



ROLE OF
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**ROLE OF CASTEISM IN
INDIAN POLITICS**

ROLE OF CASTEISM IN INDIAN POLITICS

Symposium held on 27 March 2004 at
Indian International Centre, New Delhi

Foreword

T.N. Chaturvedi
Governor, Karnataka

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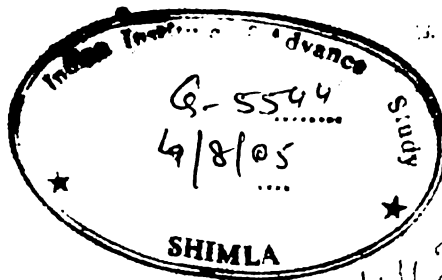
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Foreword

Caste has been both a changing and an unchanging reality of Indian society. It has also been the subject of intellectual disputation and philosophical dialogue over the ages. The term has been interpreted in different ways by scholars, religious leaders and reformers in their own light. That caste is not to be determined by birth or hereditary occupation but by individual qualities is borne out from notable scriptures and the lineage and parentage of many Indian sages, who occupy revered place in spiritual annals as well as in folk memory. However, with the passage of time, social and moral decadence led to stratification of society and rigidity grew with distortions and sectarian oppression, which led to emergence of many protest movements—Jainism and Buddhism being the most pronounced ones. The various streams of *Bhakti* movement, both in the South and the North of the country, opposed strongly the caste system and its accretions, such as untouchability and many blind beliefs lacking the rationality and liberality of outlook and social relations which were the hallmark of the Vedic heritage. A good deal of literature exists on the subject

From the beginnings of what has come to be known as social and religious renaissance in the late 18th and early 19th century, religious reformers—like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Dayanand, M G Ranade, Mahatma Phule, Swami Vivekananda and Narayan Guru—and a host of other illustrious figures preached fervently against and worked ceaselessly for abolition of caste system with its evils and

distortions. Sri Aurobindo, the sage of Pondicherry, pointed out that caste appeared in early Indian society, in its nascent stage, and that it had no religious or spiritual connotations and authority. He added that in a modernising society, it had no place whatsoever and should be abolished.

Despite many ups and downs, social reform movements and institutions of different kinds working in various parts of the country were successful in creating a climate of opinion in which it seemed that caste was on its last legs or fading away steadily, aided by growing urbanization and its consequences. But, unfortunately, the foreign rulers, who were busy consolidating their hold, smelt danger to them in its fading away as they stood to gain by disunity in the country as a whole, and particularly the majority community which had begun to voice opposition to them in different ways. They stood to gain by the policy of 'divide and rule' to which they resorted as is borne out by history. Many policies, approaches and programmes were initiated which were intended to create and accentuate fissures and divisions from different angles among various communities. Caste, with its association came very handy to the foreign masters in their game of divide and rule. We are all aware as to how Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B R Ambedkar, in their own light, tried to stem this tide and give a positive direction to the movement for abolition of untouchability and uplift of the 'dalits' in an effort to bring about social equity and economic justice in society. After Independence, the Constitution that was framed—in the making of which Dr. Ambedkar played such an important role—the practice of untouchability in all its forms stood abolished and various legal measures and laws followed, but these were not always fully adequate and effective. 'The politics of parliamentary elections gave a new edge to caste politics. Gradually, the baneful influence of caste began to overcast party politics in the country. Rationalisation and justification

of caste also began with some vehemence. Reservation issues developed new dimensions. Vote-bank politics began to operate subtly. Even the question of sub-classification of lower castes into sub-castes and the problem of 'creamy layer' in matters of reservation to governmental jobs also came to the fore. Many right-thinking people began to voice their feelings to stress that casteism was as much a danger to the nascent democratic system as fundamentalism and communalism. Many felt that a new wave of social reform movement of a radical nature was called for in this regard.

The Chairman of the Diwan Chand Trust, Shri Vishwa Nath and other trustees thought that it was high time that under its auspices the Diwan Chand Institute of National Affairs should organize a symposium on the broad theme of "Role of Casteism in Indian Politics", which was held on 27th March 2004 at the India International Centre, New Delhi. After a wide consultation, experts, scholars and men of public affairs were invited to participate in the symposium and make their presentations. Effort was made to make the participation representative of all sections of opinion. The participants had complete freedom to express their views and the nature and coverage of their presentation was left to them. The table of contents has the names of distinguished participants, and the participants who made interventions, asked questions or made their own observations in the course of discussion. As has been our practice, it has been decided to bring out a monograph of the proceedings for wider public information and debate. We are grateful to our valued contributors and participants. Due to various reasons, some of the very eminent men of public affairs and opinion makers could not join at the last moment, but we thank them too for their original intent and appreciation of the effort of the Trust.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Diwan Chand Institute of National Affairs played a significant role in providing an

academic avenue and a forum for dialogue on matters of public concern in our polity, economy and society. A journal came out regularly and brochures and monographs used to be published besides organization of seminars, conferences and symposia on contemporary issues of fundamental significance to the future. The founder of the trust, Lala Diwan Chand, though himself endowed with exceedingly modest education, desired that the public in general, policy-makers, and opinion makers must have an opportunity to inform themselves adequately enough to ensure the healthy climate for enlightened citizenship and a vibrant democracy as envisaged in our Constitution. In accordance with the wishes of the founder, besides continuing our service to society in manifold ways, it is our effort to revive and reinvigorate the Diwan Chand Institute of National Affairs and restore it to its previous position and status in the world of contemporary studies and scholarship. We seek suggestions and support from all thoughtful citizens in this direction.

I am thankful to the Chairman and my fellow trustees for asking me to provide this introduction to our purpose and consequent endeavour. I do hope, the monograph brought out by Diwan Chand Institute of National Affairs, which is in your hands, will be found worthwhile. We look forward to your response and constructive suggestions to serve the purpose that the Trust has in view, in a better and more effective.

Bangalore,
November 12, 2004

—T.N. Chaturvedi
Governor of Karnataka.

Welcome Address

Friends, It is my pleasant duty and a privilege to welcome you all to this symposium on a subject of national importance. Our Institute of National Affairs, under the aegis of the Diwan Chand Trust, apart from running the Institute, has various other activities in the fields of education, health, social and tribal welfare, and many others. We have been organising symposia and seminars on issues of current importance. During the past 18 months, we have organised four seminars on subjects like Living in Peace with Pakistan as Good Neighbours; Communal Harmony: National Imperative for Prosperity; and Environment and Non-conventional Energy Sources. This is the fifth seminar which we are holding today.

One may ask why we have selected this subject. In one of the earlier seminars, Dr. P. C. Alexander, M.P., former Principal Secretary to Prime Minister and former Governor of Tamilnadu and Maharashtra, underlined the importance of this subject in his key-note address, saying that caste politics poses a very grave danger to our country in the coming years. He went to the extent of saying that it will be the gravest challenge for the country, even more than communal discord.

We are now in the throes of election and we know how caste factor has influenced the selection of candidates, who are going to govern, in a way, our country for the next five years. The issue raises many important issues again, such as: whether secularism would be able to survive

under the threat of casteism, whether our nation may face some sort of disintegration and many other issues which I am sure, this distinguished panel of speakers would address from various angles. We are fortunate in having eminent people to take part in the deliberations. We have the privilege of having Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, who will be joining after some time as the chairperson of the next session. She is an erudite scholar and a profound thinker. Now we have Dr. D. L. Sheth to chair this session. Let me also say that whatever seminars we organise, we see to it that the deliberations and discussions are printed for wider dissemination.

With these few words, very warmly I again welcome you all—the distinguished speakers and also our esteemed guests who have so graciously responded to our invitation and are here with us. Welcome and thank you once again.

Vishwa Nath

✦ *Chairman, Lala Diwan Chand Trust*

Opening Address

Dr. D. L. Sheth

[Dr. Sheth is a renowned sociologist and a Senior Fellow of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. He has specialised in minorities, national identification, human rights and caste. He is the Editor of Alternatives—an international journal—and founder of Lokayan. He has published a large number of books and articles on human rights, minorities, citizens and political parties among others.]

I am grateful to the Diwan Chand Trust for asking me to give my address this morning. On the eve of coming elections, organising this seminar on a very important topic is very significant as the topic is of great concern to most of us. We, our class of people, have almost made up our mind—and partially rightly so—about this concern, about what caste is doing to politics. I hope this particular seminar will be able to take a somewhat more dispassionate, distant and an objective view of this phenomenon and its influences, *i.e.* what caste is doing to politics and how politics has been impacting the society, particularly the caste factor. Caste is tormenting us, the elite and the theorists. It is an institution unique to India. It has, of course, existed generally in South Asia, but not in the form, function and structure that it manifests in India. Caste has imparted a peculiar political character to the whole national society of India. This is something quite different. And because it is different, the readymade, derivable theories that we have are of not much use to us. We are just learning on job, as it were. We, of course, have formed some strong

opinions and attitudes without bothering about the studies we have on what caste is doing to our democracy and what democratic politics is doing to caste.

It is true that caste is an embarrassment to most of us. But it is there, obstinately there, flourishing in politics and confounding us at every moment how to deal with this phenomenon. I hope that this seminar would address the issue of caste-politics interaction in a more objective way.

I will make a few remarks, only to set the ball rolling—not trying to pre-empt the discussions or propound any thesis on caste. I do not have much time for that here, nor do we have it collectively.

Yes, caste is an embarrassment, because it shows us in a very bad light to the outside world. It has upset many of our modernist, secularist sensibilities. But if you empirically look at what politics has done to caste and what caste has done to politics and to our democracy, then some interesting facts come in view. Caste movements and organizations—organizations of the Dalit movement, of the OBC movement, e.g., the Yadav Mahasabha and myriad such other organizations—on the whole, have inducted people in massive numbers and at a great space into our democratic politics, imparting a peculiar participative character to our democracy. Our Constitution has recognised caste in a certain form, as a system of dis-privilegement, of social inequality and discrimination adversely affecting a majority of Indians. Accordingly, it also recognizes the need for social policies to address problems of social injustice and discrimination caused by the caste system. The issue, therefore, we need to address is: what caste movements have done to politics and what the constitutional recognition of caste has done to distribution of power in our society? To put it in another way, it is important to recognise that traditionally and historically *political power* in our society has been structured

by caste and it is not possible to address the issue of democratic redistribution of power without taking caste into account.

In my view, the political movements of caste and the social policies that emanated from constitutional recognition of caste have substantively contributed to redistribution, re-allocation and re-shuffle of power and *resources* that were endowed traditionally to *certain* inherited statuses, access to which was prohibited to incumbents of the *other* statuses in the society. Both, power and resources in the society, which for centuries remained in the hands of a small social minority, have now been made subject to open political competition carried on the basis of political equality, where numbers count more than traditional statuses.

I am not focusing for now on the negative impact of caste in politics. Much is being said and written on this topic in the media. And we all seem to have assumed that caste is an unmitigated evil in politics. There are, without doubt, many undesirable and unacceptable aspects of caste politics. But if the so-called 'caste-politics' has in reality, contributed to redistributing power, delegitimising traditional status resources and to interrogating and, in the end, destroying the minority monopoly of power in society enjoyed by the English-educated upper castes to whom the power was sociologically transferred at the time of Independence, we have to take the positive, democratising role of caste politics seriously. Just denouncement of castes as a knee-jerk response is not enough.

The other hypothesis I would like this seminar to address is that caste-politics frustrates a certain kind of, what may be called collectivist (fascist?), political mobilisation of people by a religious ideology; caste politics works with a multi-cultural-representational ideology which is in opposition to the unilateral and homogenizing

ideology, of cultural nationalism. These two types of competing politics—of Caste and of Political Hinduism—have, in recent years, shaped even our party-system.

What do we make out of this contradiction between Caste and Hinduism? If caste rests on a religious ideology integral to Hinduism, why caste politics works against *Hindutva*? This is an important issue we will have to address when we take stock of what caste has done to politics. Is casteism a religious ideology? Is casteism an ideology of *Hindutva*? Or is casteism akin to multiculturalism? Whatever the ideology of caste, why caste-politics is more in sync with competitive-representational democracy than with *Hindutva*? In short, what is caste, *today*? It seems many changes have taken place in the caste system, which we have not entered in our social registers. While we may keep on using the old nomenclature, something very different is confronting us in the name of 'caste'. It seems, a radical change has been taking place in the relationship between caste and politics for past ten-years, but it has remained unseen; and if seen, untheorised. This change is waiting to be understood and theorised about.

Outstanding scholars in the field are going to address some of these issues this morning. I should not stand any longer between you and them. I will again come at the end, if I have time, to make a few comments on the mutational changes in caste. All the understanding that we had, even ten years ago, about caste, needs radical revision. Since Mr. Arun Kumar has asked me to open the seminar with a few remarks, I took the opportunity to make these observations for whatever they are worth.

Role of Caste in Politics

Professor Dipankar Gupta

[Professor Gupta is working in the Centre for Studies of Social Systems in the Jawaharlal Nehru University. Prior to that he has been a Liver Hume Professor at the London School of Economics. He is the Co-editor of Contributions to Indian Sociology. A prolific writer, he has written several books. Among his latest books are Interpreting Caste published in 2000 by Penguin; Cultural Space and National State published by Sage in 2000, and Mistaken Modernity published by Harper Collins.]

I think, we should be forewarned that it is not as if caste and politics have twinned for the first time in history. Castes have sought political power even in the past. There have always been a political side to caste as far back as history can recall. Chandragupta Maurya, a person from a supposedly 'low' community, became the founder of the most celebrated empire of ancient India. Rajputs and Jats, some of the major Kshatriya castes of today, also came to the top through slaughter and conquest in the medieval period.

The difference is that today politics and caste relate to each other in a very naked fashion, in all kinds of combinations, and on an everyday basis. In the past, castes rose and fell episodically with a lot of hell fire and brimstone. After each such philippic event, things settled down for centuries, giving the impression that in the past caste relations (even inter-faith ties) were peaceful and harmonious. It is just that in pre-modern times, medieval peace prevailed over a long duration, punctuated every

now and again by violent uprisings till the victor and vanquished knew their positions once again.

In a democratic society, there are no clear victors and no unambiguous vanquished. There are competing groups, who take on each other as equals, at least in terms of the law. This makes a big difference for such a situation was unthinkable in the past. Moreover, as time moves, much more rapidly now than it ever did before, it gives the impression that there is just too much politics going around. It is, however, true that the way castes are expressing themselves in politics is very different from pre-modern times, but it is not as if castes are waking up to politics, sleeping beauty like, after centuries of quiescence.

It should also be borne in mind that when candidates are chosen on the basis of caste, it is not as if voters behave along the same lines as well. First, voters often express their preferences on issues other than primordial ones. This is a very extensive phenomenon but does not get adequately reflected. Second, even if a person were a dogmatic casteist, rarely can such a person vote on the basis of caste. This is because there are far too many castes in any one constituency. There is no caste in the country that can win an election on the strength of its own numbers. The Jats, in the best of times, constituted about 8 per cent in areas of West Uttar Pradesh where they are supposed to be very strong. The Yadavas can muster up to 20 per cent in some constituencies, but in most other places where they have a strong political presence, their numbers rarely exceed 10-15 per cent of the total population of that region. So, if we take a constituency that is bigger than a gram panchayat, voting on caste grounds becomes very difficult. Only in a small percentage of cases can caste and political preference easily coincide. No matter how determined a casteist voter might be, that person will just not get the satisfaction, in most cases, of voting along community lines.

The only caste which is really numerous in this

country is that of the Marathas. They often make about 30 per cent of the population in certain parts of Maharashtra. Yet, by virtue of being so big, the caste is internally fractionated along a number of party lines—from Shiv Sena to Communist. It is, therefore, not caste arithmetic that works. Numbers do not add up unproblematically. To understand caste and politics in democratic India, it is important to pay attention to caste chemistry as well. It has to be caste plus something else that would make sense, if one were to pay serious attention to the contemporary political scenario. Obviously, there is something more than numbers or else the caste question does not add up.

I have researched on this aspect in different villages of India, and I really cannot understand how people can be so definite in proclaiming that caste identities translate themselves easily into political alliances. This is far from true. One of the fundamental characteristics of the caste order is that castes repel each other. No caste thinks well of another caste, no matter how close they may seem to each other from the outside. Jats and Gujjars are both agrarian castes from the same area, but their relations are marked by a significant element of hostility. Jats think Gujjars are cowards, and the Gujjars say that the Jats are always willing to compromise with rulers even if they are Muslims. This feature of caste repulsion is present everywhere, and it is only the naiveté of the urban observer that makes certain castes appear as natural friends.

But the point is that why do castes that normally do not mix well with one another, come together for political purposes? The answer, very simply, is that it must be something more than caste to cement such political bonds. The fact of castes coming together is then a function of a factor that is outside the caste logic *per se*. The political alliances struck are so idiosyncratic that there is no guarantee at all that the ties will last the wash. In fact,

very often, when the next elections are round the corner, caste leaders go into a huddle figuring out afresh their friends and enemies for the next round. When alliances are made, and when they are unmade, it is not caste considerations as much as secular factors that are responsible for the outcomes. It so happens that members of a certain caste, or a group of castes, happen to occupy a similar position in the structure of the society. This is merely a statistical fact, and no more than that. It could well be the case that there are historical reasons behind this statistical datum, but it is not something that can be explained by looking inside the ideology of the caste order itself.

Unfortunately, those who have had first-hand experiences with caste politics on the ground will readily attest to this truth, and yet when it comes to theorizing or conceptualizing caste, they fall back to the Brahmannical version of the pure ideology. Unless we intellectuals rid ourselves of this fixation, caste relations will always appear peculiarly non-amenable to sociological analysis.

To-day, one cannot talk about vote-banks any longer, not at least in the way they were supposed to be in the past. In a few isolated pockets, perhaps, vote-banks still function as they used to, but such cases constitute the exceptions rather than set the rule. The upper castes—and not just the Brahmin—in most cases cut a pretty sorry figure in comparison to what they used to be in the not so distant past. They can no longer swing an election, they cannot use the *danda* like they used to till not very long ago. This is because the land-holding patterns and agrarian relations have changed so much in recent years that the better off landed castes can no longer afford the swagger that was so common among them even up to the late 1970s. In fact, I stopped teaching a course on peasant sociology for I found that the reading list did not quite reflect the reality of the village any longer. The books I was teaching about

discussed zamindari abolition, land reforms, and so on, which are no longer of any relevance. Even the issue of agrarian labour has to be significantly re-cast to have any resonance with empirical reality. Now, we know that at least 85 per cent of land-holdings are below five acres, and roughly 63 per cent are below three acres, the nature of agrarian relations is bound to be very different from what used to be the case in the era of big land lords.

Given this kind of land-ownership pattern, one cannot imagine an active and working vote-bank any longer. There is no village oligarch as of yore and many of the practices associated with the caste system have fallen into disuse. The village patrons can no longer command their liege men to do things for them. In villages today, different castes live in their own solitudes. There is very little interaction across castes as community groupings. The caste system, as a system, does not survive any longer. Even the so-called *jajmani* traditions are hard to find.

The breakdown of the caste system has led to the assertion of caste identities. Castes that were hitherto shame-faced about their background and so forth and only whispered, *sotto voce*, about their ancestry are now proudly announcing their origins in their many *jati puranas*. The proud assertion of their assumed origins, which are always exalted, was not possible in the days of the closed village economy under the sway of the village oligarch or the dominant caste. These subaltern castes were forced to 'behave' themselves and live by the dictates and the preferred hierarchical notions of the superior castes in the village.

This is no longer true. The landed people today do not have that kind of political and economic power. They too are strapped for cash. Very often when they fail to pay their labourers, it is not because they are exercising their power but because they do not have the necessary money for the purpose. As most holdings are small, they

are managed by family labour, except for the harvesting season when labour is in peak demand. The agricultural labourers know that too, and know it very well. As they are hired for roughly six weeks a year, they seize the chance to get the best wages, and the land-owners are not always able to comply.

Both the landed and the landless are looking for jobs outside the village. This has led to a phenomenal rise in the extent of non-farm employment. In many cases, I have found that the family income of a small farmer is primarily from non-farm employment. Further, rich or poor, very few people in the village see their future in agriculture. Those with surplus cash would rather invest outside agriculture, such as in transportation, commercial shops, or in urban real estate. Against this background, it is not at all surprising that the caste system should be collapsing. This is what provides the occasion for the assertion of caste identities. As long as the system held, many poorer castes dared not come forward with their origin tales and with their demands to be treated as equals at least. The idea of caste dominance too can no longer be understood in local terms. It is now regional in character and its contours and alliances keep changing.

The caste system is, therefore, a thing of the past. The *dharmashastras* cannot be enacted any longer in Indian villages. Instead of the system, we now have caste identities and it is this that gives the optical illusion of caste dominating politics. Now that identities are to the fore, there is no hierarchical consideration of the Brahmannical type that governs caste relations. Castes make friends and enemies depending upon the issue at hand and on past and expected experiences.

One final point. We have seen before our eyes how the many cohorts of caste, for instance, inter-dining restrictions, occupational rigidity, and ritual ranking, have fallen by the wayside. The only thing that still operates

is caste and endogamy. As long as caste and endogamy are together, I would say caste identity has a future. The only way one can knock the bottom out of caste identities is increasing urbanization. Of course, the first flush of urbanization will bring about greater caste identity as one is freed from the bondage of the village. But as time goes by, one will find it more and more difficult to determine not only who one's neighbours are going to be, but even who one's son-in-law is going to be as well. Once this happens and endogamy breaks down, then and only then will the caste order gradually disappear.

Politics of Caste Among Indian Muslims

Professor Imtiaz Ahmed

[Professor Ahmed is Professor at JNU for the last 30 years. Prior to this, he has been in the University of Chicago, Institute of Advanced Study in Social Sciences in Paris, and the International University of People's Initiative in Peace in Italy. He has a string of publications to his credit. His latest publication is: Islam in South Asia. His work on Caste in Muslim Society is also very well known.]

Mr. Chairman, I would have preferred if there would have been a few more presentations on the Hindu aspect of the caste system before I came in.

First, the question of caste in respect of the Muslims is a remarkably tangled subject. It is tangled not sociologically, because the sociological evidence suggesting that there are social divisions that are remarkably comparable to the caste system, is overwhelming. Not only that, something similar to the *varna* division also obtains among Muslims in the sense that whether you call them ethnic groups, you call them caste-like groups or you call them castes. They are divided into three major layers, consisting of a category called the *Ashraf* which is the noble born or drawn from or tracing their descent to some sources across to Saudi Arabia. Then you have *Ajlaf* comprising a whole lot of occupational groups that are known by the hereditary occupation that they practise, and generally have come to power groups in the Hindu society. The weavers, the butchers, the cotton-carders are all caste groups among Muslims. Then you have also a third category called the

Arzal, which is a category of Dalit Muslims. Somehow, there are only seven communities of Dalit Muslims that we are familiar with and that to a certain extent is an indication of the fact that major conversions to Islam in this country took from the intermediate layers of the Indian society, particularly as a result of the character of the Moghul rule, where groups that were of some economic significance to the Moghuls were brought into the Moghul fold, or the Islamic fold, and the Dalits were not very widely converted at least in the mainland, though of course Buddhist communities in places like Kashmir and also in places like Assam and Bengal did convert to Islam. So, by and large, it is tangled not sociologically—sociological evidence, as I pointed out, is quite overwhelming—it is tangled emotionally. I feel, if you look at any literature that is produced on the subject, the authors would tend to argue that there is a caste-like division and having stated that, kind of recoil from that statement and say that we cannot say that it is a caste system because there is no sanction for it in Islam. This is something that runs through most of it. My own personal formulation on this has been that one of the psychological reasons for this tendency arises from the fact that because Muslims branched off from the local population, that is the Hindu population, there is an innate fear that if you were to say that we have a caste system we stand at the risk of relapsing back into the caste Hindu society and, therefore, in order to assert that we are distinct, we must deny the fact of caste even though it is a part and parcel of our social practice and sociological practice.

I want to make one point quickly that when it is said that Islam is opposed to the caste, it is an establishment opinion and it is possible to look at the text differently, which I have done recently, in fact in a piece I have done on whether there can be a category called Dalit Muslims.

I will make three quick submissions. One, that the

Islamic text in respect of the society to which it refers is fully cognisant and recognises the principles of social divisions based on income and on birth. So there were social divisions within the Islamic society as existed at that time; the text is relatively fairly open to the possibility that human inequalities do exist in societies and that they are a part and parcel of the society. The second point which I think is related to this is the notion of hierarchy—because caste has to be seen not only in terms of inequality but also in terms of the principle of hierarchy—and much of the current controversy about caste is with respect to the notion of inequality, not with the notion of hierarchy. I think Duma was absolutely right in making the point many, many years ago that after all, caste is hierarchy. The notion of hierarchy permeates the entire Islamic textual consciousness. Therefore, all relations—the relationship of the individual to God, the relationship of the men to women, the relationship of the individual to the community—are conceived in relatively hierarchical terms. And, therefore, the text is neither hostile to the notion of hierarchy nor is it hostile to the notion of social divisions, so on and so forth. It is true, however, that Islam in its conception, as the Indian constitution in its conception, conceives of a future society which would be egalitarian, where there is no social inequality, where everybody would have the same standing and so on and so forth. So what continues to be the establishment opinion, that Islam is opposed to caste, is actually derived from this projected scenario that in the future at least the Islamic society that would be created, or the society that Islam seeks to create, be an entirely egalitarian society.

This is with respect to the notion of caste among Muslims. By and large, today, we can identify three categories of Muslims—the so-called Ashraf caste, which is the high caste, the Arzal caste, the counterpart of the OBC, which are hereditary groups with counterparts groups

in the Hindu society, and then we have this small category of Dalits. The Indian constitution anticipated developmental and other interventions to be made in respect of three categories, to begin with to two categories of people, *viz.*, the scheduled castes and the scheduled tribes. After V. P. Singh's government, a third category was incorporated, which is called the Other Backward Classes, which, of course, makes provisions for interventions on behalf of the other backward communities that existed in the pre-Independence period as well as in the post-Independence period.

If you place Muslims in this, then it would seem that there are some tribal communities among Muslims—for there are Muslim tribes—the Gujjars and the Bakarwals, and the tribes of Lakshadweep, are a very good case in point of the tribal Muslim communities. In the case of the Dalits, as I mentioned, seven groups of Dalit Muslim are subjected to the same kind of treatment characterised by the discrimination, characterised by social distance so on and so forth that exist among Muslims. But because the reservation provisions do not anticipate allocation of these interventions in favour of non-Hindu Dalits, therefore, that category does not get any interventionist advantage. The Mandal Commission took care of that later on. But, by and large, on the ground that there is no caste among Muslims, the Indian state, in fact, excludes Dalit Muslims from the purview of the benefits of SC reservations for the time being, though there are many Dalit groups demanding those provisions to be extended.

Then we have a large number—the estimates roughly would be about 75 to 78 per cent—of Muslims which constitute what might be called the Muslim OBC category. The Mandal Commission then decided that it would include within the category of OBC all untouchable converts that are of non-Hindu origin. Therefore, Dalits are incorporated under the OBC, though they are not

entitled to share benefits as scheduled castes in their own right. Then castes which are occupational in nature, which have a counterpart group and so on and so forth. These are the groups which we know as Muslim OBCs.

There have been two or three tendencies. The OBC movement (I do not want to trace the rise of this)—those who are familiar with the rise of the Momen conference during the congress days in the pre-independence period would recall that—was a very sizeable movement, very substantial movement that continued to be assiduously committed to a united India and was also at the same time seeking to spread social consciousness for a better social standing and a better social position.

The grouse of the OBCs has been—as reflected in their demand and as reflected in their movement—is that they are not able to compete with the more advanced sections of the OBC communities of the Hindu variety, *i.e.* in comparison with the Kurmis, the Yadavs and the Jats and so on and so forth. As such they are at a disadvantage and they should, therefore, be entitled to a quota within the OBC category as Muslim OBCs. Now, this has provoked certain hostility across Hindu groups, who resent as they think that the cake would become shorter for them if such a quota system were introduced, and this has generated a certain kind of hostility on the part of the groups that are privileged or advanced in the OBC category.

A third tendency which is reflected in the discourse of the Muslim elites, is that because the 'Muslims as a class are backward and Muslims as a category are backward, there should be a ten per cent reservation for Muslims, which, of course, is contested both by the OBCs and by the so-called 'liberal' category—I do not know if there is a category of liberal Muslims, but if that exists, then they oppose that on a certain ground. The liberals say that if this is done, first, it will create a ready ground for the Hindutva forces to create hostility against Muslims and,

secondly, that it would lead to the privileged within the Muslim community taking advantage of this 10 per cent reservation. But the OBCs are opposed to this on the ground that, in fact, their own share would be greatly curtailed if such a reservation policy is adopted.

There has of late been also a tendency among Muslim OBC groups to tie up with the Dalits across Muslim society with Hindu Dalits and Muslim OBCs to form alliances with others. To a certain extent, I am, therefore, inclined to think that a kind of political and economic subaltern trans-religious identification is in the process of emergence which, to my mind, is the nemesis of the fundamentalist politics that the Muslim leadership has played for the last 40 or 50 years.

Politics of Dalits

Professor Gopal Guru

[Professor Guru teaches at Delhi University in the Department of Political Science and is also doing some work on issues related to Dalit women. Of late, he has been working on a very unusual area that of 'humiliation'.]

I will make three or four points. There will be some overlap on the points that have been made by the earlier speakers. Let me begin by asking: Is caste relevant in India today, more specifically in Indian politics? This is continuing with Dipankar's formulation. If it is relevant, in what form and at what level? These are two important questions. I am going to argue—and this argument is based on my observations on the field, which I visit intermittently. I am going to present to you that in certain conception of politics, caste has not remained to be as relevant as it was before. Particularly in electoral politics, it has not been so important. It is important, but not so important. Let me quote what the local activists from Bombay have to say about it. They say, casteism is irrelevant, but caste has remained relevant. That is the point they are making. They are making very subtle distinction between what is caste and what is casteism, and which category is relevant for electoral politics. Therefore, they say, casteism is not relevant. Caste, too, has remained relevant only for endogamous purposes, arranging relationships. The caste is governing matrimonial relationship and inter-community relationship. That is all. It is getting de-limited to that sphere. Therefore, one can argue that caste is becoming

relevant in some fields, and losing out in some other fields. Now, the feminists might take caste as a serious problem of not really subverting the patriarchal relationship. In the patriarchal politics, caste still has some importance. This is one angle.

There is an explanation to that, as to how caste has transmuted into something else, some other highly political relevant category. You will see OBCs and Dalits and to some extent tribals—tribals are being transmuted into a larger category based on ethnicity or religious identity so as to use this category against the minorities. This has happened in Ahmedabad, Gujarat, and Bombay. Whether it is going to happen in other parts of the country in elections, I do not know. That is what it has become today.

Therefore, in electoral politics, it certainly does not have high profile presence. It is relevant for nominations, this and that, but castes themselves are being transmuted by being given a pan-Indian character.

The other point arises because of the intrusion of new castes, that too upper castes, into politics of reservation and hence caste seems to be losing importance. The caste, therefore, is getting neutralized. Earlier, the middle class people in particular used to play caste-based reservation as a divisive factor. Everything was put down to this—caste-based reservation was the real problem in this country. Now, if the Brahmin caste from Rajasthan, a constituent of the Social Justice party, is asking for reservation, are you going to change your perception about the caste? Will you consider caste as a divisive factor? How are you going to theorise? That is why I said it is really difficult to theorise caste. The continuance of caste has become uncertain because of the new intrusion by castes coming from the top layer of the society. To that extent, one can safely conclude, look here, caste logic is losing its importance as far as new entries into reservation politics are concerned. I think caste, as a divisive, explosive, volatile

factor, is now getting normalised.

One will have to conduct a study on how the people feel now. Is there a notion of new brotherhood now that the Brahmins and the Dalits are in the same category? I do not think so; at least that is the hunch I have. One has to go and ask these people, the leader of the Social Justice Party in Rajasthan: What do you feel about the Dalits? Do you feel inclined to them, and have fascination and love for them? One has to ask them. The answer would be, I think, very negative, and it is the hierarchy, which Imtiaz Ahmed was talking about, still governing your mental make up.

The third point: why caste becomes important in one area and not in other areas? This point is about the nature of politics, particularly in India, which has undergone a tremendous change, both in terms of form and its articulation. Now, we have been so much Americanized. The media, TV, the electronic media has taken over—Yogendra is here, and he will add to this. You are forced to consume Political Science—I would not say that it is the whole understanding of the structure of Indian—where media itself is constructing and de-constructing personalities. And those personalities you are offered for your consumption. Therefore, what have become important are the cut-outs, the '*gustakhi maph*' shows, and similar other fares, and this, in consequence, has really neutralised or rendered useless the structural logic where one could really locate castes. The caste, as a structure-governing relationship, including politics of this country, is losing importance and significance because of the impact of the cut-outs and such other things. You project a person with a halo, as if nothing but that person is important, and you have to organise your thinking and action and take decision on the basis of that person. This is a big joke on Indian politics. Why are you projecting a person, as if he is all important and the voters are useless? The answer

to caste issue has become really a little less significant. I have a larger argument to make on this, but I will just leave it there.

I feel that the former Indian politics has taken a psychological turn where you find that it is the psychology—the feel good—becomes absolutely important and not the institutions embedded in the relationship. I will give you a very funny example. If I want to meet somebody and I offer to go to his party office, he says: “Don’t come to the office, what is there after all? You can talk to me on my cell phone.” You have compressed all the political relationship into a small little cell-phone. So where do you require caste-based deliberations, dynamics and all that? That is the problem for caste and that is the problem for everybody here.

Therefore, the caste in former politics may not be that important, as it is important in the patriarchy and political economy. I am not going to give any example of caste being so absolutely important in political economy. Dipankar mentioned some. You know, caste has not remained the same, but it has taken new *avatars*, and it is governing the political economy of this country. There was an interesting NDTV report—I am not condemning TV at all—which brought out a report on the accommodation problem, the housing industry in Bombay. As such, minorities are not sold flats or houses. After Gujarat, minorities have become a new caste, despite the fact that there is a hierarchy, internal hierarchy in Islam, but the new hierarchy is being confirmed. So they are becoming like Dalits. Dalits are also denied beautiful accommodation in beautiful colonies, where one will say it is a habitat and you can enjoy life free of pollution and criminality. I am not talking about one of the five freedoms that he is talking about. We have to discuss that as well, but caste has become absolutely entrenched and strong in some areas, but not so in the former political practice

of the country.

The last point I would like to make is on the Dalit politics, since I am working on that subject. What happens to Dalit politics? Is it based on caste? I would submit for your consideration, yes, it is based on caste. But if you really define caste also from the egalitarian point of view, then they do not continue to remain castes. They lose their very essence. Since OBCs, the Mandal caste, Muslim OBCs, the Dalits and the Tribals, do not have any other vibrant category to articulate their political aspirations, they are routing their aspirations through this form which is readily available to them. Secondly, the internal dynamics of the castes is progressively egalitarian, because they are the ones which have organised themselves on the basis of the future agenda of emancipation. Their very value content is equality and the caste is basically against equality and their agenda is to transcend such a system. So how can they be called castes? Therefore, their both internal and outer dimension is egalitarian. As such, they cannot be called caste, though they have adopted the medium or the idiom which is called caste.

But this is not true of others. For example, the Shiv Sena. The internal dynamics may be equality-driven, but outer expression is terrible. I think that balance, that mismatch is very carefully maintained by the Shiv Sena *pramukh*.

I think this is what is happening. It is not a simple, but brazen inter-play of caste in politics. It is much more complicated than what we think, both in terms of theory and practice.

Historical Development of Dalit Identity in Uttar Pradesh

Implications for Politics

Professor Sudha Pai

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This paper explores historical development of dalit identity in Uttar Pradesh, since the colonial period. It is based on the premise that such an exercise helps us understand present-day dalit politics in the state. More specifically, the paper argues that understanding the historical specificities of the Dalit movement in UP enables us to understand the role played by the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in the politics of this state: both its undeniable and seminal achievement of creating an upsurge from below, and at the same time its socially conservative characteristics that have contributed to the endemic political instability and economic crisis in the state in the 1990s. The BSP, in short, I argue, is a product of the Dalit movement as it has unfolded in this state.

The gradual emergence of Dalit consciousness and movements were a significant feature of colonial India.

The pace of change was, however, different in different regions of India, leading to *uneven* development of the Dalit movement across the subcontinent in the post-independence period. Two major legacies from the colonial period have been instrumental in shaping the ideology and agenda of Dalit movements/parties in the post-colonial period in UP. First, social awakening among the depressed classes in the colonial period in comparison with southern and western India arose very late in north India. This region did not experience any large-scale or sustained Dalit movement until very late in the colonial period, its mobilisational impact upon the vast mass of the depressed classes in the province was limited, and it came too late to have a transformative impact on society. As a result, there was *delayed development of dalit consciousness* among the large mass of depressed classes in the state. In the Bombay presidency, the late nineteenth century was a period of much change and it is often lamented that this early promise of the late 19th century in the long run has not been fulfilled. I will argue that such a promise did not exist in north India because the processes of social change were very different here.

Second, certain characteristics of the historical trajectory of social awakening and movements led by the depressed classes in the United Provinces are important in understanding Dalit movements in the post-colonial period. These are :

1. The movements in the colonial era were *reformist* and not radical in nature and did not espouse an anti-caste ideology.
2. They were limited to the urban-based, educated depressed classes in the towns of the United Provinces who did not attempt to mobilise the depressed classes in the rural areas, until the late colonial period.
3. Their main aim was initially to improve the socio-

economic conditions of depressed classes in the urban areas, and in the 1940s obtain a share in the new emerging post-colonial political order, rather than destruction of the unequal caste system. This helps explain the conservative ideology of later parties in the state and their preoccupation with political power rather than grassroots mobilisation.

A combination of factors was responsible for the slow growth of Dalit consciousness and lack of a sustained movement in the United Provinces as follows:

1. In contrast to the Bombay and Madras presidencies, the United Provinces underwent no social reform movements, which could have shaken the rigid caste hierarchy, introduced egalitarian values and created a climate favourable to the emergence of a dalit movement. In fact, Mahar society was in ferment before the advent of Ambedkar due to movements by leaders, such as Jotiba Phule, in contrast to the United Provinces, where old-age practices continued unhindered. In the Tamil areas of the Madras Presidency too, the conscious construction of a low caste or *adi-dravid* identity pre-dates the political expression of non-brahminism. The lack of any such cultural/political movements in the United Provinces meant the absence of any widespread anti-caste ideology and the passive acceptance of the unequal social and political system.

2. The pattern of mobilisation in the United Provinces during the National Movement was also significantly different from that in the Bombay presidency, insofar as its impact upon the lower castes was concerned. The anti-colonial movement in the United Provinces came under the leadership of Gandhi, while in the Bombay Presidency it was profoundly influenced by Ambedkar. In the United Provinces, both during the Kisan Sabha agitations in 1920s and the Civil Disobedience and rent campaigns in 1930s, low caste tenants and labourers participated in large

numbers. The Congress leaders, under Gandhi, recognised the political importance of mass mobilisation of the peasantry and supported their grievances as part of the struggle. However, once the movements acquired a degree of autonomy and incorporated some of the basic contradictions of Indian society—such as the unequal caste/class hierarchy—the leadership made a conscious effort to separate the “political” and “social issues” and called off the movements. Moreover, under Gandhi’s leadership, the Congress adopted a policy of “Harijan uplift” which once established, continued into the post-independence period with its attendant politics of patronage and vote-banks. In contrast, the Mahars had an alternative path of mobilisation under the leadership of Ambedkar. They used “political means” consistently and unitedly in their attempt to ameliorate social conditions, participate in the political process, acquire political skills, which would help their assimilation in the broader political mainstream.

3. An important contributory reason for absence of a Dalit movement in the United Provinces was the relative lack of economic development, resulting in extreme poverty among the depressed classes, compared to their counterparts in the Bombay Presidency. In the Bombay presidency, the advent of British rule created alternative occupational opportunities for the Mahars leading to their migration to urban areas from the 1860s, to jobs in the docks, the railways, textile mills, employment in the army and ammunition factories. These developments led to the circulation of new ideas, particularly through those Mahars who returned home to their native villages after a stint in the army or in the urban areas. In contrast, the United Provinces, apart from some improvements leading to commercialisation of agriculture in pockets, establishment of a few sugarcane mills, leather goods factories, and rise of cantonment towns, there was little attempt in the colonial

period to set up industries, which could have played a catalytic role in breaking down old structures. Towards the end of the colonial period, activities in towns began to have consequences in the rural sector but these came too late to have an impact in the colonial period. The traditional, unequal village structure continued uninterrupted, compared to western India, organised around two institutions—caste and the *jajmani* system. This effectively suppressed the initiative and capability for a revolt from below against caste oppression.

These developments shaped the type of movements that arose in the United Provinces. Two phases can be discerned: an early phase from 1920 to the late 1930s, of gradual awakening when the depressed classes adopted *sanskritisation* to rise in the caste hierarchy; a second phase in the 1940s when they renounced *sanskritisation* and Gandhian principles, and entered the political arena to improve their socio-economic situation and obtain a share in power in the new independent order that was emerging.

Phase of Awakening and Community Upliftment

The 1920s were a period of ferment and awakening among the depressed classes in the United Provinces. Two factors—introduction of education by the Christian Missionaries and the Arya Samaj and the establishment of the leather industry by the colonial government at the turn of the century—provided the stimulus in the awakening of the depressed classes. Most of the leaders of the UPSCF formed in the late colonial period and the RPI in the 1960s, were the sons of leather merchants who could acquire education, had the leisure and mobility needed to organise movements, such as B.P.Maurya, Gautam, etc.

The lack of a strong leader, like Ambedkar, who could bring all the smaller movements together, was an important reason for the lack of a large-scale and sustained movement. Very few can be described as state-level leaders who formed

the UPSCF. The large majority were merely local leaders, well known only in their own region, district or locality. Certain common characteristics are discernible in a generation of depressed class leaders born in the late 1800s, which provides an insight into the direction taken by the Dalit movement in the United Provinces.

1. Almost all these leaders were urban-based and their activities were limited to a handful of towns—Meerut, Agra, Kanpur, Unnao, Bareilly, Lucknow and Allahabad.

2. None of the leaders came from the poorer sections. While they did encounter social disabilities, few experienced great poverty or hardship in early life.

3. A common pattern of action noticeable among these leaders in this phase was of service or *upliftment* of their community in their own town, rather than organising a social or political movement. They were committed to improvement of material conditions of depressed classes, rather than breaking down the caste system or attacking the upper castes. In cities, such as Agra, they started libraries, Ravidas temples, schools and hostels for depressed classes, newspaper and organizations, such as the Jatav Mahasabha, which helped an entire generation to gain education and improve their socio-economic condition.

During this phase, two kinds of movements are seen: those aimed at raising their social status through *sanskritisation*, caste organisations and petitioning the colonial government for recognition of a higher social status and *Adi-Hindu* movements based on revival of *bhakti* devotionalism. These movements did not constitute an attack on the caste system, even though their definition of it as an instrument for imposing social inequalities and job discrimination in the towns implied a critique of ritual hierarchy. Neither of them developed into a 'full-blown' attack on the caste system.

Late Colonial Movements and the use of 'Political Means'

The 1940s constitute a significant break when many educated DC leaders in North India became interested in the National Movement and the activities of Ambedkar and his controversy with Gandhi. Jurgensmeyer describes this process of change as the "Ambedkar Alternative" while Lynch calls it a "turning point". Instead of *Harijan*, from 1935 onwards, these leaders adopted the nomenclature of SC and use of political means to introduce change in the conditions of their community. The reference group of identity of *jatav* leaders now became the *scheduled caste* community, with whom they identified as part of the untouchable section of the population, which now became the basis of a new *jatav* self-image and was a shift from the earlier claim to *kshatriya*, based upon notions of purity and pollution by which they had hoped to rise within the caste hierarchy. The origins of the movements in the late colonial period lie in this shift.

Consequently, the UPSC, as a branch of the AISC of Ambedkar, was formed in 1944 during a period of rising awareness among SCs. Formed by the coming together of local organizations, such as the *Jatav Mahasabha* in Agra, and *Chamar Mahasabha* in Kanpur. It provided the political platform on which SC leaders from a number of districts, such as Meerut, Agra, Lucknow, Kanpur, etc., were able to come together, albeit briefly. The UPSCF contested the 1945-46 elections on the agenda of separate electorates. The Congress victory made the Ambedkarites in the United Provinces even more opposed to joint electorates and led to a large-scale agitation for their rights in 1946 and again in 1947 in some districts, such as Lucknow, Kanpur, Etah, Etawah, Faizabad, Azamgarh, Agra, Ferozabad and Farrukhabad. However, the rapidly changing political situation led to collapse of the agitation. It was obvious that India would gain independence and on April 28, 1947, the Constituent Assembly passed a bill abolishing

untouchability and making its practice a criminal offence. Another important event took place on July 2, when Ambedkar was nominated to the Constituent Assembly, as a Congress Candidate from the Bombay Legislative Council. In this situation, an exodus began and many prominent SC leaders in the United Provinces offered their cooperation and services to the Congress. Thus, the UPSCF disintegrated at the time of independence. During the transitional phase of 1945-47, it was an important political force, but at independence its task was over; it lacked roots in the countryside to evolve either into broad social movement of the SCs, or a political party in the presence of the Congress in the United Provinces.

Post-colonial Period

This narrative helps us understand why the dalit movement in the post-independence period in UP has been slow and halting. It is not incremental and has experienced many setbacks. The 1970s, for example, constitute a hiatus between two periods of Dalit activism. The RPI remained a marginal party in UP for a brief period. Its brief electoral success in mid 1960s was possible because it was a period of Congress weakness. Starting from a limited social and regional base, at a time when the large mass remained trapped within the larger Hindu identity, before it could mobilise and improve its vote share or spread to new areas, the party disappeared. A product of ideas and developments in the late colonial period that had thrown up the UPSCF, which were no longer useful, it lacked a clear self-identity and its leadership remained deeply divided over both ideology and methods of action leading to self-destructive internal factionalism. For many among the small group of socially and politically aware leaders of the party, political participation within the new constitutional order, which gave them reserved seats,

abolished untouchability and promised economic betterment, emerged as a better means for entering the new power structures and obtaining social upliftment than leading a movement against the established social and political order. Consequently, their attitude towards the State and the ruling Congress party remained ambivalent making it easy for the latter to absorb it. By the late 1960s, the Dalit movement as a whole lost its distinct identity and entered into a phase of decline.

In the 1980s, the Dalit movement in UP entered a new phase of separation and hostility to mainstream parties and the upper caste Hindu community, leading to formation of the BSP. The emergence and establishment of the BSP as an important political force can be traced to a number of significant developments in the state and the country since independence, and more immediately in this decade. Two long-term factors have played a central role in the emergence of the BSP: democratization and affirmative action. In the changed context, unlike the RPI, the BSP developed a definite self-identity, strong and assertive leadership, and a distinct social base. The collapse of the "Congress System" in UP created a political vacuum which a new generation of educated, upwardly mobile, socially aware, SC leaders used for mobilization, and creation of a new identity of Dalit and based upon it a party. Simultaneously, there were a number of significant changes within the economy of UP, which underlay changes in rural social relations and emergence of low caste identity and assertion: economic development, rise in literacy among the Dalits and resulting political consciousness.

The BSP bears the imprint of both the colonial past and the nature of socio-economic and political changes which took place in the post-independence period in UP. For our understanding of the BSP, it is essential to grasp

that the above-described developments—in the economy, society and polity—have taken place only in parts of the state and the pace of change has been slow. Second, only a small section—mainly among the *Chamars*—have benefitted from these developments, the large mass of the Dalits due to their disadvantaged position could not take advantage of these changes. This means that economic development, education and affirmative action, together with the longer term process of democratisation, led to emergence of a small, privileged, middle and lower middle class, who formed the vanguard of the new “Dalit” assertiveness in the 1980s and 1990s and formed an *independent* party and movement. Consequently, the roots of the BSP, its ideology, leadership, and organisation are different from other Dalit movement/parties in the country formed in the early 1970s, such as the Dalit Panthers in Maharashtra in 1972 and the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti in Karnataka in 1974. The latter groups represented a new form of militant protest based upon the identity of “Dalit” against the failure of the State to eradicate caste hierarchies, oppression and untouchability. The BSP-led Dalit movement has its roots in the same period but has specific characteristics, which distinguish it from these movements. The BSP did not emerge out of revolutionary struggles or movements; its roots lie in a lower middle class “Trade Union” organisation of government employees formed in 1976 by Kanshi Ram—the Backward and Minority Classes Employees Federation (BAMCEF)—made up of the new, educated and better-off group among the Dalits. It was only later that its base was broadened by the formation of the DS-4. As a result, the BSP is not a movement emerging from civil society against the State. It is not a religious or reform movement, it is definitely a political organisation whose aim is to capture power and use it to improve the condition of the Dalit community.

Implications for the Present

What implications does the past have for present-day politics in UP. The historical development of Dalit consciousness and the trajectory it has followed since the colonial period has impacted upon the politics of UP. The BSP arose very late, thirty years after independence, as UP society was very conservative in outlook in the immediate post-independence period. There was consequently the lack of a strong anti-caste ideology and a sustained movement until comparatively recent times in UP. Yet formed by a post-independence, educated and socially consciousness new generation of leaders within a short period of its emergence, BSP has emerged as a strong party. Unlike the RPI, it cannot be co-opted by mainstream parties. It has developed a clear identity of its own.

As long as the BSP remained a Dalit movement, aimed at critiquing and attacking the existing hierarchical caste order and position of the Brahmins, it remained a socially progressive formation. In this phase, the achievements of the BSP are considerable. It was able to carry forward the ongoing process of democratisation in north India, leading to increased social and political awareness among the SCs and create a new identity and a counter ideology to the *varna* system—of Dalit and Ambedkarism respectively. This succeeded in removing the hold of Brahmanical ideology and submissive attitude of the Dalits, providing them with a new confidence and self-respect. Although the stress has been on political empowerment, in the social sphere, the rise of the BSP has provided self-confidence and Dalits are no longer prepared to put up with domination and oppression. Consequently, in the political field, the party was able to break down the vertical patron-client relationship with the upper castes and replace the Congress as the party representing the Dalits and consolidate Dalit vote behind the party. The BSP today occupies a central

position whose support is sought by all parties in the state. These are no mean achievements in the highly conservative society of UP, which still exhibits features of social feudalism.

Moreover, as a strong Dalit movement against upper caste domination in the 1980s, the BSP played a seminal role in containing the communal mobilization of the BJP in the early 1990s in UP around the issue of RJBBM. The BJP attempted to create a single Hindu vote-bank across the north Indian plains. In the 1993 assembly elections, the BSP, together with the SP, was able to defeat the BJP. Caste-based mobilization proved to be capable of uniting the backward and lower castes against the BJP, representing primarily the upper castes. The presence of the BSP has forced the BJP to moderate its ideology and widen its social base in UP. Beginning as an upper caste Hindu party, the latter is today trying to shed its upper caste image, widen its social base and build downward alliances. *Secondly*, the BJP has not been able to create a strong base in UP, as in Gujarat, due to the existence of the BSP and the SP.

However, the mid 1980s witnessed a shift from a strong movement against upper caste domination to an opportunistic political party keen to capture power. This has brought the socially reactionary and unprogressive character of the movement/party to the fore contributing to the endemic political instability and economic underdevelopment that the state has suffered throughout the 1990s. The BSP compromised with the same forces it described as *manuvadi* and communal, namely the BJP, in order to capture power. This happened precisely at the point when it seemed close to capturing power in collaboration with the backward classes and constructing a *bahujan samaj* in the state.

This compromise is in keeping with the historical trajectory of the Dalit movement in UP which has been reformist and not radical in character. A major legacy of

the Dalit movement since the colonial period has been pre-occupation with use of *political* power for introducing social change, rather than radical struggles at the grassroots. The movements led by Dalit leaders in the 1930s and 40s in UP were distinctly political in their orientation and goals. The emphasis on political power is also seen in the rapid disintegration of the UPSCF, once independence was gained. Large number of its leaders joined the Congress party, as they felt that they could best serve the interests of the Schedule Castes within a party that would form the government in post-independent India. This feeling among a section of the leaders of the RPI also made it possible for the Congress to subsume this fledgling party in the 1960s. There are strong parallels between the attitude of the leaders of the UPSCF in the 1940s, the RPI in the 1960s and the BSP in mid 1990s; all of them believed that political power is essential to improve socio-economic conditions of the lower castes, rather than a grass-roots revolution which would be arduous, time-consuming and difficult.

A second reason is that the BSP emerged out of the BAMCEF, a middle class government employee's organization, which has made it elitist and conservative in nature. It is not an anti-systemic party or movement which has challenged and tried to transform the basic structure of the Indian social system, replacing caste and the accompanying social oppression, economic exploitation and political domination by an egalitarian society. Rather, it is a party that wants to work *within* the system reforming it in the light of its own ideology and philosophy. It could be argued that the BSP is opposed to the *brahminical system*; however, it wishes to capture state power through electoral victory from the brahminical elite, replacing and not destroying it. Unlike the Dalit Panthers or the Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, it is not a party of the poor committed to the revolutionary transformation of the social order, but

of the better-off sections of the lower castes. Rather it is a *statist* party. It believes in providing social justice and uplift to the Dalits "from above" using the power of the State, rather than a revolution "from below", and has entered into coalitions/alliances with parties representing the upper castes, such as the BJP and the Congress to capture power.

A perusal of the programmes, when it captured State power, shows this clearly. The BSP came to power in 1995, based on a critique of mainstream parties, such as the Congress, which it described as '*manuvadi*' and anti-Dalit, and the promise of *retributive social justice* to dalits, which would right historical wrongs. However, it has no alternative economic agenda to offer which could lead to all-round development of the State and deal with the specific problems of deprivation of the Dalits. It has concentrated its energies on providing self-respect, pride and political empowerment to the Dalits. While in power-twice during the 1990s and again in 2002, the BSP has spent considerable amounts on Dalit-oriented programmes, such as Ambedkar Villages, Periyar Melas, and Ambedkar parks which were aimed at providing self-respect and empowerment, and consolidating the Dalit vote behind the party. These programmes have emptied the coffers of the state and little funds are left for investment in key sectors, such as education, infrastructure and health, which is harmful for the economy but more particularly, for the poorest sections of the population, which includes a substantial section of the Dalits. This has led to further deterioration of the state's economy and UP is in a debt trap. Many of the programmes for Dalits have not led to their upliftment. In most cases, it has been mere symbolism. Moreover, it is questionable whether in the future after leading a movement and achieving political power, programmes aimed at providing self-respect through cultural policies and political empowerment will continue

to satisfy the subaltern sections of the Dalits.

Nor have the BSP and the SP been able to join hands after 1993. An important project was the building of a Bahujan Samaj by these two parties based upon the common platform of opposition to brahminism, which would unite all sections of the backwards, Dalits, Schedule Tribes, and religious minorities overcoming their caste/class differences in order to upset the existing unequal social order. But this has not been possible due to the historical animosity between the two groups, which has led the BSP to prefer the BJP.

Thus, the socio-political roots of the BSP lie in the past. The historical path taken by the Dalit movement and its distinct characteristics in the colonial and post-colonial period have, to a large extent, shaped the activities of the BSP and impacted upon politics in UP. Both the positive and negative characteristics that the BSP has displayed are an end-product of the manner in which the Dalit movement has unfolded in UP.

Electoral Politics in Tribal Societies

Professor Virginious Xaxa

[Professor Xaxa has been Professor of Sociology in Delhi University. Prior to this, he has been teaching at the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU). He has done work on plantation labour and agrarian relations. For the last 5-6 years, he has been working on various tribes of the country. Among his most celebrated books is Policy and Its Impact on Tribals at the all India level with special emphasis on the North East.]

I am slightly moving away from the main theme of the discussions which we had earlier, because by the very nature of the population about whom I am trying to speak, who are generally considered to be outside the purview of the caste system, my presentation is likely to move on a different kind of direction.

My focus is on the kind of nature of politics which is being articulated by the tribes and, of course, it is very difficult to generalise. Surely, my reference point will be more of the Eastern and North-Eastern India. In passing, I would like to make some general observations also in the context of other parts of India.

Where do we begin, when we want to study the politics as articulated by the tribals? The assertions or the articulation of their interest or their aspirations or what they think are their requirements and needs can only be traced after they were incorporated into the so-called larger Indian society or the State structure. Therefore, to know the genesis of the politics, if one is trying to understand tribes, probably one has to start with their integration or

rather their incorporation into the larger State structure or the larger social system. To grasp their incorporation into the State structure, one has to really understand what has been the nature of this incorporation. It is in the light of this that probably one can see the way in which the tribal people began to articulate. One of the forms, in which you will find articulation of their anxiety, is that their interests began to be expressed more in terms of autonomy, more in terms of greater say, almost to the extent of moving away from the larger State structure or larger social system, creating a territorial boundary of their own. So, you will find that the earlier kind of articulation that one can see with regard to tribes is more in terms of trying to determine their life in their own way rather than being a part of the larger social system. That was being reflected more in terms of the kind of autonomy, creating a kind of State structure outside of the Indian union and within the Indian union. That seems to be the most decisive kind of articulation one can see on the eve of independence or in the post-independence era. One could think about why this kind of articulation? You find that this is probably much more pronounced in north-east and eastern India as compared to, let us say, in the southern or western or northern India, where you find absolutely no forms of that kind of an articulation. I have been wondering as to why one finds a great deal of articulation in the eastern and north-eastern India. I find that probably one of the reasons is the spread of education, literacy, and along with literacy also higher education, also with higher education you will find an emergence of middle class. I think, emergence of middle class becomes important. It is with the emergence of the middle class that the articulation of deprivation, domination and the exploitation really became pronounced: Either the cultural or economic, or political elite became really important. It is in that process one gets to see this.

Politics, as articulated by the tribals, had in fact the

genesis in this kind of domination, either cultural domination, at least in north-east India or the economic and political as well as cultural domination in the case of eastern India. I think that is where one finds the genesis of the politics.

This kind of politics eventually gives rise to what you call the regional dimensions or regional politics or regional parties and, increasingly, therefore, *vis-à-vis* the Congress in the north-east, you find emergence of a lot of regional parties, which began, in fact, to articulate for a separate state. This separate state was, in fact, being demanded by regional parties—whether you take Meghalaya or Mizoram and, to some extent, Nagaland—much earlier. The regional parties became more important. You find that the articulation of the tribals is being reflected more in the context of formation of regional parties. That one can see also in the eastern India, particularly Jharkhand or in area, where the Jharkhand movement had become very important. Increasingly, one finds that the tribal interest can be articulated only through the parties which have been formed or which represent the actual interest of the tribal people. Even when you find that there are regional parties, you find that there is a great deal of cleavage between the dominant linguistic community and the tribal community, and within that you can say that the cleavage is much stronger. Therefore, you find that the interest of the tribals, even when there is a larger regional party or a dominant linguistic community, has been subservient. Therefore, in the demand for autonomy, formation of regional parties become very important.

Even though emergence of regional parties is in order to articulate the interest of the tribals, there has also been a dilemma, a dilemma due to the fact that one is really part of the larger state, a larger social system. And the larger social system provides all kinds of space, and the space is, of course, for representation in the state legislature

and in the parliament. Therefore, you find that there is a reserved constituency. I think this policy of reservations in politics is something again one has to take note of. It is because of the reservations that you find there is competitive politics among the tribals. On the one hand, you have a regional party which you thought is going to represent the real interests, but, on the other, you find that there is a reserved constituency, with much more power, with much more resources, which can provide some kind of space for them, and as a result of which you find that competitive politics really begins among the tribals. All political parties find that reservations do provide some space. In fact, if there was no reservation, I do not think that the tribals would have been represented by someone else. It is precisely because of the reservations that you find the tribals being represented by tribals themselves. This opens up a lot of space for competitive politics among them. So, you find the national parties—Congress, Left and others—competing because each one of them is trying to provide space for the tribals. This is because of the compulsions of the reserved constituency and there is no way in which one can do away with that, as it provides all kinds of space for this kind of politics.

But within this politics of reserved constituency, I feel there is always a feeling of being let down, a feeling of not being taken seriously, a feeling of not addressing the issues which really affect the tribals. The more you are within the party, the more you are sharing the power, the more you are aware of what is really happening in politics, the more there is the anxiety within them, because senses of deprivation, discrimination, and domination start building up within the political party itself. Whatever party you take, whether it is the Congress or any other party, there is always only a symbolic representation of the tribals. The actual interest is not to represent, but just because of the compulsions of reserved constituency, you provide

them some space. But within the space provided, there are all kinds of discriminations, all kinds of dominations, as a result of which you find there are some kinds of problems which are emerging. This is one kind of scenario.

One cannot really generalise on it. But when you find that there is a competition between regional parties, I think the electoral politics, *i.e.* the way in which the tribals have been voting, becomes difficult. What I find today is that this competition is increasing. While in eastern India the national parties—either the right, centre or left, as well as regional parties—are competing with each other; whereas when you move away from eastern India, the competition is taking place more and more between the regional parties. In fact, for a very long time, the Congress had a complete monopoly over the tribals. During the last 10 or 15 years, this monopoly of Congress is really getting cut down. The reason why this has happened is that the Congress has taken them for granted. This is evident from the kind of policies that had been pursued, the legislations, enforced; though well meaning, but I think these have not delivered to the people. If you look at the grassroots, there are all kinds of problems—alienation of land, displacement, unemployment and land passing away from traditional tribals. Although in the last 50 years, a lot of well-meaning policies have been enacted, yet enough has not been delivered to the people. So long as there was no competition politically, the people were constrained to vote for the Congress, because there was no other alternative, no other competitor. But of late, I think the competition has really emerged with the coming of the BJP. Although, on one hand, it is not delivering to the people, the BJP is cushioning the tensions which are already there. Cushioning is taking place more in terms of social welfare. BJP, through its other organisations, has been working very systematically among the tribals for the last 30 or 40 years in terms of setting up of various kinds of NGOs and

organisations. RSS is running institutions, running schools, hostels, so on and so forth. The anxiety of the problems of development—the problems which have been created with the nature of development—and, that distress has, in fact, been cushioned by these kinds of organisations, which have come up. Therefore, you find in most of the tribal areas, there is a very strong cadre of the BJP in terms of RSS and other organisations. Therefore, there is no political party which can really compete with the BJP today. Wherever there are Left parties, one can see it, but elsewhere the Congress is not able to do this as it does not have that kind of a base, and they are not engaged in that kind of social welfare activities. As such, they are not able to cushion anxieties and tensions that have emerged. The result is that the BJP has increasingly taken over. BJP has no competition at all and probably, in the next two or three decades, BJP is really going to sweep the tribal areas unless something extraordinary happens.

The agencies which possibly could have contained it—which were so far containing it to a great extent—were the Christian missionaries, particularly in eastern India. These do not have so much presence in other parts as these are not so strong there. The Christian missionaries were in it, because they were the ones who have been doing social work as a kind of cushioning the tensions. These Christian missionaries were the backbone of the Congress. These missionaries have themselves become vulnerable in the last 10 to 15 years, for whatever reasons. As a result, you find the activities of the Christian missionaries in the tribal areas have to a great extent been curtailed. Therefore, you find that these organisations, which could divert the movement from one direction to other, have become very, very vulnerable. Therefore, I think in other places also the BJP is increasingly going to become stronger and stronger, because it is engaged in social welfare activities, because of the human resources it has,

and because lot of institutions are being set up almost every day in different parts of the areas where the tribals are living. That is the kind of trend that is taking place.

At the same time, one cannot generalise on this. You also find that in eastern India and in the North-East wherever some kind of consciousness has emerged with the rise of middle class and spread of education, the regional parties increasingly become important. Now you are also hearing similar things about Gondwana in Chhatisgarh. This can be contained only by emergence of regional parties, which to some extent seems to be happening. The other way could be through assertion of identity by creating political space, in terms of the local self-government, where you can have control over the resources. At the same time, not only in politics, the tribals have become increasingly conscious of how best they can safeguard their interest in terms of control over the land, or resistance to large-scale projects which give rise to displacement, etc., and the strengthening of the local self-government. This is what you can see in Kerala, with C. K. Janu and all others. So, there have been examples where you see the tribals seem to be moving in different directions, but in large parts of areas the tribals are increasingly getting absorbed into BJP politics.

Caste as Social Capital in Modern India

Professor Satish Deshpande

[Professor Deshpande is both a sociologist and an economist. In fact, he has worked as a full-time community worker in Rajasthan earlier. Now he is teaching in the Institute of Economic Growth in JNU. His main areas of work are: socio-cultural aspects of economy, especially class structure and economic ideologies; caste inequalities and identities in contemporary India and their relationships.]

The first point I would like to make is the inevitable aura of disapproval that hangs over terms like caste and casteism. Casteism is a term that we always reserve for the things that other people do. What I myself do, I would describe as retaining one's cultural values, respect for tradition, and so on; when others do the same or similar things, I describe them as casteism. So, my first point is that this inbuilt 'illegitimacy' is a broader issue having to do with caste as an institution. There is this bad odour that seems to hang around it. Even within the social sciences, we have not quite got over this problem that it creates for us, and the embarrassment of working on this institution. One of the most far-reaching consequences of this embarrassment *vis-à-vis* caste in the social sciences has been that this concept has got locked into a very unproductive negative mode ever since the independence movement, roughly the period covered by the collective memories of the people in this room. We have been schooled to think of caste as an institution whose abolishment or disappearance is eagerly awaited. Modern Indians have always felt—at least collectively, and in

public—that the only civilised response to caste is to wish to abolish it.

While this was indeed a laudable political objective, from the social science point of view, it locked us into an unproductive stance *vis-à-vis* this institution, in the sense that we kept thinking about caste as a prohibitive force, as a force that blocks, prevents and does not let things happen. We think of caste in negative terms only or primarily in negative terms, as an institution that says “No” to so many things. We have not paid as much attention to its productive aspects—what it enables and what it makes possible.

Productive Aspects of Caste

When I use the word ‘productive’, this does not necessarily mean desirable. The productive effects of caste may not always be good or worthy of support. But we still need to think of caste not just as a force that says no, that blocks, but also as a force that elicits, that makes possible, that empowers, and so on. Because of the ‘bad odour’ and the embarrassment that surrounds caste—and most academics being upper caste, middle class people feel this—we have perhaps been less sensitive to the productive aspects of caste.

If one begins to pay attention to the productive or enabling aspects of caste, one way of studying these is to think of caste as a form of *capital*. As we all know, the term ‘social capital’ is now very fashionable and two of the most famous names associated with it recently are Robert Putnam and, of course, the World Bank. To cut a long story short—I am not going into the academic details—in my opinion, this concept of social capital is a relatively ‘thin’ notion of capital. There are other scholars in social sciences who have used concepts like ‘symbolic capital’, ‘cultural capital’, and so on—most notably French socio-anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu, American sociologist

James Coleman, and others. These other traditions of thinking about social capital conceptualise it as a 'thicker' institution, more deeply embedded in society. I think these latter traditions are of more use to us in the Indian context.

What would it mean to think of caste as a form of capital? Roughly speaking, it would mean that we think of caste as though it were a kind of property. In other words, we would apply the analogy of property to caste as an institution. What are the main characteristics of property as a social institution? For something to become property, firstly, it should confer some benefit (whether real or imagined, *i.e.*, material or psychological); secondly, it should be something that is privatisable—*i.e.* you should be able to exclude others from using it, unlike a public road or sunshine, and so on which cannot become property. Thirdly, you should be able to pass it on in some way; it should be inheritable in some fashion. If you think of these three basic qualities of capital, then we can see that caste also has these to some degree—it is an institution that confers benefits of some kind or acts as a resource in particular contexts and it is privatisable. Its use or benefits can be limited to a certain set of people and others can be excluded from it; plus it can be (and has been) transmitted across generations—perhaps not in the same way as other kinds of material capital, but nevertheless it is inheritable.

With this kind of a framework in mind, let me once again, to cut a long story short, straightaway suggest to you that there have been two broad eras or epochs in which caste has functioned as capital in particular ways. (What I am presenting here is only a very brief sketch, an outline of the detailed argument.)

The Nehruvian Era

The first era, broadly speaking, is the Nehruvian era. In this era, caste functioned as capital in two major contexts.

The first, and to my mind the least noticed context, was the ways in which the upper castes leveraged their caste capital to move from their earlier economic base in the rural areas, involving various kinds of property rights over agricultural land, to move to the urban areas and new kind of economic base involving 'credential' capital or capital based on educational qualifications of various kinds. This is the era of development, when scientific technical manpower was being developed, this is the era of massive investments in institutions of higher learning. This era gave the Indian State unprecedented legitimacy and prestige, partly because (according to the thinking of that time) the State was supposed to play a leading role in development; and partly because the State had inherited the moral prestige of our freedom struggle.

This context provided a historic opportunity to the upper castes who could simultaneously pursue the lofty public ideals of development, while at the same time pursuing their own career advancement. To use a term that sociologists use, their own advancement could be productively 'misrecognised' as development, which it also was to a some extent. These opportunities were available only to the upper castes because the traditional social system and the colonial system had combined to place them in the right place at the right time. The upper castes were the ones with the educational qualifications necessary to enter government jobs; they were also the ones with the material and, most importantly, the cultural resources needed to take advantage of the opportunities for higher education, specially in technical-professional fields. Basically, what was happening was that immoveable property in land was being converted into more portable property in credentials or educational qualifications. And this conversion depended crucially on caste—in other words, caste was itself functioning as a form of capital that allowed this leveraging, this transition. In a certain

sense, one could compare this to what Marx called the process of original accumulation, the process by which capitalism first came into existence. It never gets repeated—like all beginnings—and it is a once-only event. In this sense, the process by which modern India was created by my parents' generation—the Mahalanobis-Nehru generation—was a process dominated by the upper castes. However, the most crucial aspect of this domination was that it was achieved *not in the name of caste but in the name of modernity and development*. In fact, the relevance of caste in this process was actively suppressed or denied, sometimes (or even most of the time) with very good intentions. But regardless of the intentions, the stark fact was that the upper castes cornered most of the 'urban-modern' benefits of development.

The second major context in which caste was being leveraged as capital was that of the dominant castes and the social and political transformation that came about with independence and with the coming of adult franchise. The impact of this on the Indian society is fairly obvious. For the first time, we had actual adult franchise and what are called the dominant castes were leveraging their caste capital in particular ways and beginning to play a new role in independent India. Unlike the process I had outlined earlier, this process—namely, emergence of intermediate castes as the dominant force in rural India and by extension in national politics—has been studied extensively. Sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and even economists have worked on this phenomenon. It is quite well known and I don't really have to say much about it here.

The Contemporary Era

These were the two major ways in which caste was being leveraged as capital in the Nehruvian era. This era lasted, roughly, up to the 1980s. Since the 1980s, we are in a

different era. For want of a better term, let us call it the contemporary era. This era is marked by changes of various kinds. First of all, the age of developmentalism is gone. We are now in the era of *globalisation*— a new term that is taking over the ideological space once occupied by development. Like its predecessor term, globalisation also means different things in different contexts. The new era has brought important changes for both the routes of ‘capitalisation’ of caste described above.

In the urban-modern sphere, we have lots of changes. The role of the State is now seen very differently. We are beginning downsizing of government. We have the entry of multinationals not just as sellers but as employers. We have, most importantly, the west or more broadly the developed world emerging as a horizon for what used to be the Indian middle class in the Nehruvian era. This class is no longer a ‘middle’ class in any of the different senses in which its ‘middleness’ was understood. It is more of an elite class now, one which no longer has the nation as its horizon. The horizons of this class have gone global as its primary objective now is a frankly self-centered one, namely to enter the global or internationalised middle class. There is also change in the structure of credential capital— apart from a few elite institutions, the former middle classes have, by and large, abandoned the State educational system—they no longer need State support for educating their children, nor are they looking to the State for employment. We must remind ourselves that, for whatever reasons, this group is overwhelmingly upper caste.

In the other context, the ‘rural-traditional’ context, what seemed like the stable dominance of the dominant castes—which political scientists also call the Congress era—has come to an end. The old dominant castes are facing challenges from a broader segment of the so-called ‘Shudra’ or non-twiceborn castes, what are now called the Other Backward Classes, more precisely, the relatively less

privileged, less resource-rich members of this invented category. In short, it is a less neat era, there is a lot more confusion, there is a lot more up for grabs, a lot of things are 'in transition'. This is a very broad picture of these two eras—the Nehruvian era and the contemporary era.

What Kind of Capital is Caste?

Let me now return to a more detailed consideration of what it might mean to think of caste as capital. I think, it is useful to think of caste as capital on two broad registers or dimensions. One register might be called 'technologies of the self' (to borrow a term from a famous French thinker). Membership in a caste enables a person to develop particular kinds of competencies, skills, attitudes—in short, various resources that are *embedded in social identity*. Unlike money or land or other material assets, these assets are almost inseparable from the bearer's social person—hat is, they become effective only in particular social contexts and relationships where they are recognized and valued. As a shorthand term, one could use the term 'merit' for these kinds of resources. But this is also a risky move, because in our society the term, 'merit' is already loaded—even over-loaded—with various meanings.

The main problem in thinking about the notion of merit is that we have been plagued by a dichotomous—that is to say, an 'either-or' or 'black-white'—framework. For most upper caste people, 'merit' is the opposite of 'caste'. The word invokes the idea of an intrinsic ability that has very little to do with social processes—it stands for inherent ability uncontaminated by caste, money, etc. On the other hand, when merit is debunked or critiqued from the side of the so-called 'lower' castes, the other side of the dichotomy comes into play, and it is claimed that there is no such thing as merit, that it is just an upper caste conspiracy and so on. These 'either-or' frameworks have unfortunately also infected the academy, and social

scientists have also been imprisoned in this 'black-white' way of thinking. We have yet to develop a detailed concrete account of how particular kinds of abilities and competencies are both intrinsic skills and undeniable objective capabilities, and at the same time these are embedded in particular kinds of social contexts or caste habitats. Therefore, they are not 'caste neutral'—they owe some part of their existence to caste, even though this may be partly unrecognised or unconscious or unintentional. To put it more strongly, the development of merit in this sense, maybe 'in part', based on caste-based forms of inclusion and exclusion. This is one story that really needs, to be told. We need a more sensitive, more concrete and detailed history of this.

To give an example, one way of telling this story could be by relating this to a history of the development of the technical professions in India. How were particular competencies developed for the first time? What sorts of resources were used or were available for learning something previously unknown? Or, to take another example, one could think of it in terms of a social history of the examination. In the Indian context, in particular, the examination is an extremely important institution that not only measures merit but also functions as a socially legitimate gate-keeping mechanism for saying 'No' to a very large number of people who cannot be provided jobs or other scarce resources. There is a vast amount of social energy spent on devising ways to succeed in examinations, and it would be interesting and fruitful to study the role of caste in this. In short, in studying the relation between caste and 'merit', we have to be able to separate out the ways in which exclusion may have been produced at the same time as competencies of a various kinds were also being produced.

Another register in which we could possibly think of caste as capital is the register that is most relevant for

today's discussion. Others have already spoken about it, namely caste as a political resource. It could be called the leveraging of collective identities to produce synergies of a kind that would not be available to you if you were not using caste. Here, too, I think social scientists have been very guilty of laziness. Let me mention my own discipline, Sociology, which is very proud of having discovered or put into play notions like dominant castes, sanskritisation and, most importantly, the notion of 'vote-bank'. From a sociological point of view—today there are others who have also worked on this—it should be amply clear, not just to an academic but even to a lay person, that the notion of vote-bank is a lazy term. It is lazy because it conceals much more than it reveals—it does not tell us about the concrete processes or the *work* involved in producing caste politics. After all, this is politics, not pure ascription—it is not just by being born a Jat or being born a Brahmin or being born a Yadav that something called politics is gifted to you. When millions share this quality, why do some become politicians and others fail? Politics also involves work of a certain kind, which has to be 'produced' through symbolic work. We don't yet have good accounts of this kind of work, although there is activity on this front, especially in the recent past, including by people present here, such as Sudha Pai. We need more such detailed accounts of concrete work that is involved in caste politics, the labour that is involved in creating and maintaining what are very lazily called 'vote banks'.

Concluding Remarks

To return to my original point, what is gained by looking at caste as a form of capital is that we begin to notice something that has escaped our notice or that has not been emphasised enough—that is the productive or enabling aspects of caste. It will help us to break out of this negative mode in which we have been stuck *vis-à-vis* caste. This

is not to say that all the things that caste produces are great things that should make us happy or proud, but that as social scientists, as people wanting to analyse society, we cannot be blind to these productive aspects. This is the sense in which I would say that even though looking at caste as a form of capital may be taking a step back from the immediacies of the coming election and the role that caste might be playing before our very eyes, I think it is still a useful perspective to have in mind. Because whenever we think of the 'encashment of caste'—this is a typically upper caste or 'non-voting class' view of contemporary politics—let us remember that this is only one of the forms in which caste has been encashed. There have been other forms in which caste has been encashed, forms which we have been taught to look past, forms which have been invisible to us. Precisely, in order to be able to truly 'abolish' caste, it is necessary to understand the different ways in which caste has functioned as a kind of capital in modern India.

Brighter Side of Caste Politics

Professor Yogendra Yadav

[Professor Yadav is well known for more reasons than one. He is the Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies and co-director of Lok Neeti, a residential programme. He is a psephologist working on elections in India and quite a popular figure on TV channels, specially the NDTV. He has written several articles and a book co-authored with Dr. D. L. Sheth on Electoral Politics, which is about to be released shortly.]

The previous speakers (some of whom have been my teachers) have already covered the subject from different angles. So, I am wondering what more could I say on the subject. I am a social scientist, but as you know, I have been working on the elections in recent times. There is some advantage in popular communication as it gives you some fresh ideas which you do not get because normally you are only in touch with like-minded people. I have chosen to speak in Hindi, not because people here will not understand—all of them know English very well—but if I start to speak in English and I keep thinking in English, a social scientist slant and idiom come in, whereas if I speak in Hindi a different thought process works and a different world comes in.

What is the essence, the main points of all that has been spoken so far? We are all educated people, residing in cities. We seem to be somewhat obsessed with caste. We also seem to equate the terms 'casteism', 'communalism', 'regionalism' and tend to feel that these are all some kind of a disease, a cancer and constitute a great disaster in

our body politics. Of course, as responsible citizens, we must be concerned with these issues. Sometimes, we also speak of this problem in relation to economic development, but we do seem to consider this as a kind of a terrible thing in our society. Satish Deshpande also said that social scientists also start on this premise.

I was wondering whether I should call it disease, cancer, or a ghost. The term 'ghost' appeals to me better. Because when we start brooding on ghost, it starts to climb on to our head, it starts to get the upper hand. This is what seems to have happened to those who think about casteism that way. Previously, it used to frighten us from a tree-top, now it has jumped on to our shoulders. This has, in fact, upset our normal process of thinking and has coloured our thinking, making us think in odd ways.

What is the essence of what the previous speakers have said today? That casteism is bad, it is bad particularly because it has a 5000 year old tradition behind it, that our young polity has been captured by this age-old villain, and that this would have terrible consequences on our polity, and the nation must be saved from its clutches; that caste is an old institution and it has, thus, become a part of our nature; that our helpless polity has come under its grip; and we must change all this. These things have been brought out in the morning session discussion, and I thought I will make pointed references to them.

As Satish has said and others have said, we tend to equate the terms 'caste' and 'casteism'. We must ponder over this for a minute. When a person says he is a Saraswat Brahmin, we think he is speaking on caste basis. When I go to Tamil Nadu and someone comes to me and tells me that he is also a Yadav—who knows what his caste is, if he comes to my village and says this, perhaps he might be hounded out there as a 'foreigner', but he also seems to speak of it as a caste. When we talk of OBCs, we are also treating it as a caste. A hundred years back,

perhaps, there was no such thing as 'OBC', somehow this term came to be included in the Constitution and we have started using it as a caste—actually OBC is a collective term referring to a large number of castes. In fact, I would go to the extent of saying that Yadav is not a caste, but it is a 'political coalition', like the term NDA, *i.e.* the National Democratic Alliance, which is a political coalition formation, a political federation. But they do not marry with each other.

I read a beautiful passage in a book by Satish Deshpande. The book starts with an episode which takes place in a hotel in Hyderabad. A person goes to the hotel but nobody attends to him. He shouts at the waiter in English, "Do you take me for a scheduled caste?" There is no connection between the word, 'Scheduled Caste' and 'Dalit'. But we consider these terms as a caste. They are not castes. So what we learn from this seminar is that in this package, which we call 'caste', there are different animals, different things, and we should consider each of them separately. I may come back to this point a moment later, because 'caste' is used in different ways at different places, denoting different meanings. Some caste may have a beautiful meaning, while another caste may mean some association with violence.

In my village, sometimes people sit together and think about the question of dowry. Someone might say that in our society the problem of dowry has increased, and that the society should decide that not more than eleven persons should go in a Barat from our society and no dowry should be demanded. But when he says 'society', he means Yadavs, nothing more. In one sense, you might call it casteism, but there is lot of selfishness involved in it. It happened to me once. I married a girl from outside the Yadav community. A person from the village bemoaned that such an educated person from our village could not get a suitable, educated wife from the community. He did not

mean any offence when he said this. That is a kind of casteism, but harmless, not the kind of casteism that will break up your country.

Another instance. Sometimes I might get telephone calls from some educated people for using my influence in getting them a job. A person once phoned me up and said, my name is Anand Prakash, but actually I am a Yadav from Bihar. Please speak to someone about me on the interview committee.

This is yet another matter. So we should not club all issues arising from 'casteism' in one package. We must think of separate treatment for each illness. If we consider them all as one package, there will be a problem. This is one lesson we have learnt today.

There was a mention that the caste system goes back to 5,000 years and that it is a very rigid and inflexible system. This feeling is not something new. As some speakers pointed out, please read some history and anthropology. We will come to know that after all this has not been such an inflexible system, that it has been changing constantly and, in fact, has been changing right in front of our eyes. As I pointed out just now, in Bihar, Yadav is the most important caste today, both in terms of numbers and also in terms of the leading role that it plays in politics. But those who know Bihar will know that only 50 years back, there were three important castes—Gop, Gwala and Ahir. Even 10 or 15 years back no inter-marriages took place between the members of these castes. They were considered three separate castes. But in the mid-twentieth century, the Yadav Mahasabha made efforts to bring these three castes together. In the same way, in recent years, Mr. Bajpai brought together his coalition partners. The Yadav Mahasabha brought them together and asked them to proudly call themselves Yadav. So, by and by, during the last sixty or seventy years, the Yadav emerged as a major caste. During last 10-15 years, they have also

started inter-marriages.

What does this tell us? That it is not as if we are in the grip of a caste system which is 5,000 years old. What has happened is that politics has altered the structure of the caste system. And this is happening in different parts of the country at a very fast pace. Therefore, it is not correct to say that caste system functions from within an inflexible boundary of its own. There is a term 'gerrymandering' which is used in America. An MP might suddenly get into his head to say, please change my boundary. The cheating that takes place while changing the boundary is known as gerrymandering. I will say that there is lot of gerrymandering taking place in the caste system. There is a caste called Gadaria in Gujarat. Who knows, they might start calling themselves as Yadav. This has nothing to do with casteism; it is a pure and simple political coalition. In Tamil Nadu, for instance, some people have been convinced that they are Yadavs, because they were Krishna-bhaktas, as there are people in Orissa also. So what we call 'caste' keeps changing with times and it changes fast.

You go to a village in Bihar and tell them your name is Yogendra. At once, they will ask you, "Yogendra what?" You say, do not be silly, I am telling you I am Yogendra. And the response is: "Okay, give me a straight answer—are you 'forward' or 'backward'?" They did not ask whether you are an Ahir or a Brahmin, but whether you are forward or backward. Now, in every language, terms 'forward' and 'backward' are used. In fact, we are creating a new caste. So caste is not something inflexible, which has been handed over to us 5,000 years back; it is being created, getting split and is changing. And it is changing before our very eyes, as some speakers pointed out.

Third point: It is not as if our 50 year old State is in the grip of 5,000 year old caste system. The reverse is possibly true. I am not saying anything new. Thirty years

back, Professor Rajni Kothari—who was to attend this seminar, but could not as he has been unwell—made a statement that what is called casteism in Indian politics is actually politicisation of caste. You might say that this is just a matter of semantics. But there is a difference. And the difference is: which is the horse and who is holding its reins. What is more likely is that politics is holding the whip and caste is the horse. This is happening at many places that politics is actually directing the caste, do this, do that. As Professor Dipankar Gupta said in the beginning, there are always conflicts in the villages, but which is the caste, and which is the boundary of that caste is determined by politics. So, politics plays a major role in these things. Someone mentioned about the Maratha caste. There are a number of castes within this term. This is all the handiwork of modern politics. Creation of OBCs, or Dalits, consisting of so many castes, which don't even inter-marry and yet they have all come together—all this has been brought about by the modern politics. Modern politics is indeed revolutionising the caste system. It is not a one-sided play.

In passing, I would like to make another comment. Both Satish and Professor Sheth mentioned the embarrassment felt by an educated person in India that he is living in a country which has this obnoxious system of caste. But there is no country in the world which does not have some divisions on the basis of one's birth, and there is no country where this is not related to politics. The term 'part' is in-built in both the words 'party' and 'partition'. And parties are formed on the basis of divisions within a society. Politics is also similarly based on divisions within a society. Sometimes, I feel that we should keep aside this issue of caste. But then we realise that this is something which happens in every part of the world when you are asked "where were you born". If I go to Uttar Pradesh, it would not be prudent to call myself as a Yadav.

Perhaps, I might say, I am not Yadav from that part of Uttar Pradesh, I am from Haryana. These interplays keep taking place in politics.

I would like to refer to a couple of other lessons that we have learnt from this seminar today. The image of caste we have in our mind is like a dark well, once you go into it, everything is finished, everything is closed for you, modernity is shut from you, etc. What we have learnt today is that, maybe politics is somewhat like a dark well, but at the same time, politics may also be the ladder to get out of the well. This has happened in many places. We often say that vote-bank politics is taking place in Uttar Pradesh, and the SP and BSP are playing pure caste-based politics. But we do not say that BJP is playing caste politics. If you go by the term 'vote-bank', all the three parties are playing a similar game and the vote they get is based on their respective vote-banks. We do not say that BJP is casteist, but we only say that SP and BSP are indulging in casteism. It is possible that what BSP is playing is caste-politics, but actually it may be a ladder to get out of the dark well, to get out from a situation in which millions of people have been pushed into. Hence, it may not be just a negative use of caste, but may be a method of getting liberated.

This has happened in Uttar Pradesh. In the last ten years, lakhs of people have participated in the elections. You could not imagine that such people would ever think of being able to vote in elections. Now lakhs of people can think of riding a horse at marriage; same people who only some time back could not even imagine that people of their caste could ride a horse in their village at marriage. People in villages, who used to stand up before the so-called superior caste, now keep sitting on their cots, unmindful of any caste complex. This is a beautiful thing. Such revolutions take place only once in a long time. So, let us not run it down simply as caste-based politics, let

us not throw it down the drain. Major developments are taking place in the country and we must ponder over them.

Another lesson that we learn from the discussion is that in some places casteism may not be visible. As we said earlier, many things may be happening where casteism is visible. What Satish has told us is that even when caste is not visible in some places, even then casteism may be operating there. If you were to take a census of people in this room—I know all the panelists and a few others, but not all the people present here—but I can say with guarantee that 80 per cent of the people present here are upper-caste people. Because in the seminars held in IIC, 80 per cent of the people always come from the upper castes. If you do not trust me, let us do a survey.

I will narrate an interesting thing. Once Rajdeep Sardesai was interviewing me on the reservation policy in their "Big Fight" programme on the TV channel. Every time someone spoke against reservations, there was loud applause from the audience. I told to Rajdeep, "This is too much. Stop for a moment and let us play fair. How many among the audience belong to SC or ST or OBC. All right, also add Muslims. How many in the audience belong to these four categories?" It turned out that in the studio there were only four out of 100 persons belonging to these four groups. So, what appears as 'casteless' may actually be deeply caste-entrenched. When six people sitting in the evening debate on caste and lament: "See, how casteism has destroyed this nation. Look what Mayawati is doing; look at Mulayam Singh; look at Deve Gowda", you may be sure that all six of them, or at least five of them, belong to the upper castes. We must really ponder over this.

There is often a demand that politics must be based on merit, on high thinking, and on good tradition. I agree with all this and, in fact, I try to see that this is brought about. But, from time to time, we must also consider,

whether we are not, through the backdoor, asking for perpetuation of the rule by the same people who have been ruling this country for the past 100 years. Against this, no body will say that I have been in power all these years, but now you take over, and that after governing this country for 5,000 years, my people are now tired, and you better take over the reins. This never happens. Nobody says simply that he has been governing this country for so long but he has now been rightly removed. Instead he will lament: "Look, how justice has been perverted, and how the country is being destroyed." He won't say that another person has come to power, but that history has changed, and a tradition has fallen.

These things have been happening for the last ten or twenty years. We must give some thought to this matter. The question may be asked: What do we do? What all that has been said here, amount to saying that casteism is a great thing, applaud it. Many people applaud Mulayam Singh Yadav, let us also join them in the applause. No, this is not the sense of what has been said in this room today. Casteism is an issue, in the same way as rule by particular caste is an issue. In politics and in education, change of control is always an issue, whether it has been with one group or the other. But to hide real issues of concern to the people, or trying to cover them up in the name of caste, is a dangerous thing. When no economic development is taking place in Bihar and Laloo Yadav tries to take over power in the name of caste, it is a dangerous thing for Bihar as instead of having no interest in constructing roads, in getting anything done, they just forms on how to exploit the vote-bank. We should really protest against such things. It is our duty as citizens to do so. Trying to seek votes on caste basis, on the basis of being proud of one's caste, on the basis of 'feel good' factor, or exploiting the face of particular leaders, all these are dangerous for democracy, and we must protest against

all these. Only we have to ensure that we are not being selective in our protest.

Secondly, casteism has many bad things, but there are also some positive factors. It is the duty of the citizen to strengthen the positive factors. Thirdly, what we might consider as 'caste-less' or 'above-caste' attitude may actually be influenced by caste factor. We should also honestly reflect upon this. As Satish said, sitting in the IIC, it would appear that casteism is prevalent only outside the IIC; on the contrary I myself may be indulging in casteism, only I would not call it casteism, but I would call it merit, I would call it character, etc.

Well, the world may not have become a cheerful place, but let us hope that it has become a better place.

Interventions and Concluding Session

Chairperson, Dr. Kapila Vatsayan's Remarks

There are just three points I want to make. First, this word 'caste' is a source of many problems and confusions. The term is used for a *jati*, a *varna*, the whole *Jati-varna* system or even for a large conglomeration of many castes or even an ethnic group. Often a vague usage of the term is deliberately made by scholars. So, when we ask the questions like: What has happened to caste in politics? In modernity and in industrialisation, which caste and in what sense are we referring to? In answer, we find one thing that has definitely happened is that a basic transformation has taken place in the system of caste—a hierarchy of ritual-statuses—is that democratic politics has entered it first and then has engulfed it. The caste consciousness as a hierarchical consciousness of one's status, *i.e.*, a ritually determined sense of one's status being 'high' or 'low', has been reduced to a subjective feeling, which is not usually reciprocated or validated in social interactions. Caste as a *hierarchy of ritual statuses* has almost ceased to exist. That system has collapsed, rather has imploded from within. Hierarchical consciousness of one's ritual status has now become a private thought. The traditional privileges and 'disprivileges' attached to a ritual status have been legally abolished and socially delegitimised. There are hierarchies in every society, but the hierarchy in the contemporary Indian society cannot be seen as the one that is reducible to ritual statuses. The

castes, as it were, have busted out from the straight jacket of ritual hierarchy into horizontal, independent and autonomous existences of different kinds. The caste consciousness or castesim today is horizontally chauvinistic sentiment, rather than a sense of superiority or inferiority of groups based on their erstwhile ritual statuses.

Second, through this process of horizontalisation of communities, new political formations are taking place. Can you really call them *castes*? That is the question. Whatever they are, these are larger formations, conglomerations of *different communities*, which have come together through democratic politics which link secular, economic and political interests of many communities to a broadly common, cultural identity. We often think of casteism as a false consciousness, because it has lost its old material base—an occupation attached to a ritual status. But we forget that caste has acquired new political-cultural bases—in the process of which it seems to have lost its intrinsic, constitutive character *qua* caste. Caste today, in modern politics, can be more appropriately seen as a network of power groups which creates commonality of interests, by and large, among the economically and socio-culturally similarly placed communities in the erstwhile caste-system and knits them into a new political-cultural identity. Lots of caste politics could, thus, be seen more fruitfully as politics of interest groups, as politics of power groups, as interest-coalescing processes. Is this a new incarnation of caste or a mutatively transformed entity, belonging to a different kind of stratificatory system than the *caste system*, is clearly visible .

To sum up, I would say three things have happened to caste: *horizontalisation*, *de-ritualisation* or de-sacralisation, and a degree of *individualisation* of members of a caste even as many castes join together and project a common, collectivist cultural-political identity. What we are, thus, empirically witnessing is a process of caste conflating with

class and ethnicity—a simultaneous process of classization and ethnicization of caste. All this is happening in the course of caste-participation in politics.

Third, these manifestations of caste in politics should prompt us to re-examine—or rather look at the history of caste. We have always thought of caste as a historically established inflexible, ritual status hierarchy. But caste has always been primarily a *political* organisation, an institution ordering *power relations* in the society. For the same reason of being a political organisation, caste historically had its own *politics* which continually sought to undermine the ritually legitimated unequal power relations among communities. This ritually legitimised, but constantly contested, system—that once dispensed rewards and punishments to different communities—has collapsed. In its place, a different kind of (secular) hierarchy (with inequality) has emerged.

Has the caste then totally disappeared? Obviously not. The system has collapsed, but caste-groups survive as micro-communities, as kinship groups. The other level of caste is its existence as a macro, larger, political formation. In a way, this has always been there, in the form of *varnas*, but I would not go into this now in any detail. The *varna* perspective, or the ritual-system view of caste, *i.e.*, viewing *varna* as a *ritual*—rather than a *power*—hierarchy, has not allowed us to see caste for what it is, *i.e.* as a *macro-power* structure. *Varna*, thus, needs to be seen historically as a *power* hierarchy—comprising power groups of *Dwijas*, *Sudras* and the *Chandals* (many different names were given to the untouchables)—in which these groups were ordered in relationships of domination and subjugation. Within *Dwijas*, there indeed took place intense inter-elite competition among the *Brahmins*, the *Kshatriyas* and the *Vaishyas*, representing respectively the intellectual, political and economic power. They, however, jointly wielded power and authority over the rest of the society. This ideologically

(ritually) legitimated power-hierarchy is being reproduced in different times and in different names. But it has been challenged and dismantled, ideologically and structurally, for the first time in our history through democratic politics.

To conclude, today the politics of these larger, power-based conglomerations of 'castes' have been trying to redefine what we may call a pan-Indian social structure: we have not been able to grasp this drama of macro-level transformation theoretically, directly. This is because a lot of our sociology has been micro-sociology. We have built a macro theoretical perspective on India on the basis of an aggregation of many repetitive micro studies. There is no independent endeavour to really understand the newly emerging pan-Indian social structure. There is something interesting happening here and we are missing the excitement.

One last point. The process of democratic caste politics—that undermined the ritually legitimated, unequal power structure of the caste system—has taken a new turn with the rise of the Hindutva movement. The politics of Hindutva has been transforming caste in a more fundamental way than what politics ever did in the past. What we are seeing is a new inclusiveness of Hindu society or of Hinduism as politically defined. The Hindutva politics of inclusiveness is of the kind where both the erstwhile Dwija and Sudra communities are brought into a common frame of cultural symbolism and that of political and economic interests, thereby constituting India's new middle-class. In this new scheme of things, the numerically preponderant and politically dominant, *i.e.* the erstwhile subjugated communities of Sudras have attained a degree of centrality. This politics of Hindu inclusion (*ekta*) is creating new kind of *exclusions*, which are different from the kind of exclusions that were ritually defined when the traditional caste system was functioning. It has integrated, or is in the process of integrating, the Dwijas

and the Sudras, but has *severely* distanced the *dalits* and the non-Hindu communities. The growth of Hindutva politics is accompanied by changes in Hinduism, generally. Today's Hinduism is based in a mass-society and has been largely de-ritualised. Its festivals are often celebrated on a mass scale, and symbols of communication and power travel from urban to rural locales. This has created vast anonymous 'religious' spaces, allowing participation of erstwhile excluded groups by the caste system, eventually drawing them into the centre of politics. This has created new kinds of exclusions, but we continue to see them in terms of caste in which a majority (the non-Dwija) was excluded. But that majority is now being *included* by the Hindutva politics. To conclude, while the new Hindutva politics is based on the inclusion of the erstwhile subaltern majority of the Sudras, it brutally excludes the *Dalits* and the non-Hindu communities. Thus, the democratic 'caste-politics' and the 'caste-politics' of Hindutva are running parallel, confronting and competing with each other, producing contrary impacts for our democracy.

Sorry for being abstract with my last remark. All that I was trying to do is, to invite your attention to see the third incarnation of caste, after its ritually vertical, and democratically horizontal ones.

Imtiaz Ahmed

My final point. I am very happy that India has caste. It is our only guarantee against any kind of a fundamentalist, fascist take over of the society, because that provides the resistance against any fascist take-over of India as it exists.

Professor D.L. Sheth

I think everything has been said. But since we are talking of the role of casteism, I will have a brief comment on casteism. Casteism, as conventionally understood, is hierarchical status consciousness. It is about discriminating

others on the basis of ritual distance that marks one's hierarchical status. It is a group consciousness which is not just about *difference* but about distancing the other as 'low' or 'high' in status. Such consciousness is different from a political consciousness of pursuing common interests, collectively, often even chauvinistically. This distinction of the two types of consciousness has to be kept in mind.

Chairperson

Thank you very much, Dr. Sheth. You have raised an important question of the understanding which also came out in Dr. Satish Deshpande's presentation and Dr. Yogendra Yadav's presentation. Before I open the discussion, I thought we have limited time available and, for clarity, we might want to restrict ourselves or have one group of questions or comments on the fundamental issues of our understanding of caste in the past and in the present. This can take five days, 20 days, 20 years. I think this is an aspect which has come out in terms of our definitions. The second group, which I see—I am sorry I was not present for the first two presentations—is in terms of the actual field-level working of two different but related issues—one that was raised by Dr. Xaxa—in terms of the tribals and how we describe these very crucial terms that we are using all the time—caste, lower caste, scheduled caste etc. Will you tell me who made the scheduled caste and scheduled tribe? Because—in terms of both the historical perspective and our intellectual understanding of this—I am coming from totally outside, outcaste discipline called Indology, my head is full of references and so on in terms of the dynamics of this which has not entered, if I may say this straightaway, in what we consider to be social-political dialogue here today.

Naturally, we have to keep that in mind that the centre of this discussion is casteism and Indian politics.

Interruption: I am interested to find out who is the 'lagam' and who is the horse. That is the main question which is troubling most of us.

Ajit Mazumdar [formerly Finance Secretary to GOI]

I want to speak briefly and quite narrowly on caste and electoral politics, which is the basic subject of this discussion, and to give some defence of the old-fashioned views which underlie the organising of this conference. I am essentially wondering whether the influence of caste on politics was not to be deplored. We had, of course, a large number of speakers, all of whom have explained, as sociologists and political scientists, the reasons why we are where we are. But it would altogether be unfair not to go back to the original pre-supposition of our Political Science understanding of the electoral process. Now they have turned out to be quite wrong, but when we first gained independence and Constitution and so on, we assumed that political parties were to be formed on the western model on the basis, essentially, of class. The political struggle was conceived of as between parties, which would broadly be based on social and political differentiation and which at that point, we thought, would follow the western models. I come from Bihar. When Bihar politics was seen to be dominated by the three dominant castes of the time, we would deplore the intrusion of Bhumihars, Rajputs and Kayasthas' distinctions into the political structure. Caste was, therefore, a negative element. If you looked at the South, then there similarly were dominant castes also—the Vokkaligas and Lingayats versus the Brahmins, Khammas and the Reddys versus the Brahmins, and so on. To analyse politics in those terms seemed to be essentially retrograde, because we hoped that liberal, Marxist, view of the world would prevail and those were necessarily not to be in the larger interest.

When the Rudolfs first propounded—and I think they

must be given credit for the first political sociological understanding of caste in politics (remember the book was called *Modernity of Tradition*)—all of us, progressives as well as young progressives, were against it and thought this is a totally wrong understanding of what India is about. It is in that context that we deplored, for a long time to come after that, any kind of casteist analysis of political parties and so on. We did not recognise the great sort of seminal role that caste played in political mobilisation in those early years, after independence. No doubt, it involved blindness on the part of ruling elite, saying that we were assumed to be casteless and the others were casteists. All that is agreed, but I think it is not altogether to be deplored that there was a hope that our political system would operate on a liberal-Marxist kind of model. I just want to make a point here that it has not turned out that way. We now have all the analytical evidence to prove that it could not have been that way, given the structure of Indian society.

I still say that we were hopeful and that those hopes have been dashed. Whether the Indian democracy will emerge out of the present sort of malaise of parties and that we would be able to make a success out of the parliamentary system and political party system—given the structure of our society and given the structure of our parties—is yet to be seen. But, certainly, it is not going to be a kind of parliamentary type of model that, we thought, we would have.

Dr. K. Srinivasan [IAS (retd.); President, an NGO, New Delhi]

I just want to raise this particular issue before the collective wisdom of this assembly. Mr. Mazumdar was telling us about the Marxists. I was working in a state which was ruled by the Marxists, and there also I found that communalism comes first and Marxism comes afterwards.

Once the famous Marxist minister was publicly asked: "All your poverty alleviation programme was to favour a particular caste group, why?" The answer given was, if all the poor are Ezhavas, what can I do? The main question that I want to raise is whether politics is using casteism or caste is using politics. As was asked, who is having the *lagam* and who is the horse? Krishna participated in Mahabharata war without using any weapon. But it was he who manipulated and made the war winnable. Today, the politicians' approach is 'winnability'. With the computers available and information technology being advanced, all political monitors of elections are studying the constituency based on caste. The candidates are chosen on computer-output based caste analysis. Even the cabinet formation is being done with an accent on caste groups. Classless, casteless and all those things have turned out to be false. Even the political agenda is submerged or hidden or put in different forms in different areas which is suitable to the castes to which they appeal. This tendency is there. We have chosen political democracy as a conscious decision for this country. Since democracy depends on numbers and the numbers can be achieved by any means. To get that numbers, casteism will be either exploited or used. Whether it is good or bad for the country, it is for the people to decide. But it is there, and one cannot just wish it away.

Chairperson

Thank you very much. You have put your point squarely, with its complications.

Brigadier M. L. Mehra [(retd.) Delhi]

So far, the intelligentsia has been speaking. Now a lay man and an ex-army officer, is coming before you. Rather than dictating any points or asking any questions, I would only like to put up my loud thoughts. The important thing

is that we discuss everything among ourselves as the intelligentsia. But does it reach the common man? The language that we speak is known to us. But do the advertisements that we give reach the common man? *Hindustan Times* gives ads and who reads them? It is we. Therefore, are we reaching anybody? That is my question. The 'haves' and the 'have-nots' will always be there. Therefore, politics would always be there. In the end, it would only be a Messiah who would come to help you.

Next food for thought. We do not want conversions, but are not prepared to look after the poor and the Dalits. We do not want cows to be killed, but we are not prepared to look after them and they are rotting around. We discuss several useful ideas among ourselves, but do not pass it on to the people, who really matter in this country. We are also thinking of reservations for women, but can any one assure that in the parliament it will not be like kitty parties? I would like to ask all the intelligentsia as to what do we need? We need to lift the children of this country up. We need to lift the girl child of this country up. We need to guide the young men of this country. If we keep on discussing amongst ourselves, we will be very proud of having made a good speech, but have we reached them? Could we somehow implement what we are trying to say? Another point: We should make sure that our children learn about our religion —I am not mentioning any particular religion whether Muslim or Hindu. They must know their religion thoroughly. We also do not educate them properly so that they can build up a career or a life for themselves. Is this casteism, is this politics? I cannot say, you are the intelligentsia, please guide us. We are here as an NGO trying to look after the common people. If you, the intelligentsia, discuss amongst yourselves and do not include us, how can we reach those people?

Chairperson

I am most grateful to you for telling us that there are people here who have two different castes—one the intelligentsia and the other the laypersons. That means we will have to go into the very basic definitions. What about this place? I take the liberty, as former President of the IIC, to say that IIC is a talking shop. What else it does? The fact that many of the people who come here have a decision-making role in terms of power and they also have another role in their capacity as academics or field workers or social activists. Discussions here help them in discharging those roles. We will talk to Dr. Yogendra Yadav separately about statistics, about the upper castes, upward mobility of lower castes, etc.

Gautam Mehra (Development Research and Action Group)

I wanted to comment and substantiate what Dipankar Gupta had said on the changing nature of caste and I want to relate it to the work we have been doing in a village in the Faridabad district of Haryana. His point that the dominant caste and land were no longer related, is very much applicable to the work we have done in this village called Manger. Firstly, land has got bifurcated—I won't say because of reforms but because of sub-divisions—as population expanded. And I would say that as much as 85 per cent of the people own not three, but only two, acres of land in this country. I would go further to observe that once you get into the question of dominant caste and land owning as relationship of the caste structure, you find that the situation is very different. He also made the point that 60 to 70 per cent of the income of the marginal farmers is coming from outside the farm. It is very much true of Manger, the Gujjar village, that we are working in. But what disturbs us is that our work on making this demonstration plot of two acres a productive unit may not succeed even when we ensure or provide for a farming

that does not require much investment. As he said, all the investments are not in land now. It is going outside. Now what do we do as an NGO working for promoting food security in small plots, where there is no investment involved? We are growing trees—three types of trees: fuel, fodder and fruit. No investment is coming from outside. We are demonstrating that. But there is no interest in land. Is it the urbanisation of caste? I do not know, I am just coining a phrase.

Two brief points more. In our earlier participations on castes, we used to hear a lot on class dimension of castes and mobilisation and modernisation of caste. Dr. Sheth, while making the preliminary introduction, had said that there have been lots of changes in castes. Are these aspects no longer relevant, Sir?

S. P. Jakhanwal [formerly Vice-Chairman, Delhi Development Authority]

My qualification is that I come from a state which, according to any social survey, will be ranking at the top of caste-ridden states in India.

I want to start with a very small episode. In good old days, 30 years back, when the Chief Minister used to be very, very important. At that time Chief Secretary was probably L. P. Singh. Then CM called him one day and said: "Elections are coming. Such and such caste officer should be posted in a district." The reply of the Chief Secretary was: "Sir, I do not know officers by their castes. Their castes are not mentioned in the service books." The Chief Minister very mildly said: "If you want to be an effective Chief Secretary, you must know the caste of the officers." I stop here, without saying whether it is right or wrong. But it is a real story.

No. 2 episode, which is, again, illustrative of the deep-seated casteism. We were on a pilgrimage to Badrinath. The sun was setting, so you could know which side is

west and which side is east. I could see on the southern side of the famous temple that there were about 20-25 hutments. I told my wife that these must be the hutments of the Scheduled Castes people because it is on the southern side of the temple. Soon afterwards the waiter came with the tea. We asked him, who are the people in these hutments. He said, they are scavengers and others. It immediately hit the point. In the Indian village system, the southern side of the village was probably reserved for the lowest of the low. This was probably the caste system which we have lived through.

Coming to the theme of this seminar, we will have to tackle some problems straightaway. Any system or institution which places merit at an inferior place and gives more weight to something else—whether it is caste, colour, religion, or wealth—is anathema to democracy. That is my axiom No. 1. Axiom No. 2 is whether casteism is one of these characteristics or not? The majority of the people will probably think that casteism is definitely one of those characteristics by which merit is supposed to be put on the little backburner and some other considerations—whether extraneous or others—are given some higher weightage. If these two axioms are accepted, the third axiom is that we should tackle it by the horns and not merely by the manifestations. If there is some root cause, some disease, then there will be manifestations. Sometimes, one or two will be better ones, eight or ten will be backwards. Whether this group wants to tackle it by the horns or by talking about the manifestations and symptoms? When you go to a doctor, he asks your age; if you are young, it should be treated by the root cause; but if you are seventy or eighty, then, live with those symptoms as the root cause cannot be removed at this stage. Since our democracy is only fifty years old, we have to tackle it by the roots, not by the symptoms.

Finally, there are three or four action points as follows:

(1) Politicians should withdraw the recognition given to the caste system. There may be enough calculations at the back of their mind but the way it is manifested is to be despised. (2) To the Media, whenever you make any electoral analysis, what is probably most prominent is, how many voters are caste A, B, C etc. Can't there be a kind of a code of ethics that when we talk of electoral politics, caste will not be given the same prominence? Twenty years back, there were communal riots, but names of the communities involved were not given in the Press. The report used to say that there were some clashes between two communities. There was a code which prohibited giving names of the communities involved, lest it inflames the situation further. A very good practice has emerged regarding dropping surnames indicative of the caste—*i.e.* Srivastava, Saxena, Jadhav, etc. But this had a set back about 15 years back. I think NGOs will be doing a yeoman service, if they succeed in convincing people that at least one thing that everybody can do easily is to drop the surnames which are indicative of castes.

Chairperson

Let me give you factual information. Dropping of surname started nearly a century ago and the phenomenon was well known in Bengal, Punjab, Bihar, and everywhere else.

Jaidev Arya [New Delhi]

I heard the speeches of Yadavji and Deshpandeji. They spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of the caste system. However, I do not find any advantage in the caste. Actually, I do not know the real meaning of caste, as caste is determined on the basis of one's birth. To me, casteism really means that a person, because of his birth, tries to gain advantage or some special right. I do not think anybody should get any advantage merely by belonging to a particular caste. As Dr. Yadav said in a

TV programme, out of a hundred people there were only four belonging to the so-called lower castes. Who is responsible for this? Nobody could prevent the so-called lower caste people from attending the programme. Probably they themselves had some shortcomings in them whereby they did not come to participate in the company of educated people. Dr. Yadav talked about 5,000 years of Indian tradition. But we know that in the olden days, within the same *gotra*, there were upper and lower castes, which means that the classification had some other criteria other than that of birth. We had the Panchayat system. The *Rig Veda* says that let five people service my 'agni hotram'—four of the Arya varna and the fifth one of 'nishad' caste or the out-caste. During the raids of Mohammad Ghazanavi, records show that in Indian society, there were inter-caste marriages. For instance, marriage between Gupta and Brahmins. It was due to the fact that many castes had come together in order to increase their scope. This is all right. It is said in *Purana* that Sage Kanwar went to Misr and brought 10,000 people; gave them education and allocated different *Varnas* on the basis of their capacity and conduct. So, in the same group there were upper and lower castes, as between Saraswat Brahmins and Gour Brahmins. Chaudhuri Charan Singh once asked Panditji to tell the officers to go in for inter-caste marriage. Panditji told him that this might amount to curtailing their freedom of choice. Chaudhuriji told him that even now there were restrictions, for instance a person cannot marry his sister or from his own *Gotra*. If only Panditji had listened to Chaudhuri and all the officers went in for inter-caste marriage, the caste system would not have survived today. When he was Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Chaudhuri Charan Singh enforced a rule that government aid will not be given to any institution started on caste basis, unless they changed the name of that institution.

There was also a reference regarding lower castes not being permitted to sit on a horse during the Barat in their wedding, etc. Against this, there was a time when the charitable-minded upper castes people used to make efforts to mix with the other castes. But unfortunately now caste equations are being used only to kick up conflicts. I will give some examples from the history of the Arya Samaj. Once the Chamars stressing their right to use the wells, threatened that if not permitted, they would convert to Islam. When this was placed before Dr. Nagendra's father in Aligarh, he readily agreed that the wells be opened to use by everyone. But when the Valmiki caste people went to the area where the Chamars lived, the latter refused to allow them to use their wells. Once Acharya Kripalani related an incident in one of his writings. He said some children came to him and complained that a group of people (higher caste) would not eat with them. When the Acharya asked them about it, they said let them first eat with the people belonging to castes lower than theirs. But those people refused point blank to eat with people belonging to caste below theirs. There was another incident in Lahore, in the DAV College. The hostel kitchen refused to serve a Chamar student, who had taken admission in that college. When this was brought to the notice of Mahatma Hansraj, he asked all other students to boycott the kitchen, if the Chamar boy was not served. In this manner, the upper caste people were trying to mix with the other castes. There are several examples in our *Puranas* where Brahmins and Baniyas had even given their life in order to lift the so-called lower castes. What I am trying to say is that there should be no discrimination on the basis of one's birth. In fact, there is no advantage to be gained on the basis of one's birth and the only use of the caste one can say is for purposes of marriage, etc. Karl Marx had said that status of a person would depend on his wealth. In India, more poor a Brahmin was, the greater

was his status.

We should realise that Swami Dayanand Saraswati and others had thought of other ways of lifting the lower castes. But now politics is exploiting caste or *vice-versa* but purely from a selfish point of view. Dr. Lohia had warned that the so-called lower castes would later exploit their caste status, and this is happening.

Chairperson

Now this would be the very last intervention.

Tila Kumar (teaching Sociology in Delhi University)

I do believe that role of caste and casteism is still rampant and that it has also a role to play in years ahead in terms of Indian politics, whether it be caste-isation of politics or politicisation of caste. I agree with Dr. Yogendra Yadav, who said that there has been a shift or a change in the nature, definition and re-definition of caste.

One can talk about the nomenclature that has come into flow, its currents and counter-currents, in terms of methodological imperatives for the social scientists to delve deeper into the definitional aspects. But in this process, we have also to take into consideration the cognitive hiatus that lies in between cast and its perception in the context of Indian politics. It is pertinent to realise that casteism has given us a kind of primordial loyalty as also a traditional institution of Indian society. On the other hand, Indian politics—which proclaims to be modern, democratic, and boasts of making India the largest democracy in the world—when juxtaposed brings into focus the context that politics can never exist in a vacuum and it works very much on social basis within which it operates. We, therefore, need space for modern, new politics, which also guarantees our demands or calls for a modern social order. Therefore, attaining modern, democratic polity of India would be possible, only if there is a restructuring of Indian

society. That is the first point.

Second, I would seek clarification from Professor Pai, who said in her presentation that a silent revolution has been taking place in the northern India. Jakhanwal also talked about a scientific revolution by depicting how the rise of BSP in northern India has emerged as the hallmark of Indian democracy. But there is also a cleavage to it, that is to say, how it has not been possible for the caste composition to dilute in terms of the membership pattern as well as the vote-bank politics in the case of BSP as a political party. Another clarification request is addressed to Professor Gopal Guru. It is true that the Dalit politics can be seen as a liberative movement, the whole ethos, essence of its being in terms of egalitarian, social, emancipatory process, but he did not respond to the eventuality of coming together of the BSP, the RPI or the Socialist Party or Justice Party with a common agenda. Although common agenda was mentioned but, infact, there was no such agenda.

These are some of the observations which I felt would take us a step ahead in terms of understanding of Indian society and Indian polity.

Chairperson

Thank you very much, May I ask Professor Pai to respond to this specific question. Then we can proceed further.

Dr. Sudha Pai

If I have understood you correctly, you are trying to suggest that Jakhanwal has said that there is not much difference between different lower castes. He uses the term 'lower castes' and puts OBCs and the Scheduled Castes, or what we call the Dalits, together. Today, I have dealt with only the Dalits. I think he has also suggested that in North India, it took a long time for the OBCs or the Dalits to come into politics and he suggests that the South was much

faster. I do not think there is much of a difference in the two regions.

Coming to the BSP particularly, what I was trying to suggest was that the BSP is a product of a certain kind of socio-economic-cum-political development in North India, first in the colonial period and then in the post-colonial period, in terms of what has been the trajectory of politics, of social-economic development, and more specifically, the kind of pattern of economic development, and also the kind of social reform movements that arose. Then I tried to suggest that there are certain achievements, no doubt, and there I would agree with Yogendra, but the promise that it held on anti-caste movement was not fulfilled. BSP is as much interested in political power because it is a political party; it is as much interested in the capture of power; and it believes—like a lot of political groups before it in the North Indian plains—that capture of political power is probably the most important; and that if you do that, by the use of state power you are able to bring about changes. It is not interested in, for example, a long-term social reform movement which would take a long period of time. In that way, I have dealt with Dalits. But Jakhnawal has dealt with them on a much larger space of putting all of them together as lower castes. I think there should be a distinction between the two.

What I said today also suggests that a certain autonomous space should also be given to the understanding of the unfolding of the lower castes—let us say below-the-line-of-pollution movements—whereas his works seem to club them all together. I would say, that makes the difference.

Professor Gopal Guru

I was just thinking also how I should respond. I agree that there is a problem not only in Dalit politics, but politics as a whole. The dilemma—which I am going to share

with you—is that the Dalit politics, in general is enjoying a lot of autonomy from other groups of Dalits and also those in the mainstream of politics. The moment you enjoy autonomy without any moral constraint, it leads to infinite fragmentation, and there is no end to that fragmentation. But what is important—we have not discussed that as a separate issue altogether—is that what are the moral conditions in Indian politics. Actually, it should begin with those people who want to really corrupt the historical agents, corruption of the Dalit politicians. It cuts both the ways. So you must take a very conscious moral decision that, look here, I will not be corrupted, and that is the autonomy I should really enjoy. As long as you do not enjoy that moral autonomy, you will face this infinite fragmentation. People will float any number of parties, including the Justice Party, which would help mainstream of parties to consolidate their own grip over the fragments. That is the worst of the whole thing.

Professor Satish Deshpande

I do not really have anything specific to respond. (Thereafter he spoke in Hindi, which is not translated here).

Yogendra Yadav

Thank you, I will now give up the infotainment mode in which I was earlier and come to a more serious scientific mode. The point I am making—and I am glad that some of us succeeded in provoking some people—is that there has been a standard way of responding to caste. Cutting across the differences that all of us may have had, what we were all saying was that: Can we look at it differently? Can we have a different kind of response to it, instead of the standard, straight-jacket response that we have had? What are the usual responses? One is a straight—or at least what looks to me—insensitivity. Complete insensitivity, which is not to recognise that caste differences

and inequalities exist. You said, did anybody prevent them from coming to the TV studio? Yes, of course, you can enter the TV studio only by invitation; you and I just cannot enter. Why is it that out of 90 invitations, 80 go to people belonging to a particular caste? This is something we should all ponder on. You see, if anyone wanted to enter this room, nobody would have prevented him; there is no conspiracy to keep people of some caste out. But the people belonging to the ruling class usually think of the problems of their own class of the society. The power elite also attract others belonging to that class. You see, the equation of power hierarchy is reflected in the IIC, in the television studio, etc. Therefore, to me, this is a very insensitive response to things that we see in front of us all the time. I would make a plea of not doing that.

The other is a response of closing one's eyes, not out of insensitivity, but out of fear. Don't see it; it is a bad thing, keep your eyes closed. Sometimes well meaning people have done it over the last 50 years. I would also make a plea against that. By closing the eyes, we are not solving the problem; in all probability we are contributing to it; in all probability we are a beneficiary of that. So, let us not close our eyes, let us deal directly with it.

The third, a mixed one is a sense of shame and guilt; shame, guilt and closing one's eyes go together. That is the kind of response: "Oh, it is so dirty, let us not talk about it." What all of us should probably be saying is: "Yes, it is dirty. Yes, things may be wrong, but let us look into it. Let us classify it, let us see what is good and what is bad, and what works and what does not work" so on and so forth. Sometimes, I tell my colleagues that, as political scientists, our job is that of a professional gutter inspector. We cannot say it is gutter and close our eyes. We are professional gutter inspectors. It is our job to look into these things.

Sometimes, there is also another response, which is:

“We will do good things for them.” We are fifty-year old and mature now. Let us stop making that sort of statements, that things would be good only if I do some things for you; you don’t stand up and try to do anything for yourself; yes, you have been disadvantaged, but I will do something for you. We are really matured; we have gone beyond those things.

That leaves with me the last anxiety. That is very, very last question, Ajit Da’s question, a question which was at the back of my mind. If what I said or gave this impression that caste is absolutely wonderful, delightful institution and caste in politics is such a sweet combination, then that is not at all the sense in which I said that. I said so only to provoke; I did not really mean that. There is something deplorable when someone in Uttar Pradesh says, “What do I do? I know this candidate is bad. I know this person does nothing, but the other fellow is from another caste. What can I do?” The sense of being locked, the sense of being frozen is, of course, deplorable anywhere in the world—be it caste, be it region, be it whatever. Whatever category freezes politics, political competition or selections or whatever; whatever freezes and takes something away from the inner *dharma*—the *dharma* of competitive politics, allowing people to choose their own interests—whatever takes it away from that, is deplorable. All that, I think, I was trying to argue and, I thought, many of my colleagues were arguing was that castes need not always be frozen, and whatever is frozen need not always be caste.

That is all, thank you.

Imtiaz Ahmed

Madam Chairperson, nobody has asked me any question, so I can skip this. But since you have granted me two minutes, I will tell you a story, one sentence and two points. I lived in a village in Madhya Pradesh as a Brahmin. There

was a school master, a Brahmin, who was a great source of Sanskritization, and I lived in this village. He was a Sharma—Shankar Prasad Sharma. He asked me, what is your name, I said, my name is Ganga Prasad Sharma. He said, which Sharma are you? I had found out that he was a Saryupari Sharma, so I told him that I was a Kanyakubj Sharma. He asked me which Kanyakubj were you. So I had to say I was a Sharma. And then he asked me what was my Gotra. I said I was a Bharadwaj. I am telling you this story, because caste has never been fixed. That is exactly the point I am making. This is point No.1.

No. 2: What is the democracy project about? The democracy project in India is a project for democratisation of Indian society. Can you ever achieve that process without taking note of the fact of one element, which has been the greatest obstruction to its democratisation? So, you have to address that. What shocks me is the language we use—'Caste intrudes'. It is like moving of American forces in Afghanistan but Al-Qaida intrudes. I think there is a built-in prejudice that we must try to examine.

My final point. I am very happy that India has caste. It is our only guarantee against any kind of a fundamentalist, fascist take over of the society, because that provides the resistance against any fascist take over of India as it exists.

Dr. D. L. Sheth

I think everything has been said. But since we are talking of the role of casteism, I will have a brief comment on casteism in the sense that what is casteism today is not what is usually seen by people like us, that is people congregating, networking, joining together for achieving or advancing common interests in democratic politics. This behaviour is generally seen as casteism. So, there is this difference: Casteism, as conventionally understood, is a hierarchical consciousness which is about discriminating

others on the basis of hierarchical status. So, casteism I would define in terms of a consciousness which discriminates, a consciousness which is chauvinistic, a consciousness which is different from politics of interest which most of the time is seen as casteism. So, this distinction has to be kept in mind.

Chairperson

Friends, the time is up, and I am beyond time. Therefore, to make any comment, or final comments or concluding comments, is not easy, because the subject is far too complex, far too deep and far too inside our DNAs. Therefore, allow me merely to say two or three very brief things, judging from the kind of discussion that I have heard and taking into account casteism rather than caste. I begin by classifying our discussion and go back to Professor Xaxa, more than anyone else, and this is very educative for me. The very important point he raised about what was happening to what is known as tribal—very problematic word—‘aborigins’. This is not in the consciousness of the intelligentsia or the lay people. I think this is revealing as an intellectual discourse. Second, is in terms of what our understanding of this other problematic English word ‘caste’ which came into prominence as it does in all writings, as it does in every debate in the IIC Conference; in Room I, people are talking about Tribes and Scheduled Castes, presided over Dr. B. K. Roy Burman, and we are talking about Casteism and Politics.

But on that, there are two very brief but important things: that there is a whole history, whether from the point of view of the sociologists or that of politician or Indologists or Orientalists. There is a history of discourse on this subject of the Nature of Caste in India, which has influenced all intellectual, political and social discourses in contemporary India. We have to do—and I say this with

some emphasis—is to undergo a little bit of de-briefing of our intellectual conditioning which is necessary. This is too complex a phenomenon and I can list out from 17th century onwards—Mr. Roger Adams talked about open door to heathendom and when he started both the questions of—and these are two connected questions *i.e.*, the understanding of our linguistic map and the Indo-European discussion and understanding of what constituted the Indian society and based there on the use of the word 'caste'. Therefore, the question that arises is purely at academic and intellectual level, as our terms of reference are the terms of reference of western discourse grounded strongly in the era of enlightenment. We have to do re-thinking on that; I say this with great respect as I am a reader of all the modern discourses as well as a reader of the primary sources.

Without going into their complexities, two points that you have raised need to be flagged. Was caste a fixed category or not? Even the *varna ashram*, as we may call it, was known in terms of a classificatory system. It was a system of defined roles, but in the fixity and fluidity of categories, reversals could take place at any time. Within it, there were at certain times hierarchies and non-hierarchies.

The second part of this constitutes empowerment. On empowering issues history has both a positive and a very negative side. There are great positive things in it, because you rightly mentioned of merit and, secondly, you mentioned transmission. In other forums, when we talk about the great transmission system of India, can we mention with equal ease about our great leather work tradition? How can we avoid mentioning the role therein of the artisans without calling them Chamars? We had closed but flexible system of transmissions of specialised skills—whether it was the case of *julahas*, or potters or the Chamars. This is all that we have in today's terms

of the classificatory system of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes without going into their box category. So, empowerment at a sociological level and a societal level is required without going into a box category of recognising intellectual skills and empower people horizontally in recognition of their optimal skills in their different social strata. There is a mismatch here. Ranging from Dilli Haat to everything else, everyone is saying, I am wearing a saree of Nagaland, so on and so forth, and not giving status in terms of the skills, including cerebral skills required for their preparation and also perpetuation of that tradition. There has been nothing that I read in the intellectual discourse on that subject. I think this is something that needs to be looked at.

Then there is another dimension. We jump from the classificatory system and our necessity to re-look at that in terms of the intellectual implements that we have had, is the recent history. We had a reforms movement in India, going back to Brahma Samaj, Arya Samaj, wherein we purposely wanted social reform. But at that time, there was no politicisation of that social reform. All these were social reform movements. In these, there was an important aspect, which I think Dr. Sheth traced, is whether we agree entirely on the ritual hierarchical status of caste, that is both the horizontalisation of it as also the new nature of its inclusiveness, of giving Hinduism a box category. But Hinduism was never a boxed category. By giving Hinduism very fixed parameters and into a boxed category with a new type of inclusiveness, I think we have created very complex issues of understanding self in terms of caste and the relationship between power and caste.

Then we come to the question of politics, that is '*lagam*' and horse. On one hand, we are talking about having a casteless society while on the other hand—Ajit Da's point is right—our political system and political democracy is wedded to the western model. We decided on this by

volition, or compulsion or were propelled by power, the very power that we were decrying in our intellectual discourse most mercilessly, unethically, morally and politically. Therefore, the mess in which we are caught was clear, and that is where correctives from both sides are necessary.

Thank you very much.

Rajendra Gupta [Secretary, Lala Diwan Chand Trust]

Dr. Vatsyayan: I have clock in front of me and it shows 2.30 p.m. and I know that food is getting cold. So I must finish my remarks fast. First of all, I must thank the India International Centre for having joined us in organising this seminar and making it a success. I must mention a point at this stage. When we had a similar meeting some time ago, Dr. Alexander, former Governor of Maharashtra, was present. He spoke on Communal Relations. He said that we might succeed in eradicating the evil of communalism, but if we do not stop the spread of the menace of casteism, it might turn out to be a big problem for the country. That is how this programme came to be planned, so that we can have the benefit of several leading persons and maybe, in the process, the country may get a proper direction to proceed on in this regard.

From several speeches made today, one point is clear, *i.e.* the 'vote bank' is getting broken up. Mr. Mulayam Singh claimed that he will get the Muslim votes, who will follow his direction, or as Ms Mayawati claimed that the entire 'vote bank' was with her and that is why she did not want to have alliance with the Congress Party for her vote may go to them but their vote may not come to her. So why should she align with them? But it is clear from today's observations that, maybe in the forthcoming elections, many of the 'brandiyans' in our midst will break up. Professor Dipankar Gupta said that he did not think that casteism is advancing in the country, in the context of the

increasing population in the country. Another speaker, who is working in a Haryana village, also said that it does not look as if the caste will have any great influence on the voting pattern, maybe the 'vote bank' concept will break up.

In the context of this seminar, all the things that are happening in the country are quite important and one hopes that we could give some practical shape to some of the important things spoken here. Some of the political scientists are expecting that their pet theories will be tested in the coming elections.

In the end, I will make a brief point and conclude my speech. Jakhanwal Sahib is sitting here. He was once head of DDA in Delhi. He made a remark which both shocked and amused me. From what he said, in future those who will be staying in South Delhi will be the Scheduled Castes.

We are going to publish the proceedings of the seminar. Those who could not get an opportunity to speak today may kindly send their ideas in the form of a short note. I hope the participants here have left their addresses with the office, so that we could be in touch with them.

Our grateful thanks to all the participants. I request them to give us a written note based on their presentation, so that we can give a proper shape to the publication. It occurs to me that today we have gone several steps ahead from what we have read in the existing literature on the subject, and the society at large will derive benefit from it.

About Lala Diwan Chand and the Trust

Born on 24th September in the year 1885 to a poor Khatri family of village Saidpur, district Jhelum, (now in Pakistan) Lala Diwan Chand was an orphan at eight and had to venture out at that tender age into the struggle for existence. His first employment on Rs. 10 per month, while still in his early teens was a formative stage in his life during which he equipped himself with knowledge and experience that proved invaluable in his later life.

Years of struggle followed. Finally, in the year 1911 with less than Rs. 500 as his entire capital he came to Delhi and started his business. His meteoric rise to dizzy heights of success is still a matter of living memory. In the heyday of his prosperity, his pent-up silent sympathy for the poor, the weak and the helpless, streamed out into a grand channel of charity His ungrudging help went to every cause that the Society sponsored and to numerous schools, orphanages and widow homes. But before the bud could blossom into full glory, the cruel hands of death snatched him away on 4th February, 1930 at the young age of 45.

With his usual foresight Diwan Chand had left a Will and Lala Diwan Chand Trust was formed. The Trust has continued to do the noble work of Lala Diwan Chand according to his behests. Immediately after the death of Lala Diwan Chand, a Girls School, a Hospital and a Community Hall were set up in his native village and a sum of rupees one lakh was made over to the Arya

Pratinidhi Sabha, Punjab for the maintenance of these institutions. Lalaji was an ardent follower of the Arya Samaj and had willed a provision of rupees one lakh fifty thousand for the erection of a suitable building at Delhi which might serve as a centre for the activities of the Samaj and also provide accommodation to Scholars and sanyasins visiting the metropolis. Within a few years of his death this wish was realized with the completion of Diwan Hall—a magnificent building embodying a beautiful blend of traditional and modern architecture at the eastern end of Chandni Chowk, Delhi facing the Red Fort.

Lala Diwan Chand was a great patriot. The interests of the country were always in his mind. The need of the members of the Central Legislature were easily visualised by him and with his rare foresight he had made provision for an organization in his Will to be styled as the Political Information Bureau for providing the members of the Central Legislature with a specialised library and a forum for intellectual interaction. A fine building at 30, Ferozeshah Road, was bought for housing the Bureau which was formally opened by the Hon'ble Sir Abdur Rahim, K.C.S.I., Kt., in the presence of all the members of the Central Legislature and other prominent persons on 1st April, 1936. Dr. M.B. Natarajan, M.A., Ph.D., a professor and a noted journalist, was appointed in July 1936 as its first Director.

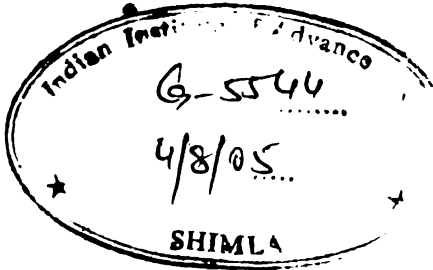
Incidentally, the offices of the Congress Assembly Party, the largest opposition party in pre-independence days, were housed in this premises gratis for nearly a decade.

Over the years, Lala Diwan Chand Trust has done pioneering work in the cause of welfare of the society and for promotion of sundry charitable activities. The Trust constructed a building to house Diwan Chand Arya Senior Secondary School, Lodhi Colony, New Delhi. Apart from making a hefty contribution to the running of the school, the Trust gives scholarships to other deserving individuals

for pursuing their studies. Diwan Chand Nursing Home was established 2, Jain Mandir Road and distinguished well-known doctors were associated with this Nursing Home to provide excellent medical service to patients. It was run on 'no profit no loss' basis The poor patients were provided free treatment.

Financial assistance to educational institutions, scholarships to tribal girls, dissemination of literature, orphanages, holding of free eye camps, setting up of a para-medical Science Institute in Yamuna Nagar, a cardiac centre in Mool Chand Hospital of New Delhi and immediate relief in times of national distress are just a few of the many charitable activities of the Trust.

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Lala Diwan Chand



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