

JAGTAR SINGH DHESI ANNUAL LECTURE*
CASTE, NEO-LIBERAL ECONOMIC
REFORMS AND THE DECLINE OF SOCIAL
DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Ronki Ram

{Jagtar Singh Dhesi son of S. Milkha Singh Dhesi and grandson of a pioneer Punjabi settler in California, Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi was born in village Dhesian Kahna (Jalandhar), Punjab in 1948. He did his early schooling in the village school. The Annual Lecture under the Decian Heritage Endowment Fund has been instituted in the School of Social Sciences by Dr. Autar Singh Dhesi, grandson of Sardar Mahan Singh Dhesi and former Professor and Head, Punjab School of Economics, Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar, (Punjab) India.

Jagtar Singh Dhesi went to England while still in his teens in 1964. After arriving in London, he joined Isleworth Polytechnic to do City and Guilds Diploma in Electronics. He passed not only Intermediate Examination of the City and Guilds Diploma but also 5 O' levels of the University of London in a year. Then he joined Acton Technical College for two years to do A' levels before joining the University of London for B.Sc. (Hons.) in Physics. He always took an active interest in sports. Besides being captain of his college hockey team, he was a keen cricketer and golfer. However, he was a very independent person by nature but trusted others to a fault. His direct, well-meaning approach to public issues was often misunderstood and was possible cause of his many difficulties. During his student days, he preferred to take a job during vacation to supplement his Local Authority Award rather than seeking financial support from the family.

His permanent residence during his studies was family house at 176 Regina Road, Southall, Middlesex. After completing B.Sc. (Hons.) in Physics from the University of London, he joined service with the New Ham Borough of London Education Authority. He taught Computer Science and Mathematics at different institutions run by the said Education Authority. He shifted his residence to East Ham, London E1 and later bought a house at 2 Ashford Road and a couple of other properties over the years. In spite of various professional and social responsibilities, he was able to get his

* This is revised version of the presentation for 'Jagtar Singh Dhesi Annual Lecture' on 18th February 2014 at Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar. It was organized by the School of Social Sciences,

M.Sc. of University of London in Nuclear Physics as a part-time student.

With his early brought up in an ambience of high social concerns, he devoted his spare time to social work, especially as an Executive Member of the National Union of Teachers. Later, he held an influential position of Secretary, New Ham Parliamentary Constituency Labour Party for a number of years. During this period, he made a notable contribution to the integration of immigrants into the host society. His wife, Harmesh, science graduate from London and a teacher, got elected with his support to the Local Borough Council and became Deputy Chairperson of its powerful Education Committee responsible for running a large number of schools, institutes/colleges of technical education.

*Inspired by liberal, progressive thought, he shunned narrow dogmatic social, political, and economic ideas. However, he always showed keen concern and compassion for the well-being of his students, especially those from deprived homes. Whatever his failings, he did make a positive contribution to society that merits some recognition. He left this world in his prime at the age of forty five in June, 1993. The **First Jagtar Singh Dhesi Annual Lecture** was delivered on March 22, 2013 by Professor Subhash Prihar, Central University, Bathinda (Punjab) on the theme **Medieval Architecture of the Punjab. Editor**}*

Before Indian economy could actually open its gates to the surging influences of world market, the study of economic liberalisation has actually become a buzzword in the domain of social sciences in India. However, in terms of contents and research interests, it is yet to settle its pace with political sociology as large amount of literature available on this theme is primarily confined to mainstream economics. It rarely focuses on the intricate but often neglected relationships between caste and economy and the subsequent contradictions it gives rise to between the emerging structures of neo-liberal market economy and the nascent institution of social democracy in India. In other words, economic liberalisation, caste and social democracy can be reckoned as some of the most prominent challenges that India encounters in contemporary times.

Among the above mentioned core challenges of contemporary India, the issue of economic liberalisation seems to be the latest, while that of caste certainly remains the oldest. At the same time, caste also enjoys the dubious distinction of being the most perennial and complex. As an intangible exclusionary social institution, it has eclipsed the Indian (read Hindu) society for ages and continues to affect its economy and polity even today. Over the years, it has proved a stumbling block in

the way of substantive democratisation from below. The scourge of caste, as the most perennial social institution, has expanded beyond imagination during the long spell of Muslim rule as well as the subsequent British Raj (Barrier 1968). In the postcolonial India, it assumed a new potent *identity* against the traditional hierarchized status (Still 2009). The constitution-based state affirmative action has further aided the institutionalisation of caste as a political identity.¹

Social democracy figures somewhere in-between the institutions of Neo-liberalism and caste. It has its roots in the directive principles of state policy as well as protective discriminations as enshrined in the constitution of Independent India, which aimed at bringing the historically deprived sections of the society into the mainstream what in current terminology come to be known as inclusive policy. In other words, it aims at nurturing an inclusive civil society that will strengthen democracy in the country. Despite the widespread belief about the ancient roots of democracy in India², it is considered to be of recent origin. Unlike its counterpart in Europe, democracy in India was not hatched under natural conditions. But once it was transplanted/inherited, efforts were being made for its survival.³ The institutionalisation of social democracy is one of a few such measures that aim at strengthening the roots of the 'inherited democracy' in India. Since independence, routine and fair organization of elections at the national, state and grassroots levels is yet another equally effective measure towards deepening democracy in India. However, given well-entrenched structures of the intangible institution of caste, the phenomenon of social democracy in India could not flourish the way it was originally thought about. In fact, what initially hindered the smooth functioning of social democracy in India was the dormant phenomenon of widespread contradictions between the institutions of inherited democracy and that of indigenous caste that prominently appeared on the surface in the form of tug of war between tradition and modernity. There is a general impression that instead of blunting the fangs of the monster of caste, the postcolonial institution of parliamentary democracy has further sharpened them. Given the typical communal character of the Indian electoral constituencies, caste has come to acquire a leading role in the arithmetic of electoral number game.

What further complicates the aforesaid contradictions between caste and democracy is the adoption of neo-liberal economic reforms

in India in 1991. Neo-liberal economic reforms were adopted to bridle the ever-increasing menace of fiscal crisis and to rescue India from the grip of chronic poverty in the long run. However, what is being missed at this level is that the problem of chronic poverty in India is not merely an economic issue. It has equally been rooted rather more intensely in the asymmetrical social structures of the oppressive Brahminical social order for ages. It is in this context that economic liberalisation assumes critical postures. It needs not only to deal with the economics of the market but also the political sociology of caste that has close bearings on the levers of power politics in Independent India. But if the question of poverty in India, as has been stated above, is not merely an economic then will it be possible for economic liberalisation, being primarily capital intensive and profit driven, to address the questions of rampant poverty and social exclusion. Though scholarly literature abounds on economic liberalisation, poverty, caste, and democracy in India, how economic liberalisation affects the complex patterns of relationship between caste and poverty, on the one hand, and social democracy, on the other, is conspicuous by its absence.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first critically examines the institution of social democracy in India while distinguishing it from that of social democracy in Europe. In the second, complex but intricate relationships among caste, poverty and neo-liberal market economy are delineated at some length. This part is based on a premise that neo-liberal market economy in India does not only deepens poverty but also strengthens the asymmetrical structures of caste, which in turn entrench the already existing social exclusion in the society. Part third deals with the phenomenon of social democracy as articulated by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and the ways it facilitated downtrodden to improve their living conditions. How the institution of free market economy scuttles the essence of nascent institution of social democracy in India and the new challenges it throws on the socially excluded sections of the society are also discussed at length. The fourth part draws on heavily on the implications of the neo-liberal economic reforms for the emancipatory project of social democracy in India and the birth of new contradictions that it gave rise to the disadvantage of Dalits.

I**Understanding Social Democracy**

Social democracy owes its origins to Europe. It transforms 'delegative democracy' and 'passive citizenship' into democracy with active participation and social citizenship (Meyer and Hinchman 2007:1; see also Merkel 2003). Though theoretical thinking about social democracy in Europe goes back to the early twentieth century (Bernstein 1909; Berman 2003), but practically it was first introduced in Europe during the turbulent interwar years in the form of state welfares, compromise between labor and capital, and employment security measures (Callaghan 2002:432-36; Sandbrook et al 2007:12-3; see also Sassoon 1997:42). The world economic depression of 1929 and the subsequent World War II has led to the realization among the policy makers in the capitals of Europe that if the world had to be saved from similar future turbulences within and among the sovereign states, developmental as well as welfare state must be given a respectable chance to strengthen those social conditions that help deepening democratic structures and their legitimacy (Lipset 1959, 1994). In other words, liberal democratic regimes based on political freedom and unrestrained capital accumulation had to accommodate the interests of those peoples who were pushed towards the margins while helping them come into the mainstream under the welfare tutelage of the state. It was such a thinking of state welfares accompanied by the fear of violent overthrow of the capitalistic system of democratic governance that gave rise to the growth of social democracy in Europe in the aftermath of World War II.

Social democracy calls upon state to play a positive role for the protection as well as promotion of the interests of the weaker sections of a society. It expects that state need not be confined solely to law and order system. The state is rather expected to play the role of a harbinger of social and economic justice as well. It is in this context that the extended contractarian tradition of the welfare state comes into head-on-collision with the forces of neo-liberal market-economy. Social democracy aims at removing social inequalities by bridging gulf between 'formal validity' of rights and their actual realization in the real-world living conditions what Meyer and Hinchman called 'real-world efficacy of universal basic rights' (Meyer and Hinchman 2007:2).⁴ As long as gap remains between the formal validity of rights

and their efficacy in a plural society like India, the functioning of democratic institution 'remains wedded to a purely formal, procedural notion of decision-making' (Meyer and Hinchman 2007:2). For a democracy to rise above the façade of formal institutional mechanisms of rule based decision-making, it must ensure that all the members of a society have acquired equal social status to contribute effectively in the democratic processes of the country. Democratic set up relies much on the actual and meaningful participation of the citizens. Any sort of social and economic disability would not only deprive its victims of equal opportunities, it also precludes the natural growth of democracy in a given society in the true sense of the term. Social democracy helps liberal democracy become both 'social and effective' (Meyer and Hinchman 2007:229). It emphasizes on the realization of social and economic rights in addition to civil and political rights; and guarantees social inclusiveness. 'Social democracy, as a general type', argues Meyer and Hinchman, 'features a democratically controlled and proactive state that pursues equitable and broad-based development within a largely market economy' (Meyer and Hinchman 2007:234).

There is another interpretation, which links the emergence of social democracy with the then surging fear of socialism in the post World War II Europe in the absence of pro labour policies. In Latin America too, social democracy was experimented in the wake of democratic response to the neo-liberal market driven economic crisis. Social democracy is thus based on a strategic understanding between capital and labour that evolved during a long march on the vast track of industrialization, democratization and social regulation in Europe. However, one hardly finds any such traces of holy alliance between capital and labour in the developing non-European world.

Genesis of Social Democracy in India

The story of the emergence of social democracy in India, however, is different from that of Europe. Unlike Europe and Latin America, social democracy in India did not emerge as a response to rabid capitalism and severe economic depression. Instead, it started taking shape in colonial India, as aptly argued by Dr. Manmohan Singh, the former Prime Minister of India, "to liberate ourselves from centuries of misrule, from the scourge of poverty, ignorance and disease, from tyranny and bigotry, from caste prejudice and communal divisions" (Singh 2010:1). The founding fathers of independent India were well

aware that if free India had to mature into a full-fledged democracy, its social sphere needs to be thoroughly overhauled (Nehru 1986: 502; Nehru 1958:60; and Three Historical Addresses 1999:53-56). On the completion of the Draft Constitution (25 November 1949), Dr. Ambedkar, Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the constitution, sounded a grave warning in his famous address in the Constituent assembly:

On the 26th January 1950, we are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one-man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one-man one value. How long shall we continue to live this life of contradictions? How long shall we continue to deny equality in our social and economic life? If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. We must remove this contradiction at the earliest possible or else those who suffer from inequality will blow up the structure of political democracy which this Assembly has so labouriously built up (Three Historical Addresses 1999:53-54).

The social democratic vision of independent India as nurtured during the freedom struggle and also during the drafting of the constitution got further reflected in the Resolution of the Government of India adopted for the creation of the Planning Commission in March 1950 (Chakravarty 1989:95-101). The Resolution clearly defined the scope of the work of the Planning Commission in the following terms:

The Constitution of India has guaranteed certain Fundamental Rights to the citizens of India and enunciated certain Directive Principles of State Policy, in particular, that the State shall strive to promote the welfare of the people by securing and protecting as effectively as it may a social order in which justice, social, economic and political, shall inform all the institutions of the national life, and shall direct its policy towards securing, among other things –

- (a) that the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;
- (b) that the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub-serve the common good; and

- (c) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment (The First Five Year Plan: 1)

Thus an all-inclusive vision of development and an egalitarian social order underlined the basic spirit of the constitution as well as the ambitious Five Year Planning projects of the Planning Commission of India. To translate the ideals of the founding fathers for the establishment of an egalitarian social order, a number of special provisions were incorporated in the constitution of independent India as well as in the Resolution adopted for the creation of the Planning Commission. Among them state affirmative action is the most prominent. It aimed at overcoming historic caste-based social exclusion and oppression. Along with reservations in education, employment and legislature, rural development programme, Public Distribution System (PDS), public health programmes, cooperatives, the Right to Information Act, the Right to Education Act, mid-day meals programme, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, the Food Security Act, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, and the Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana are a few more significant state initiatives aimed at the creation of social democracy in India.

Yet another important measure towards the formation of social democracy has been a series of attempts, under the Directive Principles of State Policy, to democratize and decentralize governance and the devolution of authority from the centre to the grass-roots Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Thus the constitution of India, as aptly argued by Dr. Manmohan Singh, the former Prime Minister of India, is “a unique social charter – the boldest statement ever of social democracy” (Singh 2010:1). Whether these varied measures have been able to facilitate the growth of social democracy in India or not, is a matter of contention (Desai 2010:10). But the incorporation of such measures in the constitution is a vindication enough that the founding fathers of independent India wanted to deepen the roots of liberal democracy while placing it on strong footings of social democracy. Social democracy is broadly defined as:

a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles ... are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy (Three Historical Addresses 1999:53).

Frozen in the centuries old stratified structure of the Hindu social order, the principles of equality and fraternity are yet to find a clear expression and a significant space in the liberal democracy of independent India. Social life in India is still governed by the birth-based principle of graded inequality that tends to elevate some (upper castes) and degrades many (Dalits). Even after more than six decades of India's independence and despite the wide spread reach of various anti-untouchability laws⁵, the Dalits continue to be subjected to social exclusion and all sorts of humiliations. They have continuously been deprived of education, basic human rights, equal social status, and equal opportunities in the field of art, culture, science and technology (Shah *et al* 2006). It is against such deep-rooted asymmetrical social structures of the Indian society that the institutions of social democracy become highly significant for the survival of liberal democracy.

Social democracy in India, thus, emerged as a response to deep-rooted caste-based social disabilities as against the fiscal crisis of 1929 and the upheaval generated by the World War II in Europe. The central focus of social democracy in Europe was on economic equality (Desai 2010:9). Whereas, in India the main focus of social democracy has been on deepening democracy while empowering the downtrodden to come forward to democratically struggle for their long denied human rights as enshrined in the constitution. In other words, it is the 'social' as against the 'economic' that provided impetus to the rise of social democracy in India. It is in this regard that the role of state affirmative action is noteworthy, which aims at distributive justice that helps downtrodden making equal contribution towards strengthening the base of liberal democracy. It intends to empower them in such a way that they reap the fruits of hard earned freedom, at par with the privileged twice born. In other words, state affirmative action aims at rescuing the Indian society from the clutches of the centuries old institution of caste and the all pervasive social exclusion and discrimination embedded in it (Jacob 2009). It is in this context that the neo-liberal market-economy (discussed below) and the institution of social democracy come face to face in a mutually antagonistic posture with serious implication for the sustainability of the growing sapling of liberal democracy in India.

My key argument here is that social democracy in India is different from its counterpart in Europe. In India, it aims at building an indigenous base for the restoration of an egalitarian social order

that in turn facilitate the internalisation of democratic values of equality, freedom and fraternity as incorporated in the constitution. It underscores the urgent need of demolition of the discriminatory social structures. Since democracy thrives on numbers in a closely contested sphere of electoral politics, the burden of tradition becomes too difficult to be avoided. Given the typical communal character of almost all the electoral constituencies in India, caste has come to acquire a leading role in the arithmetic of electoral politics; thus blocking the on-going processes of deepening of democracy in the country. There is a general impression that instead of blunting the fangs of caste, the institution of liberal democracy has further sharpened them. How to overcome caste and similar other socially stagnating forces, is really an uphill task for the policy makers in India? It is in this context that social democracy aims at deepening the roots of liberal democracy in India – established on the pattern of British parliamentary setup – while facilitating ethnically divergent and socially fragmented vast majority of rural poor to become active participant in the political processes at the grass-roots. In fact, the inherent contradiction between the indigenous institution of caste and the transplanted institution of democracy is what acted as a stumbling block in the way of deepening the roots of democracy in India. This contradiction subsequently assumed the form of a tug of war between tradition and modernity (Gurumurthy 2009).

Yet another key argument that I want to raise in this paper is that the entry of neo-liberal market-economy in India in 1990s has further compounded the ongoing tug of war between tradition and modernity to the disadvantage of the latter by entrenching, albeit indirectly, the oppressive caste structures in the country. In the tug of war between tradition and modernity, the forces of neo-liberalism quite interestingly seem to toe the line of the primordial and ascriptive institution of caste. They discriminate against the poor and the marginalized sections of the society. Neo-liberalism reiterates that the social and material interests of the citizens would be better served if they were left free to flourish in the market ‘prompted by the profit motive to supply essential services’. It laid emphasis on the merit of unrestrained individualistic economic endeavours, independent of any sort of state interference. It does not tolerate any interference whatsoever by the institution of the state (Steger and Roy 2010). It aims at deregulating national economies, liberalizing international

trade, and creating a single global market (Steger and Roy 2010: X). The neo-liberal market-economy primarily focuses on economic growth and profit⁶. Given its exclusive concern for economic growth and profit, and insensitivities towards the rabid discriminatory social structures, will it be feasible for economic liberalisation to plough through the arid land of caste hierarchies and rampant social exclusion in India? Or would it further deepen inequalities, caste hierarchies and social exclusion by tightening caste-rope around the neck of the nascent institutions of social democracy? Would it also not delay, if not preclude, the often talked about trickle-down impact of the economic liberalisation on the lives of the multitudes of the Indian poor with majority of them historically pushed to the margins?

Neo-liberalism poses a serious challenge to the formation of social democracy in India. Neo-liberalism is often paraded as a custodian of enormous 'opportunities', but what such 'opportunities' are and whom they benefit is a question that directly concerns the Dalits. In an existential asymmetrical world, where we actually live, such opportunities, no doubt, open many doors to the *haves*. But it shuts its door for the *have-nots*, a large majority of whom happen to be low castes, socially excluded, tribals, women, and other vulnerable sections of the society. The have-nots are the worst victims of the much-hyped regime of neo-liberal economic reforms (Ahlawat 2008). Taking side with the lower caste victims of the 'economics of market', which are mercilessly excluded from the business domain, social democracy compensates them in ensuring a respectable space in the 'politics of democracy'⁷. Social democracy, thus, aims at overcoming the primordial and ascriptive hurdles in the way of arduous but steady march of liberal democracy. It is against this backdrop that the model of neo-liberal market-economy needs to be evaluated rather critically vis-à-vis the implications of the shrinking space of social democracy for the on-going process of deepening of democracy in India.

II

Democracy, Caste, Market

Caste and democracy in India are locked in a peculiar relationship. Traditionally, caste assigns rights to some and excludes many from the public domain merely on the basis of birth. As a pristine discriminatory social system, it permeated and continues to permeate almost all fields of the Indian society. Every thing is organised around

it “in unequal measures of social, religious, economic relations and rights” (Thorat 2002). Opposed to the exclusionary nature of the institution of caste, democracy, on the other hand, is based on liberal legacy of “equal dignity and worth of all persons” (Mayer & Hinchman 2007:10; see also Habermas 1996; and Munch 1986). It promotes popular participation and freedom of action and speech. Caste as mentioned earlier shelved all such liberal principles that in turn suffocate the *inherited* institution of democracy into farce. Though caste and democracy are antithetical to each other, but in certain respects politicisation of caste in the sphere of electoral politics is flagged as having a positive impact on the deepening of democracy in post-colonial India. Scholars, of late, have started recognizing the fact that once caste structures get politicized they help in deepening democracy, which in turn empowers the marginalised sections of the society (Yadav 1999; Palshikar 2004). Delivering a lecture on “Democracy and its Critics” organized by the United Nations Foundation, Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen said, “There is a need for caution, however, for those who believe that invocation of caste in any form in democracy is an evil force. As long as caste is invoked in speaking for a lower caste or uniting it, it is good” (Hindu: 16 December 2005). Such a pragmatic view of caste eclipses the common conjecture predicated on the idea that the onset of the modernity project would inevitably render the institution of caste invalid as a power index in the long run. Politicisation of caste, however, does not go well with the grammar of fast economic growth model of the neo-liberal market economy, which sharply underlines the phenomenon of the rollback of the state as a stumbling block in the way of economic growth and democracy.

What further complicates deepening of democracy in India is the intermeshing of caste and poverty. The problem of poverty in India is not merely an economic issue as discussed above (cf. Sunil Khilnani, *The Hindu*, September 24, 2009). It is equally well entrenched in the asymmetrical caste structures of the Brahminical social order, which in turn, as Alam argues, “defy every norm of democratic justice, even of decency” (Alam 2004: xvii). It is against this backdrop that the status of Dalits⁸ who have been pushed to the bottom of the social hierarchy in the Indian society needs to be examined rather critically in the wake of the implementation of neo-liberal economic reforms in the country.

The relationship between caste and poverty seems to be of symbiotic nature. They reinforce each other and often club together in posing a serious challenge to the nascent institution of democracy in general and social democracy in particular in India. The inextricably intertwined phenomena of caste and poverty is so well entrenched that it has failed to recede back even after the adoption of economic reform measures in India in 1991. On the contrary, the latter has further been strengthening the anti-democracy nexus between caste and poverty in the country.

The capital intensive and profit driven model of neo-liberal market economy has, in fact, not only flared up the dormant caste contradictions in India, but has also brought into light some fresh ones between Dalits and various 'Backward and Other Backward Classes' that have mushroomed in the post-Mandal era. Though the neo-liberal market economy has been promised to provide an ample space to the socially excluded sections of the society by opening new and unrestrained opportunities for them in the fast emerging domain of free market economy in India, but the reality is the other way round. The neo-liberal free market economy has failed to ward off the contagious effect of the hoary and exclusionary institution of caste in India.

Untouchability, Democracy, Free Market Economy

Untouchability and democracy are antithetical. Democracy is totally negated in the scheme of untouchability. Democracy is premised on the liberal principles of freedom, equality and fraternity. On the contrary, untouchability thrives amidst inequality and denial of human rights. It promotes social segregation and denies freedom to the socially excluded sections of the society. It rests on asymmetrical social structures of difference and domination that preclude democracy to emerge in its natural stance. It is at this crucial juncture of vendetta between democracy and untouchability, the institution of free market economy enters into the whirlpool of caste contradictions in the social set up of the country.

In the tug of war between democracy and untouchability, the forces of the free market economy sided with the latter. They strengthen the hands of the capital rich upper castes by making it almost impossible for the chronic capital starved ex-untouchables to participate in the glamorous domain of finance capital. Since capital lies mostly with

the upper castes, it is only they who matter the most in the multiplexes/malls of the new market economy. It is only they to whom the market has been pushing into billionaires. There is hardly anyone from the ex-untouchables communities in India who have joined the elite club of the billionaires. Thus market does not only favour the upper castes, it also accentuates the gulf between the rich and the poor. Since poor and lower castes are co-terminus, market further marginalizes the lower castes by preventing them from entering into business operations.

If untouchability prohibits the lowest of the low from actively engaging in the operations of the public-social realm, the free market economy discourages them from entering into the domain of business. The former squeezed the 'public' or the 'social' into 'public' or the 'social' of the privileged few (the *savarnas/dvijas* [upper castes]) only and the later mortgaged the entire economic domain of the country to the upper castes only. It means elevation of the few upper castes and degradation of the multitudes of the socially excluded lower castes. Quite interestingly, untouchability and free market economy join together in favouring the upper castes with immense wealth/privileges as against the lower castes who in spite of working hard have to live a life of abject poverty and severe deprivations. This in turn deprives them (lower castes) substantially of the periodic opportunities to compete for power berth in the electoral bogies of the political democracy in the country. Elections are, in fact, very costly political games. They are beyond the reach of the poor and socially excluded sections of the society. Thus social exclusion and poverty deprive the lower castes of the opportunity to compete on equal footings with their rich and upper castes rivals in the limited electoral arena of the political democracy in India.

Thus it is in the aforementioned context that untouchability precludes deepening of democracy in India by supporting the oppressive social structures of power in the country. It is in this very context that free market economy and social democracy become incompatible. Thus the neo-liberal free market economy model by virtue of its being anti poor and anti lower caste has ultimately led to squeezing the already skimpy space hard earned by the nascent institution of social democracy in India. Since social equality and freedom are inseparable, political democracy without social democracy is farce. In the absence of social democracy, the socially excluded sections of the society would find it difficult to participate effectively

in the process of the political democracy. It raises the most obvious and perennial question of freedom: political vs social and economic.

Freedom: Social vs Political

Though political liberation from the British rule was the central theme of the Indian freedom movement, the question of freedom had never been merely a 'political' issue in colonial India. It had always been intertwined with the 'social' of the country. In other words, the question of freedom from the external/British rule was closely tied with the much larger as well as complex internal question of freedom from the oppressive Hindu caste system in the country. But the mainstream anti-imperial stance of the Indian freedom movement failed to address the later larger question of social exclusion of the vast number of downtrodden/ex-Untouchables of India who were sandwiched between the oppressive systems of internal colonialism of Hinduism on the one hand, and British colonialism, on the other. The ex-Untouchables were, thus, doubly oppressed. They had no hope for any relief whatsoever from the Hindu social order as it was based on the doctrine of permanent inequality in every sphere of life⁹. Their social conditions too remained almost unchanged even during the long spell of the so-called liberal minded British rulers who probably did not like to touch the institution of caste lest it unleash revolt from within the upper caste hegemonised Hindu society. On the contrary, the British rulers rather reinforced caste as it helped them in some ways in maintaining their hold over colonial India¹⁰ (Thekaekara 2005). Though the constitution of independent India has provided ample space to the inherited institution of democracy, it has yet to overcome the subtle legacies of centuries old caste structures in the country.

Since Hindu society is intensely rooted in the pre-modern system of caste-based social hierarchies, it openly clashed with the liberal principles of equality and liberty. It is basically indifferent to the liberal principles of individual worth and justice, which blocked the way for the natural growth of the social democracy in the country. Caste inculcates a sense of complete alienation among those who have been condemned to live separately as 'outcastes' away from the mainland habitations of the upper castes. The goal of Political freedom of the people of India can never be accomplished in the real sense of the term until and unless the deprivations and sufferings of the large

numbers of the ex-Untouchables are removed by completely annihilating the oppressive caste system of the Hindu society (Ambedkar 1936). In the words of Dr. Ambedkar, “Political democracy cannot last unless there lies at the base of it social democracy” (Three Historical Addresses 1999:53). Social democracy, in fact, is the ‘cornerstone’ of the edifice of political democracy in India. Saheed-e-Azam Bhagat Singh, one of most prominent of the few forerunners of the institution of social democracy in India, also expressed the similar views, of course much earlier, in his less quoted article published in the June issue of *Kirti* 1929. He was of the firm opinion that Political freedom gained from the British colonialism could not last long if failed to be accompanied by a massive social and economic reforms measures for clearing the muck long accumulating under the internal social set up of the country.

III

Ambedkar and the Dilemma of Social Democracy

Social democracy occupies centre stage in the philosophy of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. It constitutes the core of his struggle against graded inequality in India. That is what distinguished Dr. Ambedkar from the rest of the mainstream Indian freedom fighters who were struggling primarily for the liberation of the country (political freedom) from the foreign rule of the British Empire. Dr. Ambedkar expanded the meaning of freedom by incorporating in its fold the less talked about issue of freedom from internal colonialism –caste based social exclusion. He assigned special importance to the principles of social democracy by championing the cause of ‘the annihilation of caste in India’. He wanted to strengthen the emerging sphere of political democracy in India by incorporating in its civil domain the less talked about institution of social democracy. The reach of caste in India is so pervasive that it did not divide only the Hindus, but also afflict even those who have converted to various other religions – Buddhism, Christianity, Sikhism and Islam – in the hope of evading the stigma of Untouchability.

Dr. Ambedkar defines social democracy as “a way of life which recognizes liberty, equality and fraternity as the principles of life. These principles ... are not to be treated as separate items in a trinity. They form a union of trinity in the sense that to divorce one from the other is to defeat the very purpose of democracy” (Three Historical Addresses 1999:53). Frozen in the centuries old stratified structure of

the Hindu social order, the principles of equality and fraternity are yet to find a clear expression and a significant space in the political democracy of independent India. Social life in India is still governed by the principle of birth-based graded inequality that tends to elevate some [upper castes] and degrades others [Dalits]. Even after more than six decades of India's independence, the so-called outcastes have continued to be subjected to repulsion and all sorts of humiliations. They have continuously been deprived of education, basic human rights, equal social status, and equal opportunities in the field of art, culture, science and technology¹¹.

It is repulsion rather than fraternity that underlined the social structure of the Indian society. Repulsion promotes social exclusion. Repulsion is one of the three main agencies (the other two are hierarchy and hereditary occupation) of caste that determine the exclusionary boundaries of Indian social structures (Bougle 1971). In the views of Dr. Ambedkar:

In fact, it makes isolation of one caste from another a virtue. There is isolation in the class system. But it does not make isolation virtue nor does it prohibit social intercourse. The class system, it is true produces groups, but they are not akin to caste groups. The groups in the class system are only non-social while the castes in the caste systems are in their relations definitely and positively anti-social ([http://www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb Commandments of Baba Saheb.htm](http://www.ambedkar.org/Babasaheb_Commandments_of_Baba_Saheb.htm))

The caste based principle of repulsion, thus, generated mutual antagonism within the society that ultimately squeezed the required space for the deepening of social democracy in the country. The roots of democracy are to be searched in the fabric of social relationship/ associated living, "which enables every human being to unfold his or her limitless potentialities to the maximum possible extent without in any way jeopardizing the equally legitimate interest and aspirations of the other" (Rodriguez 2007: 151; Chand 2005). Since caste thrives on mutual repulsion and complete rejection of the principle of fraternity, it goes against the norms of associated living that affects the machinery of the state by making public opinion impossible (Mungekar 2006:1). It introduces separation in the society, and generates jealousy and antipathy among the socially segregated inmates of the society. On the completion of the Draft Constitution (25 November 1949),

Dr. Ambedkar sounded a grave warning in his famous address in the Constituent assembly as mentioned above, that if we fail to get rid off social and economic inequalities we would not be able to keep intact our hard earned equality in the political domain.

It seems that the Indian state have accorded some concern to his prophetic warning. Independent India opted for a mixed economy model of development and introduced the system of reservation for the downtrodden in government jobs, education institutions and legislature. Legal provisions for reducing the enormous gap between the rich/upper and the poor/lower castes have been incorporated in the law book of the land. The Preamble of the Constitution clearly spells out the objectives of securing “to all its citizens JUSTICE, social, economic and political” as well as “EQUALITY of status and of opportunity” (emphasis added). The very spirit of this legal system has, however, yielded to the forces of globalisation in India. The adoption of the model of neo-liberal market economy by India in 1991 has thus severely diluted the social welfare concern of the Indian state for the uplift of the downtrodden. It is in this context that the institution of social democracy has come under dark clouds of the free market economy in the country.

Neo-liberal Economy vs Social Democracy

The neo-liberal free market economy model of the post-1990 India seems to run in the opposite direction of the well-conceived social democracy model of Dr. Ambedkar. The profit driven paradigm of free market economy accords no importance to the principles of liberty, equality and fraternity. The only value that it considered worth of honouring is the value of unrestrained and free flow of capital without least interference by the institution of the state. This new paradigm of neo-liberal market economy did not confront at all with the pre-modern institution of caste in India. On the contrary, caste and market nurture close relationship within the paradigm of neo-liberal market economy. They reinforce each other. Market thrives on capital and profit. Since capital has traditionally been accumulated by the upper castes who have been able to establish their monopoly over the economy of the country, the free market economy, based as it is on the unrestrained flow of capital tends to promote their interest rather more confidently. It welcomes upper castes with enormous opportunities and hefty profits. But it ignores the ex-untouchables who lack the requisite

capital. In the traditional Hindu social system, the ex-untouchables were kept at distance from the capital through the mechanism of purity-pollution principle. They were not allowed to have land, possess precious metals and keep certain kind of animal. Whereas in the present system of the free market economy, they were forced to be fence sitter precisely because they did not possess the desired amount of capital or capacity that has value in market economy to enter into business. Earlier they were denied all sort of access to capital in the name of sacred scriptures. Now they were kept at a distance because free market economy does not entertain them because they do not have capital. It is in this context that the dialectics of inverse relationship between democracy and untouchability and the complementarity between market and caste assumes an added importance for the understanding of the impact of globalisation on the life of the Dalits in India in general and the structures of social democracy in the country in particular.

IV

Social Democracy, Dalits and Globalisation

Dalits constitute a significant proportion (16.23 per cent, Census of India 2001) of the total population of India. Since the beginning of the process of globalisation in India, they have suffered the most. The bulk of Dalit population falls in the category of below poverty line. Majority of them continue to live in extreme poverty without land or opportunities for better employment or education. With the exception of a minority who have benefited from India's policy of quotas in education and government jobs, Dalits are relegated to the most menial of tasks, as manual scavengers, removers of human waste and dead animals, leather workers, street sweepers, and cobblers. Dalit children make up the majority of those sold into bondage to pay off debts to upper caste creditors. Dalit men, women, and children numbering in the tens of millions work as agricultural labourers for a few kilograms of rice or Rs. 15 to Rs. 35 a day.

Given sever lack of technical education among them, their chances of acquiring jobs in the high-tech industry at home as well as in the multinational corporations seems quite bleak. The system of primary and elementary education in the rural and urban settings has been subverted almost totally. Since, majority of the rich upper caste send their wards to the private/convent/public schools, government

schools have been reduced into dysfunctional centres of learning for the poor Dalits. It is simply out of the reach of the matriculates of such neglected government schools, where hardly any infrastructure and teachers are available, to be able to compete for admission in the country's prestigious Information Technology (IT) or management schools. Moreover, since the background of a majority of Dalit undergraduates is in Arts and Humanities, it becomes difficult for them to meet the job requirements of the multinational corporations. Even if some of the Dalits aspire to compete in the technology driven new job market, it would be, perhaps, out of their reach to acquire the requisite qualifications at exorbitant rates from the various engineering and management institutes. It is precisely due to these reasons that Dalits are rarely to be found in the prestigious management schools all over the country.

Dalits happened to be the beneficiaries of the state's affirmative action before India enters into the realm of neo-liberal free market economy in the beginning of 1990. The Indian state had brought some improvements in the lives of Dalits by making special provisions to provide them education, employment, respectable wages, access to land, water, health, housing and other resources. But this welfarist stance of the Indian state gave way to a new system of free market economy in 1990s. One of the main tasks of this new paradigm is to force the roll back process of the welfare state and to allow the market forces to operate in an unrestrained manner. The pro-market stance of globalisation has led to the widening of the gap between the privileged few and the large mass of the marginalized section of the society. It further led to marginalisation of the already marginalized people thus widening the gulf of inequity in the society (Kumar 2007). Dalit labourers, daily wage workers and workers in the informal sector among them suffer the most. In other words, globalisation process severely affects some categories of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who are deprived of jobs, and face great difficulties in accessing housing, drinking water, food, healthcare, education, and employment. Thus the way globalisation affects the life of a Scheduled Caste worker differs significantly from that of the non-Scheduled Caste one.

In a caste-based hierarchical and graded social set-up where lower social status and economic backwardness seems to be coterminous, social rank plays an important role in determining one's economic status. Globalisation further aggravates this vicious interrelationship between

social and economic backwardness. The logic of economic globalisation favours the rich, who can invest and multiply capital. The favoured rich are mostly found among the so-called traditional ‘upper castes’ that have monopolised land and other economic resources in the country. It has made them prominent in the newly carved out vast *private* space of the open market. In other words, capital and caste have joined hands against labour and the principle of state social welfare it has led to an alliance between the forces of the market and the upper castes – much to the disadvantage of the marginalised and the lower castes.

Another way through which the process of globalisation has been affecting the lives of the Dalits rather more severely is the transformation of their traditional hereditary occupations into lucrative profit seeking competitive avenues where they find themselves incapable of competing with the so called upper castes who until very recently used to consider such professions as polluting. In other words, when the occupations of sewage disposal, scavenging and raw hides were performed in the *Jajmani* (hereditary system of asymmetrical reciprocity and patronage between landlords and occupational experts) set up, bereft of profit incentive, Dalits were forced to take them up. But when these same occupations became profit-generating businesses, Dalits find themselves at odd in their own tested fields. It is in this context that the process of globalisation perpetuates the system of caste and inequality albeit in a new form. Instead of liberating them, it further pins them down. Earlier they were excluded and were condemned as *shudras* because of their closeness to the sewages, now it excludes them by way of defeating them in the profit oriented open market system of the neo-liberal economy. In fact, this market is open only for those who have the capital to play the profit game on the chessboard of its unrestrained competition. In this new profit driven game of the process of globalisation, Dalits—normally starved of capital—stand disqualified.

Yet another way through which the process of globalisation severely affects the lives of the Dalits is the accentuation of the phenomenon of their exclusion from land. Significant parts of the vast majority of them who live in villages are landless labourers. Only a small number of them are cultivators with marginal holdings. The large-scale landlessness on the part of the Dalits led to their dependence on the upper caste land owning communities, which in turn deepened

the caste based inequalities with the additional burden of asymmetrical class structures. The neo-liberal economic policies adopted under the regimes of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation widen the already existing caste and class divisions between the Dalits and the dominant castes, and further minimises the chances of the emergence of the feelings of brotherhood among the peoples of different communities.

Moreover, atrocities against Dalits (social boycott, kidnapping, murder, abduction, bonded labour, intimidation, rape, honour killings and residential segregation)have also increased many folds during the economic reforms measures. Tapan Basu in his engaging review of Anand Teltumbde's latest book on *Khairlanji: A Strange and Bitter Crop* wrote, "[t]he paradox of Indian modernity is that it instigates Dalits to fight for social justice, even as more and more social injustices are heaped upon them every day" (Hindu, December 7, 2008). It is this heightened amount of Dalit atrocities wrapped in a double foil of chronic poverty and emerging Dalit assertion that has in fact come to challenge the much hyped neo-liberal market economy model and the promise that it flags for the deepening of democracy in India. There has been about a three-fold rise in cases of crime against Dalits such as murders, grievous hurt, rape, social boycott etc during the last decade and half (Puniyani 2002). Late Suraj Bhan, the then Chairman of the National SC and ST Commission, while speaking in a seminar on *Reservation In Privatisation* organised by the Ambedkar Trust (Jalandhar), commented that more than 45,000 cases of atrocities against Dalits and downtrodden have been registered in India during the past one year alone. However, if the numbers of those cases, which were either suppressed or went unnoticed, are included, the total figure could easily go up to one hundred thousand (The Tribune September 5, 2005). During 2003-05 the number of such atrocities against Dalits was 69,216 (Mungekar 2006).

Talhan, Meham, Dulina, Gohana, Saalwan, Chakwada, Khairlanji and Khandamal are some of the recent instances of atrocities against Dalits in India. Atrocities against Dalits are thus continued to exist even today, despite constitutional safeguards, and various legislative measures. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in its report on the Prevention of Atrocities on Scheduled Castes released in 2002 pointed out that there was "virtually no monitoring of the implementation of the SC/ST Prevention of Atrocities Act at any level"

(Narain 2006). This clearly shows how vulnerable Dalits are in the face of globalisation. In the opinion of Christine Moliner, a French anthropologist who visited the 4th World Social Forum (WSF) in Mumbai in January 2004, “[t]he Indian state has in recent years often proved itself unable or unwilling to protect Dalit; indeed, state representatives – police especially – are frequently accused of active participation in anti-Dalit violence” (Moliner 2004: 2; see also: Mungekar 2006:2). How the state in India can save the socially excluded if its own security agencies remain immersed in the pre-modern institution of caste? Dalit atrocities bluntly negate what Dr. Ambedkar called “associated life between the people”.

Sharpening the Contradictions

Globalisation has further sharpened the already existing contradictions between political equality on the one hand and social and economic inequality on the other. It has deprived Dalits of whatever little they have in the name of so-called fast development under the model of free market economy. There exists no space for them at all in the glamorous showrooms of neo-liberal market economy – Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These fabulous zones are yet to be tamed to accommodate the ever-increasing vast multitudes of downtrodden section of the society who could no longer be denied any more their due share in the varied structures of power.

Downtrodden, in fact, are tired of being governed for centuries, and are impatient to govern themselves. However, whatever little space was available to them where they could dream the possibility of their betterment seems to be being grabbed by the forces of the neo-liberal market economy in the name of quick development. Their patience and ‘urge for self-realization’ can no longer be tested any more. Articulating the urge of the downtrodden for self-realization during his famous address on the completion of the Draft Constitution in 1949, Baba Sahib Dr. B.R. Ambedkar said that “... the sooner room is made for the realization of their aspiration, the better for the few, the better for the country, the better for the maintenance of its independence and better for the continuance of its democratic structure. This can be done by the establishment of equality and fraternity in all spheres of life”. Similar views were expressed after 50 years by K. R. Narayanan, the President of India, in his address to the nation on January 25, 2000: “Beware of the fury of the patient and long suffering people” (as quoted in Puri 2006: 7).

The benefits of globalisation are yet to reach these 'patient and long suffering people who never shirk from hard work and toiling labour. But the free market economy driven forces advocate the concerns of the rich and resourceful only. This widens the gap between the rich and the poor. The widening gap coupled with the rolling back of the state lead to further resentment and alienation among the downtrodden that in turn put pressure on the practice of democracy in the country (Singh 2006). Baba Sahib Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was very well aware, much in advance, about the serious implications of the lopsided development for the growth of social democracy in a caste ridden country like India. He therefore underlined the inclusion of the downtrodden into the governmental set-up of the country. For that he emphasised that the safe route goes via total annihilation of caste and in that the role of the state is of utmost importance. If globalisation implies pushing the state out, then the future of the project of social democracy seems to be very bleak. It is in this context that the responsibility and the task of safeguarding the developmental character of the Indian state becomes very crucial more so for the empowerment of Dalits in particular and strengthening the forces of social democracy in India in general.

Though a lot has already been said about the desired human face of globalisation, but in the absence of an egalitarian alternative to the structures of domination, the human face of globalisation based on global governance makes no difference for the marginalised sections of the society. The free market economy has not only failed to liberate them, it has rather further pinned them down. Downtrodden are not welcomed in the sphere of market as equal partners of profit. In other words, the market too practices untouchability, albeit in a different form. They feel alienated in the very world that promises to empower them. How strong the free market economy could be, but in long run it will not survive until and unless the question of the marginalised sections is addressed amicably. In fact, the question of equitable distribution of resources is closely related with the issue of the immediate and amicable redressal of the cause of the marginalised and their exclusion from the mainstream. They need not be provided with only low price wheat, rice and pulses as have been popularly done in some Indian states. What seems to be essential is to empower them, to enhance their buying capacity in the real sense of the term in order to dismantle the structures of economic and social dominations, and to remove the stresses of globalisation. "If we are not concerned of the stresses of globalisation, ideological counter-currents will

emerge. Globalisation is not a bed of roses. There is a need to be watchful, always,” warned Singapore Foreign Affairs Minister George Tong-Boon Yeo at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Partnership Summit in Bangalore (The Hindu, March 19, 2007). In other words, a balance needs to be created between the forces of market and the principles of social justice. It is in this context that Baba Sahib Dr. B. R. Ambedkar’s warning, as referred to in the beginning of the paper, assumed critical importance. The globalisation process has been compelling India to bind up as early as possible its social and economic justice project aims at empowering the Dalits. In other words, before social democracy could take firm roots in India, the state started rolling back from its commitment to facilitate the process of emancipation and empowerment of the downtrodden classes.

Dalits are now no longer confined within the rural settings and patron-client relationship. Some of them have been able to move into mainstream sectors of non-polluting professions and a few of them ventured abroad. Now the relatively better off Dalits come forward to articulate the interests of their brethren and to some extent they have been successful in providing them with an alternative leadership. Dalits who have once tasted the fruit of political equality can no longer be denied further any more their long overdue social and economic rights. Nothing short of structural transformation including the free market based system of economic domination on the one hand and the traditional *Varna* system of four-fold occupational division based on graded social hierarchy on the other could provide them their long denied basic human rights. In fact, in India the problem of Dalits is not just linked to the economic forces emanating from the spheres of the free market economy. It has equally been made complex by the all-pervasive caste ridden social order. It seems that market and caste have joined hands to pose a most serious challenge to the nascent institution of social democracy in India.

Notes

- ¹ In the constitution of Independent India caste has been accorded a distinct place in the form of state affirmative action. The lower castes, legally referred to as Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the constitution of independent India, are provided reservation in the fields of education; Government/Public Sector jobs and the legislature in order to help them in overcome their chronic social exclusion. The phenomenon of the reservation of SCs, however, has brought ‘caste’ into the centre stage of the electoral politics in independent democratic India.

- ² For a discussion on the ancient roots of democracy in India see: Jayaswal (1924) fifth edn, 1978; Amritya Sen, *Argumentative Indian*
- ³ Ashutosh Varshney identified three basic conditions for the survival of democracy in the West: “universal suffrage came to most Western democracies only after the Industrial Revolution, which meant that the poor got the right to vote only after those societies had become relatively rich; a welfare state attended to the needs of low-income segments of the population; and the educated and the wealthy have tended to vote more than the poor” (Varshney 2007:93). He argued cogently that none of these three conditions exist in India. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in India long before the advent of the industrial economy. As far as welfare state is concerned, India was not a match to that of the West. And thirdly, poor citizen tend to vote more in India than the rich (Varshney 2007: 93-94).
- ⁴ For detailed accounts of social democracy see: Callaghan 2002; Callaghan 2000; Gray 1996; Hicks 2001; Hirst 1996; Huber and Stephens 1998; Lipset 1959; Lipset 1994; Merkel 2002; Milner 1989; Pontusson 1992; Przeworski 1992; Rothstein 1996; Rothstein 2002; Thomson 2002; Vanderbroucke 1998; Vivekanandan 2000.
- ⁵ The Protection of Civil Rights [Anti-Untouchability] Act of 1955 and later on under the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989.
- ⁶ Economic liberalisation is primarily concerned with the problems of economic domain. It least bothered about what transpires within the political sphere of democratic regimes. For a detailed account see: Dreze and Sen 1995; Bhaduri and Nayyar 1996; and Nayyar 2007: 388-89.
- ⁷ For ‘economics of market’ and politics of democracy’ phrases, I am indebted to Deepak Nayyar (Nayyar 2007:362—69).
- ⁸ The term ‘Dalit’ is used in this paper, as a social category that incorporates the Scheduled Castes (SCs), the Scheduled Tribes (STs), and the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) – constitutional categories referring to socially and/as well as economically excluded sections of the Indian society. However, in the current political discourse, the term Dalit is mainly confined to the SCs only. To be more precise, it covers only those SCs who are classified as Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists but excludes Muslim and Christian Dalits. They were subjected to forced and customary undignified labour, precisely because of their low birth. Thus, Dalit is the “politically correct” nomenclature for the ex-untouchables who traditionally have been placed at the lowest rung of the Hindu caste hierarchy and were contemptuously called by different names like *Shudras*, *Atishudras*, *Achhuts*, *Antyajias*, *Chandalas*, *Pariahs*, *Dheds*, *Panchamas*, *Avarnas*, *Namashudras*, *Adi-Dravida*, *Ad Dharmis*, *Mazhabis*, Depressed Classes, *Harijans*, and Scheduled Castes. They were forced to live on the segregated peripheries of the mainstream rural settings. In the Urban sectors they are confined to shanty colonies in slums. According to the 2001 census, 22.59 per cent of the total urban population in India was living in slums. A large number of them happened to be Dalits.
- ⁹ In the Hindu social order, rights were not granted on the basis of an individual’s personal worth. They are, in fact, granted or denied on the basis of one’s social status in the Hindu caste hierarchy (Throat 2002). For those who had been pushed to the bottom of the hierarchy, it hardly matter whether they enjoy any human rights or not (Ramaswamy 2001).
- ¹⁰ It is in this context that Dr. Ambedkar spoke very forcefully in the London Roundtable conferences against the British rule in India.

- ¹¹ Untouchability splits people into distinct and seamless geographical settings. It blocks the channels of effective communication among different castes especially between the upper and the lower castes by erecting permanent barriers of social exclusion. It is a nefarious system/mechanism of ghettoising a large number of people into the periphery of a mainstream social realm. Despite its practice being declared a criminal offence in the Constitution of independent India, first under the Protection of Civil Rights [Anti-Untouchability] Act of 1955 and later on under the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act of 1989, it continues to exist even today in the form of separate Scheduled Castes settlements in the country, especially in the rural sector where most people still live. The spatial segregation of the ex-untouchables has become a formidable hurdle in the realisation of social democracy in India. Untouchability, by its very nature, negates the very possibility of the rise of an egalitarian social order. It inculcates a sense of complete alienation among those who have been condemned to live separately as 'outcastes' away from the mainland habitations of the upper castes.

References

- Alam, Javeed (2004), *Who wants democracy?* Hyderabad: Orient Longman.
- Ambedkar, B.R. (1995) [first published in 1936], *Annihilation of Caste*, Jalandhar: Bheem Patrika.
- Bardhan, Pranab (2007), "The Political Economy of Reforms in India", in Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Paperbacks, pp.397-414.
- Barrier, N.G. (1968), "The Punjab Government and Communal Politics", *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3, May.
- Basu, Kaushik (2010), "Foreword" in Sukhadeo Thorat and Katherine S. Newman (eds.), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Berman, Sheri (2003), "The Roots and Rationale of Social Democracy", *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Vol. 20, No.1, pp113-44.
- Bernstein, Eduard (1961) [originally published in German in 1899 and first published in English in 1909], *Evolutionary Socialism: A Criticism and Affirmation*, Reprint, New York: Schocken Books.
- Bougle, Celestin, Trans, D.F. Pocock (1971), *Essays on the Caste System*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Callaghan, John (2002), "Social Democracy and Globalisation: The Limits of Social Democracy in Historical Perspective", *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 4, No. 3, October, pp. 429-451.
- Chand, Shyam. 2005. "Democracy as Ambedkar Wanted it", *The Tribune*, December 6.
- Chopra, Suneet (2008), "Neo-Liberalism and Social Justice", *People's Democracy*, 32(6), July 6, pp. 1-3. http://pd.cpim.org/2008/0706_pd/07062008_15.htm accessed 1/14/2011
- , (2008b), "Neo-Liberalism and Social Justice - II", *People's Democracy*, .32(6), July 13, pp.1-3. http://pd.cpim.org/2008/0713_pd/07132008_22.htm accessed 1/14/2011.

- Damodaran, Harish (2008), *India's New Capitalists: Caste, Business, and Industry in a Modern India*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black.
- Desai, Meghnand (2010), "Equality or Inclusion: The Dilemma of India's Democracy", in Chandan Sengupta and Stuart Corbridge, eds, *Democracy, Development and Decentralisation in India*. New Delhi: Routledge, pp. 8-15.
- Gurumurthy, S (2009), "Is Caste an Economic Development Vehicle?" *The Hindu*, January 1.
- Iyer, V.R. Krishna (2008), "Needed, a Renewed Socialist Concern", *The Hindu*, February 5.
- Jacob, K.S. (2009), "Caste and Inequalities in Health", *The Hindu*, August 22.
- Jayaswal K. P. *Hindu Polity*, Delhi, Chaukhamba Sanskrit Pratishthan, 1978 fifth edn, [1924].
- Jenkins, Rob (1999), *Democratic Politics and Economic Reforms in India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark (1988), *Religious Rebel in the Punjab: The Social Vision of Untouchables*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications.
- Khilnani, Sunil, (1999), *The Idea of India*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, paperback.
- Kohli, Atul (2006), "Politics of Economic Growth in India, 1980-2005 – Part II: The 1990s and Beyond", *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 8, pp.1361-70.
- Kudaisya, Medha (2009), "'A Mighty Adventure': Institutionalising the Idea of Planning in Post-colonial India", *Modern Asian Studies*, 43(4), pp.939-78.
- Kumar. Arun (2007), "Threat from SEZs: Inequality will Worsen", *The Tribune*, May 16.
- Kumar, Nagesh (2000), "Economic Reforms and Their Macro-Economic Impact", *Economic and Political weekly*, March 4, pp 803-12.
- MacCartney, Matthew (2009), "'Episodes' or 'Evolution': The Genesis of Liberalisation in India", *Journal of South Asian Development*, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 203-28.
- Meyer, Thomas with Lewis P. Henchman (2007), *The Theory of Social Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Mungekar, Balchandra (2006), "Caste War", (www.dalitnetwork.org).
- Narrain, Siddharth (2006), "Justice for Dalits still a Dream", *The Hindu*, May 11.
- Nayyar, Deepak (2007), "Economic Development and Political Democracy: Interaction of Economics and Politics in Independent India", in Niraja Gopal Jayal (ed.), *Democracy in India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, Paperbacks, pp.361-96.
- Palshikar, Suhas. (2004). "Revisiting State Level Politics", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 39, Nos. 14-15, pp. 1477-80.
- Puniyani, Ram (2002), "Striving for Social Justice", *The Hindu*, September 28.
- Puri, Harish K. (2006), "The Lower Caste and the Globalisation-imperative: Rethinking the National Project", *Journal of Political Science (Jalandhar)*, 2(2), 5-16.

- Ramaswamy, Justice Dr. K. (2001), "Casteism, Intolerance and Instruments of Law", *PUCL Bulletin*, December,
- Sandbrook, Richard *et al* (2007), *Social Democracy in the Global Preiphery: Origins, Challenges, Prospects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sassoon, Donald (1997), *One Hundred Years of Socialism: The West European Left in the Twentieth Century*, London: Fontana.
- Singh, Manmohan (2006), "Towards an inclusive globalisation" (Excerpted from the Prime Minister's speech at the University of Cambridge on October 11 on the occasion of his being awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Law), *The Hindu*, October 13
- , (2010), "Relevance of the Global Experience of Social Democracy for India", November 20, <http://indiacurrentaffairs.org/relevance-of-the-global-experience-of-social-democracy-for-in> accessed 2/1/2011.
- Still, Clarinda (2009), "From Militant Rejection to Pragmatic Consensus: Caste among Madigas in Andhra Pradesh", *Journal of South Asian Development* 4:1, 7-23.
- Three Historical Addresses of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly: In Search of Remedies for Current Instability of Polity*. 1999. New Delhi: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation Research Cell.
- Thekaekara, Mari Marcel (2005), "Combating caste reports from India on the stink of untouchability and how those most affected are trying to remove it", *New Internationalist*, July (http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_380/ai_n15763155).
- Thirumaavalavan, Thol (2004). *Uproot Hindutva: The Fiery Voice of the Liberation Panthers*, Kolkata: Samya.
- Thorat, Amit (2010), "Ethnicity, Caste and Religion: Implications for Poverty Outcomes", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XLV, No. 51, December 18-24.
- Thorat, Sukhadeo (2002), "Hindu Social Order and the Human Rights of Dalits", *Combat Law*, 1 (4), October-November, (http://www.combatlaw.org/information.php?article_id=109&issue_id=4).
- Thorat, Sukhadeo and Katherine S. Newman (2010), "Introduction: Economic Discrimination-Concept, Consequences, and Remedies", in Sukhadeo Thorat and Katherine S. Newman (eds), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp1-31.
- Thorat, Sukhadeo and Katherine S. Newman, eds. (2010), *Blocked by Caste: Economic Discrimination in Modern India*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Varshney, Ashutosh (2007), "India's Democratic Challenge", *Foreign affairs*, Vol. 86. No. 2, pp. 93-106.
- Yadav, Y. (1999). "Electoral politics in the Time of Change: India's Third Electoral System, 1989-99", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 35, Nos. 34-35, August 21-27/28-September 3, pp.2393-99.