people to expose the real anti-people character of the budget.

The single biggest characteristic of this budget is the complete subservience of the economic policy establishment to the neo-liberal ideology propagated by the institutions like IMF, WB and WTO. This ideology has been underscoring the economic policy formulation during the last 10 years after its formal adoption by the Narsimharao-Manmohan Singh duo in July 1991, but never before it was reflected in such a pristine form as in this budget. As the evil effects of the economic reforms based on this ideology started showing up in people's misery, the ruling classes had to indulge in political repairs and show some amount of concern for the people. This was clearly reflected in the budgets as the ruling class compromises with their avowed ideology. Although, in the recent past years, the government with the declaredly rightist ideology is increasingly reflecting its fascist tendencies in pushing its reactionary agenda, it is the first time that it is showing up in its naked form through the annual budget.

### Will the Budget Spur Growth

The prominent reason resonated in the elite ecstasy for budget was that it would spur economic growth while controlling the fiscal deficit. We do know that the economic growth is not the sole guarantee for the people's prosperity. Until there is an operational mechanism to distribute the surplus income through growth among the people, economic growth accentuates the existing inequality. As we see during the last decade, both economic growth as well as inequality had risen, the latter perhaps more speedily than the former. Still, in the prevailing milieu, the poor still have to depend on the growth in economy for it is only then that they can hope for getting jobs, income and improve their lot. It is therefore always necessary to examine the claim of growth orientation in the budget.

Economic growth results basically in two ways: 1. Short-term growth through government's revenue expenditure and 2. Long term growth through government's capital expenditure. Some people cite third way of exports, forgetting that the exportability also demands the above expenditure in the economy. In a way the economic growth can be construed as a manifestation of the degree of fiscal momentum in the budget. Seen thus, one does not find anything in the budget that will result into economic growth. The ratio of the revenue expenditure minus interest payment to the GDP has been falling in the reform period till 1996-97 when the trend reflected some upturn till last year. But in this budget, this trend is reversed and this ratio is slated to go below even its level in 1989-90.

The ratio of the capital expenditure to GDP is considered as a reliable indicator of economic growth. This ratio which was at the level of 5.9 % before the reforms were started (in 1989-90), had come down to 3.1 % in 1996-97. It showed upward tendency thereafter but during the last two years it again slid back to an alarmingly low level of 2.5 %. It is expected to be around this level in this budget too.

Thus, on the basis of fiscal considerations, the budget fails to promise any incremental economic growth. This inference is validated by the savings rate in the economy. The incremental capital out put ratio for our economy has been around 4. That means, even to maintain our growth rate at 6 %, the rate of savings in the economy should be  $6 \times 4 = 24$  %. But, our savings rate also has been on decline in the reforms period and

today it is at mere 22 %. There is enough ammunition in the budget, as we would see shortly, in the form of cuts in the interest rate on small savings etc., to shoot it down still further. Strategically, there are two ways to increase the growth rate, One, increase savings and two, increase the incremental capital output ratio with technological inputs. There is nothing in the budget on both these counts. It is pertinent to remember that the dream growth rate of Mr. Sinha had materialized in the East Asian economies when their savings rate was over 40 %. The folly of the budget makers is that they show people the mirage of growth from the drying up oasis of savings.

The protagonists of the economic reforms have been flouting the growth statistics in justification of their policies. Their euphoria is just begun to wane when the growth rate is slowly recoiling back. It has already slid down from 6.6% in 1998-99 to 6.4 % in 1999-2000 and further to 6.0 % last year. It may at best be maintained at that level this year if everything goes smooth. The reforms had certainly enlivened the economy to a magnitudinally higher plane but its direction has not been without a question mark. The growth in the reform period mainly accrued through the impetus to service sector. The commodities sector, on the other hand, has been on decline. The growth of the industrial sector has fallen from 8.2 % in 1998-99 to 6.5 % in 1999-2000 and is expected to further fall this year. The growth of the commodity sector is an index of the demand in the economy. Its sluggishness indicates the recession in demand. The real growth in India can only accrue through boosting this demand. The export led growth that was relied upon in the reforms has been too inconsistent to depend. The budget needed to mind two basic dictums at this juncture: 1. There is need to strengthen internal demand for economic growth and 2. There is a need to increase the government expenditure for strengthening the internal demand. There is no evidence of either in the budget.

### **The lost opportunity**

The budget makers had an unprecedented opportunity to boost internal demand but they could not see it through their glasses of neo-liberal ideology. This opportunity manifested in the form of two things: 1. Huge stocks of food grain in the government godowns and 2. Similar huge reserves of foreign exchange with the Reserve Bank of India. Today despite the declining output of food grains their stock in the government godowns are exceeding 45 million tones. The FE reserves in the RBI hovered over \$ 41 billion at the time of budget making. This combination spelt a golden opportunity for the government to boost expenditure without a danger of inflationary trend that normally sets in due to increased demand for food and other commodities as a result of increased incomes in the hands of people. The food stocks could take care of the increased demand for food and the FE reserves could be used for importing other commodities to curb their price rise. Instead of spending huge money in maintaining these stocks of food grains and booking it to inflate subsidy to the poor, the government could use it for food-for-work programme. As the experience shows, it is a proven method to directly impact rural poverty. It would have also resulted into much needed rural infrastructure that has been the biggest constraint on the economic activity of our majority population. This could have pulled up the poor below poverty line and pushed them into the market for boosting the internal demand. The budget entirely foregoes this opportunity.

The political economics driving this seeming irrational behaviour of the budget makers becomes clear when we see what government seeks to do with the stocks of food. Instead of devising the ways to distribute these food stocks among hungry people as indicated above, the government proposes privatization of procurement of food grains and entire logistics operations till its distribution. The government's liability is spelt out in terms of maintaining the safety stocks of estimated 10 million tonnes. Taking into consideration, the current stocks of 45 million tonnes with the government, it implies that there will not be any government procurement of food grains at least for 3-4 years from now. The privatization in this critical sector will play havoc not only with the poor consumers but also with the 65 % of our population connected with farming which shall be devoid of any support in the event of vagaries of nature. The field is getting opened for the big international companies to enter the Indian agro markets.

### **A Text Book Example of The Neo-Liberal Economics**

The manifestation of the neo-liberal economics can be observed in the conditionalities and overall policy framework of the IMF and World Bank. The hegemonic shadow of this economic ideology has engulfed entire world. The salient components of this ideology is promoting entrepreneurship, reliance on free market and reduction of government interference with the free market processes. They imply reduction in the rates of direct taxes, reduction in the rates of custom duties on imports, removal of other controls on imports, reliance on the free financial markets towards financial liberalization, and control of fiscal deficit of the government. We will find that the budget 2001 is the textbook example of this policy package.

Mr. Yashvant Sinha explained his compulsion in his theatrical style. The income of the center is Rs. 281,000 crores. From this after deducting the share of the states in central tax and grants of Rs. 72,900 crores, what remains with the center is Rs. 209,000 crores. Interest payment (Rs. 101,000 crores), defence expenditure (Rs. 59,000 crores), various subsidies (Rs. 23,000 crores), pension (Rs. 16,000) totals up to Rs. 199,000 crores, leaving behind Rs. 123,000 crores for the government expenditure. The government's unproductive revenue expenditure is Rs. 77,000 crores. Considering nominal capital expenditure the government has to take loan of Rs. 110,000 crores just to make the two ends meet. The mounting interest on the existing loans and the additional interest burden on the fresh loans will certainly push the country into a debt trap.

### **Wrong Assumptions**

This seemingly transparent presentation is based on certain wrong assumptions. The first assumption is about the limitation of the government income. The ratio of the net tax revenue of the center to the GDP has been declining from the pre-reform level of 7.9 % in 1989-90 and has come down to 6.6 % in 1999-2000. In comparison with other developed as well developing countries, this ratio for India being already low, the budget proposal to reduce the rates of direct taxes and custom duties is incomprehensible. In this budget for instance, two provisions are responsible to limit the government income: 1. In the name of promotion to entrepreneurship, the grant of various fiscal concessions to corporates and high income group people and 2. Reduction in the rates of customs duty in the name of trade liberalization. Only these two things shall amount to a loss of Rs. 28,000 crores in government income.

The second assumption is about taking the growing interest burden as inevitable. After the reforms were launched, in terms of financial liberalization the government had to mobilize debt equivalent to its deficit in the open market at much higher interest rate instead of monetizing it by issuing treasury bonds to RBI at much lower rate. The rationale provided by the IMF was that the RBI's autonomy to operate monetary policy to promote economic growth and control inflation was being eroded if it had to monetise the government deficit. As the experience shows, this autonomy in practice has never materialized. RBI is burdened with the more arduous task of controlling the exchange rate of rupee that substantially eats up its ability to devise this kind of monetary policy. The flow of the portfolio investment tends to raise the exchange value of rupee which if allowed to happen would adversely affect it. Therefore RBI needs to purchase Dollars in the market and maintain huge stock of foreign exchange to govern the rupee value in a small band. Also, in order to attract the foreign funds the country had to maintain high interest regime as ordained by the reform package. If we had independently followed our own economics, the savings on the interest payments could be in tune of Rs. 16,000 crores.

Just these two assumptions would reduce the government deficit by 40-50 % or in other words this much money could have been available for the government for capital expenditure. But, instead of taking a dispassionate relook at the cost benefit of the reforms, the government was keen to launch its second phase!

### **Bounty to the Rich**

1. The imprint of neo-liberal ideology cannot be missed in anywhere in the budget. The following provisions for instance clearly favour the rich:
2. Withdrawal of the surcharge on the income tax: The 10 % surcharge levied on the corporate tax and 15 % surcharge on others has been withdrawn. It will benefit right from the high-income bracket salaried people to the industrialist and foreign investors.
3. The dividend tax has been reduced from 20 % to 10 %, again benefiting the capitalist class by crores of rupees.
4. Full exemption of the tax on capital gains if it is invested in the primary issues. This seeks to impel hard earned savings of common man to share market. It is well known that the speculative world of the share market is governed by big money bags in the ring who eventually siphon of such moneys of small fish through their net.
5. Many other investments have been given tax exemptions or tax concessions in the budget the benefit of which again would accrue to the rich.
6. The reduction of custom duty even below the levels committed to WTO will promote the influx of the foreign goods and endanger the Indian industry. Contrary to commonplace understanding the brunt of this also is borne by the working class. The capitalist can have various options to compensate his loss but the worker gets thrown on the road due to the job loss.
7. Rationalization of the excise duties to partially compensate loss of Rs. 2,200 crores has raised excise duties on the manufactured goods for people's consumptions and reduced it for the luxury items. It is clearly regressive to have a common rate of excise duty on the luxury items like cars and air

conditioners and the necessities such as oil, soap, pens and pencils. The rich are expected to benefit by Rs. 4,400 crores through this measure.

This is the way, the government freely distributes the bounty among the rich and then resorts to curb its expenditure in the name of controlling the fiscal deficit at 4.7 %.

### **Blows to the Poor**

1. The reduction of the capital expenditure as explained above is going to impact the poor disproportionately.
2. Reduction of the interest rates on the provident fund and small savings schemes by whooping 1.5 % shall mean direct attack on common people. This is prompted by the need to control the swelling burden of the interest payments by the government in order to control its fiscal deficit (remember the theatrics of the Finance Minister about the debt trap!). For this the government touches the provident fund, which by definition is meant to provide for the poor for their future needs.
3. The interest rate reduction announced in the budget has impelled the RBI to reduce the bank rates and consequently the interest on bank deposits have also come down. Considering the prevailing rate of inflation of 8.57 % and the net interest rates on the bank deposit, it is increasingly leading to a funny prospect of eroding principal as the time passes by. Since, common people depend on bank deposits for their savings, the impact on them shall be severe.
4. Divestment of the government's equity in PSUs is estimates at Rs. 12,000 crores in the budget. It is obvious that the privatization of PSUs leads to downsizing and spells death knell to many. Dalits shall be the worst sufferers, as besides losing the opportunity of job gains through reservations, they are rendered vulnerable for any kind of attack in absence of any protective cover. The revised estimates for the current year is scaled down to Rs. 2,500 crores. Out of which govt. could mop up just Rs. 788 crores, Rs. 552 crores being from the controversial BALCO deal. The balance divestment of Rs. 1,312 crores must have been planned on the lines of BALCO deal to be effected within a month. However, in view of the BALCO controversy refusing to die this money may not materialize. The government may resort to divest its equity in the stand-alone refinery companies to the oil PSUs and compensate for this loss.
5. The budget anticipates the tax collection to grow by 14 %. With the reduction of rates across the board, it is unlikely to materialize. The impact of this will further reduce the capital expenditure and accentuate the difficulties of people.
6. The government has declared its intention to reduce its employment by 10 % in the next five years. It will impact dalits by way of reservation. But that is not all. The reduction of the government employment will severely affect the state of public services such as sanitation, health and school education in non-metro India used by the poor. In fact, there is huge requirement for these services in the country but the government is just not concerned with it. The sphere of employment accounted by the government in India is much smaller in comparison with the developed and developing countries that offer public services to their citizens.
7. Labour law reforms proposed in the budget inter alia shall allow the management of companies employing less than 1000 workers to close down the company or effect reduction in its employment by any other means without any prior permission. It also seeks to liberalize the provisions relating to casual employment including its regularization. All this is going to impact the poor people severely.
8. The budget envisages cancellation of reservation for certain products such as toys, leather goods etc. in the small-scale industries. Already the reforms have led to the closure or sickness of lakhs of small-scale industries in the country. This is going to be a final whip on the back of a dying camel. Since this sector is the major employer of dalits and other downtrodden people, the impact of this move also is clear to be seen.
9. The government proposes to start a micro-credit movement in the rural area with the initial provision of Rs. 40 crores. The rural people will get easy loans for their consumption through this scheme. This innocuous move is really meant to convert the rural areas into a market for plunder of the MNCs as many studies on similar schemes in other countries have revealed. They want to seed consumption habit of rural masses in a particular way. Already the satellite television has polluted the living of rural masses and distorted their consumption pattern. It is not difficult to see that in the remote villages Pepsi or Coke being easily available but not even the life saving drugs. As many studies have revealed, the rural masses easily fall prey to the urban allurements and reduce the expenditure on essentials as education, health etc. of their children.
10. Privatisation of the procurement and its logistics operation for the Public Distribution System envisaged in the budget is going to result in raising the prices of food grains. It provides for distribution



of food grains through the PDS with increased subsidy for the people below poverty line but for the rest of the population it will all be the market. It is going to impact people severely in short term and in long term hand over our food production sector to the transnational conglomerates.

Thus each provision in the budget could be seen directionally as anti-people and in corollary pro-rich. It is amusing to analyse impact of the budget on dalits as an entity beyond the general poor and exploited masses. Because, this socially disadvantaged section of the population that admeasure approx. its 25 %, finds a token mention in a single para. The resource allocation of Rs. 280000 crores has a sprinkling of some few crores in their name. This budget talks of increasing the budgetary provision for the Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme from Rs.72 crores to Rs.130 crore for the scheduled castes and of stepping up the plan allocation by Rs.126 crores for tribal welfare.

The budget, which is the crucial instrument in the hands of the rulers also does not seem to significantly distinguish dalits from the stock of generally poor and exploited people. This holds many lessons for the dalits, especially the educated ones who curiously tend to behave ostrich like in refusing to see the reality. One of the lessons is that the dalit destiny is intertwined with the destiny of the exploited masses in the world and the specificity of their caste cannot obliterate this reality.

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## **Budget And Neo-Liberalism.**

- By Achin Vanaik

(Achin Vanaik is an anti nuclear social activist, author, and commentator. Born to Sikh parents in China, while his father was posted in Indian Embassy; he graduated in Maths from Bristol University and joined the Trotskyite stream of youth headed by Tariq Ali. He returned to India in the 80s and joined TOI as Asst Editor. He left TOI to become a Nehru Fellow. Now he spends full time into research. He is married to Pamela Philipose, Senior Editor Indian Express, New Delhi.)

The hosannas for this year's budget are a measure of the complete victory of Neo liberalism ideology over others amongst Indian elite. The budget simply consolidates and extends the neo-liberal project of the 1990s despite the fact that by all reasonable standards this project has been a comprehensive failure. Before assessing the scale of this failure let us look at the main, ideologically driven thrusts of this budget.

There are major tax giveaways to the corporate sector. But neo-liberalism demands as much - give more money to those in the private sector who already have the most because they are the true "heroes" of your economy, the ones whom you must rely upon to "lead" the economy by investing and producing more.

Unfortunately, the ratio of tax revenues to GDP, which was 10.1 per cent in 1990-91 has come down to 8.8 per cent in 1999-2000 falsifying all prognostications about how lower tax rates would actually raise this ratio. But lowering direct taxes on the well off and making the tax structure even more regressive in its impact is still the right thing to do because "good" economics of the neo-liberal orthodoxy tells us so.

There is a real problem of the fiscal deficit, we are told. Actually the problem is not the fiscal deficit but the revenue deficit. But ideology demands that the former be made into the real "sinner" because you can reduce the fiscal deficit without reducing the latter. Simply raise capital receipts (disinvest in PSUs) and reduce public investment and social sector spending, i.e. progressively diminish the role of the state in the economy regardless of its human and other consequences because neo-liberal orthodoxy insists that public capital expenditure essentially "crowds out" private investment when all evidence in India has pointed to the opposite conclusion. Since the revenue deficit has not progressively declined, all claims by neo-liberal economists that the reforms of the 1990s would result in a progressively declining fiscal deficit have been belied.

Instead, the fiscal deficit has simply hovered between a low of 4 per cent and a high of 7 per cent since 1992-93 with the revenue deficit hovering between 2.4 per cent and 3.7 per cent. But if you are going to keep on lowering direct taxes (and there is a limit to how much you can increase indirect taxes which already constitute such a huge proportion of total tax revenues) and constantly increase defence expenditure then it is hardly surprising that with interest payments being what they are, the revenue deficit stubbornly refuses to fall as

much as it should. But then defence expenditure is a "hard" item, not like "soft" and "unproductive" social sector spending.

Over the coming financial year, the budget proposes to privatise 27 PSUs with the BALCO privatisation providing something of a model. All evidence from South Korea to Europe shows that public sector firms can be as efficient as private ones and also meet their distinctive burden of fulfilling certain "social requirements" provided they have sufficient autonomy from Government interference, i.e. that ownership patterns in themselves have little effect on efficiency. However, neo-liberalism demands total privatisation of even profit-making PSUs. Public sector privatisation is an ideological imperative disguised as an economic necessity. According to a study by the Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE) in conjunction with the Centre for Commercial and Industrial Research, the top 50 PSUs in 1997-98 earned a net return of 13 per cent as against 12 per cent for the top 50 private sector companies, and the ratio of net profit after tax of net worth for basic PSUs (excluding nationalised sick industries) at 5.4 is substantially higher than the 4.7 ratio of the domestic private sector.

The budget also traverses new ground in seeking to amend the Industrial Disputes Act and the existing laws on contract labour. The purpose is to make it easier for employers to 'hire and fire' workers because neo-liberal orthodoxy demands greater 'labour flexibility'. This simply means that at the bottom organised workers, i.e. trade unions, and not anyone else are really to blame for unemployment or poorly paid employment in industry because their 'unreasonable' wage demands or equally 'unreasonable' demands for job security undermine the economy and prevent it from flourishing. So please give more powers to the 'suffering' (even if much richer) employers and capital-owners. So now enterprises with less than 1,000 employees no longer require Government approval before getting rid of workers provided they meet enhanced severance pay requirements.

Actually it is the firms which have between 100 and 300 workers that most want the freedom to fire. The budget proposal is really the first move in a bargaining process that is now in motion. Severance pay requirements will be reduced significantly to please employers and the limit for freedom to fire will be lowered from 1,000 but will definitely remain over 300 in an apparent gesture at pleasing the unions. The overall result, of course, will greatly favour capital and cause considerable suffering to workers in an economy where industrial employment in the organised sector is declining.

But then, these measures are great because they will maintain the supposedly higher growth trajectory of the 1990s. This neo-liberal obsession with high growth rates is, of course, ideologically motivated. It serves as justification for ever increasing inequalities of wealth and income under the false assumption that this is necessary for benefiting all. The average annual growth rate for the 1990s was 5.7 per cent which is not a statistically significant increase over the 5.6 per cent annual average growth rate of the 1980s.

As for the other indicators of economic progress such as poverty, employment and inequalities the evidence is there for all who are willing to see. The less said about the statistical-methodological mess up of the 55th National Sample Survey Round which gives the absurd (non-comparable) figure of a 26 per cent poverty rate, the better. The most honest and serious of economic journalists and commentators have already explained why this figure cannot be taken seriously, especially since even neo-liberal economists claim that the key determinants of poverty decline are agricultural growth rates (which have declined in the second half of the 1990s relative to the past) and food prices, which in real terms have not behaved so as to support those claiming a significant poverty decline. As for employment, the 1990s even more than the 1980s were the decade of jobless growth.

As for inequalities, whether these are measured across the rural-urban divide, classes or States, these have all grown. Rural per capita income as a ratio of urban per capita income which improved between 1970-71 and 1980-81 went down from 42 per cent in 1980-81 to 38 per cent in 1993-94 and has continued downwards.

Between 1985-86 and 1996-97 the share of wages in value-added (current prices) fell from 35 per cent to 20 per cent while the profit share (before tax but after depreciation and interest) went up by 15 percentage points.

But, the hosannas for the budget and for India's new ideological direction will continue.



## An interview with Mr. Chandra Bhan Prasad

-by Siriyavan Anand

"Shudras in power treat Dalits as subjects as they cannot treat Brahmans as subjects. They point to the social monster called Brahmans, rob Dalits' support, then oppress Dalits."

Chandra Bhan Prasad is perhaps India's only dalit who gets to write a weekly column in a mainstream English newspaper, Pioneer. He also runs the Dalit Siksha Andolan and has emerged as one of the key spokespersons of the dalit movement in India. Chandra Bhan lives with his wife, Meera, in Delhi. Here, in this exhaustive interview, the intellectual shares his views with Siriyavan Anand, journalist-activist, on a wide range of issues that concern the dalit movement in India today. Anand is currently anthropologically examining brahmans and brahmanism having been born one. He is associated with Dalit Media Network, Chennai. The interview was conducted in the last week of February 2001; 30-plus questions were emailed and Chandra Bhan Prasad said he took four days to reply. (Please mail feedback to [ands@ambedkar.org](mailto:ands@ambedkar.org) and [meera5@vsnl.com](mailto:meera5@vsnl.com))

**SIRIYAVAN ANAND:** *How does it feel to be (perhaps) the sole English language dalit journalist in the country?*

**CHANDRA BHAN PRASAD:** No. I am not a journalist in the classic sense of the term. I am at best a researcher, and an activist. But I write in the mainstream media. The column [Dalit Diary] in the English Daily, 'Pioneer', a paper now 137 years old which originated from Lucknow, is translated and used by the Telugu daily, 'Vaartha', and is the first Dalit column... so people tend to think that I am a journalist.

Yes, since I am the first and the only Dalit columnist in the English language press, I feel self-conscious and burdened with responsibilities — from a population of over 20.5 crore Dalits, which is more than the combined population of France, the UK and Germany, only one regular commentator in the Indian mainstream media. There is more to be researched, more to be commented upon, but a single-man army?

*How did you come to be what you are now? Tell us about your childhood formation, your education, your politicisation... some definitive private and public moments that shaped your consciousness.*

I was born in a sleepy village of district Azamgarh, east Uttar Pradesh, in September 1958. Both my parents were illiterate, but had sufficient agricultural land. From the history we know, the family was, by Dalit standards, economically well-to-do. My grandfather was a Police-Station Chaukidar who had six other brothers... most of them, you may describe as Social Rebels or Social Bandits. My father was a wrestler, an acrobat, and an expert at the game of Lathi. He had three brothers. Two of them, after beating up landlords, had fled to Rangoon in early 1930s. They got some government job there, and had the first experience with currency. My father too had joined them, but that was the beginning of the World War II. Barring the eldest uncle at home, my father and two of his senior brothers joined Indian National Army. But they had to flee Burma after the Hiroshima bombing.

With the money they had earned in Rangoon, they built a huge house in 1935, and later bought land. Ours was the first brick-house [in the village], and when it was being built the local Zamindar had come requesting us to keep the height of the walls/roof below that of his own house. Since my father and uncles were musclemen, and going by family tradition — where each social snub was responded to violently — they raised the foundation even higher. They all ensured education for their children, and the son of my eldest uncle became a postal clerk as early as in 1952. In my childhood, when I was probably in lower primary, say Class-II, I met with a serious accident, but survived. When I was in Class VI, my elder brother, who was the first child of my parents [I was the last, after three sisters], became a Sub-Inspector. He is now a Deputy SP posted in Lucknow, due to retire next month. Thus, I was extremely fortunate in the sense that my entire childhood, and youth, did not see poverty. Because of a sound economic background, I had the opportunity to study in JNU, where I did my MA in International Politics, MPhil on 'China's Technology Acquisition in the Post-Mao Era', and had enrolled for a Ph.D. project to study the 'Development of Science in Communist China'.

I have a CPI[ML] past in politics. I did my graduation in a college situated one km from our village... say, in my village college. In 1977, when I was in first year BA, Students Union elections were to take place. The upper castes and OBCs were against any Dalit standing for any of the posts. They had even thrown a challenge. I was very upset upon hearing this, and narrated the matter back home. My Dalit friends asked me to take up the challenge.

One of my cousins, who had secretly joined the CPI[ML], encouraged me to contest. And I decided to contest. The news spread like a wild fire. The CPI[ML] brother gathered his own armed squad, supported by the Dalits of the area, and I filed the nomination. I won, and my opponents lost deposits. I received great support from the girl students, most of them belonging to the upper castes, for two reasons. First, my niece was a BA final year student, so she could muster great support. Second, most my opponents were lumpen elements, who were disliked by the girl students. So they decided to back me. Some upper caste friends, afraid of an OBC onslaught, too supported me. Meanwhile, another cousin brother of mine, who was an Engineering student, too had joined CPI[ML]. There were lots of confrontations, and the CPI[ML] movement was gaining ground. I too joined the party. Thus, before coming to JNU, I was deeply involved with the CPI[ML] movement.

In JNU too, I continued with radical politics, but I was always fascinated by Dr Ambedkar. In JNU, I had the opportunity to read Ambedkar, and thus began arguing with my Comrades. There was already an SC/ST Students Welfare Association, in which I became active, and later became its Vice-President. My CPI[ML] comrades were supportive of the issues we were taking up, but never agreed with Dr Ambedkar's philosophy.

In the May 1983 JNU movement, I was at the forefront. In the movement, we were arrested. Some 600 JNU students, including some 200 women students, were put in Delhi's Tihar Jail. JNU was closed sine die, and no admissions took place for the 1983-84 academic session. An inquiry commission, headed by a retired High Court Judge, was instituted to probe the incidents of the May 1983 movement. Along with about 40 students, I too was rusticated for two years, in two cases. Like about a dozen students, I too didn't submit an apology. After rustication, we were given an option: either apologize and give an undertaking that we would not involve ourselves in any movement on the campus, or face action and vacate the university premises. Most [students] had apologized.

For three years, 1983-1987, I worked as a full-timer for CPI[ML] in UP. During that period, I thought that I was wasting my energy — I argued with my leaders why they were all the time against the Indian State, which is the only place where Dalits get some relief, and, in what way is Dr. Ambedkar less radical than Karl Marx? It was indeed amazing to hear them dismissing the Varna/Caste nature of society as a NON-FACTOR in Indian society. They didn't agree with me, and I got disillusioned, left the movement, came back to JNU, completed my MPhil, and enrolled for PhD.

But, during my three full-time CPI[ML] years, I had firsthand experience of revisiting the countryside. The pathetic condition of the average Dalit always haunted my mind. While I was back in JNU, I had no peace inside me. And then came Mandal. I was very skeptical about strengthening OBCs, upper segment in particular. I had seen them occupying the aggressive space being vacated by Dwijas from rural India. But, the anti-Mandal agitation had begun questioning Dalits' reservation as well. Then we jumped into, rather initiated, the pro-Mandal agitation in JNU, and Delhi. Dalits all over India supported the pro-Mandal agitation; in most cases, the Dalits were at the forefront.

I was restless within, and thus launched Dalit Shiksha Andolan in 1991. It spread in UP. Almost in each district. But then I thought by merely restricting the movement to scholarship and literacy-related issues, issues are not going to be resolved. The bigger question was about the model of development pursued so far, about changes taking place since 1950, and about history itself. And about Ideology. I sat down in Delhi, and began exploring all these...

*Could you identify the central issues facing dalits today? Is it possible to see the dalit movement in a national/pan-Indian sort of way at all, say like the hindutva movement?*

Central question? We all know: land, quality education for all Dalits, democratisation of KNOWLEDGE, and public institutions including media, democratization of the capital, redefining democracy, etc. Unless English-

speaking Dalits take up the Dalit movement as their profession, a pan-Indian Dalit movement will remain a dream.

*Is it a strength or weakness of the dalit movement that there does not seem to be a pan-indian dalit consciousness, a national dalit political leadership? Do you think this is necessary or will it emerge/happen in the future? Other than Ambedkar the dalits do not seem to agree upon anyone as a leader/icon...*

There is a pan-India Dalit consciousness — Dalits everywhere, illiterate or educated, hate the Chatur-Varna order; they want a change, want a democratic and egalitarian social order. But, it has to take an organized form, and that has not happened. That is a big weakness. Since there is no pan-India Dalit movement, there is no all India Dalit leadership. Kanshi Ram is there [BSP, UP], Dr Krishnaswamy [Puthiya Tamilagam, Tamilnadu] is there, but they need to transcend their boundaries.

*How do you view the BAMCEF-BSP growth and subsequent developments in UP, Punjab and other neighbouring areas? Why does the Kanshi Ram-Mayawati duo seem to have not lived up to its promise? What next in UP, and what bearing/ lessons would that have for young dalit political parties that have come up in other states?*

The creation of BAMCEF was a great, wonderful thing to happen. The BSP sprung from BAMCEF. Though BAMCEF elaborated the theory of BAHUJANWAD [the idea of the oppressed majority of 85% coming together], when BSP started practising politics, it attracted Dalits alone. Then and there BSP should have dropped Bahujanwad, and must have spoken of a Dalit movement. After Mayawati was attacked by the Shudras, the BSP should have realised that Shudras are the Dalits' prime opponents in rural India. No new Dalit party can now grow unless it talks of the Dalit movement and raises central questions haunting the community.

*Ambedkar did say that capturing political power was important; but there does not seem to be any cultural-social agenda that dalit leaders/ parties seem to have evolved...*

Political power is the master key which can open all the locks. That is what Ambedkar said, and this remains true even today. But without capturing political power, he did wonders. This, the Dalit leadership must realise — they must bring immediate benefits to the community, and create an articulate middle class and elite within the community which can handle political power. There is already a socio-cultural agenda, but that is yet to be theorized.

*When the blacks in the US started asserting themselves (Black Power) and fought discrimination, it was accompanied by a renaissance in the cultural realm — art, literature, music... What similarities and differences do you see between the various black consciousness movements and the dalit movement here?*

There are lots of similarities between Dalits' and Blacks' positioning in their respective societies. But there is marked difference between the conscience of the oppressors — here in India, the most radical NON-DALIT will be less progressive than the most conservative White in America. As you can see in my recent series on Affirmative Actions in America in the 'Pioneer' on Sundays, there in America, White society is talking of Democratizing Capital, and Affirmative Actions in ART, LITERATURE, TV, FILM etc. Is any Varna-Indian [caste hindu] talking of such things?

*Early on, the US blacks put in place an institution like the NAACP (National Association for Advancement for Coloured People), had black churches, opened black schools and colleges and saw the need to rally around as a community... they even went on to have black-centred media, publishing, created distinct musical genres... even in terms of religion, there was/is the Nation of Islam. Do you think we need such efforts here? Are similar things possible, desirable in the dalit context? What about a National Association for Advancement of Dalit People to start with?*

See, the NAACP had Whites too. If it happens in India, very good. It should happen. Unless there is Dalit bourgeoisie in India, there cannot be any effective alternative Dalit media, etc. You know, there are Black billionaires, several hundred Black millionaires in US, several hundred Black companies are publicly trading in

America. In India, if things happen at the present rate, it may take another century for a Dalit to emerge as a billionaire!

*Do you think we can compare race and caste-based disabilities? Is not what happens to dalits, especially in villages, a form of apartheid?*

Yes, you are right.

*Of late, efforts to get world bodies such as the United Nations to recognise caste as a source of discrimination (like race, gender) have had some success... How important are such moves for dalits in the country? Would such pressure finally matter? Can we get foreign nations to slap sanctions on India over the issue of casteism, especially as it relates to dalits?*

This is a wonderful effort. Some NGOs are doing fantastic work in this direction. But, I think, unless Dalits themselves become organized enough to boycott the products of some companies, it will a very difficult task to get foreign nations slapping sanction on India. But this does not mean that we must not work in this direction.

*A major drawback of the dalit movement has been the lack of visibility of dalit women's voices. In mainstream politics we have of course Mayawati, but in terms of intellectuals, academics, opinion-makers we hardly hear them...*

This of course is related to the larger problem of the invisibilising of dalitist ideas by savarnas; yet, don't you think the dalit movement should be simultaneously alive to the problem of dalit patriarchy? Should we not make conscious efforts to evolve a dalit-feminist praxis instead of postponing the issue of dalit women's liberation? It is true that the Dalit movements have not given importance to the gender question. This has created roadblocks in the Dalit movements. But, I believe, it is not a conscious decision on the part of Dalit leadership to suppress the gender question. You see, unless there evolves an articulate middle class within Dalits, the gender question will remain a minor issue.

*What is your opinion on 'hinduism', not just the hindutva variety, but... all types?*

The overemphasis on 'Hinduism' or 'Hindutva' is dangerous. The moment you debate on the plank of 'Hindu' religiosity, the focus of the Dalit movement gets shifted, and in that case, instead of a Dalit raising a Dalit agenda, he is led to raise agenda of secularism, a ploy drafted by erstwhile Dvijas, who have converted to Christianity or Islam. To my mind, every so-called Hindu is 'Hindu' later; by his/her Varna/Caste a Brahman is a first a Brahman, loyalty to his community comes first. The same holds good for Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Kammas, Reddies, Thevars, Chettiyars etc. No classical Hindu text knows the term 'HINDUTVA'. Thus, the issue is the annihilation of the Chatur-Varna Order, its system of privileges and discriminations. The upper-caste converted Minorities are trying to bluff Dalits by raising the bogey of 'Hinduism'.

*Do we need to distinguish between 'good hindus' who dissociate themselves from the BJP-RSS-VHP brand of hinduism? Or are these 'good hindus' (who practise caste discreetly) more dangerous than the hindutva type?*

A so-called Hindu is only bad. 'Hindus' cannot be good. When did the RSS/BJP/VHP etc. come into being? In the 20th century. Isn't it? But, what was society before that? Was it less cruel? Were not Dalits made to hang an earthen pot to their neck if they had to spit? Life then was worse than it was for animals. But, the so-called non-hindutva 'Hindus' glorify that period.

*What do you think about the brahmanism/ hinduism of the communists?*

Christianity didn't have the Varna Order, and nor did Islam. Both the religious system came to India with many good virtues, but the Chatur-Varna Order corrupted them. Similarly, Communism came with wonderful notions of equality, but the Chatur-Varna Order corrupted Communism as well. As recent history shows, the two organised groups — RSS and Communists — are more hostile to Ambedkarism than anybody else. In fact, between RSS and CPI-CPI[M], the latter are more dangerous as they don't believe in debate. You can abuse the RSS and still get away. But, the so-called Left will not leave you.

*Your comments on the Kumbh Mela... Did you go there, or think of going there, out of mere curiosity? Women of course cannot splash in the nude at the Kumbh, but do north indian dalits figure in some way here? And what does one make of a buddhist like the Dalai Lama visiting the mela?*

My parental place is less than 200 miles from Allahabad. I know, most of the Kumbh visitors are Shudras, poor Brahmans, and Sadhus etc. Few Dalits go there, a majority of them out of curiosity. I have never been there. The Dalai Lama is a Brahmanized Buddhist.

*What kind of music do you listen to, what books do you read, what films do you like watching? Leading an urbanised life with modern amenities one is faced with a barrage of cultural-artistic representations which are hardly alive or attuned to subaltern concerns of the aesthetic. We are forced to consume what is around us but these tend to alienate us from our own moorings, however region-specific these moorings be. These male-savarna-created cultural practices even inferiorise dalits, poor muslims, women and other subaltern communities. Yet, we seem to partake in the process as choiceless consumers... How do you, as an insurgent dalit intellectual, come to terms with it?*

I have very little time to spare for music or cinema. I generally watch news on TV. I sometimes like watching Discovery and National Geographic. Frankly speaking, I can't relate to mainstream art, music, cinema etc. as they all relate the lives of the Chatur-Varna Order. I find mainstream art as lifeless, rotten and static as life in the Chatur-Varna Order itself.

*What have you registered yourself as in the Census? A buddhist? What should be the strategy of dalits vis-à-vis the Census? What is your position on caste count in the Census?*

I was in Indore when they came to my house. Had I been there, I would have argued to be registered as a non-believer. But that is my personal choice. Now, the Census is over, so let us not waste time on that. I think we should not waste time on religious issues. What happened in Maharashtra? The entire energy went towards spreading Buddhism, and the Dalit movement suffered. We must focus on the present-day challenges. The question of the betterment of the community. Look which section of Dalit is talking of Buddhism — the educated, employed, and those financially better off through other means. So, whenever the community at large becomes economically better off, with very little effort they will choose Buddhism.

*Do you believe in god? I mean, does the larger question of faith as a socio-political space interest you personally and/or in terms what it means to dalits?*

I am a perfect non-believer; if at all I believe in any thing, these are Ambedkarism, Dalits' intelligence, democracy, science, and the Indian State. Call them my gods and goddesses.

*Could this (question of faith) have been a problem that Periyar, because of his credo of atheism, failed to understand, especially as it concerned dalit spiritual-cultural practices? What do you think is the major faultline in Periyar's philosophy (if we can see it separately from the political legacy that the mainstream political parties in Tamilnadu claim to represent)?*

As facts show, Periyar had launched an Anti-Brahman movement, and a movement against Brahmanism. He could probably not foresee that the Shudra once in power will become Ultra-Brahmanical. That is why he targeted Brahmans alone, and not the Chatur-Varna Order. That one blunder eliminated the Dalit movement from the Tamil soil in the 20th Century. Unconsciously though, Periyar's movement has created a Social Monster in the form of Shudras. Tamil Nadu under the Dravida parties has the worst record in land reforms. While at the all-India level, out of every hundred SCs, 49 are landless agricultural labourers, in Tamil Nadu, it is 64. Since Shudras are in power, the Dalit movement in Tamil land has a tough task ahead.

*You have been arguing that dalit-OBC unity is not possible, given that wherever an OBC movement has flourished (as in Tamilnadu, the Dravidian movement, or in Bihar now) the dalits have not been able to stand their ground. But culturally and in day-to-day habits don't you think there is more in common between the sudra-OBCs and the dalits?*



I have never argued that 'Dalit-Shudra unity is not possible'. I have argued that the Dalit-Shudra unity, even if it takes place somewhere, should be stopped. You know, Shudras play with Dalit sentiments — they will point to the social monster called Brahmans, rob Dalits' support, come to power, and then turn to Dalits to oppress them. Every ruling group looks for subjects. And the Shudras, once in power, treat Dalits as subjects as they cannot treat Brahmans as subjects. Not only in Tamil Nadu, the entire South is a classic example. Land-labour relations in South are more undemocratic in the South than elsewhere in India. For instance, out of every hundred SCs in UP, 43 are cultivators, whereas in Tamil Nadu it is 15, Kerala 3, Karnataka 23, and Andhra Pradesh 13. Had OBCs captured power in UP, say 30 years ago, UP may have met the same fate.

I think there are more Brahmans who eat Beef and Pork than Shudras. I also think Shudras tend to have an increased intensity of religiosity than Brahmans. I think Shudras practice untouchability more vigorously than Brahmans today. Further, Shudras tend to use violent methods against Dalits more often than Brahmans do. To me, a violent form of aggression is the ultimate form of oppression. But I still believe an attempt should be made to unite with artisan Shudras.

*Dalit-OBC unity may not be happening out there in the field... but do you think it is at least theoretically desirable? Can it be a long-term goal/ possibility?*

Dalit-OBC unity is theoretically most undesirable, as the fruits of unity will go to Upper OBCs or Upper Shudras, who tend to practice Brahmanism of the medieval era. The Shudras' aim is to dislodge the Brahmans, and continue with the Chatur-Varna Order, while Dalits want to destroy the Order itself. So, when both the categories have different aims, where is the theoretical basis for unity?

*You have even been suggesting that a brahman-dalit (political) alliance seems to be emerging (the BSP fielding brahman candidates). You even seem to think intellectually they can come together... But do you think a brahman and a dalit can ever come together physically, philosophically and spiritually; in marriage, living together, food habits...? Aren't they the opposite poles of the caste system?*

See, Dalits will always differ with, or rather fight with Brahmans in the area of philosophy, ideology, culture, art, notions of life... in other words, on worldviews. This will go on for several thousand years. But since Dalits and Brahmans are both social minorities, both have a common enemy in Shudras. Thus, for their own different reasons, (Brahmans trying to retain their hold on urban assets and institutions, and Dalits trying to fulfil the basic needs of life) Dalits and Brahmans have no option but to come together politically in the near future, say by the second decade of this century. Suppose, there is an attempt by the State to redistribute land on the principle of LAND TO THE TILLER, who will be affected most: Shudras or Brahmans? And who will lose most — Shudras or Brahmans? Who will benefit most — Shudras or Dalits? To me, unless radical land reforms take place in India, Dalits can never, and should never, think of achieving freedom. And on the land question — the most crucial Dalit question today — the Dalits will be violently resisted by the Shudras.

*Do you subscribe to the term 'bahujan' or the idea of 'oppressed majority' formulated by Phule and which has found contemporary rearticulation in Kancha Ilaiah's writings? Elaborate...*

It is not the majority which is oppressed, it the minority, it is the Dalits. Do you think Shudra communities such as Thevars, Vanniyars, Chettiyars, Gaudas, Lingayats, Vokkaligas, Kammas, Reddies, Jats, Yadavs, Gujjars, Kurmis, Patels, Marathas are oppressed communities? When Phule talked of uniting with Shudras, the Shudras then were only the social police of the Brahmans; they were tenants. Today, they own land, most of the rural assets and institutions. They have a fair share in the media, cinema, and urban assets as well. All the four chief ministers in the South are of Shudra origin, including the CMs of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Punjab, Haryana, Bihar. Thus, ten major States are ruled by Shudra Chief Ministers. What is the condition of Dalits in these States?

Kanch Ilaiah is a Shudra scholar. He targets Dalits sentiments. Tells them that Brahmans are the creators of the Chatur-Varna Order, that they developed the notion of untouchability. And therefore, they must be destroyed. Dalits tend to get emotionally moved. But, he never says that it is not the Brahman, it is the Brahmanical Order which has to be destroyed. He never says that upper Shudras are turning more Brahmanical than Brahmans themselves. He never tells what is the performance of Shudra governments in



the South and elsewhere. He never tells us what the Thevars do to Dalits in Tamil Nadu, or Kammas and Reddies do in Andhra Pradesh.

*Ilaiah, foregrounding his position as an OBC, has talked about the need to dalitise the nation as a challenge to savarna cultural hegemony. Do you think it is possible/ okay to identify something like 'dalit' culture as a distinct category? Or does that amount to essentialising...*

In fact, Kancha is drafting an intellectual trap to Shudraise the nation's culture. Dalits and Shudras differ culturally as much as Dalits and Brahmans do. Shudras and Brahmans are culturally more close to each other than Shudras and Dalits. Dalits are a distinct social category, and so is there culture.

*If you reject Ilaiah's diagnosis of brahmanic hinduism and his positing the need for dalitisation of the savarnas, including the OBCs, what cultural alternative must we pose to the 'brahmanic' model, especially in the context of the pressure on dalits and other subaltern communities who, while coming to enjoy the benefits of urban modernity, are forced to 'brahmanise'. What can be done to prevent the proliferation of what some dalit intellectuals have identified as the 'dalit brahman'? How do we get dalits to be proud of being dalit?*

Dalits have a distinct culture. But we should not glorify it. Neither do we want Brahman/Shudra culture. We want European culture, which is the best. When West's economic model is turning out to be the standard model for most nations, why not their culture? Every Dalit who is happy today, it is because he is westernised. With which culture was Dr. Ambedkar more close to? Was it not western? In fact, if you examine minutely, Dalits are culturally more close to western culture than cultures anywhere.

*Is there a need to distinguish between the 'harijan' and the dalit, in the sense of the latter being a politicised/ intellectually aware, responsible person. But what do we do with 'harijans' like Bangaru Laxman, Ajit Jogi, Paswan, Meira Kumar, or similar figures who occupy the academia, media and opinion-making sections of society? In other words, how should we view dalits who want to efface/ disavow their dalitness? I feel savarna intolerance is to be blamed to a large extent for this situation... Don't you think this problem, of what the brahman sociologist M N Srinivas conveniently termed 'sanskritisation', will remain as long as we do not provide a meaningful alternative? Can such an alternative be built by fusing the positive elements of dalit cultures and those of western modernity (meaning concepts of liberty, equality and fraternity)?*

Let us not condemn Dalit leaders. It will serve no purpose. In that case, we will land up calling [President K R] Narayanan also a 'harijan'. When Dr. Ambedkar had joined Pandit Nehru's Cabinet, he too was criticised by many Dalits.

The alternative is there, in the last sentence of your question. Fusion. Yes, fusion of the positive elements of Dalit culture — which is yet to be theorized — and the modernity of the western culture. M N Srinivas suffered from the same inferiority complex which Arun Shourie suffers from today. Shourie is under great civilisational pressure: why was no Brahman suitable / good enough to write the Constitution of the Indian Republic, which regulates the affairs of the State, and also of society. He, therefore, went on to artificially prove that Dr Ambedkar had only a minor role in drafting the Law Book. Srinivas sensed that the new Brahmans' modern [westernized] culture is more closer to Dalits — man-woman relationships, sex patterns, non-vegetarianism etc. — and therefore instead of admitting that Brahmans are picking things from Dalit culture, he went on to artificially prove that Dalits are aping Brahmans!

*What is your position on the participation of nondalits in dalit struggles? Till now, the savarnas have been interested in dalit issues only in a patronising gandhian way, without attacking the varna system. Should not nondalits underplay themselves in terms of visibility/ outspokenness, and try to be mere facilitators...?*

Dalits have always welcomed non-Dalits in their struggles. But, as you seem to suggest, they should be more as facilitators than claiming leadership roles.

*Don't you think the intellectual responsibility of nondalits who (in whatever way) approach dalit identity issues should be to address those nondalits who are wilfully unalive to the problems posed by caste and their own implicatedness in the caste system?*

You are right. They should educate their own people, they should critique their past, their vision, their culture, and their intellect.

*How should dalit intellectuals, especially historians, look at history? Recently Gopal Guru has argued that the dalits have no nostalgia; what they remember is 'only the history of humiliation and exploitation'. Your comments.*

Gopal is right. I largely agree with him. But I would like to add one thing: Dalits must look at history, rather write history of non-Dalits from a Dalit perspective. That will help Dalits as there is continuity of the doctrine of exclusion. Untouchability was nothing but a doctrine of exclusion where Dalits were denied all rights, access to wealth and institutions. Dalits can conclusively prove that Romila Thapar practices that doctrine. So did Bipan Chandra. The Department of History in JNU grew under the shadow of Bipan and Romila. But, they did not allow a single Dalit to become a teacher. They threw constitutional provisions into the dustbin. Today, the same Romila Thapar talks of defending the Constitution. So is the performance of Sumit Sarkar. These historians have distorted history; and in terms of vision, they are closer to the Sangh Parivar. They have the same view of British Imperialism that the Sangh Parivar propagates. To the Dalits, the coming of British gave great relief...

*Isn't the intellectual liberation of nondalits, starting with the brahmins, important for dalit liberation? Can a dalit struggle take place independent of the emancipation of all castes? Isn't it necessary to dialogue with the oppressors, though the possibilities of such a dialogue — a scenario where a brahman listens to dalits and is willing to change — seem remote right now. Where and how do we start, given that dalit consciousness and brahman revivalism seem to be happening simultaneously?*

We must be clear in what we mean by DALIT LIBERATION. Dalits have to first and foremost cross the transition phase: that no Dalit remains as landless agricultural labourer, no Dalit remains uneducated, Dalits have a fair representation in English medium schools, higher education, a fair representation in public institutions, several hundred of Dalits as millionaires, their housing issues are resolved, they have access to good healthcare etc. Only after these basic questions are resolved, Dalits can think of the battle for complete emancipation. It is wrong to sell a dream which is not likely to be achieved. This abstraction of Dalit struggles is dangerous as it dilutes the immediate agenda of the community.

Yes, Dalits must convincingly tell nondalits that they too are in the bondage of the Chatur-Varna Order. Nondalits' intellectual emancipation is very important, for unless they undergo emancipation, Social Democracy can be accomplished. It is extremely necessary to tell Brahmins that once Shudras capture political power at the all-India level, the first thing they would do is destroy democratic institutions. Then, the Shudras will unleash SOCIAL FASCISM in India, which will not harm Dalits alone; Brahmins too will face humiliation.

The real danger of revivalism of Brahmanism rests with Shudras, and the Brahmins will be the immediate victims of Brahmanism.

Brahmins cannot revive their medieval oppressive system, nor the medieval-type dominance. Yes, the real danger of revivalism of Brahmanism rests with Shudras, and the Brahmins will be the immediate victims of Brahmanism. Dalits can still withstand that revivalism, as they already undergone that experience. But Brahmins will collapse, will be totally shattered. Therefore, they should join the Dalits' battle for land reforms. The only way Brahmins can escape the Shudras menace is to democratise land-labour relationships, followed by achieving social democracy. If the land-labour relationship is democratised, Shudras will lose their clout. But, unless Brahmins decide to share urban assets and institutions, Dalits can't save Brahmins from their sure downfall. If Brahmins do not take the initiative, they will be finished in the coming fifty years.

*During a talk in Hyderabad in January you talked about how a 'progressive-leftist' journal like the Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) refused to publish your article. But they allowed a nondalit, Aditya Nigam, to theorise on the epistemology of the dalit critique. Would you like to throw more light on this? Is this related to the larger problem of the hypocrisy of savarnas of all hues — marxists, feminists, secular-liberals, antimodernists (like Nandy, Kakar, Kishwar), postmodernists, and the hindutva-wadis?*

A Savarna is always a Savarna. He is not a Marxist, he is not a secularist. He is not a liberal. Ideological divisions such as Marxist, Socialist, Liberal or Rightist are all artificial divisions. Is The Hindu/Frontline group of papers owned by an official Rightist? How many Dalits have a regular column in Hindu/Frontline? I can give hundreds of instances where Left/Secularists are University VCs, but have they implemented the Constitution in appointing Dalits in teaching positions? There used to be a good lobby of Left artists in Hindi cinema — but did they ever launch a movement to include Dalit art and Dalit artists in Hindi Cinema? There is still a big secular lobby in Bollywood; but has it ever made an attempt to democratize the film world? There are a host of Left/Secular columnists in mainstream media. But have they ever sought to improve Dalit presence in field of journalism? EPW is just the other face of Organiser (RSS journal).

Right or Left, both the arms belong to the same body, serve the same body, are guided by the same brain. We must be able to understand this situation.

Yes, when Brahmans are cornered, then they look for allies. That is what happened in UP, when in order to escape subjugation at the hands of Shudras, they approached BSP, and made Mayawati the chief minister twice. Likewise, when we strip the Brahman intelligentsia naked, and parade them on the intellectual streets of India, they will need some patch of cloth for cover — then they will look towards Dalits to turn saviors!

*There's been great confusion over how the dalits should understand and react to the formulations of the Narmada Bachao Andolan and its spokespersons, Medha Patkar and Arundhati Roy. How should we critique their gandhian-environmentalism without undermining the larger issues that concern the dam-affected?*

NBA is known as Patidar's [an equivalent of Thevars in Tamil Nadu, or Kammas of Andhra Pradesh] Land Bachao Andolan [PLBA] in the Valley, Rehabilitation Andolan in Delhi, and Save Environment Movement in London and elsewhere in Europe. NBA talks of Gandhism, it opposes modernity. It glorifies the past, in the same manner as the RSS does. For the Dalits, the past was more cruel, local institutions are more oppressive. Modernity has given Dalits some relief. NBA is supported by bored house-husbands/ bored housewives of Savarnas, and its cadres are the spoilt brats of the urban elite. Arundhati Roy and Medha Patkar represent the most ugly face of the Brahman world.

*Some dalit and OBC spokespersons have been talking about the liberatory potential of globalisation/ liberalisation for dalits/ subaltern groups, arguing that it would be easier to deal with a professional capitalist like Jack Welch (GE chairperson) than with an unprofessional baniya-capitalist like Rahul Bajaj. Do you agree? There is also a demand for reservation in the private sector? Will this be possible? How should dalits handle globalisation?*

Globalization/liberalization must be seen in a particular social/political context. In the Indian context, most ideas, institutions, which come from the West, howsoever ill-intended they may be, in the end, benefit those who are outside the Chatur-Varna Order, namely Dalits and Adivasis. I totally agree with the view that it is easier to deal with Jacks but difficult to deal with Bajajs.

The anti-globalization drive has been launched by the Sangh Parivar and the mainstream Left, whom I call the Domesticated Left. For, both are ultra-nationalists.

But here I have one problem, which is different in nature, and which neither Left and nor the Sangh would agree, for, both have an amazingly high degree of contempt for the Indian State. My problem is this: globalization/liberalization is inseparably linked to privatization. As I have stated earlier, any Dalit who has some smile on his face, is better-dressed, better-housed, is so because he is serving or has served under institutions of the State — be it a Class-IV employee, an Engineer/Doctor/ Civil Servant or a legislator. The few Dalits who are abroad, in the US or UK in particular, must have some indirect connection with the Indian State — their parents, relatives or friends. Thus, if the institutions run by the State get privatized, where will Dalits go? This question has always haunted me. Look at the condition of Muslims! Within fifty years, where have they gone, those who once ruled for over six hundred years?

Today, nine major Indian states are being headed by Shudra Chief Ministers. The Shudra parties like DMK, TDP, RJD, SP, JD, Shiv Sena, Akali Dal, Chautala's Lok Dal, etc. seems to have entered into agreements with Dwija parties like Congress and BJP. The agreement is — 'Don't raise the question of Land Reform, we will

not oppose privatization'. Likewise, Dalit parties should tell Dwijas, 'Your game will be over within 50 years. Shudras will finish you politically. Then your hold over urban assets and institutions will be over. So, align with us, as Shudras want to treat us as their subjects. And, therefore, support us in a new phase of Land Reforms, give us our share in private sector — in both capital and jobs, and in public institutions. Then, we can support you in redefining Mandal reservation, which must go to artisan Shudras.' Something like this can be done. Only then can the larger Dalit mass benefit.

*What about computers and the hype over information technology? Where do dalits stand in the context of such virtual, air-conditioned, anti-sweat labour? What must be their strategy?*

Few Dalit individuals apart, Dalit masses stand nowhere. Out of every 100 SC (1991 Census), 63, and in case of STs 70, are illiterate. By 2001 Census, it may at the most come down to 50 for SC/STs put together. How many of them are educated above matric? To me, not more than 5 per cent. How many of them are English-literate? Maybe 0.001 per cent. Those who are English literate, and have education above 12th standard? Maybe 0.0001 per cent. And how many of them own PCs? May be 0.00001 per cent or much less than that! Thus, there is a very clear danger of IT becoming another Sanskrit. While we should welcome the IT revolution, we must demand our due share in it.

*What is your position on conversions? Since reservation in the public sector hardly matters given that government jobs are shrinking, and being counted as a 'hindu dalit' has no social benefits whatsoever, do you see the possibility of dalits embracing new religions — islam, christianity or buddhism — if these faiths offer them not just dignity and respect but also tangible material benefits like education, jobs... What threat does this pose to localised dalit spiritual traditions, faith-spaces?*

If there is any Dalit who 'feels' that he/she is a 'Hindu', then he/she must immediately switch over to any other religion, preferably Buddhism. This could be an ideal position. But will this kind of conversion lead to emancipation as well, spiritual or material? What is our experience? Those who switched over to Christianity, turned into 'Dalit-Christian', those who embraced Sikhism, became 'Dalit-Sikh', those who sought Islam became 'Dalit Muslims' and those who converted to Buddhism, are called Neo-Buddhists, equivalent of 'Dalit-Buddhist'. The Dalit intelligentsia must rely more on its intelligence, genius, than on emotion, and try to find out why even after changing one's religion, a Dalit continues to be identified with his/her earlier identity.

Those who have a clearer idea of the Chatur-Varna Order, or the Caste System, must keep this basic fact in mind — that, there is no Varna or Caste, in the traditional Chatur-Varna Order, without an OCCUPATIONAL identity, and vice-versa. Thus, unless a Dalit changes his/her occupation, which is historically imposed on him/her, and chooses an occupation, or is caused to choose one, no real emancipation can occur. Since conversions are not necessarily accompanied by a change in occupation, he/she continues to be identified with his/her traditional occupation and Dalit identity, and thus turns into DALIT-CHRISTIAN, DALIT-SIKH, DALIT MUSLIM, NEO-BUDDHIST etc.

Today, all those Dalits who have some respect [respect in the relative sense of the term, for instance, the status of a Dalit who is an Engineer, and status of a Dalit who remains a cobbler] in society, are so because of change of occupation. Thus, if a Dalit (who remains a so-called Hindu) becomes a clerk in Railways or Postal Department, or a schoolteacher, or even a peon in Collectorate, he/she is more respected than a Dalit who remains a landless agricultural labourer but becomes Christian or a Buddhist. Thus, keeping this experience in mind, the Dalit energy, or the Dalit movement should address the basic material/ educational question of the community, and try to dismantle the relationship between traditional OCCUPATION and Caste.

*But, then one can easily tell Mr Prasad, "A Dalit who has become a clerk, and converts to Christianity or Buddhism, is still called Dalit-Christian or a Neo-Buddhist. That means, his/her occupational transformation has not helped him/her."*

My answer to this kind of question simple: There are two individuals — one a Bangladeshi billionaire, and the other an American pauper. At first instance, one would tend to weigh the American pauper more than the Bangladeshi billionaire; for, the Bangladeshi billionaire is identified with the average condition of Bangladeshis and the American pauper with the average condition of Americans, who are better-off. Thus, those Dalits, who are in Civil Services, or those who have migrated to America or UK, will always be identified with their social

roots. Therefore such sections of Dalits, instead of raising emotive issues, or issues abstract in nature, must concern themselves with ground realities and raise fundamental issues of their less fortunate brothers and sisters — land, quality education, employment, business and trade, participation in public institutions, question of atrocities etc. SOUND-BYTES FROM THE INTERVIEW THAT COULD BE USED AS BLURBS

"A so-called Hindu is only bad. 'Hindus' cannot be good."

"RSS and Communists are more hostile to Ambedkarism than anybody else... EPW is the other face of Organiser."

"The Dalai Lama is a Brahmanized Buddhist"

"I have never argued that 'Dalit-Shudra unity is not possible'. I have argued that the Dalit-Shudra unity, even if it takes place somewhere, should be stopped..."

"Shudras play with Dalit sentiments — they will point to the social monster called Brahmans, rob Dalits' support, come to power, and then turn to Dalits to oppress them."

"The Shudras, once in power, treat Dalits as subjects as they cannot treat Brahmans as subjects. Not only in Tamil Nadu, the entire South is a classic example. Out of every 100 SCs in UP, 43 are cultivators, whereas in TN it is 15, Kerala 3, Karnataka 23, and AP 13."

"Ours was the first brick-house [in the village]... the local Zamindar requested us to keep the height of the walls/roof below that of his own house... [We] raised the foundation even higher."

"I have a CPI[ML] past in politics... In JNU, I had the opportunity to read Ambedkar, and thus began arguing with my Comrades."

"I argued with my [CPI-ML] leaders why they were always against the Indian State, which is the only place where Dalits get some relief, and, in what way was Dr Ambedkar less radical than Karl Marx? ... It was indeed amazing to hear them dismissing the Varna/Caste nature of society as a NON-FACTOR."

"Here in India, the most radical NON-DALIT will be less progressive than the most conservative White in America."

"I believe in Ambedkarism, Dalits' intelligence, democracy, science, and the Indian State. Call these my gods and goddesses."

"I think we should not waste time on religious issues. What happened in Maharashtra? The entire energy went towards spreading Buddhism, and the Dalit movement suffered."

"Periyar could probably not foresee that the Shudra once in power will become Ultra-Brahmanical. That is why he targeted Brahmans alone, and the Chatur-Varna Order. That one blunder eliminated the Dalit movement from the Tamil soil in the 20th century. Unconsciously though, Periyar's movement has created a Social Monster in the form of Shudras."

"Shudras tend to have an increased intensity of religiosity than Brahmans... and practice untouchability more vigorously than Brahmans today. Further, Shudras tend to use violent methods against Dalits more often than Brahmans do. To me, a violent form of aggression is the ultimate form of oppression. But I still believe an attempt should be made to unite with artisan Shudras."

"It is not the majority [bahujan] which is oppressed, it the minority, it is the Dalits. Do you think Shudra communities such as Thevars, Vanniyars, Chettiyars, Gaudas, Lingayats, Vokkaligas, Kammas, Reddies, Jats, Yadavs, Gujjars, Kurmis, Patels, Marathas are oppressed communities?"

"Dalits and Shudras differ culturally as much as Dalits and Brahmans do. Shudras and Brahmans are culturally closer to each other than Shudras and Dalits. Dalits are a distinct social category, and so is there culture."



"When we strip the Brahman intelligentsia naked, and parade them on the intellectual streets of India, they will need some patch of cloth for cover — then they will look towards Dalits to turn saviors!"

"NBA is supported by bored house-husbands/ bored housewives of Savarnas, and its cadres are the spoilt brats of the urban elite. Arundhati Roy and Medha Patkar represent the most ugly face of the Brahman world."

"Shourie was under great civilisational pressure: why was no Brahman suitable / good enough to write the Constitution of the Indian Republic, which regulates the affairs of the State, and also of society."

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## **Buddha And His Dhamma**

By- Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

*Part I - From Birth to Parivraja*

7. Early Traits
8. Marriage
9. Father's Plans to Save His Son

### **7. Early Traits**

1. Whenever he went to his father's farm and found no work he repaired to a quiet place, and practised meditation.
2. While everything for the cultivation of the mind was provided, his education in the military science befitting a Kshatriya was not neglected.
3. For Suddhodana was anxious not to make the mistake of having cultivated the mind of his son at the cost of his manliness.
4. Siddharth was of kindly disposition. He did not like exploitation of man by man.
5. Once he went to his father's farm with some of his friends and saw the labourers ploughing the land, raising bunds, cutting trees, etc., dressed in scanty clothes under a hot burning sun.
6. He was greatly moved by the sight.
7. He said to his friends, can it be right that one man should exploit another ? How can it be right that the labourer should toil and the master should live on the fruits of his labour?
8. His friends did not know what to say. For they believed in the old philosophy of life that the worker was born to serve and that in serving his master he was only fulfilling his destiny.
9. The Sakyas used to celebrate a festival called Vapramangal. It was a rustic festival performed on the day of sowing. On this day custom had made it obligatory on every Sakya to do ploughing personally.
10. Siddharth always observed the custom and did engage himself in ploughing.
11. Though a man of learning, he did not despise manual labour.
12. He belonged to a warrior class and had been taught archery and the use of weapons. But he did not like causing unnecessary injury.
13. He refused to join hunting parties. His friends used to say : " Are you afraid of tigers ? " He used to retort by saying, " I know you are not going to kill tigers, you are going to kill harmless animals such as deer and rabbits."
14. "If not for hunting, come to witness how accurate is the aim of your friends," they said. Even such invitations Siddharth refused, saying ; "I do not like to see the killing of innocent animals."
15. Prajapati Gautami was deeply worried over this attitude of Siddharth.
16. She used to argue with him saying : " You have forgotten that you are a Kshatriya and fighting is your duty. The art of fighting can be learned only through hunting for only by hunting can you learn how to aim accurately. Hunting is a training ground for the warrior class."
17. Siddharth often used to ask Gautami: " But, mother, why should a Kshatriya fight ? And Gautami used to reply : " Because it is his duty."
18. Siddharth was never satisfied by her answer. He used to ask Gautami : " Tell me, how can it be the duty of man to kill man ? " Gautami argued, " Such an attitude is good for an ascetic. But Ksha-triyas must fight. If they don't, who will protect the kingdom ? "
19. " But mother ! If all Kshatriyas loved one another, would they not be able to protect their kingdom without resort to killing?" Gautami had to leave him to his own opinion.



20. He tried to induce his companions to join him in practising meditation. He taught them the proper pose. He taught them to fix their mind on a subject. He advised them to select such thoughts as " May I be happy, may my relations be happy, may all living animals be happy."
21. But his friends did not take the matter seriously. They laughed at him.
22. On closing their eyes they could not concentrate on their subject of meditation. Instead, some saw before their eyes deer for shooting or sweets for eating.
23. His father and his mother did not like his partiality for meditation. They thought it was so contrary to the life of a Kshatriya.
24. Siddharth believed that meditation on right subjects led to development of the spirit of universal love. He justified himself by saying : "When we think of living things, we begin with distinction and discrimination. We separate friends from enemies, we separate animals we rear from human beings. We love friends and domesticated animals and we hate enemies and wild animals."
25. "This dividing line we must overcome and this we can do when we in our contemplation rise above the limitations of practical life." Such was his reasoning.
26. His childhood was marked by the presence of supreme sense of compassion.
27. Once he went to his father's farm. During recess he was resting under a tree enjoying the peace and beauty of nature. While so seated a bird fell from the sky just in front of him.
28. The bird had been shot at by an arrow which had pierced its body and was fluttering about in great agony.
29. Siddharth rushed to the help of the bird. He removed the arrow, dressed its wound and gave it water to drink. He picked up the bird, came to the place where he was seated and wrapped up the bird in his upper garment and held it next to his chest to give it warmth.
30. Siddharth was wondering who could have shot this innocent bird. Before long there came his cousin Devadatta armed with all the implements of shooting. He told Siddharth that he had shot a bird flying in the sky, the bird was wounded but it flew some distance and fell somewhere there, and asked him if he had seen it.
31. Siddharth replied in the affirmative and showed him the bird which had by that time completely recovered.
32. Devadatta demanded that the bird be handed over to him. This Siddharth refused to do. A sharp argument ensued between the two.
33. Devadatta argued that he was the owner of the bird because by the rules of the game, he who kills a game becomes the owner of the game.
34. Siddharth denied the validity of the rule. He argued that it is only he who protects that has the right to claim ownership. How can he who wants to kill be the owner ?
35. Neither party would yield. The matter was referred to arbitration. The arbitrator upheld the point of view of Siddharth Gautama.
36. Devadatta became his permanent enemy. But Gautama's spirit of compassion was so great that he preferred to save the life of an innocent bird to securing the goodwill of his cousin.
37. Such were the traits of character found in the early life of Siddharth Gautama.

## § 8. Marriage

1. There was a Sakya by name Dandapani. Yeshodhara was his daughter. She was well known for her beauty and for her ' sila."
2. Yeshodhara had reached her sixteenth year and Dandapani was thinking about her marriage.
3. According to custom Dandapani sent invitations to young men of all the neighbouring countries for the Swayamvar of his daughter.
4. An invitation was also sent to Siddharth Gautama.
5. Siddharth Gautama had completed his sixteenth year. His parents also were equally anxious to get him married.
6. They asked him to go to the Swayamvar and offer his hand to Yeshodhara. He agreed to follow his parents' wishes.
7. From amongst the young men Yeshodhara's choice fell on Siddharth Gautama.
8. Dandapani was not very happy. He felt doubtful about the success of the marriage.
9. Siddharth, he felt, was addicted to the company of saints and sages. He preferred loneliness. How could he be a successful householder?
10. Yeshodhara, who was determined to marry none but Siddharth, asked her father whether to be in the company of saints and sages was a crime. She did not think it was.
11. Knowing her daughter's determination to marry no one but Siddharth Gautama, the mother of Yeshodhara told Dandapani that he must consent. Dandapani did.
12. The rivals of Gautama were not only disappointed but felt that they were insulted.

13. They wanted that in fairness to them Yeshodhara should have applied some test for her selection. But she did not.
14. For the time being they kept quiet, believing that Dandapani would not allow Yeshodhara to choose Siddharth Gautama so that their purpose would be served.
15. But when Dandapani failed, they made bold and demanded that a test of skill in archery be prescribed. Dandapani had to agree.
16. At first Siddharth was not prepared for this. But Channa, his charioteer, pointed out to him what disgrace his refusal would bring upon his father, upon his family and upon Yeshodhara.
17. Siddharth Gautama was greatly impressed by this argument and agreed to take part in the contest.
18. The contest began. Each candidate showed his skill in turn.
19. Gautama's turn came last. But his was the highest marksmanship.
20. Thereafter the marriage took place. Both Suddhodana and Dandapani were happy. So was Yeshodhara and Mahaprajapati.
21. After a long term of married life Yeshodhara gave birth to a son. He was named Rahula.

### **§ 9. Father's Plans to Save His Son**

1. While the king was happy to see his son married and thus enter the life of a householder the prophecy of the sage Asita continued to haunt him.
2. To prevent the prophecy from coming true, he thought of getting him engrossed in the pleasures and carnal joys of life.
3. With this object in view Suddhodana built three luxurious palaces for his son to live in, one for summer, one for the rainy season and one for winter, furnished with all the requirements and excitements for a full amorous life.
4. Each palace was surrounded by an extensive garden beautifully laid out with all kinds of trees and flowers.
5. In consultation with his family priest Udayin, he thought of providing a harem for the prince with very beautiful inmates.
6. Suddhodana then told Udayin to advise the girls how to go about the business of winning over the prince to the pleasures of life.
7. Having collected the inmates of the harem, Udayin first advised them how they should win over the prince.
8. Addressing them he said : " Ye are all skilled in all the graceful arts, ye are proficient in understanding the language of amorous sentiments, ye are possessed of beauty and gracefulness, ye are thorough masters in your own styles.
9. " With these graces of yours, ye are able to move even sages who have lost all their desires, and to ensnare even the gods, who are charmed by heavenly nymphs.
10. " By your skill in expressing the heart's feelings, by your coquetry, your grace, and your perfect beauty ye are able to enrapture even women, how much more easily men.
11. "Thus, skilled as ye are, each set in your own proper sphere, it should not be beyond your reach to captivate and capture the prince and hold him in your bondage.
12. " Any timid action on your part would be fit for new brides whose eyes are closed through shame.
13. "What though this hero be, great by his exalted glory, yet ' great is the might of woman.' Let this be your firm resolve.
14. " In olden time a great seer, hard to be conquered even by gods, was spurned by a harlot, the beauty of Kasi, planting her feet upon him.
15. "And the great seer Visvamisra, though plunged in a profound penance, was carried captive for ten years in the forests by the nymph Ghritaki.
16. " Many such seers as these have women brought to naught, how much more then a delicate prince in the first flower of his age ?
17. " This being so, boldly put forth your efforts that the posterity of the king's family may not be turned away from him.
18. "Ordinary women captivate simple men; but they are truly women, who subdue the nature of high and hard."

***...to be continued***

## Riddle In Hinduism

### RIDDLE NO. 3

#### The Testimony Of Other Shastras On The Origin Of The Vedas

I

The search for the origin of the Vedas may well begin with the Vedas themselves.

The Rig-Veda propounds a theory of the origin of the Vedas. It is set out in the famous Purusha Sukta. According to it, there was a mystic sacrifice of the Purusha a mythical being and it is out of this sacrifice that the three Vedas namely, Rig, Sama, Yajus came into being.

The Sama-Veda and Yajur-Veda have nothing to say about the origin of the Vedas.

The only other Veda that refers to this question is the Atharva-Veda. It has many explanations regarding the origin of the Vedas. One explanation reads as follows:

" From Time the Rig verses sprang; the Yajus sprang from Time. " There are also two other views propounded in the Atharva-Veda on this subject. The first of these is not very intelligent and may be given in its own language which runs as follows:

" Declare who that Skamba (supporting principle) is in whom the primeval rishis, the rick, saman, and yajush, the earth and the one rishi, are sustained....

" Declare who is that Skamba from whom they cut off the rick verses, from whom they scrapped off the yajush, of whom the saman verses are the hairs and the verses of Atharvan and Angiras the mouth. "

Obviously this statement is a challenge to some one who had proclaimed that the Rig, Sama and Yajur Veda were born out of a Skamba.

The second explanation given in the Atharva-Veda is that the Vedas sprang from Indra.

II

This is all that the Vedas have to say about their own origin. Next in order of the Vedas come the Brahmanas. We must therefore inquire into what they have to say on this subject. The only Brahmanas which attempt to explain the origin of the Vedas are the Satapatha Brahmana, the Taittiriya Brahmana. Aitereya Brahmana and Kaushitaki Brahmana.

The Satapatha Brahmana has a variety of explanations. One attributes the origin of the Vedas to Prajapati. According to it:

" Prajapati, was formerly this universe (i.e., the sole existence) one only. He desired, 'may I become, may I be propagated '. He toiled in devotion, he performed austerity.

" From him, when he had so toiled and performed austerity, three worlds were created—earth, air and sky. He infused warmth into these three worlds. From them, thus heated, three lights were produced,— Agni (fire), this which purifies i.e., Pavana, or Vayu, (the Wind), and Surya (the Sun). He infused heat into these three lights. From them so heated the three Vedas were produced,— the Rig-Veda from Agni (fire), the Yajur-Veda from Vayu (Wind) and the Sama-Veda from Surya (the Sun). He infused warmth into these three Vedas. From them so heated three luminous essences were produced, bhuh, from the Rig-Veda, bhuvah from the Yajur-Veda, and svar from the Sama-Veda. Hence, with the Rig-Veda, the office of the adhvaryu; with the Sama-Veda, the duty of the udgatri; while the function of the brahman arose through the luminous essence of the triple science (i.e., the three Vedas combined)."

The Satapatha Brahmana gives another variant of this explanation of the origin of the Veda from Prajapati. The explanation is that Prajapati created the Vedas from waters. Says the Satapatha Brahmana:

"This male, Prajapati, desired, 'May I multiply, may I be propagated '. He toiled in devotion; he practised austere-fervour. Having done so he first of all created sacred knowledge, the triple Vedic science. This became a basis for him. Wherefore men say, ' sacred knowledge is the basis of this universe '. Hence after studying the Veda a man has a standing ground; for sacred knowledge is his foundation. Resting on this basis

he (Prajapati) practised austere-fervour. He created the waters from Vach (speech) as their world. Vach was his; she was created. As she pervaded (apnot) waters were called 'apah'. As she covered (avrinot) all, water was called 'Var'. He desired, 'May I be propagated from these waters'. Along with this triple Vedic science he entered the waters. Thence sprang an egg. He gave it an impulse; and said 'let there be, let there be, let there be again'. Thence was first created sacred knowledge, the triple Vedic science. Wherefore men say, 'Sacred knowledge is the first-born thing' in this universe. Moreover, it was sacred knowledge which was created from that Male in front, wherefore it was created as his mouth. Hence they say of a man learned in the Veda, 'he is like Agni; for the sacred knowledge is Agni's mouth'.

There is a third explanation given in the Satapatha Brahmana:

" I settle thee in the ocean as they seat. "

" Mind is the ocean. From the mind-ocean with speech for a shovel the Gods dug out the triple Vedic science. Hence this verse has been uttered; 'May the brilliant deity today know where they placed that offering which the Gods dug out with sharp shovels. Mind is the ocean; speech is the sharp shovel; the triple Vedic Science is the offering. In reference to this the verse has been uttered. He settles it in Mind."

The Taittiriya - Brahmana has three explanations to offer. It speaks of the Vedas as being derived from Prajapati. It also says Prajapati created king Soma and after him the three. Vedas were created. This Brahmana has another explanation quite unconnected with Prajapati. According to it:

"Vach (speech) is an imperishable thing, and the first-born of the ceremonial, the mother of the Vedas, and the centre-point of immortality. Delighting in us, she came to the sacrifice. May the protecting goddess be ready to listen to my invocation, she whom the wise rishis, the composers of hymns, the Gods sought by austere-fervour, and by laborious devotion. " To crown all this the Taittiriya Brahmana offers a third explanation. It says that the Vedas came from the beard of Prajapati.

### III

The Upanishads have also attempted to explain the origin of the Vedas. The explanation offered by the Chhandogya Upanishad is the same as that given by the Satapatha Brahmana—namely that the Rig-Veda originated from Agni, Yajus from Vayu and Sam from the Sun.

The Brahad Aranyaka Upanishad has two explanations to offer. In one place, it says:

"As from a fire made of moist wood, various modifications of smoke proceed, so is the breathing of this great Being the Rig-Veda, the Yajur-Veda, the Sama-Veda, the Atharvangirases, the Itihasas, Puranas, science, the Upanishads, verses (slokas), aphorisms, comments of different kinds—all these are his breathings. " In another place, it says

" Prajapati (identified with Death or the Devourer) is said to have produced Vach (speech), and through her, together with soul, to have created all things, including the Vedas."

"By that speech and that soul he created all things whatsoever, rick, yajush, and saman texts, metres, sacrifices, creatures and animals. "

"The three Vedas are (identifiable with) these three things (speech, mind and breath). Speech is the Rig-Veda, mind the Yajur-Veda and breath the Sama-Veda."

### IV

Coming to the Smritis, there are two theories as to the origin of the Vedas to be found in the Manu Smriti. In one place, it is said that the Vedas were created by Brahma.

"He (Brahma) in the beginning fashioned from the words of the Veda the several names, functions, and separate conditions of all (creatures). That Lord also created the subtle host of active and living deities, and of Sadhyas, and eternal sacrifice. And in order to the performance of sacrifice, he drew forth from Agni, from Vayu and from Surya, the triple eternal Veda, distinguished as Rick, Yajush and Saman."

In another place he seems to accept the story of Prajapati being the originator of the Vedas as would be evident from the following:

"Prajapati also milked out of the three Vedas the letters, 'a', 'u', and 'm' together with the words 'bhuh', 'bhuvah' and 'svar'. The same supreme Prajapati also milked from each of the three Vedas one of the three portions of the text called Savitri (or gayatri), beginning with the word tat... . The three great imperishable particles (bhuh, bhuvah, svar) preceded by om, and the gayatri of three lines, are to be regarded as the mouth of Brahma."

## V

It is also interesting to note what the Puranas have to say about the origin of the Vedas. The Vishnu Purana says:

"From his eastern mouth Brahma formed the rik verses, the trivrit, the soma-rathantara, and of sacrifices, the agnishtoma. From his southern mouth he created the yajush verses, the trishtubh metre, the panchadasa-stoma, the vrihat-saman and the ukthya. From his western mouth he formed the saman verses, the jagatimetre, the saptadasa-stoma, the vairupa, and the atiratra. From his northern mouth he framed the ekavinsa, the atharvan, the aptoryaman, with the anushtubh and biraj metres." The Bhagvat Purana says:

"Once the Vedas sprang from the four-faced creator, as he was meditating 'how shall I create the aggregate worlds as before? . . . He formed from his eastern and other mouths the Vedas called rik, yajush, saman, and atharvan, together with praise, sacrifice, hymns and expiation." \*[There appears to be some quotations missing as there is no link between these two paragraphs.]

"Entering between her eyes. From her there was then produced a quadruple being in the form of a Male, lustrous as Brahma, undefined, eternal, undecaying, devoid of bodily senses or qualities, distinguished by the attribute of brilliancy, pure as the rays of the moon, radiant, and embodied in letters. The God fashioned the Rig-Veda, with the Yajush from his eyes, the Sama-Veda from the tip of his tongue, and the Atharvan from his head. These Vedas, as soon as they are born, find a body, (kshetra). Hence they obtain their character of Vedas, because they find (vindanti) that abode. These Vedas then create the pre-existent eternal Brahma (sacred science), a Male of celestial form, with their own mind-born qualities."

It also accepts Prajapati as the origin. It says that when the Supreme being was intent on creating the Universe, Hiranyagarbha, or Prajapati, issued from his mouth the sound 'Om', and was desired to divide himself—a process which he was in great doubt how he should effect—the Harivamsa proceeds:

"While he was thus reflecting, the sound 'om' issued from him, and resounded through the earth, air and sky. While the God of Gods was again and again repeating this, the essence of mind, the vashatkara proceeded from his heart. Next, the sacred and transcendent vyahritis, (bhuh, bhuvah, svar), formed of the great smriti, in the form of sound, were produced from earth, air, and sky. Then appeared the goddess, the most excellent of meters, with twenty-four syllables (the gayatri). Reflecting on the divine text (beginning with 'tat'), the Lord formed the Savitri. He then produced all the Vedas, the Rik, Saman, Atharvan, and Yajush, with their prayers and rites."

## VI

Here we have eleven different explanations regarding the origin of the Vedas—(1) as originating from the mystical sacrifice of Purusha, (2) as resting on Skambha, (3) as cut or scraped off from him, as being his hair and his mouth, (4) as springing from Indra, (5) as produced from Time, (6) as produced from Agni, Vayu and Surya, (7) as springing from Prajapati, and the Waters, (8) as being the breath of Brahma, (9) as being dug by the Gods out of mind-ocean, (10) as being the hair of Prajapati's beard and (11) as being the offspring of Vach.

This bewildering multiplicity of answers to a simple question is a riddle. The writers who have come forward to furnish these answers are all Brahmins. They belong to the same Vaidik school of thought. They alone were the guardians of the ancient religious lore. Why should they have given such incoherent and chaotic answers to a very simple question?

*...to be continued*

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